

Historical Evolution and Reflections on “Harmony between Man and Nature”

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Abstract

“The unity of nature and human” is the cognitive method and idea of ancient Chinese sages to explore the relationship between human and nature. It originates from in three emperors’ period and arises from the plain perception of nature. Through the Zhou Dynasty, the concept of “destiny” and “Son of Heaven” was established. From the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period to the Qin and Han dynasties, the perception of the relationship between nature and man underwent a transformation. And then the Jin and Tang periods continued to explore. The turbulent changes from the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms to the Two Song Dynasties. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the philosophers pondered and changed. “Nature and Humanity” cognition has experienced a long history of change and formed a unique theory and practice system. This paper explores the core content, characteristics and evolution rules of the cognition of “the unity of nature and man” by sorting out the changes in the cognition during the historical development.

Keywords

Unity of Nature and Human, Relationship between Nature and Human, Cognitive

1. Introduction

Chinese civilization has been exploring the cognition of human and nature for five thousand years since the ancient times, and it has been exploring the laws and methods that are conducive to the development of human civilization. “Unity of nature and human” is a cognitive method formed in the process of exploring nature. From the early origin to the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the understanding of the relationship between nature and human was influenced by the corresponding ideological and cultural background in different historical pe-

riods, which formed the cognitive content, characteristics and advantages in each period, and formed the cognitive limitation under the specific historical background and cultural trend.

This study explores the ancient Chinese traditional civilization and summarizes the content of the relationship between nature and man in ancient Chinese culture in different historical periods, such as the Three Emperor Period, the Zhou Dynasty Period, the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, the Two Han Dynasties, the Jin and Tang Dynasties, the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period, and the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with a view to bringing new insights into the perception of the unity of heaven and man. This study brings feasible ideas and methods for applying the cognition of celestial harmony to promote the development of social civilization nowadays.

2. Harmony between Man and Nature

Harmony between man and nature means that man needs to adapt to the laws of nature in order to make progress in development. Therefore, human society needs to preserve nature while developing. As some of the actions that do not respect the laws of nature have produced undesirable consequences, they have caused considerable threats to the long-term interests of human existence. For example, that people are now facing the ecological crisis. Any behavior and consequence against the laws of nature will be detrimental to the development of human society. Only with the support of natural conditions can human society achieve long-term development. Therefore, man and nature need to maintain a harmonious and symbiotic relationship.

3. Perceptions in Different Historical Periods: The Unity of Nature and Man

3.1. Three Emperors Period

In ancient times before Zhuanxu, the ancient sages had an obvious concept of communication between God and man (Hou, 2000). The three emperors are called the Emperor of Heaven, the Emperor of Earth and the Emperor of Man in the Han Dynasty ancient books, as the ancestors of the Chinese nation and the origin of human civilization in cultural transmission. Before the Zhou Dynasty, there was no concept of the Son of Heaven. The emperor of human and the emperor of heaven and earth (人皇、天皇、地皇), the three emperors are equal in status. The supreme ruler of the Shang Dynasty had the highest power over nature and society. From ancient times to the Shang Dynasties, the three emperors of “heaven, earth and human” were equal in status, and the understanding of “heaven” and “man” was basically close to the level of equality during this period.

Early primitive human depended on materials in nature and used readily available natural objects as the basis of their lives. Man’s understanding of nature is often instinctive, and has not yet separated “nature” from “man” in un-

derstanding. Therefore, on the plain understanding of the oneness of nature and human, we instinctively explore nature and discover ways that are beneficial to the development of human survival and life. When people develop diseases, they look for treatments and medicine in nature to recover themselves. The search and discovery of cures for diseases is based on the process of exploration of primitive nature.

3.2. Zhou Dynasty Period

The Western Zhou replaced the Yin Shang, causing a shock to the human mind. When the Zhou dynasty replaced the Yin dynasty, the period of the human emperor (人皇) came to an end and the period of the “Son of Heaven” began, with a change in the perception of the “unity of nature and man. The rulers of the early Zhou Dynasty, in view of the lessons of the fall of the Yin and Shang dynasties, came to the conclusion that “Heaven’s destiny was unpredictable”. Heaven had the rational ability to “choose and send down virtue”, and that the Yin people had “fallen early because they did not respect their virtue”. King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty was able to be wise in virtue and prudent in punishment, so he was ordained by Heaven and ruled the country. Therefore, the Zhou dynasty established the idea of “matching virtue with heaven”, and in terms of understanding, “Heaven” was regarded as the authoritative master of “man”, while the human monarch was called “the Son of heaven” (天子), who ruled over all the people, was under the command of the heavenly order to carry out his activities. According to the “yizhoushu” (逸周书), “Everything grows in spring and summer, and harvests in autumn and hides in winter, the righteousness of heaven and earth, the extremes of the four seasons, and the way that is not easy.” People regard the regularity of nature as the order of heaven. From the Zhou Dynasty onward, the understanding of heaven and man was no longer equal, and man put the status of heaven as the supreme authority.

During the Zhou Dynasty, a system of medical affairs already existed and a system of medical officials was formed. According to the “Zhouli” (周礼), “The doctor is in charge of curing the diseases of the people, and the reare pestilence in all four seasons. In spring, there is the cephalopathy, in summer, there is the itchy disease, in autumn, there is the malaria disease, in winter, there is the cough disease, with five flavors, five cereals, five medicines to cure their diseases.” In the understanding of diseases, we need to pay attention to the influence of natural climatic factors on human morbidity, consciously summarize the causes and changes of diseases, and obtain grains and medicines from nature to heal injuries and treat diseases.

3.3. The Spring and Autumn and the Warring States Period

During the Western Zhou dynasty, only the emperor of the Zhou dynasty could accept the mandate of heaven, which was the basis of the emperor’s statehood, but during the Spring and Autumn Period, the vassal states claimed to have the mandate of heaven. Under the patronage of the mandate of heaven, the rise of

vassal kings formed a general trend. The supreme authority of heaven has always been recognized by the people. During the Spring and Autumn Period, people still maintained the idea of valuing the mandate of heaven and continued their knowledge of it. During this period, wars were frequent and current situation were turbulent, which at the same time promoted the development of diversity in the field of thought and culture. The hundred schools of thought, mainly Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, wrote books and established doctrines, and explored the relationship between nature and man with Laozi, Mozi, Zhuangzi, and Xunzi. As represented by Laozi, he recognized that man is a product of heaven, earth and nature, and advocated that man's activities need to be in harmony with nature and develop on the basis of the laws of heaven, earth and nature.

The formation of the doctrines of the hundred schools of thought provided a reference for the construction of the theories of Chinese medicine, and against the background of the contention of the hundred schools of thought, the theoretical system of Chinese medicine was birthed. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, traditional medicine's understanding of human life patterns and diseases was closely linked to nature, and problems were discovered from nature and diagnosed and treated by examining the changes in human life in conjunction with the laws of nature.

3.4. The Period of Two Han Dynasties

During the Western Han Dynasty, Dong Zhongshu combined the ideas of Taoism, Legalism, and the Five Elements of Yin and Yang, and proposed the doctrine of the relationship between nature and man. Joseph Lee said, "There is a remarkable similarity between the emperor and the pole star" (Lee, 1957). Emperor Wu of Han not only established the dominance of Confucianism, but also adopted Dong Zhongshu's doctrine of the relationship between nature and man. The "induction of nature and man" and the "divine right of kings" are the core of the doctrine of the relationship between nature and man, and help promote the further exploration of people's perception of the "unity of nature and man". However, this doctrine met the needs of the emperor's rule for a certain period, so it had its own limitations.

During the reign of Emperor Xian of Han, the Eastern Han Dynasty was in a period of frequent wars and turmoil. Emperor Xian of Han ceded the throne to King Cao Pi of Wei, ending the pattern of patriarchal succession since the Han Dynasty, and the divine right of kings was impacted by three abdications. This historical event became a turning point, from the cognitive point of view, people no longer take the power of heaven and the will of heaven as the master. In order to enhance the self status of the subject, achieve the change of the order of Heaven through their own efforts.

After the historical and cultural development of the Qin and Han dynasties, the history of Chinese medicine ushered in the peak of theoretical development, marked by the appearance of four classics of traditional Chinese medicine, which

formed the theoretical system from basic theory to evidence-based treatment, inseparable from the historical and cultural background of “the unity of heaven and man”. By the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, Chinese medicine had developed an understanding of the causes of disease, both internal and external. The external causes were the six evil spirits felt in nature, while the internal causes were caused by the person’s diet, emotional disorders, and other factors. Diseases are caused by the combination of internal and external factors. The understanding of internal and external causes is formed by considering the interaction between human and nature. By the Eastern Han Dynasty, the perception of the “unity of nature and man” had shifted in essence. Before the Eastern Han Dynasty, in the understanding of the relationship between nature and man, man was dominated by the mandate and will of heaven. After the Eastern Han Dynasty, man’s self-subjective consciousness strengthened gradually, further shaping the cognitive characteristics of “nature and man in one” in this period. At the time of the ideological turn in the perception of the “unity of nature and man”, the first peak in the construction of the theoretical system of Chinese medicine was brought about.

3.5. Jin and Tang Dynasties

The Yellow Turbans Uprising led to the disintegration of the Eastern Han Dynasty, and people’s minds were freed from feudal shackles and had a need for further development in terms of independent personality and subject status, driving people’s consciousness toward self-consciousness. Wang Bi’s commentary on “Zhou Yi” uses yin and yang, cold and heat, to illustrate birth, senility, illness and death, gain and loss, i.e. the so-called investigation of nature and man. The Wei to Jin dynasties were characterized by frequent wars and social unrest, and the mind of the human subject in the social environment was gradually enlarged, thus focusing on personal interests and highlighting the status of the self. Although the change and development of natural things are recognized, they are only regarded as natural phenomena, and natural laws are regarded as content outside of human social life. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the rulers presented an inclusive attitude in cultural thought, not only enriching the Confucian system but also actively supporting Buddhism and elevating Taoism to the level of a state religion. A new stage of cognitive change has been reached in the “unity of heaven and man”. According to Liu Yuxi (刘禹锡), “nature is to produce all things; man is to manage all things” (Liu, 1990). The relationship between “nature” and “man” is a dialectical relationship of mutual struggle and interdependence (Liu & Liu, 2013). The development of view on “the unity of nature and man” entered a new stage in this period. Han Yu (韩愈) proposed the theory that heaven and man are incompatible, and thinkers such as Liu Zongyuan (柳宗元), Liu Yuxi (刘禹锡), and Liu Zhiji (刘知几) criticized the theory of the mandate of heaven, making the status of man as a subject improved in the exploration of the problem of heaven and man. The Sui to Tang dynasties focused on medical summaries, comprehensively synthesizing pre-

vious medical achievements, drawing on effective contemporary clinical experience, and raising awareness of the causes, pathogenesis, and clinical manifestations of each type of disease. Chao Yuanfang (巢元方) systematically summarized the medical achievements before Sui dynasty, described the symptoms in a comprehensive and accurate way, and developed a system of classification of symptoms. Sun Simiao (孙思邈) summarized the medical achievements before the early Tang Dynasty in a more systematic way, and discussed in detail the diagnosis and treatment methods of various clinical departments as well as prevention, with a greater play on viscera syndrome differentiation.

3.6. The Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms to the Two Song Dynasties

The political realities of the late Tang Dynasty brought Chinese culture to another stage. During the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, the ideological understanding underwent a process of change from turmoil to stability in terms of demand, thus ushering in the rise and development of science of the two Song dynasties. The prevalence of theories led to an increasingly patterned and homogenized thinking (Li & Si, 2010), which became the core of the ideological and cultural cognition of the Song dynasty. In other words, the “heaven principle” is understood from the perspective of human thought and understanding, so it is limited by subjective cognition, leading to a certain extent affects the exploration of the relationship between nature and man. During the two Song dynasties, the influence of the mainstream of thought in the general environment prompted people to think about medical theory, but they were limited by subjective cognition, so they were mostly limited to summarizing and organizing the understanding of their predecessors in medical theory. For example, the theory of three causes was proposed by the Nei Jing, and the foundation was laid by the JinKui Yao, until the Song Dynasty when Chen Yan formed the doctrine of disease causes, which became an integral part of the theoretical system of Chinese medicine (Fu & Wu, 1990). At the same time, clinical internal medicine developed rapidly, and there were also some monographs on surgery, injury and gynecology. The rise of the Neo-Confucianism influenced the construction of medical schools of thought, and in the exploration of traditional medicine, more attention was paid to the summary of practical clinical experience, and accordingly there was a lack of breakthrough progress in the summary of the occurrence of natural phenomena and the laws of nature, and the study of the laws of life and disease.

3.7. Ming to Qing Dynasties

With the decline of Neo-Confucianism, materialism developed further. It inherited the ancient Chinese philosophical tradition of yuan qi ontology and expounded the idea of yuan qi monism. Yangming’s philosophy of the mind, which combines the essence of Confucianism’s active initiation into the world, Taoism’s freedom, and Buddhism’s ethereal awareness, became one of the most

prevalent philosophical ideas of the Ming Dynasty (Jin et al., 2018). Yangming's theory of mind advocates that man returns to his natural heart, that is, he can achieve a state of oneness with all things in heaven and earth. In terms of cognition, we reject the method of extinguishing human original desires, and instead, through the discovery of inner conscience, we can achieve oneness with everything in the universe. During this period, there was a breakthrough in the subjective limitations of human cognition, and the "unity of knowledge and action" contributed to the exploration of the "unity of nature and man".

The Qing dynasty went through a turbulent process of change from prosperity to decline in terms of ideological and cultural perception. With the disintegration of feudal society at the end of the Qing Dynasty, the influence of the historical environment stimulated people to further enhance their subjective consciousness and advocate changing nature. This weakened the understanding of nature and affected the objectivity of natural cognition. The emergence of Yangming's theory opened a new direction for the exploration of the unity of nature and man, aiming at liberating human cognition and having a certain guiding and inspiring effect. During this period, some Confucian scholars practiced medicine, promoting the integration of Confucianism and medicine. Their understanding of disease, life, and medicine bears traces of cognition of "the unity of nature and man" in this period. In the Ming Dynasty, many famous doctors, books and schools of thought enriched the theory of traditional Chinese medicine. At the same time, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of summaries and medical writings on the diagnosis and treatment of internal medicine. At the end of the Qing dynasty, influenced by the eastward advance of western studies, people's understanding was divided, with some scholars accepting western medical ideas and forming a school of Chinese and Western medicine convergence, while others rejecting Chinese medical cognition, thus losing the advantages of the holistic view of Chinese medicine.

4. Conclusion

With the change in history and culture, the cognition of "harmony between man and nature" has undergone a tortuous evolution and formed different cognitive contents and characteristics in each historical period under the corresponding ideological and cultural cognitive background. The development of today's society and the ecological and social problems brought about by it, have led to the reflection and exploration of the concept of "harmony between man and nature". Through the re-establishment of the cognition of "harmony between man and nature" and the discovery of the ancient wisdom of traditional Chinese civilization, new ideas and methods can be brought to the development of human civilization and medical progress. Due to the limited time and funds, this study mainly compares the theoretical perceptions of each historical period from a macroscopic perspective, in which the specific details of each period have not been specifically explained and need to be further explored.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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