

On The Transcendence Of Confucianism

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Abstract. The theory of Confucian immanent transcendence proposed by Mou Zongsan has been the subject of many academic debates. The transcendence of Confucianism has become the consensus of current academic circles. As for whether Confucianism is immanent transcendence or external transcendence, Confucianism should contain both immanent transcendence and external transcendence from the perspective of specific occurrence of Confucianism. It is still an open question if Confucianism should opt for immanent or external transcendence in the future. Tracing the origin of the appearance and philosophical significance of these two transcendence, immanent transcendence is the direction that Confucianism should continue to adhere to.

Keywords: Immanent transcendence; external transcendence; Confucianism.

Western philosophers have generally believed that Chinese culture, particularly the Confucian culture, lacks the spirit of transcendence since Hegel. In order to deal with this problem, the New Confucianism of Hong Kong and Taiwan put forward the theory of immanent transcendence of Confucianism, emphasizing that Confucianism also contains transcendence, but it is different from the western external transcendence, which can be called immanent transcendence, in the 1950s[1]. There was a long-term discussion about the transcendence of Confucianism. This paper attempts to study the origin and philosophical significance of the transcendence of Confucianism on the basis of academic research, reveal the shortcomings of the transcendence of Confucianism, and propose corresponding solutions.

1. The Discussion about the Transcendence of Confucianism

1.1 Research Status

Researchers discussed the transcendence of Confucianism and formed four views in the past. First, Hao Dawei and An Lezhe believe that Confucianism does not contain transcendence, only internality. They say: “the use of the term ‘transcendence’ is relatively complex in western philosophy, and its strict meaning is: in the relationship between principle A and principle B, if A determines B in a sense and B does not determine A, then principle A is transcendence” [2]. And “there is neither transcendental existence nor principle in Confucius’ thought. This is a strong prerequisite for internalism”[3].

Second, the students of New Confucianism, who generally inherited Mou Zongsan’s view, believe that Confucianism contains immanent transcendence, and immanent transcendence is superior to the external transcendence. Li Minghui points out that Hao Dawei and Anlezhé used the concept of transcendence too narrowly, and they took transcendence and internality as two opposed conceptions.

[4]. If we get rid of this dualistic framework to understand the concept of transcendence, it can express surrealism or idealism. immanent transcendence can be established in accordance with this definition.

Third, Zhang Rulun believes that Confucianism contains transcendence, and it is external transcendence rather than immanent transcendence. He believes that the heaven in Chinese philosophy can be regarded as a transcendental concept. It is the origin and the ultimate foundation of all things, the absolute force that can determine the destiny of human beings, and the ultimate decider of good and evil[5]. Heaven and human are the relationship of external transcendence[6].

Fourth, Huang Yushun believes that Confucianism contains both immanent transcendence and external transcendence, but immanent transcendence is not unique to Chinese philosophy, nor is it superior to external transcendence[7]. He emphasizes that immanent transcendence has caused

many problems in both the West and China, so Confucianism would have revert to external transcendence to solve the problems caused by immanent transcendence.

1.2 Problem Raising

The above are the principal views on the transcendence of Confucianism. The first and second views mainly discuss whether Confucianism contains transcendence. Hao Dawei and An lezhe continued the previous western philosophers' views, believing that Confucianism does not contain transcendence. However, their definition of transcendence is too strict. The concept of transcendence is complicated in Western philosophy, and it can also express the ultimate basic meaning of the world, and the original meaning of value. In this sense, we can say that Confucianism contains transcendence.

The third and fourth views mainly discuss whether Confucianism contains immanent transcendence or external transcendence, on the premise of recognizing the transcendence of Confucianism. It also raises a new question: should Confucianism choose immanent transcendence or external transcendence in the future?

Zhang Rulun disagrees with the theory of immanent transcendence. He mainly uses the concept of heaven in Chinese philosophy to explain the characteristics of external transcendence in Confucianism, but the heaven he mentioned mainly refers to the dictatorial heaven, not the moral heaven evolved after the Spring and Autumn Period. Huang Yushun thinks that Confucianism contains both immanent transcendence and external transcendence, which is more precise. However, he uses the subjective turn of western modern philosophy to explain that western philosophy and Chinese philosophy are both immanent transcendence. The immanent transcendence of Confucianism recognizes the objectivity of the way of heaven, and also recognizes that the way of heaven lies in the mind, which is different from western philosophy.

As for Confucianism should choose the theory of immanent transcendence or external transcendence in the future, Huang Yushun believes that we should choose external transcendence. Because immanent transcendence leads to serious problems. However, we should first see how these two transcendence of Confucianism appeared, and what philosophical significance they express in history, if we want to deal with this question.

2. The Significance of the Transcendence of Confucianism

2.1 External Transcendence

The transcendence of Confucianism is often expressed through heaven, as Zhang Rulun pointed out. The concept of heaven emerged during the Western Zhou Dynasty, which was regarded as the origin and ultimate basis of all things by the people of Zhou Dynasty. This type of heaven, often known as dictatorial heaven, contains external transcendence. The dictatorial heaven generally governs life and death, success or failure and other aspects from the perspective of real life.

Heaven was gradually endowed with ethical characteristics in the later development. The will of heaven was called destiny in the Zhou Dynasty. Destiny is also the foundation of political power. However, people realized that the destiny is not unchanging, and does not protect a person or a dynasty for a long time, but protects the virtuous people for a long time during the period of Yin and Zhou Dynasties. People consider the change of political power as heaven reward and punishment. Therefore, heaven is also regarded as the final decision maker of rewards and punishments for good and evil. Heaven is not only the master of nature, but also the master of morality in the world. However, the function of rewards and punishments of heaven is not enough to make morality a kind of belief. At best, it only makes people regard moral pursuit as a means to avoid disasters, with utilitarianism. That is to say, the heaven is infinite, and people are limited in the view of heaven and man in the Western Zhou Dynasty. People cannot access the infinite. They can only fear the heaven, and pray for the protection of the heaven through virtue. In a word, the dictatorial heaven of external transcendence is a mysterious force, which cannot ensure that people

tirelessly pursue morality, but warns people by rewards and punishments. Confucius' thought also contains the factor of dictatorial heaven, which reflects the inheritance of the Western Zhou Dynasty's concept of Heaven.

2.2 Immanent Transcendence

In addition to the dictatorial heaven of external transcendence, Confucius refined the moral heaven from various setbacks and dilemmas. He said: "Heaven produced the virtue that is in me." The heaven mentioned here has a clear moral meaning, that is, the so-called moral heaven. Different from the external dictatorial heaven, the moral heaven can be embodied in individuals. According to Confucius, the moral heaven embodied in the individual is benevolence, which is the essence of human being. People can demonstrate the moral heaven in the process of practicing benevolence, and realize the realm of harmony between heaven and man. Therefore, it can be said that the moral heaven is immanent transcendent.

The significance of the moral heaven of immanent transcendence lies in: First, it establishes the close relationship between heaven and man; Second, it guarantees the transcendence of morality. To sum up, from the perspective of concrete occurrence in the pre-Qin Confucianism, immanent transcendence and external transcendence were originally both included in Confucianism. External transcendence emphasizes the fear of the people for external forces, and the restriction of external norms in ethics, which repress the self-development of human nature. Immanent transcendence emphasizes the moral consciousness of human, and represents the principle of self-discipline. Therefore, Confucianism, which is dominated by immanent transcendence, attaches importance to human self-restraint, and regards morality as a belief. It can be seen from this that Huang Yushun's views do not conform to the connotation of immanent transcendence of Confucianism. It is precisely immanent transcendence that makes morality contain transcendental value and belief effect. Therefore, we believe that immanent transcendence is still the direction to which Confucianism should adhere.

3. Reflection on the Immanent Transcendence of Confucianism

3.1 Problems Caused by Immanent Transcendence

Immanent transcendence plays an indelible role in establishing moral belief as a typical characteristic of Confucianism. However, the problems caused by immanent transcendence cannot be ignored.

3.1.1 Problems in the political and legal system

Huang Yushun quoted Tang Yijie as saying that "it is difficult to establish an objective and effective political and legal system due to immanent transcendence"[8], which is an accurate point of view. Because immanent transcendence stresses the pursuit of moral value. Mou Zongsan summarized it as "the application of reason"[9]. "In terms of politics, the application of reason is the way of Confucian virtue"[10]. The application of reason is difficult to form a political and legal system in the modern sense. The formation of them requires rational structure performance.

3.1.2 Problems in science

Nor is immanent transcendence conducive to the development of science, for immanent transcendence reflects a kind of value rationality, and its purpose is not to obtain scientific knowledge. The pursuit of value has become the most important thing in life, under the influence of immanent transcendence. Cognition based on value will negatively influence the development of science. Scientific reason starts from pure interest, which could develop normally without being influenced by moral values.

4. Solutions

Mou Zongsan believes that moral reason must reflect a reverse meaning, in order to solve the problems caused by immanent transcendence. The reverse of moral reason is its self-denial, that is, the conscience self-negation. Moral reason can develop democratic politics and scientific knowledge only through self-negation. However, Mou Zongsan's solution also has its shortcomings. Conscience self-negation is likely to stay at the level of moral rationality, and cognitive rationality, in turn, cannot develop freely under the influence of moral rationality. Moreover, Mou Zongsan still remained at the level of understanding to grasp scientific cognition, and did not involve specific observation, experience, research and other activities.

As for the way to solve the problems caused by immanent transcendence, we should respect the diversity of personal interests, and not let moral reason obliterate personal interests. In other words, we should pay attention to the difference of temperament. Of course, Confucianism does not pay no attention to people's temperament, and is good at guiding people with different temperaments in different ways, but it is more concerned about how to make people own the sage personality on the basis of the original temperament, and improve the temperament through moral conscience, which is called changing temperament. What we are saying here is that we should pay attention to the difference of temperament in life, let people do what they are good at, using their potential abilities. But here is a difference from Confucianism. Human life revolves around morality, and the choices of occupation are also related to morality in Confucianism. We think that people's career choices are motivated by interest rather than value, which belongs to the zone of moral neutral. Of course, people live in groups in society. When we develop our temperament and engage in life, we will inevitably encounter moral and ethical problems. At this time, it needs the adjustment and guidance of moral reason, and the moral belief formed by the immanent transcendence of Confucianism will play an important role.

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