

THE HUMAN ISSUES IN EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

The East (China and India) is known as a cradle of human civilization. Since ancient times, this place has achieved many brilliant development achievements in all fields of social life, especially philosophy. During the process of formation and development, Eastern philosophy has taken people and human-related issues as the object of study. Theories on people are very rich and diverse in order to clarify the human issues in many different aspects. The paper uses the methodology of the materialist dialectic with comprehensive principle, development one, specific history one and methods of comparison, analysis and synthesis to clarify the basic contents of the human issue in ancient Eastern philosophy, specifically the contents of human origin, human nature, socio-political attitudes of people in ancient Chinese and Indian society.

Key Words: Human problems, Eastern philosophy, China, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the cradles of human civilization, the East has achieved many brilliant achievements in the fields of culture and thought, especially philosophy. Eastern philosophy was born and reached its peak in its development in the ancient period. Therefore, when studying Eastern philosophy, scholars mainly focused and even only did their research on the ancient period. Studying the entire content of Eastern philosophy, we will see that the political, social, ethical, and moral issues and the liberation of people from the sufferings and deadlocks of earthly life. Therefore, man is one of the central issues of Eastern philosophy. The schools of philosophy all have a common tendency to introversion and focus on studying human beings in many different aspects: human origin, human nature and socio-political attitudes of people before the economic, political and social reality of Eastern countries. Although there are still many limitations due to historical conditions and class positions, the concept of man in Eastern philosophy has many positive points that we can apply to the cause of human construction and development presently.

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2.1. *Regarding human origin*

Both Indian philosophy and Chinese philosophy have a fierce debate between the religious idealism and the human-origin materialism. If the religious idealism holds that man is created by a supreme god, materialism holds that man is created by material factors.

The viewpoint of religious idealism is clearly expressed in the Indian system of Vedata and Upanisads; The Book of Poetry and the Book of Scripture in China. The Vedata Sutra conceives that human beings and all things are created by a God. The Upanisad says that the soul (atman) of man is only product and manifestation of the soul of the world (brahman), "The Atman is likened to infinite space, the individual is like the space contained in a jar. The jar is the body... that example demonstrates how one must understand birth. When the jar breaks, where does the space

contained in the jar go? It disappears into infinite space. In the same way that the individual disappears into the supreme entity, Atman”.

Meanwhile, The Book of Poetry and the Book of Scriptures assert that man are influenced by the destiny of heaven; Typical is the view of Confucius (the founder of Confucianism) that “all human beings have destiny and fate”. In ancient Chinese philosophy, Confucius was the opening pioneer; Later, more and more other thinkers joined in making the arguments about the origin of man more and more extensive.

Idealism is based on the above view of Confucius to develop widely. During the Han Dynasty, Tung Chung-shu (a leading representative of the Confucianists of the Han Dynasty) said that humans have the following origins: Heaven gives birth to human beings in their own shape, Heaven gives birth to human beings to fulfill their will. Heaven gave birth to animals to feed people, Heaven gave birth to propriety to teach people, Heaven gave birth to kings to rule people. It can be clearly seen that the ultimate goal of the view of heaven's destiny is “Heaven gave birth to a king to rule people” (Doan Chinh, 2010). He exalted Heaven just to absolutize the role of the King. The king was called “Son of Heaven” to replace Heaven in practicing religion. Thus, this point of view aimed to strengthen the centralized feudal system and became an excellent tool to dominate the majority of laborers at that time.

In contrast to religious idealism, the views of materialism and atheism in both India and China are very progressive. Buddhism does not recognize the world soul as the source of the human sou, and claim that man is his own cause; in which, the past man is the cause of the present man, and the present man is the cause of the future man. This is clearly demonstrated in the doctrine of The Twelve Links Of Dependent Origination. With the use of material factors as the basis to explain the birth and existence of human beings, Buddhism has had a positive meaning in fighting against the idea of destiny and fate. However, Buddhism still cannot escape the vicious circle of mystical idealism when it believes that human beings are caused by the law of cause and effect, due to “karma”. Birth and death are in the cycle of retribution.

In the Upanishads, the materialistic view holds that the original human world consists of four elements: earth, water, fire and wind. This view is similar to the Chinese “Five Elements” view. The “Five Elements” consists of five elements: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth have both mutual relations and mutual interactions. It is the origin of man and all things. This view laid a solid ideological foundation for later periods. By the Song Dynasty, Zhou Xi and other physicists made the point: Humans are born from “Li” in a process: “Li” gives birth to “qi” (ie yin and yang five elements) - “qi” gives birth to “person” and “thing”. This “qi” became the instrument of domination of the feudal classes in China. Thus, it can be seen that for the philosophers of ancient Chinese philosophy, even though they come from different worldviews to give different explanations about the origin of man, in the end, they all aim for the same purpose, which was to support and justify the caste order of the contemporary feudal system.

Criticizing the view of heaven's destiny, Xunzi continued the view of Sun Jian and Yuanwen, when he said that qi was the source of all things and people. Later, Zhang Zai in the Song dynasty conceived of “Great emptiness” (the basic form of existence of qi) as the source of all things and people. During the Qing Dynasty, materialist Dai Zhen believed that the origin of man was in the movement of primitive matter, which he called “the circulating qi”.

Besides, Lao Tzu said: “Tao” was “the sect of all things” (the origin of all things). Its process was “Tao gives birth to 1, 1 gives birth to 2, 2 gives birth to 3, 3 gives birth to all things”. After “Tao”, there are factors that help things form: “Tao is born, virtue is nurtured, objects

manifest and the body helps to grow”. We can understand Lao Tzu's word of “Tao” to refer to the absolute principle that existed before the creation of heaven and earth; no birth, no death, no increase, no decrease. Tao can be understood in two ways: Wu and Huu.

2.2. Regarding human nature

Since ancient times, Eastern philosophical schools have tried to explain the issue of human nature, the relationship between people and the surrounding world. Due to the socio-economic conditions and historical characteristics of Eastern philosophy, human issues are explained on the basis of idealistic worldview, mystical religion or dualism.

With the predominance of idealist or materialistic views, both Confucian and Taoist philosophies discuss human nature and human destiny. Confucius believes that human nature is “Heaven's will” that dominates decisions, the “Core” virtue is the highest human value. On the other hand, Taoism believes that people are born from “Tao”. Therefore, people need to live non-action by pure nature.

In Chinese philosophy throughout its history of more than two thousand years of ancient and medieval times, the issue of human nature is a matter of primary concern. To solve this problem, thinkers of Confucianism and Legalism have approached from the perspective of practical political and ethical activities of society and came to the conclusion that human nature is Goodness (Confucianism), and human nature is Badness (Legalism). Taoist thinkers, right from Lao Tzu in the Spring and Autumn period, approached to solve the problem of human nature from a different perspective and came to the conclusion that human nature is human. The difference in approach and the different conclusions about human nature have been the premise for the different views of these philosophical schools in solving problems of their political, moral and human views. Regarding the issue of human nature, philosophers of the Confucian school (Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi) made many profound arguments. When discussing human nature, Confucius said that human nature was good and it was almost the same in everyone. He said: “Their natures are much the same; their habits become widely different” (Nguyen Dang Tien, 2007). It means that, people are born with almost the same nature, but due to the process of contact and learning, it makes them different, some are wise, some are stupid; Human qualities are simple, honest and that is a favorable condition for cultivating benevolence, and all other virtues also come from benevolence. Human nature is good, but because people are used to the habits of life, and they love every things, so they see the benevolent things far away from themselves. Therefore, when a person has benevolence, he must always keep the benevolent thing, and never leave it, even for a moment.

When discussing human nature, Mencius said that human nature was good, and human benevolence was expressed through four great virtues: Benevolence, Propriety, Righteousness, Wisdom. Those four great virtues originate from the four elements. Those are: Compassion (knowing mercy), shame (knowing shame), respect (knowing reverence) and lucidity (knowing the difference between the right and wrong). Anyone who has no compassion is not a person. Those who has no respect is not a person. Those who has no lucidity is not a person. Compassion is the clue of benevolence, shame is the clue of righteousness, the respect is the clue of propriety, and lucidity is the clue of wisdom. Humans have those four clues like the body has four limbs. These are the qualities that people are born with. The four qualities are the four clues of good things, so they are also called kindness. Kindness is inherent in human nature. If people know how to cultivate kindness, they can easily become saints, but if they lose kindness, let it fade away, they will become petty, lose all humanity. If you say you can't fix yourself with these four clues, you're

harming yourself. If you already have these four clues inside of you, if you know how to extend them, it's like a fire just starting to burn, like a stream just starting to flow (Tran Nguyen Viet, 2015). Besides, according to Mencius, human nature is good and because “nature is the common thing, the nature of the species” (Nguyen & Ho, 2018). In humans, it has many similarities, in which the first similarity is a good instinct given by nature. Then, there is the similarity in the faculties to recognize the good, the bad, slander...With that talent and ability, everyone has good seeds and can become good. Mencius said that all things of the same kind have a similar nature, why did people doubt that the nature was not similar? The saints and we are all of the same type, that is, the personal character is all the same...A saint is someone who knows in advance the mind of all people. Therefore, propriety and righteousness make our mind like it, just like the food that pleases my mouth (Nguyen The Long, 2015).

Human nature is good, because in every human being there is a heart. The mind is the subject in the human spirit, is the wisdom which is endowed with human beings to understand and deal with all things, to distinguish between the right and wrong, good, bad, benevolence, righteousness..., to know that these are the four clues of kindness; Those four clues are inherent in people, not because of the outside. According to Mencius, mind is the root of kindness; mind and nature are one, and mind is endowed, so knowing your own nature is knowing the nature of heaven. The mind is the place to distinguish between the right and wrong, goodness and badness, so understanding from the mind is deeper than understanding from senses. In the senses, the ears and eyes are the things that do not think, so they are covered by external things. Objects are in contact with objects, so it is easily covered by outside objects. Objects are in contact with objects, so it is easy for objects to get lost. The mind is the thought that understands the right, understands the right and wrong. The organs from the small ones which are the ears, eyes, nose, mouth to the big ones which are the mind. All are given to man by Heaven. If we have already decided on the big one and nurtured the mind. Then, the small things, like the ears (falling in love with the sound of things), the eyes (loving the color of things), the nose (loving the taste of things), hands, feet, body according to smooth objects...can not usurp power and wisdom of the mind. Thus, according to Mencius, the knowledge of rightness and wrongness, righteousness and evil to have kindness brought by the mind is what you know yourself; Heaven create human beings with those knowledge - that is the foreknowledge, the “birth with knowledge” of human (Ha Thuc Minh, 2001).

At the end of the Warring States period, Xun Tu saw with his own eyes the scene of fighting, tearing and killing each other between classes, between people and people in society, so he advocated the explanation that human nature begins with evil. According to him, at birth, human beings inherently have greed and desires, so in order to satisfy those feelings and desires, people must act according to their own nature. And, that must lead to fighting, tearing, plundering, appropriating each other. According to Xun Tzu, “Human nature is born with greed; accepting that nature, man will compete with each other without respect. Human nature is born with envy; accepting that nature, man becomes a harmful one without loyalty. Human nature is born with the desire of eyes and ears, having a liking for sound and beauty; accepting that nature, man becomes lustful without propriety and righteousness. Thus, following one's nature, there is bound to be a fight, a violation of fate (ie, each other's rights), disorder of morals, and a brutal mistake. Therefore, there must be a teacher, a permission to transform (the nature) away, a propriety to guide it, and then there is the respect, a conformity with morals, and become a rule” (Vu Khieu, 1995). Thus, with Xun Tzu, the original nature of man is evil, and the good nature is man-made.

According to Xun Tu, the nature of man is created by harmony, the flexibility with everything, and the mutual induction. Love and hate, joy and anger, love and joy are called love. Love is infinity, so you must have a mind to choose what you should and shouldn't do, called "contemplation". Having contemplation is to make people act, and people need to have study and practice to shape their own nature.

If Mencius thought that benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom were the four clues of human nature, Xun Tzu said that was not the case and he said that the clues of human nature were greed, envy, and lusts of the flesh; it was these three clue that were available at birth. Humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom were created by humans, not by heaven.

Unlike Chinese philosophy, the thinkers of the Indian philosophical schools, typically the Buddhist school, approach from a different perspective. That is the perspective of thinking about people and human life at the depth of metaphysical philosophy (Metaphysics) for human affairs. The conclusion about the nature of No-self, impermanence and the good disposition of people on the path to Enlightenment is one of the unique conclusions of Buddhist philosophy. Buddhist philosophy considers man to be a combination of nama and rupa (matter and spirit). Man's mundane life is just an illusion, a temporary empty space of "Not lasting", man must return to nature "Nirvana", where the human soul is liberated to become immortal.

In ancient Indian philosophy, Buddhism discussed humanity as a religion. From Theravada Buddhism to the Hinayana and Mahayana schools, they all agree on the point of view: Humans have two types of personality: Buddha nature (called "nature") and mundane nature (called "love"). In which, the Buddha Nature is the enlightened human nature of the "unreal" and "empty" realm; the enlightenment about the world of "true likeness", about the realm of "nirvana" without birth and death. The worldliness is the human nature that is still immersed in the realm of ignorance with the thought of being filled with the habit of "greed - anger - delusion". "Greed" means coveting, wishing for and possessing; "anger" means angry, hot-tempered; "delusion" means ignorance, darkness. The worldliness makes people covered with ignorance, wandering around and unable to escape from the cycle of samsara to advance to Buddhahood. Therefore, if wanting to have Buddha nature to attain Nirvana; people must destroy sex, that is, give up greed - anger - delusion, follow the eight paths called the eight righteous paths.

2.3. People's attitude towards the country's socio-political situation

From clarifying issues related to people such as nature, human nature and human morality, Chinese philosophy moves on to discuss people's attitudes towards politics and society. This is, after all, the central part of all philosophical doctrines on man.

People's attitude towards the country's socio-political situation is aimed at the incarnation spirit of human beings. It plays a decisive role in what people need to do to make their mark in the general development of society. Confucianism advocates that people incarnate, attach themselves to society by giving the model of a perfect gentleman who must know "cultivate oneself, put the family in order, govern the nation, bring peace to the world". Therefore, people need to study hard to succeed, become an officials to help the king and save lives. If you succeed, you will become a mandarin, if you are not successful, you will hide or bring the learned knowledge and pass it on to your students. This is a positive view, promoting human's training ability, capacity and behavior, and upholding human's sense, responsibility and mission for the development of the country.

Contrary to the point of view of Confucianism, Taoism offered a view of "Wu-wei" (nondual action). Criticizing the Confucian viewpoint of fame and benefit, the viewpoint of "wu-wei" causes

people to have two attitudes towards socio-political issues. It is a noble life attitude, deeply studying and practicing the religion, not caring about fame and benefit, money, not being greedy for fame and wealth, but consequently, it gives rise to a negative, boring, irresponsible attitude of the people to society.

Buddhism advocates to emerge from the world, to stay away from life to go to practice to find a life of nothingness. It makes people have negative thoughts, cynical.

3. CONCLUSION

Ancient Eastern philosophy pays great attention to human issues in many aspects such as human origin, human nature and people's attitude towards the country's socio-political situation. This philosophical system always focuses on solving socio-political problems and the pressing daily problems, solving ethical and moral problems, taking people, the interests of people and human society as the center. That is also the reason why ancient Eastern philosophy has made a profound influence in contemporary political and social life since its birth. Many theories of famous schools were adopted by the ruling classes as the state religion, elevated to a highest position in order to rule the country and dominate the vast majority of the working people. Therefore, it can be affirmed that, with positive values, the viewpoint of man in Eastern philosophy has a great role in educating people, directing people to good moral values. Therefore, many viewpoints and thoughts on human in the philosophy of this period have still had profound values to this day.

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