

The Fundamental Representation and Achievement Methods of a “Good Life” in Chinese Traditional Culture

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Abstract: A “good life” refers to a life phase in which people achieve a satisfying degree of spiritual value perception and emotional experience in the environment of “current” high material living standards, social harmony, fairness, and justice, and thus exclaim “good” from the heart. This article focuses on Chinese traditional culture's understanding of the “good life,” and attempted to summarize the “good life” in Chinese traditional fundamental characterization, as well as analyze the “good life” in Chinese traditional ways of implementation, using the literary method.

Keywords: Chinese traditional culture; The good life; Implementation

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1. Introduction

In fact, a “good life” has been the aspiration of people since ancient times. People’s desires for life, whether Chinese or Western, are mostly motivated by “beauty,” material satisfaction, or spiritual satisfaction. However, each historical period, each social stage, and its “happy life” symbolizes the connotation, the fundamental representation included in, and the method’s specific achievement is not the same ^[1]. Then, how does traditional Chinese culture view and understand “good life,” and what are the fundamental representations and methods for achieving that “good life?” Therefore, this paper will focus on the above issues raised in the following research.

2. The Fundamental Representation of a “Good Life” in Traditional Chinese Culture

The three images of “good life” in traditional Chinese culture, which conform to the nature, the great harmony of the world, the happiness of a family and the happiness of contentment, solves the problem of what the “good life” is in the relationship between man and nature, man and society, and man and man ^[1]. Then, what are the fundamental representations of a “good life,” based on these three images in traditional Chinese culture? After further induction and summary of traditional culture, the author has drawn three fundamental representations of a “good life” in traditional Chinese culture:

2.1. A “good life” is based on the “farming culture”

The first fundamental representation of a “good life” in traditional Chinese culture is that a “good life” is based on the “farming culture.” As mentioned in the definition of the “good life,” the first and most prerequisite for a “good life” is material. Furthermore, due to China’s geographical characteristics and

perfect climate environment for breeding, China has a long history of farming culture since ancient times, the origin of which is known as “men plough, women weave.” It is not difficult for us to develop in all types of depictions and yearnings for a “good life” in traditional Chinese culture, among which there are traces of “farming culture.”

As early as the pre-Qin period, “Song of Beating the Soil,” an ancient poem circulating among Chinese people before the Qin Dynasty, vividly depicted the “beautiful life” with pastoral scenery poems: “You work with the sunrise, you rest with the sun, you drink with the well, and you eat with the ploughs. What is Dili to me!” This means that when the sun comes up, they go out to work the fields. When the sun goes down and the night comes, they go home and rest. When they dig a well, they can have water to drink. When they work in the fields, they won’t go hungry especially for grain. “What a wonderful life it was, and who would fight for the emperor and covetous for power?” said the Herdsman in Guanzi. It is also mentioned that “only when people have enough food to eat and clothing, can they talk about the issue of etiquette, and pursue honor and attach importance to pride.

It can be seen that a “good life” in the eyes of traditional Chinese people has a premise, that is the problem of survival must be solved first, whereby the fundamental problem of food and clothing must be solved first. However, food is the most important thing for the people. In traditional China, food demand has always been mainly met by planting wheat, rice and other crops. The “farming culture” formed under such a small-scale low economy model is not only the foundation of the traditional society, but also the foundation of a “good life” in the eyes of the traditional Chinese people. Therefore, the first fundamental representation of a “good life” in traditional Chinese culture is that a “good life” is based on the “farming culture.”

2.2. An individuals’ “good life” depends on the family’s “good life”

The second fundamental representation of a “good life” in Chinese traditional culture is closely related to the nature of Chinese traditional society. As mentioned in a “good life,” is the happy life of a family. In truth, Chinese society is an ethics-based society. The traditional Chinese lack social life in such an ethics-based society, and pay special attention to their family and society. As a result, the individual's “good life” is dependent on the family’s “good life.”

Family is a very important part for both traditional and modern Chinese people. This is very different from Westerners, for whom the intensive nature of corporate life makes the concept of home dispensable. For the traditional Chinese people, the family is not only a place for eating and living, but also a harbor for spiritual rest, a place for personal sustenance, as well as a bond of kinship and consanguinity, which holds a high status. In many depictions of the “good life” in traditional Chinese culture, the shadow of home appears. For example, in the “Three Kingdoms” period, Cao Cao wrote in “Walking Out of the Summer Gate” that “Although the Turtle Lifestyle” which meant, the happiness of keeping others happy can lead to eternal life. He is busy in life and striving for a stable home to enjoy his old age, such as Du Fu in the “Hut for the Autumn Wind Broken” song which described, in the safe mansions between ten mountains, it is not difficult to see the tile cover the head in the world, and this image has a strong hold on people’s hearts.

In traditional Chinese culture, a “good life” is not achieved only by one person, but also by a peaceful and harmonious family life, which is the complete “good life.” Lin Yutang, a representative of New Taoism, once said, “There are no more than four things to be happy in life: one is to sleep in one’s own bed; Two is to eat the food cooked by their parents; Three is to listen to the love words; Four is to play games with the children.” Therefore, for the traditional Chinese people, the “good life” is not so much of an individual one, as a “good life” depends on the family. Therefore, the second fundamental representation of the “good life” in traditional Chinese culture is that a “good life” of the individual depends on the “good life” of the family.

2.3. “Good spiritual life” takes precedence over “good material life”

The essence of a “good life” has two levels, one is material level, the other is spiritual level. Although in traditional Chinese culture, material needs are the most prerequisite for the pursuit of a “good life,” but material needs are not only about food and clothing, but also about more material needs. When the fundamental material needs have been solved, there are still two aspects of the material and spiritual aspects of the pursuit of a “good life.” Which comes first, “a good spiritual life” or “a good material life?”

There is no doubt that for traditional Chinese people, it is obviously more important to have a “good spiritual life.” Liu Yuxi, the poet of the “Tang Dynasty,” wrote in his “Humble Room Inscription,” that “Si is humble room, but my virtue is sweet. What’s so bad about it?” It is a classic example of not cooperating with the secular world. Even at that time, Liu Yuxi was degraded by the imperial court for his innovation, leading to a bad situation, living in the “humble room,” but if he is willing to give up their own pride and noble transactions, obviously there is a great wealth and glory, but he did not, preferring to pursue the spiritual level of noble and pride. Confucius also mentioned in the *Analects of Confucius*, “Food sparse. Delight in it. Unrighteous riches and dearth are like clouds to me.” It can be seen that he would rather live on a simple diet than abandon his spiritual pursuit and pursue the glory and wealth of material life.

Of course, the fundamental needs of survival are the priority, but when the fundamental material conditions are met, there will be the pursuit of higher spirit to meet. Even in traditional Chinese culture, for many ancient sages, they would rather sacrifice their lives for justice and abandon all material life in pursuit of a “beautiful spiritual life.” For example, in the book, “Life is my desire, and justice is my desire. Give up life... Take righteousness.” Therefore, the second fundamental representation of “good life” in traditional Chinese culture is that “good spiritual life” takes precedence over “good material life.”

3. The Methods to Achieve a “Good Life” in Traditional Chinese Culture

People’s pursuit of a “good life” is ultimately based on the achievement of a “good life.” Whether it is a harmonious society or a well-off society, on the road of desire and pursuit, the traditional Chinese people have adopted a variety of methods to achieve it. Through the grooming and summarizing of traditional culture, based on the three fundamental representations of a “good life” in traditional Chinese culture, the author draws three ways to achieve a “good life” in traditional Chinese culture:

3.1. A “good life” depends on hard work

As we all know, a “good life” is something you strive for, not something you get for nothing. In traditional Chinese culture, the achievement of a “good life,” whether it is the Confucian concept of active entry into the world and great harmony, or the Taoist concept of inaction and contentment, all methods to the achievement of a “good life” must depend on the hard work of the people.

The achievement of a “good life” must be inseparable from hard work, and all desire, etc., is not to wait for a “good life.” Ban Gu, a famous historian of the Eastern Han Dynasty, mentioned in his book “Records of Rites and Music of the Han Dynasty” that it is preferable to retreat to weave a web than fish in the pond,” which vividly demonstrated that instead of waiting for appreciation for the “beautiful life,” one should take practical action and depend on hard work to achieve it. It’s also mentioned in “Chuang Tzu’s, A Happy Journey” that if the wind does not accumulate heavily, its negative wings will be weak, implying that without hard work and sufficient accumulation in daily life, success and a “good life” are impossible to accomplish. As the sage Zhang Heng said, “life in diligence, no gain?” Nothing can be gained without hard work, as mentioned by “Zuo Zhuan in Xuan Gong 12 years.” In people’s livelihood in attendance or not.” People’s livelihoods are based on productivity, and only productivity can lack materials, and only productivity can become wealthy.

“No pain, no gain,” hard work is the most important factor in achieving a “good life,” significant to the

country's strength and prosperity, little to the family's happiness, rich life, cannot be achieved without it. Easy food and clothing, as well as food and clothing stability, are the result of people's hard work; family harmony and happiness are the result of family members' joint efforts and hard work; and the country's prosperity and society's stability are also the result of state administrators' hard work. In a summary, in traditional Chinese culture, achieving the "happy life" requires hard work.

3.2. "Good life" depends on "benign politics"

Since "all schools of thought have been dethroned, only Confucianism has been respected." Later, Confucian culture became the main body of traditional Chinese culture, and the core of Confucian ideological system is "benevolence," which emphasizes "benevolence, justice, order, and harmony," advocated for the implementation of "benevolent government" through the "system of people's property," so that people have the fundamental security of life to achieve political stability and social harmony. At the same time, the implementation of "benevolent government" is also the main method to achieve a "good life" in Confucianism [2].

Confucius, the founder of the Confucian school, puts forward the idea of "benevolent governance" in his "Papers," such as do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you. When it came to Mencius, he further proposed the idea of "benevolent government," that is the specific measures to carry out the "benevolent government," the fundamental of which was "people-oriented." Mencius mentioned in his book, "the people are the most important, the state is the second, and the king is the lightest." It is precisely this idea of "benevolent government" and the implementation of the "well field system" and "low tax collection" of "benevolent government" measures that have won the hearts of the people. For example, Du Mu wrote in the poem "send an ox to Xianggong" that describes six years of benevolent government eulogize, which is to praise the "benevolent government" of the ruler.

The Confucian concept of "benevolent government" had such an impact on subsequent generations that, in traditional Chinese culture, "benevolent government" was inherently the first choice for rulers seeking a "good life" in their political methods. Furthermore, the Confucian concept of "benevolent government" is reflected in the development of productive forces. "When the farm is not in accordance with the grain is not good than food," according to "Mencius, King Hui of Liang." It emphasizes that adhering to the law of production allows one to achieve "grain is not better than food" and a "good life." As a result, in traditional Chinese culture, achieving a "good life" is largely dependent on "benevolent government."

3.3. The "good life" depends on blood relations helping each other

Since the last years of the Shang Dynasty, when the system of succession was established, the traditional Chinese society began to have a patriarchal system for several thousand years. Patriarchal system, is a social system in which the power of the family is distributed according to blood relations in order to maintain "hereditary rule." Among them, one of the most critical ties is the kinship relationship, which distributes social resources and family power according to the kinship relationship, among which the highest power is inherited by the eldest son.

In patriarchal society, the relationship between people, especially those who are related by blood, becomes very important, because it is directly related to the resources enjoyed by individuals in ruling power, wealth and fief. In terms of material life, if you are born into a family of great wealth and great power, your father will give you enough resources to support you, and you will have nothing to worry about when you are young, so the "good material life" will naturally be attained. On the other hand, if you were born into a poor family, it is difficult to avoid poverty early in life, but this does not mean that you cannot achieve "good material life," because as you grow older, you can still obtain rich social resources through

hard work, and you can also achieve “good material life” through feedback to your family and parents. It can be seen that a “good life” can be achieved materially by blood relations and kinship [3].

Similarly, on a spiritual level parents make selfless efforts to raise their children, and children grow up to know how to practice Thanksgiving filial piety, family happiness, and to achieve the state of family happiness, the “spiritual life” develops naturally. Therefore, in traditional Chinese culture, due to the influence of patriarchal system, the achievement of a “good life” can depend on the mutual help of blood relatives.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, extensive and profound Chinese culture has a long history. In traditional Chinese culture, we see the traditional Chinese people pursuing "good life" to "farming culture" as the foundation, personal "good life" depending on "family good life," and "spiritual life" prior to "material life beautiful" as the three fundamental characterizations. This paper analyzes the achievement way of "good life" in Chinese traditional culture, which depends on hard work, benevolent government and mutual help of blood and kinship. Taking history as a mirror and the ancients as a reference, these are important to our current achievement of the objective of “people’s desire for a good life,” which will aid us in achieving the “good life” in this new era.

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