

On the Basic Connotation and Characteristics of Confucian Cultural Psychology



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Abstract: Confucian cultural psychology is a psychological discipline that studies Confucian culture mind, Which refers to the meanings of stimuli, situations, events, the world, etc. endowed or constructed by Confucian culture during its formation and development, as well as the psychological reactions or behavioral patterns regulated or constrained by these meanings. It is the mental characteristics of the “gentleman” (the ideal persona in Confucian culture) and the mainstay of Chinese cultural mind. It has the following basic properties and characteristics: (1) A humanistic-people-oriented concept and value pursuit with Ren (benevolence) as the core; (2) An introspective method of seeking understanding through the Xin (heart or mind); (3) The family-state sentiment, life attitude, and sense of mission embodied in the concept of “cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world”; (4) The life principle of “He (和: harmony) is precious”; (5) A practical rationality that advocates pragmatism and earnest action; (6) The concept of win-win cooperation for the great harmony of the world and the psychological quality of working for the common good.

Keywords: Confucian Cultural Psychology; Xin (心: Heart or Mind); Ren (仁: Benevolence); He (和: Harmony)

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1 Introduction

“The fine traditional Chinese culture has become part of the genes of the Chinese nation, taking root in the hearts of the Chinese people and subtly influencing their way of thinking and behavior” [1]. It embodies positive psychological qualities such as “the world is for all; the people are the foundation of the state; govern with virtue; reform and innovate; appoint people on their merits; harmony between man and nature; unrelenting self-improvement; virtue carries things; emphasize trust and amity; be kind to neighbors” [2]. Confucian culture is no exception. *The Opinions on Implementing the Project*

of Inheriting and Developing Fine Traditional Chinese Culture requires that the core ideological concepts, traditional virtues, and humanistic spirits of Chinese culture to be inherited and developed are basically Confucian cultural psychology [3]. The educational contents such as family and country feelings, social care, and personality cultivation emphasized in *the Guidelines for Improving the Education of Fine Traditional Chinese Culture* are also Confucian cultural psychology [4].

Confucian culture is a basic component of Chinese culture, which has long been integrated into the daily life of

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the Chinese people in the long history and has always played an important role in the development of the Chinese nation. In periods of relatively stable society, Confucian culture plays an irreplaceable role in regulating social order and forming stable and harmonious social relations and ethics. In times of social unrest, there are always some “scholars” with Confucian cultural mental characteristics who, adhering to the ideal and belief of “regulating the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world”, take the initiative to stand up to put an end to the chaos. Zhao Pu, the prime minister in the early Northern Song Dynasty, mainly read and used “*The Analects of Confucius*” all his life. It is said that “half of The Analects of Confucius stabilized the country, and half governed the country” (《鹤林玉露·乙编 卷之一 论语》《宋史 赵普传》).

The Confucian culture's transcendental roots, inherent roots, social roots, and cultural roots are not only the source of its vitality but also the internal foundation of its uniqueness [5]. Many of its thinking methods have important enlightenment significance for overcoming certain one-sidedness in Western empirical scientific thinking methods; many of its political ideals, principles of governing the country, and personality traits play a great positive role in contemporary people's ideological and moral cultivation, self-cultivation, and the establishment of national subject consciousness. The positive mind of Confucian culture, such as the cultural spirit of “constantly striving for self-improvement and carrying things with virtue”, the ideal of joining the world to govern the family and the country, the humanistic spirit centered on Ren (仁: benevolence), the thought of people-oriented, the feelings of family and country, the sense of mission, the way of dealing with others of Ren (仁: benevolence), Yi (义: righteousness), Li (礼: propriety), Zhi (智: wisdom) and Xin (信: faith), the way of forgiveness, and the thought of harmony as the most precious, has taken root in the hearts of the Chinese people and become the cultural gene of the Chinese nation. Because of this, it is very important and necessary to carry out research on Confucian cultural psychology and cultivate and enhance people's Confucian cultural mental quality.

2 The Concept of Confucian Cultural Psychology

Confucian cultural psychology is a knowledge and the-

oretical system that studies Confucian cultural mind, which refers to a structured meaning system with “Confucianism” as the core, which is uniquely characteristic of Confucian culture and gradually formed in the process of the formation and development of Confucian culture, as well as the psychological and behavioral system constrained by it [6].

2.1 Confucian Cultural Mind

Confucian cultural mind is the object of study in Confucian cultural psychology, referring to the psychological traits that Confucianism establishes as essential for a Confucian, i.e., a Junzi (君子: gentleman). The Chinese character “儒” (Ru, meaning Confucian) is composed of “人” (Ren, meaning person) and “需” (Xu, meaning need). The radical “亻” (Ren, referring to a person) indicates a special group of people who emerged from shamans, historians, ritual officiants, and diviners, possessing specialized knowledge and skills, primarily referring to scholars. The component “需” (Xu: need) signifies those who can meet the needs of people at that time, especially the needs of social development.

The ideal image of a Junzi (君子: gentleman) or Confucian in Confucian culture is “内圣外王” (Nei sheng wai wang), meaning “sagely inwardly and kingly outwardly”—having lofty inner cultivation and achieving great external undertakings, with the two complementing and supporting each other. Nei-sheng (内圣, Inner sageliness) is the essential quality required to accomplish Wang-ye (王业, kingly undertakings); without Nei-sheng (inner sageliness), Wang-ye (王业, kingly undertakings) lack necessary support and cannot be achieved at all. Kingly undertakings are the external manifestation of Nei-sheng (inner sageliness) and the realization of its intrinsic value. This indicates that from its origin, a “Confucian” is someone who has abilities and actively demonstrates them in society.

Confucius, the founder of Confucian culture, actively standardized the spirit of “Confucian” in the direction of the spirit of a great man and the character of a Junzi (君子: gentleman), striving to elevate and summarize the Confucian ideological system centered on “仁” (Ren, benevolence), ultimately making Confucians a special class of wise men in the social structure. Later Confucians inherited Confucius' commitment to engaging in society and

actively devoted themselves to making contributions, never shrinking back in the face of any difficulties or obstacles.

“士不可以不弘毅，任重而道远” (A scholar must be resolute and broad-minded, for his burden is heavy and his road is long) (《论语 泰伯》), clearly affirms that Confucians should actively take on the important responsibility of governing the family, managing the state, and bringing peace to the world, while cultivating positive psychological qualities such as perseverance and a broad mind. If one's self-cultivation is insufficient, one should constantly strengthen it, improve what one is incapable of, and match one's virtue to one's position. If one has cultivation but is unrecognized and lacks opportunities, one should retreat to continue enhancing one's self-cultivation, or educate people to cultivate talents needed by society, or write books to advocate one's ideas. This is what Confucian culture emphasizes as “立功” (Li gong, establishing meritorious deeds), “立德” (Li de, establishing virtue), and “立言” (Li yan, establishing words) [7].

“Respecting virtue and delighting in righteousness, one can live a carefree life. Therefore, a scholar does not lose righteousness when impoverished, and does not depart from the Dao when prosperous. Not losing righteousness in poverty, the scholar remains true to himself; not departing from the Dao in prosperity, the people are not disappointed. Ancient people, when achieving their aspirations, brought benefits to the people; when failing to achieve their aspirations, they cultivated themselves to set an example in the world. In poverty, they maintained their own integrity; in prosperity, they benefited all under heaven” (《孟子 尽心章句上》). These are the essential psychological qualities or behavioral characteristics of a Confucian or gentleman.

2.2 Confucian Cultural Mind Is a Meaning System and a Response Pattern Constrained by It

Confucian cultural mind is a system of meanings assigned or constructed by Confucian culture to stimuli, situations, events, the world, etc., during its formation and development, as well as the psychological responses or behavioral patterns prescribed or constrained by such a system. For example, Confucian culture endows predica-

ments, setbacks, or failures with the meaning of tempering the positive psychological qualities that one should possess to take on great responsibilities. This prompts people to face them with a positive and optimistic attitude and cherish such opportunities for tempering. Precisely because of this, predicaments or adversities, reproaches, setbacks, blows, ridicules, etc., are transformed by Confucians or Junzi (君子: gentlemen) into positive factors that spur and motivate them to constantly strive, make progress, and surpass themselves.

Confucius said: “The learning of a Junzi (君子: gentleman) is not for the sake of success, but to remain unperturbed in poverty, not to let worries dampen his spirit, and to understand the beginning and end of fortune and misfortune without being confused in his heart. Being virtuous or unvirtuous is a matter of natural endowment; acting or not acting is a matter of one's own choice; being fortunate or unfortunate is a matter of timing; life and death are a matter of fate.... Therefore, a Junzi (君子: gentleman) studies extensively, plans deeply, cultivates his character, and conducts himself uprightly, waiting for his time.... Thus, those who do not live in seclusion cannot think far, and those who do not experience leisure cannot have broad aspirations” (《荀子 宥坐》). “Only when the year grows cold do we know that the pine and cypress are the last to shed their leaves” (《论语 子罕》). These clearly regard hardships, worries about life and death, and difficulties as opportunities or ways to temper people's positive psychological qualities such as aspirations, wisdom, perseverance, the spirit of enduring hardships, ambition, integrity, confidence, and courage.

“When Heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on a person, it first frustrates his spirit and will, exhausts his muscles and bones, makes him hungry and impoverished, and thwarts his efforts so as to stimulate his mind, harden his nature, and enhance his abilities” (《孟子 告子章句下》). This indicates that difficult and adverse circumstances are opportunities or ways to temper the positive psychological qualities that one should possess to take on great responsibilities, such as the ability to withstand setbacks, psychological resilience, the calmness to handle changes, and wisdom in dealing with affairs [6].

“One who is inherently poor and humble acts in accordance with poverty and humility; one who is inherently in hardship acts in accordance with hardship; thus, he can find contentment wherever he goes.....If one is in-

herently poor, humble, and in hardship, and learns to conduct oneself amid poverty, humility, and hardship, then one can also find contentment wherever one goes.....Now, having again encountered such tempering by the times, his progress and improvement are immeasurable” (《王守仁全集 卷九 与王纯甫 (壬申)》).

The positive meaning system constructed by Confucian culture has gradually taken root in the depths of the Chinese nation's psyche, becoming a cultural gene, spiritual character, and an inexhaustible source of motivation for the survival and development of the Chinese nation. From generation to generation, people with Confucian cultural psychology, adhering to the spirit and sense of responsibility that “every common man has a duty to his country in times of national crisis”, have constantly strived for self-improvement, remained unyielding, and overcome various difficulties, obstacles, internal troubles, and external threats, enabling the Chinese nation to always stand firm among the nations of the world. This shows that the meaning system constructed by Confucian culture is of great significance to both contemporary society and people who aspire to achieve great undertakings.

3 Basic Nature and Characteristics of Confucian Cultural Psychology

In summary, Confucian cultural psychology has the following basic characteristics.

3.1 Humanistic-People-Centered Ideals and Value Pursuits with Benevolence as the Core

Ren (仁, benevolence) is a fundamental quality that Confucian culture particularly emphasizes as essential for Ren (人: human), and it is also the most basic criterion for handling interpersonal relationships, occupying a core position in Confucian culture.

Confucian culture holds that Ren (仁) is the fundamental attribute and core characteristic of humans. “A benevolent person is a true human” (《中庸》). “Scholars should establish the nature of humans. A benevolent person is a human; one should distinguish what is meant by 'human' for a human. Learning is about learning how to be a hu-

man” (《宋元学案 卷十八 横渠学案下 语录》). “Benevolence is the principle by which humans are humans. However, benevolence is a principle; a human is a creature. The combination of the principle of benevolence with the human body is what is called the Dao (Way)” (《孟子集注 卷十四 尽心章句下》). “The reason why Ren (人: humans) are called Ren (人: humans) is because of their benevolence. Speaking of benevolence without mentioning humans fails to show where the principle resides; speaking of humans without mentioning benevolence reduces humans to no more than a piece of flesh and blood. Only by combining the two can the principle be revealed” (《朱子语类 卷六十一 孟子十一》). These clearly regard Ren (仁) as the most fundamental reason and primary criterion for being human.

In Confucian culture, Ren (仁) is specifically embodied in Ren-xin (仁心, Benevolent intentions), Ren-de (仁德, Benevolent virtues), and Ren-xing (仁行, Benevolent actions) (including benevolent governance). Ren-xin (仁心, Benevolent intentions) form the cornerstone of the entire concept of Ren (仁)—they are the psychological qualities or ideal personality traits essential for a benevolent person [8], and the innate psychological seeds in humans. Their fundamental characteristic is “Sheng-sheng” (生生: generating and nurturing), meaning the equal generation, nourishment, and care for all things. Their core lies in the moral virtue and psychological realm of “extensively benefiting the people and being able to aid the masses”, “being close to the people”, and “resting in the highest good”. To become a benevolent person, one should actively perceive, comprehend, cherish, and cultivate the benevolent intentions inherently present in one's original nature in daily life.

Ren-de (仁德, Benevolent virtues) are the moral qualities manifested through Renxin (仁心). They involve regulating and restraining one's behavior with Li (礼, ritual propriety), ensuring that one's actions conform to the requirements of Li (礼)—that is, consciously abiding by social moral norms, spontaneously acting in accordance with them, forming habits of doing good, and cultivating the psychological qualities of Ren (仁).

Ren-xing (仁行, Benevolent actions) are acts of righteousness, namely behaviors of being close to and caring for others, society, or the country. In terms of national governance, Ren-xing (仁行) are embodied as benevolent

governance, which refers to implementing political systems that are close to and love the people, treating the people with kindness, and bestowing benefits upon them. “Governing with virtue is like the North Star, which remains in its place while all other stars revolve around it” (《论语 为政》), clearly identifying benevolent governance as the measure or approach to truly winning the people's hearts. Therefore, rulers should “govern with virtue” and “be thrifty in expenditures and love the people”. The Confucian classic *The Great Learning* explicitly states at the beginning: “The way of great learning lies in illuminating virtue, in being close to the people, and in resting in the highest good”, emphasizing a people-centered approach.

In summary, Confucian cultural psychology is a humanistic and people-centered psychology with Ren (仁) as its core. It is people-oriented and respects human values; it pursues truth and goodness, emphasizing humanistic care; it advocates harmony without uniformity, respecting individuality and the unique value of each person. This ideology is embodied in national governance as the people-centered thought, which holds that the people are paramount, treats the people with a benevolent heart, cares about their sufferings, and values, honors, stabilizes, sympathizes with, and loves the people.

3.2 The Method of Comprehension by Seeking Within the Heart

Confucian culture pursues the grasp of the supreme “Dao (道)” or DaDao (大道, Great Dao)” or “Li (理)” or TianLi (天理, Heavenly Principle)”. However, “Dao (道)” or “Li (理)” cannot be expressed in words, nor can they be given or received; they can only be comprehended by one's own inner understanding. “Books cannot fully convey words, and words cannot fully convey meanings” (《周易 系辞上》). “The sages wrote books just like painting portraits to capture the spirit. They merely show people the general outline, enabling them to seek the truth from it. Their spirit, temperament, speech, laughter, movements, and stops are inherently beyond what can be conveyed” (《王守仁全集 卷六》《传习录 卷上 门人陆澄录》). Since “Dao (道)” or “Li (理)” is embodied in humans as the Benxin (本心: original mind) or Zixing (自性: self-nature), which is inherently Zizu (自足,

self-sufficient), humans can only and can indeed comprehend it within their hearts.

Confucian culture holds that “All things are already complete in me” and “There is nothing outside the mind” (《孟子 尽心章句上》《王守仁全集 卷七》《传习录 卷中 答欧阳崇一》). Since there is nothing outside the mind, and the Benxin (本心: original mind) or Zixing (自性: self-nature) is inherently sufficient in conscience and supreme virtue, all things, Dao (道), Li (理), benevolent virtues, etc., all reside within the mind. Thus, all things can be recognized and utilized by the human mind. Since the Dao (道) or Li (理) of all things is consistent with or identical to the Dao (道) or Li (理) embodied in human intrinsic nature or original mind, one can comprehend the Dao (道) or Li (理) of all things by the “Xin (心, mind)”, that is, seek Dao (道) or Li (理) within the heart. This is actually Guan (观, observing) and reflecting on the mind. Guan (观, Observation) here refers to “Zhi-guan (止观, stopping and observing), which means restraining delusions arising from worldly thoughts in the mind, keeping the mind calm and stable, so as to concentrate one's thoughts on active observation and right thinking, thereby understanding Shili (事理, the principles of things), achieving conscience, and gaining wisdom. “Xing (省, Reflection)” refers to “Neixing (内省, inner reflection)”, that is, examining one's own inner psychological activities and psychological qualities.

Guan (观, Observing) and Xing (省, reflecting) on the mind is an essential way or method emphasized in Chinese culture, especially Confucian culture, for enhancing self-cultivation. “I reflect on myself three times a day” (《论语 述而》). Introspection or self-reflection is a process of comprehending and expanding one's Benxin (本心: original mind). “The function of the mind is to think; by thinking, one gains understanding, and without thinking, one gains nothing. This is what Heaven has bestowed upon me” (《孟子 告子章句上》). “Anyone who possesses these four beginnings within themselves knows that they should all be expanded and fulfilled, just as a fire starts to blaze or a spring starts to flow. If one can fulfill them, they will be sufficient to protect the four seas; if one fails to fulfill them, they will not be sufficient to serve their parents” (《孟子 公孙丑章句上》). If one can comprehend and expand their “Benxin (本心, original

mind)", they "can become like Yao (尧) and Shun (舜)".

"Man is the mind of Heaven and Earth. Heaven, Earth, and all things are inherently one with me." "Nature is the substance of the mind. Heaven is the source of nature. To fully realize the mind is to fully realize nature. 'Only the most sincere person under Heaven can fully realize their nature and understand the transformation and nurturing of Heaven and Earth'. To retain the mind means the mind has not been fully realized" (《王守仁全集 卷六》《传习录 卷上 徐爱录》). "The principles of all things in the world do not lie outside our minds... As for fully realizing nature and understanding Heaven, it is nothing more than realizing the innate knowledge of our minds" (《王守仁全集 卷七》《传习录 卷中 答顾东桥书》).

Comprehending the "Dadao (大道, Great Dao)" or "Tianli (天理, Heavenly Principle)" is aimed at gradually reaching the psychological realm of "Nei Sheng Wai Wang (内圣外王, inner sageliness and outer kingliness)" through cultivation. To attain the state of a sage, one needs to turn to their own inner mind and rely on their own comprehension. The cognitive path of "Jinxin (尽心: fully realizing the mind) → Zhixing (知性: understanding nature) → Zhitian (知天: knowing Heaven)" pursued in Confucian culture is a form of comprehending cognition, and the self-cultivation approach of "Cunxin (存心, retaining the mind) → Yangxing (养性, nurturing nature) → Shitianxia (事天下, serving the world)" [6] is a mode of comprehending cultivation. Precisely because of this, Confucian culture particularly emphasizes examining and observing the mind.

Guanxin (观心: Observing the mind) allows one to observe Li (理, principles), and then verify the them within the mind by observing things. "One must work on the substance of the mind. Whenever one cannot understand or act, one must reflect and experience within one's own mind, and then one can comprehend. For the Four Books and Five Classics merely speak of this mind-substance. This mind-substance is what is called the Dao-mind (道心); clarifying the substance is clarifying the Dao... There is no Li (理, principle) outside the mind, no affair outside the mind.....Self-examination is the preservation and nourishment when there are affairs; preservation and nourishment is self-examination when there are no affairs" (《传习录 卷上 门人陆澄录》).

Since Li (理, principles) or Dao (道) reside in the mind, comprehending Li (理, principles) and attaining Dao (道) can only be achieved by mental comprehension, with no need to seek outside the mind. If one seeks outside the mind, they would find nothing.

Examining the mind is to perceive or apprehend the Li (理, principles) or Dao (道) that are all complete within the mind, to comprehend the "generative" Benxin (本心: original mind) or Zixing (自性: self-nature) embodied by the Dao (道) in humans, and to make the mind conform to the natural Li (理, principles) or Dao (道), i.e., Tiandao (天道, Heavenly Dao) or Tianli (天理, Heavenly Principle), merging with external things that come into the mind [6]. When the mind is moved, external things naturally respond; when the Dao (道) is comprehended within the mind, one can naturally align with the Dao (道) and merge with external things that embody the Dao (道).

Since the Benxin (本心, original mind) conforms to the Dao (道) and Tianli (天理, Heavenly Principle) inherently exists in the mind, attaining Dao and understanding Li can only be sought within the mind, with the basic way or method being comprehension [9]. In this sense, it can be said that Confucian cultural psychology is a psychology of comprehension.

3.3 The Feelings for Family and Country, Attitude Towards Life, and Sense of Mission

Since its birth, Confucian culture has emphasized engaging in society to achieve meritorious deeds and establish a career, thus attaching particular importance to the cultivation and enhancement of the psychological qualities required for such achievements. Confucian culture is a learning of engaging in the world. Engaging in the world means entering society to take positive actions and accomplish great things, which is the basic life attitude of Confucian culture, manifested in its outlook on life, values, and worldview. Therefore, a Junzi (君子: gentleman) should actively shoulder the social mission of being human, and diligently temper and continuously improve the psychological qualities needed for achieving meritorious deeds and building a career.

The engagement in the world in Confucian culture is

mainly reflected in three aspects: Li-de (立德: establishing virtue), Li-gong (立功: establishing meritorious deeds), and Li-yan (立言: establishing words). “The highest is to Li-de (立德: establish virtue), the next is to Li-gong (立功: establish meritorious deeds), and the next is to Li-yan (立言: establish words); these will not be discarded even after a long time” (《左传》).

Li-de (立德: establishing virtue) means “creating systems and leaving laws, extensively bestowing benefits and aiding the masses, so that sage virtue is established in previous generations and its kindness and grace are spread endlessly” (《左传正义 卷三十五 襄二十二年》), that is, setting up moral benchmarks, constructing moral thoughts and social norms that benefit generations to come, and earnestly practicing them. “‘Great virtue promotes transformation’, integrating Ren (仁: benevolence) and Zhi (智: wisdom), being profound and transformative; ‘small virtue flows like a river’, emerging like a spring from time to time. ‘Great virtue does not overstep boundaries, while small virtue can have deviations’, for those with great capabilities are not limited by trivial matters” (《正蒙 至当篇第九》). This indicates that the fundamental and main function of “De (德, virtue)” is to nurture and cultivate all things, embodying the Confucian value of morality being supreme, and placing moral character in a position more important than life itself. Confucian ideas such as “sacrificing one's life for righteousness” and “giving up one's life to achieve benevolence” place moral value above life and death to resolve the contradiction between life and death. According to this view, death is not terrifying; the key is that death should have value, especially value to society. Thus, Confucian culture transcends the desire for survival and fear of death through moral cultivation such as Ren (仁: benevolence), Yi (义: righteousness), Li (礼: propriety), Zhi (智: wisdom), and Xin (信: faith), and constructs a higher-level spiritual or psychological need than survival [7].

Li-gong (立功, Establishing meritorious deeds) refers to “rescuing from adversity and eliminating difficulties, achieving merits for the times... working diligently for the people to stabilize the country, resisting disasters and warding off calamities” (《左传正义 卷三十五 襄二十二年》). It is the realization of the ideal personality of “governing the country and bringing peace to the nation” in Confucian culture. In essence, it means promoting the

kingly way and accomplishing the kingly cause, and it is the aspiration and ambition of a Junzi (君子: gentleman), as set by Confucian culture, to assume social responsibilities. If one has and realizes such aspirations or ambitions, his life would have meaning and value. In other words, “establishing meritorious deeds” can endow and realize the meaning and value of life, and give people a huge internal driving force to strive for progress, overcome difficulties and obstacles, and achieve great things [7].

Li-yan (立言, Establishing words) means “words hitting the key points, and reasoning being sufficient to be passed down” (《左传正义 卷三十五 襄二十二年》), that is, writing books and establishing theories, and constructing ideas or methods, etc. [7]. Like establishing virtue and meritorious deeds, establishing words can also make people gain a sense of life meaning, a sense of life value and a sense of achievement, enable people to have a strong motivation or desire to construct ideas and make inventions, and cultivate and stimulate people's innovation and creativity.

The idea of engaging in the world to “govern the country and bring peace to the nation” in Confucian culture has gradually taken root in the hearts of the Chinese nation, becoming its cultural gene, spiritual character and an inexhaustible source of motivation for the survival and development of the Chinese nation. From generation to generation, the Chinese people, in the spirit of “everyone has a responsibility for the rise and fall of the country” and with a sense of mission, have constantly strived for self-improvement, remained unyielding, overcome various difficulties, obstacles, internal troubles and external threats, and stood firm in the world. In this sense, Confucian cultural psychology can be called psychology of feelings for family and country, psychology of engaging in the world or psychology of achievements.

3.4 The Way of Getting Along with Others with “He (和) as the Most Precious”

Confucian culture attaches special importance to ethical or personnel issues, attempting to take good ethical or personnel relationships as a way or means to govern social problems well, maintain social harmony and stability, and promote healthy social development. The “Wuchang

(五常, Five Constant Virtues)” that are Ren (仁, benevolence), Yi (义, righteousness), Li (礼, propriety), Zhi (智, wisdom), and Xin (信, faith) and “Bade (八德, Eight Virtues) that are Zhong (忠, loyalty), Xin (信, faithfulness), Xiao (孝, filial piety), Ti (悌, fraternity), Li (礼, propriety), Yi (义, righteousness), Lian (廉, incorruptibility), and Chi (耻, shame) in Confucian culture are all used to handle various interpersonal relationships. “The entire society is a network interwoven by various interpersonal relationships, and everyone is a knot in this network, being in multiple and complex interpersonal relationships. This network of interpersonal relationships is formed on the basis of blood kinship. On the basis of blood kinship, every Chinese person is in a certain ethical relationship, and whether people can handle various ethical relationships well is the key to measuring their success” [10].

In handling ethical relationships or personnel matters, Confucian culture values “He (和, harmony)”. “The function of Li (礼, propriety) is to achieve harmony, which is the most precious” (《论语 学而》). “He (和, harmony)” is the ultimate goal of achieving harmonious and healthy social development, and Li (礼, propriety) is the method or means to achieve “He (和, harmony)”. “He (和, harmony)” refers to a dynamically balanced relationship among multiple different things or people, which involves Xiang-sheng-xiang-ke (相生相克, mutual generation and mutual restriction), mutual coordination, and harmony and consistency. “Xiang-sheng (相生, mutual generation)” is a relationship among things that is coordinated, mutually nurturing, mutually promoting, developing together, and achieving win-win cooperation. “Xiang-ke (相克, mutual restriction)” is a relationship among things that involves mutual limitation and restraint to prevent one or some elements of the system from developing excessively (overly fast or overly slow), which would lead to the imbalance or destruction of the entire system. Mutual generation and restriction are the self-regulation, self-protection, and development mechanisms of the system composed of various elements, by which a balance conducive to the stability and development of the entire system is achieved among the elements of the system.

Since “He (和, harmony)” is a relationship formed among different objects, “Fen (分, distinction)” is indispensable. “Fen (分, distinction)” refers to differentiation, classification, division of labor, and distribution, that is,

classifying different things or people with differences, reasonably dividing labor according to their characteristics or attributes, establishing and straightening out their relationships, then stipulating their roles and behaviors, and acting in accordance with such stipulations and handling interpersonal relationships. The “Five Relations” in Confucian culture (the five relationships between monarch and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, and friends) are to distinguish and stipulate or standardize the functions, duties, and roles of different roles. This is Li (礼, propriety). If everyone acts in accordance with Li (礼, propriety) and does their own duty well, then “harmony” would be established, and the entire society can develop healthily. “There are five universal ways in the world, and three universal virtues for practicing them. The five are: the relations between monarch and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger brothers, and the intercourse between friends. These five are the universal ways in the world. Wisdom, benevolence, and courage: these three are the universal virtues in the world” (《礼记 中庸》).

In summary, “He (和, harmony)” is the basic goal of Confucian culture in handling various social relations, as well as the basic principle or way of getting along with others in dealing with various personnel or ethical relations. Thus, it can be said that Confucian cultural psychology is a He (和) psychology of “harmony”, ethical psychology, or psychology of getting along with others.

3.5 Advocating Practical Rationality of Being Pragmatic and Earnest in Action

The ultimate goal of Chinese culture, dominated by Confucian culture, is to act or do things in accordance with the “Dao (道)” to enhance the effectiveness of actions and undertakings. Therefore, it focuses on “action” or “activity” [11]. The ultimate goal and value of life in Confucian culture do not lie in acquiring general knowledge about the essence and laws of things, but in applying knowledge to the world. The fundamental purpose of comprehending the “Dao (道)” or “Li (理)” is to act or do things in accordance with the “Dao” so as to improve the effectiveness of actions and undertakings. Understanding the essence or laws of things and acquiring

knowledge are only part of doing things, acting, or engaging in activities, serving as links or means to accomplish things or take actions.

In summary, the purpose of Confucian culture's comprehension of the “Dadao (大道: Great Dao)” or “Tianli (天理: Heavenly Principle)” is to apply them to society to achieve the improvement of self-cultivation and social governance. Hence, it emphasizes applying what one has learned, integrating knowledge and action, advocating pragmatism and earnest practice, and attaching importance to “being pragmatic and earnest in action, doing what one should do and what one ought to do”. It promotes actively undertaking social responsibilities and missions, working steadfastly and diligently on undertakings, especially those related to people's livelihood. It regards pragmatic and earnest practice as a kind of mission, spirit, and the psychological qualities and behavioral habits that a person should possess. Since the Tiandao (天道: Heavenly Dao), Dadao (大道: Great Dao), or Tianli (天理: Heavenly Principle) pursued by Confucian culture cannot be expressed in words, nor given or received, they can only be personally comprehended by the subject in actions or activities and must be practiced through personal efforts. This has formed a cultural character of “valuing reality and rejecting fantasy” and a basic cultural spirit of “comprehending the Dao-practical rationality”, with a unique people-oriented, world-first worldview, outlook on life, values, an action-comprehension methodology, and the life wisdom of integrating knowledge and action. “Knowledge is the intention of action, and action is the effort of knowledge; knowledge is the beginning of action, and action is the completion of knowledge” (《传习录 卷上 徐爱录 心即是理》).

Doing things or taking actions is not only a way to fulfill social responsibilities or missions but also a fundamental way to temper people's positive psychological qualities. Only by actions or activities of doing things, especially difficult ones, can people continuously temper and enhance positive psychological qualities such as strong will, psychological resilience, positive attitude, and wisdom. “Do not observe high cliffs, how can you know the danger of falling from the peak? Do not approach deep springs, how can you know the danger of drowning? Do not observe the vast sea, how can you know the danger of storms? Isn't the one who fails to do so like this? If people is cautious about these three, they would not be

troubled by them” (《孔子家语 困誓》). “Upholding the Dao of benevolence and righteousness in the face of the troubles of a chaotic world, how can people be reduced to poverty? Therefore, by introspecting inwardly, people would not be separated from the Dao; when facing difficulties, people would not lose one's virtue. When the cold of heaven arrives and frost and snow fall, people thus know the prosperity of pine and cypress. The hardship in Chen and Cai was indeed a fortune for me, Qiu” (《庄子 杂篇 让王》).

In summary, Confucian culture highly values “Xing (行, conduct)”, i.e., action, activity, and doing things. Therefore, it can be said that Confucian cultural psychology is a psychology of doing things, a psychology of action or activity, and a psychology of practical rationality.

3.6 The Concept of World's Datong and the Psychological Character of Tian-xia-wei-gong

World's Datong (大同: great unity) is the highest social ideal, life ideal, and ideal personality in Confucian culture. “When the Great Dao prevails, the world belongs to all. The virtuous and capable are selected, trust is emphasized, and harmony is cultivated. Therefore, people do not only care for their own parents or love their own children. They ensure that the elderly have a proper end, the strong are employed, the young are nurtured, and the widowed, orphaned, lonely, and disabled are all provided for. Men have their proper roles, and women have their proper homes. People dislike wasting goods by leaving them unused on the ground, but they do not necessarily hoard them for themselves; they dislike holding back their strength from being exerted, but they do not necessarily work for their own benefit. Hence, scheming and conspiracy do not arise, theft, robbery, and rebellion do not occur, and doors need not be locked. This is called Datong (大同)” (《礼记 礼运》).

In such an ideal world, everyone is equal, enjoying common rights and fulfilling the same obligations. It embodies the aforementioned psychological qualities of “Ren (仁, benevolence) and “He (和, harmony) in handling relationships between different ethnic groups and countries. It acknowledges the differences among countries worldwide while placing greater emphasis on divi-

sion of labor, collaboration, and win-win cooperation [12].

The world of Datong (大同) has been the yearning and assiduous pursuit of people with lofty ideals throughout the ages, and in the contemporary era, it is embodied in the practice of building a community with a shared future for mankind. The community with a shared future for mankind represents contemporary China's pursuit of global progress and harmonious development. It actively advocates a noble spirit that transcends self-interest and pursues public interests, places fairness and justice at the height of global governance, and is committed to promoting the fairness and rationality of international relations, safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of people of all countries and ethnic groups [13], constructing a social order of fairness and justice, and enabling all ethnic groups and even all mankind to benefit from common development and progress [14].

The social ideal and worldview of “Datong (大同: great unity) for the world” not only aim to build an ideal society in the sense of time and space by positive regional interactions, but also represent an ideal society based on the extended line of historical time and the extended line of spatial radiation, characterized by mutual complementarity, division of labor and cooperation. It also embodies the new vitality and driving force for economic cooperation, connectivity, opportunity-sharing and joint response to various challenges among countries, which is “a state where history and reality converge, and each country is part of the other” [15].

It not only affirms and respects the subjectivity, autonomy and uniqueness of each nation and country, but also constructs an international system of “comprehensiveness” and “unity” with the holistic thinking of “co-existence, co-prosperity and symbiosis” and the approach of seeking “the greatest common divisor” to pursue common ground while accommodating differences [16]. It integrates the destinies of all nations, countries and peoples into the sustainable development of the entire human destiny [17], forming a systematic effect for the harmonious development of the whole world.

In summary, the concept of world Datong (大同) respects the diversity of civilizations and development models in the world, aiming to promote global win-win cooperation and achieve the overall development of mankind and the greatest common divisor of the interests of all parties [13]. Nowadays, the Confucian cultural

thoughts of “Datong (大同) for all under heaven” and “harmonious coexistence” are not only a social ideal, but also have become the basic concept for the development of all countries in the world and the practice of globalized cooperative development [18, 19]. In this sense, it can be said that Confucian cultural psychology is a psychology of global win-win cooperation.

4 Conclusion

In summary, Confucian cultural psychology is a unique system of cultural psychology. With “Ren (仁, benevolence) as its core, it emphasizes the subjective comprehension by turning to one's own heart, requires people to actively engage in society to achieve meritorious deeds and build careers, takes “harmony as the most precious” as the basic principle in handling various social relations, regards world's Datong (大同) as the social ideal and life goal, and advocates being pragmatic and earnest in action.

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