

The Similarities and Differences and Fusion of the Aesthetic Thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism

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Abstract: This paper deeply discusses the similarities and differences of the aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in ancient China. These three thoughts occupy an important position in the history of Chinese culture, and they have a profound impact on aesthetics, life values and social ethics. By analyzing the Confucian emphasis on social order and human ethics, the Taoist pursuit of nature and inaction, and the Buddhist emphasis on inner peace and liberation, as well as the contrast and connection between them, we can better understand how these ideas have influenced the aesthetic concepts of ancient and modern Chinese society. In the aspect of Confucian aesthetics, this paper first discusses the Confucian values of etiquette, benevolence, human relations and social order. Confucianism integrates aesthetic values into social norms, believes that human virtues are unified with moral cultivation, and realizes social harmony by following etiquette and human relations. Confucian aesthetics focuses on the role and relationship of individuals in society, and reflects an external beauty through interpersonal interaction. The part of Taoist aesthetic thoughts discusses the aesthetic views of Taoism on nature, inaction and individual freedom. Taoism believes that nature is the highest beauty, pursues integration with nature, emphasizes the principle of non-governance, and embodies the realm of beauty through inner peace. Different from Confucianism, which focuses on social order, Taoism pursues internal balance and harmony and advocates aesthetic experience beyond the norm. The part of Buddhist aesthetic thought introduces the Buddhist aesthetic view of transcendence, inner peace and liberation. Buddhists combine aesthetics with liberation of the mind, believing that liberation is the highest beauty, beyond the cycle of life and death. Buddhist aesthetics emphasizes inner tranquility and concentration, pursues the realm beyond worldly desire, and reflects an inner depth of beauty. By comparing the aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, this paper finds that they have some common points in the pursuit of inner beauty, harmony and individual spiritual growth. Although the three schools differ in specific points of view, they all focus on the improvement of the inner state to achieve a higher aesthetic realm. In addition, these three thoughts have also influenced and penetrated each other in history, forming a rich and diverse cultural tradition. In contemporary times, the aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are still of great significance. They provide enlightenment of values for modern society and prompt people to think about the harmonious relationship between the inner and outer world of individuals. In the face of the increasingly diversified aesthetics and cultural integration, these ancient thoughts provide us with profound guidance to help us better understand and shape the aesthetic view and life value in contemporary

society.

Keywords: Confucianism; Taoism; Buddhism; Aesthetic Thought; Similarities and Differences; Integration; Values; Aesthetics

1. INTRODUCTION

The three philosophical thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in ancient China represent an important part of Chinese culture and have exerted a profound influence on both ancient and modern Chinese society. Among these three schools of philosophy, the aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism not only differ in aesthetic concepts, but also show the commonality and possibility of blending on some levels. The purpose of this thesis is to deeply explore the similarities and differences and fusion of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, in order to reveal the rich contribution of these thoughts to Chinese cultural aesthetics and the enlightenment in contemporary society. As the representatives of ancient Chinese philosophy, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism each have their own unique ideas and values, but they also influence and converge with each other, forming the diversity of Chinese traditional culture. Confucianism emphasizes etiquette, benevolence and social order, and advocates social harmony by following the relationship of human relations. Taoism emphasizes nature, inaction and inner peace, advocating symbiosis with nature and pursuing beauty beyond the norm. Buddhism focuses on transcendence and inner liberation, emphasizing inner peace and the beauty of the inner state (Ames & Rosemont Jr, 2010). Although there are differences in aesthetic concepts among these three schools, they all emphasize the inner beauty and harmony, advocating the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature and society. This article will be divided into several parts, first, we will deeply explore the Confucian aesthetic thought. In this section, we will look at core Confucian concepts such as etiquette, benevolence, and humanity, and how these concepts influence the Confucian aesthetic. Secondly, we will discuss the aesthetics of Taoism. Through the elaboration of fundamental Taoist concepts such as the beauty of nature and the rule of inaction, we will reveal the pursuit of inner and outer beauty. Next, we will delve into Buddhist aesthetic thought, analyzing its values of transcendence, inner peace and liberation, and how these values affect Buddhist aesthetic ideas. After analyzing the aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in three separate parts, we will reveal the similarities and differences between them through comparative

analysis. We will emphasize the impact of these ideas on individual and social aesthetics, and explore how their respective values are reflected in different cultural contexts (Ivanhoe, 2000). Then, we will explore the points at which these ideas meet, and how they intersect at certain levels, especially under the influence of history and culture. This part will emphasize the similarities of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in inner beauty, harmony and individual spiritual growth, laying a foundation for further discussion. Finally, we will discuss the contemporary significance of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism aesthetics. Although these ideas originated in ancient times, they are still of great value today. We will consider how these elements of thought can be incorporated into modern aesthetics and life values, and how they can bring harmony, calm and meaningful guidance to contemporary society. In this section, we will explore how these ancient ideas still have a profound impact in today's world. To sum up, this thesis will reveal the similarities and differences and possible fusion points between Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism through a comprehensive discussion of their aesthetic thoughts. By analyzing these ideas in depth, we will better understand the richness of ancient Chinese philosophy and its value to contemporary culture. At the same time, this paper will also provide a useful reference for cross-cultural communication and the discussion of values.

2. CONFUCIAN AESTHETIC THOUGHT

Confucianism, as one of the three major philosophical schools in ancient China, has had a profound impact on shaping Chinese culture and values. Confucianism's aesthetic thought is rooted in its emphasis on interpersonal relations, social order and ethics, emphasizing the harmonious development of society and individuals. The aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism are embodied in many aspects such as etiquette, benevolence, human relations and social order. Confucianist aesthetic thought blends with Confucianist ethics to some extent. Confucianism pays attention to the harmony of interpersonal relations and emphasizes the concept of human relations with benevolence as the core. In the view of Confucianism, human virtue and behavior are interrelated, and individuals realize the harmony between themselves and society by following etiquette, respecting elders, and honoring parents. This kind of harmony is not only reflected between people, but also extends to people and nature, people and social norms, reflecting a kind of internal and

external corresponding aesthetic (Ames, 2011). Etiquette plays an important role in Confucian aesthetics. Etiquette is not only the expression of social order, but also reflects the individual's pursuit of beauty. Confucianism emphasizes dignified appearance and consistency between words and deeds, and believes that appropriate etiquette can highlight individual morality and inner beauty, and also help maintain social harmony. Through etiquette, people can express their respect for beauty and show the nobility of human nature, so that the beauty between individuals and society can coexist. The Confucian aesthetic view is inseparable from the social order. In the view of Confucianism, the maintenance of social order is to achieve harmony, and harmony is one of the manifestations of beauty. While following social norms, people realize the harmonious coexistence of individual and collective. The social order emphasized by Confucianism is not only a constraint of authority, but also a rational pursuit. Through moral education, people's behavior and thought can achieve an internal balance, so as to achieve the realm of beauty. However, there are also some challenges and controversies in Confucian aesthetics. Some people think that Confucianism overemphasizes social norms and ethics, which may lead to the restriction of individual creativity and freedom, thus affecting individual independence. In addition, whether the Confucian aesthetic view is still applicable in modern society is also a question worthy of discussion. With the change of society and the rise of individualism, whether Confucian aesthetics can be combined with the values of modern society has become a question that needs to be considered. To sum up, Confucian aesthetic thought shows its unique characteristics in emphasizing social harmony, benevolence, etiquette and human relations. Through the harmony of interpersonal relationship, the maintenance of social order and the pursuit of moral cultivation, it embodies an aesthetic view of harmonious coexistence with nature, society and inner state. However, in the context of modern society, how to combine Confucian aesthetics with individual independence and creativity, and how to make it glow with new vitality in modern society, are the issues that need to be deeply discussed.

3. TAOIST AESTHETIC THOUGHT

Taoism, as a branch of ancient Chinese philosophy, emphasizes harmony with nature, governing without doing anything and the pursuit of inner peace, which embodies a unique aesthetic view in its aesthetic

thoughts. Taoism's aesthetic thought is exciting, showing a profound understanding of the beauty of nature and the inner state of individuals, providing people with aesthetic experience beyond the secular. The core of the Taoist aesthetic view is the pursuit of natural beauty. Taoism emphasizes integration with nature, believing that nature is the supreme source of beauty. Taoism regards nature as the highest law and order, and through the pursuit of harmony with nature, experiences the existence of an unconventional beauty (Hall & Ames, 1995). The beauty of nature is not only the expression of the external scene, but also the embodiment of the inner realm, which needs to be felt through the perspective beyond the conventional. This aesthetic view allows people to have a deeper understanding of various changes and scenes in nature, thus producing a profound aesthetic experience. Taoism emphasizes "ruling without doing anything", which is also reflected in its aesthetic thoughts. Inaction is not passive inaction, but the pursuit of unfettered, conforming to nature. In the field of aesthetics, Taoism believes that too much intervention and modification may destroy the beauty of the thing itself. Instead, it is by maintaining inner peace and allowing nature to flow and develop that the true beauty of things comes out. This aesthetic view of inaction emphasizes the inner state of the individual, making people feel the inner and outer harmony in peace. Inner peace is also an important part of Taoist aesthetics. Daoists believe that through inner peace and tranquility, one can transcend worldly distractions and experience inner beauty and peace (LaFargue, 1994). This inner state is achieved through meditation, meditation, etc., enabling people to put aside distractions and enter a pure aesthetic realm. Inner peace can not only make people experience a profound feeling of beauty, but also contribute to the growth and cultivation of individuals. However, the aesthetic thought of Taoism has also caused some discussion and controversy. Some critics argue that Daoism's emphasis on inaction and transcendent aesthetics may lead individuals to disregard the real world, thereby neglecting social and practical concerns. In addition, whether the inner peace of Taoism is applicable to modern society is also a question that needs to be considered. In the fast-paced and changeable modern life, how to balance the relationship between inner peace and the external environment is a topic that needs to be deeply discussed. To sum up, Taoism aesthetics embodies its uniqueness in the pursuit of natural beauty, the emphasis on non-governance and the pursuit of inner peace. It provides an aesthetic realm beyond the earthly world by integrating with nature, maintaining inner peace and pursuing unconventional aesthetic experiences (Hall & Ames,

1987). However, for the modern society, how to combine the aesthetic thoughts of Taoism with the fast-paced lifestyle, and how to achieve inner peace and harmony with the external environment in reality, still need to be deeply studied and discussed.

4. BUDDHIST AESTHETIC THOUGHT

As a branch of ancient Chinese philosophy, Buddhist thought is famous for its unique view of liberation and the value of inner peace. The aesthetic thought of Buddhism emphasizes inner peace, transcending worldly pursuit, combines beauty with spiritual liberation, and provides people with an aesthetic experience beyond the earthly world. The core value of Buddhist aesthetic thought lies in the pursuit of transcending the world. Buddhist teachings emphasize liberation, that is, transcending the cycle of birth and death and freeing oneself from worldly constraints (Laozi, 1993). In the Buddhist view, liberation is a state of the heart, a transcendence of worldly disturbances, and an experience beyond conventional beauty. Buddhists believe that people's attachment to material things and desires can make their hearts troubled, and by getting rid of these constraints, they can achieve true freedom and beauty. Inner peace is also an important element of Buddhist aesthetic thought. Buddhist practice emphasizes inner tranquility and concentration, believing that only through meditation can one achieve a state of inner peace. In this inner state, people can transcend their attachment to external things and experience a profound feeling of beauty. This inner peace is not only a return to the troubled world, but also an elevation of the inner state, enabling one to feel a beauty beyond the normal. The relationship between Buddhist aesthetic thought and aesthetic experience is also worth exploring. Buddhists believe that the experience of beauty is not only the feeling of external things, but also the experience of inner states. Through practice and meditation, one can experience an inner beauty and maintain inner peace and tranquility even when the external environment is not necessarily beautiful. This kind of aesthetic experience not only transcends the beauty of the sensory level, but also experiences and pursues the inner realm. However, the Buddhist aesthetic thought has also caused some controversies and discussions. Some critics argue that Buddhism's emphasis on transcendence and liberation can lead to an individual's disregard for the real world and neglect of social and interpersonal relationships. In addition, whether Buddhist inner peace is applicable to modern society, and how to combine it with the fast pace of

life in modern society, are questions that need to be considered (Slingerland, 2007). To sum up, Buddhist aesthetic thought embodies its uniqueness in transcending the pursuit of the world and emphasizing the values of inner peace and liberation. It offers people a state beyond sensory beauty by transcending the mundane, cultivating inner peace, and combining it with liberation. However, how to combine the aesthetic thought of Buddhism with modern society, and how to achieve inner peace and harmony of external environment in real life, still need further research and discussion.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES AND FUSION

The three philosophical thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in ancient China have their own characteristics, but they also blend with each other on some levels, forming a rich and diverse cultural tradition. There are similarities and differences in the aesthetic ideas, values and outlook on life of these three schools. Through in-depth comparative analysis, we can better understand their influence in ancient and modern society.

5.1 Comparison of Similarities and Differences

Aesthetic differences: Confucian aesthetics emphasizes the harmony of social order and human relations, and realizes the harmony between individuals and society through etiquette and benevolence. On the other hand, Taoism aesthetics pursues harmony with nature, advocates non-intervention, inner peace, and pursues unconventional beauty. Buddhist aesthetics focuses on inner liberation and peace, transcending worldly disturbances and pursuing inner beauty. The aesthetics of these three houses are different, one emphasizes social harmony, one emphasizes harmony with nature, and one emphasizes inner peace (Swain, 2010). **Differences in values:** Confucian aesthetics pay attention to social ethics and morality, emphasize the harmony of interpersonal relations, and pursue the common prosperity of individuals and society. Taoism aesthetics pays more attention to the inner harmony of individuals, emphasizes the integration with nature, and pursues inner freedom and calm. Buddhist aesthetics emphasizes transcendence, liberation and inner peace, and the pursuit of a state beyond suffering. The difference in values among the three reflects different concerns about the individual, the

society, and the transcendent.

5.2 Integration and Blending

Integration of harmony: Although the three schools of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are different in aesthetic concepts, they are integrated in harmony concepts. Confucianism emphasizes social and interpersonal harmony, Taoism pursues harmony with nature, and Buddhism emphasizes inner harmony. To some extent, these harmonious ideas complement each other. The social harmony of Confucianism provides the soil of tranquility for the inner mind of the individual, the natural harmony of Taoism and the inner peace of the individual promote each other, and the inner harmony of Buddhism provides the basis for the pursuit of transcends the world (Yu, 2015). Common inner beauty: the aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism all emphasize the importance of inner beauty. Confucianism emphasizes the beauty of character and behavior, Taoism pursues inner tranquility and the state of inaction, and Buddhism emphasizes inner liberation and peace. This common point of inner beauty reflects the consensus of these three thoughts on the inner growth and cultivation of individuals, and provides a way to improve the spiritual realm of individuals. The pursuit of transcendence: Although the three schools of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism differ in their ways and goals of pursuit, they all express the pursuit of transcendence. Confucianism achieves harmony through the maintenance of social order, Taoism achieves harmony through integration with nature, and Buddhism achieves harmony through inner peace. This pursuit beyond normal is reflected in their aesthetic thoughts, although the way is different, but the goal is similar (Lopez Jr, 2002).

5.3 Historical Influence and Modern Significance

The aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism were each other in ancient Chinese culture and influenced each other. Confucianism and Taoism had exchanges and fusion in the period of the unification of Confucianism and Taoism, and Buddhism also influenced Chinese philosophy and culture (Schumacher, 2018). In modern times, these thoughts still provide rich spiritual resources for Chinese society. The Confucian concept of social harmony still has enlightenment for modern social governance, the Taoist concept of inner peace can help people cope with the fast pace of life, and the Buddhist concept of liberation provides guidance for the pursuit of inner peace. To sum up, Confucianism, Taoism

and Buddhism have obvious similarities and differences in aesthetic concepts, values and outlook on life. They achieve a kind of fusion and blending through the common points of harmony, inner beauty, the pursuit of transcendence and so on, providing profound philosophical and cultural resources for ancient and modern Chinese society. Through in-depth comparative analysis of these three ideas, we can better understand their value and significance in ancient and contemporary society.

6. THE CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFUCIANISM, TAOISM AND BUDDHISM AESTHETICS

As the representatives of ancient Chinese philosophy, the three aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism not only played an important role in ancient culture, but also had far-reaching influence and important practical significance in contemporary society. The values of harmony, inner beauty and individual growth emphasized by these three thoughts are still of inspiration and guiding significance in contemporary society, and provide valuable resources for modern people to seek a balanced, harmonious and meaningful life.

6.1 The Contemporary Meaning of Harmony

In contemporary society, the complexity of interpersonal relations and the diversity of social contradictions make the pursuit of harmony more important. The harmonious view emphasized by Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism can provide wisdom for modern people to deal with interpersonal relations and social conflicts. The Confucian concept of social harmony emphasizes etiquette, benevolence and human relations, which can help people establish a positive social interaction model. The Taoist concept of harmony emphasizes harmony with nature and provides modern people with a peaceful attitude starting from the heart. The Buddhist view of inner harmony can help people seek peace from within and thus better cope with external pressures and challenges (Gimello, 2004).

6.2 Contemporary Significance of Inner Beauty

In modern society, utilitarianism and external pursuit of impetuosity are prevalent, while Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism emphasize the concept of inner beauty, which helps people to return to the heart and find the real value and beauty. Confucian self-cultivation can guide people to

pay attention to the beauty of moral character and behavior, and avoid blindly pursuing material and power. The Taoist concept of inner peace can help people balance inside and out and find peace from within. The Buddhist view of liberation reminds people not to be troubled by desires and attachments, and to pursue inner peace and beauty.

6.3 Contemporary Significance of Individual Growth and the Meaning of Life

In modern society, the need for individuals to pursue self-growth and the meaning of life has become increasingly prominent. The individual cultivation, inner growth and the pursuit of transcendence that Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism pay attention to provide a reference for modern people to explore the direction and meaning of life. The Confucian concept of human relations and benevolence can guide people to realize the all-round growth of individuals in the society. The Taoist view of inaction and inner pursuit can guide people to maintain inner peace in the process of personal growth. The Buddhist view of liberation reminds people to go beyond worldly pursuits and focus on inner growth and improvement (De Bary & Lufrano, 2001).

6.4 Contemporary Significance of Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development

Under the background of contemporary globalization and increasingly prominent environmental problems, the values of harmony with nature and inner peace advocated by the three aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism have important implications for environmental protection and sustainable development. Confucian etiquette can guide people to respect nature and establish a harmonious relationship with nature. The Taoist view of inaction can remind people to respect the laws of nature and avoid excessive intervention (Chang, 2007). The Buddhist view of transcendence can awaken people to reflect on their material desires and thus reduce their consumption of the environment. To sum up, the aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are of great practical significance in the contemporary society. Their views of harmony, inner beauty, individual growth and environmental protection all provide valuable spiritual resources and ideological guidance for modern people to seek a balanced and meaningful life and cope with the challenges and pressures of modern society. These ancient philosophical thoughts can still provide profound enlightenment for people's spiritual growth and

social development.

7. CONCLUSION

The three aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in ancient China carry rich cultural wisdom. They are unique in aesthetic concept, value and outlook on life. At the same time, there are fusion and fusion in some aspects. Through the comparison and analysis of the three aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, we can better understand their similarities and differences and fusion, and draw profound enlightenment to the contemporary society. Confucian aesthetic thought emphasizes social harmony, human relations and moral ethics, and its values reflect the harmonious coexistence of individuals and society, emphasizing order and norms. Taoism aesthetics pursues harmony with nature, inner peace and pays attention to rule by doing nothing, which is of profound significance to the pursuit of transcending the world and the exploration of inner beauty. Buddhist aesthetic thoughts emphasize transcending the mundane and inner liberation, and achieving transcendent beauty through inner peace. In the aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, we find some common values and ideas. These common points provide important inspiration and reference for the contemporary society. The pursuit of harmony is still of great practical significance in the context of complex social relations and diverse values. Whether it is Confucian harmony of human relations, Taoist harmony with nature or Buddhist inner harmony, they can provide ideas for modern society to deal with relations and reduce conflicts. The pursuit of inner beauty is the common focus of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, which is particularly important for the pursuit of real value and the meaning of keeping away from utility in modern society. Confucian self-cultivation, Taoist inner peace, Buddhist liberation state, all remind people to pursue inner beauty, beyond vanity and superficial vanity. On the other hand, the pursuit of individual growth and the meaning of life is also reflected in the three aesthetic thoughts. The Confucian view of human relations and benevolence, the Taoist view of inner pursuit and the Buddhist view of transcendence from the world all provide spiritual guidance for individual growth and the pursuit of life meaning in modern society. In the contemporary diversified development path, learning from the thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism can make individuals explore the direction of growth more independently. Environmental protection and

sustainable development are important issues facing the world today. The three aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism emphasize harmony with nature and provide a new perspective on the treatment of environment. The Confucian concept of etiquette, the Taoist concept of inaction, and the Buddhist concept of transcending the world all provide ideas and ideas for the environmental protection and sustainable development of modern society to varying degrees. To sum up, the similarities and differences of the three aesthetic thoughts of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism not only add color to the ancient Chinese cultural tradition, but also provide rich wisdom resources for the contemporary society. These thoughts have important practical significance in the pursuit of harmony, the exploration of inner beauty, individual growth, environmental protection and so on. With the inspiration of these ancient thoughts, we can better cope with the challenges and pressures of contemporary society and pursue a more meaningful, balanced and harmonious life. Just like the wise men of ancient times, we should also learn wisdom from our exploration to cope with the changing modern society.

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