

# 论传统儒家经典观<sup>\*</sup>

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**摘要：**传统儒家以《诗》《书》等为经典。这些经典创作于圣贤，不仅反映了普遍的道与理，而且洋溢着圣贤气象。普遍的道与理构成了经典的内容，并使经典具有了知识价值，圣贤气象的洋溢不仅彰显了经典文本形式上的优美，而且能够产生感化效果。经典体现了圣人之心。圣人之心既有气质之心，又有超越之性。气质之心产生了情感，而超越之性表现于活动中便是道与理。心统性情。在这个统一体中，普遍之性主宰了气质之心的活动，个体主体性因此被消解。传统儒家揭示了经典的三项内涵，却忽略了经典的个体主体性向度。

**关键词：**经 经典 道理 儒家

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DOI:10.16349/j.cnki.52-5035/c.2024.01.005

在儒家思想文化中，经典是其中最重要的组成因素之一。它不仅凝结了传统思想的智慧，更是社会文化作用的重要力量，即，社会借助经典来教化民众，从而形成稳定的文化与社会秩序。即便是在思想自由与开放的今天，人们依然离不开经典。那么，什么是经典呢？这是本文关注的中心问题。本文将传统儒家对“经”的理解为基础，力图指出：在传统儒家那里，经典便是由圣贤制作而成的经，它包含两项基本要素，即，通过完美的写作技巧而再现圣贤气象，以及类通普遍之理的圣人之心，从而产生审美的趣味与对道理的认知；传统经典观虽然也承认经典表达了圣人之情，但是这种自然之情并不能代替圣人的意志与主体性，故而传统儒家忽略了经典的个体主体性的向度。

## 一、圣人与经典的产生 [15]

经典是一个现代术语。在中国传统文化中，表示经典的概念是“经”字。章太炎考据道：“‘经’之训‘常’，乃后起之义。《韩非·内外储》首冠‘经’名，其意殆如后之目录，并无‘常’义。今人书册用纸，贯

\* 本文系国家自然科学基金2020年度后期资助重点项目“传统儒家心灵哲学研究”（项目批准号：20FZX A005）阶段性成果。

之以线。古代无纸，以青丝绳贯竹简为之。用绳贯穿，故谓之‘经’。经者，今所谓线装书矣。”<sup>①</sup>经的本意是线装书所用之线，后泛指线装书。过去纸张、竹简比较珍贵，非经典重要之作，不得入编。故能够被写入文献的书籍一定是重要的、有价值的文本。在《庄子·天运》中，庄子曰：“孔子谓老聃曰：‘丘治《诗》《书》《礼》《乐》《易》《春秋》六经，自以为久矣，孰知其故矣。’”便已将儒家的《诗》《书》等经典文献叫作经。荀子曰：“《道经》曰：‘人心之危，道心之微。’”（《荀子·解蔽》）这里的《道经》便是《尚书》，即，荀子开始用经来称呼儒家的经典。荀子曰：“其数则始乎诵经，终乎读《礼》；其义则始乎为士，终乎为圣人。……故《书》者，政事之纪也；《诗》者，中声之所止也；《礼》者，法之大分、类之纲纪也。故学至于《礼》而止矣。夫是之谓道德之极。《礼》之敬文也，《乐》之中和也，《诗》《书》之博也，《春秋》之微也，在天地之间者毕矣。”（《荀子·劝学》）《诗》《书》等经便是经典。

经或经典，在传统儒家看来，产生于圣贤。荀子曰：“若夫总方略，齐言行，壹统类，而群天下之英杰，而告之以大古，教之以至顺，奥窔之间，簟席之上，敛然圣王之文章具焉，佛然平世之俗起焉，六说者不能入也，十二子者不能亲也。”（《荀子·非十二子》）只有博学的圣人才能够著作“文章”而教化苍生。这里的“文章”便指经典文本。圣人是经典的作者。或者说，只有圣人的语言与作品才能够被众人所接受。荀子曰：“圣人也者，道之管也。天下之道管是矣，百王之道一是矣。故《诗》《书》《礼》《乐》之归是矣。”（《荀子·儒效》）所有的道等皆产生于圣贤，或者说，圣贤以著作经典的形式为世界立法，即：“《诗》言是，其志也；《书》言是，其事也；《礼》言是，其行也；《乐》言是，其和也；《春秋》言是，其微也。”（《荀子·儒效》）圣人制作的《诗》表达了自己的志向或理想、《礼》规范了合理的行为等。《易传》曰：“古者包牺氏之王天下也，仰则观象于天，俯则观法于地，观鸟兽之文，与地之宜。近取诸身，远取诸物，于是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以类万物之情。作结绳而为罔罟，以佃以渔，盖取诸《离》。包牺氏没，神农氏作，斫木为耜，揉木为耒，耒耨之利，以教天下，盖取诸《益》。日中为市，致天下之民，聚天下之货，交易而退，各得其所，盖取诸《噬嗑》。神农氏没，黄帝、尧、舜氏作，通其变，使民不倦，神而化之，使民宜之。”（《周易·系辞下》）《易传》详细列举了伏羲（包牺氏）、神农、黄帝、尧、舜等历史传说中的众圣人的功绩。其中尤其是他们的文化贡献：“上古结绳而治，后世圣人易之以书契，百官以治，万民以察，盖取诸《夬》。”（《周易·系辞下》）书契的产生不仅仅是文化的产生，更是经典或经典的初级形态的出现。王符明确提出：“先圣之智，心达神明，性直道德，又造经典以遗后人。……是故圣人以其心来造经典，后人以经典往合圣心也，故修经之贤，德近于圣矣。”<sup>②</sup>圣人是经典的作者。经典，方以智称之为“典要”：“上古圣人不得已而为之立名，此上古之典要也。”<sup>③</sup>经典由圣人制作。

在传统儒家看来，很多儒家经典产生于孔子。早年的孔子承认自己仅仅“述而不作，信而好古，窃比于我老彭”（《论语·述而》）。到了后来，随着孔子地位的提高，人们通常将儒家经典如“四书五经”等都视为孔子或与孔子相关的作品。《史记·孔子世家》曰：“阳虎由此益轻季氏。季氏亦僭于公室，陪臣执国政，是以鲁自大夫以下皆僭离于正道。故孔子不仕，退而修《诗》《书》《礼》《乐》，弟子弥众，至自远方，莫不受业焉。”孔子退而修《诗》《书》等经典。“《书》《传》《礼记》自孔氏。”（《史记·孔子世家》）而古代的“《诗》三千余篇，及至孔子，去其重，取可施于礼义”，最后剩下“三百五篇孔子皆弦歌之”（《史记·孔子世家》）。《白虎通》称之为“定五经”：“孔子所以定《五经》者何？

① 章太炎：《国学讲演录》，吴永坤讲评，南京：凤凰出版社，2008年，第44页。

② 王符著，汪继培笺：《潜夫论笺校正》，彭铎校正，北京：中华书局，1985年，第13页。

③ 方以智：《方以智全书》（第10册），黄德宽、诸伟奇主编，合肥：黄山书社，2019年，第11页。

以为孔子居周之末世，王道陵迟，礼乐废坏，强陵弱，众暴寡，天子不敢诛，方伯不敢伐。闵道德之不行，故周流应聘，冀行其道德。自卫反鲁，自知不用，故追定《五经》，以行其道。”<sup>①</sup>汉代学术界认定孔子定五经等儒家经典。后人将“定”改为“删”：“孔子删《诗》《书》，定《礼》《乐》，赞《周易》，修《春秋》，皆传先王之旧，而未尝有所作也，故其自言如此。盖不惟不敢当作者之圣，而亦不敢显然自附于古之贤人；盖其德愈盛而心愈下，不自知其辞之谦也。然当是时，作者略备，夫子盖集群圣之大成而折衷之。其事虽述，而功则倍于作矣，此又不可不知也。”<sup>②</sup>《诗经》《尚书》《礼》《乐》《春秋》乃至《周易》等都和孔子相关。后来人大多接受这一基本观点，以为孔子乃是儒家文化经典的创造者或作者。

经典的作者是圣人，比如孔子。王阳明曰：“圣人述《六经》，只是要正人心。只是要存天理、去人欲。于存天理、去人欲之事，则尝言之……世儒只讲得一个伯者的学问，所以要知得许多阴谋诡计，纯是一片功利的心，与圣人作经的意思正相反，如何思量得通？”王阳明将圣人“述经”称为“作经”。其又曰：“周公制礼作乐以示天下，皆圣人所能为，尧、舜何不尽为之而待于周公？孔子删述《六经》以诏万世，亦圣人所能为……”<sup>③</sup>礼乐产生于周公，六经删定于孔子。其中的“礼乐”应该指《礼》《乐》等经典。王阳明曰：“《韶》之九成，便是舜的一本戏子。《武》之九变，便是武王的一本戏子。圣人一生实事，俱播在乐中。所以有德者闻之，便知他尽善尽美，与尽美未尽善处。”<sup>④</sup>“韶乐”产生于舜，“武乐”等产生于武王，经典产生于圣人。

经典表达了圣人的心意。扬雄曰：“面相之，辞相适，捺中心之所欲，通诸人之嚙嚙者，莫如言。弥纶天下之事，记久明远，著古昔之昏昏，传千里之恻恻者，莫如书。故言，心声也；书，心画也。”<sup>⑤</sup>以语言或书写形式流传的经典产生于人心。王符曰：“是故圣人以其心来造经典，后人以经典往合圣心也，故修经之贤，德近于圣矣。”<sup>⑥</sup>圣人依心作经典，经典出自圣心。朱熹曰：“庄子文章只信口流出，煞高。”<sup>⑦</sup>庄子的文章，从固有的性情到外在的文章，自然天成而无隔阂，形成一个气贯整体，故而为高明。比如，“读《论语》，须将《精义》看。先看一段，次看第二段，将两段比较孰得孰失，孰是孰非。又将第三段比较如前。又总一章之说而尽比较之。其间须有一说合圣人之意，或有两说，有三说，有四五说皆是，又就其中比较疏密”<sup>⑧</sup>。读《论语》便是为了洞察圣人之意而致知。再如《诗》，“此言为此诗者，得其性情之正，声气之和也。盖德如睢鸠，挚而有别，则后妃性情之正，固可以见其一端矣。至于寤寐反侧，琴瑟钟鼓，极其哀乐而皆不过其则焉，则诗人性情之正，又可以见其全体也”<sup>⑨</sup>。圣人的性情自然流露而成经典。这种内容，在陆王心学家那里，便是圣人之心。陆九渊曰：“学苟知本，《六经》皆我注脚。”<sup>⑩</sup>从本原之心到经典文本之间，由气而贯通，自然而天成。经典是心意的自然天成。经典与心意之间由气而贯通一体。王阳明曰：“人心天理浑然，圣贤笔之书，如写真

① 陈立：《五经》，《白虎通疏证》卷九，吴则虞点校，北京：中华书局，1994年，第444—445页。

② 朱熹注：《论语章句集注》，宋元人注：《四书五经》（上），天津：天津市古籍书店，1988年，第27页。

③ 王守仁：《传习录上》，《王阳明全集》卷一，吴光等编校，上海：上海古籍出版社，1992年，第9、12页。

④ 王守仁：《传习录下》，《王阳明全集》卷三，吴光等编校，第113页。

⑤ 汪荣宝：《法言义疏》卷八，陈仲夫点校，北京：中华书局，1987年，第160页。

⑥ 王符著，汪继培笺：《潜夫论笺校正》，彭铎校正，第13页。

⑦ 黎靖德编：《老庄列子》，《朱子语类》卷一百二十五，王星贤点校，北京：中华书局，1986年，第2992页。

⑧ 黎靖德编：《语孟纲领》，《朱子语类》卷十九，王星贤点校，第441页。

⑨ 朱熹注：《诗经集传》，宋元人注：《四书五经》（中），第2页。

⑩ 陆九渊：《语录》，《陆象山全集》卷三十四，北京：中国书店，1992年，第252页。

传神，不过示人以形状大略，使之因此而讨求其真耳；其精神意气言笑动止，固有所不能传也。”<sup>①</sup>经典与圣人是贯通的，或者说，圣人之心意自然流淌至经典中，从而赋予经典以生机或生命。王夫之曰：“程子与学者说《诗经》，止添数字，就本文吟咏再三，而精义自见。作经义者能尔，洵为最上一乘文字，自非与圣经贤传融液吻合，如自胸中流出者不能。先辈间有此意，知之者鲜。”<sup>②</sup>胸中即心中。经典是心意的自然呈现。那么，经典所表达的圣人之心意包含了哪些内容呢？

## 二、道、理与经典内容 [17]

从语义学的角度来看，任何经典总是说了“什么”，即意谓（meaning）。意谓是经典的内容或作为知识形态的文本本义。经典的意谓或知识形态的本义，在传统儒家看来，便是某种作为抽象规则的道与作为超越法则的理，经典陈述了道与理。

最初，人们相信经典陈述了某种普遍的规则之道。孟子曰：“《诗》云：‘迨天之未阴雨，彻彼桑土，绸繆牖户。今此下民，或敢侮予？’孔子曰：‘为此诗者，其知道乎！’”（《孟子·公孙丑上》）作《诗》者知道。《诗》中有道。荀子曰：“故《书》者，政事之纪也；《诗》者，中声之所止也；《礼》者，法之大分、类之纲纪也。故学至乎《礼》而止矣。夫是之谓道德之极。”（《荀子·劝学》）《礼》中记载的各种规范乃是最好的、符合道的行为。《礼》中含作为规则的道。《礼记》曰：“古之制《礼》也，经之以天地，纪之以日月，参之以三光，政教之本也。”（《礼记·乡饮酒义》）《礼》中之礼乃是规范自然界和人类社会的普遍规则或法则，即道。经典之中蕴含着普遍之道。《白虎通》曰：“经所以有五何？经，常也。有五常之道，故曰《五经》。《乐》仁，《书》义，《礼》礼，《易》智，《诗》信也。人情有五性，怀五常不能自成，是以圣人象天五常之道而明之，以教人成其德也。”之所以有五经，原因在于有五种常道。圣人以这种五常之道来教化民众。经典蕴含着普遍之道，这也是孔子定经典的原因：“孔子所以定《五经》者何？以为孔子居周之末世，王道陵迟，礼乐废坏，强陵弱，众暴寡，天子不敢诛，方伯不敢伐，闵道德之不行，故周流应聘，冀行其道德。自卫反鲁，自知不用，故追定《五经》，以行其道。”<sup>③</sup>孔子之所以重新删定经典，原因在于孔子力图删除那些不合道的内容，从而只保留那些合乎道的内容。经典只能陈述普遍之道。到了宋明时期，理学家们从普遍之道观念中抽象出某种超越的、客观的法则，即理，理即超越的自然法则。儒家的经典蕴含着这种绝对之理。二程曰：“《论语》中言‘唐棣之华’者，因权而言逸诗也。孔子删《诗》，岂只取合于雅颂之音而已，亦是谓合此义理也。如《皇矣》《烝民》《文王》《大明》之类，其义理，非人人学至于此，安能及此？作诗者又非一人，上下数千年若合符节，只为合这一个理，若不合义理，孔子必不取也。”<sup>④</sup>圣人并非任意删定《诗》，而是根据义理。不合“理”的诗篇便被删除。比如《诗》，二程曰：“夫子言‘兴于《诗》’，观其言，是兴起人善意，汪洋浩大，皆是此意。如言‘秉心塞渊，騄牡三千’。须是塞渊，然后騄牡三千。（塞渊有义理。）又如《驹》之诗，坵牧是贱事，其中却言‘思无邪’。《诗》三百，一言以蔽之者在此一句。”<sup>⑤</sup>诗表达了圣人之意，而圣人之意则合乎义理。因此，《诗》中有理，比如“坵牧”所言有贱事，所含有真

① 王守仁：《传习录上》，《王阳明全集》卷一，吴光等编校，第11—12页。

② 王夫之：《夕堂永日绪论外编》，《船山全书》（第15册），长沙：岳麓书社，2011年，第843页。

③ 陈立：《五经》，《白虎通疏证》卷九，吴则虞点校，第447、444—445页。

④ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷二上，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，北京：中华书局，2004年，第40页。

⑤ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷二上，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第41页。

理。故“造道深后，虽闻常人语，言浅近事，莫非义理”<sup>①</sup>。语言通常包含事与理。显而易见的是事，深藏不露的是理。故二程曰：“由《经》穷理。”<sup>②</sup>读《经》能够通理。

经典之中蕴含着道理。朱熹曰：“文者，顺理而成章之谓。”<sup>③</sup>文章包含道理。朱熹曰：“成章，言其文理成就，有可观者。”<sup>④</sup>经典文章不仅包含义理，而且可以直观，即，“文章，德之见乎外者，威仪文辞皆是也。性者，人所受之天理；天道者，天理自然之本体，其实一理也。”<sup>⑤</sup>圣人所作的文章是形式美与内容真的统一。内容之真在于含理。经典表达了理。这便是“著”：“著者，知之明；察者，识之精。言方行之而不能明其所当然，既习矣而犹不识其所以然，所以终身由之而不知其道者多也。”<sup>⑥</sup>“著”即隐藏着的道理呈现出来。经典呈现了理。故朱熹曰：“大凡文字有未晓处，须下死工夫，直要见得道理是自家底，方住。”<sup>⑦</sup>从文字中看出或获得道理。朱熹曰：“读书以观圣贤之意；因圣贤之意，以观自然之理。”<sup>⑧</sup>圣人通过创作经典表达自己的心意，心意之中蕴含着天理。因此，观圣人之意便是穷理：“读书着意玩味，方见得义理从文字中进出。”<sup>⑨</sup>通过阅读经典，我们可以从中明理。儒家经典一定包含了仁义之理。王阳明曰：“以事言谓之史。以道言谓之经。事即道，道即事。《春秋》亦经，《五经》亦史。《易》是包牺氏之史，《书》是尧、舜以下史，《礼》《乐》是三代史。”<sup>⑩</sup>在儒家看来，经典的基本内容便是道理，《经》中有理。

圣人，在儒家理论体系中，是天理的化身或曰“人心良知的一种符号和象征”<sup>⑪</sup>。圣人之意符合天理。理或天理是圣贤存在的终极性根据或最终的标准。二程曰：“圣人公心尽天地万物之理，各当其分，故其道平直而易行。”<sup>⑫</sup>圣人尽理，由圣人所创作的经典必然有理。这是儒家对经典的基本规定。二程将经典分为三类，即“（一）儒者之经；（一）文人之经，东坡陈少南辈是也；（一）禅者之经，张子韶辈是也”<sup>⑬</sup>。经分为儒家经典、文人经典和佛教经典。尽管儒家相信仁义之道才是天下唯一的天理和正道，但是，它也不否认其他传统或文明中所蕴含的、与天理相似的普遍性东西。也就是说，在儒家看来，经典不仅是漂亮的文本，而且包含了某些具有普遍性与绝对性的东西，比如具有天理或仁义之道等。绝对真理性应该是经典的一个内涵。从认识的角度来说，这种绝对真理性包含两层内涵，即，作为知识的道和作为法则的理。其中，作为知识的道便是对作为法则的理的描述与再现。从广义来看，经典一定是包含了某些知识的文本。这些知识，既有科学知识，如命题，也有人伦知识，如规范。这些知识，古人通常称之为道。这些作为知识的道之所以得到了人们的认可与接受，原因在于这些知识获得了存在论的证明，即，这些知识乃是对某些普遍实在法则的描述。这些法则便是理。作为法则的理是作为知识的道的内容，作为知识的道则是实在之理的经验形态。任何一种经典文本的内容一定是正确地记载了某些知识。同时，它所记载的这些知识又是对某些客观的、绝对的、必然的、永恒的实在

① 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷十七，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第178页。

② 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷十五，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第158页。

③ 朱熹注：《论语集注》，宋元人注：《四书五经》（上），第61页。

④ 朱熹注：《论语集注》，宋元人注：《四书五经》（上），第20页。

⑤ 朱熹注：《论语集注》，宋元人注：《四书五经》（上），第19页。

⑥ 朱熹注：《孟子集注》，宋元人注：《四书五经》（上），第102页。

⑦ 黎靖德编：《读书法上》，《朱子语类》卷十，王星贤点校，第164页。

⑧ 黎靖德编：《读书法上》，《朱子语类》卷十，王星贤点校，第162页。

⑨ 黎靖德编：《读书法上》，《朱子语类》卷十，王星贤点校，第173页。

⑩ 王守仁：《传习录上》，《王阳明全集》卷一，吴光等编校，第10页。

⑪ 吴震：《中国思想史上的“圣人”概念》，《杭州师范大学学报（社会科学版）》2013年第4期。

⑫ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏粹言》卷一，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第1181页。

⑬ 黎靖德编：《读书法下》，《朱子语类》卷十一，王星贤点校，第193—194页。

合理地反映。因此，经典是包含了真理(Wahrheit)的文本。这便是“经典的恒常性”<sup>①</sup>。

经典表达了圣人的心声。这种心声的重要组成部分便是普遍之道和绝对之理。这些普遍之道与绝对之理表现在心灵之中便是性。经典表达了圣人之性。这种圣人之性，作为超越实体，乃是一种可能存在。故“文本陈述了可能世界与可能方式，正是通过这些可能方式，作者在此世界中走来”<sup>②</sup>。这种可能的普遍之性，从现实角度来看，便是生存的规则即普遍之道。普遍之道与绝对之理构成了经典的主要内容，并形成最终的文本。从诠释学的角度来说，它便是文本本义的主要内容。从普遍之道与绝对之理的实质性来看，任何的经典必定包含了某种文本本义，比如道理。现实之中，人们之所以怀疑文本本义的存在，原因在于这种普遍之理是形而上的超越实体，无法直观。尽管我们无法用直观的形式再现本义，但是毫无疑问，我们依然确信文本的本义，即，我们对本义的实在性表示信念，或者说，本义存在于我们对它的信念中。

### 三、圣贤气象与经典形式<sup>[18]</sup>

圣人制作的经典不仅传递了某种普遍之理，而且是优美的作品，值得人们欣赏，或者说，人们在阅读、理解这些作品时，这些作品通过再现的圣贤气象，让读者获得情感上的愉悦与审美上的享受。这便是作品的“形体美”。

汉语经典的主要形态是文字载体。王充曰：“天地为图书，仓颉作文字，业与天地同，指与鬼神合，何非何恶，而致雨粟神哭之怪？”<sup>③</sup>汉字产生于仓颉。这种文字，王充曰：“夫竹生于山，木长于林，未知所入；截竹为筒，破以为牒，加笔墨之迹，乃成文字，大者为经，小者为传记；断木为契，析之为板，力加刮削，乃成奏牍。”<sup>④</sup>古人以竹木为材料，用笔墨在其上书写而成文字，并最终形成《经》《传》《记》等文本。字是物理实体。王充曰：“古圣先贤，遗后人文字，其重，非徒父兄之书也；或观读采取，或弃捐不录；二者之相高下也。行路之人，皆能论之，况辨照然否者，不能别之？”<sup>⑤</sup>书籍所记载的文字能够为后人所观看或阅读。由文字等所形成的文本成为物理实体，能够保存与流传。朱熹曰：“学者初看文字，只见得个浑沦物事。久久看作三两片，以至于十数片，方是长进。”<sup>⑥</sup>文字是可以观看的形体之物。

通过这种物理实体，圣人制作的经典能够生动而形象地再现什么，或传递什么。从认识意义来看，传递的内容是道理，从审美趣味的角度来看，传递的内容便是“气象”。二程曰：“文章成功，有形象可见，只是极致事业，然所以成此事功者，即是圣也。”<sup>⑦</sup>由词语等所组成的文本，有形象而好看，可以直观并产生美感。二程曰：“人语言紧急，莫是气不定否？曰：‘此亦当习。习到言语自然缓时，便是气质变也。学至气质变，方是有功。人只是一个习。今观儒臣自有一般气象，武臣自有一般气象，贵戚自有一般气象。不成生来便如此？只是习也。’”<sup>⑧</sup>人的言语之中自然体现了言说者的气质或气象，

① 景海峰：《经典的原义及其扩展性——以儒家经典诠释为例》，《湖南大学学报(社会科学版)》2016年第3期。

② Paul Ricoeur, *Writings and Lectures, Volume 2: Hermeneutics*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 60.

③ 王充：《论衡》，《诸子集成》(第7册)，上海：上海书店，1986年，第52页。

④ 王充：《论衡》，《诸子集成》(第7册)，第124页。

⑤ 王充：《论衡》，《诸子集成》(第7册)，第133页。

⑥ 黎靖德编：《读书法上》，《朱子语类》卷十，王星贤点校，第163页。

⑦ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷五，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第79页。

⑧ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷十八，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第190页。

比如儒臣、武将与贵戚，从其各自的言说中便能够感受到各有一番气象。经典能够生动地再现作者的气质，能够再现气象的文本或经典，从审美的角度来说，便是能够感染人的美文。二程曰：“学圣人者，必观其气象。《乡党》所载，善乎其形容也，读而味之，想而存之，如见乎其人。”<sup>①</sup>经典能够生动而形象地反映出作者的性情，在表达上获得成功，属于好文章、漂亮的文章。比如，“申申是和乐中有中正气象，夭夭是舒泰气象，此皆弟子善形容圣人处也。为申申字说不尽，故更著夭夭字。今人不怠惰放肆，必太严厉，严厉时则著此四字不得，放肆时亦著此四字不得。除非是圣人，便自有中和之气”<sup>②</sup>。“申申”“夭夭”等生动而形象地再现了言说者的气质或性情。这种形象再现，从文学的角度来说便是成功地塑造了作品，达到了传神的艺术效果。因此，经典值得“玩味”：“但将圣人言语玩味久，则自有所得。当深求于《论语》，将诸弟子问处便作己问，将圣人答处便作今日耳闻，自然有得。孔、孟复生，不过以此教人耳。若能于《论》《孟》中深求玩味，将来涵养成甚生气质！”<sup>③</sup>玩味便是审美，值得玩味者便是具有审美趣味的作品。

朱熹曰：“言夫子之文章，日见乎外，固学者所共闻；至于性与天道，则夫子罕言之，而学者有不得闻者。盖圣门教不躐等，子贡至是始得闻之，而叹其美也。”<sup>④</sup>孔子的作品常常为人所叹美，即，“孔子言语句句是自然，孟子言语句句是事实”<sup>⑤</sup>。孔子的作品自然温润，孟子之言则严厉而有力度。这些不同形态的作品皆是上乘作品，具备感化人的功能。比如，“‘《尚书注》并《序》，某疑非孔安国所作。盖文字善困，不类西汉人文章，亦非后汉之文。’或言：‘赵岐《孟子序》却自好。’曰：‘文字絮，气闷人。东汉文章皆然’”<sup>⑥</sup>。东汉文章有闷人之气质。由文字等形成的不同的文本，各自具备特殊的气质。文如其人，如“仲舒为人宽缓，其文亦如其人。大抵汉自武帝后，文字要入细，皆与汉初不同”<sup>⑦</sup>。董仲舒的文字、文本或文章气弱。“公且看三代而下，那件不薄？文章、字、画亦可见，只缘气自薄。”<sup>⑧</sup>三代以下的文字、文章或字画等只有薄气。朱熹曰：“不知古人文字之美，词气温和，义理精密如此！秦汉以后无此等语。”<sup>⑨</sup>由文字所组成的文本内含温和之气。王夫之曰：“一篇载一意，一意则自一气。首尾顺成，谓之成章；诗赋、杂文、经义有合辙者，此也。”<sup>⑩</sup>好文章之中自有一番气象。这些气象的出现，证明了作者表达的成功。

能够再现圣贤气象的作品不仅能够表达主张，而且具有能够产生感化的功能。二程曰：“‘仁言’，谓以仁厚之言加于民。‘仁声’如‘仁闻’，谓风声足以感动人也，此尤见仁德之昭著也。”<sup>⑪</sup>仁言生仁声，进而感动人。朱熹曰：“须是看他诗人意思好处是如何，不好处是如何。看他风土，看他风俗，又看他人情、物态。只看《伐檀诗》，便见得他一个清高底意思；看《硕鼠诗》，便见他一个暴敛底意思。好底意思是如此，不好底是如彼。好底意思，令自家善意油然感动而兴起。看他不好底，自家心下如着枪相似。如此看，方得《诗》意。”<sup>⑫</sup>《诗》中不仅有是非道理，而且因为它生动形象，因此能

① 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏粹言》卷二，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第1234页。

② 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷十八，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第216页。

③ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷二十二上，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第279页。

④ 朱熹注：《论语集注》，宋元人注：《四书五经》（上），第19页。

⑤ 黎靖德编：《语孟纲领》，《朱子语类》卷十九，王星贤点校，第444页。

⑥ 黎靖德编：《纲领》，《朱子语类》卷七十八，王星贤点校，第1984页。

⑦ 黎靖德编：《纲领》，《朱子语类》卷七十八，王星贤点校，第1985页。

⑧ 黎靖德编：《孔孟周程张子》，《朱子语类》卷九十三，王星贤点校，第2352页。

⑨ 黎靖德编：《擗柏舟》，《朱子语类》卷八十一，王星贤点校，第2103页。

⑩ 王夫之：《夕堂永日绪论外编》，《船山全书》（第15册），第847页。

⑪ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷十八，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第212页。

⑫ 黎靖德编：《论读诗》，《朱子语类》卷八十，王星贤点校，第2082页。

够直接激发人体中的善气而心生感动。读《诗》能够感动自身之心。这便是“兴”：“古人独以为‘兴于《诗》’者，诗便有感发人底意思。”<sup>①</sup>兴即感动人。而读诗便是“吟咏讽诵”：“读诗正在于吟咏讽诵，观其委曲折旋之意，如吾自作此诗，自然足以感发善心。……如《郑诗》虽淫乱，然《出其东门》一诗，却如此好。《女曰鸡鸣》一诗，意思亦好。读之，真个有不知手之舞、足之蹈者！”<sup>②</sup>吟咏讽诵便是读出声音、产生气息，甚至能够激发出一定的动作。这些载体能够“化人”：“名者，命也，命呼之而人知之。呼者，声之化出者也。始化也而讹，讹生于俄，是以谓之化；倒人曰，而立人其旁，一生一死之名也，制字者苦心哉！”<sup>③</sup>名即命名。命名即称呼，称呼便有声音。这些声音作品足以感染人。这便是感应。方以智曰：“盖自然感应，发于性情，莫先于声矣。故，圣人立文字以配之，作声歌以畅之，制音乐以谐之。”<sup>④</sup>审美中的感应便是感染，即，圣人的作品能够感化读者，从而变化读者的气质，能够产生感化读者的效果。方以智曰：“雅言之教，兴于《诗》而成于《乐》。古者相见，歌《诗》谕志，闻《乐》知德，吹律协姓，微矣。操琴瑟，听新声，皆往往足以知得失、生死、成败、治乱。异室张徽，感同葭管；悟者冲口，妙与韵叶。清静音闻，感寂之微，通格异类，非道理所能说。曾子、桑户，音出金石；孤孽伉烈，声动天地。得道之人与诚迫之人，皆同此不可已之声音迸裂而出。兴之必怨，犹元之必贞。贞而元，怨而兴，岂非最发人性情之真者乎？”<sup>⑤</sup>儒家的礼乐作品是某种气质载体。这些载体产生于作者，并能够通过感应的方式激发读者的气质，从而改造读者的气质，使其向善。这种能够感化读者的作品通常具有审美价值。这便是经典的形体特征。

#### 四、圣人之心：普遍与个体<sup>[20]</sup>

经典呈现了圣人之心意。那么，圣人之心意包含了哪些内容呢？从内容来看，经典不仅传递了普遍之理，而且承载了圣人气象。这种普遍之理与圣贤气象，从作者的角度来看，表现为圣人人性与圣人之情。经典中的道理体现了圣人人性。这便是体用不二的辩证关系，即用中之理转换为体中之性。二程曰：“在天为命，在义为理，在人为性，主于身为心，其实一也。”<sup>⑥</sup>行为之理，落实于身体之上便是性。也就是说，关于行为的各种普遍之道理，表现于人的心中便是性。二程曰：“行仁自孝弟始，孝弟，仁之事也。仁，性也；孝弟，用也。谓孝弟为行仁之本则可，直曰仁之本，则不可。”<sup>⑦</sup>仁义之理，在体的角度来看，便是性。朱熹亦曰：“只是这理，在天则曰‘命’，在人则曰‘性’。”<sup>⑧</sup>在用为理，在体为性。性即理，即，行为之理最终本源于圣人人性。朱熹曰：“人之性情，心之体用，本然全具，而各有条理如此。”<sup>⑨</sup>圣人合理行为的起源便是包含了性的圣人之心。

经典表达了圣人之“气象”，即情。情，按照中国传统儒家哲学理论，乃是以某种自然禀赋的气质为主体的活动。如，情生于气质性的人性。孟子曰：“乃若其情，则可以善矣，乃所谓善也。若夫

① 黎靖德编：《论读诗》，《朱子语类》卷八十，王星贤点校，第2084页。

② 黎靖德编：《论读诗》，《朱子语类》卷八十，王星贤点校，第2086页。

③ 方以智：《方以智全书》（第1册），黄德宽、诸伟奇主编，第313页。

④ 方以智：《方以智全书》（第10册），黄德宽、诸伟奇主编，第10页。

⑤ 方以智：《方以智全书》（第1册），黄德宽、诸伟奇主编，第347页。

⑥ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷十八，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第204页。

⑦ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏粹言》卷一，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第1173页。

⑧ 黎靖德编：《性情心意等名义》，《朱子语类》卷五，王星贤点校，第83页。

⑨ 朱熹：《孟子集注》，宋元人注：《四书五经》（上），第25页。

为不善，非才之罪也。”（《孟子·告子上》）在孟子那里，自然禀赋的性乃是某种气质的、善良的性，其所发动的活动即情因此反映了性的善良。这便是“乃若其情”。同样，荀子之性也是气质之性，即，“荀扬韩诸人虽是论性，其实只说得气”<sup>①</sup>。这种气质之性是情欲活动的主体。荀子曰：“性者，天之就也；情者，性之质也；欲者，情之应也。”（《荀子·正名》）性是主体，情和欲便是性的表现，如性动为欲、表现为情。荀子曰：“性之好、恶、喜、怒、哀、乐谓之情。”（《荀子·正名》）性动而生情。《性自命出》曰：“性自命出，命自天降。道始于情，情生于性。始者近情，终者近义。知情[者能]出之，知义者能内之。”<sup>②</sup>情生于性，或者说，情是性的活动。情乃是人的、以自然气质为主体的形体所主导的活动。

这种自然禀赋的气质形体，理学家改称之为心。由此，性动为情便转变为情产生于心。二程曰：“在天为命，在义为理，在人为性，主于身为心，其实一也。心本善，发于思虑，则有善有不善。若既发，则可谓之情，不可谓之心。譬如水，只谓之水，至于流而为派，或行于东，或行于西，却谓之流也。”<sup>③</sup>心是体，情是其用，情产生于心。准确地说，情是心性合一而产生的活动。伊川曰：“性之本谓之命，性之自然者谓之天，自性之有形者谓之心，自性之有动者谓之情，凡此数者皆一也。”<sup>④</sup>人心依据于人性的活动叫作情。胡宏曰：“性譬诸水乎，则心犹水之下，情犹水之澜，欲犹水之波浪。”<sup>⑤</sup>心在水下，是根基。其表面为情和欲。情生于心。朱熹曰：“‘性’字从‘心’，从‘生’；‘情’字从‘心’，从‘青’。性是有此理。”<sup>⑥</sup>情产生于心、正于性。这便是“心统性情”<sup>⑦</sup>。朱熹曰：“惟圣人全体此心，随感而应，故其所行无非不忍人之政也。”<sup>⑧</sup>情生于心，即，心动而生不忍人之情。朱熹曰：“性无不善。心所发为情，或有不善。说不善非是心，亦不得。却是心之本体本无不善，其流为不善者，情之迁于物而然也。性是理之总名，仁义礼智皆性中一理之名。恻隐、羞恶、辞逊、是非是情之所发之名，此情之出于性而善者也。”<sup>⑨</sup>心是行为主体。这个主体包含了两项要素，即超越之性理和气质之心脏，二者合一而产生情。情的发生便有了两个主体，一个是性体，一个是形体。其中的气质心灵便是情的直接主体，而性则是其间接主体也是终极主体。王阳明说：“性一而已。仁义礼智，性之性也；聪明睿知，性之质也；喜怒哀乐，性之情也；私欲客气，性之蔽也。质有清浊，故情有过不及，而蔽有浅深也。私欲客气，一病两痛。非二物也……”<sup>⑩</sup>人类自然禀赋的心灵不仅有超越之性，而且有气质之心。正是后者直接产生了喜怒哀乐之情。王阳明说：“性一而已，自其形体也谓之天，主宰也谓之帝，流行也谓之命，赋于人也谓之性，主于身也谓之心；心之发也，遇父便谓之孝，遇君便谓之忠，自此以往，名至于无穷，只一性而已。犹人一而已：对父谓之子，对子谓之父，自此以往，至于无穷，只一人而已。”<sup>⑪</sup>忠孝节义等情或行为皆出自于符合良知的本心。心动而生情，这便是传统儒家的共同结论。

这种依赖于自然禀赋而发生的情欲活动具有自然性的特点，却没有个体主体性的特点，即它仅仅是人类缘于气质载体而发生的，并非个体能够自己做主的行为。比如，“今人乍见孺子将入于井，

① 黎靖德编：《人物之性气质之性》，《朱子语类》卷四，王星贤点校，第78页。

② 荆门市博物馆编：《郭店楚墓竹简》，北京：文物出版社，1998年，第179页。

③ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷十八，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第204页。

④ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷二十五，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第318页。

⑤ 胡宏：《知言》，《胡宏集》，吴仁华点校，北京：中华书局，1987年，第13页。

⑥ 黎靖德编：《性情心意等名义》，《朱子语类》卷五，王星贤点校，第91页。

⑦ 黎靖德编：《张子之书一》，《朱子语类》卷九十八，王星贤点校，第2513页。

⑧ 朱熹注：《孟子集注》，宋元人注：《四书五经》（上），第24页。

⑨ 黎靖德编：《性情心意等名义》，《朱子语类》卷五，王星贤点校，第92页。

⑩ 王守仁：《传习录中》，《王阳明全集》卷二，吴光等编校，第68页。

⑪ 王守仁：《传习录上》，《王阳明全集》卷一，吴光等编校，第15页。

皆有怵惕惻隐之心，非所以内交于孺子之父母也，非所以要誉于乡党朋友也，非恶其声而然也”（《孟子·公孙丑上》）。惻隐之心的产生并非出于主体的故意或自愿，而是主体的自然反应。王阳明曰：“知是心之本体，心自然会知：见父自然知孝，见兄自然知弟，见孺子入井自然知惻隐，此便是良知不假外求。若良知之发，更无私意障碍……”<sup>①</sup>内含良知的心灵自然知道孝顺父母，仁孝的情感或行为是一种自然的显现，于个体选择无关。这意味着情的出现乃是一种非自由主体的个体性行为。或者说，在情感活动中，主导因素并不是行为人的自由意志，而是自然的禀赋活动。

经典承载了圣人之心，心中含性与情。在这种复杂的心灵活动之中，我们并不否定圣人的自主而自由的心灵活动，对于圣人来说，经典可能体现了圣人的自由意志。但是，从儒家心灵活动的原理来看，作为意志的心显然听命于作为规则的道或理，即在心性关系中，普遍之性占据了绝对主导权。二程曰：“圣人与理为一，故无过，无不及，中而已矣。其他皆以心处这个道理，故贤者常失之过，不肖者常失之不及。”<sup>②</sup>心是一切行为的主宰。而在这个气质心灵与绝对天理的统一体中，气质心灵最终听命于超越之理或性。二程曰：“圣人公心尽天地万物之理，各当其分，故其道平直而易行。”<sup>③</sup>圣人尽心便是心听从于理或性。性对心灵的主导作用，朱熹称之为“心统性情”：“盖性即心之理，情即性之用。今先说一个心，便教人识得个情性底总脑，教人知得个道理存着处。若先说性，却似性中别有一个心。横渠‘心统性情’语极好。”<sup>④</sup>张载的心统性情说非常精准，因为它准确地表达了心性关系，即心中含性、性主心灵。朱熹曰：“性便是心之所有之理，心便是理之所会之地。”<sup>⑤</sup>性是心的根据，心则是性所在之处。朱熹曰：“但人为物之灵，极是体而全得之，总会于吾心，即所谓性。虽会在吾之心，为我之性，而与天固未尝间。……（那个不是心做？那个道理不具于心？）天下岂有性外之物，而不统于吾心是理之中也哉？但以理言，则为天地公共，不见其切于己。谓之吾心之体，则即理之在我有统属主宰，而其端可寻也。”<sup>⑥</sup>内含性的心之所以虚灵明觉，原因在于心中含性、性主动。假如我们承认心中包含着现代人的意志观念的话，那么，在朱熹心灵哲学体系中，个体的意志最终服从于普遍的法则即道与理。

经典体现了圣人之心。在圣人之心，真正主导者乃是普遍的道理，而非个人的意志。或者说，传统儒家认为，经典首先包含着普遍的道理，以及圣人的气质，对于每一个圣人自己的、独特的个体性，传统儒家有所忽略。即便儒家相信经典蕴含着个人的意志，从心性关系来看，这种个人意志并未获得主体性或主导性地位。由心性合成的主体的活动无法体现作者的个体主体性。这应该是传统儒家经典观的一大缺憾。

## 五、结语：个体主体性的消解 [22]

传统儒家认为，经典是由圣人所创造的文本，普通人几乎没有资格创造经典。这是儒家经典的第一个特征。经典的第二个特征是经典一定含有永恒的道与理，经中有理。通过学习经典，读者能够知“道”而明理。经典的第三个特征是，在儒家看来，经典之中一定蕴含了圣贤气象，也就是说，经典

① 王守仁：《传习录上》，《王阳明全集》卷一，吴光等编校，第6页。

② 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏遗书》卷二十三，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第307页。

③ 程颢、程颐：《河南程氏粹言》卷一，《二程集》，王孝鱼点校，第1181页。

④ 黎靖德编：《性情心意等名义》，《朱子语类》卷五，王星贤点校，第91—92页。

⑤ 黎靖德编：《性情心意等名义》，《朱子语类》卷五，王星贤点校，第88页。

⑥ 朱熹：《晦庵先生朱文公文集》卷五十七，朱杰人、严佐之、刘永翔主编：《朱子全书》（第23册），上海：上海古籍出版社，2002年，第2740页。

一定是美文。这些美文能够栩栩如生地描述或再现作者的性情。这些文字，通过呈现圣人气象而影响读者，从而激发读者的激情或情感，调动读者的良善气质，并最终改变读者的气质、致善成人，以发挥经典的教化作用。

传统儒家的这些经典观具有一定的现代意义和价值，即，它能够给我们理解一般的经典提供一定的启发。从现代诠释学的角度来说，经典一定是美好的文章，即，能够形象地再现作者的心声或心意，在形式上令人欣赏，且能够感动读者。这便是经典的特征。同时，在内容上，经典讲述了一个普遍的知识、道理或真理，因而具有永恒性和绝对性。或者说，经典作品不仅仅表达了作者的个人感悟或情感，而且包含了某些普遍的观念，如真理、致善和完美等绝对的价值或观念（至少人们以之为普遍的观念）。经典作品通常内含普遍而绝对的东西。“当我们说某某人的著作是经典的，就表示该著作具有一种不受时间限制的永远价值。”<sup>①</sup>也正是这种绝对者的存在，不仅给读者带来审美的享受，同时也能够让读者获得超越、获得新生。这便是经典的社会价值。因为经典中内含永恒的真理，因此，经典是永恒的。

除此之外，经典还有一个必不可少的内涵，即蕴含了作者的独特个体意志，呈现了个体的独特个性化人生。真正的经典一定是基于作者的个体化活动而产生的作品。如果我们把经典的创作视为一个事件，那么，这个事件最重要的特征便是其特殊性，即这是某个人、在某个特定的时间、特定的地点的创作。这种时间性、空间性注定了这个创作事件的唯一性或特殊性。这种唯一而特殊的事件所具有的性质，我们称之为创作活动的个体性。经典的制作一定是个体化过程，它蕴含着个体性。这个个体性事件的源头便是自主而自由的心灵，或者说，人的自由意志。这也是我们阅读经典时常常关注的最重要的向度，即作品体现了作者独特的心声或主体性。其中，人的主体性属于绝对的、形而上的实体，它并不直接呈现，而是借助于某些经验的存在而在世。经验的存在不仅是显而易见的，而且是变化的，而个体主体性却是不变的。这种不变的主体性的另一个概念便是自我。“在自然世界，变化的状态与进程总是相对于某种保持不变的事物，同样，我们意识中的变化也依赖于某种事实，即，它们总是从属于某种不变自我。”<sup>②</sup>不变自我即主体性。这种超越的主体性常常通过自然的情感、易知的理想等而在场。也就是说，我们通常能够通过经典而知晓作者的认识、理想与情感等。这些情感与理想等最终体现了作者的个体意志与主体性。经典一定是自由个体的创作。这种“作为可能世界的文本世界，可以肯定地说，这是一个我能够为了在那里实现我的可能性而栖居、然后思考自己的地方”<sup>③</sup>。作品一定是作者自由创作的产物。

中国传统儒家认为，经典体现了圣贤的气象与性情。我们不能否认这些气象或情感之中隐藏着作者的自由意志与主体性，但是，传统儒家诠释学却并未明确揭示出这一内涵。对于经典的个体化向度，传统儒家有所忽略，或者说，传统儒家认识得并不清楚。更重要的是，在普遍的道理与个体的（可能包含了意志的）观念之间，传统儒家选择了普遍道理为主宰、个人意志听从于绝对的道理，从而弱化了个人意志的主体性地位，消解了人的个体主体性。

（责任编辑：张发贤 责任校对：陈真）

① 洪汉鼎：《文本，经典与诠释——中西方经典诠释比较》，《深圳大学学报（人文社会科学版）》2015年第2期。

② Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics between History and Philosophy: The Selected Writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Pol Vandavelde and Arun Iyer (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 127.

③ Ricoeur, *Writings and Lectures, Volume 2: Hermeneutics*, 17.

# Traditional Confucian View of the Classics\*

Shen Shunfu\*\*

**Abstract:** In the Confucian tradition, the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of History*, and others are regarded as classics created by sages that not only reflect the universal *dao* and principles but also exude the aura of the sages. The universal *dao* and principles constitute the content of the classics and give them value as knowledge. The radiant aura of the sages showcases the beauty of classical writings and can also have a persuasive effect. Classics embody the mind of the sages, which comprises both a physical and also a transcendental, inborn nature. The physical mind generates feelings, and the transcendental nature is manifested through the *dao* and principles in activities. The mind governs human nature and feelings. In this unity, the universal nature dominates the activity of the physical mind, and as a result, individual subjectivity is dissolved. Traditional Confucianism reveals the three types of purport in the classics but overlooks their dimension of individual subjectivity.

**Keywords:** *jing*, classics, *dao*, principle, Confucianism

*Jingdian* 经典 (classics) are the most important constituents in the Confucian tradition. They not only embody the wisdom of traditional thinking but also play an important role in social and cultural forces. People use classics for instruction, thus forming a stable cultural and social order. Even in today's world of intellectual freedom and openness, people still cannot do without classics. What then are classics? This paper is based on the traditional Confucian understanding of *jing* 经, arguing that in traditional Confucianism, *jingdian* is *jing* made by sages, which contains two basic elements: the reproduction of the aura of the sages through perfect writing techniques and the inherent nature of the sages, similar to the universal rules, that thereby generate aesthetic interest and understanding of the *dao* 道 (the Way) and principles (*li* 理). Although the traditional view of the classics also acknowledges that classics express the feelings (*qing* 情) of the sages, such natural feelings cannot replace the will and subjectivity of the sages. Therefore, traditional Confucianism overlooks the dimension of individual subjectivity in the classics.

\* This paper is a preliminary result of the post-funded project *A Study of the Traditional Confucian Philosophy of the Mind* [传统儒家心灵哲学研究], supported by the 2020 National Social Science Fund of China (Project No. 20FZX005).

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## The Emergence of the Sages and Classics

[Refer to page 14 for Chinese. Similarly hereinafter]

*Jingdian* is a modern term that is represented by the word *jing* in traditional Chinese culture. The original meaning of the word *jing* is the thread that was used for traditional Chinese bookbinding.<sup>1</sup> In the past, materials for writing such as silks and bamboo slips were relatively precious, so writings were not included in compilations unless they were important and canonic. Therefore, texts included in canonic compilations had to be important and valuable. In chapter 14 of the *Zhuangzi*, it is recorded: “Confucius said to Laozi, ‘I have been compiling the Six Classics (*liujing* 六经)—the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Rites*, the *Book of Music*, the *Book of Changes*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*—for what I would call a long period of time. I believe that I am well acquainted with them.’” Such classic Confucian documents as the *Book of Poetry* and the *Book of Documents* have been already called *jing*. In the “Dispelling Blindness” [解蔽] chapter of the *Xunzi*, the *Book of Documents* is referred to as the *Classic of Dao* [道经], and *jing* is also used to refer to other Confucian classics.

The classics, according to traditional Confucianism, originated with the sages. Xunzi wrote, “If a man combined specific methods with general strategies, made what he said equal what he did, united guiding principles with proper categories for each thing, and assembled the most talented heroes of the world, informing them of the great antiquity and teaching them perfect obedience, then by merely facing toward the south wall of his room and sitting upon his mat, the full array of forms and outward signs of the sage-king would gather about him.”<sup>2</sup>

The “array of forms and outward signs” here refers to classic texts. Sages are the authors of the classics, and they legislate for the world by writing classics; that is, “the *Book of Poetry* expresses the sage’s intentions; the *Book of Documents* his official business; the *Book of Rites* his conduct; the *Book of Music* his harmoniousness; and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* his esoteric meaning” (*Xunzi*, “The Teachings of Confucianism” [儒效]). The “Appended Remarks II” [系辞下] chapter of the *Book of Changes* elaborately lists the achievements of various legendary sage-kings from Fuxi 伏羲, Shennong 神农, and the Yellow Emperor 黄帝 to Yao 尧 and Shun 舜, and their cultural contributions are mentioned at the end: “In early ancient times, people conducted affairs by tying ropes for records, and in later times, sages made records by carving characters, officials governed local affairs in the same way, and all people observed and checked their daily affairs in the same way. This is perhaps the origin of the ‘Guai’ [夬] hexagram.” The emergence of carved characters indicates not only the emergence of culture but also the emergence of the primary forms of the classics. Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 85–162) proposed, “The wise sages had broad minds (*xin* 心), bright divinity, and upright morality in their inherent nature (*xing* 性), and they created classics to pass on to future generations.”<sup>3</sup>

Confucius said that he was only “a transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients.”<sup>4</sup> Later, with the rise of Confucius’s status, Confucian classics such as the Four Books and the Five Classics were often regarded as the works of Confucius or related to

1 Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, *Lectures on Chinese Classics* [国学讲演录], ed. Wu Yongkun 吴永坤 (Nanjing: Phoenix Press, 2008), 44.

2 “Contra Twelve Philosophers” [非十二子], in *Xunzi*. The English translations of the *Xunzi* are based on John Knoblock’s version, with minor alterations.

3 Wang Fu 王符, “Praising Learning, Chapter I” [赞学第一], in vol. 1 of *A Recluse’s Comments Annotated* [潜夫论笺校正], ed. Wang Jipei 汪继培 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1985), 13.

4 *Analects* 7:1. The English translation of the citation from the *Analects* is based on James Legge’s version.

Confucius. According to “The Hereditary House of Confucius” [孔子世家] in the *Records of the Grand Historian* [史记], “Confucius did not serve official positions but retreated to study and compile the *Book of Poetry*, the *Book of Documents*, the *Book of Rites*, and the *Book of Music*. His disciples were numerous and came from afar. They all studied under his instruction.” The *Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall* [白虎通] states that Confucius “confirmed the Five Classics,”<sup>5</sup> and later generations changed “confirmed” to “simplified.” Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) comments, “Confucius simplified the *Book of Poetry* and the *Book of Documents*, confirmed the *Book of Rites* and the *Book of Music*, eulogized the *Book of Changes*, and edited the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, all of which were transmitted by him from the past sages and kings but were not written by himself. That is why he said this.”<sup>6</sup> Overall, most later generations accepted this view that Confucius was the creator or author of the Confucian cultural classics.

Wang Yangming 王阳明 (Wang Shouren 王守仁, 1472–1529) said,

Sages wrote the Six Classics in order to rectify the human mind, to preserve the principle of Heaven and eliminate human desires. . . . Worldly Confucian scholars only talk about the knowledge of the ruler. Therefore, they must know many conspiracies and tricks. It is purely a utilitarian mind, contrary to the meaning of the classics written by sages.<sup>7</sup>

He also said, “The Duke of Zhou formulated rites and music to instruct the world, all of which could only be done by sages. . . . Confucius simplified and compiled the Six Classics to educate all generations, which could also only be done by sages.”<sup>8</sup> Thus all the figures quoted above concur that the classics originated from sages.

Classics express the intentions of the sages. As Yang Xiong 扬雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) wrote,

Both facial expressions and appropriate language express the desires of the mind, and there is nothing like speech that can release people’s frustration and anger. For summarizing the affairs of all under Heaven, for recording the old and explaining what is far away, for making known the darkness of antiquity, and transmitting unclear matters from a thousand miles away, there is nothing like writing. Therefore, speech is the voice of the mind, and writing is the picture of the mind.<sup>9</sup>

Wang Fu wrote, “Therefore, the sages used their minds to create classics.”<sup>10</sup> Zhu Xi remarked, “This comment on the poem reveals the integrity of the poet’s inherent nature and feelings and the harmony of his voice. . . . Therefore, the integrity of the poet’s inherent nature and feelings can also reveal its wholeness.”<sup>11</sup> It can be seen that the natural flow of the sages’ inherent nature and feelings reveals itself as a classic. This kind of content, in Lu Jiuyuan 陆九渊 (1139–1193) and Wang Yangming’s philosophy of the mind, is the minds of the sages. Lu Jiuyuan said, “If learning is for the essentials, then the Six Classics are all annotations of myself.”<sup>12</sup> Wang Yangming said, “The human mind and the Heavenly principle are the whole unity. What the sages wrote is like the painting to transmit the spirit,

5 See Chen Li 陈立, “The Five Classics” [五经], in vol. 9 of *Interpretations of the Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall* [白虎通疏证], ed. Wu Zeyu 吴则虞 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1994), 444–445.

6 Zhu Xi 朱熹, ed., *The Analects of Confucius Annotated* [论语章句集注], in book I of *The Four Books and Five Classics* [四书五经] (Tianjin: Tianjin Classics Bookstore, 1988), 27.

7 Wang Shouren 王守仁, *Instructions for Practical Living I* [传习录上], vol. 1 of *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming* [王阳明全集], ed. Wu Guang 吴光 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Press, 1992), 9.

8 Ibid., 12.

9 Wang Rongbao 汪荣宝, *Interpretations of Exemplary Figures* [法言义疏], vol. 8, ed. Chen Zhongfu 陈仲夫 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1987), 160.

10 Wang Fu, “Praising Learning, Chapter I,” 13.

11 Zhu Xi, ed., *The Book of Poetry Annotated* [诗经集传], in book II of *The Four Books and Five Classics*, 2.

12 Lu Jiuyuan 陆九渊, “Teachings” [语录], vol. 34 of *The Complete Works of Lu Xiangshan* [陆象山全集] (Beijing: China Bookstore, 1992), 252.

only to show people the general forms, and thus to make them seek the truth.”<sup>13</sup> The minds of the sages naturally flow into the classics, endowing them with vitality or life. What then are the minds and intentions of the sages that are expressed in the classics?

## The *Dao*, Principles, and the Contents of Classics [17]

From a semantic perspective, any classic always says something. The original meanings of classics or knowledge forms, in the traditional Confucian view, are the *dao* as certain abstract rules and principles as transcendent rules. That is to say, the classics state the *dao* and principles.

Initially, people believed that the classics stated the *dao* of universal rules.

It is said in the *Book of Poetry*, “Before the heavens were dark with rain, / I gathered the bark from the roots of the mulberry trees, / And wove it closely to form the window and door of my nest; / Now I thought, ye people below, / Perhaps ye will not dare to insult me.” Confucius said, “Did not he who made this ode understand the way of governing?”<sup>14</sup>

The *Book of Rites* contains the model for the primary social distinctions and the categories by analogical extension for the guiding rules and ordering norms of behavior. (*Xunzi*, “An Exhortation to Learning” [劝学])

When the ancients established the *Book of Rites*, they followed the principles of Heaven and Earth, the laws of the sun and moon, and the assistance of the three luminaries. These are the basics of politics and indoctrination. (*Book of Rites*, “The Graduation Drinking Etiquettes” [乡饮酒义])

And the *Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall* says, “Classics indicate constancy. There is the *dao* of Five Constant Virtues, and therefore these works are called the Five Classics. Sages analogized the *dao* of the heavenly Five Constant Virtues for enlightenment, by which they instructed people to attain the virtue.”<sup>15</sup>

In the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties, Neo-Confucian scholars abstracted certain transcendent and objective laws from the concept of the universal *dao*, namely principles. It was believed that the classics of Confucianism contained absolute principles.

When Confucius edited the *Book of Poetry*, he chose what to delete or retain not just based on the sound of odes and hymns but also based on the Confucian principles. . . . If they do not conform to the Confucian principles, Confucius did not include them.<sup>16</sup>

The cultivation of the *dao* is profound. Despite its simple form of everyday speech and its closeness to current affairs, it still reflects the Confucian principles.<sup>17</sup>

Language usually includes both affairs and principles, where affairs are obvious and principles are concealed. Therefore, Confucians were required “to read through the classics to extend the principles.”<sup>18</sup>

From a Confucian perspective, the basic contents of the classics are the *dao* and principles. Zhu Xi said, “Good writings come into being by following the principles”; “Such writings contain considerable merits in both style and thought.”<sup>19</sup> Confucian classics must

13 Wang Shouren, *Instructions for Practical Living I*, 11–12.

14 *Mencius* 2:4. The English translations of the *Mencius* are based on James Legge’s version.

15 Chen Li, “The Five Classics,” 447.

16 Cheng Hao 程颢 and Cheng Yi 程颐, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers* [河南程氏遗书], vol. 2, part I, in *Works of the Cheng Brothers* [二程集], ed. Wang Xiaoyu 王孝鱼 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2004), 40.

17 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 17, 178.

18 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 15, 158.

19 Zhu Xi, ed., *The Analects Annotated* [论语集注], in book I of *The Four Books and Five Classics*, 61, 20.

contain the principle of benevolence (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 义). As Wang Yangming taught, “Writings on affairs are called history; writings on the *dao* are called classics. Affairs are the *dao* and the *dao* affairs. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* is also a classic, and the Five Classics are also history.”<sup>20</sup>

In the Confucian theoretical system, the sage is the embodiment of the principle of Heaven and “a sign and symbol of the intuitive knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知) of the human mind.”<sup>21</sup> Cheng Hao 程颢 (1032–1085) and Cheng Yi 程颐 (1033–1107) divided classics into three categories: Confucian classics, literati classics, and Buddhist classics.<sup>22</sup> Although Confucianism believes that the Way of benevolence and righteousness is the only principle of Heaven and the right *dao* in the world, it does not deny the universal things similar to the principle of Heaven that are contained in other traditions or civilizations. Absolute truth should be implicit in the classics and includes the *dao* as knowledge and the principles as law. Principles as law are the content of the *dao* as knowledge, while the *dao* as knowledge is the empirical form (the description and reproduction) of the principle of reality. The content of any classic text must accurately record certain knowledge, and simultaneously this knowledge is a reflection of certain objective, absolute, inevitable, and eternal realities and rationality. This is the “classic constancy.”<sup>23</sup>

Classics express the minds and voices of the sages, and the universal *dao* and the absolute principles are important constituents of their minds and voices, manifested in the mind as inherent nature. Classics express the inherent nature of the sages. “Texts speak of possible worlds and possible ways of orientating oneself in these worlds.”<sup>24</sup> This possibility of universality, from a practical perspective, is the rule of survival, that is, the *dao* of universality. From a hermeneutic perspective, the universal *dao* and the absolute principles are the main contents of the text’s original meaning. From a substantive perspective, any classic must contain certain textual meanings, such as the *dao* and principle. In reality, people tend to doubt the existence of the original meaning of the text because this universal principle is metaphysical, transcending entities, which cannot be directly perceived. Although it is not possible to reproduce the original meaning in directly perceptible form, there is no doubt that we are still convinced of the text’s original meaning, that is, convinced in our belief in the reality of the original meaning; or to put it differently, the original meaning exists in our belief in it.

## The Aura of the Sages and the Forms of Classics<sup>[19]</sup>

The classics created by sages not only convey the universal principle but are also beautiful works. These works provide readers with emotional pleasure and aesthetic enjoyment by reproducing the aura of the sages. This is the formal beauty of the work.

For their main form, Chinese classics have the written character as the carrier. Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 97) said, “Cutting bamboo into a tube, breaking it into slips, and

20 Wang Shouren, *Instructions for Practical Living I*, 10.

21 Wu Zhen 吴震, “The Concept of ‘Sage’ in the Chinese Intellectual History” [中国思想史上的“圣人”概念], *Journal of Hangzhou Normal University* (Humanities and Social Sciences) [杭州师范大学学报(社会科学版)], no. 4 (2013): 13–25.

22 See Li Jingde 黎靖德, ed., “Methods of Reading II” [读书法下], vol. 11 of *Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi* [朱子语类], ed. Wang Xingxian 王星贤 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986), 193–194.

23 Jing Haifeng 景海峰, “The Original Meanings of Classics and Their Extension: In Case of the Interpretations of Confucian Classics” [经典的原义及其扩展性——以儒家经典诠释为例], *Journal of Hunan Normal University* (Social Science) [湖南大学学报(社会科学版)], no. 3 (2016): 11–16.

24 Paul Ricoeur, *Writings and Lectures, Volume 2: Hermeneutics*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 60.

adding marks with brush and ink, people produce characters. The major ones are classics, and the lesser ones are annotations.”<sup>25</sup> The text formed by characters becomes a physical entity that can be preserved and passed down for later generations to observe or read.

Through this physical entity, classics created by sages can vividly reproduce or convey content. Epistemologically speaking, the contents conveyed are rules and principles; aesthetically, they are aura. “The success of writings lies in their vivid imagery. This is the ultimate attainment. Whoever achieves this is a sage.”<sup>26</sup> Human speech reflects the physical nature or aura of the speaker, such as Confucian officials, military generals, and nobles, who all differ from each other in their manner of speaking. Classics can vividly reproduce the author’s physical nature, and texts or classics that can reproduce the aura are, from an aesthetic perspective, beautiful texts that can affect people. “To learn from sages, one must observe their aura. What is recorded in book 10 of the *Analects* is its fine description. Reading to experience it and thinking to remember it, one feels like seeing the man himself.”<sup>27</sup> Classics can vividly reflect the nature and feelings of the writer and achieve success in expression so that they become good and beautiful writings. For example, *Analects* 7:4 reads, “When the Master was unoccupied with business, he remained *shenshen* 申申 and *yaoyao* 夭夭.” “‘*Shenshen*’ refers to the aura of fairness and justice (in harmony and joy),” explain latter-day commentators, “and ‘*yaoyao*’ refers to the aura of easiness and peace, both of which are well described by disciples for the sage.”<sup>28</sup> The reproduction of this image, from a literary perspective, successfully shapes the work and achieves a vivid artistic effect of transmitting the spirit. Therefore, classics are worth pondering: “If you ruminate over the expressions of the sage long enough, you will gain something.”<sup>29</sup>

Different texts have their own unique qualities. Zhu Xi said, “Confucius’s language is most natural, and Mencius’s language is most factual.”<sup>30</sup> And also, “Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) is generous and gentle, and so is his writing.”<sup>31</sup> The emergence of such an aura proves the success of the author’s expression. Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) wrote, “A piece of writing contains a meaning and a meaning originates from a *qi* 气 (vital force). If the beginning and the end naturally come in order, it is called the completion of writing; the completion and rhyme of poems, essays, and classics follow the same rules.”<sup>32</sup>

Works that can reproduce the aura of the sages not only express what they are but also exert a sympathetic influence. “A ‘benevolent remark’ means influencing people by kind and generous expressions. A ‘benevolent sound,’ like ‘benevolent listening,’ means that the sound is enough to move people, which is particularly evident in the remarkable virtue of benevolence.”<sup>33</sup> Take the *Book of Poetry* as an example: Not only does it contain the principles of right and wrong, but because of its vividness, it can directly stimulate people’s goodness and move their hearts. “Reading poetry is to chant it again and again to observe its intricate and concealed meaning. If I write a poem myself, it naturally tends to stimulate

25 Wang Chong 王充, *Discourses Weighted in the Balance* [论衡], in book 7 of *Collection of the Ancient Philosophers* [诸子集成] (Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore, 1986), 52, 124, 133.

26 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 5, 79.

27 Cheng and Cheng, *The Sayings of Henan Cheng Brothers* [河南程氏粹言], vol. 2, in *Works of the Cheng Brothers*, 1234.

28 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 18, 216.

29 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 22, part I, 279.

30 Li, “Outlines of the *Analects* and the *Mencius*” [语孟纲领], in vol. 19 of *Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi*, 444.

31 Li, “Outlines” [纲领], in vol. 78 of *Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi*, 1985.

32 Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, “Criticism of Xitang Yongri, Outer Volume” [夕堂永日绪论外编], in book 15 of *The Complete Works of Wang Fuzhi* [船山全书] (Changsha: Yuelu Press, 1996), 847.

33 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 18, 212.

my kindness. . . . Reading it, one truly cannot help dancing ecstatically!”<sup>34</sup> The works of the sages can inspire readers and change their physical nature. Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611–1671) argued that,

The teachings of refined language arise from poetry and are formed through music. In ancient times, when people met, they sang poetry to express their aspirations, listened to music to know virtue, and played tunes to harmonize life, which was subtle and profound. Playing the *qin* and *se*, and listening to new music would often be enough to know gains and losses, life and death, success or failure, and governance and chaos. . . . After winter comes spring, and after resentment comes poetic inspiration. Are they not the most genuine expressions of human nature and feelings?<sup>35</sup>

In summary, Confucian works of rites and music are the carriers of a certain physical nature. These carriers are generated by the author and can inspire and transform the reader’s physical nature through induction, making them tend toward goodness. Such works that can affect readers usually have aesthetic value. They are the formalistic features of classics.

## The Minds of the Sages: Universality and Individuality <sup>[21]</sup>

From the contents, classics not only convey universal principles but also carry the aura of the sages. From the author’s perspective, these two types of content are respectively manifested as the inherent nature and feelings of the sages. The principles in the classics reflect the nature of the sage, which is the dialectical relationship of the unity of form and function. The Cheng brothers said, “The mandate of Heaven, principles of affairs, inherent nature of humans, and the mind of the body, in fact, are all one unity.”<sup>36</sup> As for the principle of benevolence and righteousness, speaking in terms of substance, it is nature. “Benevolence is human nature; filial piety and fraternal duty are its application. It is right to call filial piety and fraternal duty the basis of applying benevolence, but it is not right to directly call them the substance of benevolence.”<sup>37</sup> The principle of behavior ultimately stems from the nature of the sage.

Classics express the aura of the sages as feelings. Feelings, according to traditional Confucian philosophy, are the activity based on a certain physical nature. For example, Mencius said, “From the feelings proper to it, it is constituted for the practice of what is good. This is what I mean in saying that the nature is good” (*Mencius* 6A:6). Similarly, what Xunzi calls nature is also the physical nature: “Nature is the consequence of Heaven. Feelings are the substance of that nature. Desires are the resources of that nature”; “the feelings of liking and disliking, of delight and anger, and of sorrow and joy that are inborn in our nature are called feelings” (*Xunzi*, “On the Correct Use of Names” [正名]). The movement of human nature generates feelings.

Human nature, the physical form of human beings endowed by Nature, has been renamed by Neo-Confucianism as the mind. As a result, feelings arising from the movement of nature transform into feelings arising from the mind. The Cheng brothers said, “The mind is inherently good, but having launched into contemplation, it may be good or bad, whereupon it can be described as feelings, no longer as mind.”<sup>38</sup> The mind is the substance, and feelings are its function. To be precise, feeling is an activity that arises from the unity

34 Li, “On Reading the *Book of Poetry*” [论读诗], in vol. 80 of *Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi*, 2084, 2086.

35 Fang Yizhi 方以智, *Complete Works of Fang Yizhi* [方以智全书], book 1, ed. Huang Dekuan 黄德宽 and Zhu Weiqi 诸伟奇 (Hefei: Huangshan Publishing House, 2019), 347.

36 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 18, 204.

37 Cheng and Cheng, *The Sayings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 1, 1173.

38 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 18, 204.

of the mind and nature. Cheng Yi said, “The essential nature is called destiny, the natural human nature is called Heaven, the tangible nature of self is called the mind, and the dynamic nature of self is called feeling.”<sup>39</sup> Feelings arise from the mind and are rectified in human nature. This is the concept of “the mind governing human nature and feelings” (*xin tong xingqing* 心统性情). Zhu Xi said,

There is nothing bad with nature. However, feelings that arise from the mind may not be good. It is not correct either to say that it is not the mind that is not good. The original substance of the mind is good, but its overflow may not be good due to the feelings it transfers to things. Nature is the general name of principles, and benevolence, righteousness, rites, and wisdom are all names of principles in human nature. Compassion, shame, humility, and right and wrong are the names of feelings that arise from inherent nature, so they are good.<sup>40</sup>

As the substance of behaviors, the mind contains the transcendent nature of principles and the physical nature as well. The combination of the two creates feelings. Then, the occurrence of feelings has two substances, namely the substance of inherent nature and the substance of form. Among these, the mind and physical nature are the direct substance of feelings, while inherent nature is its indirect and ultimate substance. Wang Yangming said, “Nature unites all. Benevolence, righteousness, rites, and wisdom are the characteristics of human nature; knowledge and insight are the essence of human nature; joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness are the feelings of human nature; and selfish desires and ceremoniousness are the obscuration of human nature.”<sup>41</sup> The human mind endowed by Nature is not only transcendent but also physical. It is the physical mind that directly generates feelings of joy, anger, sorrow, and joy. Loyalty, filial piety, righteousness, and other feelings or behaviors all stem from the original mind that accords with intuitive knowledge. Feelings arise from the stirred mind. This is the shared conclusion of traditional Confucianism.

This activity of feelings and desires that relies on natural endowments has the characteristics of naturalness but lacks the characteristics of individual subjectivity. That is to say, it only occurs in humans due to their physical carriers, and it is not a behavior that individuals can make volitionally. For example,

Even nowadays, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and compassion. They will feel so, not as a ground on which they may gain the favor of the child’s parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor from a dislike to the reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing. (*Mencius* 2A:6)

The feeling of compassion is a natural reaction of the subject, not an intentional or voluntary one. Wang Yangming asserted, “Knowing is the essence of the mind. The mind naturally knows. When you see your father, you will naturally know what filial piety is. When you see your brother, you, will naturally know what fraternal duty is. When you see a child falling into a well, you will naturally know what compassion is. This is intuitive knowledge of good and is not attained through external investigation.”<sup>42</sup> The feelings or behaviors of benevolence and filial piety are also a natural manifestation, unrelated to individual choice. This means that the emergence of feelings is an individual behavior of non-free subjects. Or, in emotional activities, the dominant factor is not the free will of the actor but the activity of natural endowment.

39 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 25, 318.

40 Li, “On the Definitions and Meanings of Human Nature, Feelings, the Mind, and Intention” [性情心意等名义], vol. 5 of *Classified Conversations of Zhu Xi*, 92.

41 Wang Shouren, *Instructions for Practical Living II* [传习录中], vol. 2 of *The Complete Works of Wang Yangming*, 68.

42 Wang Shouren, *Instructions for Practical Living I*, 6.

Classics may reflect the free will of the sages. However, according to the Confucian theory of the mind, it is evident that the mind, as the will, is obedient to the *dao* or principles that function as rules. That is to say, in the relationship between the mind and human nature, the universal nature exercises absolute dominance. “The sages and principles are united as one, nothing more and nothing less, in perfect neutral balance. Everything else is based on the principle of the mind, so the wise often lose by their excessiveness, and the unworthy often lose by their shortcomings.”<sup>43</sup> The sage devoting his mind fully means that the mind obeys the principles and nature. Zhang Zai’s 张载 (1020–1077) theory of “the mind governing human nature and feelings” accurately expresses the guiding role of human nature in the mind. Zhu Xi believed that “nature is the principle for the existence of the mind, and the mind is the place where principles dwell.”<sup>44</sup> He also said, “But humans are the spirit of things. . . . All are in the human mind, which is nature. Although all are in my mind as my nature, they have never been disconnected from Heaven.”<sup>45</sup> The reason why the mind with inherent nature has the subtle voidness and bright awareness of the conscience is that the mind contains the nature and the nature controls the changes of the mind. It can be said that, unlike the modern view that locates the concept of will in the mind, in Zhu Xi’s philosophy of mind, the individual’s will ultimately obey universal laws, that is, the *dao* and principles.

The minds of the sages are embodied in the classics, and in the minds of the sages, the true dominion is exercised by the universal *dao* and principles. In other words, traditional Confucianism believes that classics first contain the universal *dao* and principles, as well as the physical nature of the sages, but it overlooks the unique individuality of each sage. Even though Confucianism believes that the classics contain the individual will, from the perspective of the relationship between the mind and nature, this individual has not gained subjectivity or dominant status. The activities of the subject synthesized by the mind and nature cannot reflect the individual subjectivity of the author. This should be regarded as a major regret concerning the traditional Confucian view of the classics.

## Conclusion: The Dissolution of the Individual Subjectivity <sup>[23]</sup>

The classics in the Confucian tradition have three characteristics. First, classics are texts created by sages, and ordinary people have almost no qualification to create classics. Second, classics must contain the eternal *dao* and principles, which enable readers to understand them through learning. Third, classics must contain the aura of the sages. Classics are always beautiful texts that can vividly describe or reproduce the authors’ character and influence readers by presenting the sages’ aura, thereby stimulating their passion or feelings, mobilizing their good nature, and ultimately changing their physical nature and achieving good character, so as to exercise the role of classics in education.

These traditional Confucian views have a certain modern significance and value, which can provide us with some inspiration for understanding general classics. From the perspective of modern hermeneutics, classics are always beautiful writings that can vividly reproduce the author’s voice or intention, are appreciated in form, and can move readers. These are the characteristics of classics. Meanwhile, as for their contents, classics narrate

43 Cheng and Cheng, *The Posthumous Writings of Henan Cheng Brothers*, vol. 23, 307.

44 Li, “On the Definitions and Meanings of Human Nature, Feelings, the Mind, and Intention,” 88.

45 Zhu Xi, *Selected Works of Zhu Xi IV* [晦庵先生朱文公文集(四)], vol. 57, book 23 of *The Complete Works of Zhu Xi* [朱子全书], ed. Zhu Jieren 朱杰人, Yan Zuozhi 严佐之, and Liu Yongxiang 刘永翔 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Press, 2002), 2740.

universal knowledge, principles, or truths, and thus possess eternity and absoluteness. These universal and absolute contents enable readers to achieve transcendence and new life. This is the social value of classics.

In addition, classics also have an essential connotation, which is to contain the author's unique individual will and present the individual's unique personalized life. A true classic must be a work based on the author's individualized activities; that is, it is the creation of a specific person, at a specific time, in a specific place. This temporal and spatial nature determines the uniqueness or particularity of this creative event, which can be referred to as the individuality of the creative activity. The production of a classic must be an individual process, and the source of this individual event is the autonomous and free mind, or in other words, the free will of humans. Often, this is also the most important dimension to which we pay attention when reading a classic, namely the unique voice or subjectivity of the author reflected in the work.

Among these, human subjectivity belongs to an absolute and metaphysical entity that is not directly presented but always relies on the existence of certain experiences to exist in the world. However, the existence of experience is changing, while individual subjectivity remains unchanged. Another concept of this unchanging subjectivity is the self. "In the natural world, the state and process of changes are always relative to something that remains unchanged. Similarly, the changes in our consciousness also depend on certain facts, and they always belong to a certain unchanging self."<sup>46</sup> This "unchanging self" is often present through such things as natural feelings and easily understood ideals and ultimately reflect the author's individual will and subjectivity. "A literary text in general, and a narrative one in particular, projects before itself a *world-of-the-text*, a possible world, to be sure, but a world nevertheless, a place I can think of myself inhabiting in order to carry out my own-most possibilities there."<sup>47</sup>

Traditional Chinese Confucianism believes that the classics reflect the aura and physical nature of the sages. We cannot deny that these phenomena or feelings conceal the author's free will and subjectivity, but traditional Confucian exegetics has not clearly revealed this connotation, overlooking or failing to clearly recognize the individual dimension of the classics. More importantly, between universal principles and individual (possibly including the concept of will) beliefs, traditional Confucianism has chosen the universal *dao* and principles as the masters, requiring individual will to obey the absolute *dao* and principles, thereby weakening the subjective status of the individual will and dissolving individual subjectivity.

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