

The new path of civilization development, the role reconstruction of Oriental civilization and literary theory

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Abstract:

For a long time, people basically thought that the source of all arts came from ancient Greece, and that ancient Greece itself, like the goddess of wisdom, was born suddenly from the mind of Zeus in Olympia, and was bred internally. This thought has become the source of many western scholars' sense of cultural superiority, which has led to the long-term neglect, discrimination and devaluation of Oriental Literature and Literary theory under the Western cultural hegemony. And even influenced by the superiority theory of Western civilization, the eastern academic circles are extremely self-distrusted about local culture. In fact, this is totally prejudice, or ignorance. Based on historical facts and literature comparison, the purpose of this study is to rectify the wrong source, reshape the image of Oriental civilization, and prove the significance of civilization equality and mutual learning.

Keywords: Oriental civilization; superiority of Western civilization; Chinese literary theory; equality of civilization; Comparative Literature

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1. Pride and prejudice of Western civilization

For a long time, people basically thought that the source of all arts came from ancient Greece, and that ancient Greece itself, like the goddess of wisdom, was born suddenly from the mind of Zeus in Olympia, and was bred internally. This thought has become the source of many western scholars' sense of cultural superiority. In the eyes of Westerners, Oriental people not only have the habits of "barbarism", "laziness" and "stupidity", but also are very backward and savage in culture. Oriental Literature and Literary theory have been ignored, discriminated and devalued for a long time. However, this view of some people in the West does not start today, but is a basic view gradually formed in the West since modern times, among which the typical scholar is Hegel.

The German great philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, totally despised Oriental philosophy, especially Chinese and Indian philosophy, and thought that the East was very backward. He even thought that China has no philosophy at all. Hegel said in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, "we see the conversation between Confucius and his disciples (*the Analects of Confucius*), which is about a kind of common sense morality. This kind of common sense morality can be found everywhere, it can also be found in other nationalities, which may be better than it. It is nothing outstanding. Confucius is only a practical wise man in the world, and there is no philosophy to ponder over there... According to his original works, we can affirm that in order to maintain Confucius' reputation, if his books have never been translated, it would be better." Hegel did not approve the Oriental philosophy, including Chinese philosophy. He once thought that Chinese philosophy "does not belong to what we are talking about now. We have to mention it just to show why we don't talk about it more."^[1] He thinks that there is no philosophy in China, only some common sense moral lessons, "we can't find philosophical knowledge here", so where does philosophy start? In Hegel's view, "the real philosophy starts from the West."

Under the influence of Western cultural hegemonism, Chinese academic society has developed a humble psychology, even lost cultural self-confidence completely and advocated cultural suicide. Some scholars agree with Hegel's view that "China has no philosophy". For example, Zhu Guangqian said in *the Psychology of Tragedy* that "there is no tragedy in China", and further pointed out, why is there no tragedy in China? Because there is no philosophy in China; why there is no philosophy in China, because the Chinese people do not care about the ultimate^[2]. However, Wang Jisi's *Ten Tragedies of China* and the theory of cosmogenesis in Lao Zi's *Tao Te Ching* that "Tao generates one, one generates two, two generates three, and three generates all things" can accurately refute Zhu Guangqian's arguments.

In *Comparative Poetics*, Professor Ye Weilian pointed out that some western scholars, based on the superiority of Western civilization, arbitrarily smeared the Chinese culture and characters, "it is said that the Chinese lack creativity and have not simplified the pictograph into letters. The Chinese trace is nearly barbaric. And Samuel Johnson, a famous literary critic, said, "they don't have letters, they don't make what other countries have made," as if letters were the highest realm."^[3] In *Comparative Poetics*, Professor Ye Weilian further pointed out that the ignorance and prejudice of the West had a direct impact on the Chinese scholars, "the young Fu Sinian said that

Chinese pictograph is an invention of savage ancient times, with deep-rooted barbarism, and we should abolish it." Fu Sinian's view is the same as the prejudice of Westerners, and not only does he say so, but also a considerable number of Chinese scholars think so. For example, the famous linguist Qian Xuantong said, "if we want to abolish Confucianism, we must abolish Chinese characters first; if we want to drive away the naive and savage thoughts of ordinary people, in particular, Chinese characters must be abolished first", "the evils of Chinese characters, such as being difficult to understand, being hard to write, hindering the popularization of education, hindering the spread of knowledge", "if we want to keep China alive, and to make the Chinese nation a civilized nation in the 20th century, the fundamental solution lies in the abolition of Confucianism and the elimination of Taoism, especially in the elimination of the Chinese characters that record the Confucian doctrine and Taoist evil sayings." Qu Qiubai, another famous scholar, also said, "we should abolish Chinese characters at all. Chinese characters are very difficult symbols. Smart people have to memorize them for at least ten years or eight years. To write real vernacular, we must abolish Chinese characters and adopt Roman letters." "Chinese characters are really the dirtiest, worst, most asshole of the medieval latrine on earth!" Even Mr. Lu Xun said, "if Chinese characters do not die, China will die!"^[4] Chinese characters are the sharp weapon of obscurantist policy. Chinese characters will be abolished eventually. If people keep themselves, Chinese characters will be abolished, if people keep Chinese characters, people themselves will perish. In this era, there is no way to be lucky. Chinese characters are also a tuberculosis of the Chinese laboring masses, there are potential pathogens in it. If we don't remove it first, we will die by ourselves. ^[5] It's a pity that many well-known and influential Chinese scholars relegate Chinese characters to such a low position, even attribute the rise and fall of China to the abolition of Chinese characters. Such phenomenon has gradually formed the "Aphasia" anxiety in Chinese culture and literary theory, which could not be completely rid of for a long time.

2. Chinese and Western scholars' criticism on the superiority of Western civilization

In fact, there has been a critical voice in the academic circles of the East and the West for the superiority of Western civilization and cultural hegemony. Edward W. Said, who is currently a professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University, is an important critical theorist in contemporary America. Said's theory has a strong color of ideology and political criticism. His criticism is directed at western cultural hegemonism and power politics. His great achievement is the description, investigation and persistent criticism of European Orientalism. He wrote a challenging monograph *Orientalism*, and then set up his own banner in post-colonial criticism. When he talked about the definition of Orientalism, he said, "Orientalism is not just a political theme or research field passively reflected by culture, academia or institutions; it is not just a large and diffused combination of some texts about the East; It is not just a reflection and expression of some sinister conspiracies of the 'Western' imperialists who are trying to restrict the 'eastern' world... Indeed, my exact argument is that Orientalism is --but not merely represents some aspect of modern political-intellectual culture, and that it is not so much about the East as about our

world. ^[6]To some extent, it reveals that the relationship between the West and the East has been dominated and restricted for a long time. Therefore, based on this long-term inequality, the so-called "Orientalism" is the European Orientalism, which was invented by the Westerners out of ignorance, prejudice and curiosity towards the east or the third world. Therefore, in the eyes of Westerners, on the one hand, Oriental people are "lazy" and "ignorant". On the other hand, Oriental itself is full of some kind of desirable "mysterious" color."In the final analysis, Orientalism is essentially a kind of political doctrine that the West tries to restrict the East. As a deep-rooted system of Western knowledge of the East, it has always served as the ideological pillar of European and American colonialism."^[7]Said's works express his hatred and disgust for the hegemony of Western imperialism. With profound knowledge and political and cultural connotation of the East and the west, he looked conversely on the image of "the Other" in the East, pointed the research tentacles to the east or the third world which has been deliberately marginalized and indifferent by the western mainstream academic circles. And he makes an important contribution to reshaping the image of the dignity of the eastern civilization.

In addition, there are many outstanding scholars who express their dissatisfaction and criticism on the superiority of Western civilization. For example, Russell criticizes Hegel's defamation of China in his *History of Western Philosophy*, "Hegel knows nothing about China except that he knows it." Voltaire once defended China, "the only reason we slander China is the difference between China's philosophy and ours." He also praised Confucius' learning in China and put forward "common sense is not so common" in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, The Western Enlightenment Movement advocates rationalism, and the idol of rationalism of Enlightenment thinkers is Confucius, and the rational spirit they yearn for is the Oriental world.^[8]Roger T. Ames expressed a negative view on Hegel's statement that China has no philosophy, "I personally think this is a very simple problem. If China has no history, it's a joke. A nation and a civilization have their own history...It's impossible to say that there is no philosophy in China. If philosophy pursues a kind of wisdom, in order to help us live a better life, China certainly has philosophy. The West has its own special understanding of "philosophy". They want to associate this word with their traditions. If philosophy is not ours, it is not philosophy. I personally think it is a very biased opinion. "

In view of Hegel's arrogance, Qian Zhongshu put forward severe criticism. Qian Zhongshu's great work named *Guan Zhui Bian* includes almost all the social sciences and humanities, among which there are countless insights, and it is a well-known academic masterpiece. In the first volume, part one named *On the three names of Yi*, Qian Zhongshu wrote, "Hegel despised our Chinese and thought it's not worth thinking logically; he also boasted that German can know the way well, taking Aufheben as an example, both positive and negative meanings are integrated in one word (ein und dasselbe word fur zwei entgegengesetzte Bestimmungen), and thought there is nothing more abundant than it in Latin words. He doesn't have to be blamed for his ignorance of Chinese; he is ignorant and careless but makes high opinions and normal skills, which are not surprising; however, it is so pity that he equated the Eastern philosophy with the opposite meaning."^[9]Mr. Qian clearly

shows his contempt for Hegel's reckless disregard of Chinese culture and Chinese characters.

Aiming at the thought that some domestic scholars belittle Chinese characters and advocate the abolition of Chinese characters, Ji Xianlin, a famous scholar, put forward the opposite view. He praised Chinese characters greatly, "Chinese is the most concise language in the world. If you want to express the same meaning, it takes 60 seconds for English but 5 seconds is enough for Chinese. The Chinese character is the only one in the world that has not disappeared, from pictograph to pictophonetics to ideographic character, and it is the oldest character that has been developing and improving continuously. The Chinese nation has been thinking, communicating and writing in Chinese for thousands of years. In a sense, it is Chinese culture that breeds the intelligence of Chinese people and casts Chinese civilization." He not only strongly demonstrated the superiority of Chinese characters from the facts, but also pointed out the people who disliked Chinese characters between the lines. From the modern perspective, in the era of rapid development of the Internet, Chinese characters have strong word formation ability and common characters are concentrated, which provides convenience for fast reading and is most suitable for voice control. Chinese characters are also brain complex characters, which can give full exercise to the functions of the two hemispheres of the brain. We should be glad that Chinese characters are not really abolished!

3. Ancient Greek civilization is actually a secondary civilization

Of course, the arrogance, prejudice and ignorance of the West need to be severely criticized. However, it is far from enough just to criticize the debate, and we cannot really eliminate the discrimination mentality of the westerners. We must use the basic historical facts of the development of civilization to correct the source, so as to truly reshape the eastern civilization confidence and the Chinese civilization confidence!

Hegel not only said that "the real philosophy starts from the west", but also said in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, "in the minds of educated Europeans, when it comes to ancient Greece, there will be a sense of home." The word "home" actually represents the source of the theory of superiority of Western civilization, that is, ancient Greek civilization is the home of all arts. There is no history in oriental culture, because the reason is sleeping there, and the real history starts from Greece, because reason begins to move towards self-realization. The rational feature of western culture is the motive force and goal of history, which is Hegel's essential proposition. Only by analyzing the origin of the "home" of Western civilization can we refute the error of the theory of superiority of civilization, and make people realize that the prosperity of civilization and the progress of human beings can not do without equal exchange and mutual learning.

There are four ancient civilizations in the world, Ancient Sumeria / Babylon, ancient Egypt, ancient India and China. Many achievements of humanity, science and technology, art and so on are researched on the shoulders of giants. Historical facts tell us that the nectar of the flower of human wisdom actually comes from the East. The four ancient civilizations have created their own calendars and characters and spread them all over the world. The oldest characters in the world are

Sumerian cuneiform characters. At the same time, they have created great literary works, such as Sumerian *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, Chinese *The Book of Poetry*, etc.

However, the four ancient civilizations do not include the ancient Greek civilization, which is not the negligence of scholars, nor the prejudice, but because the four ancient civilizations are independent birthplaces of civilization, with the context of self-sustaining culture. The ancient Greek civilization does not belong to the original civilization, that is, the non-original civilization. In essence, the ancient Greek civilization is a secondary culture formed by absorbing the ancient Egyptian and Cuban Byron civilization. For example, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, Chinese oracle, Mesopotamian cuneiform, and ancient Indian darlopathic are all original inventions, while ancient Greek comes from Asian Phoenician alphabets. Another example is that the earliest dawn of human civilization came from Sumer.^[10] Professor S.N. Kramer, an archaeologist in Mesopotamia, lists in his book *History begins in Sumer* that Sumer has made his first achievements in almost all major areas of human endeavor. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is the oldest known heroic epic in the world,^[11] as early as more than 4000 years ago, it spread among the Sumerian people, full of the Sumerian people's admiration and praise for their great hero Gilgamesh. The historical period described in the epic is about 2700-2500 BC, much earlier than the ancient Greek epic. Sumerians recorded the legend of the ancient flood and the battle of the gods. These legends have been handed down for thousands of years and become part of the *Old Testament* and part of the cultural heritage of Western civilization.^[12] Several key themes in *the Bible*, such as the great flood and Noah's ark, evolved from the records of *the Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is the forerunner of the Hebrew *Bible*. The earliest bronzes appeared 6000 years ago in the ancient Babylonian River Valley. Ancient Greek bronzes learned from the two river civilization. Herodotus once made it clear that "almost all the names of gods were introduced into Greece from Egypt".^[13]

From today's perspective, no matter in ancient Greece or ancient Hebrew, the civilization that Westerners originally regarded as the source was just "flow" rather than "source". Western civilization itself was formed by learning from Eastern civilization, and Westerners' arrogance and prejudice were fundamentally unreasonable.

4. Chinese elements in Western Literary Theory

In the current Chinese academic circles, young scholars admire western literary theories such as Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Structuralism, and pursuit western philosophy masters such as Heidegger, Gadamer and Derrida. Thinking their thoughts and theories are all out of their own originality, and even ignore Chinese literary theories. This is totally wrong --the composition of Western culture and literary theories has absorbed many factors of Oriental culture and literary theory. Here are a few examples of Chinese elements in western literary theory, in order to correct this mistake and prove the value of Oriental Literature and literary theory.

Zhu Qianzhi said, "although Hegel does not recognize the influence of Chinese thought, Schopenhauer himself admits that his theory is the same as that of Zhu Zi, which can be said to be the place where he has the most relationship with Chinese thought." The tragic aesthetic consciousness in Schopenhauer's thought is highly similar to that of Zhu Xi's thought of the natural principles and human desire. First of all, Schopenhauer believes that the real face of the world is "will", and that all things in the world are "objectification of will", which is the same with Zhu Zi's view of "the unity of man and nature", "the mind is the God of man, so it is the one who has all principles and could do all things; the nature is the principle of the mind", "one mind has all kinds of reasons, cherishing certain intentions, one can clear everything." Secondly, Schopenhauer believes that human greed and suffering are the results derived from "life will". "Human existence is a painful struggle, and every second of life is fighting against death, which is doomed to fail." It's a reproduction of Zhu Zi's "human desire produces a vicious". Schopenhauer advocates that people must carry out "the negation of life will" if they want to return to the original, which is Zhu Xi's saying, "keeping the natural principle and destroying the human desire".^[14] Even Schopenhauer himself marvels, "the consistency between this last sentence and my theory is so obvious and amazing, if these words are not published in my works, and if it's printed eight years later, people may mistakenly think that my basic ideas are from them."^[15]

The French philosopher Descartes' Dualism is also obviously influenced by the dualism logic of "Li" and "Qi" of Chinese Neo Confucianism in Song and Ming Dynasties. In his book *Methodology*, he also warmly praised the wisdom and rationality of Chinese people. According to Descartes, the unique cultural symbol system in the *Book of Changes* has played a great role in enlightening the rational thinking of Chinese people. The dualism thinking mode of the harmony and transformation of Yin and Yang constitutes the basic style of Chinese traditional culture.

In Volume 75 of the complete works of Heidegger, *About Hölderlin; the journey to Greece*, Heidegger discussed the ideological significance of Hölderlin's poems and he quoted the full text of Chapter 11 of *Lao Zi*, "Thirty spokes meet at the hub, but it's the space between them that provides the car's presence. The utensils were made of clay, but it was the space between them that provided the utensils. Walls and windows make up the room, but it is the space between them that provides the room. The existential gives the availability and the non existential gives the existence."^{[16][17]} This is because Heidegger once cooperated with Xiao Shiyi in translating *Lao Zi* in 1946, and held a feast of dialogue between the East and the West. Heidegger explored the truth of time, the world and existence. In his mind, eternity is a change in the quiet silence, therefore, Heidegger recorded two sentences in Chapter 15 of *Lao Zi*, "Who can stop the flow like the turbid water, and become clear slowly when it is quiet? Who can be as quiet as grass and trees for a long time, but with vitality?"^[18]

Philosophy and literature masters such as Voltaire, Valéry, Foucault, Pound, Derrida and so on are all more or less influenced by Chinese culture. Even Lacan's psychoanalysis theory is quite interested in Lao Tzu's "Tao" theory. It can be seen that Chinese and Western culture can not only communicate with each other, but also learn from each other and absorb each other, thus creating

colorful, rich and resounding literature and literary theory for the whole world.

5. Cultural globalization is the inevitable trend and basic law of human development

So many historical facts of civilization can confirmed enough that the development and progress of civilization are often the result of mutual reference and promotion. Cultural globalization is the inevitable trend and basic law of human development. People must correct cultural prejudice, recognize and accept the value of Oriental civilization. People in the third world should also re-establish our own cultural self-confidence and continue to strive for the development of local civilization.

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