

Comparative Study on Chinese and Western Life Values in the Context of Epidemic

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Life values are people's understanding and view on life. After the COVID-19 outbreak, China quickly adopted policies such as lockdown to control the epidemic, while the west could not adopt. One of the important reasons is that Chinese and western life values are different. Through the comparative analysis on Chinese and western life values, it is found that Chinese traditional life values emphasize collective consciousness, while the west pays attention to individual value. Chinese traditional life values avoid death, while the west faces death directly. China emphasizes the present world, while the west pays attention to introspection. There are also similarities between Chinese and western life values. They both emphasize the realization of life values, desire to surpass life, and regard physical life as a natural process. The main reasons for their differences are different economic bases, different cultural influences, and different religious ideas. Therefore, the comparative analysis of Chinese and western life values has theoretical and practical value.

Keywords: epidemic, Chinese and western, life values, comparative analysis

Introduction

Life is the basis for the existence and development of the world. Marx pointed out that the first premise of all human history is undoubtedly the existence of living individuals. The existence of human life and the continuation of history are inseparable from the influence of life and its concept. In the long process of human development, people always intentionally or unintentionally express their yearning and pursuit for life values. Due to different cultural traditions, religious foundations, and economic foundations, China and the west show different characteristics in life values. After the COVID-19 outbreak, China quickly brought the epidemic under control by adopting policies such as centralized isolation, lockdown, etc. Western countries adopted the same policy, while it is difficult to maintain. Demonstrations were also present. One of the important reasons is that Chinese and western life values are different. Studying the differences and finding different reasons can further enrich the research results in theory and provide reference for epidemic control in practice, thus further improving epidemic prevention and control work.

Meaning of Life Values

The correct understanding on "life" is the basis for understanding "life values". Engels pointed out in *Dialectics of Nature*:

Life is the existence mode of protein. The basic factor of this existence mode lies in the continuous metabolism with the external nature around it. Once this metabolism stops, life will stop, and the result is the decomposition of protein. (Engels, 1971, p. 277)

The so-called life values are people's understanding and view on life, including all views and attitudes towards the beginning, process, and end of life. It not only includes the understanding on "life", but also the understanding on "death". Life values include not only the attitude towards life, but also the understanding on nature, others, and society (Li, 2013, p. 11). Marxist life values believe that life value is the dialectical unity of personal value and social value. The main characteristic that distinguishes human from animals is that human beings have thinking and consciousness, can be aware of the existence and activities on his life, and can reflect, create, and improve their behavior and activities. The essential attribute of human lies in sociality, and the realization of individual life value is inseparable from society. The value of life lies in making more contributions to society and the people, creating material and spiritual wealth for the people through society, and realizing the unity of individual value and social value.

The Difference and Connection Between Chinese and Western Life Values

The Difference Between Chinese and Western Life Values

China emphasizes collective consciousness, while the west pays attention to individual value. China's life values put more emphasis on collective consciousness, collective concept, and collective value. Confucianism believes that life originates from heaven and earth. Heaven belongs to Yang and earth belongs to Yin. Heaven can breed all things, and the Tao of heaven has endless creativity and vitality. Under the influence of Chinese traditional thought, the Chinese traditional outlook on life is dominated by collectivist values, emphasizing the individual's responsibility to the family, the society, and the state. The so-called "everyone is responsible for his country's rise or fall" and "being the first to worry about the affairs of the state and the last to enjoy oneself" summarize the Chinese traditional collectivist concept. Faced with the impact of the epidemic, it is hard for western countries to imagine that a country with a population of 1.4 billion could respond to the party's call with one voice. The important reason is not only the strong calling of the Communist Party of China itself, but also the value concept of Chinese traditional collectivism. After the epidemic outbreak, many Chinese prefer to stay at home for centralized isolation rather than affect others and society. Different from Chinese collectivist values, western life values pay more attention to individuals, emphasize the value of individual life, advocate publicity of personality, and highlight the value of individual existence.

Chinese avoid death, while western face death directly. Influenced by Chinese traditional Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, the attitude towards death in Chinese traditional life values often shows an attitude of avoidance and fear. In Chinese traditional outlook on life and death, it reflects the tendency of rebirth to avoid death. Confucianism emphasizes the contribution of life to the country and society in life values, and life should be used to do meaningful things. However, it shows the attitude of "life and death have destiny, wealth is in heaven" in the attitude towards death, leaving death under the control of "destiny". Confucianism believes that "man is the lord of creation". Xunzi said: "water and fire are angry and asexual. Plants and trees are born and ignorant. Animals are born without righteousness. People are born with knowledge and righteousness, and thus they are the most precious in the world". Taoism pursues inaction and governance. Taoism, which is closely combined with Taoism thought, advocates "becoming immortal through Tao" and pursues immortality, showing a strong desire for eternal life. Buddhism closely binds people's "life" and "death" and advocates karma. It

believes that there is still a soul after people's body disappears. After people die, they may also be punished for their desire to live in another world. Influenced by traditional culture and religious thought, most Chinese people avoid death and prefer to live rather than accept death. Accepting death is a painful thing. Specifically, some people refused to accept isolation and resisted centralized isolation out of fear of death after the epidemic outbreak.

Different from Chinese traditional culture, western culture is more influenced by Christianity, and tends to face death in life values. In the western life values, life and death are regarded as two inseparable parts of a problem. Everyone has to face death and move towards death. There are many uncertain things in one's life, while death is eternal. Christianity believes that people have original sin, and thus they will die in the end. The more they do not want to die, the more selfish they are, the more likely they are to lose their lives. Under different cultural and religious backgrounds, China and the west show different manifestations in the face of epidemic. Chinese people cherish their lives, accept isolation, and receive treatment. Citizens of some western countries believe that isolation is a violation of civil rights, and freedom is priceless, which eventually leads to the spread of the epidemic.

China emphasizes the present world, while the west pays attention to introspection. Chinese traditional life values are based on the development of human life, the fulfillment of life responsibilities, and the realization of value in the present world. They advocate that the value of life should be built on the realistic basis of meritocracy, advocating "self-cultivation, family harmony, governance and world peace". With the development of economy, people's attitude towards life is also changing. The influence of religious thought on people is slowly fading in modern society. Chinese people say that death means the end of life and nothing left, and thus they pay attention to the behavior of this life. Western religious thought emphasizes the "afterlife", believing that people must eliminate their own desires, do more good deeds, and love all sentient beings, so that they can return to god in the afterlife and achieve happiness. In the two different value attitudes, China and the west show different behaviors towards life. Facing the impact of the epidemic, the Chinese people cherish their lives and stay away from the epidemic area. When informing the high school risk area, people can take the initiative to avoid and cherish their lives, while the west shows a casual attitude after the epidemic outbreak.

The Connection Between Chinese and Western Life Values

Both emphasize the value of life consciously. Confucianism believes that life is valuable, but its moral attribute is more important. Benevolence, righteousness, and morality are more important than human life. It emphasizes that "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faith" are the principles of life. Mohism pays attention to righteousness, believing that they could "give up life and take righteousness" when morality and life conflicted. Taoism emphasizes that human life is the unity of material and spirit, and spirit is more important than body. Taoism emphasizes essence, qi, and god, and advocates the development of essence, qi, and god to improve the value and significance of life. There is also the value consciousness of life in the western life values. Socrates said: "The pursuit of a good life is far more than life". The so-called good life is "right and wrong, good and evil, honor and disgrace". People must take noble values as the standard of thinking and action, distinguish right from wrong, uphold justice, approach good and far from evil, and know honor and shame. Only a fair and just life is worth living.

Both desire to transcend life. Compared with Chinese and western life values, it is found that the similarities between Chinese and western life values all hope to surpass life, which is mainly manifested in the pursuit of spirit and the realization of soul freedom. Confucianism hopes to surpass life itself. Life is a natural

process, while the pursuit of “benevolence and righteousness” can make life surpass life itself. “Benevolence” is mentioned 106 times in the *Analects of Confucius*. “Benevolence” can be understood as self-denial inward and love outward, which is the core of Confucian morality. Confucius said: “People with lofty ideals and benevolence do not seek survival to harm benevolence, but kill their bodies to become benevolence” (Wei Linggong, 2019). Mencius said: “Righteousness is the right way for people” (Li Lou, 2017). Confucianism advocated “sacrifice oneself for justice”. Taoism has had an important influence on traditional Chinese culture. Zhuangzi believed that people can achieve spiritual transcendence and freedom as long as they maintain the psychological state of “pure veggie house” and “sit and forget”. People should be open-minded, tolerant, indifferent, and quiet, not tired of things, not sad for themselves, not happy about gain, and not worried about loss. When people really understand the “Tao”, people’s life and mind can be free. Buddhism stresses “reincarnation”. Taoism opposes death and seeks eternal life.

Western life values also contain many thoughts of surpassing life. Thales, the founder of the Greek Miletus school, believes that “everything in the world has life, and everything is full of gods, and life and death are also transformed in the circulation of everything”. Pythagoras believes that “all life has a common soul, and the soul is immortal, and people need to purify their own soul” (Wang, Huang, & Ji, 2017, p. 279-280). Socrates also believes that people are human because they not only have feelings and desires, and there is soul and thought. Soul and reason are the basis for people to be human. The basic life view of Christianity, which has an important impact on western culture, holds that people have original sin, and thus they will die in the end. However, they can believe in Jesus Christ, and do more good than evil, so that they can die and rise again, get eternal life, and overcome death.

Both regard physical life as a natural process. Although Chinese and western life values have different forms in pursuing the realization of life, they all have the idea that physical life is a natural process. Confucianism believes that human life and death are subject to an irresistible force, which is the force of nature. As the saying goes, “There is life in death and wealth in heaven”; “If you don’t know your life, you don’t think you are a gentleman”. Confucianism believes that the process from life to death is an inevitable truth and a human law. Taoism believes that human life and death are as natural as spring, summer, autumn, and winter in nature. Zhuangzi said: “Death and life, survival, poverty, wealth, immortality, reputation, hunger and thirst, cold and heat are the changes of things and the actions of life”. Therefore, everything, including death and life, survival and death, is natural and social phenomenon, which cannot be changed by human beings. Birth is life, and entering the earth is death. All of this is just a natural change, and everything has life and death changes.

In the western life values, Heraclitus believes that “people have life and death, and fate is inevitability”. Democritus believes that “death is the disintegration of natural body”. He opposes theism and believes that life is composed of atoms. If atoms disintegrate, life will disappear. Although the western outlook on life also contains many thoughts of eternal soul, they all regard the disappearance of body as a natural process.

Reasons for the Difference in Chinese and Western Life Values

Different Economic Bases

Marx pointed out that the economic foundation determines the superstructure. In western countries, most of them take the capitalist road. The foundation of capitalism is market economy, and the economic foundation is capitalist private ownership. China follows the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and its economic foundation is public ownership. Therefore, corresponding superstructure has also been established in different

economic bases. Western life values are also based on western capitalist private ownership. Both morality and law are related to economic foundation. Therefore, the government is not allowed to blockade and the government is not allowed to implement the isolation policy after the epidemic outbreak, which is related to the economic foundation. China's economic foundation is socialist public ownership, and has also established a corresponding superstructure, emphasizing the collective concept. The collective consciousness is also related to the economic foundation of public ownership. On different economic bases, the west emphasizes individuality, pursues freedom and independence, and develops individuality. China emphasizes collective concept, and collective consciousness appears. Therefore, China can carry out policies such as road blockade, home isolation, and centralized isolation, which cannot be implemented in western countries.

Different Cultural Influences

Chinese traditional culture is shaped by many influences, especially Confucianism, Taoists, Taoism, Buddhism, etc., which have a far-reaching impact on Chinese traditional culture. Under the influence of various thoughts, different life values have also been formed. Confucianism advocates birth, Taoism advocates adapting to nature, and Buddhism believes metempsychosis. Different life values have also been formed under the influence of multiple thoughts. The culture of western countries is also influenced by many aspects, such as ancient Greek philosophy, Christianity, Renaissance, etc., which have far-reaching influence on western culture and also form the unique western concept of life value.

Different Religious Ideas

Chinese culture is deeply influenced by Taoism and Buddhism. Taoism advocates adapting to nature, gaining enlightenment, and flying immortals, attaching importance to the value of life and avoiding death. Buddhism advocates karma and metempsychosis. It advocates doing more good deeds in this world and getting the opportunity of the afterlife. Different from Buddhism and Taoism, western culture is deeply influenced by Christianity. Christianity believes that only by loving Jesus Christ, eliminating their own desires, and doing more good deeds can people return to the palace of god in the afterlife and be happy. Under the influence of different religions, different life values have also been formed.

Conclusion

After the epidemic outbreak, China quickly brought the epidemic under control by adopting policies such as isolation, lockdown, travel ban, etc. The policies that can be implemented in China cannot be implemented in western countries. One of the important reasons is that the Chinese and western life values are different. Compared with the Chinese and western life values, it is concluded that the different reasons have important theoretical value and practical value. Theoretically, it can further enrich the research on life values. Practically, it can not only provide reference for us to control the epidemic, but also offer reference for our life values education.

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