

## Humanistic Spirit and Scholarship Value of Ancient Chinese Scholars

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**Keywords:** Ancient chinese scholars, Humanistic spirit, Scholarship value

**Abstract:** The humanistic spirit of ancient Chinese scholars can also be understood as the spirit of learning. It is said in “The Note of Learning” that “If jade is not polished, it cannot become a thing of use. If a man does not learn, he cannot know his duty.” It shows that what ancient people advocated in the underdeveloped natural science and social science was still a learning spirit of reading changes life. There are very few serious scholars. Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism and Mohism all embodied the idea of “people-centered”, they think of man as the center of the universe or take man as a small universe. To a certain extent, this kind of philosophy has influenced ancient Chinese scholars to pursue the maximization of human value, and has also beautified the energy of human being as the center of the universe. It has also played an important role in the formation of humanistic spirit, such as “The Theory of Zhouyi”, “Analects of Confucius”, “The Book of History” and “Filial Piety”, thereby embodying this humanistic spirit into scholarship value. This paper discusses the origin of humanities, the formation of humanistic spirit and the embodiment of the value of ancient scholarship.

### 1. Introduction

In a sense, the humanistic spirit of ancient Chinese scholars is determined by their academic attitude. For example, “If you know your deficiencies, you can reflect on yourself; if you know what you don't understand, then you can encourage yourself.” These seemingly ordinary words express the determination of ancient scholars to pursue the original appearance of things in their studies. In The Doctrine of the Mean, it is said that “If you like research, you are close to intelligence.” and wisdom is regarded as the result of learning. This is a learning attitude that ancient scholars have raised from their academic attitude. Then in Xuncius's “On Learning” (QuanXuepian), the role of learning is said: A moment's learning is better than a day's dreaming. It is better to look at the height and look far. We climb up and wave, our arms do not lengthen, but people could see them in relatively far places. We shout down the wind, our voices do not increase, but it sounds much clearer. The people who take the horses are not necessarily swift runners, but they can finish the journey of thousands of miles; the people who take the boats are not necessarily swimming, but they can cross the vast rivers. Successful people do not have special talents, but are good at enhancing their abilities through learning<sup>[1]</sup>. This is a kind of learning attitude. It is with this kind of learning attitude that the ancient scholars will be diligent in the humanistic spirit.

### 2. On the Humanities and Humanistic Spirit of Ancient Scholars

What is humanistic spirit? When it comes to humanistic spirit, its core is humanity, and the most fundamental of human beings is human beings. Of course, such an explanation is too “superficial”. When will the word “humanities” appear? Judging from the information that can be found now, it is first appeared in the TuanCi of Hexagram Bi of the Book of Changes. The Hexagram Bi means angry, and a hexagrams in the Book of Changes called eight hexagram diagrams. Hexagram Bi has a TuanCi, which is the Yi Zhuan. The TuanCi of Hexagram Bi of the Book of Changes said firmness and gentleness reappear, namely the astronomical. The astronomy expressed by the TuanCi of Hexagram Bi of the Book of Changes is a kind of “relationship between heaven and man”, which can also be understood as a natural harmony. The existence of firmness and gentleness is Yin and Yang, and the civilization that returns to human society is also a kind of Yin and Yang in a sense.

From astronomical harmony to the generation of civilization, it is the original appearance of humanity. We look at the firmness and gentleness interlacing of astronomy. By observing this astronomical phenomenon, we can connect with human life. At the same time, we can also examine the changes of the secular world. Therefore, we can master the changes of the sky and help the people to get enlightenment. This is the macro sense of humanity, and to understand the humanities from a narrow perspective must be a philosophical view with the will of the ruling class, which is reflected in the thought of the supremacy of Kings. Therefore, the humanistic view of ancient scholars is a kind of humanistic view with strong characteristics of the times, and the appeal of a kind of thought with the benchmark of the times formed by the humanistic view is the humanistic spirit, the constant era shows different humanistic spirits. The humanistic spirit in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States period is an idea of pursuing great unity, the theories of other schools are political confusion and lack of governance. Politicians and thinkers have never had such a unified thought. Since the Han Dynasty, Confucianism has become an orthodox theory and an ideological strategy for governing the country, thus pursuing “benevolence and courtesy”. But not all scholars will follow the humanistic spirit under Confucianism, so there will be people with different views who “live in seclusion” and be abandoned by that era. They were sorrowful and unhappy, and the will of the monarch became an insurmountable.

Later in the Tang Dynasty, Kong Yingda explained this sentence. He said that the observing humanities mean transform into the world. What does he mean by this? The sage observes the relationship between man and society, and chooses poems, etiquette and music as teaching methods to change the behavior of people in the world, so that the society can achieve a harmonious state. Obviously what he talks about the humanistic spirit is that what Wang Bi talks about is not by force but by a civilized method. So what is the method of this kind of civilization? It is to use poetry, books and music to educate the people.

In the Song Dynasty, Cheng Yi, a famous ritual scientist, explained this sentence more clearly. He said that astronomy is the theory of heaven, humanity is the way of people. Astronomy refers to the rules of heaven's movement, while humanity refers to such a rule of human society. He said astronomy refers to sun, moon and stars that each has their own positions, then there will be changes in Yin and Yang in winter and summer. So looking at this astronomical change, we can know such a rule of such a movement all the year round.

What about humanity? He said that humanity is the order of human principles and the order of human relationships. Humanity is the running order of human society and human relationships. Therefore, he said that if the world is educated by humanities, then the world can form such a kind of etiquette and custom. Therefore, we can see from these explanations that the word humanity is in the middle of Chinese traditional culture was compared with the word astronomy at first. What is astronomy and what is humanity? Astronomy refers to the operating rules of nature, and humanity refers to the operating rules of human society.

### **3. The Influence of Ancient Scholars' Humanistic Spirit on Scholarship**

“Confucius Homely Talks” records the story of Confucius who persuaded to despise the role of learning. The story is like this: Confucius's disciple Zilu went to visit Confucius. Confucius asked: “What do you like?” Zilu said: “I like long swords.” Confucius said: “I am not asking you this. I just said, with your talent and knowledge, who else can match?” Zilu said: “The bamboo of South Mountain does not need to be processed. It is naturally straight. It is cut down to make an arrow and can shoot through the armor made of rhino skin. From this point of view, what is the use of learning?” Confucius said: “Cut the bamboo out of the tail of the arrow, insert the feathers, then install the arrow, and grind the arrow to a sharp point. So, doesn't that make it deeper?” Zilu suddenly realized and bowed down said: “I will remember your teaching.”<sup>[2]</sup> This story tells us that it is precisely because ancient Chinese scholars saw the important role of learning in a person's understanding and ability that they advocate hard study. In a sense, this is the embodiment of a kind of humanistic spirit. The whole society advocate a higher level of humanistic ecology from the ruling will of the country to the spiritual pursuit of the common people. Its advertised height is the

core “benevolence and courtesy” of Confucianism. So from this perspective, the humanistic spirit of ancient scholars also affects their scholarship. Since Han Dynasty, the influence of ancient scholars' humanistic spirit on scholarship is mainly reflected in two aspects: First, it is based on the ideological height of Confucianism as the orthodox humanistic spirit. However, it does not exclude the optimization of ancient scholars and the existence of other schools such as Taoism, Legalism and Mohism, so the humanistic spirit presented in the history of our country has a certain degree of tolerance. Therefore, it also reflects different humanistic views in scholarship. Second, the scholarship of humanistic spirit is influenced by the will of the ruling class, so different dynasties have different emphases. Especially in the Song and Ming dynasties, the foolish people's thoughts had far-reaching influence on the scholarship at that time. In the late Qing Dynasty, the imperial examination system of “spending money to buy officials” was ineffective, this was the influence on scholarship after the loss of the humanistic spirit. However, we cannot deny that the books and theories wrote by ancient scholars in different periods of the long history have retained the traditional Chinese humanistic spirit and scholarship thought.

#### **4. The Value of Ancient Scholars' Humanistic Spirit to Scholarship**

The emergence and development of this humanistic spirit among ancient Chinese scholars have different significance and value of the times. Confucius's Analects of Confucius at the end of the Spring and Autumn period, Confucianism originated from the Book of Changes and gradually formed the humanistic spirit dominated by Confucianism from the middle and late Warring States Period to the early Han Dynasty. In the early years of the Western Zhou Dynasty, it has established the characteristics of this humanistic spirit in Chinese culture. Learning and thinking are embodied in scholarship. In order to give full play to the important role of thinking activities, ancient scholars emphasized that in the process of actively carrying out thinking activities, we must adhere to the basic principles of the combination of learning and thinking, and especially remind people to pay attention to some key issues in the combination of learning and thinking. First, when thinking hard, you should pay attention to learning. Lu Shiyi, a scholar in the Qing Dynasty, pointed out that learning is to understand, to think, and there is no way to think without learning. Thinking is based on learning. Ancient scholars believed that learning is the basic premise of thinking. With this premise, thinking can be carried out normally. Therefore, this premise cannot be ignored not only at the beginning of thinking activities, but also in the process of thinking activities. Especially when thinking hard, it is necessary to go back and enrich the ideological materials. Confucius has a deep understanding in this respect. He said: “I used to not eat all day and not sleep all night and spent time thinking, but in vain. So I will learn.” ( from “The Analects of Confucius: Duke Spirit of Wei”) When Confucius seriously thought about it, he did “not eat all day and not sleep all night”. However, when he thought hard and could not be solved, he turned back to absorb new knowledge to promote the solution of the problem, thus getting rid of the dilemma of thinking hard. Confucius's experience is also learned from his lessons. Xun Kuang also had a similar experience in the process of scholarship. He said: “I think about it all the time, it is better to learn it.” ( from “Xuncius: To Encourage Learning”) This shows that Xuncius, who is good at thinking, also attaches importance to absorbing new knowledge in time when thinking hard, and promotes new progress in learning. Zhu Xi further clarified the truth of thinking and studying hard: “When you read the text, you should not be urgent, if you have doubts, you should gradually think about it. If you want to understand it well, haste makes waste. To sum up, the value of humanistic spirit to scholarship mainly reflects the relationship between learning and thinking, and solidifies this relationship into a humanistic spirit.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The humanistic spirit of ancient Chinese scholars originates from the influence of Confucianism, but it also has the characteristics of different historical periods. To sum up, it is mainly the relationship between learning and thinking, studying hard is the direction pursued by ancient

scholars. But today, we need to pay more attention to the effect of studying hard than just for one kind of feelings.

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