

Awakening of the Spirit of Ancient Chinese Humans from the Changes in the Concepts of Pre-Qin History

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Abstract: The changes in the historical concept before pre-Qin can be used as an example of the awakening of the ancient Chinese human spirit. The concept changes of ancient Chinese history ideas are of great significance in understanding the formation and development of human thinking and culture. In this study, document analysis is used as the research method to organize and compare the pre-Qin historical concept in a systematic way. This paper starts from the characteristics of the ideas in the pre-Qin period, and focuses on the different views and theories of Confucianism, Taoism and Legalism on the evolution process of the historical concept. Through the research, it is found that the awakening of the ancient Chinese human spirit changed significantly in the pre-Qin period. The early concept of the times emphasized how powerful the gods were and how stable the world order was. All problems could only be left to the gods to solve. Later, people began to pay attention to human behavior, morality, politics, social relations and so on. More and more people put forward their own views and theories. The formation of Confucianism, Taoism and Legalism in the pre-Qin period is a lively process in which the ancient Chinese human spirit is gradually awakened and becomes increasingly mature. Under the impact of the rise and development of these three schools of thought, the ancient Chinese human spirit has been further awakened and widened, and has achieved unprecedented social self-awareness, social awareness and value awareness.

1. Introduction

The ancient history of China is long, and its ideological concept and spiritual outlook have far-reaching significance not only for understanding Chinese society but also for the development of human spirit. The pre-Qin period was one of the key forks for the development of ancient Chinese thoughts. During this period, people's cognition and concept of history changed a lot, and this change played a role in the awakening of the ancient Chinese human spirit. This article aims to observe the awakening of the ancient Chinese human spirit from the change of the historical concept of pre-Qin, so as to better understand the development of ancient Chinese thought and culture. In the pre-Qin period, the ancient thinkers of China had deep thoughts and exploration on historical concept, and put forward their views and theories of human behavior, social order and

political system. The inheritance of this kind of thinking is of great importance to understanding the awakening of ancient Chinese human spirit. Through the change of pre-Qin historical concept, it can better understand the cognition of history and society, and human existence and responsibility. At the same time, this research is of practical reference and enlightenment for contemporary society, which is of positive significance for promoting social progress and the development of human spirit.

This article first introduces the historical concepts and ideological background of ancient China's pre-Qin period, including the characteristics of early concepts and the reasons for their evolution. Secondly, this article elaborates on the research methods and uses literature analysis to organize and compare pre-Qin historical concepts. By studying schools of thought such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism, this study explores the significant changes in historical concepts. Finally, the research results were summarized, and the awakening process of ancient Chinese human spirit and its impact on social development were analyzed.

2. Related Work

Many scholars have conducted research on ancient history, among which Lei Dachuan, based on the historical context of the pre-Qin era, integrates modern disciplinary theories such as political communication, cultural anthropology, and semiotics to deeply explore the basic essence of the pre-Qin political communication concept, which has important theoretical significance and practical value [1]. Han Qiaosheng believes that from "filial piety" to "filial governance", the Han Dynasty comprehensively completed the isomorphism of ethics and politics from the perspective of national practice, which is of great value. From a political perspective, the isomorphism between ethics and politics provided ethical support for the governance of the Han Dynasty; from a social perspective, the use of core values enhanced the social cohesion of the Han Dynasty [2]. Liu Dongying believes that the integration and cohesion of the "Four Seas Unification" in the education of ritual and music, as well as the continuous integration and cohesion of the Chinese nation, have promoted the evolution of the "Four Seas Unification" worldview and the recognition of the cultural spirit of "Great Unification". With the historical evolution of the concept of "Four Seas", a world view and cultural spirit with Chinese characteristics, represented by "One Family in Four Seas", have emerged [3]. From a historical perspective, exploring the concept of "integrity" by Zhuang Wen helps to trace and sort out the ethical and moral thoughts of the pre-Qin period. It is of great significance to build a harmonious socialist society with Chinese characteristics and achieve the unity of moral governance and rule of law [4]. Sun Xiaochun proposed that the story of the Holy King is the theoretical basis for all political theories of pre-Qin Confucianism. By telling the story of the Holy King, pre-Qin Confucianism achieved an understanding of morality and the highest good, thus forming judgments about the rightful social and political life [5]. Afrina A aims to provide the material value of historical science for the contribution of social research [6]. Li K S S explored how the officials of the Qin Dynasty achieved accuracy and precision in the production and design of measuring containers [7]. Feng S proposed that both the Western Zhou Dynasty and the Qin Empire had risen in the northwest region of China, becoming a decisive force in influencing the historical process of the northwest region of China [8]. Barbieri-Low A J attempts to analyze and categorize different forced immigrants under the influence of Qin, in order to reveal the ideological and policy motivations behind them [9]. Zhao L I attempted to conduct a systematic study on the life, hometown, and water management history of Li Bing, the governor of Qin and Shu, based on literature records, archaeological discoveries, and folk legends [10]. These studies provide many historical references, and this article can analyze the spiritual awakening process of ancient Chinese humans through pre-Qin history.

3. Method

3.1 Awakening of Historical Consciousness during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period

The Spring and Autumn Annals is an important historical book of the Spring and Autumn period, considered the first chronicle style historical book in Chinese history. Its appearance marks the transformation of historical records from myths and legends and clan history to a universal historical concept. The compilation and recording of *the Spring and Autumn Annals* emphasize the authenticity and objectivity of facts, emphasizing the recording of political events and war dynamics of various feudal states, marking the awakening of historical consciousness [11-12]. Confucius was an important thinker and educator during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, and his emphasis on history is reflected in his works and educational ideas. He advocates "learning from time to time, which is not a bad thing", emphasizing the education of wisdom and morality through learning and researching history. His students also consider history as an important part of their learning and thinking, such as Zisi's *Spring and Autumn Blossoms*. Confucianism is one of the main ideas of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, which had a significant impact on shaping historical concepts. Confucius proposed concepts such as "propriety", "benevolence", and "righteousness", emphasizing the relationship and moral responsibility between people. Confucianism emphasizes the reverence and learning of previous sages, seeking moral norms and governance through the study of ancient sages and classic works, which promotes people's thinking and attention to history. The Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period were a period of frequent wars and warlords vying for supremacy, and these historical events had a profound impact on people's lives and society. People are beginning to reflect on the causes of war, the gains and losses of political systems, and the establishment of social order, summarizing and reflecting on the experiences and lessons of historical events, in order to improve the situation in real society.

3.2 Influence of Confucianism on Historical Concepts

Confucianism emphasizes the importance of history, believing that past experiences and lessons are crucial for understanding reality and shaping the future. The thinking of Confucianism originated in ancient China and treated history as a valuable resource. It tried to employ the moral norms and governance from ancient sages and classic works, and believed that wisdom and virtues are gleaned from history and can be used on self-cultivation and social governance. Confucianism insisted on the inheritance and promotion of traditional culture, encouraged the respect of former generations and study of their noble characters. In addition, it strongly supported the core values, such as "propriety, benevolence and righteousness". By studying and inheriting classics, it can help public to promote and inherit the wisdom and moral level of the ancients, thus leading the code of conduct of individuals and society [13-14]. Its view has made history become a guiding resource and an ethical value. Confucianism has had an important influence on social order and political governance. It highlighted the ethics of interpersonal relations constructed by the monarch and subjects, and by the father and son, husband and wife, and friends, promoting harmony in the society. Confucianism highly esteemed the virtues and bears in mind of monarch, calling on the monarch to take the lead by example and to carry out, as a moral example, the harmonious and friendly governance. Also, Confucianism considered understanding the governing laws in the ancient time and the active understanding of the modern politics and its history to be important ways timely used to draw lessons for political governance.

3.3 Changes in Human Cognition and Values

During pre-Qin China, the concept of history changed from a mythical era to historical records. In the time of myths, people explained what happened in history through stories and legends where they thought that gods and heroes made history. Over time however they started being concerned more with the truthfulness and objectiveness in recording past events [15-16]. This change shows development in people understands about history; they stopped depending on myths but began giving priority to facts and evidence. One of the important alterations in ancient Chinese historical concepts was the awakening of historical consciousness during spring and autumn period. At this time individuals started taking note of happenings around them that could be called “historical” as well reflecting upon them critically or evaluative manner. The importance of certain records in relation to the years can be seen through the compilation of Spring and Autumn Annals, as well as other historical writings initiated by Confucius and his followers who emphasized accounts of previous ages. This awareness allows individuals to better comprehend today and tomorrow based on what happened yesterday [17]. Also, Taoism had a great impact on how people think and value things during this time. Table 1 is the main school of thought:

Table 1: Main schools of thought in contention of a hundred schools of thought

School of Thought	Representative Figure	Brief Introduction
Confucianism	Xunzi	Confucianism emphasizes moral values, social order, and the importance of benevolence and ritual. Xunzi highlighted the innate evil nature of humans and advocated governance through laws.
	Mencius	Mencius believed in the innate goodness of humans and advocated benevolence, good governance, and the simplicity of rulers. He emphasized personal efforts and cultivation to improve society and individuals.
Daoism	Laozi	Laozi proposed the concept of "wu wei" and emphasized following the natural way (Dao), seeking freedom, and governing through non-action.
	Zhuangzi	Zhuangzi, a prominent Daoist philosopher, advocated returning to simplicity and pursuing harmony with nature.
Legalism	Han Feizi	Han Feizi advocated rule by law and strong authoritarian governance. He emphasized the importance of strict punishments and rewards and provided many ideas for state management and governance.
	Li Si	Li Si was an important official during the reign of Qin Shi Huang. He advocated centralized power and strict enforcement of laws, which had a profound impact on Chinese history.
Mohism	Mozi	Mozi advocated universal love, pacifism, and social equality. He opposed warfare and violence, and emphasized social justice and humanitarianism.
School of Names	Shen Buhai	Shen Buhai emphasized straightforward speech, criticism, and opposed hypocrisy and political intrigue. He focused on the authenticity and purity of language, which had a positive impact on social norms.

3.4 Changes in Social Systems and Ethical Concepts

The evolution of China's pre-Qin political system is a process in which the tribal clan system evolved into centralization. In primitive society, China was originally composed of multiple tribal clans. Each tribal clan had a tribal chief and a political organization. According to the strength of different tribal chiefs, some powerful feudal states gradually took shape and established a centralized political system and feudal dynasties through war and conquest. The evolution from tribal society to centralized society reflects the cognition and understanding of different times and social order and political organization throughout the development of the Chinese people. After some time, the Chinese society formed a strict hierarchical order, such as the aristocratic system, and the scholars, peasants, and merchants within the division of labor system. When the hierarchical system is formed, the social organization is more orderly and organized, and the social status of different roles can be relatively clear. At the same time, this also reflects the changes in people's understanding and values of social order and organization, emphasizing the responsibilities and obligations between different social classes [18-19].

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Confucianism in Contention of a Hundred Schools of Thought

In the early Qin Dynasty, due to the implementation of powerful rule and centralized system by Emperor Qin Shi Huang, some ideas and cultural freedom were suppressed, limiting academic and cultural diversity. However, over time, a wave of dissatisfaction with the rule of the Qin Dynasty and a desire for free thinking emerged in society. In this context, various schools of thought and cultural trends began to emerge, forming contention of a hundred schools of thought, which includes different schools, and schools of thought such as Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, Mohism, and famous schools of thought. Various schools of thought express their views and propositions through theoretical debates, the transmission of works, and academic exchanges, competing and arguing. Figure 1 shows the development process of Confucianism:

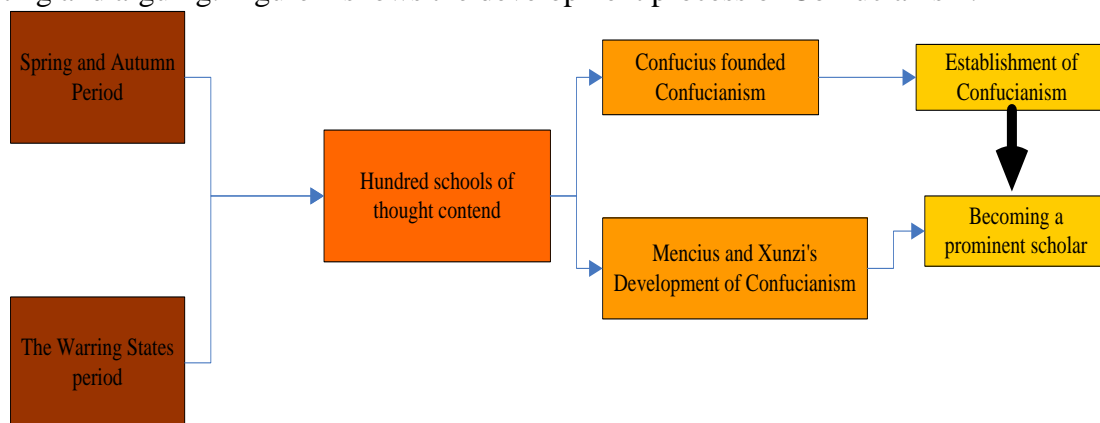


Figure 1: The development process of Confucianism

The rise of Confucianism has had a profound impact on social ethics, emphasizing the moral relationships and norms between individuals. Confucianism emphasizes the ethical and moral norms of interpersonal relationships such as monarchs and subjects, fathers and sons, spouses, and friends, advocating virtues such as benevolence, loyalty, and filial piety. The transformation of this concept has had a positive impact on the ethical concepts and moral behavior of society, promoting social harmony and stability.

4.2 The Development Process of Taoist Thought

Laozi is the founder of Taoist thought, as shown in Figure 2, and he is considered the author of *The Tao Te Ching*. *The Tao Te Ching* emphasizes "Dao" as the fundamental principle of the universe, advocating "governing by inaction", which means achieving harmony and balance through conforming to the Tao of nature. It emphasizes the abandonment of desires and the pursuit of a state of non action and non desire, in order to achieve a true and natural state. Zhuangzi is an important representative figure of Taoist thought, and he further developed Taoist thought in his book *Zhuangzi*. Zhuangzi emphasizes "nature" and "freedom", advocates returning to simplicity, transcending artificial social norms, and pursuing individual freedom and the realm of governance through inaction. He expressed his profound thoughts on life and the universe through humor and fables. During the Warring States period, Taoist thought gradually formed an independent school of thought. Among them, Caomuzi, Liezi, Wenzi and others are representative figures of the Taoist school. They further promote the ideas of nature, inaction, and non desire, emphasizing the Tao that conforms to nature and the universe, transcending the constraints of society, and pursuing individual freedom and spiritual tranquility. Figure 2 shows the portrait of Laozi:

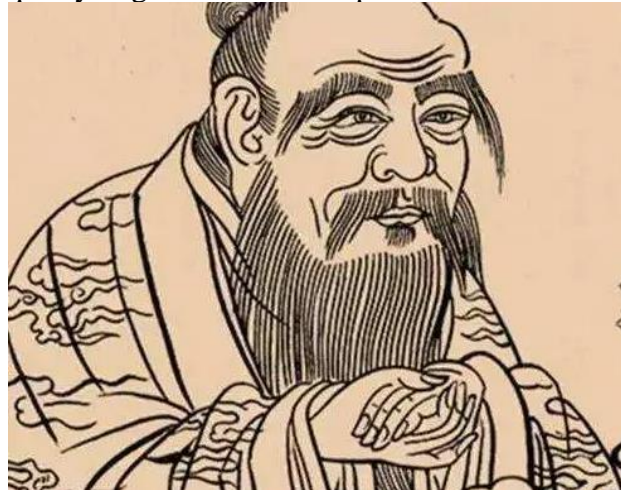


Figure 2: Portrait of Laozi

4.3 Development of Legalist Thought

Legalism emphasizes the rule of law and the management of society and the country based on the law, which has had a significant impact on the legal system and administrative management of ancient China. Legalism has also had an impact on legal and political thought around the world, especially in the construction of modern rule of law countries. The development process of Legalist thought began with Shang Yang's reforms and, through the development of Han Feizi and Li Si, formed a unique political philosophy and legal thought system. It emphasizes the authority and enforcement of the law, advocates the rule of law, and has had a profound impact on the political and legal system of ancient China. It also provides important ideological references for the construction of the rule of law worldwide. Figure 3 shows the development process of Legalism:

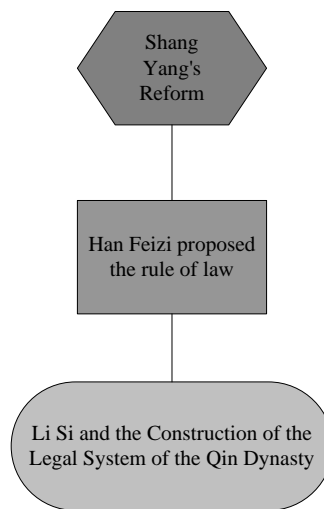


Figure 3: The development process of legalism

5. Conclusions

During the pre-Qin period, thinkers such as Laozi, Confucius, Mozi, etc., began to pay attention to human behavior, morality, politics, and social issues, and put forward their own opinions and theories. Confucianism emphasizes the values of human cultivation, morality, and benevolence, and promotes individual and social progress through education and moral guidance. Taoist philosophy emphasizes the pursuit of natural truth and the realm of governance through inaction, emphasizing individual freedom and harmony with nature. Through the changes in pre-Qin historical concepts, it can be seen that the awakening of ancient Chinese human spirit was a gradual process, and thinkers gradually formed their own theoretical systems in their thinking about history and society. This awakening promoted the diversity and richness of ancient Chinese thought, and also provided important intellectual resources and references for later eras. This awakening is one of the key factors for the prosperity and progress of ancient Chinese culture, and has had a profound impact on shaping the values and cognitive methods of ancient and modern Chinese society.

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