

The Influence of Confucian Cultural Values on the Social Roles of Contemporary Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Women

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Abstract: The background of the research is based on the problems and dilemmas faced by women in modern East Asian society. The research investigated how Confucius's thoughts put social constraints on women in China, Japan, and South Korea because of their gender through the content of the books and the derived meaning of folk while looking at the ideological transformation of women in society to resist these regulations. People in those societies are often disciplined by thousands of years of traditional etiquette, hence the conflict between self-consciousness and cultural oppression brought about by Confucianism becomes an important topic among East Asian scholars. The paper aims to show how the Confucius norms build on the fixed gender role in different ways and analyze the social oppression of East Asian women, with the resistance and struggle that women are making in these countries. Hence a better understanding of the progress of women's rights in East Asian countries and the role of women in society. The significance of the paper is that it makes up the research gap on how Confucian culture oppresses women's social status and uses realistic scenes while demonstrating the transformation of women's self-consciousness under these regulations in a chronological sequence.

Keywords: Gender equality, Confucianism, Japan, China, South Korea

1. Introduction

The Confucian cultural values have lasted for thousands of years. Those social norms and consensus permeate every aspect of the East Asian cultural circle including China, Japan, and Korea, and shape people as individuals. It is undeniable that some norms and rules introduced by Confucius taught people some admirable characteristics. However, it also builds on the gender inequality and the fixed gender roles in those societies, causing mental and physical harm to those women in different aspects. China, Japan, and Korea enjoy close geographical and cultural norms [1]. Historically, women in the three countries had the same or similar experiences and feelings caused by the spread of Confucianism. China, Japan, and Korea are currently the center of the economy in Asia, the trade and interactions with Western countries bring the idea of feminism in 20th century Japan with the political transformation. In modern times, China, Japan, and Korea have embarked on different paths of development, and women in the three countries are also exploring and practicing the path of women's liberation and gender equality [1]. However, the class division with the strong patriarchy and the

judgment of human values brought by Confucianism has lasted for thousands of years. The collision and fusion of traditional and modernized ideas seem to have exposed these East Asian countries to Western culture. However, this has made the oppression of women in these countries invisible in their daily lives and victimized women through the customary social regulations. The fixed social roles stipulated by the patriarchy still exist in daily life. Nevertheless, in different ways, women in East Asia gradually dismantled the constraints imposed by Confucianism [1]. This essay will focus on the restraint or resistance of various states to Confucian regulations in each period by explaining the content of the book written by Confucius and the regulations derived from civil society to evaluate the significance of the role of women in society.

2. The Formation of the Confucian Cultural Circle in the Tang Dynasty Shaped the Social Roles of Women in China, Japan, and South Korea

2.1. Confucian Norms Contribute to the Value of “Women are Less Valuable than Men”

In the Confucian cosmogony, the I CHING placed men and women in antithesis. With Qian and Kun; Yin and Yang, with representing the value of the two compounds [2]. The social responsibility and character traits of men and women as well as the meaning of the word itself all convey the view that women are less valuable than men. “Qian is heaven, pure yang, and male. Qian consists the fundamentality, prevalence, fitness, and constancy”. With the quality of Qian, people which in the scenario is men, have the power to get success. On the other hand, Kun means “Earth, pure yin and female.” Chenyang Li commented that “Between yin and yang, yang is the superior and dominant principle, and yin is the inferior and subservient and subordinate principle [3].”with the textual support of yin and yang in the chapter “The Great Appendix” of I Ching “as heaven is high and noble and Earth is low and humble”; Wilhelm remarks that “heaven, is more exalted and honored, earth, is regarded as lesser and lower [4]”. The relationship of yin and yang described by Ni Hua-ching is that “When yang moves, yin becomes apparent. Like an object and its shadow [5]”. The indication of qi and yang is the heaven that is above the earth and as the leader for yin, it directly expresses that men are the leaders of society and are superior to women.

Also, Confucius's attitude towards women is illustrated s in his book “Analects of Confucius” which states that “Only women and small-minded people are hard to cooperate with”. Those small-minded people refer to people of low moral character whom Confucius hated, the opposite with the small-minded people is “Junzi”. which means a man of complete virtue, refers to male. In Confucius's attitude, women are to be hated just as much as those misbehaving people, and the opposite, which is the man with complete virtue, refers to men in society. It is worth mentioning that all the good qualities advocated in the book are possessed by the gentleman which is “Junzi”, and the word "Junzi" appears a hundred times in the article, with no description of praising the good qualities of women [6].

2.2. The Effect of Confucian norms and Values on Women’s Social Role

In the book, the only female that has the name is Nanzi, in the content, Confucius’s students hate her because of the symbolization of women in politics. Confucius went to visit Nanzi, and Zi Lu was very unhappy. Confucius said sincerely, "Although I visited her, I did not do anything that I should not have done, otherwise God would have rejected me!" Heaven will despise me!", Nanzi was not only the queen of the Duke of Weiling but also the actual ruler in the later period of the state of Wei, a politician with insight. She had a strong ability to organize the events in her country. However, due to the historical limitations of the Spring and Autumn Period, people have biases and doubts that women can handle political issues. Confucius explained five categories of people, praising the gentleman, the sage, and criticizing the mediocre and the scholar without women. In the Rites of

Zhou, it said: “charge of the methods of women's studies to teach the nine imperial, women's virtue, women's speech, women's appearance, and women's merit”. Also, it builds the value of “before a woman is married, she needs to listen to her father, after that she needs to listen to her husband.” This concept deeply affected Confucius's view on the education of women, he banned the education of knowledge of women. Instead, from the perspective of Confucius' betrothal of his daughters and nieces, the married women have accepted the norms of "three obediences and four virtues". In this way, women are set up to serve the family under the social treatment because they were forbidden to get an education, women are expected to obey and assist men, rather than participate in the politics of the state.

2.3. The Effect of Concept of Confucian Benevolence on Women

In Confucius perspective, benevolence is the main character of being a “Junzi”; If a person does not have the characteristic of benevolence, then you can't call it a human being. In contrast, “Junzi” is often translated as “gentleman”; a “superior man” can be wise with those good qualities and become fully human. That precious quality of respecting and loving others is based on Junzi's behavior. When it comes to women, the idea of love is to listen to the father and the husband. Benevolence contains respectful, generous, honest, diligent, and gracious. However, women are excluded from the concept, hence, Confucius excluded women from social activities and disciplined them to serve the family because they have no benevolence [2].

3. The Inheritance of Contemporary Confucian Cultural Values and the Shaping of Women's Social Roles in China, Japan and South Korea

3.1. The Patriarchy in Marriage

What most affects women under the patriarchal system emphasized by Confucianism is the bondage of marriage. As the paper mentioned in the last part, Confucianism strengthened the gender role that women need to do the housework to assist in men's power. Maintaining a peaceful family became the goal of a woman's life, rather than her happiness and freedom [7]. The son bias in Chinese tradition is caused by the value that “Women are less valuable than men” which leads families to give more resources to the brother in the family, inaccessible educational resources lead women to need to be married to survive, and that is what the family of a daughter thinks. The daughter is worthless in the family because she will be married to another man in a new family. This vicious circle of male superiority over female values makes it impossible for women to freely choose their marital status. Moreover, the Qian and Kun, Yin, and Yang shaped women as mothers and caretakers. The gender roles limited women's consciousness. Children in those circumstances often be the strain for women getting divorced. Families often educate women on the importance of family and being a mother--the caretaker. Under the education, women are more likely not to divorce. For the sake of the child, afraid of divorce can not get the child custody, afraid of hurting the child so that the child loses the integrity of the family. Second, the value of women is judged by Confucianism, which makes it the lifelong goal of a woman to help her husband and family, rather than to be a benevolent person. Third, because a woman's lifelong goal is to run a good family, divorce represents the failure of the family, to evaluate the success of women. When people see divorced families, they always question that it is the woman's problem and that it is the woman's dereliction of duty. Fourth, as this paper mentioned earlier, families often do not allocate resources to their daughters. Divorced women lack the education and skills they need to survive on their own. What's more, because of the traditional preference for sons, women do not get enough love and recognition in the family, so they are often sensitive and feel that they are unworthy of love. To give their husbands greater mental control over them.

3.2. Inequality Women's Role in the Workplace

Women, as the paper mentioned above, have been defined as a supportive role for men in the home. Because of the Confucian emphasis on gender roles and gender status differences, there is always a great deal of prejudice and hostility towards women in the workplace. The results show that on average women get 71.57% of men earned in China [8]. Japanese women on average earned 74 percent for full-time job [9]. Women receive only 68.9 percent of what men receive in salary in Korea [10]. Many factors contribute to the result. First, the role of “mum”: needs to be taken by women. However, the gender role of men led them to not need to forgive their work and take care of the family. The work in the house was not recognized by society and the partner, causing women to become the whole time house-wife without any earnings. Dr. Kim Nan-joo claims that the current wage system is discriminating women to become the leader of the company because the pregnancy [10]. Second, it's hard for women to reach the management level. Under the traditional concept that Yin can only rely on Yang to move, in the workplace, many people regard women's efforts as having sex with men. This is consistent with the Confucian teaching that baryon is an accessory to Yang and that women are not allowed to participate in social activities such as political activities. With the improvement of the social level, more women have joined the workforce, but the values that people have accepted since childhood, such as mothers doing housework and fathers working, and social men's stigmatization of women, have become the shackles of women in the workplace.

3.3. The Confucius Politics and its Influence on Women

Confucius builds on the patriarchy that “Junzi” should be praised in the country. Respect for elders and powerful people strength men’s power in society. In many countries in Eastern Asia, the political disadvantage of women is affected by social values. The Confucian political view is based on the ethics of monarch, minister, father and son. The lack of a female perspective in Confucian political views can, to a certain extent, explain the historical phenomenon of East Asian societies generally ignoring the political status of women. For example, most of the country's main leaders are men, and women are less willing to participate in politics than men.

4. Changes in Women's Social Role Consciousness in Contemporary China, Japan, and South Korea Under the Influence of Confucian Culture

4.1. The Effect of Modern Democratic Politics on Gender Equality

Democracy allows people to have freedom of speech and express their opinions on the Internet. The movement of feminists in Japan and South Korea has greatly improved the rights of women in their countries. The Allied occupation led to the dissolution of the Japanese Empire and the birth of a democratic nation, Japan, based on a new constitution. Japanese women gained the right to vote in government, attend university, and enjoy equal rights with men. After the war, Japanese women were keen to learn from advanced Western countries about gender equality and democracy, and to gain the essence of their rights [1]. In 1973, at Seoul's Gimpo Airport, Ewha Women's University students staged a demonstration against "sex tourism" by Japanese men. In the 1960s, Japan, with its economic development completed, set off a boom in overseas tourism, and "prostitution groups" led by South Korea spread across Asian countries. Yei Matsui, a reporter for the Asahi Shimbun, has covered opposition movements in South Korea. In 1974, she and a friend founded Women Against Sex Tourism, which began by unfurling protest banners at Haneda Airport [1]. Because of democracy, women have the opportunity to openly protest and march.

4.2. The Shaping of Feminist Values by Modern Education

From the above, the indication is that women are bound by the values preached by Confucianism in marriage, and through the popularization of education, more women begin to choose their lifestyle. The social roles advocated by Chinese Confucianism: Only men have the right to education, through the imperial examination to achieve social status while women have been excluded from the school. The most important duty of a woman is to "follow her father at home, marry her husband, and follow her son when her husband dies has been the feudal society's evaluation of women's standards. Education made women no longer rely on marriage for basic livelihood, and were free from the rules and regulations that required them to depend on their father or husband. And give them opportunities to participate in work and social activities. More women began to break the traditional concepts, actively participate in social labor, and choose to engage in social, medical, and other studies of women gradually increased. The improvement of women's educational and cultural level has also promoted the improvement of women's comprehensive quality. With the popularization of modern Japanese education, especially the development of women's higher education, Japanese women have received good education and professional training, their horizons have been broadened, and their development and career orientation have undergone great changes [1]. Modern Japanese women began to break through the shackles of the traditional concept of "men are in charge of the outside, women are in charge of the inside", enter society, and achieve employment. The high enrollment rate and high education have improved women's knowledge education level and professional ability. They are not willing to just be housewives, and their desire to actively participate in social labor and realize their value is getting stronger and stronger [1]. It can be said that good education is an important prerequisite and guarantee for women to enhance social competitiveness and enter society in large numbers. With the growth of the economy and the popularization of the democratic system, women have more opportunities and autonomy to fight for their rights and realize that they do not need to rely on men to complete their value.

4.3. The Evaluation of Achievements in Gender Equality in the Three Countries

China, Japan, and South Korea have made different progress in promoting their feminist movements. China, Japan, and South Korea have made different progress in promoting their feminist movements. Although the status of women increased with democracy and education, feudal patriarchy and Confucianism still constrained women in the three countries, whether it was sexualized women in Japan, the chaebol system in South Korea, or the authoritarian politics in China, still affected women's daily lives through all aspects. For the progress made in the West, it is very difficult for East Asian women to express themselves in a repressive social atmosphere, and the TV series and movies created by the most powerful men in society do not show social misogyny. The persistence of gender stereotypes is an important issue.

5. Conclusion

This paper assessed how the content preached by Confucianism lays down gender differences and social roles. In the first section, the paper explains the Confucian culture, in large part, has established the view that "men take charge of the social activities and women take care of the home" and strengthened the patriarchy by explaining how it builds on the value on the gender, the social roles and ignoring the existence of women. In the second part, the paper illustrates how the values promoted by Confucianism block women's daily life. Through marriage, workplace, and political activities. The last part explains the development of the recent feminist movement across east Asia and its evolution. In the future, the recommendation for the scholars to is that research Women's workplace bullying and their happiness index in the three countries. There is still a long way to go for China,

Japan, and South Korea to fight against the feudal ideology brought by Confucianism, but women around the world still congratulate the achievements they done so far.

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