

Research Article

A Comparative Study of Traditional Ethics Between Ancient China and Ancient Greece

Liu Xizhen^{*} , Zou Linxi 

The School of Marxism, North China University of Technology, Beijing, China

Abstract

The differences in traditional ethics between ancient China and ancient Greece were primarily manifested in the following three aspects. First, the origins of moral civilization were different. The insular geographical setting and the preservation of familial ties in ancient China significantly influenced the development of a self-sufficient agrarian economy. Conversely, the open geographical landscape of ancient Greece and the disintegration of primordial kinship networks were pivotal factors in the emergence of an early commercial economy. Second, there was a distinction in values centered on family-based versus individual-based orientations. The subsistence farming economy served as the fundamental economic basis for family-oriented values in ancient China's patriarchal society. Ancient Greece initially formed an economic structure with equal emphasis on agriculture, handicraft and commerce, and nurtured the value of personal interests first. Third, the ethical attributes of patriarchal ethics and contractual ethics exhibited notable variations. The ancient slave society in China developed a patriarchal ethical system rooted in patrilineal lineage due to the preservation of the clan heritage system, which was bound by kinship. In contrast, the complete dissolution of clan-based kinship ties in ancient Greek city-states led to the emergence of a contractual ethical framework grounded in legal rights. These variations had profoundly influenced contemporary Chinese and Western moral structures, particularly within the realm of elderly care ethics.

Keywords

Traditional Ethics, the Difference, Ancient China, Ancient Greece

1. Introduction

The ethical systems of ancient China and ancient Greece diverged significantly in their moral origin, value systems, and ethical structures. At the same time, there was a certain complementarity between ancient Chinese and ancient Greek traditional ethics. These differences and complementarity had significant implications for the mutual learning and development of Chinese and Western moral civilizations in today's era.

In the first part, the author examined the influence of varying geographical environments, distinct modes of economic

production, and kinship structures on ancient Chinese and Greek traditional ethics. The author posited that the insular geographical setting and the preservation of familial ties in ancient China significantly influenced the development of a self-sufficient agrarian economy. Conversely, the open geographical landscape of ancient Greece and the disintegration of primordial kinship networks were pivotal factors in the emergence of an early commercial economy.

In the second part, the author analyzed the difference between

^{*}Correspondence: Liu Xizhen (liuxizhen07@163.com)

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family-based values and individual-based values. The subsistence farming economy served as the fundamental economic basis for family-oriented values in ancient China's patriarchal society. Ancient Greece initially formed an economic structure with equal emphasis on agriculture, handicraft and commerce, and nurtured the value of personal interests first, which was in sharp contrast to the agricultural economic structure and the value of family interests first in traditional Chinese society.

In the third part, the author expounded the difference between patriarchal ethics and contract ethics. The ancient slave society in China developed a patriarchal ethical system rooted in patrilineal lineage due to the preservation of the clan heritage system, which was bound by kinship. In contrast, the complete dissolution of clan-based kinship ties in ancient Greek city-states led to the emergence of a contractual ethical framework grounded in legal rights.

2. The Different Origin of Traditional Ethics in Ancient China and Ancient Greece

The ethical divergence between ancient China and Greece stemmed from variations in geographical environment, economic production methods, political structures, and modes of moral concern. Distinct environmental conditions nurtured two separate moral civilizations. Different geographical environments were the cradles of two different moral civilizations, one in ancient China and the other in ancient Greece, and were the natural factors that contributed to the differences in ethical culture between the two. The closed geographical environment and abundant water resources had nurtured the ancient Chinese agricultural civilization, and the agricultural economy was linked by blood ties, resulting in a social and political structure that integrated the family with the state. On the other hand, the open geographical environment and superior marine resources provided natural conditions for the development of industry, commerce, and maritime trade in ancient Greece, forming an economic production form dominated by industry and commerce. It was based on business ties and established a city-state system where families and states were separated.

Blood ties used to be the link between the two ancient civilizations. However, in the process of moving from primitive clan system to civilized society, this blood ties were completely torn up in ancient Greece. Conversely, in Xia and Shang Dynasties of China, the clan heritage system with blood ties basically survived. This was the social and historical source of the difference between ancient Chinese and Greek ethical cultures.

2.1. The Difference Between Agricultural Economy and Commercial Economy [1]

The distinct forms of economic production, namely the ag-

ricultural economy and the commercial economy, were initially shaped by the significant differences in the natural geographical environments between ancient China and ancient Greece. Natural factors played a crucial role in influencing cultural disparities and all associated elements between ancient China and Greece. However, it was important to note that the natural geographical environment was not the sole determinant of social and economic development. The production mode and economic structure of a society were the outcomes of human productive practices as well as the objective geographical environment.

China's ancient society mainly produced by farming, which was closely related to its closed geographical environment and developed water resources. The ancient land of China was bordered by the vast Pacific Ocean to the east, the Indian Ocean to the south, the Gobi Desert to the northwest, the Hengduan Mountains and the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau to the southwest, and the desert and primitive forests to the north. Although there was a long coastline, but in the face of the vast and rough sea, people can only look at the ocean and sigh, and maritime trade had not been able to develop. As a result, ancient China had little contact with the outside world for a long time and remained in a closed state. In sharp contrast, at that time, Ancient Greece had the world's most developed coastline and excellent ports scattered all over the world, and sea and land transportation formed a resource complementary trend. Ancient Greece mainly relied on maritime trade and foreign colonial expansion to form an economic production structure dominated by industry and commerce.

Fortunately in the relatively closed geographical circle of ancient China, there were vast plains and grasslands, numerous rivers, rich water and grass, and relatively concentrated population, which was very beneficial to farming and animal husbandry. Archaeological excavations of Hetao culture, Hemudu culture, Yangshao culture, Longshan culture, Sanxingdui culture, etc. were the source of Chinese civilization, most of them were born in the river valley and alluvial plain. These typical prehistoric cultures were shown that the water area was an important resource for the reproduction and survival of people in ancient Chinese society, because the land near the water area was relatively fertile and conducive to farming production, and the primitive farming production mode had a direct impact on the formation of self-sufficient small-scale peasant economy. The Yellow River and the Yangtze River had become the cradles of Chinese civilization with their developed water system resources advantages.

The traditional patriarchal society of China continued the original clan blood relationship, while the ancient Greece completely destroyed the clan blood relationship, thus forming different social ethical relations and economic production forms. In ancient China, the country was founded on agriculture, and the self-sufficient small peasant economic society took the family as the production unit, and the social relationship was mainly embodied as a patriarchal and human relationship linked by blood. In the agrarian economy, men were

the main labor force. In the patriarchal society, the elderly, especially the elderly men, were at the top of the network of human relations. They were not only generally respected by family members as spokesmen for their ancestors, but also became knowledge authorities with rich life experience and long-term accumulated production experience, playing a bridge role in the process of cultural inheritance. The patriarchal and ethical structure of traditional Chinese society was based on the father-son relationship. On the one hand, the intergenerational ethical relationship embodied the authority and obedience of the father's kindness and the son's filial piety, and on the other hand, it embodied the two-way ethical interaction between nurturing and feeding. In these two relations, the society emphasized filial piety and reciprocal feeding, thus forming the ethics of respecting the elderly and caring for parents and the elderly based on filial piety. In short, in the traditional farming economic society, the social ethical culture was mainly embodied as a kind of elderly care ethical culture with blood relationship as the bond, patriarchy as the carrier, "father kindness" and "son filial piety" as the basic principle, family as the caring field, and feedback as the moral practice. It had a very important impact on the family pension model and the ethical system of health and welfare pension in contemporary China.

The 8th century BC to the 6th century BC was the period of slavery in Greece, the emergence of coinage made the exchange of goods more convenient, the commercial trade between Greece and its neighboring countries became more frequent, a large number of professional merchants appeared, and the commercial center gradually developed into a city. At the same time, Greece began to emigrate on a large scale, and hundreds of immigrant city-states were established in the Aegean islands, the coast of Asia Minor, the Black Sea coast, southern Italy and Sicily, and a social and economic structure centered on cities and dominated by industry and commerce was initially formed.

The commercial economy in the Greek city-state period was the prototype of the contractual economy, which took the disintegration of the clan blood relationship as the premise, replaced the communal clan property system with private property ownership, replaced the patriarchal and royal power with legal rights, and replaced the absolute unequal relationship between generations under the patriarchal system with the equality of rights and obligations between generations, forming the value of individual standard. In the period of Greek city-states, due to the legalization of individual private property, individuals gradually got rid of their blood dependence on the family, and supporting the elderly was not a necessary legal obligation for children. At the same time, the authority of the elderly was greatly weakened in the contractual relationship based on commercial economy, and the ethical spirit of advocating independence and freedom, equality and competition was far higher than the ethical virtue of respecting the elderly and filial piety. Contractual ethics gradually became the mainstream ethical thought in the period of Greek

city-states. Of course, this does not mean a betrayal or abandonment of the filial ethic. On the contrary, in the Greek city-state period, there was the ethical thought of filial piety for the elderly and related laws. The huge social wealth created by the primitive accumulation of capital and the modern industrial revolution laid a solid economic foundation for the establishment of the old-age security system in modern western society. The rising of human rights movement and the exaltation of the idea of rule of law provided the right support and legal guarantee for the establishment and improvement of the social old-age security system. The establishment of the old-age security system in modern western society had finally realized the socialization of old-age care, and the moral care for the elderly with health and old-age care as the main content had become a kind of social good and the legal responsibility of the government.

2.2. Blood Ties and Family- State Relations in Ancient China [1]

Consanguineous relationship was the natural link of small peasant economy. In patriarchal society in ancient China, consanguineous relationship mainly included the single aspect of paternity. Ethical relations between people in patriarchal society were family relations or quasi-family relations, and the social and political structure of integration of family and state was the extension of blood relations from family to society, and it was a political and ethical projection of blood relations on the national system.

The moral norm of filial piety and pyramidal patriarchal hierarchy of Western Zhou Dynasty were based on blood relationship. Ethics of filial piety came into being with the emergence of private property when human society developed to a certain stage. Its essence was the legal and ethical regulation of the relationship between parents and children. Supporting parents was the fundamental requirement of filial piety. *The Classic of Filial Piety* said, *Filial piety is to start from being kind to parents, to serve the king, and finally to establish oneself* [2]. Carrying on the family line was another important connotation of filial piety. *Mencius* read, *There are three ways to be unfilial, the worst is not produce offspring* [3]. These records put the family line in the first place of filial piety. In addition, filial piety also had the meaning of ancestor worship, which was also the daily moral behavior of not forgetting the blood root, remembering the ancestors, and continuing the family incense. Therefore, filial piety was a patriarchal moral code based on blood relations, which run through every clan, every family and every person's past, present and future.

Chinese people attached great importance to the relationship between family and human relations, the root of which lied in the thousands of blood ties in the agricultural economic society. *The Classic of Filial Piety* said, *The former king had the principle of governing virtue to follow the world, the people were in harmony, and there was no resentment* [2]. This

supreme ethical principle was filial piety. The moral transformation from filial piety to loyalty to the country was essentially the result of the quasi-consanguinity of social relations, the expansion and sublimation of family ethics to social ethics and political ethics.

2.3. Commercial Economy and City-State Relations in Ancient Greece [1]

From the 8th century BC to the 6th century BC, slavery was widely established in Greek city-states. From the perspective of the whole Greece, most city-states in this period were based on agricultural natural economy, and their politics were dominated by aristocrats. In the past two hundred years, as the city-state system adapted to the requirements of the development of productive forces, it promoted the all-round development of the Greek economy. Smelting, pottery making, wine making, shipbuilding and construction industries developed particularly rapidly, and there were large-scale manual workshops and smelting farms, and even three-layer oar ocean-going ships using 200 sailors, forming a relatively developed industry and commerce and maritime trade. With the development of the city's economy, the population continued to increase. In order to solve the problem of living and livelihood of the increasing population in the city-states, and to expand the trade market, Greece began a large-scale colonial movement. After the Trojan War, the Athenians established colonies in Ionia and most of the islands, the Peloponnesians established colonies in southern Italy and Sicily, and other colonies were established in other parts of Greece. There were more than 140 documented Greek colonial city-states, which focused on economic development, and industry and commerce gradually became the link of economic development of Greek city-states.

If the patriarchal society of ancient China was based on blood ties, then the Greek city-state society was based on contractual relationship. First of all, tribal migration, large-scale overseas immigration and colonial expansion made different races mixed and live together, and the blood relationship and racial concept became increasingly weak. Different city-states formed alliances or antagonistic relationships based on different economic interests and political needs, instead of establishing inter-state relations according to different ethnic blood ties. In addition, the geographical advantages and marine resources of Greece with its interlocking sea and land, good harbor gorge provided good conditions for the local Greek people to exchange commodities and trade with the colonial city-states and neighboring countries. Contractual ethics became an important aspect of social relations, and industry and commerce gradually became the link of the economic development of ancient Greek city-states.

Mr. Fei Xiaotong said, *Blood is the basis of identity society, while geography is the basis of contractual society* [4]. The so-called geography referred to the mode of production and way of life formed by the specific geographical environment,

and the social relations developed from it. Geography was one of the important conditions for the economic development of Greek city-states.

To sum up, closed geography → blood relationship → patriarchy → integration of family and state was the patriarchal ethical model of traditional Chinese society. Open geography → contractual economy → legal power → separation of family and state was the contractual ethical model of Greek city-states. These two different traditional ethical models had a profound impact on modern ethics in China and the Western countries, especially on elderly care ethics.

3. Different Values of Family-Oriented Approaches and Individual-Oriented Approaches

In traditional Chinese society, the family system was a relatively stable social system. The relatively closed geographical environment and the self-sufficient natural economy provided natural fertile ground for the breeding of family-based values. In addition, the sociopolitical structure of family and state isomorphism also had an important impact on the formation and development of family-based values.

Ancient Greece developed an economic framework encompassing agriculture, handicrafts, and commerce, which presented a stark contrast to the predominantly agrarian economic structure of traditional Chinese society. Since the establishment of the Greek city-states, the contractual relationship deconstructed the original family blood relationship, the commodity economy based on equal exchange developed rapidly, and then the democratic political system based on individual freedom and civil rights was established. All these gradually gave birth to the Western values of individual standard and the ethical spirit advocating equality, independence and freedom.

3.1. Ancestor Worship and Traditional Filial Piety [5]

The formation of family-based values was closely related to ancestor worship. The so-called ancestor worship was a kind of spiritual belief activity that regarded ancestors as spiritual beings with supernatural forces, and the living descendants communicated with their ancestors through sacrificial activities, reflected on their aspirations, expressed gratitude, and expected to receive protection and kindness. It was based on the concept of immortality of the soul and fear of ghosts and gods, and was realized through a series of funeral activities.

During the Yin and Shang Dynasties, ancestor worship developed into a universal social phenomenon. For the people in the Yin and Shang Dynasties, although the ancestors had died, they had only moved to another world, which was a kind of copy of the real world, with grades and differences between rich and poor, and the dead and immortal spirit still enjoyed

everything in the world, and it was provided by the living people. Guo Moruo argued, *The two realms seem to be separated only by a sheet of paper, and the universe is shared by man and ghost; Ghosts are an extension of man, and power can grow, and so can life* [6]. Future generations should seek a suitable place for their deceased parents and elders out of filial piety, hold a burial ceremony to announce their departure from the earthly world, and also as a report to the afterlife, thereby forming a set of funeral, peaceful death, and sacrificial etiquette systems.

With the intensification of the concept of ancestor worship, the system of ancestor worship tended to become perfect in the Zhou Dynasty, and the patriarchal moral code with filial piety as the main principle was formed. Hou Wailu et al pointed out, *In order to maintain the patriarchal rule, moral concepts cannot be pure, but must be mixed with religion* [7]. *The worship of heaven in the religious conception is prolonged in the ethical conception into the worship of virtue. In the same way, respecting ancestors in the religious concept is extended to filial piety in the ethical concept, which can also be said, the ancestor is the father, and the filial piety is the foundation* [7]. The norms of filial piety in the Zhou Dynasty were mainly manifested in the two aspects of ancestor worship and parental support, reflecting the internal connection between ancestor worship and filial piety. Respecting heaven, respecting ancestors, and respecting filial piety constituted an organic unity, which was the inevitable requirement for the mutual complementarity of filial piety norms and religious ethics.

Ancestor worship activities reflected the respect and remembrance of ancestors, the purpose was to inherit the cause of ancestors, unite the family, and flourish the family business, through which the bond of human relations was filial piety. If we said that the original funeral activities put on a mysterious religious veil, then the implementation of Confucian filial piety made the funeral activities gradually get rid of the original religious significance and took on a strong color of human relations. The ancestor worship, which took mourning as the carrier, extended the filial piety from the underworld to the reality, reflecting the filial ethics function of ancestor worship. The patriarchal hierarchy made the moral radiation effect of filial piety infinitely expand, and filial piety became an invisible bridge between Yin and Yang. It was not only the spiritual source for the extension of the divine power of ancestors in the real world, but also the foundation of human relations for ancestor worship and the ethical standard for the stability of the family system. The filial piety ethics contained in ancestor worship was mainly reflected in the following three aspects.

Hierarchical Distinction – Rituals reinforced social ranking and familial roles. Distinguishing between king and minister, superiors and subordinates, elders and children, distinguishing between men and women, father and son, brothers, marriage, and estrangement, was the basic function of China's ancient etiquette system, but also the foundation of filial piety. When offering sacrifices to ancestors, the descendants should pay

tribute according to the order of elder and younger, superior and inferior, close and distant, which reflected the strict patriarchal hierarchy. Therefore, ancestor worship had become an important carrier for promoting filial piety, maintaining patriarchal relations and hierarchical order.

Gratitude Expression – Acknowledging the nurturing role of ancestors. Thank the ancestors for the grace of birth and nurturing. The Book of Rites read, *The sacrifice is to pursue the continuation of filial piety* [8]. Why did the descendants have to follow filial piety when the elder passed away? Just to be grateful. The Book of Rites read, *Support their parents while they are alive, bury them when they die, and offer sacrifices when they are dead. To raise is to observe its conformity, to mourn is to observe its sorrow, and to sacrifice is to observe its respect* [8]. Ancestor worship, as a sacred ritual activity, had gradually become a kind of moral culture rooted in the hearts of Chinese people and continued from generation to generation with the institutionalization of ancestor worship. It embodied the descendants' reverence and gratitude towards their ancestors, expressed the feeling of feeding back to the living parents and elders, and reflected the constant blood affection between different generations of the same clan.

Filial Support Mechanism – Linking ancestor worship with moral behavior in daily life. Mr. Wei Zhengtong believed that ancestor worship was a Chinese religion, and the ritual of ancestor worship was carried out in the family [9]. Under the patriarchal system, ancestor worship and family standard were closely related. On the one hand, ancestor worship provided a moral practice mechanism at the level of belief for the formation of family-based values. On the other hand, the family-oriented value concept strengthened ancestor worship continuously, and realized the popularization from the upper class of society to the common people, and its moral radiation effect continued to expand. The internal link between the two was the ethics of filial piety. Thus, it can be seen that soul immortality → recognition of ghosts and gods → ancestor worship → moral education → filial support → transfer of filial piety to loyalty was the internal law of the traditional patriarchal society in implementing moral education and filial piety through ancestor worship.

3.2. The Basic Characteristics of the Clan and Its Ethical Source of Respect for the Elderly [1]

In Chinese traditional patriarchal society, the clan was the basic community. The clan was made up of many individual small families, which were composed of the descendants of the same male ancestor, living together for generations, forming a specific geographical relationship, and organizing production and handling daily affairs according to certain norms. The clan had four basic characteristics: First, the male consanguineous relationship was the bond; Second, it took individual family as the basic unit; Third, the clan's people lived together

and worked together in production; Fourth, implementing patriarchal management according to the patriarchal law.

Living together was a geographical feature of a family. Since ancient times, China had been a large agricultural country, and the self-sufficient small-scale peasant economic production mode determined that the population hardly needed to move, and the production of individual families had strong stability. People with the same surname often lived on the same land for generations, worked together, exchanged what they had, and jointly maintained the survival of all members of the family to ensure the prosperity of the ancestral business. Mr. Fei Xiaotong once pointed out, *Blood is a stable force. In a stable society, geography is but a projection of blood, not separation* [4]. Living together was a kind of spatial projection of consanguineous relationship under the traditional farming production mode.

The immediate benefit of living together was that it facilitated collaborative production. China's ancient society was a typical agricultural society, the level of productivity was low, the quality of agricultural harvest depended on the natural conditions and people's production experience to a large extent, and the society developed by generation after generation of production experience and labor skills accumulation and inheritance. Therefore, the production experience and labor skills accumulated by the older generation became valuable social wealth. From the perspective of social and economic origin, the ethical thought of respecting the old was closely related to the agricultural mode of economic production and the geographical characteristics of gathering together in ancient China. Because the elderly had accumulated rich production experience and labor skills, and had a better understanding of cultural traditions and social customs, they became the disseminators of production experience and labor skills, as well as the transmitters of traditional knowledge and social culture, their authority status was beyond doubt. This was also the social and economic basis for the formation of filial piety ethics in patriarchal society.

Patriarchy was the basic system of family management in ancient China. Mr. Wei Zhengtong thought the family was not only a social unit that produces children, but also a grass-roots community that dealt with complex matters such as economics, law, and sacrifice [9]. The absolute power of parents mainly came from their control of family property rights, and the ancient system of etiquette and law forbade family members to own personal wealth. According to the Book of Rites, there was no private wealth when parents were alive [8]. For those who had personal wealth, the laws of the past provided for different strokes according to the value of the property.

The sacrificial right further maintained the absolute authority of the patriarch. Ancestor worship was not only to remember ancestors, but also to use this sacred religious ceremony to unite the people, while teaching people to respect the elderly and pursue filial piety. The patriarch was generally an elderly and highly respected male. As the chief priest, he was undoubtedly the embodiment and spokesperson of the ancestors.

The patriarch's power is more holy and stronger and more tenacious because of the identity of the family priest (the chief priest) [10]. Under the influence of the concept of ancestor worship, the patriarchal system had become a powerful hidden social mechanism to discipline people to think of filial piety and provide welfare for the elderly.

The patriarch was also the supreme judge of the entire family and had jurisdiction over intra-clan disputes. In the patriarchal patriarchy era, the clan was regarded as the basic unit of social political system and legal system operation, and was also the primary judicial institution of society. The patriarch was responsible for each member of the clan and each family in the capacity of the legal person or sovereign of each grass-roots unit, and then was responsible for the country. This was the social ethical basis of family management and governing the country, the practice of political ethics based on family, and the rule of law and ethics in a family-state type country. The paramount authority of the patriarch within the family undeniably reinforced the dominance of the elders in a traditional patriarchal society. This was also the legal and ethical mechanism of ruling the country by family through the practice of filial piety.

3.3. The Ethical Difference Between the Supremacy of Family Interests and the Supremacy of Individual Interests [11]

The fundamental difference between family-oriented and individual-oriented values lied in the difference of interest orientation. Family-oriented value insisted on the supremacy of family interests while individual-oriented value emphasized the importance of individual interests. Different forms of economic production and different social ethical relations were the root causes of this difference.

The open geographical environment and the frequent flow of population in ancient Greece provided good conditions for free trade, formed an economic production form based on handicraft and commerce, and a free, open and equal mode of interpersonal communication. It emphasized the equality of individuals as social subjects and focused on the development of individual talents. City-state democracy provided the basic institutional ethical support for the equal economic exchanges between subjects, which formed a contractual ethical interaction relationship corresponding to rights and obligations, and the supremacy of individual interests was its basic interest orientation. Individual standard was a kind of value with the supremacy of individual interests as its core content, which emphasized individual freedom and independence, value and dignity, survival and development, and advocated that a just social system should guarantee individual freedom, independence, equality and basic rights.

In the traditional patriarchal society of China, individuals were absolutely subordinated to the larger family unit or the clan, where personal independence was subsumed by familial integrity, and individual interests were often superseded by

those of the family and at times the nation. The relatively isolated geographical setting and communal living arrangements naturally impeded commercial and trade activities. This was compounded by the historical emphasis on agriculture over commerce, leading to a self-sufficient agricultural production model and a limited scope of social interactions within the family. Three Principles and Five Constants was the essential meaning of traditional patriarchal ethics. Three Principles namely the king was the minister's principle, the father was the son's principle, the husband was the wife's principle, all embodied the hierarchical human relations order of respect and inferiority, elder and younger, affinity and estrangement. The Five Constants, namely benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faith, still emphasized the order of human relations based on blood relations. Therefore, in the traditional patriarchal society, family interests were supreme. The individual value lied in the glory of ancestors and fame for future generations, and the individual interests were completely dissolved in the family interests, just as the Classic of Filial Piety said, *to establish oneself as a path, fame for future generations, to show parents, and the end of filial piety* [2].

4. The Distinction in Ethical Attributes between Patriarchal Ethics and Contractual Ethics [12]

The ancient slave society in China developed a patriarchal ethical system rooted in patrilineal lineage due to the preservation of the clan heritage system, which was bound by kinship. In contrast, the complete dissolution of clan-based kinship ties in ancient Greek city-states led to the emergence of a contractual ethical framework grounded in legal rights. The distinctions between patriarchal ethics and contractual ethics were mainly reflected in the following three aspects: The difference between paternal rights and legal rights; The difference of the structure of human relations between patriarchal human relations and contractual human relations; The difference of intergenerational ethical relations between father's kindness, son's filial piety in ancient China and equality and friendship in ancient Greece.

4.1. Paternity and Legal Rights: Differences in Rights

The Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States period was an era of rites collapse and music collapse, the feudal mode of production began to form, and the original blood patriarchal system gradually disintegrated. However, some basic principles of patriarchal system did not disappear, but relied on the new feudal system and existed in Chinese society for a long time, and changed with the changes of production mode and social system, which were embodied in the following five aspects. First, the legal primogeniture system lasted throughout the feudal era. Second, the clan system had been continued

and developed after several ups and downs. Third, the social structure of family and state had been sustained and consolidated. Fourth, the hierarchical system based on the patriarchal system and linked by blood relations had long penetrated into the feudal system and gained new life in the form of the isomorphism of family and state. Fifth, the political and ethical pattern of political power, clan power, theocracy and husband power permeating each other still existed.

Patriarchy was the core of patriarchal ethics. Paternity included parents' right to discipline family members, economic rights, legal rights, sacrifice rights and other family powers, even including the right to life and death. In patriarchal society, patriarchy and absolute monarchy were interdependent. In the social structure of the integration of the family and the country, patriarchy had strengthened the clan consciousness and the relationship between human relations, making the hierarchical concepts of inferiority, elder and younger, and affinity permeate into the hearts of each clan, each small family and each individual, and the autonomy and independence of individuals were completely dissolved in the interests of the family and the country. Patriarchy was the carrier of patriarchal system and the foundation of human relations of absolute monarchy. Absolute monarchy was the magnification of patriarchy, and it was the extreme social control carried out by feudal privilege with the help of patriarchy, a kind of warm and affectionate network of human relations. From the perspective of economic origin, patriarchal patriarchy and absolute monarchy were all determined by the self-sufficient small peasant economic production mode in the final analysis. The ultra-stable social structure with the same structure of family and state was at the cost of the loss of individual freedom and individual independence. Father-son relationship was the foundation of family relationship in traditional Chinese society. It reflected the relationship of authority and obedience between the previous generation and the next generation, which was supported by the religious ethics of filial piety. At the same time, it also strengthened the concept of filial piety, brought paternity to its peak, and made the political and ethical pattern of the monarch ruling the world become a historical inevitability.

Ancient Greece destroyed the original clan blood relationship, and established city-states based on private property relations through large-scale overseas immigration and colonial expansion. In the 8th century BC, the classical Greek city-states began to form. It was centered on an independent city, radiating out into the surrounding countryside, with separate acropolis and citadel built in each isolated part of Greece. Industry and commerce was an important development form of city-state economy. It was a contractual economy based on free trade and equal communication between subjects, and its main feature was the equivalence of rights and obligations between interest subjects. Of course, this kind of contractual economy was still very immature, but it was the prototype of modern Western contractual economy. Legal right was the core idea of contractual economy and the basis of protecting the legitimate interests of all parties in economic activities. In

the social structure of the Greek city-state, the interest relationship between citizens and the city-state and the interest relationship between citizens were much higher than the blood relationship between family members. The interest relationship between citizens and the city-state and between citizens were mainly regulated by law, so the contractual relationship based on legal power became the main aspect of the social relationship of the city-state.

Deconstructing blood relationship with contractual relationship and replacing royal power with legal power were two great changes of ancient Greek society towards civilization era. After Theseus' reformation, Athens became a city-state rather than a family of blood ties. Citizens, as the basic elements of the city-state, were a subject that transcends blood, paternity and kingship, and a democratic regime that respected the individual's independent personality, protected the individual's basic rights and maintained the legal private property rights was taking shape. In ancient Greece, the historical change of deconstructing blood relationship with contractual relationship and replacing royal power with legal power also took place in ancient Rome. Replacing parental rights with civil rights was the key to changing royal power by legal power in ancient Rome.

4.2. Patriarchal Relationship and Contractual Relationship: Differences in the Structure of Human Relations

The predominant social relationships in traditional Chinese society were characterized by patriarchal and kinship structures rooted in a patrilineal system. Since the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, the patriarchal system had gone through ups and downs, and its blood ties had never been broken, which had become the cornerstone of human relations of patriarchy and autocracy. The self-sufficient natural economy formed the geographical characteristics of living together, and the social mobility of the population was very small, which naturally was not conducive to the development of industry and commerce and free trade, and therefore did not form the relatively developed industry and commerce in the city-state period of ancient Greece and Rome. The integration of agriculture and cottage industries into a natural economy emerged as the predominant economic structure in ancient China, attributed to its comprehensive self-sufficiency, inherent adaptability, and localized production and consumption patterns. On the one hand, the self-sufficient natural economy provided fertile soil for the birth of patriarchal system. On the other hand, patriarchal system provided strong social ethical support for the development of natural economy with the natural network of consanguineous human relations and unshakable paternity.

Under the patriarchal family system, individuals were entirely governed by the principles of the Five Relationships. The Five Relationships referred to the following: father and son shared familial bonds, rulers and subjects observed right-

eousness, husbands and wives maintained distinct roles, seniors and juniors adhered to proper order, and friends uphold trusted. Among them, the relationship between father and son, husband and wife, the relationship between old and young were based on the family relationship, and the relationship between king and minister and friends were a quasi-family relationship. As Mr. Feng Youlan said, *The Chinese social system is the family system. In traditional China, social relations are classified into five types: king and minister, father and son, brothers, husband and wife, and friends. Of these five kinds of social relations, three are family relations, and the other two are not family relations, but can also be regarded as an extension of family relations. For example, the relationship between the king and the subject is regarded as the relationship between father and son; Friends are seen as brothers* [13]. In a patriarchal society bound by kinship and founded on paternal authority, The Three Obediences and Five Constants served as overarching principles to uphold the feudal hierarchical order, and filial piety was the fundamental principle running through it.

In the period of Greek city-state system, the contractual economy based on industry and commerce was initially formed, and the contractual relationship based on the equality of rights and obligations constituted an important aspect of the social relations of city-state. The contractual economy in the city-state period of ancient Greece had the following two characteristics.

Firstly, it was based on legal authority, not on paternal authority. As mentioned above, deconstructing blood relationship with contractual relationship and replacing royal power with legal power were the two great changes that led ancient Greece and Rome to civilized society. The replacement of royal power by legal power was closely related to the dissolution of family patriarchy by legal power. In ancient Greece and Rome, patriarchy was the supreme parental power, which had a wide range and lifelong nature, and belonged to the scope of family law system adjustment. *The objects of the early patriarchy included slaves and free men who were subject to the paternal authority, livestock used for haulage or loading under the paternal authority, Italian land and certain easements attached to it, and in the era of prevalent patriarchy, it even included the right to sell children (ius vendendi) and the right to live and kill (ius vitae ac necis)* [14]. In the later period of Rome, the law restricted the patriarchy to some extent, entrusting children with certain personal rights and property rights, which gradually weakened the patriarchy. The fact that children obtained the right of marriage autonomy and independent property rights weakened the family patriarchy, and finally deconstructed the social structure with the nature of clan blood. After the establishment of city-state democracy, the rights and obligations of citizens were defined in the form of law. With the continuous development of industry and commerce of the city-state, the increasing frequency of economic exchanges between individuals, and the increase and complexity of commercial exchanges between the city-state and

other countries, it was inevitable to standardize the responsibilities, rights and interests of the two parties in the form of legally effective contracts, thus gradually forming a new social and economic relationship, that was the contractual relationship, which became the basis of all social relations of the city-state. Maine pointed out, *what gradually replaces the form of interrelation of rights and obligations derived from the family is a contract between individuals* [15]. *The movement of all progressive societies, up to this point, is a movement from status to contract* [15]. Contractual economy was the economic source of legal rights, and legal rights became the cornerstone of rights in contractual economy.

Secondly, the contractual economy was characterized by contractual relationships as the foundation, rather than kinship ties. Maine highlighted in *Ancient Law*, *There is one point in which the movements of all progressive societies concur. Throughout its evolution, this progression is marked by the gradual dissolution of familial ties and their replacement with the expansion of individual responsibilities. The individual has consistently supplanted the family as the fundamental unit in civil law* [15]. *The relationship that emerges is the contract* [15]. From the 8th century BC to the 6th century BC, slavery became prevalent across numerous Greek city-states, undermining the independent economic status of the original tribal communities. The economic and political structures that emerged, grounded in the slave mode of production, dismantled the kinship ties within these tribes. Gradually, contractual economic relationships, rooted in private property, began to take shape. As the city-states rose and the contractual economy initially developed, individual autonomy progressively strengthened. The dissolution of traditional kinship networks led to a growing separation of individuals from their familial bonds, reducing their reliance on the family unit. Ultimately, the establishment of the city-state supplanted the identity of clan membership with that of citizenship. Through legal frameworks, the city-state delineated the rights and duties of its citizens, thereby fostering the ongoing advancement of the contract economy and commercial activities.

4.3. Father's Kindness and Filial Piety, Equality and Friendship: The Difference of Intergenerational Ethical Relations

Father's kindness and son's filial piety summarized the basic characteristics of intergenerational ethical relations in Chinese patriarchal society, and it was also the fundamental principle to realize the virtuous cycle of intergenerational ethical relations. Father's kindness was the moral requirement for parents and elders, including the moral obligation to raise children and teach them to become talented. Filial piety was the gratitude of children to their parents and elders, and it was more important than father's kindness.

Filial piety was the core of Confucian ethics and the foundation of traditional Chinese morality. It was the most fundamental ethical principle and moral norm in Chinese traditional

society, and the moral foundation of intergenerational ethical relations. Confucius said, *Filial piety is the foundation of benevolence* [16]. Filial piety was the foundation of Confucius' benevolence thought. Mencius established the foundation of human nature for promoting filial piety through his theory of innate goodness. Mencius noted, *Each person cherishes their own and nurtures their own, leading to a harmonious world* [3]. Mencius advocated the extension of filial piety from the family to society. He said, *We care for the elderly as we do our own elders, and the young as we do our own children, so that the world is under control* [3]. It was evident that the concept of great love in Confucianism was grounded in filial piety, which was fostered through the intergenerational ethical interactions of paternal kindness and filial devotion.

In traditional Chinese society, father-son relationship was the foundation of family relationship and the epitome of other social relations, and was the origin of all human relations. On the one hand, the intergenerational ethical relationship of father's kindness and filial piety was supported by religious ethics of filial piety; On the other hand, it was just a realistic reflection of filial piety in the family-based social life, which strengthened the son of man's filial duty to his parents and elders, brought paternity into full play, and had a profound impact on the family pension model in modern China.

Filial piety and foster parents were also esteemed as family ethical virtues in ancient Western societies especially in ancient Greece and Rome, with the equality of intergenerational ethical relationships constituting a significant aspect of social relations during the era of ancient Greek city-states. Hesiod wrote in *Work and Days*, *Children do not respect their rapidly aging parents, and often insult them with evil words, and these sinful people do not know how to fear gods. These people who did not repay their elderly parents for their upbringing will be severely punished by Zeus* [17]. Socrates had warned his eldest son, Lomploc, not to be angry with his mother, because it was very difficult for her to give birth to children, and her harshness was motivated by kindness. We should remember the kindness of parents, because parents had to pay countless efforts to bring up their children. *The state took no notice of other forms of ingratitude, neither prosecuting them, nor whether a man was grateful for the favour he had received, but imposed heavy penalties on those who did not respect their parents, and disallowed him from the responsibility of leadership, for it was considered impossible for such a man to offer a pious sacrifice to the state, nor will he discharge his other duties honorably and justly* [18]. The Athenian statutes of civil debate stated that anyone who had beaten his parents, who had failed to support them, and who had squandered the property he had inherited from his parents, could not speak at the Assembly. It can be seen that the democratic political system of Athens contained the moral requirements of respecting and supporting parents.

Plato believed that all that a man had belongs to those who gave birth to him, and that he should serve them with all his might, *First with property, then with body and mind, and with*

these give the old men that which they so desperately need at their age: To repay them for all the eager attention and care they have devoted to him, the long-term 'loan' they gave him as a child [19]. Plato said, *The old are always much more respected than the young, and this is the same among gods and men, so long as they still wish to live in safety and happiness. Everyone in our society should show respect for his elders by his words and deeds. Beating anyone old enough to be their parent must always be avoided [19].* Assaulting an elderly person should be tried for assault, and if he lost the case, he must serve not less than one year in prison.

Aristotle said, In matters of food, we must help our parents before we help anyone else, because we owe them our upbringing. In this respect, it was more honorable if we helped our parents before we help ourselves. According to Aristotle's *Athenian Politics*, the selection of various officials in Athens had to undergo a strict qualification examination, one of the important contents of which was to examine whether the candidate treated his parents well [20]. This kind of moral qualification examination had some similarities with the system of filial piety in ancient China.

5. Conclusion

The traditional ethics of ancient China and ancient Greece were not only different, but also complementary. This difference and complementarity had an important impact on modern Chinese and Western ethics, especially the ethics of caring for the elderly.

Firstly, the two civilizations established different intergenerational ethical interaction models. The family centered values based on blood ties and the patriarchal based kinship structure had made fatherly love and filial piety the basic principle of intergenerational ethical relationships in traditional Chinese society, thus forming an intergenerational ethical interaction model of nurturing and giving back. In ancient Greek city-states, the contractual ethics based on the equivalence of civil rights and obligations had an important impact on the modern western intergenerational ethical relations of equality and fraternity, and formed the relay model of intergenerational wealth flow and intergenerational emotional return model with distance.

Secondly, the long-standing family-care system in China and the state-managed eldercare system in the West illustrated how moral models influenced social policy. In China, family remained the core of elderly support well into the modern era. Meanwhile, the West, grounded in contractual ethics and civil equality, created public welfare systems that assume collective responsibility for eldercare, legally enforced through the state rather than families.

From ancient Chinese patriarchal society to modern Chinese society, the family had always been the primary setting for the moral care of the elderly, and filial piety and providing for the elderly had become an unshirkable responsibility of the

younger generations. In modern China, elderly care had become an important responsibility of the government and a common responsibility of the whole society. The moral concept of respecting the elderly and caring for the elderly also existed in ancient Greece, but due to the destruction of primitive clan blood relations by contractual relationships, the replacement of patriarchy and royal power by legal rights, and the replacement of family ownership of property by individual private ownership, blood relations did not become the most important social relationship for individuals, and elderly care was not a legal obligation of offspring. Therefore, a family elderly care model was not formed, and it was impossible to produce a systematic ethical culture of elderly care. However, the contractual ethics based on legal rights laid the social ethical foundation for the rise and development of modern Western social pension security systems, and also laid the historical groundwork for the institutional ethical construction of moral care models for the elderly.

Finally, The traditional ethics of ancient China and ancient Greece were complementary, providing an important moral basis for the integration and optimization of modern ethical systems in China and the West. The interplay between these two kinds of traditional ethics provided a valuable resource for addressing modern challenges in aging societies. At present, China is the country with the largest aging population in the world. With the wave of silver hair sweeping the world, how to improve the quality of life of the aging population has become a major issue that China and western aging countries are facing together. Optimizing the design of institutional ethics with interest ethics, institutional ethics, care ethics, health ethics, and end-of-life ethics as the core is the fundamental way to solve ethical issues in an aging society. The traditional ethics of ancient China and ancient Greece have both differences and complementarity, and their differences are the historical and cultural roots of the differences in modern Chinese and Western elderly ethics; Its complementarity is the ethical and cultural gene that achieves the integration of the two and effectively promotes the optimization and development of the elderly ethics system in modern China and the Western countries.

Author Contributions

Liu Xizhen: Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – original draft

Zou Linxi: Investigation, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



Liu Xizhen is a professor at North China University of Technology, the School of Marxism. Doctor of Philosophy. Her research interests include Ethics, Applied Ethics, Political Philosophy, Marxist Theory. She has presided over the completion of two National Social Science Fund projects, published over 40 papers in journals such as Morality and Civilization and Ethics Research, and authored the monographs Research on Health Equity in Aging, Comparative Ethics of Aging in China and the West, and Studies on Aging Ethics.



Zou Linxi is a graduate student at North China University of Technology, the School of Marxism. Her research interests include Jurisprudence, Marxist Theory. In October 2021, she won the first prize in the Public English Group of the National English Writing Competition at the FLTRP·ETIC Cup; In February 2022, she won the second prize for Micro Films (Plot-based) in the 8th Beijing Municipal Education Commission's Excellent Legal Education Works Collection Activity for Teachers and Students.

Research Field

Liu Xizhen: Ethics, Applied Ethics, Political Philosophy, Marxist Theory

Zou Linxi: Jurisprudence, Marxist Theory