



Canadian Social Science
Vol. 10, No. 2, 2014, pp. 56-61
DOI:10.3968/4462

ISSN 1712-8056[Print]
ISSN 1923-6697[Online]
www.cscanada.net
www.cscanada.org

Preliminary Analysis of YANG Changji's Thoughts on Ethics

ZONG Hao^{[a],*}; YANG Rui^[a]

^[a]Politics and Public Management College, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Supported by National Social Science Fund Project: The Research on Construction and Innovation of Marxism Ecological Philosophy System (NO.12BZX026).

Received 12 January 2014; accepted 28 March 2014
Published online 15 April 2014

Abstract

Yang Changji is a famous educator and ethicist in modern time. His ethics thought combines the West and Eastern ethics as a whole, gathering each school's advantages. This paper makes a preliminary study on the ethics thought of Yang Changji, summarizes the main content of his ideas, evaluates its ideological value, and criticizes the deficiency. Moreover, it analyses the effect of his thoughts on Mao Zedong and other revolutionists.

Key words: Yang Changji; Modern ethics thoughts

Zong, H., & Yang, R. (2014). Preliminary Analysis of YANG Changji's Thoughts on Ethics. *Canadian Social Science*, 10(2), 56-61. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/4462>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4462>

INTRODUCTION

Yang Changji (1871-1920), whose alias is Huasheng and courtesy name is Huaizhong, was also known as the Sir Bancang. As a famous educator in modern China and ethics, his ethics thoughts combine western and eastern, while inheriting Chinese traditional culture, he accepts the western advanced culture and ideology, creates his own unique cultural ethical thoughts while fully criticizes China's traditional ethics culture, and made a great achievement for China's modern enlightenment.

His thoughts include thoughts of family ethics, personal ethics, self-cultivation and virtue ethics, political ethics and educational ethics. Yang Changji's ethical thoughts have the characteristics both of Chinese and Western ethics, expressed in the content both with the traditional part of Chinese ethics, and the part of western ethical culture. Yang Changji preferred using Western conceptions to gaze at Chinese ethical culture comparatively, absorbed some essence of western culture, criticize bad habits of Chinese ethical culture, and dig out the ethical culture suitable for current events.

1. YANG CHANGJI'S ETHICAL THOUGHTS

1.1 Combination of Chinese and Western Ethics

After the failure of the reform Wu Xu, Yang Changji studied in Japan for six years, then studied in the UK for three years, and later stayed in Germany in for nine months. He is familiar with the basic geology western ethical thoughts, and taught the history of western ethics when he came back to China, which is a brand new baptism of the traditional ethics culture in China. He is familiar with western ethics' emphasis on the rational judgment and the reality of ethical culture of individualism.

Yang Changji appreciated the ethics positively, but also criticized the asceticism and hedonism ethics in western ethics.

Asceticism, confirms the rational value, hope to prevent the move of affection, we could not refute it; but preferring ratiom and deputing affection and regarding they are not compatible, which is even more wrong. Improper behaviors resist sensibility by ratiom to reach a certain goal. To achieve a certain purpose, there should be corporation of the two parties. (Yang, 2009, p.249)

The asceticism represses emotions and desires by ration and belittles the role of emotions, and the correct behavior should be the corporation of ration and affection.

Yang Changji also criticizes hedonism:

Hedonism, also have difficulties which can not be avoided. Happy person, there should be a non-constructive doctrine, setting theory for people to pursuit of the nature of happy. People who advocate hedonism, say the goal of any behavior is happy, in fact it is not; we are not people pursuing happy specially in our whole life, but we are people pursuing things above meeting the requirements of happiness. Our purpose of behavior, often in behavior (activity) itself, not in happiness; happy person has some desire during the activity is going, if there is no block when the activity completed, happiness is the spirit he has. The happiness of someone is not necessary for others; and the sadness of someone is not necessary for others also; so we can not set happy as the ideal of morality, neither set it as standard of criticism. (Yang, 2009, p.253)

That is, hedonism as sensitive things cannot be used as a judgment standard for judging a behavior is moral or not. Yang Changji also criticized our traditional ethics culture influenced by the idea; in family ethics, he advocated the abolition of polygamy, advocating monogamy. He regards all human beings are born free and equal, giving people respect of rational and humanity. In the individual morality, he advocates ration and freedom; cultivate gentleman's virtue, and do good deeds.

1.2 Subjective Idealism

Yang Changji was influenced by Neo Confucianism of Song and Ming Dynasty, advocated the importance of people's heart in personal morality. He praised the idea of physicists' uphold justice annihilate desire, and once pointed out that "there has been inexorable doom, not the intention to kill, which is Yin increasing and Yang perishing in destiny, and it is desire wining and ration dying in the heart", "pursuing desire is bitter and following ration is bliss". He advocated holding peace in heart to abandon some material and burden, following the ration and giving up desire.

And in the specific morality, Yang Changji agreed with Lu Jiuyuan's "simple Kung Fu". Jiuyuan advocated "the universe is my heart, and my heart is the universe." That means, it does not need much social practice in cultivating morality, we only need to concentrate on cultivating and conserving conscience, can achieve the realm mixed with the universe as a whole. Lu Jiuyuan also named it as "seeking rest assured", that means calmly eliminating all distractions.

The action of the heart declares because the words, but it can keep silent, the main static work obtains big part of it. Clever words please people and gossip kills time, both disturb the peace mind which should be quitted. Worthy in old times said, we must story energy, because it is tired when less energetic so will be reluctant and insincerity, which can be seen in greeting guest, how about important things? There are four aspects in preserving health: the first is mercy. Man's compassion exists everywhere. There could not be unkindness in the world and people's life can not live without the spirit of joy. The second is frugality. Seeing,

listening, speaking and acting, diet and clothing, thinking and reading, all need to be frugal to make room for spirit. Correcting anger and curb desire are about frugality.

The third is the happiness. Being clear about trouble things in the world, so where could the troubles settle down? About improving virtue and refining achievements they can not do without regret, but do not arrest, arresting makes it hard to last for a long time. Sage wisdom start at respect, respect and keep on doing, there will be happy. The fourth is respect. Spirit fainted, like evil theft my thoughts, because it can not life integrity with ambition, so need to know worry, hardworking, alert and strict, which is the method of sanitation, you can carry enlightenment when read "Yi". (Wang & Yang, 2008, p.3)

That presents the importance of holding breath and keeping peace for human's morality. In addition, Yang Changji also advocates Wang Yangming's conscience theory:

There is a principle of nature, and principle of human, man should deeply exam the principle of nature, can not bound himself with the principle of human. People who study the phenomenon of nature to get knowledge admire celestial beings; people who study routines admire sages. Admiring sages is not good as admiring celestial beings, and famous teachers are not good as nature, then will know it is hard to reach Lu and Wang's judicious judgment. Lu Xiangshan said all the six classics are his footnote, Wang Yangming advocated the conscience of science, neither of them bounded themselves with principles set by human set, and deeply exam the science of nature.

Thus, Yang Changji's ethical thought has subjective idealism.

1.3 The Universal Value of Behaviors

Yang Changji proposes cultivating personal morality also master proposes cultivating social morality. As mentioned before, in the individual's virtue theory, Yang Changji advocated kindness, generosity, honesty and bravery, in the social theory of virtue, he advocated the heart of public and aspiration of saving the country.

That is,

When people were born, they have five ethical concerns, and have responsibilities can not be escaped for the family, for the community, and for the country. If their country is on the brink of peril, it is hard to be conscientious and responsible, man can not be sufficient if he has not talent and ambition of the ultra world. Man can not accomplish something to the society if he has not ambitious planning for century and undeterred perseverance.

He emphasized on the relationship between the people and state, and national peril is a person's responsibility which can not be shirked, the individual must take great virtue, built the great power to save the fate of the country.

He also thought,

I view gentlemen in the world, there are who are not regretful being killed and leaving their families. They want to live, but they really do not want to harm the world for themselves. When there is a disaster, being killed to save the whole family is the hope of dutiful sons; when there is a disaster in the world, being killed to save the whole world is the hope of benevolent people. People all love their lives, but how about people who are willing

to die! They can't endure not to die. Viper Stings hand, and man decides to cut the wrist, eh does not dislike his wrist, it is only cutting it can save the body. The benevolent people, treat the world as his body, and treat themselves as wrists and with their eternal sincere loving the world which can not love themselves and families, though the body is dead, the world being saved, and the benevolent people could have peace of mind.

He emphasized the spirit of sacrifice saving the nation, which is dying a martyr.

In political ethics, he also emphasized the importance of saving the country by morality. His ethical thought is a kind of pursuit of the value of the generality or universality, which is reflected in great value for the countries in crisis or development.

1.4 Emphasis on Temporality

Yang Changji's ethical thought and closely combined with current China, China was in chaos at that time, with warlords, bureaucratic corruption, and extreme decline of social mora. Yang Changji went abroad to study in such circumstances, trying to find a way to save the social moral crisis.

He pointed out that:

The social and moral corruption of our country origins since long ago and it is the result of the thousands of years' autocracy. China experienced many revolutions but the government has not improved. There were few outstanding monarchs and ministers, and fatuous, greedy and violent people often take the power so as the dynasties continued, chaos superposed, and vulgar of fawning upon the rich and powerful persons and bribery was formed and continued. (Wang & Yang, 1983, p.46)

The present bureaucratic corruption is a bad habit of thousands of years. Yang Changji's ethical thought is more about practical operation, he claims ruling the country by morality and law in the governance of the country, morality is the base of law, and also the basis of national actions, so as to promote the stable development of a country. In the family ethics, Yang Changji criticizes Chinese old customs in traditional feudal society, "There is equality of personality, and there should not be slaves in the society. Concubine is also a kind of slave, concubine can not be compared with wife in social communication, and her personality is incomplete. It remains concubinage in the society, which has been deprived part of human rights in the society, we should think about it. And concubinage is not single-minded for love and raised family misfortune, there are countless examples made by the bad system, so need to change it". Thus, Yang Changji's family ethics thought can solve the contradiction of realities, focusing on the function of moral practice.

2. VALUE OF YANG CHANGJI'S ETHICAL THOUGHTS

2.1 Criticism to Chinese and Western Ethics

Yang Changji elaborated in his paper that western ethics generally pay attention to personal ethical

thought, and China pays attention to the overall effect of collectivism ethics. Yang Changji criticized western ethics of asceticism and hedonism, considered "asceticism suppresses affection with ration, never moved by desire as happiness, which reverse the human nature." He pointed out that asceticism suppress affection with ration is a violation to human nature.

Hedonism, also called happy doctrine. This doctrine believes people's aim is happy, and take happy as standard to judge behaviors. When someone judges behaviors, it does not need to consider motivation, only need to ask whether it is happy or not. (Wang & Yang, 2008, p.141)

The basic point of hedonism is taking happy as a standard judging anything. "I try to evaluate briefly: pursuing happy and avoiding distress is animal's instinct, and human is not a exception. If morality is not a humiliation of personality, we can not deny the ethical value of happy" (Yang, 2009, p.253). That is, pursuing happy and avoiding distress is animal's instinct, human has personality and can not use happy as criteria standard of ethical value. And the correct moral behaviors should be humane and rational behaviors.

Yang Changji takes the attitude of criticism for China ethics. In the *Treatment*,

China's vulgar, only gambling is great enough to increase consumers? Gambling is a game. The impulse of game belongs to man, which use property to gamble, is harmful to treatment. Recently the gambling spreads throughout the country, only very few people do not play it, the so-called personage are not exceptions... People say that, the final outcome of Britain and German's competition depending on the national productivity, but actually depending on the citizens' morality. The decline in productivity is due to the moral decay. (Wang & Yang, 2008, p.136)

Westerners insist in conjugal relation, husband and wife live together and does not disturb by parents and brothers and sisters. Couples often live together, and there are no things like regarding profit higher than emotions. The husband can not have concubine, if the husband has an affair, wife may request the divorce. When wife dies, the husband was in mourning for two years. I heard the local people remarry only after wife's death for a few months, which is superficial love and not benevolent. And new wife and her relatives do not care. Women can not be independent, and depend on man on everything, which is sad. (Wang & Yang, 2008, p.111)

One of the bad habits in China is gambling, officers, noble lords, and civilian population are infected. Moral decline is very serious in modern China. In family and marriage, there was polygamy and the entire clan lives together, and the women can not be independent. And the right ethics should be equal among man and woman, and carry out monogamous.

2.2 Advocating Ethics of Freedom, Equality, and Moral Autonomy

Yang Changji is affected by western ethics, and he raises ethical thoughts of freedom and equality, and moral autonomy. The freedom and equality mainly manifests the

improvement in the relationship between family system and family members.

China's three cardinal guides flay young people but not elders, which is real brutal. The father should be merciful and son should be fealty. Elders can not contempt youths' free wills and independent personality. People know shame to improve the virtue, the pressing is not proper for education. (Wang & Yang, 1983, p.71)

That is, he proposed the ideas of freedom and equality among the family members.

On the subject of marriage, Yang Changji advocated free marriage. He thought Chinese parents hold children's fate, believe the words of a match-maker, and arrange the marriage of their children, and then children can only endure it lifelong when they are not satisfied with the marriage. "What a pity! Marriage is an important event, they do not ask children and enforce them, which is a sale of human body, and the women have to endure it without legal protection, which is horrible! This is also Chinese savage habit and administrative legislators' intention". He pointed out the compression of China's marriage for women. And the correct marriage should respect the individual freedom, accord with humanitarian spirit, and implement free marriage. It has a great practical value for the change of our marriage conception.

In the ethics of self-reliance, Yang Changji advocates self-reliance and independence, being a person with virtue. In family virtue ethics, Yang Changji argues: "There are many people in family and lack of food, it make the family work hard. There are several aspects. First, do not make the children have the intention relying on parents and brothers. When children are young, provide them with equivalent education, make them professional in one major to earn his own living and not relying on parents and brothers' help." That is, the children's growth can not rely on his parents and brothers, they should live by themselves. Then Yang Changji also proposed that fathers could not have the intention relying on children, neither of the parties can rely on each other, the woman also can not completely dependent on men, they also should have their own business.

In the individual self-cultivation,

There are two righteousnesses in implementation, the perseverance and courage. Courage and perseverance, in fact is one thing. Brave to create and insist to the end need to stand on the force of will. People need to fight in their whole life. People are brave who unremittingly struggle, even though there is no hope to survive. (Wang & Yang, 1983, p.366)

To sum up, sincere is most important, which exists from beginning to the end, there is no object without sincere. People with sincere is the true figure and true knowledge. Sincere cannot be broken by gold and stone, cannot oppose by the world. (Wang & Yang, 1983, p.367)

Person should have perseverance, courage and integrity, in order to better live in the world, being a virtue and moral person still has a great sense of value to our moral cultivating today.

3. THE INSUFFICIENCIES OF YANG CHANGJI'S ETHICAL THOUGHTS

3.1 Lack of Theoretical Logics

Yang Changji's ethical thoughts have a great value, also have obvious limitations. As a moralist in early modern China, he criticized the ethics of our country with the full understanding of western ethical thoughts. But because of restrictions of age, Yang Changji's criticism to the western and China's ethics is lack of certain theoretical logics.

There are often a few points of criticism without detailed arguments. In the criticism of western ethics, the most obvious is criticism for asceticism and hedonism. He pointed out that

Asceticism suppresses feeling with ration, never by the desire of happiness, this reverses the human nature. Happiness is noble as well as bad; the latter should be rejected, and the former does not have reasons to be rejected. This doctrine is rejecting all happiness, is it not serious, and not suitable for reality? People can not be controlled by happiness; but life can not live without happiness; if happiness is removed from life, the life will be tasteless as water. (Yang, 2009, p.149)

Asceticism suppresses emotions with rations, does not move by pleasure or sensitive desire. It is against nature of personality; happiness has distinctions of noble and inferior. Noble happiness should be advocated, and life can not without happiness. Yang Changji did not make a real understanding and complete separation of asceticism, just wrote with a few strokes. While the right thing is, asceticism on one hand is of rational depression, such as the ancient Greek cynic; on another hand is because of my fear, such as religious culture in the fear of God or god. It is suppressing the inner desire by an external condition. But Yang Changji did not give a detailed proof. In Chinese ethics, Yang Changji said, "There are two righteousnesses in implementation, the perseverance and courage. Courage and perseverance, in fact is one thing." (Wang & Yang, 2008, p.247). "Life attitude dedicates Yin, Ren, Liu, Duan. Yin for wisdom, Ren for courage, Liu for mercy and Duan for justice" (Wang & Yang, 2008, p.10). But Yang Changji did not carry out the proof on how to do Yin, Ren, Liu, Duan, and just gave a dogma proposition.

3.2 Emphasis on Individualism

Because of influenced by western ethics, Yang Changji more emphasizes on the role of individualism. Yang Changji criticized the feudal traditional culture in China with this thought, promoted personal concept of freedom and equality, the idea of personal independence, and personal subjective initiative training. This is especially reflected in the criticism of China's traditional views of marriage:

There is strict rule for our men and women, young men and women are not easy to meet. The parents arrange the engagement, children can not intervene. Designed by the

matchmaker, and can not exam matchmaker's empty words, so lots of people are sad about their spouses are not who they want. Because of this, women may die for improper husbands. A worthy man is easy to have wife. Such as men of idiot, disability, disease, or smoke ruffian, there is no hope to get married in West, but they often get beautiful wives in China. (Wang & Yang, 2008, p.114)

Chinese parents often arranged the marriage for their children, bride and groom can not meet before getting married. The west advocates free marriage, free love. In the realization of individual's moral behavior, Yang Changji also advocates the individual virtue, individual's ration and freedom, and the pursuit of a peaceful mind to avoid certain interference from outside, and promote it as a morality of gentleman in the society. But this exaggerated the importance of morality of individualism, in modern chaotic China, the traditional collectivism morality played an important role. In the social with declining morality, promoting individualism morality often can not gain the expected effect. Current research also shows the importance of collectivism or collective morality in the period of society's turmoil, Yang Changji did not explain the importance of collectivism or integrated morality.

4. INFLUENCE OF YANG CHANGJI'S ETHICAL THOUGHTS ON MAO ZEDONG AND OTHER REVOLUTIONISTS

Yang Changji worked in ethics education and teaching after studying abroad and returning to China, the first school he worked in is the Hunan first normal school. At that time, China was in the warlord period, the whole nation faced with the serious problem of domestic trouble and foreign invasion. Influenced by western thoughts, Yang Changji advocates combine the ethics of western and China, emphasized western individualism ethics, advocated personal moral cultivation, live and study rationally, freely and equally; he also emphasized Chinese traditional collectivism culture, which mainly refers to the educational ethics of Chinese traditional collective patriotism. Mao Zedong and Cai Hesen are young and studious students who studied continuously with Yang Changji's guide.

The individual moral thoughts advocated by Yang Changji and brave, perseverance, generosity, benevolence and integrity play an important role in cultivating Mao Zedong's gentleman virtue or sage virtue. He also criticized the traditional view of marriage, advocated free love and marriage of western. He also did the training and education of patriotism, making Chinese saving China's fate, which shocked revolutionists in the generation of Mao Zedong's. Mao Zedong developed Yang Changji's thought in his own writing, "Wang Chuanshan said: a hero without sages is not better than saints, saints have

both morality and skills; hero is lack of morality, but have merits and achievements. Napoleon is hero but not saint" (Mao, 1990, p.589).

Mao Zedong combined saint inside with hero outside, cultivating morality with render meritorious service.

The saint gets the principle, sage gets part of the principle, and fool does not get it Saint knows all, knows past, present and future, he insight into the three realms, such as Confucius knowing hundreds years' knowledge, and Mencius is also a sage, it's not easy for us to explain. The world is huge, the social organizations are very complicated, and has a history of thousands of years, people are too fool to educate. People want to change the world need to change the mind of the world, and not only in the obvious trace. Who can change the mind need to have the essential origin. Today's reform starts from minor matters like the parliament, constitution, president, cabinet, military, industry, and education, all of them are mirror matters. The minor matters are essential and have their origin. If it can not get origin, the minor matters are superfluous faults. (Mao, 1990, p.85)

The chaos of current world is a chaos of people's mind, and we must solve the problem from the fundament. This laid a good foundation for Mao Zedong's revolutionary thoughts.

CONCLUSION

Yang Changji's ethical thought as an important China ethics in modern times, which on one hand emphasized the importance of personal morality, individual virtue and social morality, on another hand also criticized the Chinese traditional family ethics, and raised his political ethics and educational ethics thought. His thoughts gave Chinese of moral decadence with new moral ideal, inspired a number of men and women with high ideals and their ambition, to reach Chinese social unity, unified, sovereignty not being violated and the stability of social order. This ethical thought not only gave the Chinese the great ethical meaning, prompted many men and women with high ideals beginning to think from the foundation of society, saved China's moral decline, and set up patriotic to save China's moral distress. And also has the great value and significance to contemporary China.

There is still a moral decline phenomenon in current China, in the deepening of reform and opening up today and people's material life becoming rich, people tend to have a very secular life due to the impact of adverse aspects of the market economy. The principle of market economy is grasped into real life, and a lot of things tend to pursuit benefit only. A lot of events of moral indifference often can be seen in the society.

Because of the network technology's development and globalization continues to intrusion, some young people's patriotic sentiment for the country is more and more weak. In the morality of individuals, Yang Changji's ethical thoughts advocates that gentlemen need to cultivate

morality, treat integrity, courage, kindness, tolerance, and perseverance as the fundament of their self-cultivation. On the relationship between the individual and the state, he advocated that combine the state and individuals, and there is no home without state, as well as no state without home, and highlights the importance of patriotism education for young people. Therefore, it is still very important and valuable for Yang Changji's ethical thought for today's moral education.

REFERENCES

- Mao, Z. D. (1990). *Mao Zedong's early revolutionary works*. Chinese Communist Party Literature Research Center. (in Chinese)
- Wang, X. G. (2008). *Collected works of Yang Changji*. Hunan Education Press. (in Chinese)
- Wang, X. G. (1983). *Collected works of Yang Changji*. Hunan Education Press. (in Chinese)
- Wang, X. G. (1983). *Yang Changji's works*. Hunan Education Publishing House. (in Chinese)
- Wang, X. G. (2008). *Yang Changji's works*. Hunan Education Publishing House. (in Chinese)
- Yang, C. J. (1978). *Diary of Dahua room*. Hunan People's Press. (in Chinese)
- Yang, C. J. (2009). *Western ethics review*. Times Literature Press. (in Chinese)