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A Study of Two Confucian Scholars and Their Quotation Writings

As we all know, Confucius was a preeminent philosopher, social thinker, political theorist, and educator in ancient China, and also the founder of *the Confucian school* 儒家學派, and was honored as the greatest sage and teacher. And Wang Shouren 王守仁 was also an influential philosopher in *the Ming Dynasty* 明朝, and was representative of *the School of the Mind* 心學. Although these two historical celebrities are rarely discussed together, in the process of studying them, I found that they have many similarities in many aspects. In the following, I will briefly describe the similarities in their life experiences and focus on the analysis of quotation writings that record their teaching content.

Distant Similarity

In 537 BC, a young man of fifteen was determined to study. He resolve upon learning, and this young man was Confucius. Similarly, in 1483, a twelve-year-old young man also set his ambition early. He believed that becoming a sage was more important than the imperial examination, and this aspiring young was Wang Shouren. Not only that, in 481 BC, Confucius' most prized disciple Yan Hui 顏回 died prematurely, which made Confucius extremely sad. By coincidence, in 1518, Wang Shouren's favorite disciple Xu Ai 徐愛 also died prematurely at the age of thirty-one. When Wang Shouren learned of his death, he expressed the same sentiment as Confucius, ‘Heaven is destroying me! Heaven is destroying me! 天喪予! 天喪予!’ In addition, they both had been frustrated in officialdom, and they both chose to return to their hometown to give lectures in their later years. Moreover, their disciples have compiled their teacher's teachings into books, which we know as *the Analects of Confucius* 論語 and *the Chuanxilu* 傳習錄.

All of the above make people feel that even though they are thousands of years apart, and even at such a long time distance, there are still many similarities between them. Below, I will explore and analyze the two classics compiled by their disciples.

Analysis

As for these two classics, in terms of their commonalities, they are both the teacher's teachings recorded by the disciples, and both belong to the quotation writings. But the difference is that *the Analects of Confucius* is generally considered to be the first work of quotations, while *the Chuanxilu* was produced after some changes in the form of quotations. Next, I will explore these two classics with the change of the quotation style as a clue.

First of all, we need to clarify the concept of the word 'quotation', the word 'quotation' first appeared in *the Old Book of Tang* 舊唐書.¹ And quotations are records or excerpts of words and deeds of a person or a group, and it is a verbal product of social languages life practices such as ancient lecturing and preaching.² Therefore, in the history of education at all times and in all countries, there are many educators who would express their thoughts in the way of dialogue to show their understanding of education to the outside world, and the works that use this way of expression are works in the form of quotations.³ The characteristics of quotation writings, one is that the chapters are relatively short, often stating a brilliant viewpoint in just a few words, and therefore it is more enlightening. Another is that its theme is mostly the discussion between teachers and students on a certain issue, and its content is mostly teaching content, so it is also an essential reference book for disciples to cultivate themselves. But at the same time, because the quotation writings are truthful

¹ Zhang Zikai 張子開, *Yuluti Xingcheng Zouyi* 語錄體形成鄒議, Wuhan University Journey 武漢大學學報, 5(2009), 517

² Zhu Keyi 祝克懿, *Yuluti de Yuanqi Fenhua yu Ronghe Kaolun* 語錄體的源起、分化與融合考論, Contemporary Rhetoric 當代修辭學, 4(2020), 63

³ Song Min, Li Shuhua 宋敏、李淑華, *Yuluti Zhuzuo de Tedian Jiqidui Dangdai de Qishi* 語錄體著作的特點及其對當代的啟示, View on Publishing 出版廣角, 10(2016), 80

records of teaching situations and academic debates, although they can show a strong sense of the scene, there are also many dialects and slang. ⁴And for readers who are not familiar with dialect and slang, this can make reading difficult and cause bias in their understanding.

Secondly, after having an overall understanding of the quotation writings, I began to explore the two classics separately. According to *the History of the Han Dynasty* 漢書, ‘As for the Analects, it is the language of Confucius spoken when responding to contemporary figures and answering his disciples, as well as their conversations with him, and what they heard about the master. At the time each disciple made his own record.’⁵ The materials in *the Analects of Confucius* are derived from the notes made by disciples in the course of Confucius’ teaching and daily conversation. Moreover, Guo Yuheng 郭預橫 believed in *the Long Edition of the Ancient Chinese Literature History* 中國古代文學史長編 that the quotation writings as a style was first created by *the Analects of Confucius*. Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 also noted in *the Handout on the Study of Ancient Chinese History* 中國上古史研究講義 that the earliest existing quotation writings are actually *the Analects of Confucius*. Thus it can be seen that *the Analects of Confucius*, as a valuable spiritual treasure in the history of Chinese education, can also be said to be the earliest quotation writings in China.⁶ As for the reasons for the creation of *the Analects of Confucius* can be summarized as the rise of private schools, the expansion of the educated community, and the gradual popularization of the concept of ‘Transmits but does not innovate.述而不作’⁷. In terms of its content, in the book *A History of Chinese classical scholarship, volume i*, Professor honey said, ‘Out of 495 verses in the Analects, 347 record Confucius stating

⁴ Yang Yuhua 楊玉華, *Yuluti yu Zhongguo Gudai Baihua Xueshu* 語錄體與中國古代白話學術, Sichuan University Journey 四川大學學報, 3(1999), 108

⁵ Honey, David B. *A History of Chinese classical scholarship, volume i, zhou: confucius, the six classics, and scholastic transmission*, (Washington: Academica Press, 2021), p.88.

⁶ Liu Zhanzhe 劉湛哲, *Cong Yuluti dao Yulu Xianxiang* 從語錄體到語錄現象, Master thesis of Jinan University 暨南大學碩士學位論文, 2012, 3

⁷ Honey, David B. *A History of Chinese classical scholarship, volume i, zhou: confucius, the six classics, and scholastic transmission*, p.116.

something.’⁸ Therefore, each chapter in *the Analects of Confucius* is relatively independent, and there is a lack of contextual connection between chapters and sentences.⁹ However, these simple and concise statements summarize Confucius’ teachings into aphorisms and aphorisms, which inspire future generations. These sentences are still very kind to read. Many of these sentences have become idioms and are still found in written and spoken languages.¹⁰

Then, due to the influence of Confucianism and Zen Buddhist quotations, the quotation style became popular after *the Song Dynasty* 宋朝. From the perspective of book naming alone, there are two hundred and fifteen kinds of books with the name of *lu* 錄 included in *the Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書, accounting for more than 42%.¹¹ This is because, with the rising status of Confucian classics, in the practice of education, teachers were required to impart knowledge easily and effectively, and in the practice of learning, students were expected to master the knowledge quickly and effectively, which became the demand of students under the examination system at that time. The quotations of Neo-Confucianism in *the Song Dynasty* just meet this demand.¹² In addition, inspired by Zen Buddhism, Neo-Confucianists built academies such as Bailu, Shigu, Yingtian, and Yuelu to promote their theories. They used simple and easy language to talk about classics. These questions and answers were recorded and compiled by their disciples and became quotation writings.¹³ Moreover, the development of the printing industry provided a high degree of technical support for the preaching and propagation of the Neo-Confucianists, and the quotation writings played a very important role in the dissemination of Neo-Confucianism.¹⁴ In addition

⁸ Honey, David B. *A History of Chinese classical scholarship, volume i, zhou: confucius, the six classics, and scholastic transmission*, p.189-190.

⁹ Wang Xiangchen, Liu Hong 王祥辰、柳宏, *Lunyu Yuluti Mohuxing Tanwei* 《論語》語錄體模糊性探微, *Wenjiao Ziliao* 文教資料, 16(2015), 1

¹⁰ Yang Yuhua 楊玉華, *Yuluti yu Zhongguo Gudai Baihua Xueshu* 語錄體與中國古代白話學術, 108

¹¹ Liu Zhanzhe 劉湛哲, *Cong Yuluti dao Yulu Xianxiang* 從語錄體到語錄現象, 8

¹² Li Juan 李娟, *Songdai Lixue Yulu de Boxing yu Chuanbo* 宋代理學語錄的勃興與傳播, *Lanzhou Xuekan* 蘭州學刊, 9(2012), 59

¹³ Zhang Zikai 張子開, *Yuluti Xingcheng Zouyi* 語錄體形成鄒議, 520

¹⁴ Chen Lisheng 陳立勝, *Lixuejia yu Yuluti* 理學家與語錄體, *Shehui Kexue* 社會科學, 1(2015), 142

to the brevity and colloquialism of the quotations of the Pre-Qin scholars, the quotations of Confucianism in *the Song Dynasty* also have their own unique characteristics. One of them is that it has highly didactic, which originates from the educational nature of Neo-Confucianism quotations. This is why there are many metaphors and questioning sentences in the quotation writings, and targeted education is carried out for different students. The language used in these works is inspirational, admonishing, illuminating, and alarming.¹⁵ In addition, the quotation writings of Neo-Confucianists show a fresh and lively feature, which is because these works are mostly the actual records of lectures and academic discussions in the academy. In order to make it easy for the listener to comprehend, the lecturers use a variety of metaphors, and the language is not too profound but logical.¹⁶ This allows the listener to inadvertently accept the views of the lecturers, which is a wonderful and natural state.¹⁷

Next, although the Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism was divided into the two camps of Cheng-Zhu and Lu-Wang, the way of teaching and discussing the Tao in the plain and understandable oral language is the same, and this feature is also evident in *the Chuanxilu*. In addition, Wang Shouren pays much attention to the systematic nature of his treatises, and he often starts a discussion on a single topic, forming a larger group of discourses rather than a scattered dialogue structure. There are also some concise scene descriptions in *the Chuanxilu*, This question-and-answer structure has a strong situational color, which conveys the aesthetic effect of a happy and harmonious discussion between teachers and students.¹⁸ The *Chuanxilu* not only includes Wang Shouren's Q&A quotations and the collection of letters, but also is an academic that explains the classics of Confucianism.¹⁹

¹⁵ Li Juan 李娟, *Songdai Lixue Yulu de Boxing yu Chuanbo* 宋代理學語錄的勃興與傳播, 56-57

¹⁶ Yang Yuhua 楊玉華, *Yuluti yu Zhongguo Gudai Baihua Xueshu* 語錄體與中國古代白話學術, 109

¹⁷ Guan Guiyang 官貴羊, *Yuluti de Jizhong Xingtai ji Zuoyong* 語錄體的幾種形態及作用, *Anhui Wenxue* 安徽文學, 12(2011), 144

¹⁸ Huan Jianxin 華建新, *Chuanxilu de Wenxue Jiazhi Chutan* 《傳習錄》的文學價值初探, *Journal of Ningbo University* 寧波大學學報, 1(2011), 44

¹⁹ Wang Xuequn 汪學群, *Wangyangming Chuanxilu dui Rujia Jingdian de Quanah* 王陽明《傳習錄》

Moreover, the *Chuanxilu* also systematically discusses the basic proposition of *the School of the Mind*, which is the quotations work of *the School of the Mind*, marking the transformation of the topic of ancient quotation writings from multi-dimensional to thematic.²⁰

Comparison and Conclusion

From the above analysis of the two classics, it is clear that there are many similarities between the two classics from the perspective of the quotation writings, as well as differences due to different social backgrounds. In fact, there are other connections between these two classics. Simply put, the title of *the Chuanxilu* comes from *the Analects of Confucius*. Moreover, as far as the contents of the book are concerned, many of the questions are asked by the disciples about the original sentences of the relevant chapters of *the Analects of Confucius*, and then after Wang Shouren would interpret the contents of *the Analects of Confucius* with the theory of *the School of the Mind*. For example, when Wang Shouren interprets *the Analects of Confucius*, he often injected the perspective of *zhiliangzhi* 致良知 into it, which means that we should make constant efforts to purify our minds of selfish desires and restore our original innate knowledge. In the chapter of ‘The superior man in the world’ in the chapter of Li Ren, the chapter of ‘There may be those who act without knowing why’ in the chapter of Shuer, and the chapter of ‘If a man take no thought about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand’ in the chapter of Wei Linggong, he interpreted them all from the perspective of *zhiliangzhi*.

In conclusion, although these two great philosophers lived in different times and social backgrounds, they both sincerely wanted to benefit students, and revealed from their plain and concise language, illuminating the way forward for ancient and modern people. In my opinion, the distant similarities between them are not only their

對儒家經典的詮釋, Mingshi Yanjiu Luncong 明史研究論從, 1(2014), 175

²⁰ Huan Jianxin 華建新, *Chuanxilu de Wenxue Jiazhi Chutan* 《傳習錄》的文學價值初探, 43

life experiences or their quotation writings, but also their sincere mind that they and other ancient sages shared, all for the benefit of everyone.

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