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A brief discussion on the connotation of Xunzi's thought of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature 『化性起偽』’

(2835 words)

Chapter One - Preamble

As a representative figure of Confucianism at the end of the Warring States Period, Xunzi gathered the essence of previous thoughts, creatively developed Confucianism, and formed an ideological and theoretical system with his own characteristics. The thought of Xunzi involves politics, economy, culture and other aspects, and has great significance to the historical and cultural research of the pre-Qin period. Xunzi's thought is close to his exploration and thinking of human nature. Among this, the idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ is an important part of Xunzi's ideological and theoretical system, which is also an unavoidable part of contemporary scholars' exploration of Xunzi's thoughts. Exploring the connotation of Xunzi's thought of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ will not only help contemporary academic researchers to understand the connotation of Xunzi's thought on a deeper level but also help transform theory into practice and achieve the ideal state of ‘unity of knowledge and action’.

This essay will start from the origin of the idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’, and further explore its inner meaning, practical methods and ultimate goals, and the value of this thought, in order to have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Xunzi's thought.

Chapter Two - A preliminary exploration of the thought

The in-depth exploration of any idea requires sorting out the development context of the idea and tracing its roots back to the germination and initial ideology. Therefore, when exploring Xunzi's thought of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature', it is necessary to place it in the historical and social background, and think about the origin of the idea from many angles, then make a preliminary and reasonable interpretation of its inner meaning.

2.1 The origin of the thought

The end of the Warring States period in which Xunzi lived is an important period for the study of ancient Chinese history, social and academic thought, and is also the main source of his thought of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature'.

First, during this period, the Zhou royal family had declined and lost its governability over surrounding areas and subordinate forces. The old hierarchic system and social structure gradually fell. The feudal princes were fighting against each other, the society was unrest, and the situation of falling ceremonies day by day appeared, which resulted in the state that

When contentions about territory are the ground on which they fight, they slaughter men till the fields are filled with them. When some struggle for a city is the ground on which they fight, they slaughter men till the city is filled with them.¹

Under this situation, Xunzi put forward the idea of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature' to curb the excessive power desires of the feudal princes and maintain the stability of the social structure.

Secondly, although affected by war, the economy at the end of the Warring States Period was

¹ James Legge, 'Li Lau Part I' 離婁上, in *The Works of Mencius in The Chinese Classics*, Vol.II (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2011), p. 305.

still at a high level of development. During this period, ironware was gradually spread in agricultural production, promoting the development of the agricultural economy, and at the same time driving the prosperity of handicrafts and commerce.² While the prosperity of the commercial economy also affected people's way of thinking. Pursuing profits became the main survival goal of people under the social background at that time. Conflicts between people continued and social order was disrupted. Therefore, Xunzi's idea of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature' is also his way to find the method.

Finally, the collapse of the original social system and the development of social productive forces both promoted the development of thought and culture at that time. Academics were no longer the privilege of the aristocratic class, the objects of education were moved downwards, and the contention of hundreds of schools of thought began to emerge. The idea of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature' was also an innovation and development of the theories of Xunzi's school at that time.

2.2 Original nature and acquired nature

To understand the true meaning of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature', we must combine the text to make a reasonable explanation of 'original nature' and 'acquired nature' in Xunzi's ideological and theoretical system, rather than making assumptions without evidence.

Xunzi once mentioned: 'What characterizes a man from birth is called his "nature" ... what

² This conclusion can be found in many Dissertations, two of which are selected here for reference:

Tao Juanjuan 陶娟娟, *Lun Xunzi huaxingqiwei sixiang* 論荀子的『化性起偽』思想, (Nanjing: Nanjing shifan daxue zhongguo zhexue shuoshilunwen, 2019), pp. 6-7.

Chen Qian 陳倩, *Lun Xunzi de deysixiang jiqi dangdaijiazhi* 論荀子的德育思想及其當代價值, (Shijiazhuang: Hebei keji daxue sixiangzhengzhi jiaoyu shuoshilunwen, 2011), p. 7.

from birth is effortless and spontaneous are called “nature”³. Therefore, for Xunzi, the most important definition of the concept of ‘original nature’ is that a person is born with, an innate and naturally revealed. However, Xunzi’s explanation of ‘original nature’ is not limited to this.

In *Man’s Nature is Evil*, Xunzi said:

Now, it is the inborn nature of man that when hungry he desires something to eat, that when cold he wants warm clothing, and that when weary he desires rest — such are essential qualities inherent in his nature.⁴

In addition, *Of Honor and Disgrace* also mentioned:

when hungry, they desire food; when cold, they desire to be warm; when exhausted from toil, they desire rest; and they all desire benefit and hate harm. Such is the nature that men are born possessing. They do not have to await development before they become so ... The eye distinguishes white from black, the beautiful from the ugly. The ear distinguishes sounds and tones as to their shrillness or sonority ... These, too, are part of the nature that man is born possessing, that he does not have to develop.⁵

If the ‘nature’⁶ involved in the above sentence is simply understood as ‘instinct’, that obviously does not make sense. This kind of performance is more like an experience and desire led to by the senses. To sum up, Xunzi’s ‘original nature’ has a double meaning. One is the instinctive and innate ‘original nature’, and the other is the ability and experience of human senses, which is a functional ‘original nature’. Of course, no matter what kind of ‘original nature’ both are ‘spontaneous from Nature, what cannot be learned, and what requires no application to master’.⁷

The words ‘acquired nature’ appears many times in *Xunzi*, with different uses and meanings. However, as far as ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ is concerned,

³ John Knoblock, ‘On the Correct Use of Names’ 正名, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 127.

⁴ John Knoblock, ‘Man’s Nature Is Evil’ 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 153.

⁵ John Knoblock, ‘Of Honor and Disgrace’ 榮辱, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.I (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 191.

⁶ In the Chinese of the above sentence, ‘nature’ is written as 「生」, and the actual writing of nature in Chinese is 「性」. Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 believes that 「性」 is a derivative of 「生」, and in Chinese terminology, this phenomenon is called 「孳乳」. Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Zhongguo renxing shilun: xianqin pian* 中國人性史論·先秦篇 (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2014), p. 8.

⁷ John Knoblock, ‘Man’s Nature Is Evil’ 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 152.

it cannot simply be understood as meaning ‘hypocrisy’. In *Man’s Nature is Evil*, Xunzi mentioned: ‘what must be learned before a man can do it and what he must apply himself to before he can master it yet is found in man is properly called “acquired nature” ’.⁸ From this, it can be seen that ‘acquired nature’ is relative to ‘original nature’, which is a learned and human-dominated activity. This kind of ‘acquired nature’ is not an aimless and blind activity, but a decision made under the consideration and guidance of the ‘mind’. As Xunzi said: ‘The mind’s thinking something and the natural abilities’ acting on it is called “conscious exertion” ’.⁹ In addition, Xunzi also said: ‘When thoughts are accumulated and one’s natural abilities have been practiced so that something is completed, it is called “conscious exertion” ’.¹⁰ Wang Xianqian commented that: ‘Although the mind can think, it still has to learn over time, and then it can correct its nature’.¹¹ It can be seen that in addition to thinking caused by the mind, ‘acquired nature’ also has a second meaning of ‘correction’. As Deng Xiaohu said:

Etiquette and righteousness are actually produced through the accumulation of thoughts and the familiarity of human actions. This gives us a reason to believe that etiquette and righteousness just belong to the second meaning of “acquired nature”.¹²

To sum up, in Xunzi’s thought of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’, the ‘acquired nature’ also has a double meaning. One is human action driven by the mind, and the other is behaviour under the principles of etiquette and righteousness. The two are closely related and mutually strengthen each other.

Chapter Three - The connotation of the thought

⁸ John Knoblock, ‘Man’s Nature Is Evil’ 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 152.

⁹ John Knoblock, ‘On the Correct Use of Names’ 正名, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 127.

¹⁰ John Knoblock, ‘On the Correct Use of Names’ 正名, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 127.

¹¹ Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), p. 487.

¹² Deng Xiaohu 鄧小虎, *Xunzi de weiji zhixue: cong xinge dao yangxinyicheng* 荀子的為己之學：從性惡到養心以誠 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015), p. 59.

To truly understand the connotation of the idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’, it cannot simply limit the explanation of the literal meaning, but also needs to deeply explore the logical relationship between ‘original nature’ and ‘acquired nature’, understand the feasibility of this thought, and define its ultimate goal, then the idea will be truly transformed from paper discussion into practical action and realize the ideal state of ‘unity of knowledge and action’.

3.1 The distinction and combination of original nature and acquired nature

In Xunzi’s thought of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’, the logical relationship between ‘original nature’ and ‘acquired nature’ always is an important part of research that cannot be ignored. Therefore, exploring the relationship of distinction and combination between ‘original nature’ and ‘acquired nature’ is also the connotation of the thought of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’.

In the ideological and theoretical system of Xunzi, ‘The distinction of original nature and acquired nature’ is an important framework and foundation of his theory of human nature. In Xunzi’s view, ‘original nature’ is innate and instinctive of people, while ‘acquired nature’ is learned and affected by the environment and human factors. Therefore, Xunzi said:

What cannot be gained by learning and cannot be mastered by application yet is found in man is properly termed ‘inborn nature.’ What must be learned before a man can do it and what he must apply himself to before he can master it yet is found in man is properly called ‘acquired nature.’ This is precisely the distinction between ‘inborn’ and ‘acquired’ natures.¹³

However, it is worth clarifying that although there is a clear distinction between ‘original nature’ and ‘acquired nature’, they are not opposed or isolated from each other, but have their

¹³ John Knoblock, ‘Man’s Nature Is Evil’ 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 152.

own focus and are compatible with each other. In Xunzi's view, 'Human nature is evil; any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion'.¹⁴ 'Original nature' can be reshaped through later education to achieve 'good'. The evil nature of human is also the main cause of 'transforming original nature', and 'developing acquired nature' is the important way of it. 'People is a community of natural life and cultural life, and is the unity of "original nature" and "acquired nature"'.¹⁵ The process of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature' is that people move toward 'good' step by step in the course of acquired education, it is also the process in which 'original nature' and 'acquired nature' gradually turn from distinction to combination. Just as Xunzi said: 'When inborn nature and conscious activity are joined, the world is made orderly'.¹⁶ 'The distinction of original nature and acquired nature' is the ultimate goal of people's moral practice, and it is also the completion mark of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature'.

3.2 The practical method of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature'

Once the feasibility of 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature' is clear, it will be necessary to find ways and methods to achieve this goal. Otherwise, no matter how good the idea still will only become empty talk. In Xunzi's ideological and theoretical system, there are also clear guidance ways, which can be roughly divided into personal inner self-education and external social etiquette, righteousness and legal education.

In Xunzi's view, the generate of 'acquired nature' is influenced by the role of 'mind', which

¹⁴ John Knoblock, 'Man's Nature Is Evil' 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 150.

¹⁵ Chen Lin 陳林, 'Hauxingqiwei heyi ke'neng: Xunzi gongfulun tanxi' 『化性起偽』何以可能——荀子工夫論探析, *Daode yu wenming* 道德與文明, 2(2012), 75-84 (p.81).

¹⁶ John Knoblock, 'Discourse on Ritual Principles' 禮論, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 67.

plays an inner guiding role in the process of ‘developing acquired nature’, and the ‘acquired nature’ is ‘what must be learned before a man can do it’.¹⁷ Just as Xunzi said: ‘Learning must never be concluded’¹⁸, and ‘before the real life of people is unfolded, there is generally nothing except original nature, and all special regulations come from the “accumulation” of people’.¹⁹ People realize the cultivation of the ‘mind’ through learning, and in the process gradually accumulate the concept of ‘good’ and improve their own moral cultivation level.

In addition, Xunzi also especially emphasises the influence of external factors in the process of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’. ‘For Hsun Tzu, the perfecting process involves a complex interaction between the cognitive functions of the mind and social constraints’.²⁰ In Xunzi’s view, ‘etiquette and righteousness’ are the guiding principles for governing the country, regulating society, and leading personal activities. Therefore, Xunzi said: ‘It is through ritual that the individual is rectified’.²¹ While excepting the pure ‘ritual’, Xunzi also pays attention to the importance of ‘legal’ and proposes to carry on the ‘developing acquired nature’ through the combination of ‘ritual’ and ‘legal’, and ultimately achieve the goal that ‘If “ritual principles are exalted and the model perfected,” then the state has constancy.’²²

3.3 The limitations of the thought

Although the thought of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ of

¹⁷ John Knoblock, ‘Man’s Nature Is Evil’ 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 152.

¹⁸ John Knoblock, ‘An Exhortation to Learning’ 勸學, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.I, p. 135.

¹⁹ Chu Zhaohua 儲昭華, *Mingfen zhidao: cong Xunzi kan rujiawenhua yu minzhuzhengdao tongrong de kenengxing* 明分之道：從荀子看儒家文化與民主政道融通的可能性 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2005), p. 202.

²⁰ Tu Wei-Ming 杜維明, ‘On The Mencian Perception of Moral Self-Development’, *The Monist*, 61(1978), 72-81 (p. 73).

²¹ John Knoblock, ‘On Self-Cultivation’ 修身, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.I, p. 157.

²² John Knoblock, ‘On the Way of a Lord’ 君道, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.II (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 184.

Xunzi has its unique innovation angle and development direction in the social context of that time, it is undeniable that the idea still has its limitations. As a theoretical idea explains and develops from the perspective of ‘human nature’, the idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ simply divides the ‘original nature’ into inborn property and believes that this inborn property does not have the existence of ‘good’. However, the good or evil of human nature is a kind of complex performance, affected by various factors such as subjective and objective factors, and cannot be defined and discussed in a single way. The idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ ignores the inherent moral property of human nature and overemphasizes the impact of external factors such as education and environment on morality, which restricts personal thinking and development to a certain extent.

Chapter Four – The value of the thought

As for an idea, understanding its connotation is not the final goal of contemporary academic researchers. On the contrary, understanding the connotation of the idea is the beginning of everything. Thus, only by combining the guiding function of the idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ with reality can fully explore its inner value and have a beneficial and extended impact on the practice of contemporary social life.

4.1 personal perspective

From a personal perspective, the idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ reveals to people the close connection between moral cognition and moral practice. In Xunzi’s view, just possessing sufficient moral cognition cannot enable people to achieve the ideal state of moral cultivation. Only by putting cognition into action on the basis of moral cognition, thinking can be transformed into reality and morality truly assimilated into personal

life. Therefore, in the process of personal moral cultivation, people should also pay attention to ‘actions’ in addition to ‘thinking’ and clearly realize that moral cognition and moral practice are interdependent and transform each other. Only in this way can people cultivate both internal and external, truly improve their moral standards, and try hard towards the ideal moral state.

4.2 social perspective

From a social perspective, the idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ is beneficial to the construction and maintenance of a harmonious society. In Xunzi’s view, the rule by ‘ritual’ or ‘legal’ alone cannot effectively govern the country. Only the combination of etiquette and legal can achieve social stability. Thus, people should clearly realize from the idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ that the education of etiquette and morality and the standard of the legal system are inseparable. ‘ritual’ is responsible for making people’s minds good through moral guidance and improving the spiritual civilization level of society, and ‘legal’ regulates people’s behaviour and maintains the social system through clear constraints and rules. The two complement and cooperate with each other to jointly build a harmonious and stable society and maintain long-term social order.

Chapter Five - Conclusion

Xunzi’s thought of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ is different from the previous traditional views on human nature in Confucianism. Instead, it stands at a certain height and carries out a new explanation, which makes the idea more in line with the social, historical and cultural background of the time, and has strong practicality.

In the process of thousands of years of research on Confucianism in China, Xunzi’s idea of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’ and even the extended theory of

Xunzi's 'human nature' has always been looked upon as the 'heresy' that is different with the traditional thought of Confucian, and there are few people pay attention on it. However, it is undeniable that Xunzi's ideological and theoretical system has indeed brought Confucianism into a new stage of development. As contemporary academic researchers, people should maintain the most basic view of history, understand the connotation of the thought of Xunzi from an objective and rational perspective, and then take this as a starting point to re-explore Xunzi's ideological and theoretical system. Only by applying it in social life practice can people better inherit and promote excellent traditional Chinese culture.

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Chapter One - Preamble



Xunzi a representative figure of Confucianism the end of the Warring States Period

creatively develop own characteristics politics, economy, culture, ect.

exploration and thinking of human nature

transforming original nature and developing acquired nature 化性起偽

important part unavoidable part

Exploring the connotation ➡ understand on a deeper level

➡ transform theory into practice ➡ unity of knowledge and action

the origin of the idea ➡ inner meaning, practical methods and ultimate goals

➡ the value of this thought ➡ a deeper and more comprehensive understanding

Chapter Two - A preliminary exploration of the thought

in-depth exploration ↪

sorting out the development context & germination and initial ideology

- ◎ place in the historical and social background
- ◎ many angles
- ◎ preliminary and reasonable interpretation



2.1 The origin of the thought



The end of the Warring States period the main source

the Zhou royal family ➡ had declined

lost governability ➡ over surrounding areas and subordinate forces

old hierarchic system and social structure ➡ fall

feudal princes ➡ fighting against

society ➡ unrest

ceremonies ➡ fall

When contentions about territory are the ground on which they fight, they slaughter men till the fields are filled with them. When some struggle for a city is the ground on which they fight, they slaughter men till the city is filled with them. ¹

爭地以戰，殺人盈野；爭城以戰，殺人盈城

curb the excessive power desires

stability of the social structure



¹ James Legge, 'Li Lau Part I' 離婁上, in *The Works of Mencius in The Chinese Classics*, Vol.II (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2011), p. 305.



Secondly

high level of development economy

ironware ➡ spread in agricultural production

➡ development of the agricultural economy

➡ driving the prosperity of handicrafts and commerce.²

affected people's way of thinking

➡ Pursuing profits main survival goal of people

➡ Conflicts between people ➡ social order was disrupted

way to find the method

² This conclusion can be found in many Dissertations, two of which are selected here for reference:

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Finally

the collapse of the original social system

the development of social productive forces



the development of thought and culture

Academics privilege of the aristocratic class ✕

the objects of education ➡ moved downwards

the contention of hundreds of schools of thought ➡ emerge

an innovation and development

2.2 Original nature and acquired nature

original nature

What characterizes a man from birth is called his 'nature' ... what from birth is effortless and spontaneous are called 'nature'.³

生之所以然者，謂之性……不事而自然，謂之性

original nature ➡ born with innate naturally

Man's Nature is Evil:

Now, it is the inborn nature of man that when hungry he desires something to eat, that when cold he wants warm clothing, and that when weary he desires rest — such are essential qualities inherent in his nature.⁴

今人之性，饑而欲飽，寒而欲暖，勞而欲休，此人之情性也。

³ John Knoblock, 'On the Correct Use of Names' 正名, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 127.

⁴ John Knoblock, 'Man's Nature Is Evil' 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 153.

Of Honor and Disgrace:

when hungry, they desire food; when cold, they desire to be warm; when exhausted from toil, they desire rest; and they all desire benefit and hate harm. Such is the **nature** that men are born possessing. They do not have to await development before they become so ... The eye distinguishes white from black, the beautiful from the ugly. The ear distinguishes sounds and tones as to their shrillness or sonority ... These, too, are part of the **nature** that man is born possessing, that he does not have to develop.⁵

饑而欲食，寒而欲暖，勞而欲息，好利而惡害，是人之所生而有也，是無待而然者也……目辨白黑美惡，耳辨聲音清濁……是又人之所常生而有也，是無待而然者也

an experience and desire led to by the senses

⁵ John Knoblock, 'Of Honor and Disgrace' 榮辱, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.I (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 191.



double meaning

➡ the instinctive and innate ‘original nature’

➡ functional ‘original nature’

spontaneous from Nature, what cannot be learned, and what requires no application to master.⁶

天之就也，不可學，不可事

⁶ John Knoblock, ‘Man’s Nature Is Evil’ 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 152.



acquired nature

Man's Nature is Evil:

what must be learned before a man can do it and what he must apply himself to before he can master it yet is found in man is properly called 'acquired nature'⁷

可學而能，可事而成之在人者，謂之偽

acquired nature relative to original nature

a learned and human-dominated activity

a decision consideration and guidance of the 'mind'

Xunzi:

The mind's thinking something and the natural abilities' acting on it is called 'conscious exertion'.⁸

心慮而能為之動謂之偽

⁷ John Knoblock, 'Man's Nature Is Evil' 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 152.

⁸ John Knoblock, 'On the Correct Use of Names' 正名, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 127.

Xunzi:

When thoughts are accumulated and one's natural abilities have been practiced so that something is completed, it is called “conscious exertion” ’.⁹

慮積焉，能習焉，而後成謂之偽

Wang Xianqian:

Although the mind can think, it still has to learn over time, and then it can correct its nature’.¹⁰

心雖能動，亦在積久習學，然後能矯其本性也

⁹ John Knoblock, ‘On the Correct Use of Names’ 正名, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 127.

¹⁰ Wang Xianqian 王先謙, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), p. 487.

Deng Xiaohu:

Etiquette and righteousness are actually produced through the accumulation of thoughts and the familiarity of human actions. This gives us a reason to believe that etiquette and righteousness just belong to the second meaning of “acquired nature”.¹¹

禮義其實是通過思慮的累積和人為行動的熟習而產生出來的。這使我們有理由相信禮義恰恰屬於第二義的「偽」

double meaning

human action driven by the mind

behaviour under the principles of etiquette and righteousness

closely related & mutually strengthen

¹¹ Deng Xiaohu 鄧小虎, *Xunzi de weiji zhixue: cong xing dao yangxinyicheng* 荀子的為己之學：從性惡到養心以誠 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015), p. 59.

Chapter Three - The connotation of the thought

truly connotation

➡ 'transforming original nature and developing acquired nature'

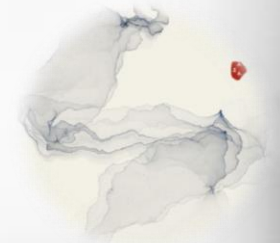
the logical relationship

➡ original nature acquired nature

the feasibility ultimate goal

transformed from paper discussion into practical action

unity of knowledge and action



3.1 The distinction and combination of original nature and acquired nature

the logical relationship between 'original nature' and 'acquired nature'

important part cannot be ignored

the relationship of distinction and combination

The distinction of original nature and acquired nature

important framework and foundation theory of human nature

original nature ➡ innate and instinctive of people

acquired nature ➡ learned the environment human factors

Xunzi:

What cannot be gained by learning and cannot be mastered by application yet is found in man is properly termed ‘inborn nature.’ What must be learned before a man can do it and what he must apply himself to before he can master it yet is found in man is properly called ‘acquired nature.’ This is precisely the distinction between ‘inborn’ and ‘acquired’ natures.¹²

不可學，不可事，而在人者，謂之性；可學而能，可事而成之在人者，
謂之偽

¹² John Knoblock, ‘Man’s Nature Is Evil’ 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 152.



not opposed or isolated have own focus and are compatible

Human nature is evil; any good in humans is acquired by conscious exertion.¹³

人之性惡，其善者偽也

Original nature ➡ be reshaped through later education ➡ achieve ‘good’

evil nature of human ➡ main cause of ‘transforming original nature’

developing acquired nature ➡ important way

People is a community of natural life and cultural life, and is the unity of ‘original nature’ and ‘acquired nature’.¹⁴

人是自然生命和文化生命的共同體，是「性」與「偽」的合一

13 John Knoblock, ‘Man’s Nature Is Evil’ 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 150.

14 Chen Lin 陳林, ‘Hauxingqiwei heyi ke’neng: Xunzi gongfulun tanxi’ 『化性起偽』何以可能——荀子工夫論探析, *Daode yu wenming* 道德與文明, 2(2012), 75-84 (p.81).

transforming original nature and developing acquired nature

➡ move toward 'good' in the course of acquired education

➡ from distinction to combination

Xunzi:

When inborn nature and conscious activity are joined, the world is made orderly'.¹⁵

性偽合而天下治

The distinction of original nature and acquired nature

ultimate goal of people's moral practice

the completion mark

¹⁵ John Knoblock, 'Discourse on Ritual Principles' 禮論, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 67.

3.2 The practical method of ‘transforming original nature and developing acquired nature’

transforming original nature and developing acquired nature

the feasibility ➡ find ways and methods to achieve goal

clear guidance ways

➡ personal inner self-education

➡ external social etiquette, righteousness and legal education



acquired nature

influenced by the mind

inner guiding role

what must be learned before a man can do it.¹⁶ 可學而能

Xunzi:

Learning must never be concluded.¹⁷ 學不可以已

before the real life of people is unfolded, there is generally nothing except original nature, and all special regulations come from the ‘accumulation’ of people.¹⁸

在人的現實生活展開之前，除了自然本性之外乃是普遍地空無所有的，所有的特殊規定性都來自人之所「積」

cultivation of the mind

➡ accumulate the concept of ‘good’ ➡ improve moral cultivation level.

¹⁶ John Knoblock, ‘Man’s Nature Is Evil’ 性惡, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.III, p. 152.

¹⁷ John Knoblock, ‘An Exhortation to Learning’ 勸學, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.I, p. 135.

¹⁸ Chu Zhaohua 儲昭華, *Mingfen zhidao: cong Xunzi kan rujiawenhua yu minzhuzhengdao tongrong de kenengxing* 明分之道：從荀子看儒家文化與民主政道融通的可能性 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2005), p. 202.

the influence of external factors

For Hsun Tzu, the perfecting process involves a complex interaction between the cognitive functions of the mind and social constraints.¹⁹

荀子認為人完美化的過程包含著一個心靈認識功能和社會強制這兩者之間複雜的相互作用

etiquette and righteousness ➡ guiding principles

governing the country regulating society leading personal activities

Xunzi:

It is through ritual that the individual is rectified.²⁰ 禮者，所以正身也

¹⁹ Tu Wei-Ming 杜維明, 'On The Mencian Perception of Moral Self-Development', *The Monist*, 61(1978), 72-81 (p. 73).

²⁰ John Knoblock, 'On Self-Cultivation' 修身, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.I, p. 157.

except ritual the importance of legal

combination of ritual and legal

If ‘ritual principles are exalted and the model perfected,’ then the state has constancy.²¹

至道大形，隆禮至法則國有常

²¹ John Knoblock, ‘On the Way of a Lord’ 君道, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol.II (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 184.

3.3 The limitations of the thought

unique innovation angle and development direction still has limitations

explains and develops from the perspective of human nature

simply divides the original nature

➡ inborn property does not have the existence of 'good'

human nature ➡ complex performance subjective and objective factors

defined and discussed in a single way ✕

ignores the inherent moral property

overemphasizes the impact of external factors

restricts personal thinking and development

Chapter Four – The value of the thought

connotation final goal ✕

combining the guiding function with reality

➡ explore inner value

➡ have a beneficial and extended impact

➡ practice of contemporary social life



4.1 personal perspective

close connection between moral cognition and moral practice

moral cognition achieve the ideal state of moral cultivation ✕

putting cognition into action

transformed thinking into reality morality assimilated into personal life

moral cognition moral practice ➡ interdependent and transform each other

cultivate both internal and external

improve moral standards

towards the ideal moral state

4.2 social perspective

construction and maintenance of a harmonious society

ritual or legal alone effectively govern the country ✕

combination of etiquette and legal ➡ social stability

education of etiquette and morality standard of the legal system

inseparable





ritual ➡ making people's minds good

➡ moral guidance ➡ improving the spiritual civilization level of society

legal ➡ regulates people's behaviour

➡ clear constraints and rules ➡ maintains the social system

complement and cooperate with each other

build a harmonious and stable society

maintain long-term social order

Chapter Five - Conclusion

different

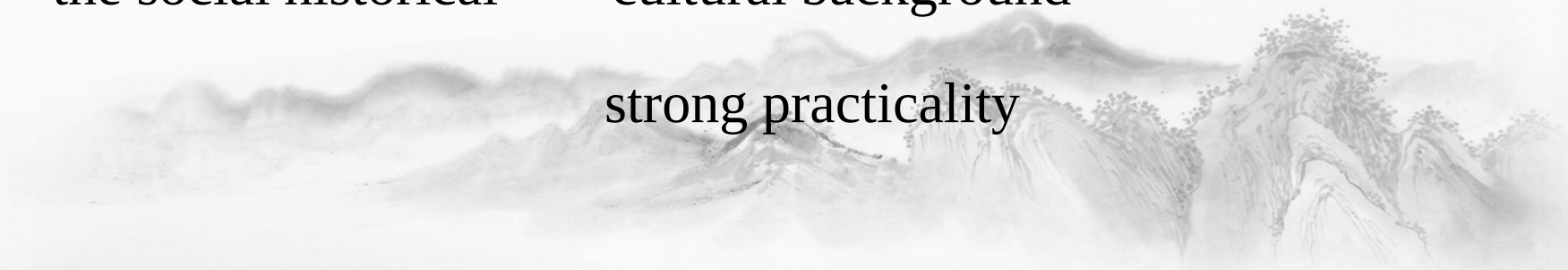
➡ the previous traditional views on human nature in Confucianism

at a certain height carries out a new explanation

in line

➡ the social historical cultural background

strong practicality



transforming original nature and developing acquired nature

theory of human nature

➡ heresy different with the traditional thought of Confucian

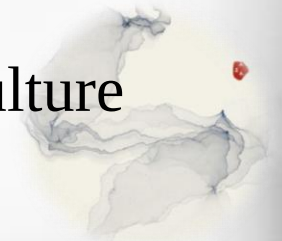
a new stage of development

the most basic view of history objective and rational perspective

re-explore Xunzi's ideological and theoretical system

applying it in social life practice

better inherit and promote excellent traditional Chinese culture



**Thanks for
listening and watching**

