



## **The problem of destiny in ancient chinese philosophy**

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## **The problem of destiny in ancient chinese philosophy**

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### ***Abstract***

China is a country with an ancient and rich culture. A country that has experienced no less than the great civilizations of antiquity and the Middle Ages shows steady growth and potential for prosperity in the 21st century. Perhaps, the reason for this stability lies in a different understanding of the person's fate and role in this world. Understanding, which gives the opportunity to act, preserve and develop the whole system of culture. This article analyzes the concept of the fate of the philosophy of ancient China. We will analyze the views of the two philosophical schools - Confucianism and Taoism. The way out to the problem of fate in ancient Chinese philosophy will be realized through a person. In our study, we will also talk about those terms through which the concept of "fate" - Tao, Heaven and Nature - is transmitted. This analysis is necessary for the subsequent understanding of the human behavior strategy in the world. In addition, this analysis provides an opportunity for subsequent historical and cultural comparison of Western European and Chinese civilization.

**Keywords:** Ancient China, myth, fate, the Chinese culture, Confucius, Taoism, Mencius.



## **1 INTRODUCTION**

In many ancient cultures, the fate of a man is interpreted as what is given initially. Man is born, and his fate is already predetermined. Birth - this is its first manifestation, as well as the beginning of a certain plan. According to the model of the world, this plan can be represented as birth - "life itself" - death, and each person realizes it. In this case, the plan is common. But each person is also unique in his own way. This is reflected in his fate: every man has to live his life in his own way. Consequently, his life is initially built on two polar parameters: uniqueness and variance (certainty / uncertainty). Man fulfills the universal destiny and at the same time the one that is allocated specifically for him, his part from the common.

The problem of fate always excited the man. Everyone at least once think about his destiny and whether he can do other way. Thoughts about fate are always philosophical, and they are full of tragedy.

However, the man of Antiquity and Ancient China thought about the problem of the fate differently. Greco-Roman tradition can be expressed in Seneca's thoughts: "We can not change the world relations. We can only one thing: to have a high courage, ... to endure what destiny brings to us, and surrender ourselves to the will of the laws of nature" [1]. The Greeks built a model in which all are mortal (man and gods both), Fate dominates everything. This left a mark on the entire Western cultural tradition [2].

The contradiction between Freedom and Necessity that could not be resolved in the West also could not arise in China, because nothing was opposed to anything; the world is originally One, not dual, and therefore can not be grasped by dismemberment and analysis. But this is not the only approach of Chinese culture to the problem of fate.

## **2 METHODS**

It may seem paradoxical to see the idea of fate in cultural tradition as evidence of the emergence of personal self-consciousness. After all, the idea of fate assumes that a man thinks himself entirely dependent on some external force. It is all more paradoxical to consider the situation of the development of culture, when this idea has already matured, not to mention the stage when it is only emerging, and to relate not only to underdevelopment, but even to the complete absence of any kind of personal self-consciousness, as things A.F. Losev.

For us, Losev's "doctrine of the connection of the slave-owning formation with the idea of fate" will be useful. This is coming from the fact that both Ancient Greece and Ancient China during the period of "Axial Age" (V - III centuries) are defined as slave-owning societies [3].

The most important in Losev's studies is the position that such aspects of ancient culture as plastic and slavery, the unity of which constitutes the "general cultural type of antiquity," coincide in one: in



the absence of the experience of the human person ... in the understanding of man not as a person, but as the thing" [6]. The Greeks built a system in which both the slave and the slaveholder are perceived not as a person, but as a "thing". The same principle is also considered for the Greek gods. All are slaves of the world order and fate.

It should be noted that the correlation of the idea of fate with slavery and the lack of experience of the human person in the Ancient Greece is not entirely true. The idea of destiny is already very clearly traced in the Homeric period, when we can not say about developed slavery yet. Consequently, this idea had a long development. On the other hand, the connection between the idea of fate and slavery really implies an idea of a man's lack of autonomy and means a radical denial of precisely the personal "dimension" of a man. This allows us to assert that the emergence of the idea of fate historically marked the emergence of personal self-consciousness.

The ancient idea of fate, its interpretation within the framework of ancient philosophy, indicates the awakening of personal self-awareness. This is also true for Ancient China, where was slavery, but a man was never perceived as a "thing".

### **3 RESULTS**

The Slavery in Ancient China develops since the Shang-Yin period and existed almost until the 19th century. It should be noted that many aspects of the slave system cause a stormy discussion in Russian historical science [4]. But it is important to emphasize that the main mass of slaves in Ancient China were strangers (non-Han). For the Chinese, everyone was divided into "we-ours" and "they-foreign barbarians" [5]. This is fundamentally different approach to man in the ancient world and in Ancient China. Even in the Middle Ages, when a man became a slave, he could have property, that is, he was still treated as a subject. However, becoming a slave, a Chinese has always fallen into the category of "evil people", opposed by "good people" – free people. And this meant that there was no way back, fate could not be corrected. In this connection, it can be said that another social reality shaped another attitude to the problem of fate in Ancient China.

This also meant that something limits a man's freedom. First of all, it is social roles, which determined the "destiny" (fen) of man. But was a man in this space free? To understand this, we must turn to the interpretation of man in ancient Chinese philosophy.

The image of a man in China traditionally has been seen as "the most spiritualized of all beings," "in the middle between Heaven and Earth" and, consequently, the center of the world cycle, "the heart of the universe." Hence the vital ideal in the Chinese tradition is "middle and constancy", "middle way" [7]. Regardless of ethical or naturalistic versions of the idea of "the unity of man and Heaven," human destiny was understood as comprehension of inner self-sufficiency.



Accordingly, self-knowledge in Chinese culture consisted in embracing the consciousness of the fullness of the man's life qualities. Such a world view implies the coexistence and even interdependence of the intellect and sensual life. Although Confucianism has always warned against excessive adherence to only reflection or only feelings, in the Taoist tradition of spiritual perfection, the priority was given to the senses.

For Confucius personality was not the original atom, he did not oppose society to man [8]. Conversely, he was an important part of society and the state. The man was entangled in debt to the father, the sovereign and he was obliged to follow the ritual.

Confucius in his "Analects" says, what it means to be a man, a special being with unique virtues and strength that are embodied in him. It is not enough just to be born, it is necessary to find a culture and through it to create a relationship determined by tradition.

Due to of Confucianism, the emergence of the "Man" in man is the result of study of the wisdom of the ancients, following their example. The ideal of Confucianism is the transformation of man into a "superior person" (jun-zi). This very firmly puts a man in the social-state-space structure and requires the fulfillment of social functions. Heaven was an external force watching over everything.

In addition, the Heaven plays a significant role in the fate of the man. This is made possible because of "The Mandate of Heaven". This is the fate of the sovereign and the superior person. For "the Mandate of Heaven is called nature, the leading nature is called Tao, the perfecting Tao is called the teaching" [9]. So when you comprehend "the teachings", you perfect Tao and become involved with it, thereby comprehending nature and receiving the Mandate of Heaven and destiny. Confucius himself learned the "will of Heaven in 50 years", and was able to follow the desire of the heart, without violating the measures. "Without understanding the will of Heaven, one can not be a jun-zi." [10] That is, understanding Heaven (his will) you gain freedom.

The mandate of Heaven for man acts as a predestination of fate. On the one hand, Heaven predetermines the social status of man. On the other hand, a person is free to act by his own will. First of all, this is reflected in the opportunity to know man's nature, and through it Heaven; secondly, a person must act reasonably. In "Meng-zi" it says: "... who knows the will of nature does not become under a tall wall, ready to fall" [11].

Taoists demonstrate a different approach to the problem of fate. According to their teaching, a man is identified with nature and is opposed to the state and society. Nature is present in the reasoning of the Taoists, primarily because Tao is inextricably present in it. Because the Tao is a certain supreme absolute, it is also connected with the concept of the destiny of man.

All changes that take place in a man's life in Taoism are regarded as preordained by Tao. So it is necessary to perceive them, as predestination of fate. But death, as change, is also present, and its



interpretation sheds light on the approach of the Taoists to the predetermined fate - Tao. Death is the natural completion of a man's life. A man must accept this as preordained from the beginning. He can not change the natural course of events and give to it the desired direction [12].

However the idea of predestination in Taoism does not have a fatal shade. So, Lie-zi unconditionally rejected the idea of a predestined man for the purpose. After all, death is not a departure, but a merger with a Tao. The Taoists pointed out that the laws of the inevitable manifestation of changes can not be shaken, and therefore man must simply submit. Realizing the inevitability of the changes that will have to be endured, and their inability to exert any influence on the process, a man, as the Taoists believed, allows events to develop in their "natural" way. But at the same time knowledge of the principles of change allows a man to "live well regardless of the nature of his age." This means that the Taoist ideal of man is treated as "natural." But in order to become a "natural person" it is necessary to know the Tao, that is, as well as in Confucianism, to embark on the path of knowledge of the Absolute. But the decision to embark on the path of knowledge is taken by man himself, and this is one of the distinctive features of Chinese culture.

"Natural man" is a man who has known his nature and the Tao. The ideal person in Taoism is outside the social world, hence the favorite image in literature and arts is the hermit. But this is only outwardly. Internally, a man is still a part of change. But only is part, not a participant.

Through the acquisition of Tao, a man becomes free, what means he is freed from fate. If man acts according to the "will of Heaven" in accordance with its innate properties (de) and its purpose; then it does not violate the general plan of the universe.

#### **4 SUMMARY**

Thus, from the point of view of the Chinese culture, destiny only depends on the man himself. Unlike the ancient world, where fate and predestination predominates over man, in China, man was initially given freedom. But it has always been limited.

For Confucianism, the state acted as a limitation, and freedom only came after the knowledge of the will / law of Heaven. For Taoists, one had to know the Tao, and through it the world. This made possible to be free from the conventions of this world. But the nature of these restrictions lay not in the social plane, but in the moral plane.

#### **5 CONCLUSIONS**

The world within the framework of ancient Chinese philosophy is treated as originally the One and all the processes in it are interrelated, that's why it is well-disposed towards the man. All the troubles in people's lives are from misunderstanding of the Way, from ignorance, therefore the way of knowing is the task that faces the man. Only through this knowledge does a person recognize his destiny and become free.



Confucianism and Taoism interpret the man and his fate in different ways, but at the same time they finish building each other. These are two traditions that do not contradict, but create a unique situation. Within a framework that a man can dispose of his destiny and do what his heart tells him to do. However, this freedom is limited by the social and moral law.

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