THE THEORY OF THE FOUR VIRTUES OF CONFUCIUS IN THE PRE-QIN PERIOD

A TEORIA DAS QUATRO VIRTUDES DO CONFUCIONISMO NO PERÍODO PRÉ-QIN*

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Abstract: As a form of social consciousness, the origin and development of the theory of the four virtues is associated with the changing process of economic and social conditions and the development of contemporary Chinese science. Confucian ethics in the Pre-Qin period was born based on certain historical conditions, during a period of great change in China's economy and society when the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (771 - 221 BC) weakened and perished. The doctrine of the four virtues is one of the very important doctrines of Confucianism in the Pre-Qin period, marking a great moral thought of mankind in general and Eastern moral thought in particular, especially in countries with great influenced by Confucianism. In this article, the author will focus on clarifying the cause of birth, the basic content of the theory of four virtues. In addition, the author also proceeds to discuss the merits and limitations of this theory.

Keywords: Confucius. Four virtues. Frequency. Thought.

Resumo: Como forma de consciência social, a origem e desenvolvimento da teoria das quatro virtudes está associada ao processo de mudança das condições económicas e sociais e ao desenvolvimento da ciência chinesa contemporânea. A ética confucionista no período Pré-Qin nasceu com base em certas condições históricas, durante um período de grande mudança na economia e na sociedade chinesa, quando a Dinastia Zhou Oriental (771 - 221 a.C.) enfraqueceu e pereceu. A doutrina das quatro virtudes é uma das doutrinas muito importantes do Confucionismo no período Pré-Qin, marcando um grande pensamento moral da humanidade em geral e do pensamento moral oriental em particular, especialmente em países com grande influência do Confucionismo. Neste artigo, o autor concentrar-se-á em clarificar a causa do nascimento, o conteúdo básico da teoria das quatro virtudes. Além disso, o autor também procede à discussão dos méritos e limitações desta teoria.

Palavras-chave: Confúcio. Quatro virtudes. Frequência. Pensamento.

1.   Introduction

As a form of social consciousness, the origin and development of ancient Chinese philosophical thought is associated with the changing process of economic and social conditions and the development of contemporary Chinese science. Confucian ethics of the Pre-Qin period (before 221 BC/ $6^{th} \pm 3^{rd}$ century BC) (FENGYAN *, 2004; REN, 2020; TSIN, 1995) was born based on certain historical conditions, which was a period when China's economy and society had many great changes. A very long historical period of more than 500 years, called the Eastern Zhou Dynasty in China (770 BC - 221 BC) (SHEN, 1994), is divided into two periods: the Spring and Autumn period (771 - 476 BC) (COGHLAN; BRYDON-MILLER, 2014; ZHAO; SELIGMAN; PENG; YE et al., 2021) and the Warring States period (475-221 BC) (ZHAO; SELIGMAN; PENG; YE et al., 2021). Starting from the reign of King Ping of Zhou (770-720 BC) (DARVILL, 2021), then the Eastern Zhou Dynasty gradually weakened in power along with the growth of the hegemony, increasing the war between the vassal countries of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, and ended when Qin Shui Huang (259-210 BC)(MA; FULLER; SUN; HU et al., 2016) unified China, becoming the first emperor of China.

A historical period full of blood, tears, intrigue, smoke and war, but also a golden age of Chinese philosophy because of the many philosophical and ideological systems that were freely developed. This upheaval has given rise to hundreds of thinkers and divided into many different philosophical schools, including Confucianism. Confucianism is one of the philosophical schools that take politics - social ethics as the object of study (GOLDIN, 2014). The basic content of Confucianism is the discussion of the way of governing the country and the way of people and is expressed in two classic Confucian books, the "Four Books" (*Sishu* 四書) (CSIKSZENTMIHALY, 2020; PANG-WHITE, 2018) and the "Five Classics" (*Wujing*) in the Han dynasty (BENDER, 2019; CSIKSZENTMIHALY, 2020). In the ethical content of Pre-Qin Confucianism, the doctrine of the "four virtues" (CAMPBELL, 2019, p. 291; GAO, 2003; NGUYEN, 2015) is considered as one of the ethical educational norms, a measure of a woman's values, talents, and virtues. And most importantly, it is deeply rooted in the thought, soul, personality and lifestyle of each East Asian woman.

The reason that Confucianism introduced the doctrine of the four virtues and considers it as one of the ethical codes that women must follow, in our opinion, is the following reasons: the division of labor in society; and the role and position of women in

society at that time. However, regardless of the causes, the doctrine of the four virtues still has a great influence on women in society. This influence is not only in Mainland China but also in many Asian countries influenced by Confucianism and Vietnam is of no exception (NGUYEN, 2015).

The reason why I chose to study the four virtues theory of Confucianism in the ancient times is because the impact of this doctrine is very strong on Vietnamese women (BORTON, 2018; FRENIER; MANCINI, 1996). Historically, women have always been an important part of society's development. With their creative labor, women have contributed to enriching society and enriching people's lives. Women always play an indispensable role in all areas of social life. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research to find out their great contribution.

2.   Research Methods

Any scientific research construction, to be successful, must be conducted using appropriate research methods. The correct use of research methods plays a decisive role in the quality and effectiveness of research. To conduct research on the doctrine of the four virtues of Confucianism in the ancient times, I have used the methodology of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. These methods are used to affirm that the author is standing on a materialist point of view to examine the theory and put the theory in relation to social issues. These relationships are located in the historical period in which it was formed, but how strongly it affected women in later historical periods.

The method of collecting secondary data used by the author in the article is to collect data from books, newspapers, theses, articles published in magazines, the media, etc. with relevant contents the theory of four virtues and its impact on women.

Methods of analysis and synthesis. Analytical method is used by the author to study individual problems of the theory of four virtues. From the analysis, the author synthesizes into a coherent system of the four virtues theory of Confucianism in the early times.

Methods of discussion, exchange, and asking expert for their opinions: The research work on a theory is controversial, therefore, the work also uses the group discussion method to unify the conclusions and objective remarks. At the same time, we invite scientific experts and politicians to exchange and get opinions so that we can have a correct understanding of the four virtues of Confucianism in the ancient times.

All of the above research methods have supported each other, helping the author have an objective and scientific view of the four virtues. Therefore, the flexible use and concurrent combination of the above research methods have been effective, contributing to clarifying the research issue.

3. The cause of the doctrine of the four virtues

The theory of four virtues was born in the context that Chinese society was in a transitional period between a slave-owning society and a feudal society in The Feudal Age (770-255 BC) (DURANT, 2011, p. 767). The vassal countries of the Zhou Dynasty or Chou Dynasty (1122-255 BC)(DURANT, 2011, p. 767) competed for power, slaughtered each other, causing the society to fall into chaos and confusion. The comprehensive transformation of economy, politics, culture and society in this period created the premise for the liberation of human thought from the domination of worldview, myth, religion, profound influence to the development of philosophical thought.

The Four Virtues of Confucianism of the Pre-Qin period was born based on the combination of traditional moral elements and new ethical elements, which met the requirements of the Zhou Dynasty in finding an optimal way to restore social order in the face of socio-political instability and serious moral degradation. In the author's opinion, the theory of four virtues of Pre-Qin Confucianism is one of the most representative theories in the history of ancient Chinese thought. Because of wanting to successfully build and maintain a dominant position in a society, the human issue is very concerned by feudal society as well as Confucianism in Pre Qin period, but it is not discussed in all aspects but only focuses on moral and ethical aspects in order to alleviate class conflicts and stabilize social order. Pre-Qin Confucian ethics considers and evaluates people through social relationships, thereby setting relatively specific ethical requirements, specifying the responsibilities of women towards the family and to the family through learning the four virtues. The Four Virtues are considered a framework, a measure of a woman's values, talents and virtues. This theory was initially built on the stance of the ruling class, it forced people in general and especially women into certain social norms, bound people, and limited their dynamism and creativity. In addition to positive values such as teaching women to perfect their outer beauty and inner content, this theory also brings many negative effects and in general it is the idea of "respecting men, disdain for women" deeply rooted in social life. The root of this idea is that Confucianism wants to educate women

according to the standards it sets out to maintain family order, broadly speaking social order for the ultimate purpose of preserving status of the ruling class. The doctrine of the four virtues is considered a golden mold, a standard for a woman to strive for and preserve throughout her life.

4.   The Confucian doctrine of the Four Virtues in the Pre-Qin period

To stabilize society, Confucianism not only builds moral standards for men to become ideal models, but also pays attention to women in society. Some theories of Confucianism refer to women such as: feudal moral and ethical doctrine; concept of religion as a wife, religion as a child; relationships with people in the family, in society; conception of the scope, field, and work in which they are allowed to participate. However, Pre-Qin Confucianism still identified them as an indispensable force to build a stable society. It comes from the social base with the idea of respecting bloodline and from the disdain for women when placing them in the lowest class in society. A woman only knows how to live resignedly next to her husband, with no other fate. If a man has "five wives and seven concubines" (CHESNEY-LIND; MORASH, 2011, p. 205), then a woman cannot have two husbands.

Confucianism believes that, in addition to obeying "the three obediences", a woman must also attain the "four virtues" (CHENG, 2009): Ethics in matrimony, Speech in matrimony, Appearances in matrimony, and "Works" or "morality, proper speech, modest manner and diligent work"(GAO, 2003; KELKAR; NATHAN, 2020, p. 90; TRAN, 2019, p. 43). The Four Virtues appeared in the Zhou Dynasty, but were later applied by Confucianism to the cultivation of women's moral qualities. According to Pre-Qin Confucianism, the Four Virtues are models from which a woman trains herself to be disciplined, to self-control, to strip away all personal desires, to be tamed to obey, to yield, to patiently endure and to unconditionally sacrifice.

The four virtues are used to refer to the four main virtues of a woman who need to pay attention when getting married, often called the four virtues. The four virtues include: woman's ethics, woman's words, woman's appearances and woman's work.

"Works", which means knowing how to work, including skillful talent, intelligence, training, and challenges. "Works" represent women's ingenuity and courage in organizing family life. First of all, women know how to stay at home, skillfully arrange household

chores and raise children. They are good at doing housework, cooking delicious meals for their husbands and children, knowing how to prepare meals when there is an anniversary, when entertaining guests, etc. As wives and mothers, women must be good at housework, doing proper functions and duties, staying at home, knowing how to manage the family's expenses. They joined the customary profession, and were responsible for ensuring the lineage of the family line. Women's talents are shown first in sewing, embroidery, and cooking. From an early age, women have been taught "*the profession of a wife*" (CONFUCIUS, 1999, p. 265).

"Appearances" is the facial appearance and appearance of a woman. "Appearances" shows on the outside, with a lovely, cute face and body. It is also the manners shown in behavior, talking, laughing, and doing business. The woman's clothes are neat, not revealing, provocative. The hair is neat, too. Women who meet the standards is the one who is slender and tender, who walks gently, shyly, and not do not have face frowning, scowling, and grumpy. Her face is always fresh and calm, even when her husband scolds her. "Appearances" is a harmonious combination between beauty of form and beauty of soul. The beauty of the soul is much more valuable than the beauty of the outside. Women are also taught to "*make up the face*" (CONFUCIUS, 1999, p. 265).

"Speech" is verbal communication. This is "the beauty of language that is respectful and peaceful" (CONFUCIUS, 1999, p. 152). In communication, women must be patient, gentle, soft, and charming.

For women, "Speech" should be sweet and gentle. They know when to say, when not to say, what to say, what not to say. In the family, women speak softly to their husbands and children. In real life, they speak gently, calmly, not arbitrarily, not loudly, not grumpy. Women do not laugh loudly, do not speak loudly; they speak politely, especially when speaking politely and respectfully to the elderly and the elderly.

"Ethics" is virtue. It is a dignified and modest morality of women. In the family, they know how to respect their husbands, love their children, and live well with their in-laws. Outside the house, they treat the person they communicate with in a mature, polite, not snobby, not sour, unconventional manner. "Ethics" shows the basic moral qualities of women, first of all, loyalty to her husband, sacrifice with children, and compassion for everyone around her. The virtuous woman in the past was always willing to bear the burden of her husband's housework, being faithful to her husband. When the husband died, the widow stayed there to raise the children, not to remarry. Therefore, all sources of joy, happiness, suffering, success and failure from the virtue of a woman decide. Beauty

without virtue is difficult to be respected by husbands and the in-laws. Not beautiful, but virtuous, the whole husband's family loves them.

In the doctrine of the four virtues of Confucianism in Pre-Qin period, "Ethics" is emphasized by Pre-Qin confucianists (Confucius, Mencius) (CLARK; WANG, 2004). "Ethics" is a basic requirement, an obligatory requirement of Pre-Qin Confucian ethics for a woman that, when getting married, every mother must teach her daughter to obey and submit to her husband. A woman who knows how to work hard, who knows how to prepare for a neat and elegant beauty, who knows how to speak elegant and meaningful words, these are the conditions for her virtue. All four virtues complement each other and are expressed through each other.

In general, the theory of four virtues when born only limited the responsibilities of women in the family. Women do hard manual labor with little knowledge, little education, and little participation in social work. Those are great limitations for women in the past, especially in promoting their intelligence, comprehensive talent and resourcefulness to contribute to society. This has greatly influenced the status and equal roles of women in the family and in society and reinforced the previous notion of "regarding men as superior to women" (XIE, 1994).

5.   Discussion

It can be seen that there were not many women who received the Confucian school of philosophy in this period because they were classified as the lowest class in society. However, for the doctrine of the four virtues to come into being, it was aimed at bringing them into the discipline of rituals. It is the ideological rope that binds the people in general or women in particular to the feudal system, in order to prolong that regime from generation to generation. Strict Confucianism requires respecting these rules in all relationships between the ruler - ministers, father - sons, husband - wife, older brother-younger brother, and friend-friend, as well as in daily life (ELSTEIN, 2012; HIGGINS, 2013).

The opinion and doctrine of the four virtues have made an important contribution to building an ideal moral model and educating women to respect discipline and family rules, contributing to stabilizing social order. Regarding this opinion, to a certain extent, I completely agree with the above opinion. Thus, "*the presence of women in the ancestral cult and their contributions towards dynastic strength is also documented in bronze inscriptions*" (KINNEY, 2017, p.

153). In an underdeveloped society like the Pre-Qin era, with her own strength, women would be more suitable for housework. The doctrine of the four virtues of this period basically met the social conditions set forth. The basic element of the content of public, content, speech and conduct in the past was to train women with knowledge to be housewives and to serve their husbands and children well. The woman is limited to activities within the family, does not understand anything about everyday life.

So how is this doctrine expressed today? We believe that, today women are involved in the affairs in society. Our task is to show that this doctrine has points that need to be preserved and promoted, and some points need to be eliminated. In fact, daily life shows that the role of women in life is extremely important. In modern life, we seem to find it more and more important, which means that the word "public" in modern life is broader. The role of women is not only limited to the family, but also extends to society. The social division of labor has made women gradually liberated. That assignment has made each person perform a different function in the group, but within the group, there is a close relationship with each other. The development of a variety of services is to serve the needs of families, so it is not necessary for a woman to know all the housework.

About "appearances": it is the beauty outside, expressed through a natural appearance combined with costumes and makeup to create decency in general. Formal beauty is always associated with beauty of soul, personality and behavior. Pre-Qin Confucianism always focuses on building a perfect beauty for women. It is the Pre-Qin Confucian concept of tolerance that has contributed to the traditional beauty of Chinese women. The positive values of "appearances" are therefore still influential in today's society. The new society has undergone many changes in many fields, the concept of beauty has many new criteria, but the standards of meek, graceful and feminine beauty are still valid for modern people.

Although there are many means to embellish a woman nowadays, nothing is as precious as natural and simple beauty. After all, there is a time when any woman is endowed with perfect beauty. The beauty here not only exudes from the beauty of the body but also the soul and the grace and maturity of the woman. Therefore, women need to be aware that a woman not only needs to have external beauty, but also inner beauty, and the beauty of her soul to create a real and sustainable value for a woman. From there, women regularly cultivate knowledge and nurture their souls so that the word "appearances" does not fade over time.

About "Speech": focused on polite and discreet language, the sound of soft, easy-

to-listen words. Language is also about respecting the content of words, paying attention to "speech" to "please" everyone and especially "please" the superiors. Words express the human soul. Rules and standards in communication are always necessary for everyone because it is a means of expressing thoughts and expressing the cultural beauty of people. Today, women don't always have to be shy, soft-spoken, and smiling to be called obedient. "Speech" needs to be clear, coherent, standard language, easy to hear, inspiring and appropriate to each situation, that's what is important. In addition, women are forthright, brave in criticism and self-criticism, and struggle against inequality in the family, with phenomena of lack of democracy and inequality in the society, in order to protect the rights of women. their own interests and those of others. A woman's strength is her soft, easy-to-listen, slow way of speaking with the motto "soft but tight".

 "Speech" is inherently a means of communication, a means of communication between a person and the people around him. Knowing how to use the word "speech" is a living art. It is not enough if a woman has the standards of ""Works", "Appearances" and "Ethics" but neglects "speech". For it is part of virtue, the manifest form of the word "virtue." People who say "good words", "good expression" are happy people. Persuasive speech requires eloquence, but perhaps only the intellectual part. In any era, people also prefer women who speak politely, gently, delicately, speak easily and have knowledge to behave appropriately with everyone.

About Ethics: In Pre-Qin Confucianism, Ethics is the leading standard to evaluate a woman's moral qualities. A woman's virtue is revealed through social and family relationships: husband-wife relationship, child-parent relationship, brother-sister relationship, people-mandarin- king relationship, relative relationship, and neighbor relationship. Women in the family live faithfully, have meaningful love, understand to be with their parents, respect grandparents, yield to brothers and sisters, these are moral values that need to be preserved and promoted today. That morality is closely associated with the spirit of patriotism, love for the people, kindness, sharing and sharing. As a woman, when she returns to her husband's house, her loyalty and deep love for her husband is a traditional beauty that needs to be preserved and promoted.

It is said that the doctrine of the four virtues of Confucianism in the Pre-Qin period greatly influenced the status and equal roles of women in the family and in society. From the point of view of Pre-Qin Confucianism, from within the family to outside the society, women have a lower status than men. Pre-Qin Confucianism at that time did not

properly acknowledge the role of women in history, but also contributed to binding freedom and inhibiting the development of women through the theory of four virtues.

Four virtues regulate the ethical behavior and living behavior of women, becoming the standard of beauty of women. Cultivating the four virtues requires women to perform in daily life at home. Therefore, at first glance, the four virtues seem the good qualities of women that need to be affirmed and promoted, but the four virtues are limited to four things that are not needed: talented, agile, beautiful, and more skillful. People and put the four virtues in the condition to get married. The Four Virtues are also the "*tool to enslave women's spirit*", the "*shackles*" that bind women.

Four virtues are barriers to women. It is a theory that contributes to gender inequality in society. In family life, men are the decision leaders, and women are the ones who make the men's decisions in a "supportive, secondary" manner. Men control and dominate all resources and interests of the family and control both women themselves and women's activities in the hierarchical system of the patriarchal family. When referring to the issue of gender inequality against women in the ancient Chinese Taoist book, it is inevitable that: "*It cannot be avoided that the old school teaching also has its age limitations, there are some scum and dogmatic methods must be reaped*" (DIEM, 2001, p. 198). "*The ancient teachers emphasized moral education in the family, but it contained the suppression of the children's independent personality, especially a series of oppressive moral normative constraints on women are things to condemn*" (DIEM, 2001, p. 198). We believe that, from a value point of view, Confucianism is not a homogeneous value system. There are positive factors that can be inherited such as Confucian moral character, but there are also negative factors that cannot be ignored, especially when women are used to dominate. Public standards Works - Appearances - Speech -Ethics require women to undertake all household chores, serve and sacrifice for their husbands and children unconditionally.

6.   Conclusion

It is very necessary to do research to show the values and limitations of the Four Virtues of Confucianism in the Pre-Qin period. Any theory born is associated with a certain historical period. Therefore, when researching we must adhere to specific historical principles. The theory of four virtues of Pre-Qin Confucianism is a doctrine that specifies the moral requirements for women in society. This theory is built on the stance of the ruling class. It forces women into certain social norms, binds people, and limits the creative

dynamism of women. In addition to positive values such as teaching women to perfect their outer beauty and inner beauty, this theory also brings many negative effects and in general it is the idea of "*respecting men, disdain for women*" deeply rooted in social life. The root of this idea is that Confucianism wants to educate women to the standards to maintain family order, broadly speaking, to maintain social order for the ultimate purpose of preserving status of the ruling class.

The Four Virtues in the past were the golden rule, the standard for a woman to strive and preserve all her life. Today, the four virtues are still necessary standards for the personality of modern women. Maybe, now, those standards have been replaced by new nuances, adapted to more modern life. However, the core values of the four virtues of Works - Appearances - Speech -Ethics are still valid. The doctrine of the four virtues of Confucianism in the Pre-Qin period not only exists in China to this day, but also affects neighboring countries, including Vietnam. That influence takes place in both breadth and depth, in both positive and negative aspects. However, when Pre-Qin Confucianism was introduced to other countries, it merged with the local culture to create a new nuance.

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