

## *Original Paper*

# Historical Comparison of Eastern and Western Ideas of Struggle

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### **Abstract**

*In both Eastern and Western cultures, the word struggle has a profound historical connotation, and along with historical changes and continuous cultural integration, the idea of struggle has gradually taken on Chinese and Western cultural connotations and values. Eastern struggle is derived from pictograms, which means to struggle with vigor; while the Western struggle is derived from the etymology of struggle, which emphasizes individual struggle. After tracing the connotation of both cultures, we find that the struggle in both cultures has a common pursuit, that is, the struggle for the realization of the ideal personality and the common pursuit of virtue and value, while the differences are expressed in the respective tendencies of rational appearance and practical practice, as well as the division of discourse between individualism and collectivism.*

### **Keywords**

*struggle, ideal personality, virtue, East and West*

## **1. The Connotation of Struggle**

### *1.1 The Meaning of Struggle in Chinese Culture*

The core semantic meaning of the word “struggle” cannot be separated from the understanding of “Fen” and “Dou”, which is explained in “Origin of Chinese Characters” as “Fen, birds flutter their wings and fly on the field”. The overall structure of the character represents the appearance of a bird raising its wings and taking off. The central morpheme lies in “dou”, which is also a simplified character for “door” and “dou”, which is described as “two soldiers facing each other, the staff is behind, and the shape of the door is like”, which means sparring and dispute, so the literal meaning of “dou” is to “struggle” with vigor and vigor.

Struggle, as a kind of spiritual pursuit, life philosophy, value orientation, and behavior shared by human beings, has been an intangible treasure shared by human beings and a fine tradition inherited by all nations in the world for thousands of years. Take the history of the struggle of the Chinese nation as an example, struggle is the same as the history of people's struggle against nature, and the fate of man's

victory over heaven, is a high summary of the experience and wisdom of the Chinese nation in seeking survival and development, and is the magic weapon of the Chinese nation to overcome all difficulties and enemies. In a word, the word struggle has gradually developed from a word expressing individual nature to a word with group meaning, from a figurative individual action to the concept of “extreme effort or endeavor to achieve a goal, overcome difficulties or prevent evil” in the modern Chinese dictionary.

### *1.2 Western Understanding of Struggle*

Due to the differences in language and culture, the meaning of the content of the idea of struggle in the Western theoretical system is elaborated differently from the Chinese perspective, and the Western grasp of the main struggle is reflected in the focus on the individual struggle: a profit over righteousness as the basic orientation, self-striving as the way to achieve, individual freedom as the value goal, and justice as the social control mechanism. The interaction between human beings and society has started since the birth of mankind, and there has been a general shift in Western thought. The change in Western thought on struggle is roughly divided before and after the Enlightenment, with the first period focusing more on the cultivation of virtue in the political and social life of the city-state in the middle of nature, and the later period focusing more on modern liberalism.

- 1) The significance of personal struggle lies in the cultivation of moral character and participation in public affairs

Socrates spent his whole life studying the meaning of life and moral values. He famously proposed that “knowledge is a virtue”, linking virtue to happiness, and believed that as long as one knows the knowledge of goodness and practices reason, then one’s behavior is good and personal happiness comes from it. Plato’s “Ideal State” also advocates virtue and justice, in which a person who wants to achieve the truest happiness must restrain his desires, pursue the highest good with virtue, and achieve personal happiness in the process of realizing goodness. To make virtue and justice more concrete, it is the kind of person one should be, and the goal of the struggle is the political participation of people, the participation in the cause of all citizens - public affairs as a good, for example, Aristotle believes that “people are by nature political creatures living in the city-state, and they can only become involved in the public life of the city-state. They can only truly realize their human potential and virtue by becoming involved in the public life of the city-state, by participating in its deliberations and trials” (Feng, 2013). Preaching that devotion and service to the common good can sacrifice personal selfishness for justice and goodness, civic virtue is the key to a polity that can be sustained. Henry Stihlkommer similarly believed that people can achieve the highest goodness in their moral cultivation through continuous effort (Henry, 1988).

- 2) The goal of struggle turns to profit and wealth

With the development of Western capitalism, the formation of the state, and the emergence of Leviathan, the rapid development of private ownership brought about the origin of inequality, the great differentiation of totalitarianism, hierarchy, money, and possession of materials, the tension between

people and society, and the gradual emergence of individuality and self as the subject of confrontation with other people and confrontation with society, with everyone taking the protection of himself as the first priority. People realize their personal struggles mainly through hard work and reflect the success of their struggle through wealth and material sufficiency. For example, in his book “The Theory of Taxation”, the British classical economist William (2016) proposed that “land is the mother of wealth and labor is the father of wealth”, and he believed that labor is the source of human progress and the dynamic element of wealth creation. Bertrand Russell believed that a powerful morality is to achieve material success through struggle; this morality applies to both nations and individuals. A further study of how to achieve the abundance of wealth can be understood at the individual level as personal striving, and Aristotle (2013) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* states that people have to strive for happiness through their own striving and struggling because happiness lies in serious work, not in pastimes. If happiness is better obtained through effort than through luck, it is reasonable to assume that this is the way to obtain it. Kant (2014) argues that nature coaxes humans who are lazy by nature by presenting imaginary objects as real ends (such as the various pursuits of honor, power, and the pursuit of money). Other scholars believe that there are still diametrically opposed tendencies in the individual’s pursuit of wealth as well as other ends, and it is extremely easy to make man detach from the goal itself to be dominated by wealth and technology, e.g., Hegel (1962) believes that man pursues his own ends individually, and when he pursues these ends extremely, his narrow self leaves the universal, and he falls into evil, and this evil is subjective. Herbert (2016) argues that developed industrial societies are generally governed by technology, which creates efficient productivity, brings people abundant material wealth, and supports totalitarian political and managerial models, which in turn reinforce the universal use of technology, transforming the rationality of technology into a means of political domination, making it the principle that governs the economy, politics, culture, and the way people behave. principles that govern the way people behave. The same understanding of the equality perspective exists in the pursuit of wealth, and the reality of individual wealth disparity exists in Rousseau’s (2011) efforts to explore the happiness of all people in the Social Contract on the equality of wealth, yet complete equality is impossible to achieve. Based on the above discussion of wealth, scholars have affirmed the undeniability of private ownership itself through a variety of perspectives, and subsequent discussions have been similarly based on the consideration that, with the system itself as such, inequality has brought about a thirst for wealth and fame, and the direction, path, and goal of striving is particularly monotonous, with the existence of a natural bondage to the irresistible forces of reality and the modern individual’s values and The pursuit of confusion.

### 3) Promote self-preservation through struggle and improve personal ability and quality

With the decline of the basic natural rights in the Western system of thought, the emphasis was placed on the value and rights of man himself, on the struggle of man not as an instrument but as an end in itself. Such as Campanella’s “City of the Sun”, More’s “Utopia”, Montesquieu’s “Caveman”, and Voltaire’s “Golden State”, confidently designed the future believing that human society could be

perfect and that human development could be achieved with efforts of transformation. For the basic conception of the philosopher king, the West in the evolution of the ideal personality shaping individual ability and personality independence placed an important position, such as Van Dijk et al. (2006) think that the motivation of people's struggle is to enhance their own sense of motivation by reducing dependence on others. Fowell Buxton attributed his success to hard work and perseverance toward a certain goal (Hou, 2002). Dale (2015) believed that only hard work can help people reach success. There are also scholars from the stimulation of human potential for "extraordinary" realization as its own needs, the American psychologist Alexander believes that the important factors affecting individual achievement, include individual perseverance, high self-control, and motivation (Zhang W. T., Zhang J., & Ma, 2009). Hayek (1998) suggests that we are struggling for the freedom to shape our lives according to our own ideas, and that we can only struggle for the absolute values of life and health, beauty and goodness, honor and spiritual peace, which cannot be at risk. Of course, the emancipation of individual freedom in the West also means the emancipation of thought, and Marx (2009) pointed out in his Outline on Feuerbach that man should prove in practice the truthfulness of his own thinking, that is, the reality and power of his own thinking, that is, the here-ness of his own thinking. Many holistic theoretical conceptions falter, and the right to defend them can only be given back to the individual, who realizes the contemplation of the way forward of the struggle through perseverance, extraordinary self-control, individual initiative and the inevitable struggle for absolute values.

#### 4) Struggle in psychology values defining struggle in terms of life goals

Psychologist Emmons (1986) defines "struggle" as "a coherent pattern of individual goal orientation, referring to what an individual is currently trying to do". He starts from the specific characteristics of struggle, sees the long-term nature and stability of struggle, and believes that personal struggle is more stable, that personal struggles reflect a continuous development throughout our lives, and that the achievement of one subgoal in a personal struggle does not represent the completion of the entire struggle process. Little (1989) similarly defines a personal plan as a series of related activities intended to achieve a personal goal; something that people think about, plan for, and engage in, a route or path to a goal. Other scholars have delineated more specifically the series of states of struggle in life, e.g., Cantor et al. (2000) introduced the concept of life tasks and defined them as a series of tasks that people are currently committed to solving and that individuals devote their energy to face in a particular life period, as an organized personal activity. Klinger (1975), on the other hand, proposed the concept of current concern as a hypothetical motivational state that organizes an individual's experience around the pursuit of a goal. Roberts and Robins (2000) introduced the concept of major life goals, which refers to the personal ambitions of individuals to plan the content of their lives and the general life structures (general life structures) that individuals establish, such as starting a family, establishing a career, etc.

## 2. Comparison of Eastern and Western Ideas of Struggle

### 2.1 East and West Explore the Struggle for the Realization of the Ideal Personality

The goal of the struggle is always clear and changing. Looking at the ideas of struggle in China and abroad, we can grasp the ultimate goal of personal struggle from the understanding of the goal of struggle and realize the great pursuit of the ideal personality. The ideal personality refers to the moral perfection advocated by a certain society or class, so it is also called moral ideal, which has the characteristics of subjectivity, history and indigenously. Although the ideal personality of each era has its own characteristics, most of them represent the highest human moral pursuit of that era, and also represent the unity of truth, goodness and beauty, as well as the unity of virtue, poetry and humanism.

In the history of human intellectual development, almost every culture contains a description of the ideal personality. In the West, there were the “philosophers” of ancient Greek culture, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the prophets, etc., in Christian culture, and later in philosophy and political science, such as the “philosopher kings”. The root of the Western ideal personality is the individualism established by breaking the group consciousness through the intervention of commodities, often highlighting individual freedom and rights, advocating individual liberation, proclaiming individual independence, promoting individual achievement, pursuing individual enjoyment, perfecting individual personality, and believing that man is an individual with an inward and inner life. This theory determines that the self and self-awareness are the axis of Western values, and are the effective yardstick to measure whether the individual’s own personality is perfect and ideal. Ancient Greek philosophy generally emphasized the centrality of man in the universe, and often regarded “being a free man” as the greatest honor. Protagoras, the representative of the school of wisdom, further took human senses as the starting point for judging all things and pointed out that “man is the measure of all things”. In addition, Nietzsche’s emancipation of personality, Sartre’s existentialism, and Faustian spirit are typical representatives of the Western ideal personality.

Traditional Chinese culture is rich in ideas about the ideal personality, such as the Confucian “saint, sage, gentleman” personality, which has become the mainstream of Chinese feudal society since Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty dismissed a hundred schools of thought and revered only Confucianism; followed by the Taoist “true man, supreme man, divine man, sage” personality, which became the cultural lineage of Chinese culture with the characteristics of retreat, worldliness and individuality, and “the transformation and fusion of foreign Buddhism into the ‘Buddha, Bodhisattva, Marigold and Arhat’ personalities with local Chinese characteristics, this lineage of thought has injected new vitality into Chinese culture. This lineage of thought injected new vitality into Chinese culture and became a cultural resource comparable to Confucianism and Taoism” (Jing & Chen, 2020). Thus, it can be seen that the ideological genealogy of the ideal personality of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism organically constitutes the ideological system of the Chinese traditional ideal personality as a whole, and becomes the main content and theoretical source of the Chinese traditional ideal personality. The Chinese traditional ideal personality is the main content of the Chinese traditional

moral value and is also the basis for supporting the spiritual world of Chinese people.

Traditional Chinese ideal personality is an important representation of traditional Chinese moral values, and its core content is the theory of “inner sage and outer king”, that is, through the cultivation of people’s own hearts, the perfection of personality and the improvement of humanistic qualities, and the achievement of external achievements, so as to finally reach the state of “unity of heaven and man”, “unity of knowledge and action” and “unity of truth, goodness and beauty”. This is the starting point and foundation of the traditional Chinese ideal personality thought and even the traditional Chinese moral philosophy. It has been passed down and circulated for thousands of years, and has long been rooted in the hearts of Chinese people, becoming an inexhaustible spiritual motivation for generations of Chinese people. Based on the common ideological lineage and cultural soil, there is a profound endogenous relationship between the traditional Chinese ideal personality and the goal of struggle, which can provide an ideological reference, path reference and valuable reference for the long-standing idea of struggle.

### *2.2 The Common Pursuit of Virtue and Value between East and West*

In the relationship between individual struggle and group struggle, it is inevitable that the issue of how to deal with personal interests and social interests should be dealt with, and it is necessary to see the unity of the general environment, as well as to pay attention to self-cognition and basic moral and ethical norms, and to give norms and initiatives that are worth following for both individual and social performance.

Neither the Eastern nor the Western thought of struggle has ever avoided such a question, and it is reflected in virtue and value orientation. “The question of virtue, which concerns the happiness of the individual and the good of society, is indeed not innate, but is acquired in social life” (Jiang & Zhang, 2014). In the logic of ancient Greek and pre-Qin Confucian thinking, virtue is both a demand made on society at large and a demand made on the common subject who holds public power. Socrates and Plato considered virtue to be the goodness of the soul, the basis and source of which is human reason. Their basic view is that virtue is wisdom, and wisdom is the virtue of reason and is the determining factor and substance of all virtues. For example, Socrates and Plato especially emphasized “wisdom,” “courage,” “temperance,” and “justice,” which were later recognized as the most important virtues in ancient Greece. They were later recognized as the “four cardinal virtues” of ancient Greece. For example, Thomas Aquinas considered “wisdom/prudence,” “justice,” “fortitude,” and “temperance” to be all intellectual and moral virtues. These four cardinal virtues, together with the four cardinal virtues he and Augustine advocated, “faith,” “hope,” and “charity” (love). These four cardinal virtues, together with the four cardinal virtues of faith, hope, and charity (“love”), which he and Augustine advocated, are listed by the Catholic Church as the “seven virtues”.

The unique virtue of Chinese culture is the source of life of the Chinese nation, a unique bloodline mark of the Chinese people, and has been deeply integrated into the marrow of the Chinese nation.

“The important core of traditional Chinese philosophy is the ethics of virtue based on Confucianism and established by integrating the ideas of Buddhism and Taoism, i.e., the Way of the Inner Sage and the Outer King” (Zhang & Nie, 2018). In the thought of Chinese philosophy, the essence of man that distinguishes him from other creatures lies in the fact that man has virtue, and that man lives to practice benevolence and virtue. In pre-Qin Confucianism, Confucius said “virtue”: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith. In the *Analects of Confucius*, it is written: “Confucius said: ‘I am not able to do the three things that a gentleman does; the benevolent is not worried, the wise are not confused, and the brave is not afraid.’ Tzu-kung said, ‘The Confucius has made his own way.’” It can be seen that Confucius regarded wisdom, benevolence, and courage as the “virtues” of human beings. Confucianism advocates practicing benevolence, i.e., “To be benevolent is up to oneself”, “My old man is as old as others, my young man is as young as others”. The value of “benevolence and love” and “propriety and righteousness” should be transformed into “the heart”, and moral cultivation should be carried out from the inner cultivation of human beings to obtain the true meaning of morality. Mencius also proposed that people have four ends, such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom, and these four virtues are the excellent traditional virtues of our Chinese nation. Confucius said, “He who has virtue must have words, but he who has words need not have virtue. Those who are benevolent must have courage, but those who are brave need not have benevolence” (Jin, 2010, p. 159). and promote “self-restraint and restoration of propriety” (Jin, 2010, p. 130), “Do not do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Jin, 2010, p. 131), so as to restrain the negative effects of power, but also to actively promote the well-being of society, to achieve “the desire to establish oneself and to establish others, and to attain oneself and to attain others”. The purpose of the policy is to restrain the negative effects of power, and at the same time, to actively promote the welfare of society, so as to achieve the goal of “standing up for oneself and reaching others” (Jin, 2010, p. 65).

In the process of struggle, people pursue happiness, wealth and status, and express them in various forms. Virtue in this context takes the values that are in line with human needs as the substance, expresses the pursuit of good values, and shows them in a comprehensive form, while virtue points to goodness, involves values, is about the judgment of good and evil, and reflects positive and positive value implications. It is in real life that people pursue humane and good values, and put them into practice in specific individuals, becoming their stable character traits and generating virtue. Virtues are externalized in the form of life as the realization of value principles and ideals, and ultimately realize the self-fulfillment and perfection of human beings. Here, the multidimensionality and unity of existence provide the fundamental guarantee for the multifaceted nature of value forms and virtue forms.

### *2.3 The Respective Tendencies of Rational Appearance and Practical Groveling*

On the way of the struggle, based on the pursuit of virtue and value in the East and the West, but in the later stages of the formation of a completely different development towards the practical application of the highest good that can be pursued from the West towards the different demands of the struggle and

the respective pursuit of the highest good.

The crisis of modernity arose in the course of the sprouting and development of capitalism, and it was Hobbes who first pointed out that the passion for pride and self-preservation led people to decide to concede their rights in accordance with the requirements of the law of nature, and that the natural justification at this time was no longer the highest good, and that liberty makes people virtuous, not virtue makes people free. Strauss clearly states that “the second wave of modernity began with Rousseau” (Liu, 2008), who brought people to modernity in the name of the classics, accepted Hobbes’ statement about the decline of natural rights in his study of the state of nature, considered self-preservation as the first and only purpose, and believed that reason was not guided by the highest good of the recipient. Rather, natural law depends on reason. The distancing of man from his natural purpose, the criticism of science and technology, and the criticism of reason as the classical concept of the virtue of the perfection of man’s nature, is another descent from natural justification to natural rights following Hobbes. After the security of life and interests of the individual are considered as something worthy of protection, the individual can likewise alienate his rights for the sake of freedom, putting human reason in the first place.

If virtue establishes the heart for traditional Chinese philosophy, then the heart establishes the life for traditional Chinese philosophy, and at the same time, the groveling establishes the action for traditional Chinese philosophy. In principle, traditional philosophy advocates that natural sincerity and true nature are the origin of life, i.e., “sincerity is the path and sincerity is the pure land”. Therefore, it is important to realize the essence of traditional Chinese culture and to pursue spiritual self-realization and transcendence in order to re-establish one’s moral subjectivity and develop one’s superego. The core connotation of groveling is to focus on practice, i.e. “groveling and practicing”. It is mainly reflected in two aspects: first, personal moral practice; second, social practice based on moral practice. No matter how high the pursuit of life and how systematic the cultivation methods are, they must ultimately be put into practice, unifying moral awareness and moral practice to achieve the unity of knowledge and action. Only by actually participating in moral practice activities and applying the moral knowledge learned in moral practice can we truly cultivate people who are more in line with social evaluation and good qualities.

#### *2.4 The Discursive Divide between Individualism and Collectivism*

Therefore, along with the whole development of thought, the study of struggle in the West is closely connected with individualism, and they rarely use the word “struggle” directly translated from the Chinese context to describe the state or the effort for the goal. Rather, thinkers and researchers have tended to focus on the relationship between human and social life, value potential, and nature from the perspective of the individual. By now, it is a consensus that the core of Western culture is the idea of individualism, and the individual is the idea promoted by Western humanistic thought, which regards individual freedom, individual performance, individual interests and individual needs as the essential content, and gives great attention to the individual and overemphasizes individual values. American



cultural psychologist Harry (1995) refined Hofstadter's theoretical framework of collectivism and individualism, arguing that individualism "is driven by one's interests, needs, rights, and treaties with others" and "focuses more on individual goals than on collective goals."

Collectivism is one of the elements of the proletarian worldview, which emphasizes the principle of subordination of individual interests to collective interests. Therefore, the idea of collectivism is fundamentally opposed to the individualism of the bourgeoisie. The idea of collectivism inherits the advanced ethical ideas in history, reflects the laws of human social development, summarizes the behavior and ideas among advanced workers who put the collective interest first and is the basic principle of socialist morality and the communist moral system. Therefore, collectivism reflects the overall interests of the working people and is the dialectical unity of individual interests and the collective interests of society. The traditional Chinese culture has such an ideological tradition, especially emphasizing the principle of great justice and selflessness, and stressing that the overall interests of society take precedence over individual interests. Li Guang and Huo Zaidi of the Western Han Dynasty and Yue Fei, the famous national hero of the Southern Song Dynasty, served their own interests and dedicated themselves to their duties, and when their personal interests conflicted with those of the state, they resolutely chose to obey the interests of the state. The ancient Chinese moral code of "the world is the common good", "the unity of heaven and man" and the ideological value of "the common good before the private good" highlight the overall interests over local interests, highlight the ideological character of the Chinese people to exchange the small for the big and the small for the big, and nurture the core value of collectivism.

Of course, the idea of collectivism is not a concept unique to Chinese society, nor is the idea of individualism the preserve of Western society; both ideas are derivatives of the social attributes of human beings. In today's era, social life in countries that have entered modernization on the Western model is faced with the problems of spiritual objectification, utilitarianism and value nihilism. People no longer believe in justice, devotion, morality and nobility in the pursuit of materialistic desires and the loss of self. Traditional philosophy takes "life" as the base to build the foundation of mindfulness, which gives us an important inspiration to highlight the status of human beings. We should grasp the profound connotation of collectivism and its fundamental opposition to individualism from the unity of understanding and practice, history and reality, theory and method, and correctly understand the requirements of collectivism and its realization mechanism in the primary stage of socialism, so as to consciously and correctly grasp collectivism and make correct guidance in group and social struggle.

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