

A Cross-cultural Analysis of the Similarities and Differences between the Theory of “The Order of Love” and Pre-Qin Confucian Ethics and Its Enlightenment for Family Education

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Abstract:

The theory of “The Order of Love” proposed by the German psychologist Bert Hellinger constructs a psychological framework for interpreting family relationships, with systematic dynamics, intergenerational connection and orderly balance as its core tenets. Meanwhile, Pre-Qin Confucian ethics, rooted in classic texts such as the Five Classics, establishes a family ethical system centered on benevolence, filial piety, fraternal duty and Zhongyong. From a cross-cultural perspective, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the isomorphic characteristics between the two theories in terms of order, emotion, practice and value, and clarifies the essential differences in their theoretical cores, value orientations and practical paths. On this basis, it extracts their enlightenment values for contemporary family education in the aspects of personality cultivation, relationship repair and cultural inheritance. The study holds that the innovative integration of Western psychological theories and traditional Chinese ethical wisdom can not only provide a psychological perspective for the modern transformation of traditional family ethics, but also inject cultural connotations into the localization of Western family system theories. Ultimately, it offers a practical path that combines ethical rigor and psychological warmth for the construction of family civilization in the new era.

Keywords:

The Order of Love, Pre-Qin Confucian Ethics, Cross-Cultural Similarities and Differences, Family Education Value, Confucian Classics, Family Constellations

1. Introduction

Traditional family ethics constitute an important part of China's fine traditional culture, yet they are facing numerous challenges amid the transformation of modern society, such as the loosening of family structures and collisions between intergenerational concepts. Promoting their modern reconstruction has thus become

an urgent task to address. At the same time, the deepening of cultural exchanges between China and the West has facilitated interdisciplinary dialogues. Among these, the integration of Western psychological theories and traditional Chinese ethical wisdom has opened a new window for resolving current family predicaments.

Before elaborating on the discussion, we first clarify several key concepts in this paper. First, the theory of “The Order of Love”, derived from Bert Hellinger’s family constellation theory, centers on the implicit order formed by family members based on blood ties and emotions. It covers the right to belong, the sequence of responsibilities, as well as the flow of emotions and energy across generations, and its operation always follows three core principles: wholeness, balance and order. Second, Pre-Qin Confucian ethics refers to the ethical system founded and constructed by Confucian sages such as Confucius and Mencius, focusing on filial piety, fraternal duty, benevolence and Zhongyong, with an emphasis on behavioral norms and their underlying value principles at both family and social levels. Third, family education ethics refers to the set of norms and practices in the domain of family life, aimed at imparting moral concepts and cultivating sound personalities.

Current academic research on family constellation theory mostly focuses on its clinical applications in psychology, while studies on Pre-Qin Confucian ethics tend to emphasize the interpretation of traditional culture. Research that conducts a cross-cultural comparison between the two and focuses on their value for family education remains relatively scarce. Targeting this research gap, based on classic texts and adopting a comparative research method, this paper conducts a systematic analysis of the isomorphic characteristics and essential differences between the two theories. Meanwhile, it supports its viewpoints with classic examples from Pre-Qin Confucian classics and practical cases of modern family constellations, and critically examines their limitations, so as to provide enlightenment for modern family education.

2. Cross-cultural Isomorphic Characteristics Between “The Order of Love” and Pre-Qin Confucian Ethics

2.1. Isomorphism in the Dimension of Order: Intergenerational Hierarchy and Equivalence of Rights and Responsibilities

Based on the shared essence of the principle of order in the theoretical cores of both theories, the Theory of “The Order of Love” regards intergenerational order as the core of systemic stability. Its order dynamics emphasize that family members including ancestors, parents and children hold fixed hierarchical positions in the system, and younger generations shall not transgress the hierarchical order of elders; otherwise, this will trigger systemic imbalance. This kind of order is formed on the basis of blood ties, which determines the distribution of responsibilities and rights among members. Any act that breaks the systemic order will lead to imbalance, and the psychological problems of an individual are essentially manifestations of the system's pursuit of balance. Hellinger emphasizes: “The order has long been arranged, and love can only grow within the boundaries of order... According to the right of belonging in the system, a hierarchical order will develop, and this is an original order.” [1] (p33) This is highly isomorphic with the ethical order that emphasizes the hierarchy of elders and juniors in Pre-Qin Confucian ethics. The statement in The Analects of Confucius·Yan Yuan that “a father should be a father, a son a son” [2] (p181) and the one in Mencius·Teng Wen Gong Shang that “there is order between elders and juniors” [3] (p94) have clearly defined the ethical norms of human relations.

The patriarchal clan system recorded in *The Book of Rites·Minor Records of Mourning Apparel* that “a collateral line son becomes the ancestor of his own lineage, the heir of the collateral line son becomes the head of the major clan, and the heir of the father becomes the head of the minor clan” [4] (p111) has further institutionalized this kind of order through ritual.

The order principle of Pre-Qin Confucian ethics not only emphasizes respecting the hierarchy of elders and juniors, but also contains the deep-seated logic of “equivalence of rights and responsibilities”, which echoes the strong demand for balance between giving and receiving, loss and gain in the balance dynamics of “*The Order of Love*” [1] (p502). *The Book of Rites·The Great Learning* proposes that “being a son, one should abide by filial piety; being a father, one should abide by kindness” [4] (p223), which, together with the advocacy in *The Book of Rites·Li Yun* that “fathers should be kind, sons filial, elder brothers benevolent, younger brothers respectful” [4] (p78), constitutes a two-way and reciprocal family responsibility relationship. Parents should fulfill their responsibility of nurturing and educating their children with kindness, while children should fulfill their obligation of supporting and respecting their parents with filial piety. This is isomorphic with the viewpoint in “*The Order of Love*” that “one must return to order and face the truth; only in this way can solutions be found... love is founded in order” [1] (p33). By examining the evolution of the story of Shun’s filial piety, Wang Pei (2025) points out that filial piety divorced from parental kindness lacks a realistic foundation [5], which further confirms the core of reciprocal intergenerational rights and responsibilities in Confucian ethics, echoing the underlying logic of pursuing family system balance in “*The Order of Love*” across time and space. The case of “Duke Zhuang of Zheng defeats his brother Duan in Yan” recorded in *Zuo Zhuan·The First Year of Duke Yin* [6](p1-2) intuitively demonstrates the consequences of order imbalance. Jiang Shi, Duke Zhuang’s mother, favored his younger brother Duan, violating the family ethical balance principles emphasized by Pre-Qin Confucians, such as respecting the hierarchy of elders and juniors and maintaining proper maternal conduct, ultimately leading to fratricide and estrangement between mother and son. This historical case verifies the viewpoints in “*The Order of Love*” that “love can only grow within the boundaries of order” [1] (p33) and “regardless of whether parents or children are outstanding or ordinary, we must accept them as our own parents or children” [8] (p147). From the perspective of family system dynamics, Jiang Shi’s behavior broke the order of love, and the system could only seek restoration in the form of internal strife, which is precisely a manifestation of order pursuing balance and wholeness.

2.2. Isomorphism in the Dimension of Emotion: Rooted in Kinship and Pursuing Balance

In response to the implicit consensus of “harmonious relationships” in the value orientations of both, the theory of “*The Order of Love*” holds that the dynamics of the family system stem from the blood ties and emotional connections among members. This implicit emotional entanglement is the core of maintaining system integrity. Whether it is the mutual support among living members or the remembrance of deceased members, it is essentially a manifestation of emotional bonds, with the ultimate goal of achieving harmonious family relationships. Hellinger points out that love emits a peaceful atmosphere and has a healing effect [1] (p1); love operates behind all human behaviors [1] (p501); and for kinship and romantic relationships to succeed, they must conform to the laws of love [1] (p30).

Pre-Qin Confucian ethics also takes kinship as its emotional foundation and regards family harmony as its core pursuit. The statements in *The Doctrine of the Mean* that “benevolence is the essence of being human, and loving one’s relatives is the greatest expression of benevolence” [4] (p189), and in *The Analects of Confucius·Learning* that “It is rare for a man whose character is such that he is filial to his parents and respectful to his elders to have a taste for defying his superiors.” [2] (p2), both emphasize the fundamental status of kinship ethics. *The Analects of Confucius·Governance* proposes that “while parents are alive, serve them with propriety; when they pass away, bury them with propriety and offer sacrifices to them with propriety” [2] (p17), and *The Doctrine of the Mean* states that “serving the deceased as if they were alive, and serving the departed as if they were present—this is the height of filial piety” [4] (p187). *The Book of Songs·Greater Odes·Already Drunk* constructs a scene of emotional interaction between ancestors and descendants through sacrificial prayers [7], and *The Book of Rites·The Meaning of Sacrifices* clarifies that “sacrifice is the way to continue nurturing and filial piety” [4](p165), highlighting the significance of sacrifice in maintaining intergenerational emotions. This cherished value of kinship is akin to the concept of emotional connection in “*The Order of Love*”.

2.3. Isomorphism in the Dimension of Practice: Unity of Knowledge and Action and Practical Implementation in Daily Life

In terms of practical paths, neither of the two theories is abstract speculation; instead, both share the core demand of “being grounded in daily life”. “*The Order of Love*” emphasizes practicing the principle of order in family life, resolving psychological distress and family conflicts by adjusting the relationship patterns among members. In numerous family constellation cases conducted by Hellinger [1][10], adjusting members’ cognition of their order positions has successfully resolved problems such as parent-child opposition and marital conflicts.

Pre-Qin Confucian ethics also opposes discussing ethics in the abstract and advocates transforming abstract moral principles into specific family behaviors. The statements in *The Analects of Confucius* that “at home, be filial; outside, be respectful to elders” [2] (p6) and that “maintaining a respectful demeanor towards parents is the hardest thing” [2] (p20), in *The Book of Rites·Li Yun* that “fathers should be kind, sons filial, elder brothers benevolent, younger brothers respectful, husbands righteous, wives obedient, elders generous, and juniors compliant” [4] (p78), and in *The Doctrine of the Mean* that “the way of a gentleman is like traveling a long distance—one must start from nearby; like climbing a high mountain—one must start from below... Harmony between husband and wife is like the harmonious music of a zither and a se. Harmony between brothers brings joy and peace” [4] (p188), all clearly require practicing kindness, filial piety, fraternal duty and marital harmony within the family. The detailed norms for daily life and social interactions recorded in *The Book of Rites·Etiquette and Ceremonial* [4] (p1-15) further permeate ethics into every detail of family life. *The Analects of Confucius·Zilu* states that “a father covers up for his son, and a son covers up for his father—this is the essence of integrity” [2](p197), advocating that relatives can act against conventional justice to maintain the balance of family ethics. This value orientation of “prioritizing overall ethics” is highly consistent with Hellinger’s core viewpoint that “everyone serves the system in their own way” [1] (p503).

2.4. Isomorphism in the Dimension of Value: Family as the Foundation and Radiation to Society

The commonality between the two theories in terms of theoretical scope is that both take the family as their core carrier, and their deeper resonance lies in the shared recognition of the transmission logic of “family, state and society”. Both “The Order of Love” and Pre-Qin Confucian ethics hold that the ethical order and emotional connections of the family can be extended to national governance and social operation, serving as the foundation for maintaining the stability of larger communities.

“The Order of Love” holds that the family system is the foundation of individual survival and development; family stability can not only ensure individual mental health, but also influence social harmony through individuals. Hellinger proposes that a healthy family system is the micro-foundation for building a harmonious society; the sense of order and responsibility that individuals acquire in the family are also the core norms for their survival in society [1](p3). This resonates intrinsically with the value core of “homology of family and state” in Pre-Qin Confucian ethics. Mencius·Li Lou Shang states that “the foundation of the world lies in the state, and the foundation of the state lies in the family” [3](p125), clearly pointing out the fundamental role of family stability in national governance. The ethical viewpoint in The I Ching·Hexagram Kun that “a family that accumulates virtue will surely enjoy lasting blessings; a family that accumulates vice will surely suffer lasting misfortunes” [9] (p25) echoes Hellinger’s viewpoint on the intergenerational effect of system dynamics [1] (p30,35). If debts left by the perpetrator’s generation are not resolved, they are usually passed on to later generations. For example, a German woman endured profound guilt and suffering due to her father’s identity as a Nazi doctor; her tutor advised her to establish an orphanage as a means of atoning for her father’s wrongdoings—a choice that became her “fortress of inner strength”. The Analects of Confucius·Learning states that “those who practice filial piety and fraternal duty rarely rebel against their superiors; those who do not rebel against their superiors never rise up in rebellion” [2] (p2). Hellinger remarks that “the power gained from sin can enable people to do great and good things” [1] (p80), and that “children should live a meaningful life to honor their mother... doing beautiful and kind deeds” [1] (p363). If the legacy passed down by the previous generation is a harmful family burden, it is better for children to donate it to charitable organizations [8] (p152-154). All these contain the radiation effect of family ethics on society, and both point to the core value of taking the family as the foundation and radiating to society.

3. Core Differences Between “The Order of Love” and Pre-Qin Confucian Ethics

3.1. Differences in Theoretical Core and Boundaries

3.1.1. “The Order of Love”: Implicit System Dynamics and Family Psychological Boundaries

From the perspective of “The Order of Love”, the family is an organic and dynamic system, and its stable operation relies on the following implicit core principles. First, the principle of order and belonging: the family system includes not only living members, but also deceased and unborn family members, and each member has an irreplaceable position based on blood ties. Second, the sequence of responsibility

assumption: the responsibilities among members follow the natural order of life inheritance, such as parents nurturing their children and children supporting their parents—a chain that cannot be reversed. Third, intergenerational energy inheritance: unresolved emotional traumas and unfulfilled wishes of the previous generations will be unconsciously passed on to later generations through implicit dynamics, affecting their life choices and relationship patterns. Although this seems to echo the Confucian view that “if it accumulates evil, there will surely be an abundance of calamities” [9] (p25), their essence is different: the former refers to energy transmission at the system level, while the latter is a moral and ethical warning. Fourth, the adaptation rule between system conscience and individual conscience: system conscience is the psychological feeling that individuals comply with group standards, and individual conscience, as a subconscious rule, governs individuals to adapt to system needs. This theory has a clear research boundary, strictly limited to the internal family system, focusing on family relationship adjustment and individual psychological healing, with its practical applications mostly concentrated in the field of psychological counseling.

3.1.2. Pre-Qin Confucian Ethics: Explicit Ethical Order and Boundaries of Connecting Family and State

Pre-Qin Confucianism advocates building an explicit ethical order to provide a practical framework and cultural basis for the homology of family and state. Taking the family as the origin of ethics, it constructs a hierarchical ethical system. The foundation of this system is the ethical order centered on filial piety and fraternal duty. The *Analects of Confucius·Learning* proposes that filial piety and fraternal duty are “the foundation of benevolence” [2] (p2), which not only regards filial piety and fraternal duty as the fundamental practice of benevolence, but also serves as the ethical starting point for the homology of family and state. On this basis, Confucianism further clarifies the practical path of connecting family and state. The *Great Learning* states that “those who wish to govern the state must first regulate their family” [4] (p222), which echoes the concept of “cultivating oneself, harmonizing the clan, and reconciling all nations” in *The Book of Documents·Canon of Yao* [11] (p1), together outlining the ethical progression route of cultivating oneself, regulating the family, governing the state and pacifying the world. Zhongyong and benevolence are the core principles running through it, integrating both the cosmic view of “harmony between humans and nature” embodied in *The I Ching·Hexagram Qian·Commentary* that “a great person conforms his virtues to those of heaven and earth” [9](p16), and the emotional core of “loving others” for a benevolent person recorded in *The Analects of Confucius* [2] (p185).

3.2. Differences in Ideological Origin and Value Orientation

“The Order of Love” evolved from Western family system theory and existential philosophy, focusing on the implicit psychological entanglements among family members. Its core is to help people find the survival rules within the family system, so as to assist individuals in resolving psychological traumas. It emerged in the specific context of modern Western society—namely, the rise of individualism, the loosening of traditional family bonds, and the increasing prevalence of various psychological problems among people. For this theory to take effect, the key lies in whether individuals can perceive the underlying system rules. “The Order of Love” takes individual health as its core value orientation, ensuring that members stand in the

family system with a complete sense of self, and its system conscience does not involve moral judgment.

Pre-Qin Confucian ethics, on the other hand, nurtured in the patriarchal clan society of ancient China, has had a distinct orientation towards the survival of collective ethics from the very beginning, with the patriarchal clan system of the Western Zhou Dynasty as its institutional foundation. During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, an era marked by the collapse of rituals and music, thinkers such as Confucius and Mencius refined and elevated the ethical practices originally within the patriarchal clan framework into a systematic theory. Their fundamental purpose was to achieve long-term social stability by regulating internal family order. Therefore, the core value pursuit of Pre-Qin Confucian ethics is not the independent development of individuals, but the survival of families and social collectives; the realization of individual value must be incorporated into the framework of collective ethics. Unlike the system conscience in “The Order of Love”, the conscience in Confucian ethics has a completely moral attribute. As Confucius said, “doing as one pleases without transgressing the rules” [2](p16), which is the best proof that individuals integrate their original intentions with moral norms through long-term self-cultivation.

3.3. Differences in Practical Paths

3.3.1. “The Order of Love”: Autonomous Psychological Adjustment Based on Awareness

The core of practicing “The Order of Love” lies in individuals’ unconscious awareness of system rules, without the need for external compulsory constraints or moral education. Through professional methods such as family constellations, individuals recognize implicit problems such as intergenerational entanglements and order dislocation, and independently adjust their behaviors and cognition, ultimately achieving harmony with the family system.

3.3.2. Pre-Qin Confucian Ethics: Dual Practice of External Norms and Internal Self-Cultivation

The practice of Pre-Qin Confucian ethics relies on the joint action of two mechanisms: external norms and internal self-cultivation. On the one hand, it takes “rituals” as external behavioral norms to constrain individual words and deeds; on the other hand, it takes “self-cultivation” as the path of internal cultivation, gradually cultivating moral consciousness through the study of classics, the demonstration of role models and personal practice. Confucius’ statement of “doing as one pleases without transgressing the rules” is the ultimate achievement of this practical path, representing a harmonious state where external education interacts with internal self-reflection.

4. Double Insights From Differences and Isomorphism: Interpretation of Family Education Value and Practical Paths

4.1. Value for Personality Cultivation: Shaping a Sound Self and Cultivating a Sense of Responsibility and Gratitude

Starting from the common foundation of personality cultivation in both theories, and combining the complementarity of the order principle in their theoretical cores

and their value orientations, both theories regard a sense of responsibility and self-awareness as their core focus, and their differences just provide complementary paths for cultivating a sound personality.

From the perspective of order, the consensus of both theories on intergenerational hierarchy and the equivalence of rights and responsibilities determines the key point of personality cultivation: individuals need to clarify their positions and responsibilities in the family. This is not only consistent with the psychological awakening approach of “The Order of Love” to correct order dislocation and resolve intergenerational traumas, but also echoes the moral cultivation requirements of Pre-Qin Confucianism that serving parents is of utmost importance and safeguarding one's moral integrity is of utmost importance.

The differences in value orientation (one emphasizing individual psychological well-being and the other emphasizing the survival of collective ethics) enable personality cultivation to form a dual system of psychological health and moral consciousness: “The Order of Love” helps people break psychological shackles and establish a clear self-awareness; the Confucian concept of self-cultivation of “doing as one pleases without transgressing the rules” enables individuals to assume moral responsibilities while realizing self-worth, ultimately cultivating a psychologically healthy personality with a sense of responsibility and gratitude.

Hellinger points out that if the fate of a member in the family system is ignored, it will exert a profound impact on personality development [1] (p33). The significance of family constellation therapy is to help people see this intergenerational transmission and achieve self-awakening [1] (p33). This also warns family education that it is necessary to pay attention to intergenerational emotional entanglements to prevent children from losing themselves in implicit identification. Pre-Qin Confucianism also attaches great importance to the role of family education in shaping personality. The Book of Rites·The Meaning of Sacrifices states that “parents give birth to their children with a sound body and mind, and children should return their body and mind to the world in the same state—this can be called filial piety” [4] (p162), requiring children to cultivate a sense of gratitude and responsibility in the process of serving their parents. Mencius·Li Lou Shang proposes that serving parents is of utmost importance and safeguarding one's moral integrity is of utmost importance [3] (p135), combining serving parents with safeguarding one's moral integrity to urge everyone to uphold goodness in their conduct. Zuo Zhuan records that Duke Zhuang of Wei's doting and neglect of education led to his son Zhou Xu's poor personality, resulting in the disastrous consequences of being betrayed by everyone and dying in infamy [6] (p12-15), which confirms the key role of family education in personality cultivation. On the contrary, the story of Meng Xizi, a minister of the State of Lu, who, on his deathbed, instructed his two sons to study rituals under Confucius, and the two sons developed a humble character after learning rituals [6] (p633-634), highlights the effectiveness of educating people through rituals. These records are consistent with Confucian ideas, highlighting the fundamental role of family education in clarifying ethics and cultivating moral character.

4.2. Value for Family Harmony: Resolving Intergenerational Conflicts and Constructing Positive Relationships

From the perspective of the isomorphism in the emotional dimension and the differences in practical paths, the emotional commonality of both theories, which is

rooted in kinship and pursues harmony, serves as the common premise for building family harmony, while the divergence in practical paths provides diversified ideas for resolving conflicts.

“The Order of Love” is good at revealing implicit conflicts and repairing relationships by clarifying unconscious entanglements; Pre-Qin Confucian ethics provides explicit behavioral norms to constrain words and deeds with ethical principles. The differences in the theoretical boundaries of the two form a complementarity: the former focuses on psychological adjustment within the family, while the latter extends harmonious relationships to intergenerational inheritance through the two-way ethics of parental kindness and filial piety. A large number of family constellation cases [1][8][10] show that the expression of love in families often goes wrong; many people unconsciously inherit the fates of their predecessors and fall into blind love. After clarifying the fate order that each person should assume, conflicts are resolved and families can return to harmony.

Pre-Qin Confucian ethics provides specific behavioral guidelines for family harmony. The Analects of Confucius proposes the principle of getting along that “when advising parents, one should be gentle; if they do not follow one’s advice, one should still respect them without disobedience” [2] (p55), advocating gently advising parents and maintaining respect even if the advice is not adopted, so as to avoid intensifying conflicts. To construct a positive parent-child relationship in contemporary family education, it is necessary to return to the two-way core of parental kindness and filial piety: “parental kindness” requires parents to abandon authoritarian education and pay attention to the psychological needs of their children; while “filial piety” should focus more on emotional care and spiritual comfort rather than blind obedience, which is highly consistent with the viewpoint in “The Order of Love” that parent-child relationships should be based on respect and boundaries.

4.3. Value for Cultural Inheritance: Carrying Forward Traditional Essence and Integrating Modern Concepts

Both Confucian ethics and “The Order of Love” take the family as the foundation and radiate to society, and this isomorphism lays the foundation for cultural inheritance; their theoretical differences provide a new perspective for the modern interpretation of traditional wisdom. Specifically, “The Order of Love” provides a scientific framework for interpreting Confucian family ethics, helping to eliminate the feudal dross from the connotations of filial piety, fraternal duty and honoring ancestors and remembering the past, and returning them to their essence of maintaining families and nurturing emotions. Confucian ethics provides local soil for the former, making foreign theories more viable when localized in China. The two complement each other to form a sound inheritance mechanism.

The concepts of system integrity and role order in “The Order of Love” can be verified through the diversified family practices of Confucianism. Among them, the advocacy of clarifying role boundaries is highly consistent with the Confucian values of parental kindness, filial piety, elder brother’s benevolence and younger brother’s respect; the problem of intergenerational emotional inheritance can also be resolved through the Confucian tradition of self-reflection that “one should be strict with oneself and lenient with others” [2] (p234).

Respecting and remembering ancestors is the common core carrier of both theories. Confucianism regards ancestor worship as the practice of being careful with the end

and pursuing the distant, strengthening intergenerational bonds through sacrificial rituals and ancestral worship, which echoes the logic of the Theory of “The Order of Love” that “every family member, whether living or deceased, has an equal right to belong” [1](p503) and “respect and pay homage to ancestors” [8](p154). In addition, Confucian culture is inherited by virtue of family education. The concept of “Three Immortalities (establishing virtue, establishing meritorious deeds, establishing words)” recorded in Zuo Zhuan [6](p502) connects individual value with family honor and social contribution, enriching the connotation of intergenerational connections. The Analects of Confucius states that “being careful with the end and pursuing the distant, the virtues of the people will return to earnestness” [2](p8), which elevates family bonds to social education; the statement that “doing as one pleases without transgressing the rules” [2](p16) provides guidance for contemporary people to balance the self and the order.

4.4. Value for Social Adaptation: Cultivating Ethical Individuals and Contributing to Order Stability

From the perspective of the internal connection between practical paths and value orientations, the isomorphism of Confucian ethics and “The Order of Love” in the “unity of knowledge and action” determines the core status of family education in cultivating individuals’ social adaptability; the complementarity of their value orientations enables the cultivation of social adaptability to balance individual development and collective harmony. Specifically, the sense of order perception and responsibility awareness cultivated by “The Order of Love” lay a solid psychological foundation for individuals to integrate into society; the moral personality and etiquette literacy shaped by Confucian ethics make individual behaviors conform to social ethical norms. The organic integration of the two helps to achieve a win-win situation of individual social adaptation and social order stability.

Hellinger points out: “Love can thrive only when individual conscience and social customs obey the hidden harmony and laws of love” [10](p30); the laws of love that individuals follow in the family system are also the core norms for the survival of the entire social customs. Pre-Qin Confucian ethics has always attached importance to the social adaptation function of family education. The Great Learning advocates that “from the Son of Heaven down to the common people, all must take self-cultivation as the foundation” [4] (p222), and Mencius·King Hui of Liang I states that “Honor the elders in your own family, and then extend that honor to the elders of others; care for the young in your own family, and then extend that care to the young of others” [3] (p12), which emphasize cultivating individual moral character and extending family ethics to the society through family self-cultivation, thus fostering sound social mores. The Book of Rites·The Etiquette Rules states that “Parrots can speak, yet they remain birds; orangutans can speak, yet they remain beasts” [4](p1), which further highlights the important role of rituals in the socialization of individuals.

This concept of family education centered on moral cultivation has been verified by numerous practical cases in history. Many cases of family prosperity have positively interpreted its profound value, while many cases of family decline have negatively confirmed the serious consequences of neglecting moral cultivation. The harmonious unity between individuals and rules advocated by “doing as one pleases without transgressing the rules” is the core requirement of modern society for citizens; cultivating this quality can achieve a win-win situation of individual development and social harmony.

4.5. Value for Practical Paths: Integrating Tradition and Modernity and Optimizing the Family Education System

Starting from the complementarity and limitations of Confucian ethics and “The Order of Love”, and taking extracting the essence, discarding the dross and integrating innovation as the core, this paper constructs practical paths for family education suitable for contemporary needs, providing directions for optimizing the family education system.

First of all, based on the differences in their origins, we should follow the principles of homology and complementarity, and adapting measures to local conditions to promote the modern transformation of traditional wisdom and the localization of theories. For the contemporary interpretation of Confucian thoughts on filial piety and fraternal duty, we should strip off the feudal hierarchical shell, transform filial piety into emotional care and support responsibilities, and extend fraternal duty into equal respect among family members. The Confucian values of “harmony is the most precious thing” in *The Analects of Confucius·Learning* [2](p10) and “attaining perfect balance and harmony” in *The Doctrine of the Mean* [4](p186) can be transformed into inclusive norms for family communication, and the concept of “when a thing reaches its limit, it reverses; change leads to continuity” in *The I Ching* [9] (p420) can guide special families such as single-parent and reconstituted families to adjust their ethical models. The localized application of “The Order of Love” needs to combine the characteristics of Chinese families that value family interests and intergenerational inheritance, integrate the Confucian concept of honoring ancestors and remembering the past, and take into account the continuation of family culture while focusing on individual psychology.

Secondly, the ethical speculation of classic Pre-Qin Confucian cases can complement the practical methods of modern family constellation cases, providing diversified references for family education. On the traditional side, the classic case of “Duke Zhuang of Zheng defeats his brother Duan in Yan” in *Zuo Zhuan·The First Year of Duke Yin* warns us to adhere to the bottom line of family ethics such as respecting the hierarchy of elders and juniors and parental kindness and filial piety. Confucius’ emphasis on “being filial at home and respectful to elders outside” highlights the importance of parents setting an example through their own actions. The story of Mencius’ mother moving three times emphasizes the importance of the growth environment. The Kong family’s ancestral motto of “upholding Confucianism, respecting the way, valuing rituals and advocating virtue” has achieved the inheritance of moral character for thousands of years, implying the logic of intergenerational transmission of moral character. On the modern side, numerous family constellation cases have resolved conflicts and reshaped cognition and personality by adjusting members’ cognition of their order positions, all of which provide cross-temporal references for contemporary family education and moral character cultivation.

Thirdly, facing up to limitations and actively exploring optimization directions are the keys to constructing an educational system integrating tradition and modernity.

For Pre-Qin Confucian ethics, we should abandon its feudal dross. For example, the advocacy of absolute obedience in *The Book of Rites·The Record of Music* that “establishing the relationships between father and son, monarch and minister as the guiding principles” [4](p131), and the patriarchal ideology in *The Book of Rites·Special Sacrifices in the Suburban Temple* that “men lead, women follow...

women are those who obey others” [4] (p90) should be resolutely discarded. Views such as “While parents are alive, do not travel far away” in *The Analects of Confucius·Governance* [2] (p56) also need to be practically transformed in light of contemporary population mobility. “The Order of Love” also has problems such as excessive mystification; the influence of unborn members lacks scientific basis, and the viewpoint that order is irreversible to a certain extent ignores the equal attributes of modern families. Its application needs to be comprehensively analyzed in combination with multi-disciplinary theories. Based on this, the construction of the contemporary family education system should adhere to extracting the essence and discarding the dross: ethically absorbing Confucian thoughts on benevolence, filial piety, fraternal duty and Zhongyong; methodologically drawing on “The Order of Love” to sort out family relationships and resolve implicit conflicts. At the same time, it should take into account changes in modern family structures, integrate the Confucian spirit of tolerance with the order adjustment ideas for special family forms, and under the guidance of Confucius’ teaching in *The Analects of Confucius·Yong Ye* that “a gentleman extensively studies literature and restrains himself with rituals” [2] (p91), promote the formation of educational synergy among schools, society and families, and improve the ethical cognition and psychological literacy of family members.

5. Conclusions

From a cross-cultural comparative perspective, this study sorts out the isomorphic characteristics and differences between Hellinger’s “The Order of Love” theory and Pre-Qin Confucian ethics, and explores their enlightening values for contemporary family education. The study finds that although rooted in different cultural soils, the two theories resonate across time and space in maintaining intergenerational order, pursuing family harmony, practicing ethics in daily life and connecting family with society, which confirms the common pursuit of human beings for family ethics. The differences in their theoretical cores, value orientations and practical paths provide space for the complementary integration of Chinese and Western family ethical wisdom.

This study has certain limitations: for example, it focuses on core family ethics and mainstream theories, with insufficient discussion on the adaptability to special family forms; it mainly adopts literature analysis with weak empirical support. In the future, we can expand cross-cultural cases, introduce empirical methods, and explore the application paths of the two theories in the reconstruction of family ethics in the digital age.

Against the background of the modern transformation of traditional family ethics, the construction of family ethics in the new era should take the fine traditional Chinese culture as the foundation, absorb the scientific methods of Western psychology, and promote the creative transformation of the fine traditional Chinese wisdom. This integration can not only provide practical solutions for resolving intergenerational conflicts and repairing family relationships, but also accumulate valuable experience and theoretical reference for inheriting the fine traditional Chinese family culture and fortifying the family foundation of a harmonious society in the new era.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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