The Influence Of Confucianism And Daoism On Chinese Societies

The development of social and political thought in ancient China occurred in the VII-III centuries BC. During this period, China began to experience significant economic and political changes because of the formation of private ownership on land. The increase in the inequality of property within communities led to the increase in the number of upper classes and social tensions. There was a struggle for power between the rich and the nobles. Ideologists began to take steps to strengthen the status of the classes they represented and to ensure political stability. As a result, certain religious and philosophical ideas emerged in China. Two of the most important ideologies were Confucianism and Daoism. Confucianism was developed by Confucius in 551 - 479 BC. Its main values are humaneness, mutual respect, kindness and ritual. On the other hand, Daoism was created by Lao-Tzu in the VI-V centuries BC, and the meaning of word ‘Dao’ is the ‘way’, ‘path’ or ‘principle’. Daoism focuses on nature. Both ideologies played the main role in the political and social life of ancient China. However, the roles they played are different from each other.

Firstly, I would like to focus on how Confucianism affected political life in China. Confucius defended the interests of those who sought to reconcile the rich and the nobles. The rule of the state belongs to the ruler and then to the nobles. According to Confucius, dividing people into upper and lower classes cannot be eliminated, so this philosophy focuses on the social and family hierarchy. The difference between Confucius and the nobles was that he chose the nobles for their moral qualities, not because of their origin. There was a thought that if fair people were employed in civil service, the public would obey them. Confucianism was against laws, and religious rules had to be followed in governance. The general principle of interaction among people was ‘do not do others what you do not wish for yourself’. The ruler had to treat the citizens as his own children, and the citizens had to obey the ruler as his children. From this perspective, Confucianism can be a good way to govern the state, but I think that it promotes inequality. This ideology leads to despotic leaders, obedience, and oppression of women.

The purpose of Daoism is to balance life. The ideology of early Daoism reflected the views of the rich and the nobles, their protest against the excessive enrichment of the rulers, expansion of government activity and strengthening of public administration. Daoism sought to discredit the ideology of the ruling class and the official religious worship. According to this philosophy, whoever gains a lot, will lose more. There were widespread beliefs in this religion about the redistribution of property in favor of the poor. Things that are excess, are taken from the rich and given to those in need. It is not unjust because what the rich take from the poor is given back to them. Daoism has criticized their rulers for being too active in society, imposing excessive taxes and prohibition laws, and waging endless wars. Wise rulers must govern the state without actively interfering in the affairs of the members of society. This ideology was supported by the nobles and community leaders who lost their positions as a reult of civil and social stratification. These classes, who did not have the real strength to fight the new aristocracy, were trying to present themselves as defenders of this sacred ideology that others did not understand. Actually, they were trying to restore their material wealth. For this, they used the community's tradition of mutual help. I think that these ideas kept this philosophy away from being completely utopian. Because the foregoing which is about the poor, does not seem real,

and it also reminds me of utopia.

Confucianism and Daoism caused important changes in the social life of people, especially women. These philosophies took a different approach to the role of women in society. In Confucianism, the family was too important. Men were the head of the family, and women were subordinate to men. Women were at the bottom of the hierarchy, and they could not be the ancestral line as it is today. Women should obey men at every stage of their lives. Confucianism taught that a virtuous woman should obey the males in her family: the father before she marries, the husband after her marriage, and her sons in widowhood (2019). Their main duties were to get married, give birth to heirs, and take care of them. The men could have numerous wives; however, women were not allowed to see men except their husbands, close relatives and masters. Not surprisingly, Confucianism has been accepted as a sexist and patriarchal ideology that has historically hurt Chinese women.

Daoism supports the opposite idea on this issue. Daoism focuses on the feminine qualities of nature. Unlike Confucianism, in Daoism, women are seen as an important part of nature, and they are respected. Not surprisingly, the word ‘Dao’ means ‘Great Mother’. “Women are also allowed to participate in all levels of Daoism and were thought to be the only ones who could reach the highest levels of Dao lineage, all except that of the Divine Lord” (Ferreri and Nock, 2003). In spite of this, their social status did not rise, and they continued to be submissive to men. If we look at modern Chinese societies, we can still see this patriarchal regime.

In conclusion, this paper focused on the influence of Confucianism and Daoism on the social and political life of China. Despite the pros and cons, Daoism played an important role in terms of gender and social equality, and Confucianism has made a significant contribution to public administration. Therefore, these ideologies lived for a long time.