

## “Huainanzi” “Morality and Happiness Consistency” View Research

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**Abstract:** The issue of virtue and happiness holds a crucial position in both Chinese traditional and Western philosophical systems, and to this day, it remains a hot topic of concern and discussion. The "Huainanzi" was written during the early Western Han Dynasty, mainly based on Taoist thoughts, incorporating various schools of thought to form its distinct theoretical system. It can be seen as a culmination of the traditional Chinese pre-Qin perspective on "virtue and happiness" holding significant research value. "Huainanzi" firmly believes that the ideal situation between virtue and happiness is and must be a consistent relationship.

**Keywords:** Huainanzi; Virtue and Happiness Transformation; The Consistency of Virtue and Happiness

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### Introduction

The issue of the relationship between virtue and fortune is a key problem in moral philosophy, and it has been explored since the pre-Qin period. In "Han Feizi: Safety and Peril",<sup>1</sup> it is mentioned that "misfortune and fortune follow goodness and evil." Various schools of thought in China have different interpretations and insights into the concept of virtue and fortune since the pre-Qin period. Confucianism emphasizes the relationship between virtue and fortune with concepts like "The fun of Confucius and Yan Hui" and "A benevolent person has no worries." Mohism<sup>2</sup> expounds on the relationship between altruism and self-interest, frugality and happiness, and good and evil with their interpretation. Daoism promotes the idea that "Nature's Way is impartial, but it constantly aligns with virtuous people." After Buddhism was introduced to China, it merged the theory of karma and retribution with the traditional Chinese concept of virtue and fortune, emphasizing the pursuit of goodness as the primary purpose. In the life of Chinese, each person's value system contains to some extent the standards of "fairness" and "justice," and everyone strives to pursue "fairness and justice" to maintain personal well-being and social harmony. This reflects Chinese most basic concept of the relationship between virtue and happiness, and behind this concept is the infinite pursuit of "freedom". Looking at the book "Huainanzi", on the foundation of inheriting pre-Qin Taoist thoughts, "Huainanzi" integrated the essence of various schools of thought, and its theory of "virtue and fortune" is particularly comprehensive. "Huainanzi" is mainly based on Taoist thought, adapted to various schools, formed different theoretical systems, and mainly involves two issues when facing the "view of virtue and happiness". Firstly, it asserts the "harmony between virtue and fortune" as the main proposition, stating that "Gentlemen secretly do good deeds, even if they don't want others to know, they will be naturally rewarded." The second is the concept of "the contradiction between virtue and happiness", which is also based on drawing on the strengths of various schools of thought to put forward a more systematic theory. Therefore, "Huainanzi" can be seen as a culmination of the traditional Chinese pre-Qin perspective on "virtue and fortune," and its theory of "virtue and fortune" holds significant research value.

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<sup>1</sup> Ancient Chinese books, a collection of the works of the Han Feizi.

<sup>2</sup> Taoism, Mohism, etc. are different schools of doctrine that have been circulating since the pre-Qin period in China.

# **1. The Social and Historical Context and Cultural Origins of the "Harmony between Virtue and Happiness" View in the "Huainanzi"**

## **1.1 The Social and Historical Context of the "Harmony between Virtue and Fortune" View**

On the basis of the "concept of virtue and happiness" of various schools, "Huainanzi" firmly believes that the ideal situation between virtue and happiness is and must be a relationship of "unity of virtue and happiness". The fundamental reason for this can be traced back to the social and historical background and original purpose of the book "Huainanzi". In Mr. Wang Yundu's<sup>3</sup> book "Biography of Liu An", Liu An, the king of Huainan, is positioned as a "tragic figure in the turning period of history". Liu An lived in the period when the new emperor had just succeeded to the throne, and the tragedy of his grandfather and father's suicide and the cruelty of the royal court struggle, as well as the hidden social contradictions in the early Western Han Dynasty, all prompted Liu An to think about strategies to help the monarch govern the country, so the book "Huainanzi" is an innovative work that integrates the essence of various ideas such as the Confucian concept of benevolent politics, the legalist view of governing the country, and the strategic and tactical thinking of the soldiers, and takes Taoist thought or Taoist political philosophy as the main purpose. Therefore, it can also be said that the "The consistency of virtue and happiness" concept of "Huainanzi" is also to serve the social stability in the early dynasty.

## **1.2 The Cultural Origins of the "Harmony between Virtue and Fortune" View**

The book "New Talks" by Lu Jia<sup>4</sup> during the early Han period also explicitly pointed out: "The stricter the law, the more painful the people; The more the ruler does, the more chaotic the world becomes." It's not that the Qin dynasty didn't want to govern, but the reason for its failure lies in adopting extreme and violent measures." From this, we can see that the idea of "inaction" from Huang-Lao Taoist received approval from rulers and occupied a dominant position in the ruling ideology. As for why Huang-Lao Taoism gained recognition from rulers and even the entire country and society, the reason is not as simple as "The emperor and the ministers wanted to be cultivated" as stated by SiMa qian. Among them, it was not only the active choice of the rulers in the early days of their reign to consolidate their position and appease the people, but also the inability of Confucianism and Law to do anything at that time also made the Taoist theory of "Inaction" a last choice for the new ruler after the turmoil of the war. The strategy guided by Taoism in politics in the early Western Han Dynasty can also be seen as the embodiment of the political philosophy of Laozi's philosophy, so the development of Taoist political philosophy in the early Han Dynasty, that is, the political thought with the concept of "Inaction" as the core, was infinitely amplified. So, in the contemporary social context, the "Huainanzi" must have been heavily influenced by Huang-Lao Taoist thoughts. Its theories on the "Way" and the concept of "inaction" come entirely from "Laozi" and "Zhuangzi". At the same time, "Huainanzi" also provides a new interpretation of the theory of "Inaction", which was popular for more than 350 years from the Spring and Autumn period to the Western Han Dynasty. From this, it can be seen that the "inaction" in the "Huainanzi" is not a form of passivity where one complies with nature with a negative attitude, but rather, it is about acting in accordance with the flow of "heaven and earth" and adhering to human and societal laws. It means not artificially going against it, and at the same time, not equating "inaction" with doing nothing. Without the aspect of "doing" in "inaction," it would become empty and hollow. Only in this way can one achieve the unity of "inaction" while simultaneously "acting." When the idea of "inaction" is developed to the "view of virtue and happiness", it means conforming to the "trends of heaven and earth" and acting in accordance with the "Tao". The "Huainanzi" believes that "the Way leads all things, and Virtue supports one's nature." People can follow the guidance of the Tao, maintain their authenticity, and achieve harmony and tranquility in their hearts, and only then can they act in accordance with their nature by "being happy and forget the lowly, and forgetting the poor in peace".

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<sup>3</sup> Wang Yundu is a professor of history in China, specializing in the history of the Qin and Han dynasties.

<sup>4</sup> Chinese statesman and writer during the Western Han Dynasty. Founding Minister of the Western Han Dynasty.

## **2. The Main Content of the "Harmony Between Virtue and Fortune" in the "Huainanzi"**

### **2.1 Ideally, the concept of "Harmony with Virtue"**

On the basis of the connection between virtue and blessing, "Huainanzi" believes that the ideal situation between morality and blessing is to achieve "the unity of virtue and blessing", which is also according to the normal operation of the way of nature. For example, the descendants of famous monarchs can be called kings again because they have morality. And the descendants of the Zhou dynasty did not have good morals, so the dynasty was destroyed. So a conclusion is that doing good things can accumulate luck, and doing bad things must not have good results. This is also a profound truth summed up by thousands of years of Chinese civilization.

### **2.2 The Reality of the "Harmony Between Virtue and Happiness"**

The "view of virtue and happiness" identified in "Huainanzi" under ideal conditions is to achieve a state of "consistency of virtue and happiness", but in reality, different situations occur. Regarding this, "Huainanzi" believes that human nature is given by God, but human destiny is determined by time and the circumstances created by time. It is also determined by the era to have outstanding talents but not meet the era that matches them. In the first half of Jiang Taigong<sup>5</sup>'s life, he failed to recognize his talent and Bigan<sup>6</sup> died for the country. Both of them were just expressions of ambition according to nature, but some caused harm and some gained benefits. Some brought misfortune, while others received benefits. Therefore, although there are certain rules for pursuing and realizing ideals, whether you can succeed or not depends on fate. Therefore, although a gentleman can do good deeds, he may not necessarily receive blessings. Even if a gentleman cannot bear to do bad things, he may not be able to avoid disasters. Therefore, "Huainanzi" attributes the situation of "inconsistency between virtue and happiness" in real situations to "time" and "fate". However, in "Huainanzi", when dealing with "time and fate", we do not just follow it blindly, but believe that there is the possibility of human change.

### **2.3 The Possibility of Transforming Virtue and Happiness**

When "time, destiny" and "man" collide, "man" can also provide a possible space for the transformation of "contradiction between virtue and happiness". "Virtue and happiness are inconsistent" in having virtue but not happiness. The idea of virtue and no happiness is somewhat similar to the Chinese saying mentioned earlier: "Good people are not rewarded." At the same time, when the concept of "virtue but no blessing" is proposed, it may refer to a concept of "virtue" that is not really complete, or the subjective understanding of "virtue" is not yet comprehensive. In addition, in Huainanzi, "happiness" is said to stem from "inaction." Saints do not take the initiative to do good deeds or avoid calamities. They just follow the laws of nature and conform to the laws of nature. By following the principles of nature, they harmonize with nature's changes. They do not seek personal gains nor reject good fortune, and they act in accordance with the path of nature. Not seeking what they lack prevents them from losing what they have obtained. By following the laws of natural operation, we can achieve "no disaster", and "no disaster" can also be regarded as "happiness".

## **3. Conclusion**

The relationship between virtue and happiness is an eternal and profound topic in philosophical inquiry, transcending time and space. But even today, the contradiction between virtue and happiness remains a pressing issue. Therefore, the concept of "virtue and happiness are consistent" is also very appropriate from an educational perspective. It constantly encourages people to do good and find inner comfort in difficult times in life. However, when the "relationship between virtue and happiness" brings about a new round of ideological changes, it is also necessary to pay attention to maintaining the balance of thought, and the impact of the "moral and happiness problem" should only be a vision and spiritual support for the future beauty, rather than religious belief. Therefore, it is clear that by taking the "question of virtue and happiness" to a theological perspective, it loses the true meaning of this question. What is embodied in "Huainanzi" is the respect for "virtue", the confidence in morality, no matter what concept is also to take "virtue" as the basis of "happiness", only the "happiness" brought by "virtue" is the real "happiness"; At the same time, after the concept of "virtue for happiness" is established, it is also necessary to carry out moral action, and the concept of "virtue" is resorted to in action.

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<sup>5</sup> Another name is Jiang Ziya. Politician and strategist at the end of the Shang Dynasty. Founding minister of the Western Zhou Dynasty.

<sup>6</sup> The uncle of the last monarch of the Shang Dynasty was killed for admonishing the monarch.

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