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Lecture 20: Philosophical Aspects of Chinese Culture

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20.1 Confucianism

Confucianism probably provides the most important system of values and institutions against which all affect, behavior, and cognition of the Chinese in both feudal and modern China have to be viewed, assessed, and comprehended.

Confucianism is a system of moral, ethical, social, political and philosophical thought, a doctrine of this-worldly social mindedness. It was ordained by Emperor Wu (漢武帝) of the Han Dynasty (202 BC–AD 220) that it should be used as a system of government. Study of the Confucian classics became the core of the educational curriculum, and formed the basic syllabus of the government examination system, the ke ju (科舉).

A major restructuring of Confucianism was conducted during the Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279) to simultaneously refute and integrate elements of Taoism and Buddhism which were becoming influential. This led to the appearance of Neo-Confucianism, of which Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200) was the most important proponent.

Since the 1980s, there has been a revivalist movement which has led to the birth of New Confucianism (also referred to as Neo-Confucianism). This movement attempts to reestablish the value of Confucianism in modern China in the face of social turbulence brought about by rapid modernization, globalization, and industrialization. (Which ultimately leads to a joke. 《何谓普世? 谁之价值?》)

Unlike Taoism and Buddhism, Confucianism does not have a priesthood or clergy with the express purpose of upholding, preserving, and propagating Confucian tenets or performing its rituals. The Confucian "priesthood" is made up of rulers, superiors at work, learned men, family elders, and people in positions of authority. Its institutions are those of the state, the school, the family, and the workplace. In this sense, the apparent absence of a priesthood or clergy has in fact ensured the permeation of Confucianism into every conceivable crevice of Chinese everyday life.

20.1.1 The Confucian Canon

The Confucian Canon of Four Books (四書) that exists today was essentially compiled by Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1120). These four books are the Analects (論語), the Mencius (孟子), the Doctrine of the Mean (中庸), and the Great Learning (大學).

The Analects

The Analects are a record of the words and acts of Confucius and his disciples and of the many discussions between them. Confucius has always been regarded as a sage of the highest order, and

has successfully avoided being deified.

Although the chapters in the Analects are grouped by individual themes, some themes, such as filial piety and loyalty, are repeated in different chapters. The chapters appear to be arranged randomly, as one chapter does not logically follow from the previous one or flow into the next one.

The Analects taught the basic values of propriety (禮), righteousness (義), filial piety (孝), and loyalty (忠) around the central value of benevolence (仁).

Mencius

Mencius is a collection of conversations between the Confucian scholar, Mencius, and the rulers of his time. The long dialogues outline Mencius's contention that human beings are born with an innate sense of moral righteousness (性善). However, in the absence of proper cultivation, this innate sense of moral righteousness can become corrupt, but is restorable through good moral education and cultivation.

The processes of corruption and restoration apply not only to common people, but also to rulers who can rule without benevolence. It is up to scholar-officials to bring rulers who have deviated from the path of benevolence back to the moral way. If such attempts fail, it is morally acceptable for these rulers to be overthrown.

The Doctrine of the Mean

The Doctrine of the Mean is a collection of 33 short chapters and is attributed to Zi Si (子思), the grandson of Confucius. This book also constitutes a chapter in the Book of Rites (禮記). The Doctrine of the Mean prescribes modes of thinking, behaving, and feeling that would lead a person to learn the right way to attain perfection, and is important in cultivating attitudes of moderation. The Doctrine of the Mean is regarded by some philosophers as the essence of Confucianism.

The Great Learning

The Great Learning contains a main text which is rather short and is attributed to Confucius. It also contains nine chapters of commentaries written by Zeng Zi (曾子), a disciple often praised by Confucius.

The importance of the Great Learning lies in its many themes of Chinese philosophy and political thinking, which have been highly influential in Chinese thought. It associates action in self-cultivation with the attainment of social harmony and even world peace.

The Confucian Canon of Four Books made up the core of the curriculum of ke ju (科舉), the civil service examination of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1911).

20.1.2 Important Tenets in Confucianism

Living during a period when there was constant strife between feudal lords, Confucius's main concern was to develop and propagate a philosophy of social order and harmony. He firmly believed

that if benevolence was highly valued by all, there was a clearly defined hierarchy of power, authority, and positions, and each person was fully cognizant of his roles and rules of conduct, then order and harmony would naturally ensue and the Way of Humanity would prevail. To this end, Confucians preached and advocated a number of key concepts on humanity.

Benevolence, Righteousness, and Propriety

The relationship between benevolence (ren, 仁), righteousness (yi, 義), and propriety (li, 禮) is clearly stated in the Doctrine of the Mean, Chapter 19:

> Benevolence is the characteristic element of humanity, and the great exercise of it is in loving relatives. Righteousness is the accordance of action with what is right, and the great exercise of it is in honoring the worthy. The decreasing measures of the love due to relatives, and the steps in the honor due to the worthy, are produced by the principle of propriety.
>
> (仁者，人也，親親为大；義者，宜也，尊賢为大。親親之殺，尊賢之等，禮所生也。)

Benevolence (humanity, human-heartedness) is an attitude which is at the roots of righteousness and propriety. Benevolence is considered to be the greatest of all virtues.

- The heart and core of benevolence lies in the love of another person.
- If people are able to regulate their behavior from the standpoint of showing love for others, interpersonal harmony and social stability will follow.
- The show of love in benevolence is compassionate and empathic, and is meant to bring out the best in others, not acts of connivance or attitudes of permissiveness.
- The love in benevolence can be further divided into love of one's family, loyalty towards one's superiors, and respect for morally distinguished people.
- One of the highest compliments that can be paid to a Chinese person is to say that he/she has the aura of a benevolent person (仁者之風).

The spirit of righteousness is demonstrated by matching one's action with what is right and proper, and the highest form of righteousness is to honor the worthy with one's action.

- Righteousness denotes an innate sense of justice. A person with righteousness is expected to adhere to what he/she deems to be right even in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, including the risk of losing his/her life.
- The popular Chinese phrase yi bo yun tian (義薄雲天) is used to compliment a person by saying that his or her sense of righteousness is so high that it reaches the clouds.

the Confucian meaning of propriety covers a broad range of cognition and behavior, from simple politeness to ritual propriety to understanding one' s correct place in society.

- Ritual propriety clearly distinguishes the hierarchy in dyadic relationships through protocols and ceremonies, ensuring that each person knows his or her place in society and is fully conversant with what constitutes appropriate behavior.
- For instance, in traditional ceremonies of ancestral worship, women were not allowed to participate, and men presented their ritual offerings according to their seniority in the family.

- One consequence of propriety is the denial of rule by law. Confucius argued that under rule by law, punishment was meted out after the performance of the illegal act, and people behaved themselves out of fear of punishment rather than understanding why they should behave well. However, when people were taught propriety, they tended to internalize proper forms of behavior, and refrained from misbehaving for fear of shame and loss of face.
- Practically speaking, there can be three functions of propriety. The first is "delimiting," in that propriety strictly prohibits certain actions and sets boundaries of legitimate action. The second is "supportive," in that propriety provides legitimate channels through which the agent can satisfy his or her needs and desires. The third is "ennobling," in that propriety functions as a moral and aesthetic ideal to be emulated.
- The great emphasis on propriety in Confucianism prohibits and inhibits the open expression of thoughts and feelings, and is likely to hinder the development of critical and innovative thinking and individuality.

Filial Piety and Loyalty

In an agrarian economy where the family is the basic unit of production, the maintenance of relational stability and harmony within the family is of the utmost importance. This maintenance is made possible primarily by a strict observance of the hierarchical structure within the family.

To make such observance voluntary, rather than obligatory, Confucians stress the importance of filial piety (孝), lauding the expression of filial piety towards parents and the dutiful performance of rituals of ancestor worship as the unmitigated marks of a benevolent person.

When filial attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors are consistently endorsed, respect for hierarchy and authority naturally ensues, and relational stability and harmony can be effortlessly maintained.

The extension of xiao is zhong (忠), or loyalty to one's ruler. In ancient China, loyalty was the equivalent of filial piety in a different dyadic relationship, that is, between ruler and minister, and was promoted to consolidate the power of the feudal lords.

Contemporary psychologists are of the opinion that there are numerous negative psychological consequents of filial piety. For instance, it has been suggested that the endorsement of filial attitudes by parents is associated with low creativity, low cognitive complexity, and high rigidity in children's learning.

The Moralist and/or Gentleman

In the Confucian sense, a moralist and/or gentleman (君子) is an exemplary man who is morally cultivated, ritually proper, filial, loyal, and benevolent, and is the culmination of Confucian self-cultivation.

> Love of knowledge is akin to wisdom. Strenuous attention to conduct is akin to benevolence. Sensitivity to shame is akin to courage. When humans understand these methods, they will then understand how to cultivate themselves.
>
> 好學近乎知。力行近乎仁。知耻近乎勇。知斯三者，則知所以修身。
>
> (The Doctrine of the Mean, Chapter 20)

Self-cultivation for the ordinary people is referred to as xue zuo ren (學做人), or learning how to be a person, and entails a process of maintaining psychosocial homeostasis by accommodating one's behavior to the preordained standards of one's ingroups, society, and culture.

The standards of self-cultivation for scholars are far more stringent, and are embodied in the popular axiom xiu shen, qi jia, zhi guo, ping tian xia (修身、齊家、治國、平天下), which, in addition to encouraging scholars to cultivate themselves, also exhorts them to unify their families, govern their countries, and bring peace to the world.

To become a jun zi, an individual must demonstrate at least eight traits:

1. Demonstrate love for humanity.
2. Possess a sense of honesty, integrity, and magnanimity in dealing with others.
3. Be philanthropic towards the needy.
4. Follow the Doctrine of the Mean and exercise moderation in all matters.
5. Show determination and perseverance in following the Way of Humanity.
6. Emphasize a sense of righteousness over personal gains and profits.
7. Be frank, righteous, just and honorable, and willing to admit to faults and wrongdoings.
8. Be courageous in the pursuit of what is just and fair.

A jun zi is the Confucian version of the ideal self, and is expected to remain sagacious on the inside and possess traits befitting a king on the outside at all times. This is referred to as the concept of nei sheng wai wang (内聖外王), literally meaning "inner sage, outer king."

The opposite of jun zi is xiao ren (小人), meaning a petty man who is only concerned with his own welfare and does not get involved in anything unless he stands to gain by it. Calling a person a xiao ren is highly insulting.

The Doctrine of the Mean

In Confucian teaching, zhong (中) means just or no bias, and yong (庸) means hold on to one's tenet and don't rely on others. It has **absolutely nothing** to do with being average or mediocre, or of not distinguishing oneself.

The Doctrine of the Mean is practiced firstly in accordance with social propriety, and secondly within the context of benevolence and righteousness. It provides guidance in both the presentation of self in everyday life and decision making in interpersonal situations, particularly those where there are conflicts of interest.

In the presentation of self, the Doctrine of the Mean exhorts one to act in moderation. For instance, in terms of dress code, one should never dress flamboyantly, but should dress appropriately in accordance with one's status and role, and as required by the occasion.

With respect to decision making involving other people, there are three things to take note of:

1. One is to see oneself as being entrenched in the social system, and hence one should adopt a broad perspective of matters that occur within this system.

2. Second, in following the Doctrine of the Mean, one should be cognizant of the interpersonal dynamics at play and the possible effect of one's decision on people within the same social system.

3. Thirdly, one should always choose a course of action with the view of maintaining social harmony, even when such a course entails self-sacrifice, self-restraint, or self-discipline. Chinese people raised in the Confucian tradition are accustomed to sacrificing their private and small self (xiao wo, 小我) for the public and large self (da wo, 大我).

The Five Cardinal Relationships

In Confucianism, the Five Cardinal Relationships (wu lun, 五倫) refers to the five dyadic relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, older and younger brother, and friends.

> Between father and son, there should be affection; between sovereign and subordinates, righteousness; between husband and wife, attention to their separate functions; between elder brother and younger, a proper order; and between friends, friendship.
>
> 父子有親，君臣有義，夫婦有別，長幼有序，朋友有信.
>
> (Mencius, Teng Wen Gong I)

Confucius dictated the social and ritual propriety to be practiced between each dyad. Generally speaking, the junior partner of the dyad owes strong duties of service and reverence to the senior partner, and the senior partner owes strong duties of care and benevolence to the junior partner.

Relationships which are contradictory to or outside the parameters of wu lun are described as bu lun (不倫), or not normal (乱倫), and hence not acceptable to society at large. It is strongly believed that if everyone stays within the dictates of the Five Cardinal Relationships, there will be relational harmony, and, by extension, social harmony and stability.

The Mandate of Heaven and the Concept of Heaven

The Mandate of Heaven (天命) was a traditional Chinese concept used to legitimize the rule of kings, who were also referred to as Sons of Heaven (天子). A person could not become a king without being blessed with the Mandate of Heaven, which in turn rendered the authority of the rulers absolute.

Mencius specifically pointed out that Heaven would be displeased with a cruel and unwise ruler and give the Mandate to someone else. Confucians also bestowed the responsibility of remonstrating with rulers who had deviated from the Way of Humanity on scholar-officials, and Chinese history is full of stories of loyal scholar-officials who risked or lost their lives pursuing this feat.

The Mandate of Heaven was predicated upon the Concept of Heaven (tian ming guan, 天命觀). Confucians perceive Heaven as the absolute embodiment of authority and the perfect personality. Heaven has the ability to manage the norms of the Universe and to execute the rights of reward and

punishment. The ultimate goal of self-cultivation for human beings is to become one with Heaven.

The belief in the Mandate of Heaven and the Concept of Heaven indicates three phenomena: firstly, the Chinese ascription to an external locus of control; secondly, the Chinese worship of authority; and thirdly, an inherent attitude of fatalistic determinism.

The Rectification of Names

Names, in Confucianism, connote roles and responsibilities. The rectification of names (正名) signifies living up to one's roles and responsibilities by being proper in one's language and behavior, that is, observing social propriety.

For Confucians, social disorder results from failure to perceive, understand, and deal with reality, which is in turn the result of failing to address matters by their proper names. Confucians believe that with the rectification of names, propriety will be observed, sociopolitical order will naturally follow, and society will run on its own without any form of external control.

For instance, cousins from the paternal side are given the prefix tang (堂), and those from the maternal side are given the prefix biao (表). Maternal cousins are considered to be more remote than paternal cousins, as the latter have the same surname as oneself. If a maternal cousin and paternal cousin approach one for limited resources, one is expected to act properly and favor the paternal cousin. One may marry one's maternal cousin, but never one's paternal cousin, although the genetic proximity of the two types of cousins to oneself is the same.

20.1.3 The Combined Influence of the Tenets

The ideal Confucian scholar possesses the qualities of benevolence (仁), righteousness (義), filial piety (孝), and loyalty (忠). He observes social propriety (禮) through the rectification of names (正名), and regards self-cultivation as a lifelong endeavor. For this ideal Confucian scholar, becoming a jun zi (君子, moralist and gentleman) and paving the way to becoming one with Heaven (天人合一) are the ultimate goals of self-actualization. In his actions, he abides by the Doctrine of the Mean (中庸) and is instrumental in maintaining relational harmony in all spheres of his life.

In terms of personality, the ideal Confucian scholar would possess these traits:

- Submissiveness to authority - parents, elders and superiors.
- Submissiveness to the mores and the norms (禮).
- Reverence for the past and respect for history.
- Love of traditional learning.
- Esteem for the force of example.
- Primacy of broad moral cultivation over specialized competence.
- Preference for nonviolent moral reform in state and society.
- Prudence, caution, preference for a middle course.

- Non-competitiveness.
- Courage and sense of responsibility for a great tradition.
- Self-respect (with some permissible self-pity) in adversity.
- Exclusiveness and fastidiousness on moral and cultural grounds.
- Punctiliousness in treatment of others.

20.2 Taoism

Taoism is a unique combination of mysticism, religion, and philosophy. As a system of mysticism, it is possibly the only one in that world that is not intensely anti-scientific.

Philosophically, Taoists are naturalists, and believe that human life is inevitably influenced by such natural events as the movement of the constellation of stars and changes in the weather. In this respect, Taoism has influenced many western philosophers, such as Richard Wilheim, Carl Jung, Alan Watts, and Erich Fromm.

Taoism has two origins: The first comprises the philosophers of the Warring States (戰國, approximately 476–221 BC) who were opposed to following the Way or Tao of Humanity as espoused by Confucians. These philosophers suggested that the Confucian way of life was far too contrived and constrictive, and believed that social harmony could not materialize without a profound understanding of the Way or Tao of Nature.

The second comprises the amalgam of shamans and magicians who have existed in Chinese culture since ancient times, and have profoundly influenced aspects of Chinese life such as the practice of medicine, alchemy, nature worship, and demonology.

Taoism Canons: Tao Te Ching (道德經), which contains the teachings of Lao Tzu (see Chan, 1963), and the Classics of Nan Hua (南華經), which contains the teachings of Chuang Tzu (莊子), are regarded as the two main classical texts of Taoism. The Taoists produced the Taoist Canon (道藏), which contains over 1,500 texts.

20.2.1 The Taoist System of Divination

1. The repeated shaking of three coins inside a dried tortoise carapace to arrive at a combination of triagrams as depicted in The Book of Changes (I Ching, 易經) and to provide a prediction on the basis of the combination.
2. Astrology and the drawing of horoscopes to indicate the future.
3. Chronomancy, in which lucky and unlucky days of the year are determined. At the end of each lunar year, a large number of books on chronomancy are published detailing the fortunes of people born under different birth signs.
4. Geomancy (feng shui, 風水), that is, the arrangement of the architecture and adornments of the houses of the living and the tombs of the dead in order to bring about health, wealth, and happiness to the living. Feng shui masters who are held in high esteem may charge consultation fees of up to 100 dollars per square foot.

5. Physiognomy, that is, the telling of an individual's fortune by examining his physical appearance and facial characteristics.

6. Oneiromancy, which is the interpretation of dreams, not as part of psychoanalysis, but as the divination of things to come.

20.2.2 Central Tenets of Taoism

The Notion of Two Worlds and One In-Between

In Taoism, there are two ideal worlds: this world in which humans reside, and the other-world to which humans aspire to ascend. The ideal this-world is one which is just, peaceful, and without wars and calamities. The ideal other-world is the world of celestial beings.

A Taoist achieves an ideal this-world in two ways: by leading a simple, non-competitive, and non-contentious life; and through the strategic use of Taoist instruments of divination to accrue enough power and wealth to be in total control of one's life. The ascension from this world to the world of celestial beings does not necessarily have to occur after death, but is attainable through ways and means such as the ingestion of elixirs of life, breathing exercises, internal alchemy, magical rituals.

Taoists seek longevity, and defy ageing and dying through their various practices of self-cultivation. The Taoist believes that through careful cultivation, an individual can possess an ageless body. This belief has laid the foundation for the development of healthenhancing disciplines such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, acupressure, qigong (氣功), the martial art tai ji quan (太極拳), medicinal cuisine (藥膳), alchemical meditation, and so forth.

In between this-world and other-world is the realm of demons and ghosts. In terms of demons, Taoists believe that if a tree, plant, flower, or animal is able to stay alive for hundreds of years, then it has absorbed the vital energy of the sun and the moon, and has acquired demonic powers. As for ghosts, zombies, vampires and the like, Taoists have a complete system of capturing, taming, and annihilating them.

Human and Nature

> Man should follow the way of the Earth, the Earth should follow the way of Heaven, Heaven should follow the way of *Tao*, and *Tao* should follow the way of Nature.
>
> 人法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然。
>
> (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 25)

Taoism considers the human being to be one of the phenomena that exist in the Universe which came into being spontaneously through the interplay of cosmic forces that operate in accordance with the principle of *Tao* (道).

Ancient Taoists believed that the human body was homologous to the Universe, and that human life was just a microcosm existing within the macrocosm of the Universe. The microcosm, nonetheless, was a perfect reflection of the macrocosm. Hence, a harmonious relationship between Man and Nature was to be cherished, and as a microcosm, Man was supposed to follow *Tao*.

All beings in the Universe were equal, and human beings were by no means the most superior creatures. Taoism emphasized that human beings could not be regarded as the center of the Universe, or as the most superior of all creatures, as espoused by Confucianism. Taoism was opposed to the whole notion of hierarchy and the differentiation of society into classes. Taoists sought a cooperative society where people carried out their activities communally and in accordance with traditional customs.

The Concept of *Tao*

> The *Tao* that can be told, is not the eternal *Tao*. The name that can be named, is not the eternal Name.
>
> 道可道, 非常道。名可名, 非常名。
>
> (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 1)

Tao (道) refers to the order of nature, the way in which the Universe works. Tao is perhaps to be experienced and lived, and not to be described because of the inherent limitations of language.

If Tao is indescribable, how can Man discern the ways in which Tao works? The sage is to imitate the *Tao*, which works unseen and does not dominate. The way to understand Nature is to engage in scientific and systematic observation. This is why Taoist temples are called tao kuan (道觀), where kuan (觀) means to look at or to observe.

The Concept of Wu Wei

Wu wei(無为) is a lawless and primitive form of peasant life whereby human beings tend to prosper in the absence of interference from the rulers, just as plants tend to flourish in the absence of interference from human beings.

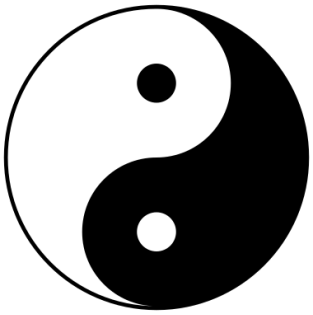
When one follows the attitude of wu wei, one permits matters to work out by themselves in accordance with their intrinsic principles. Hence, the seemingly oxymoronic expression of "acting without action" (wei wu wei, 为無为) can be interpreted as not acting against *Tao* and/or acting in accordance with *Tao*.

The Contrasting States of Yin and Yang

In nature, events and matters always exist in pairs of contrasting states, e.g., male and female, hot and cold, wet and dry, darkness and light, and solid and fluid, and these states are referred to as yin (陰) and yang (陽).

Generally speaking, yin is associated with properties such as darkness, softness, passivity, sluggishness, coldness, being cognitively-oriented, and being withdrawn or inhibited, whereas yang has the properties of brightness, hardness, activity, liveliness, hotness, being action-oriented, and being forward or aggressive.

Yin and yang are constantly interacting and competing with each other, and from this interaction and rivalry, change becomes a constant in the Universe. Nature, however, has to ensure that change does not lead to atrophy, and in this regard, it effects a dynamic balance between the polarities of



yin and yang.

Man is a microcosm reflecting Universe the macrocosm, and in this sense, Man has to find a balance between the yin and yang both within and outside himself.

The yin and yang and the taijitu (太極圖) represent a perennial quest for a state of equanimity, equilibrium, or homeostasis in Man' s relationship with Nature, in interpersonal relationships, in mental and physical health, in wealth management, in politics, and in all other walks of life.

The Five Elements

Apart from yin and yang, balance is also sought in the Five Elements (wu xing, 五行), which was developed to describe changes in Nature. The Five Elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth interact with each other either through inhibition or enhancement.

The concept of the Five Elements is used extensively to explain and predict natural phenomena such as changes in weather conditions, astronomical movements, tidal changes, and geomantic patterns.

The Five Elements are also used to describe organs of the human body and their physical and psychological functions. Some of the most important principles in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) are centered around an understanding of the mutually inhibiting and enhancing qualities of the Five Elements.

The Three Treasures

The Three Treasures (san bao, 三寶) represent the three virtues advocated in Taoism. They are ci (慈), meaning compassion and kindness; jian (儉), meaning restraint, economy, or moderation; and bu gan wei tian xia xian (不敢为天下先), meaning not daring to be the first.

Ci entails loving others and the world as one would treasure one' s own existence. Jian entails having an attitude of simplicity, living a simple life, and having simple desires. Bu gan wei tian xia xian refers to an attitude of non-competitiveness and of humility, of learning from the experience of forerunners and enjoying the fruits of this learning.

Such a person would follow a life of simplicity and spontaneity, in harmony with Nature. the truly experienced Taoist can make himself/herself invisible in a city, while the less experienced Taoist

can only become invisible in a mountain (da yin yin yu shi, xiao yin yin yu shan, 大隱隱於市, 小隱隱於山).

The Ultimate Aim of the Individual in Taoism

The ultimate aim of a Taoist is to achieve material immortality. To achieve material immortality is to become a hsien (仙), an immortal or celestial being, and to do so, the body must be prepared by a lifetime of Taoist practices. The individual must also acquaint himself/herself with the principles of geomancy or feng shui (風水) in order to live in harmony with Nature and to gather the vital energy of the Universe.

Taoist alchemy can be differentiated into internal and external alchemy. Internal alchemy primarily includes meditation techniques, visceral gymnastics, sexual practices, diet, and breathing exercises. External alchemy is involved with the notion of spagirism, the making of pills of immortality.

20.3 Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism

Confucianism breeds a relational self, whereas in Taoism, the self (the microcosm) and its environs (the macrocosm) are perfect reflections of each other, hence there is no self-other distinction. As for Buddhism, to extricate oneself from the Wheel of Karma and to attain the state of Nirvana, the self's cravings must be extinguished so that self-transcendence can be experienced following the evolution of a higher level of consciousness.

These conceptions of self are in deep contrast with the Euro-American conceptions of the self, which are characterized by self- other boundaries, personal control over life, and an independent construal of self.

The Chinese personality is an integration of the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist conceptualizations of the ideal self. Confucianism advocates benevolence and propriety for the creation of a utopian world. Taoism advocates following the way of Nature to transcend the ordinary, and Buddhism advocates the extrication from the Wheel of Karma to arrive at the state of Nirvana.

The personality that has evolved from the influence of these philosophies can be characterized as "Confucian advancement, Taoist withdrawal, and Buddhist concealment" (進則儒、退則道、隱則佛). This means that the individual is able to seek advancement when the tides are with him, and make the best of circumstances as per Confucian advocacy; retreat or withdraw when the tides are against him, as is consistent with Taoist non-contentiousness; and use the downtime for reflection and self-improvement, ultimately becoming a recluse or hermit when he has decided to forsake worldly concerns to seek Buddhist Nirvana.

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