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THE BODY AND PHILOSOPHY IN CHINA: A PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AND BODY

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Abstract

Chinese philosophy of mind does seem to show that it is possible to think outside of the box of Cartesian immaterialism, of the physicalist philosophy of the prevailing model of mind, and of other thought models constructed on Descartes' exclusivist bipolar thought trajectory. It also offers a perculiar brand of anti-Cartesianism. It is partly for this reason that we undertake this study. In Chinese philosophy of mind, the core notion, xin, is simultaneously and inseparably heart and mind. To be faithful to this notion we refer to it as the heart-mind. The Chinese concept of xin shows that there is no distinction between the cognitive and the affective states. This is informed by a folk psychology that does not discriminate between cognition, representative ideas, beliefs, reason (cognitive states) and emotion, desires, motives, feelings (affective states). The concept of heart-mind unity is influenced by Chinese medicine. Chinese medical practice, with its procedure of acupuncture, accepts that various parts of the body are intimately connected with the entire body system, forming an undivided whole. At once going beyond speech and augmentation onto the sphere of the Tao, where all distinctions evaporate, and remaining within the earthly order, where complete happiness is realized in this world, Chuang Tzu achieves an immanent transcendence (Jana S. Rošker, 2014) that unifies the internal and the external, the object and the subject, the self and the world. Again, concurrently discussing the immaterial realm (dreams) and holding on to the equality of all things (material and immaterial, real and unreal), and by resisting the temptation to claim clear and distinct knowledge while holding on to the existence of the real and the unreal, where all there is, is one, Chuang Tzu seems to resolve all estrangements of self and world, object and subject, mind and body.

Keywords*: Bipolar thought trajectory, Cartesian immaterialism, Physicalist philosophy, Model of mind, Thought models.*

Introduction

Embodiment and the Chinese Philosophy of Mind

Chinese scholars say the theory of mind in classical China is akin to the folk psychology in the Western world in the sense that both reflect their respective basic linguistic outlooks. Both theories of mind differ in such manners as match the respective folk theories of language. In Chinese philosophy of mind, the core notion, *xin*, is at once heart and mind. To be faithful to it we refer to it as the heart-mind (Hall, David L. and Roger T. Ames, 1998). The Chinese concept of *xin* indicates that there is no distinction between the cognitive and the affective states. This is motivated and informed by a folk psychology that does not distinguish or discriminate between cognition, representative ideas, beliefs, reason (cognitive states) and emotion, desires, motives, feelings (affective states). The *xin* (heart-mind) directs our actions; it does not, nonetheless, do so through beliefs and desires. Rather, the heart-mind unity (*xin*) directs actions in line with the stimuli it receives from the world. This concept of heart-mind unity (*xin*), very much in tact in contemporary Chinese philosophy of mind, is

influenced by Chinese medicine. Chinese medical practice, with its practice of acupuncture, accepts that various parts of the body are intimately connected, with the entire body system forming an undivided whole.

People accumulate, pass on to, and share with one another the conventional *guiding discourses* in the community, which are the *ways* of the community life, referred to as the *dao-s*. The Chinese *dao (*Hansen, Chad 2012) is the ensemble of conventional discourses that guides life in the community. It is a behavioural signpost indicating the behavioural direction of the community, a behavioural direction emanating from societal conventional discourses. The Chinese teach these *dao-s* to their young ones and address them to one another. When triggered (for example, by the operations of the sense organs), the heart-mind unity (*xin*) carries out or does what is contained in the guiding principles/discourse of the relevant *dao* he has learnt. Thus the *xin* (the heart-mind unity) elicits response to discourse-relevant signals.

The psychological theory (as with the linguistic theory) does not receive a sentential form. Scholars say the classical language of China is devoid of any belief grammar; that is to say, it lacks such forms as T believes that Y... (where T represents a proposition). Classical Chinese thought is not preoccupied with propositions (as is Western thought) but with the reality of concrete particulars. Rather than say 'he believes that it is bad,' as in Western grammar, the classical Chinese would say 'he knows its being bad.' The heart-mind unity (the *xin*) guides action in the sense that it allots categories to things; but it is bereft of any linguistic or mental images of things.

The attitudinal tendency in classical China is one preoccupied with the concrete reality on the ground. The subject is that which has extra-mental existence; it is in the world, rather than in the mind. The subject is a concrete, particular, actual thing, not a proposition without any extra-mental existence. The attitudinal inclination is one of disposition instead of a belief. It is a disposition to apportion some chunk of reality to a certain category. Scholars say it is a predicate attitude instead of a propositional one. The faculty required for this predicate attitude, the heart-mind unity, *xin* (or the senses, if you like), is the power to distinguish one thing from the other, a good person from a bad person, for instance.

So it is that the primal place Western folk psychology assigns to *ideas* is, in Chinese folk theory of mind, taken up by the learned or innate capacity to distinguish rightly in *doing* what is recommended in a *dao* (the *guiding discourse* regarding life in the community). In Western thought, truth is a correspondence between the picture one forms in one's mind (mental picture) and the fact/reality on the ground (correspondence theory). In Chinese folk linguistics, grounding of meaning is the function of the socio-historical tradition, instead of the individual psychology. The social and historical tradition of the community, rather than one's individual subjectivity, provides the ground for meaning. Chinese language does not hinge on cognition or on private, individual subjectivity. Chinese classical philosophy of mind applies or, if you will, carries out the recommendations of Chinese theory of language.

Thus the key concept in Chinese classical philosophy of mind would be that of the concrete reality on the ground, which is an embodied or inner *dao*, a set of natural or learned dispositions (Hall, David L. and Roger T. Ames, 1998). When one learns the content of a *dao*, it triggers the concrete reality that comes with the guiding discourses or ways that the Chinese transmit to one another and teach their children. It is the *behavioural power*, which has become second nature, to conform to the intended *action-pattern* or follow the intended pathway. It is all about making the correct distinctions in *doing* the content of a *dao* (guiding discourse).

Confucius (551-479 BC) in some way touches on the philosophy of mind in putting forward his education theory. His teaching gives a certain form to the moral discourse, greatly influencing classical notion of *xin* (the heart-mind unity). The guiding discourse (*dao*) that Confucius initiates, to a large extent, gives Chinese classical thought its character, especially in poetry, history, and ritual. While busy training the heart-mind unity (the *xin*) to be able to carry out the proper actions, Confucius considers whether *xin* (mind-body unity) could ever interpret texts for appropriate actions in the absence of some earlier interpretative power. He thus comes up with an intuitive capacity, *ren* or *jen* (humanity, humaneness). *Ren* is, roughly speaking, an affective concern for the well-being of others. 'Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you' (Wong, David, 2018). A *Xin* (a heart-mind unity) who has *ren* (humanity, humaneness) can rightly translate a *dao* (a guiding discourse on life in the community) into action.

China's first critical philosopher, Mo Tzu (about 479 BC), for whom moral character is elastic, argues that *ren* is acquired through learning. *Ren* receives its shape through human communication, particularly through the inclination toward emulating superiors. His philosophy is known as mohism. Unlike in Hobbes, where man is by nature wolf to man, in mohism individuals naturally tend to do what is right. Violent social disorder does not emanate from the pursuit of self-interest by individuals in conditions of scarcity, but from disagreements on values. We cultivate our behavioural tendencies by observing/seeing our social role models talk about, carry out, act on, and fashion their behaviours in line with what is recommended in a social discourse. Mo Tzu teaches that social role models also influence the way we interpret the social discourse. Interpretation takes the form of reacting favorably to *shi* (do this, it is right, assent to it) or reacting against *fei* (do not do this, it is wrong, dissent from it). The teachings and life of Mo Tzu show that we take care of behaviour by training the heart-mind (*xin*) to make proper distinctions that guide its choices. Mo Tzu teaches a universal love akin to the Christian love of neighbor. His 'universal love and mutual benefit', though, is not motivated by selflessness or the desire to go to heaven, as in Christianity; it is instead a normative theory grounded in equal and impartial love for the welfare of all for its beneficial results; it is as utilitarian as it is religious. Whereas Confucius promotes benefits as the results of good deeds, Mo Tzu promotes beneficial results as motivation for good deeds and righteousness (Fraser, Chris, 2015).

The cultivation of the *xin* (the heart-mind) is also a major concern of Mencius, a confucianist born between 371-372 BC. Mencius postulates a *xin* (heart-mind unity) consisting of four natural moral propensities. These natural tendencies grow in much the same way as seeds grow into plants. The natural virtues of benevolence, knowledge, morality and ritual proceed from them. In Mencius, the *ren* intuition (an affective concern for the well-being of others) is not learned from a social *dao* (a community's guiding discourse). It is instead the concrete reality on the ground that indicates a natural *dao*. This standpoint enables Mencius to uphold the Confucian teaching on rituals, against the criticism of Mo Tzu that it rests on some optional and unsteady framework.

The implication of the theory of Mencius is that moral virtue does not require any education. It does not need the linguistic *dao*. Attempting to shape the heart-mind (*xin*) through language could distort as much as it could reinforce the natural flowering and maturation of its moral dispositions. Mencius posits that the *shi* (do this, it is right, assent to it) and the *fei* (do not do this, it is not right, dissent from it) dispositions necessary for sage-like moral behaviour develops naturally and should be allowed to unfold. Mencius does not mean, however, that one knows moral theories at birth; he means rather that knowledge of these develop and blossom as the physical body does and in response to everyday moral situations.

The *xin* (heart-mind unity) operates by given appropriate directives regarding that which is right and that which is not right in any given concrete situation. It does not busy itself with ethical theories or hypothetical choices. Its concern is to *do* the *right* thing *here and now*. In Mencius, the intuitions of *xin* (heart-mind) are as situational as they are in harmony with nature. The morality Mencius advocates is independent of religion; and his major doctrine is the original goodness of human nature.

Lao Tzu (between 600 and 300 BC), a Taoist and a prominent advocate of natural spontaneity, takes the psychology of socialization to a rather different level (Lee, Y.-T., Chen, W., & Chan, S. X., 2013). Taoism comes from the word Tao, the Way. Lao Tzu postulates that to learn names is to admit of training designed to make one indulge in attitudinal discriminations as well as to desire that which society considers proper. The discriminations as well as the desires, he holds, are only right given the conventions of the related linguistic community. To learn a certain language is not merely to lose one's natural spontaneity but also to let one be controlled by a socio-historical perspective. In this way, we let society govern our legitimate desires. Lao Tzu teaches that one should instead refrain from actions driven by 'socialized desires' of this sort, that is to say, to refuse to take any action that is contrary to nature (*wu-wei*). We arrive at this negating attitude by abandoning society-driven discriminations and differentiations, simply put, by overlooking or ignoring language (Lee, Y.-T., Chen, W., & Chan, S. X., 2013).

Expressing skepticism of the neutrality of alleged natural heart-mind states (*xin* states), later mohists doubt whether all claims to natural behaviour could indeed be natural, as even robbers lay claim to some naturalness for their sordid behaviour. Watering down Mo Tzu's conventionalism, they appeal to dissimilarities and similarities in nature that people objectively access. They hold that language should echo these similarities. For them, the primary role of the *xin* (heart-mind) is the ability to discriminate the intention of language.

Chuang Tzu goes further than Lao Tzu in theorizing about emotions. He deliberates on passions and emotions that provide raw and pre-social inputs from reality. In a somewhat pragmatic sense he states that though one may not know what purposes the passions and emotions serve, there would not be any reference for the subjective ego, "I," if one does not have them. In turn, one would neither choose nor have any objects of choice in the absence of the "I." In a manner reminiscent of Hume, he argues that whereas one gets such input and feels that some "true ruler" could be somewhere organizing these signals, one incidentally does not receive input (*quin*) from such an imaginary "ruler." One only has the stimuli or inputs themselves, namely, exasperation, sadness, gladness, pleasure, satisfaction, pain *etcetera*. We cannot rightly associate the physical heart with such a "true ruler," given that it is as natural an organ as other organs and joints of the body. Chuang Tzu thus postulates that the judgments of the heart-mind (*Xin*) are invariably conditioned by training and historical antecedents. In the final analysis, the *shi-fei* (this-not this) of Mencius also consists in the inputs to the *xin* (the heart-mind unity). They are introduced to us by our experience following our contexts and previous assumptions. They are, therefore, neither objective nor neutral judgments in any sense. The main thrust of Chuang Tzu's philosophy is his position that to discriminate is to construct, and that to construct is to destroy (since it involves deconstruction). And that yet, for things as a whole, there is nether construction nor destruction, for, all things dissolve into unity and become one.

The Body, the Natural, and Chuang Tzu

Chuang Tzu (also called Zhuang Zi), living between 369 and 286 BC, lends Chinese Taoism much of its present day character and form (Boker, John, Jun 27 2018). For Lao Tzu, a defining figure in Taoism, and for Taoism in general, behind the world's material things and all its change lies a primary and universal principle, the way or Tao. This principle gives rise to all existence and governs everything; all change and all life. Tao requires living life in a non-striving manner and letting things work out naturally (Encyclopedia.com, May 14 2018)

Chuang Tzu declines a prime ministership offer from the king of Chu so as to give his undivided attention to the philosophical enquiry. His numerous write-ups evolve into a compilation, explaining Taoist doctrines. His dialogues and writings run counter to Confucianism and mohism. Chuang Tzu is as transcendental as he is engrossed in life's (daily) mundane affairs. He is as "quietistic" as he is busy (in a manner akin to a "galloping horse") moving his way through the world. His legacy for philosophy is a dialogical and analogical method that is as mystical as it is rational and fascinating. Broad-mindedness, spontaneity, and impartiality are his trademarks.

In Chuang Tzu the dissimilarities between Confucianism and Taoism become more distinct. Confucianism advocates that one develops one's nature, fulfills one's destiny, and actively participates in nature's creative craftsmanship. Chuang Tzu, for his part, proposes that one nourishes nature, abides by nature's purposes, and delights in nature (Duignan, Brian, 13 Jul. 2018).

In Confucianism, one transforms oneself through education. In the Taoism of Chuang Tzu, one transforms oneself through things in themselves. Chuang Tzu travels in the transcendental world, doing nothing unnatural. Confucius travels in the mundane world, occasionally doing what Chuang Tzu would consider unnatural (Riegel, Jeffrey. 2013).

Chuang Tzu (Boker, John, Jun 27 2018) takes the Taoist notions of *Tao* and *Te* to the transcendental realms. *Tao* is real and we see evidence of it, but it has no physical form and is not associated with unnatural action. It admits of transmission but eludes reception. We may obtain it though we cannot see it. Existing by itself for all eternity, heaven and earth owe their creation to him, and Spirits and rulers owe their spiritual powers to it. Though above, it is not high; and though beneath, it is not low. Although it pre-exists heaven and hearth, it is still not old. Chuang Tzu's *Tao* is simply real, it defies definition and transcends language and logic. *Tao* is one, everywhere, and transforming. It gives things that obtain it and come into existence their individual character and physical form. It generates all there are through movement and rest. Reality is ever changing, developing from the simpler to the more complex forms. From the smallest organisms that crop up on receiving water to the horses that evolve into humans, all things come from nature's generative process and return to it. *Tao* operates in them all (Hansen, Chad, 2014).

Te, on the other hand, is the individualization of *Tao* in the various things there are. It is that which makes things what they are. It is their nature. Having influenced developments in *Zen* Buddhism, much of the doctrines of the Taoist philosophy are akin to *Zen* Buddhism.

Conceiving *Te* as the nature of things leads to an accentuation of nature and the life of man, which leads in turn to putting the accent on the individual and his happiness. Nature is spontaneous and in constant transformation. It is the universal process binding all there are into one and making all things and opinions equal (Hansen, Chad, 2014). It is a leveling principle. Everything delights in and values its nature. Each ought to wholly and without any

inhibition take on its natural potentials. This is simply the way of the *Tao*. The big and the tiny birds have dissimilar natural powers or potentials, yet each is as satisfied as, and shares equal happiness with, the other as they freely exercise that with which nature has endowed them. Again, since man's *Te* is that which makes him what he is, man's happiness consists in the optimal and free exercise of his *Te* or nature or natural powers. That which is of nature is internal; whereas that which is of man is external. That dogs have four legs is of nature; but that they have chains put around their necks is of man. Man ought not harm that which is of nature with that which is of man.

Chuang Tzu's epistemology (Chad Hansen, 2014) postulates the equality of all things . He stresses the ephemeral nature of the phenomenal world and the folly of man's inordinate quest for external knowledge and personal aggrandizement, which distract one from perceiving and understanding the world as it is and contemplating its meaning. If the sun and the moon and all other heavenly bodies do not "contend for their positions" why should we be making discriminatory and destructive distinctions, he would seem to ask. After all, nothing we say is final. As with the frog in the well that sees but a tiny fraction of the sky and so supposes that the sky is that big, our views are lopsided and incomplete; the distinctions we make, deficient. "Great knowledge," as with a *great mind*, is "all-embracing and extensive," while "small knowledge," as with a small-minded person, is "partial and discriminative" (Chan, 1963, 180).

Bias obscures *Tao*. The sage does not go by partitioning the world into right and wrong; he rather sheds light on issues in terms of that which is of nature. He synthesizes opposites; for things are not only relative but also identical, implying one another. Rather than using one's own individual judgment, the wise person employs a common principle that identifies all things as one, harmonizing seemingly opposing and contrasting halves, and thus simultaneously following two courses. In this way his judgment is in the light of nature.

Commentators say that the doctrine of following two courses in Chuang Tzu is not an isolated case in Chinese philosophy, as basically all schools in Chinese philosophy tend to this *mean* doctrine. The understanding here is that many courses may be followed without conflict. The result is that most Chinese simultaneously adopt Confucianist, Buddhist and Taoist principles, taking multiple approaches to issues.

Chuang Tzu seems to make the point that man is not a rational animal after all. Life is a dream, he holds. One knows one has dreamt only when one wakes up. The stupid person, though, convinces himself that he is awake all the time and believes he has distinct and clear knowledge of it. Chuang Tzu denies the object-subject divide and questions the real-unreal dichotomy in a story where he talks about dreaming and feeling he is a butterfly and being happy being one. But he wakes and realizes he is Chuang Tzu. He wonders whose dream it is, his or that of the butterfly; but sees in this how things melt into one another and become one with one another. Transcending all materialistic inclinations (for instance, not sacrificing one's name for gains) and yet operating within the realm of the natural, being at peace with nature (letting nature run its course) eliminates the subject-object dichotomy and unifies all things. In this way we eliminate discriminations of all sorts, and begin to appraise success and failure, sickness and health, life and death as one, since they all form part of the natural order of transformation, with one end inaugurating another beginning. We are thus enabled to respond to external realities in natural and faithful ways, without any scheming or any manipulations.

In Chuang Tzu all dualism evaporates. He shows how we can do away with all of life's polarizations and their seeming indications of dualism. Observing nature operate and noting how it conciliates and harmonizes its bipolar elements and situations, Chuang Tzu sees the way to the *Tao* where all dualism melts into unity. In the *Tao*, as with nature where the sun and the moon, rather than contend for their positions, contribute to the harmony of the natural processes, all bipolarities dissolve into unity. Approached from this rather higher-order thinking, all things are equal to one another.

In Chuang Tzu discrimination is synonymous with destruction. To discriminate between things is to construct. But then to construct is to destruct. Yet, things dissolve into unity and become one, ruling out all construction and destruction. Heaven, the cosmos and one came into being together; and "all things with me are one." Aiming at being one with all things and at coexisting with heaven and earth, the Taoist and Chuang Tzu enlarge their world to include the entire universe. For, *Tao* has no limitation; and speech, no finality.

Chuang Tzu's unity of the world and the self resembles the concept of unity of the self and the world in Confucianism. Nonetheless, while the Confucian doctrine aims at showing how the self and the world share common concerns, joys and sorrows, the concept of the unity of the self and the world in Chuang Tzu aims at unearthing how the self and the world are intimately linked.

It is unnatural and only artificial to attempt to utilize language and its argumentations to resolve issues bordering on notions of right and wrong. Since our arguments proceed from relative, individual and finite perspectives, they are inadequate. Whoever wins in an argument is not necessarily right, and whoever loses is not of necessity wrong. And no one can be brought in to decide between them because none is free from taking sides; none is exempt from bias. The truth, which is the knowledge of *Tao*, lies in giving up argumentations, speech and language on arriving at the sameness and oneness of all there are.

Passions and other things that engage the mind preclude us from attaining the truth. We need to empty the mind of all egocentric tendencies that give us the impression of being the world's arbiters. He who knows to apply the brakes in the face of what he does not know is knowledgeable. Nature's store, which embraces all, is neither full to the brim when more things are added nor empty when some are subtracted. The sage bends all there are into a harmonious whole, knowing that things involve one another. When the duke of Chin first brought Li Chi to his palace, she wept bitterly. But after sharing with the duke the beautiful things of the palace, she regretted having wept initially. How do we know that the dead will not regret having ever wished to live. Only after waking up do we realize we ever dreamt (Chan, 1963, 189). Completeness or wholeness, thus, lies in harmonizing things and letting them flow in line with the natural flow of things and the revolving processes of nature.

Life and death, beginning and end all are one, given that each end marks a new beginning. Having a natural demeanor means appreciating this fact of nature. The Taoists and many philosophical schools at the time of Chuang Tzu held this view. The constant succession of life and death, day and night belong of necessity to the nature of things, revealing the way things should be evaluated. The sage knows this and fits himself into these natural processes of transformation that rely on the *Tao*. The natural order obtained *Tao* and without complaint conforms to (as with the sun and the moon) natural configurations and their transforming, unifying and leveling up processes. When we obtain *Tao*, we see the *One* and abolish all distinctions and become nature's companions. We begin to realize that existence is but a natural transformation, and in this natural transformation all is good and all is one. This type

of harmonization of activity and tranquility represents the height of virtue and the Tao. It leads to an all-encompassing and an all-embracing attitude to existence that makes dualism unnecessary because it would not do anything unnatural.

Conclusion

Going beyond the limitations of material conditions (egotism and self-aggrandizement) on which our so-called happiness is built, gives us real happiness. The spirit then gains its freedom and starts to move without restriction at that very point where perception and understanding end and one embraces the equality of all things. One then begins to see how things are interwoven and harmoniously blended with one another, mutually involving one another. Making attempts at, for instance, elongating the legs of the duck or shortening those of the horse would only militate against this natural freedom and the oneness and natural flow of things. Chuang Tzu believes we have no access to the subjective experience of others. We do not know about the happiness (or sadness) of the white fish or of the brown fish.

At once going beyond speech and augmentations onto the sphere of the Tao, where all distinctions evaporate, and remaining within the earthly order, where complete happiness is realized in this world, Chuang Tzu achieves an immanent transcendence (Limei Jiang, 2019) that unifies the internal and the external, the object and the subject, the self and the world. Again, at the same time (concurrently) discussing the immaterial realm (or is it the unreal?), dreams, and holding on to the equality of all things (material and immaterial, real and unreal); and by resisting the temptation to claim clear and distinct knowledge while holding on to the existence of the real and the unreal, where all there is, is one, Chuang Tzu seems to resolve all estrangements of self and world, object and subject, mind and body.

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