

Major Aspects of Chinese Religion and Philosophy

Dao of Inner Saint and Outer King

Bearbeitet von
Chun Shan

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Preface

It is obligatory to provide a commentary clue as a preface to my book since the theme dealt with contents more antique and national than they appear to be. Even for Chinese general readers they may not be fully prepared for classical Chinese words and phrases unless they have received special education for them, and they can be equally estranged from its theme unless they are specialized in the academic areas concerned. For these two reasons, such a commentary clue would be assumed helpful for non-Chinese readers, or at least it can serve as the perspective of the native thinker for those non-Chinese thinkers who may specialize in the relative areas.

Chinese scholarship or classical thinking had never been categorized as the disciplines of Greek Aristotelian type before they were introduced to Chinese intellectuals in the nineteenth century. For 2H civilizations, i.e., the Hebrew religion and the Hellenic philosophy, the world has been divided into two dimensions, one for the natural world in which everything is governed by objective laws and their essential qualities are calculated as obligatory principles, and one for the spiritual world in which every idea is guided by subjective wills and their innate capacities are evaluated as discretionary choices. These two dimensions can be academically categorized as natural sciences and humanities, which, in western antiquity, were basically mirrored in Greek philosophy including natural philosophy and Hebrew religion including the Abrahamic faiths system. After the intellectual supremacy of Aristotelian disciplines in the west, these 2H civilizations have been transformed in the conventions of religion and philosophy. Distinguished from this division of religion and philosophy, or Jerusalem and Athens, Chinese thinkers projected a picture of the unified world to their antiquity in the methodology of Integration between Heaven and Human (*tianren heyi*), in which Dao or Way was worshipped as the cosmic entity, dynamics and human principles. Unity in diversity was not a principle to welcome or reject, but an innate cultural device for Chinese scholars in their observing and reflecting the relations between heaven and human. For them what had been categorized as disciplines as philosophy and religion were all in the domains of the relations between heaven and human subject to Dao as the universal principle. For Confucius, Dao had been

dominant in social ethics, for Lao Zi, Dao in ontology and cosmology, for Mencius in moral rights and social revolutions, for Zhuang Zi in spiritual happiness, for Legalists in institutional validities. Thus all, disciplines under heaven were nothing more than the facets of Dao in its human world. However, this Dao scholarship combining the natural world and spiritual exploration was mystically corresponded with in Immanuel Kant in his epistemological revolution, i.e., associating the natural world with human faculty of sensation, perception and reason, and attributing the spiritual world with human faculty of pure reason. For Kant, human faculties targeting the natural world were contingent to other objective conditions, while human faculty employed in the spiritual world was motivated initiatively by its subjective free wills. This is parallel to Chinese Dao of inner saint and outer king in methodology, but Chinese thinkers expanded the mindset into a far wider scholarship from epistemology to cosmology, politics, ethics, and religion.

If metaphysical Dao is acknowledged in its physical ramifications, what aspects does it reveal of Chinese religion?

When Chinese scholars tell of “The Three Religions (*sanjiao*)”, they may indicate much of the similar messages concerning western religion besides their rich senses in other fields, but these religious messages are meticulously implied in humanities other than divine miracles. Among these three “religions (*jiao*)” or “teachings (*jiao*)”, they are phonetically identical in the same Chinese word, Confucianism exposed its religious facets as the supreme principle for monarchical politics in the Han Dynasty, emphasizing “Heaven” as the sole legitimacy of the human empire. Daoism emerged as a plebian religion in the later Han Dynasty for their life and natural rights when they were driven to the wall. Buddhism was introduced into China from India, from the Han to the Wei and Jin Dynasties before it attained to its religious prosperity in the Tang Dynasty. Ever since, these three religions were accepted as the mainstay of Chinese faith system.

The spirit of Chinese culture and national faith should coincide with Chinese views about world and human life. In the Integration between Heaven and Human, all physical beings, mainly human beings, are born with heavenly benevolence, therefore Confucianism particularly attentive to human life and its social morals became the chief civilian faith and official ideology in Chinese society, which fabricated the corresponding moral principles of filial piety, loyalty, and righteousness to family, country, and the world under heaven. All members in society were thus entitled with religiously moral capacity: civilians as heavenly citizen (*tianmin*), emperors as heavenly sons (*tianzi*), all persons as having heavenly conscience (*tianliang*).

With Chinese tradition, mainly from Confucian faith on the heavenly mandates, modern Chinese scholars based themselves on Marxism, western religion studies, and the introduction of Buddhism in contributing their reflections on religion and came to a general definition for religion as one connoting four chief elements (*siyaosu shuo*), namely transcendent concept, intuitional experience, religious activities, and institutions. In the Chinese faith system Confucianism is historically and intellectually distinguished in its commitment to the concept of heaven, which justified modern Confucian scholars in their translation of the

Catholic into “The Religion of Heaven Master (*tianzhujiao*)”. Therefore, the concept of heaven has a predominant place in the Chinese faith system, with Confucianism in particular. As a key the concept in Chinese faith system, heaven implies the messages from the natural, political, institutional, social, individual, and national dimensions. In contrast with the western nations as “the nation of one book”, the Chinese might be metaphorically depicted as “the nation mandated to the heaven”, obviously evidenced in their practice of “worshipping the heaven and ancestors (*jingtianjizu*)”. For the Chinese influenced by Confucianism, their religious commitments are invariably expressed in their world views and family affections. They think that all human beings are born and brought up in the family, and the world is nothing but an enlarged family, so the social ethics applicable in the world could be dearly felt and encouraged from the family blood ties epitomized morally as “humaneness (*ren*)”, phonetically identical to both human and human relations. With this humaneness as the cosmic heart, any person thus religiously committed, should love his family members, social members, and even all beings in the world, since they are all equal members born by heaven, surviving on the earth as brothers and sisters.

Religious Daoism (*daojiao*) is widely acknowledged as the religion indigenous to China with more affinities to western religions. It borrowed its cosmology from Philosophical Daoism (*daojia*) in its natural evolution instead of God’s creation, and thus stimulated religious Daoists in seeking life eternity of natural beings like tortoise and crane. They were more initiatively active in making pills of immortality by consolidating cosmic air in their bellies and taking the outer pills of chemical, mineral, and herbal ingredients. Despite its superficial illusions about nature and eternal life, their religious maneuvers tinged the religion with practitioners’ subjective efforts towards a better life after death rather than being passively salvaged. Its social moral was highly accountable for its love for individual life rather than Confucian commitments for social responsibility.

Chinese Buddhism is the only one among the three religions introduced from India, yet adapted to Chinese spirituality for social equality by way of intellectual revolution of Chan or Zen Buddhism. Indian Buddhism had two phases to preach in China. Its religious mission in the first phase was to preach *prajñā*, or the Buddhist epistemology, drastically alien to Chinese humaneness oriented Confucianism and Daoist eternal life expectation in being the immortal. But its religious mission in the second phase was to advocate nirvana, or the Buddhist philosophy of life, unexpectedly catering to Chinese Confucians and Daoists in their spiritual pursuits. Although the Buddha nature theory was not much favored among Indian Buddhists, it was gradually accepted and eventually worshipped as the spiritual gospel for Chinese Chan Buddhists to coincide with Confucian heart-nature-mandate doctrine and Daoist equal distribution of metaphysical Dao to all diversified physical beings. The universal Buddha nature thus better evaluated in Chinese society where equality and fairness for individual human life were much anticipated in religious Confucianism and Daoism than it was in Indian society where caste was preached in Hinduism.

In the integration between heaven and human, either its moral aspect or physiological aspect was always advocated by religious Confucians and Daoists. Since the Daoist focus on mental-cultivation (*xiuxing*) was eclipsed by its cosmic-air cultivation, Confucian endeavors on human dignity was spectacularly explored and socially encouraged. As human dignity is mainly associated with moral sense, Confucian thinkers effectively established a faith market among Chinese civilians for their saint personality as a “great husband (*dazhangfu*)” morally defying powerful authorities, superrich corruption, and begging poverty.

The humanistic facet of Confucianism and Daoism had much influence on western Enlightenment thinkers by the translation and introduction of Jesuit missionaries. Since the Catholic and religious authorities had been suppressing too hard on their European citizens, those thinkers managed by all means to peddle themselves as humanists encouraged and accompanied by Chinese Confucian humanists. Therefore, a comparison offered in the book would provide an academically balanced frame to rethink and reevaluate the relations between Religion and Enlightenment.

All the messages and concepts discussed in this part could be more or less connected with the area of “inner saint” in the Dao of Inner Saint and Outer King, which had intuition, national, and historical elements intricately involved with it if readers prefer to approach that way.

As for the area of “outer king”, I purposely diverted my observation and reflection to the epistemology of intimate human experience from history and natural environment, the political philosophy, and the philosophy of life which exhibit their amazing feats of Confucianism and Daoism, though not peculiarly striking in Chinese Buddhism. In the western philosophical tradition, philosophy has been unanimously related as the spiritual quintessence of historical ages. But the Enlightenment Movement provoked challenging arguments, some scholars proclaiming “an epistemological turn” has been dominating western philosophy while some others insisting that philosophy is still on its historical track of “the rehearsal of death”. Instructively, these confusing arguments do not bother Chinese philosophy too much, both philosophies of Chinese tradition and Marxist tradition firmly stick to the unity of philosophical branches, either defining philosophy as the Dao of Inner Saint and Outer King or as the unification between world views and human values. For both of them, such unity expresses steadily the spirit of Chinese philosophy, and such spirit was termed as the sphere of living or the sphere of mentality (*jingjie*).

In the frame “Integration between Heaven and Human”, the sphere of mentality has a visible predilection to human values instead of the world structure and human faculty to explore the objective world. This predilection justified Feng Youlan, the most influential philosopher as well as philosophical historian in his clue to spotlight the features of Chinese philosophy at its specific ages. In the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the spirit of Chinese philosophy was mirrored in the Scholarship of Originative Thinkers (*zhuzixue*). In the Han Dynasty, there was the prosperity in the Scholarship of Confucian Classics (*jingxue*). In the Wei and Jin Dynasties, the academic grace was thrown on Daoist

Metaphysics (*xuanxue*). In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Chinese Buddhism (*foxue*) was in exceptional profile for civilian and intellectual Chinese. In the Song and Ming Dynasties, Neo-Confucianism brought Dao Scholarship (*daoxue*) back to the focus of academics, which can be further subdivided into Rational Sect (*lixue*), Intuitionist Sect (*xinxue*), and Cosmic Air Sect (*qixue*). In the Qing Dynasty, the ethnic Chinese from the Northeastern China came to rule the whole of China and suppressed Chinese Confucian scholars by a notorious policy of “charges by word-fabrication (*wenziyu*)”. These are the basic aspects of Chinese philosophy in its history.

Philosophical Daoism was basically suggested by *The Works of Lao Zi* and *The Works of Zhuang Zi*. For Lao Zi, his works is barely an essay of no more than 5,000 words. Much similar to the formally organized collection of adages, Lao Zi had his wisdom on ontology, cosmology, and politics cogently exhibited in those rhythmically balanced phrases. We approach Lao Zi from all aspects of a modern philosophical system except the initiative subjectivity, yet this intellectual sorry was compensated exactly by Zhuang Zi. For modern citizens, all kinds of physical travels may seem feasible unless technically or commercially qualified. An astronaut or a billionaire may realize their dreams of space travel by means of their technique or money, but how did an ancient Chinese philosopher realize his universal travel? He realized it by his mentality of cosmic liberty. He masterfully demonstrated how a universal travel could be realized by mentality of cosmic liberty that permanently attract his readers beyond time and space. A reader of Zhuang Zi could be spiritually happier than he was otherwise actually anticipated.

The philosophical aspect of Chinese Buddhism is mainly expressed in its unity of epistemology and value orientation, which still reveals the advantage of Indian Buddhism and its reconciliation with Chinese Confucianism (*tianxia*) and Daoism which focused mainly on human values. Yet its epistemology can be compared with western epistemology to see its mental merits in interweaving cosmology and epistemology in peculiarly analytical sophistication. For these academic specialties, an influential modern Chinese Buddhist philosopher Ouyang Jingwu declared that Buddhism was superior to both religion and philosophy. My analysis in this chapter mainly targets its philosophical aspect which will render some references to readers for their assessments.

The unity of the Chinese world view and value orientation can be equally evaluated in regarding their traditional terms in Chinese philosophy, namely the studies on Chinese Cosmopolitanism and the moral happiness of Confucius and Yan Hui (*kongyan lechu*). Some scholars or philosophical historians would pick cosmopolitanism as the token of Chinese traditional world view and the moral happiness of Confucius and Yan Hui as the epitome of Chinese traditional philosophy of life. Their demonstrations have been arranged and evaluated in Chinese history and Confucian individual commitments.

As the mainstay of Chinese philosophy, Confucianism was organized into three classical systems, namely The Thirteen Classics (*shisanjing*), The Five Classics (*wujing*), and The Four Books (*sishu*). After the Song Dynasty, The Four Classics had been the dominant texts for Chinese civil service examinations (*keju kaoshi*)

before it was abolished in the 1911 Revolution. Therefore, the philosophical aspects revealed in The Four Books can be identical to the comprehensive facets of “Outer King”. Confucius, mainly in his *Analects*, established his humaneness oriented philosophy to consolidate the rule of proprieties which had been invented as the authoritative legality to rule China. In this sense, Confucius was a revolutionary thinker for the politics of the Zhou Dynasty and a moral teacher for the society of the Big Chaos where the ruling propriety and music had been severely violated (*libeng yehuai*). Mencius, in *The Works of Mencius*, served as the second patriarchal master of Confucian tradition before the Qin Dynasty and his intellectual contribution to Chinese society should be accounted on the moral rights for all human beings and their justification in conducting social revolutions if the rulers proved to be a solitude thief of public rights or solitary public thief (*dufu minzei*). *The Great Learning* has less connection with objective knowledge taught in the schools or universities as it seems to be. Literally, it bears the connotation of how an ordinary person can become great in society by way of Confucian philosophy. It provided a concise clue from cultivating one personality to ruling the world as a great king. *The Doctrine of the Means*, likewise, did not mean the moderate method in administering affairs or thinking in a balanced way, but aimed at the natural justice fortifying people with natural rights to expect the rule of saint king and the world of natural harmony.

The above-mentioned clues may serve as a minimum introduction to what Chinese religion and philosophy might seem to be at their first glimpse and their Modern adaption to western intellectual traditions as revived through Renaissance and Enlightenment. Apart from these concluding sentences, with immense gratitude, I would focus on these names for their suggestions, instructions, encouragements, and patience, paramountly conducive to the completion of this book from proposing, criticizing, editing, typesetting, printing, and even writing blurbs. They are Prof. Claudia Bickmann, Prof. Albert Welter, Prof. Richard N. Stichler, Associate Prof. Rosita Dellios, Prof. Lee H. Yearley, Dr. Thomas Niels Peter, and Dr. Leana Li. My thanks would invariably go to Ruhr-University Bochum for my honor of being Bochum Fellow in 2008 in the International Consortium Research of “Dynamics in the History of Religions”.