

Perception of Lao Tzu's Life Philosophy

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Abstract—Lao Tzu advocates the truth, the morality, the heaven, the earth and the nature in his "Tao Te Ching" and his philosophy of life is selflessness, tolerance, modesty, humility, concession, generousness, etc. That is to ask people to abide by the law and do their duty so as to achieve social stability and peace. So it provides us a valuable theoretical thinking for the current construction of a harmonious socialistic society, and provides good manna for the implementation of civic virtues construction and the promotion of harmony among human and nature and society, among people and among countries. This paper made comprehension of Lao Tzu's philosophy of life from the following aspects: 1. think highly of modesty and concession; 2. think lightly of fame and gain, keep Xujing (Emptiness and Stillness) Theory; 3. advocate humility and generousness.

Keywords—*life of philosophy; think highly of modesty and concession; think lightly of fame and gain, keep XuJing(Emptiness and Stillness) Theory; advocate humility and generousness*

I. INTRODUCTION

"Tao Te Ching" is our excellent traditional culture, where the lines contain Lao Tzu's philosophy of life. His "Tao Te Ching", with five thousand words, advocating the truth, the morality, the heaven, the earth and the nature, is a works in Chinese Philosophy. Lao Tzu's philosophy of life is selflessness, tolerance, modesty, humility, concession, generousness, etc. That is to ask people to abide by the law and do their duty so as to achieve social stability and peace. So it provides us a valuable theoretical thinking of current construction of a harmonious socialistic society, and provides good manna for the implementation of civic virtues construction and the promotion of harmony among human and nature and society, among the people and among the countries. No matter what we make comprehension of the connotation, objective and mode of the harmonious society that we are to build, we must properly treat the harmonious relations between human and nature, among people and among countries.

II. LAO TZU'S SPIRITUAL WORLD

Our nation has a long history of excellent culture, just like the endless Yellow River water and like the thicker and thicker riverbed, through five thousand years, both massive and splendid. During the Spring and Autumn Period, the famous Hundred Schools of Thought emerged, really a hundred flowers blooming and a hundred schools of thought

contending. Among them, the ten major factions are Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, Legalism, Ming Chia, Political Strategists, Agriculturists, Eclectics, Yin-Yang, Novelist. (from Ban Gu's "Hanshu Yiwenzhi") they are really like a group of bright stars, and the phosphor of them is just Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, who is the first philosopher in Chinese history. His "Tao Te Ching" is called "a book of philosophical poems" by scholars all through the ages, and in China it is the earliest personal writing that has a complete theoretical system. Guo Moruo said: "Tao Te Ching" is a book of political philosophy, but also a book of tactics. (from "An Outline History Of China") Lao Tzu opened up the Chinese aesthetic way in the field of literature, Buddhism also greatly absorbed philosophy of Taoism, and Confucius's Confucian school is also influenced by Lao Tzu.

Confucius once visited Lao Tzu to worship Lao Tzu as his teacher, and commended: like a high mountain, I look up to him, and said: I meet him today, and he is just a Dragon (Chinese ancient totem). Lao Tzu, a dragon. He is able to ride the dragon to fly to heaven. What a dragon? And who has seen the dragon? (The ancients said: Dragon is a thing of change, and it is flexible in space and form according to the time, and it can fly and control the forces of nature.) By this, it is visible that Lao Tzu is mysterious and significant for Confucius.

His "Tao Te Ching" is also known as "Laozi", with five thousand words, and is compact in writing and abundant in meaning, great and aborative in thinking, and it bears a great wisdom and fully expresses his philosophy of life. He puts the social life into the long history of the evolution of the universe from a deeper level and makes comparison and deep thinking, and his profound cultural connotation of knowledge between the lines makes us find the infinity of learning, which provides us with the most profound and most perfect ecological wisdom and the human spirit, as well as more delicate spiritual food. It is not exaggerative to say the "Tao Te Ching" is the result of ancient Chinese civilization, and is the essence of Chinese philosophy and wisdom, also the cultural wealth of mankind.

Lao Tzu's "Tao Te Ching" records "doctrine" in the first half part and "scripture" in the latter half part, and it contains a lot of knowledge, including political, military, philosophy, art, health, psychological, humanness and so on, which uses only five thousand words, so it can be described as a profound works! In the "Tao Te Chin", result is generally in front, followed by reason. Its unique writing method makes

us perplexed despite much thought, so to say it is a deep mystery.

Lao Tzu has its function in his "doctrine", that is "reducing their unstoppable momentum, resolving disputes among them, enabling them to reach a consensus of inaction and making their actions in unison.

Sinologist Mr. Yan Jingsong gave a very wonderful explanation:

It is wintery, with north wind, hoar frost and three-Chinese-foot ice, full of combative atmosphere, all things dying, that is described by it;

It is spring, with grass sprouting, everything coming back to life, flowers blossoming, birds contending in singing, that is described by it.

Spotless and clean-handed spirit, without stain and greed, that is described by it;

Brutal and homicidal soul, with corruption, extravagance and waste, that is described by it.

This is the great charm of "doctrine", with both benefits and disadvantages. It is everywhere and at all times, and its role is infinitely large. This just is the nature, the society, and the doctrine. Mr. Yen has instructed the doctrine with a really unique method, to make it simple and easy, and broaden our sight and open our thinking, making everyone awake suddenly. Just as you are reading a puzzling works, it makes you enlightened suddenly, like as you find a lighthouse in the vast sea at night, like as you meet a clear springs in the vast desert, so you become relaxed and happy, immersing yourself in the suppositional ambit, so as to apperceive reason and clear everything, and even drunkenly dance for joy. Really like a key to a lock, you get awake suddenly. When listening to him for "doctrine", we are afraid to miss a word, or even a character. Mr. Yan speaks really well, and we are all full of praise. We seem to see an infinite world, a fathomless heaven and an immeasurable universe. What an amazing nature! There are variable seasons, spring, summer, autumn and winter in a year, there is wind, rain, thunder and lightning in a day with sunrise and sunset. Mountains and rivers, flowers and birds, fish and beasts, all things in every phenomenon, are strange and common year after year and day after day, and everything is magical and unusual.

Mr. Yen leads us into the world of Lao Tzu just by this way, and we get close to Lao Tzu insensibly in such way, approach to the "doctrine" world of Lao Tzu quietly, comprehend Lao Tzu's spiritual ambit of life, and feel the world of peace, wisdom and thought.

III. LAO TZU'S MORAL CORE

Lao Tzu has three treasures: the first is kindness; the second is frugality; the third is risking universal condemnation against the mass of public opinion. And Lao Tzu's moral core is to think highly of modesty and concession; to think lightly of fame and gain, keep XuJing

(Emptiness and Stillness) Theory; and to advocates humility and generosity.

A. *Lao Tzu Advocates "Thinking Highly of Modesty And Concession"*

Sinology Researcher Mr. Yan Jingsong said "Four Books and Five Classics" was one part of our excellent culture. Confucius's knowledge stems from "Book of Changes". He adored the heaven, and said that a gentleman should be strong like the operation of the universe. Confucius gave priority to qian and stressed to be strong even drifting from place to place homeless and miserable. And Lao Tzu's knowledge also sources from "Book of Changes". He adored the earth, and said that a gentleman should be magnanimous like the wide stretch of land that can bear anything. Lao Tzu gave priority to kun and stressed to be gentle.

Lao Tzu advocates thinking highly of modesty and concession with the thought of recovering one's original simplicity and returning to original nature. He advocates obedience and starting from the nature, and stresses to recover the nature of human. If one can "manifest plainness and embrace simplicity with little selfishness and desire", he will be good at culture and have morality with no desire like a baby". He can get vital essence together and be meek and gentle like an unselfish baby. In other words, he can maintain the eternal virtues and recover the nature of human like a baby, and then perfuse himself with eternal virtues and recover his original simplicity. Lao Tzu requests people to return to our original simplicity, restrains ourselves, and returns to original nature with no desire like a baby.

Lao Tzu lays emphasis on nature and simplicity. We often use "Newborn Baby" to describe a man with profound culture. We may think that the man with profound culture is pure and gentle like a baby. The heart of newborn baby is compared to the natural and pure heart. A man with virtue is like a baby with no desire. It is the meaning of "含德之厚，比于赤子" (Chapter 55). Lao Tzu thought newborn baby had two characteristics. The one is pureness and the other is gentleness. Return back to the nature of baby and return back to original simplicity (Chapter 28), and then one can reach the state of gentleness. He advocates people to keep inner sincerity and not to pursue external reputation, not to be disturbed by external worldly things, and to empty inner mind and put down obsessiveness. Return your heart to be simple and plain, as if you are an ignorant and straightforward man, so that your heart can be pure and clean. Only by having this state of mind, man can have peace and eternal happiness. For example, if you want to be a good teacher, you shall be dedicated to prepare lessons and teach students, cultivate students, meanwhile you shall be indifferent to fame and wealth, without asking for anything in return, and not be affected by secular value concepts and not drift along. The present social morality is increasingly unhealthy. The society is filled with false, big and empty unhealthy ways and customs. So it is very necessary to learn from Lao Tzu. He thought people should be simple and plain, so that we could tell the truth.

Lao Tzu advocates gentleness, but it does not mean to pursue gentleness itself. It is because he found that “the gentle can conquer the strong” (Chapter 36). “The gentle is flexible and shows gentleness, and acts at any time and takes advantage of opportunities, so it is more likely for them to survive in the world” (Chapter 76). For example, a big tree is strong, but it is very easy to be broke off in the wind; a grass is gentle, but it can keep long. In other words, the gentleness is only a mean and to be strong and to survive are the purposes. He uses water to prove the truth that the gentle can conquer the strong. He said “there is nothing gentler than water, and nothing strong can conquer it, because there is nothing to replace it. The gentle overcomes the strong. We all know it but we can not do it” (Chapter 78). He advocates a matter-handling approach opposite to the world. For example, the man in the street likes fight, but he advocates harmony. The common man likes to be strong, but he treats gentleness as virtue. Furthermore, he thought “the gentle can conquer the strong”. If you think it is strong just because it seems, you will never know there is strength in the gentle and the gentle can conquer the strong. He also said that “if one can see the tiny things those others can't see (or ignore), he is bright. If one can keep gentle, it means that he is strong”. Water is a good example to prove the magical effect of the gentleness. It is the strongest to keep gentle. The gentle can overcome the strong and the yin can conquer the yang.

Lao Tzu advocates the philosophy of “conquering the strong with the gentle”. He said “天下之至柔，驰骋天下之至坚” (Chapter 43) whose meaning is that the gentlest thing can penetrate the strongest thing; and the gentle can conquer the strong. As stated in the “Book of Changes” that “kun is very gentle, and it can become strong after change”. And many times he uses water to prove it. He said “there is nothing gentler than water, but is all-conquering” (Chapter 78). Nothing can conquer it in the world. Consequently, Lao Tzu has repeatedly stressed that the gentle can overcome the strong, and it is good for people to return good for evil. He also warned that it is not wise to show too much of one’s ability and parade one's superiority and strive to outshine others. Lao Tzu’s philosophy of conquering the strong with the gentle has filled a grand and transcending spirit into Chinese traditional culture, gave a great power to Chinese nation and a great courage that we can face a variety of difficulties and setbacks bravely. The Chinese nation has the quality of generosity and the open-minded spirit, which stems from Taoism.

B. Lao Tzu Advocates “Thinking Lightly of Fame and Gain, Keeping XuJing (Emptiness and Stillness) Theory”

Lao Tzu not only values modesty and concession, but also advocates “thinking lightly of fame and gain, keeping XuJing (Emptiness and Stillness) Theory”. Lao Tzu advocated "less selfish desire", "contentment with own lot" and "supreme end", which has positive significance for such immoderate behaviors as disrespecting self for fame and gain and disregarding peril for greed. It is a condemnation for the greed and desire of the peerage under the regime, but a thought of “keeping quiet and having few desire and making

happiness lie in contentment” for the common folks, easily guiding people to the negative and conservative way. From another point of view, Lao Tzu’s original idea is that one values morality should well engage his/her material life, not be infatuated with material benefits, not desire for enjoying material life, but focus more on the enrichment of spiritual life, so it is still a view of life value worth our concerns. We must emphasize individual contribution to both the collective and human beings while we may pursue our fame and gains that we should have. The pursuit of fame and gains should be consistent with great enterprise.

We may also have feelings about such viewpoint of Lao Tzu in our daily life. Many have tried their utmost efforts in pursuit of fame and wealth, but end up with nothing. Some others stride toward their dream with hard work in a thoroughgoing manner and indifferent to the fame and wealth, and never to pursue material satisfaction, but they tend to get achievements with a happy life. Thus corresponds to the old saying “Many things grow in the garden that were never sown there”. No wonder Lao Tzu regards “Assist all others naturally” as the general principle for self-improvement, individual behavior, ways of life, management of state affairs and statement on morality and as the essence of philosophy of Taoism. The ideology which suggests not to do something forcibly by breaching natural law also reflects the nature of Taoism, namely Nature, which is the essence of all the truth, goodness and beauty.

Lao Tzu advocates “to be humbleness and selfless”, and encourages modest and stillness. Being modest and stillness is critical for selfless and knowing about honor while keeping the disgrace, namely to keep a modest and still world in our heart. If putting the selfish honor and disgrace aside, and getting to the state of “non-competition” while returning to nature, we will achieve “Tao”, the highest state of life. Of course, the non-competition advocated by Lao Tzu is not referring to refuse of material gain. He just refers to obtain material gain with non-competition, thinking that non-competition is the strongest competitiveness. The principle of “Not to seek fame and wealth, to be tranquility to achieve the far-reaching result”, “Knowing about the outside without going out” has set a good example for later generations. Thus give a warning to us that only if we can endure loneliness with a tranquil heart and get down to study, can we go further and realize our value of life.

C. Lao Tzu Advocates Humility and Generousness

Lao Tzu not only thinks highly of modesty and concession and thinks lightly of fame and gain, keeps XuJing (Emptiness and Stillness) Theory but also advocates humility and generousness.

In order for self-cultivation, we should achieve unity with modest, and get sincerity with stillness. Some knowledge about the normal doctrine will enable us to understand it completely without confuse and to be tolerant to all things with openness. As a result, we will be selfless and belong to all the things, and a unity with morality will be formed if we behave ourselves in line with the natural law. Modesty and humility is one of the methods for Lao Tzu to deal with the

political affairs. Regard ourselves with humbleness, and the higher position others hold, the more humble we should be. In the changing process of the things, reduce will bring us benefits, yet the pursuit of gaining will be ended up with reduction. "Things grow due to losses, and loss for growth." (Chapter 42) "The reason why all rivers run to sea is that its position is low. Therefore, if saint want to hold the position higher than others, he should be humble, and if he want to be a pioneer, he should be the last one for sharing something good without competing with others." (Chapter 66) He also reminds people that the best method for self-cultivation is to cherish spirit and to understand it completely. "Putting ourselves backward makes us to be the first, and putting ourselves outside something makes us inside it." (Chapter 7) Being humbleness will bring about support and reputation. Sacrificing ourselves for the benefit of others will enable us to benefit from it, which is corresponding to the Confucianism of "Complacent results in losses, and humbleness brings about benefits." So Lao Tzu suggests people to be softness, humbleness, ignorance and modesty. And advocate us to do things from the other side, as that side is a shortcut to achieve the goal on the front side. From the above mentioned, no wonder Lao Tzu encourages people to carry on "Natural Inactivity". All the questions will be settled easily if we can be free from our emotion, and be careful not to treat the problems with our own selfish opinion. Being humble and continue be smart will bring us a progress; and we will make a breakthrough with flexibility and not to cling to the tradition, assimilating to the "Taoism". Lao Tzu holds the philosophy of life of "Natural Inactivity". We will unify with Tao and harmony with nature if conduct in accordance the content of that sentence.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the opinion of Lao Tzu, there is interdependence and mutual transformation in two sides of the things, and it will develop into the opposite side when it reach its extreme. Therefore, he advocates a stop as appropriate if we want to keep a favorable state. People shall behave like the operation of all the things on earth without desire, just like the desireless, unselfish and unintelligent baby. The reason why all rivers run to sea is that the position of sea is low. And if people want to get achievements, he should behave like the sea to put himself lower. Lao Tzu expects to realize the eternal value of life through self-cultivation. To get to the state of plain and moderate, thinking light of fame and wealth while keeping stillness, and of modest and generous, we should control our desire, namely we should be good at controlling our emotions. And he says "colors make us blindness, sounds make us deaf, flavors hurt our mouth, racing in the field for hunting makes us mad, and things that are hard to get result in stealing by others.", (Chapter 15) reflecting that excessive emotions will be no good for self-cultivation. Namely the wonderful colors make us to be dazzled and unable to see anything, pleasant sounds make us deaf, delicious foods may hurt our mouth, riding a horse for hunting makes us mad, and the precious treasure may cause stealing by others easily.

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