

Philosophical Influences on Education in China: Different Schools of Thought on Self-Cultivation

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Abstract

This essay takes a holistic look at the philosophy of education in China from the antiquity to the present time, with an emphasis on the notion of self-cultivation in different schools of thought. The purpose of the study is to draw out the positive aspects of Chinese philosophy for newer generations to carry forward the cultural heritage for a healthy development of their mind, body, and spirit in the 21st century and beyond. The study is meaningful since the Chinese civilization can be traced back at least 5,000 years, and perhaps even further. Its endurance, intellectual and cultural contributions to the world civilization, and China's current rise as a world leading political and economic superpower, makes it especially worth examination. The paper is structured around four key themes: the quest for harmony, the pursuit of happiness, the search for health, and the action for healing. The article concludes with a suggestion of an integrated educational philosophy for contemporary Chinese educational practice. The study may have global implications as Confucius Institutes and Classrooms have been established worldwide since 2004 to teach Chinese language and culture. The localization and smooth integration of Chinese philosophy with Western ideologies in these countries is the key to bringing world peace and harmony.

Keywords: Chinese educational philosophy; Daoism; Confucianism; Buddhism; Christianity; Communism; higher education; China

Introduction

This paper takes a panoramic view and makes a thematic analysis of Chinese educational philosophy since the ancient time till the present day. The borderline between philosophy and religion in Chinese tradition is vague, and so this article also encompasses religious thrusts on Chinese education. Islam is omitted here because it only became an ethnic religion in China after its arrival from Persia; it did not make a major impact on the Chinese society at large. As such, the paper primarily deals with the influences of Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Communism on Chinese education. In doing so, the essay is structured around four key themes: the quest for harmony, the pursuit of happiness, the search for health, and the action for healing.

The Quest for Harmony

Chinese culture has historically promoted harmony on four different levels: harmony with heaven, harmony with earth, harmony with humans, and harmony with self.¹ Daoism and Confucianism (also referred to as Ruism) as Chinese indigenous philosophy both emphasize harmony. While Confucianism accentuates harmony in social relationships, Daoism stresses harmony with the natural world.

There are two branches of Daoism: Daoist philosophy (*Daojia*) and Daoist religion (*Daojiao*). Daoist philosophy advocates living in harmony with nature and retreating from the world of politics for peace and freedom; it subordinates material to the spiritual.²

1 Zhang, 2013/2016

2 Ching, 1993

Daoist philosophy has impacted on Chinese education in many important ways, and has contributed enormously to Chinese art, landscape architecture, literature, medicine, among other things.

Daoist founder, Laozi (meaning “Old Master”), was a mystical figure, whose real name is believed to be Li Er (c.571-471 BCE), who lived in an age of social turmoil, and witnessed much human suffering from war, poverty, injustice, disease, and death, during the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BCE). As such, he wrote the timeless guide on the art of living, *Dao De Jing (Book of the Way)*, which is a poetic, cryptic text of a little more than 5,000 words, containing 81 verses. *Dao De Jing* is the second most printed book in the world after the Christian Bible.

The Chinese word 道, pronounced Dao, can be translated as “way,” “path,” “route,” or sometimes more loosely referred to as “doctrine” or “principle,” which was later also adopted in Confucianism. Within these contexts, Dao signifies the essence or fundamental nature of the universe. It refers to the method of proper conduct if the world was to run harmoniously. For the thinkers known as Daoists, this word symbolizes the whole process of things, their past, present, and future, in eternal transformation.³

Dao is intrinsically related to the concept of *Yin Yang*, where every action creates its counteraction as inevitable movements within the Dao, and proper practices involve accepting, conforming to, or working with these natural developments. Dao is an active and holistic view of nature rather than a static and atomistic one.

Yin Yang (阴阳) literarily means “shade and light” with the word *Yin* (阴) derived from the word for “moon” (月) and *Yang* (阳) for “sun” (日). *Zhou Yi (Yi Jing, The Book of Changes)* suggests that polar opposites created Heaven and Earth, and *Yin* and *Yang*. When Heaven and Earth intersect, and *Yin* and *Yang* unite, it gives life to all things. When *Yin* and *Yang* separate, all things perish. When *Yin* and *Yang* are in disorder, all things change. When *Yin* and *Yang* are in balance, all things are constant.⁴ The mutual interdependence of *Yin* and *Yang* is called 和合 (*hehe*). The first 和 signifies

“harmony” or “peace,” and the second 合 denotes “union” or “enclosure.” The combined words imply that the harmonious union of *Yin* and *Yang* will result in good fortune, and that any conflict is viewed only to achieve eventual harmony.⁵

Daoism has its preference for peace and quietness with the *yin* force, whereas Confucianism has its emphasis on action with the *yang* force. Both philosophical and religious Daoism give a higher place for women than Confucianism. For example, their writings frequently refer to Dao as the “Mother of All Things,” and show preference for images of water, valley, emptiness, and the like, over their opposites.⁶

Neo-Daoism was a movement to reexamine the previous Daoist doctrines; it was also a radical drive which revived the interest of logic and ideology, and which somewhat influenced Confucianism with deliberately interpreting Confucius as a sage united with the Dao and giving him a higher place than Laozi. Chinese educational philosophy in large part can be attributed to Confucian educational thought. Confucius (551-479 BCE) is the Latin rendering of Kongzi (“Master Kong”), whose real name was Kong Qiu, who was a Chinese sage born in a humble family in Shandong province, and who lived in a period of political and economic unrest. He dedicated his life to teaching moral cultivation of character and the restoration of rites and duties to the family and the State.

Confucius advocated the concept of an upright moral person *junzi*, an ideal gentleman who possesses twin qualities. One is 仁 (*ren*), which is the core value in Confucianism, and which has been variously translated into English as “humanness,” “humanity,” “kind-heartedness,” and “benevolence.”⁷ The other is 礼 (*li*), which has been translated as “rite” or “propriety,” and which contains five virtues: right attitude, right procedure, right knowledge, right moral courage, and right persistence. Taken together, the practice of these virtues would lead to a new society based on justice and wisdom.⁸ In Confucian *Analects*, he reiterated the Golden Rule: “Do not do to others what you do not want done to you” (Book 5 Chapter 11; Book 12

3 Journey of Civilization, 2014a; Keswick, 2003

4 阴阳合则生，阴阳离则灭；阴阳错则变，阴阳平则恒。

5 Lau, 1991, p. 214; Yu, 1991, pp. 51-52

6 Ching, 1993; Keswick, 2003

7 Journey of Civilization, 2012a, 2013

8 Journey of Civilization, 2012a, 2013; Reagan, 2000

Chapter 2; Book 15 Chapter 23; translated by Legge, 1893/1971), which has also been observed in other traditional cultures around the world.⁹

Learning for Confucius had a social responsibility—to apply what one has learned to serve the people, as he stated in the *Analects*: “Now the man [/woman] of perfect virtue, wishing to be established himself [/herself], seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself [/herself], he [/she] seeks also to enlarge others” (Book 6 Chapter 28 Section 2; translated by Legge, 1893/1971, p. 194; [] added by the author). This passage suggests that to advance a human society, we must not only concern our own progress, but the world at large.

Confucian society regarded itself as a large family and extended it to all people in the world, which is well put in the *Analects*: “all within the four seas will be his [/her] brothers [/sisters]” (Book 12 Chapter 5 Section 4; translated by Legge, 1893/1971, p. 253). To be able to serve the State was considered a moral obligation of the scholar. Serving the State follows an order that started from the self, extended to the family, and then to the State, which is well put in his *Great Learning*: “The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own States. Wishing to order well their States, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things” (*Great Learning*, translated by Legge, 1893/1971, pp. 357-358). Thus, both the *Analects* and the *Great Learning* emphasize self-cultivation, managing the household, governing the nation, and then pacifying the world.

Education was the key to Confucian view of how the ideal social order could be achieved, and the end of education was to bring about good government

to establish peace and harmony. However, his highly stratified social order proved to be extremely conservative and resistant to change. Traditional Chinese education was to ensure social stability, and it did so effectively for most of its history, whereas an important theme in American education is on the role of the school in promoting social change.¹⁰

Confucius (551-479 BCE) in ancient China was comparable to Socrates (c.470-399 BCE) in ancient Greece as they lived at about the same time. While Socrates had proposed a Theory of Ideas,¹¹ Confucius was preoccupied with the practical aspects of life and the courage to take social responsibility.¹²

The Pursuit of Happiness

The Chinese characters closest to the Western concept of happiness include 福 (*fu*, “good fortune”), 乐 (*le*, “pleasure”), and 喜 (*xi*, “joy”). The notions of 福 and 乐 are frequently examined in Chinese schools of thought, while 喜 is a word more commonly used for traditional Chinese weddings when 喜 is pasted on walls, doors, or windows in its twofold form 喜喜 to denote “double happiness.”¹³

Confucius stated that having friends is 乐 or a pleasure, as he asked in the beginning of his *Analects*: “Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters?” (Book 1 Chapter 1 Section 2).¹⁴ A Chinese proverb likewise says that “A thousand glasses of wine is not enough when bosom friends meet; using wine to eliminate worry will cause even more worries,”¹⁵ suggesting that having a companion is better than being alone while drinking wine.

Confucius then recommended doing three things in life to bring happiness: learning etiquettes and music, speaking of the goodness of others, and having many worthy friends (*Analects*, Book 16 Chapter 5). Conversely, Confucius pointed out three things in life that are unhealthy and harmful: taking pleasure in extravagance, sauntering and inactivity, and finding joy in feasting (*Analects*, Book 16 Chapter 5).

To Confucius, happiness is being able to savor the

9 Plaks, 2015

10 Reagan, 2000

11 Feibleman, 1984

12 Journey of Civilization, 2012b

13 Zhang, 2015/2017

14 有朋自远方來、不亦乐乎?

15 酒逢知己千杯少，借酒消愁愁更愁。

simplest things in life, as he said: “With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and my bended arm for a pillow. I find joy in them” (*Analects*, Book 7 Chapter 15). In a similar vein, Confucius praised his disciple Yan Hui: “Admirable indeed was the virtue of Hui! With a single bamboo dish of rice, a single gourd dish of drink, and living in his mean narrow lane, while others could not have endured the distress, he did not allow his joy to be affected by it. Admirable indeed was the virtue of Hui!” (*Analects*, Book 6 Chapter 9).

Likewise, Mengzi (Mencius, 372-289 BCE), the most brilliant exponent of Confucius, suggested that a person should have three delights. The first is that his/her parents are both alive and that his/her brothers/sisters have no troubles. The second is that he/she has no shame to face the heaven above and no deceit to people on the earth below. The third is that he/she has the most talented students to teach in the kingdom (*The Complete Works*, Book 7 Part 1 Chapter 20).

Thus, Confucian concept of happiness is to continuously improve one’s virtue, to care for others, and to obtain social unity. Daoist happiness is in remaining one’s instinct and returning to one’s primary state. And for Buddhists, happiness requires extinguishing three causes of human suffering: greed, hatred, and illusion.

Buddhism first came to China from India during the 1st century AD.¹⁶ The Buddha (meaning “The Awakened one”), whose real name was Siddhattha Gotama or Gautama, was born a prince in Southern Nepal, and who lived between 563-483 BCE, at about the same time as Confucius. He concerned about human suffering and gave up his privileged life to become a wandering seeker of truth. Through meditation, he achieved Great Enlightenment at the age of thirty-five.¹⁷ Buddhism adjusted itself to the Chinese context to avoid conflicts and controversies, and has adapted key elements in native Chinese philosophy, including the term Dao. Subsequently, it influenced Chinese art, architecture (particularly temple buildings), literature, and daily life, embracing the values of family, longevity, and posterity.

There are two most important Buddhist schools of thought: Southern School (Theravada Buddhism), and Northern School (Mahayana Buddhism). In China, the Northern School of Buddhism had prevailed with

an emphasis on greater freedom of devotional and metaphysical beliefs and practices. Both secular and religious Buddhist education existed almost exclusively within the monastery, and their faith had a monastic communal characteristic based on the close, reciprocal relationship between the teacher and the student. Its educational thought and practice had a powerful impact on Chinese society in providing a cultural and intellectual base.

Mozi (c.470-391 BCE) then developed a unique Chinese school of thought and argued that the world disorders are caused by a lack of “universal love,” which he defined as such:

It is to regard the state of others as one’s own, the houses of others as one’s own, [and] the persons of others as one’s self. When feudal lords love one another there will be no more war; when heads of houses love one another there will be no more mutual usurpation; when individuals love one another there will be no more mutual injury. When ruler and ruled love each other they will be gracious and loyal; when father and son love each other they will be affectionate and filial; when older and younger brothers love each other they will be harmonious. When all the people in the world love one another, then the strong will not overpower the weak, the many will not oppress the few, the wealthy will not mock the poor, the honored will not disdain the humble, and the cunning will not deceive the simple. And it is all due to mutual love that calamities, strife, complaints, and hatred are prevented from arising. Therefore the benevolent exalt it. (Book 4: Universal Love II)

Although Mozi’s “universal love” may sound too idealistic, he had indeed touched on a fundamental issue and called for humanity’s unification to establish harmony and happiness. For Mozi, universal love is a reciprocal reaction because he observed that “Whoever loves others is loved by others; whoever benefits others is benefited by others; whoever hates others is hated by others; whoever injures others is injured by others” (Book 4: Universal Love II). When universal love is experienced this way, it should not be too difficult to implement it.

Like Christian belief that the ultimate bliss is to know

16 Ching, 1993; Kohn, 2008; Schwartz, 1985

17 Reagan, 2000

God,¹⁸ the Chinese are convinced that happiness is to know the Dao. Confucius focused his life on the pursuit of the Dao of 仁 (*ren*, “benevolence” or “virtue”) rather than material goods,¹⁹ as he confessed in his *Analects*: “If a man [woman] in the morning hears the Dao, he [she] may die in the evening without regret” (Book 4 Chapter 8). Confucius was the first to advocate “Education for All.” To him, education had no class distinction. His pupils were selected based on talent but not wealth or status.²⁰ He believed that by nature humans are alike, and it is through education and practice that they become differentiated. Behind this emphasis lies the assumption that everyone could succeed if one worked hard. This idea was a real revolution then because prior to Confucius, education was confined to nobles and controlled by officials. The Chinese since then have become known for the value they place on effort in education.²¹ Mengzi likewise suggested a virtuous person should uphold the Dao of *ren*, as he maintained: “Honor virtue and delight in righteousness, and so you may always be perfectly satisfied. Therefore, a scholar, though poor, does not let go his [her] righteousness; though prosperous, he [she] does not leave his [her] Dao. Poor and not letting righteousness go, thus the scholar holds possession of himself [herself]” (*The Complete Works*, Book 7 Part 1 Chapter 9). Because Chinese people look at things as having *Yin Yang* duality, they perceive good fortune (happiness) and misfortune (unhappiness) as two ends of a pendulum that are interchangeable and can be reversed, as expressed in such phrases: “Extreme happiness may turn into sadness,”²² and “When bitter experience is over, sweet joy will come.”²³ This wisdom may have derived from Laozi’s *Dao De Jing* that “Misfortune is beside where fortune lies; fortune is beneath where misfortune lingers” (verse 58).²⁴ This dialectic is often

told in a household tale in China about a farmer who lost his horse, but how do you know this isn’t good fortune?²⁵ The story goes like this:

A poor farmer’s horse ran off into the country of the barbarians. All his neighbors offered their condolences, but his father said, “How do you know that this isn’t good fortune?” After a few months the horse returned with a barbarian horse of excellent stock. All his neighbors offered congratulations, but his father said, “How do you know that this isn’t a disaster?” The two horses bred, and the family became rich in fine horses. The farmer’s son spent much of his time riding them; one day he fell off and broke his hipbone. All his neighbors offered the farmer their condolences, but his father said, “How do you know that this isn’t good fortune?” Another year passed, and the barbarians invaded the frontier. All the able-bodied young men were conscripted, and nine-tenths of them died in the war. (Translated by S. Mitchell, 1988, p.109)

The narrative implies that fortune and misfortune can be transformed into one another, and that positive and negative events interact with each other. One should not take any insensitive action to reverse things to its unfavorable side of 祸 (*huo* “misfortune”).²⁶ However, just like *Yin* and *Yang*, the inevitable reversal of the two extremes is the Dao.²⁷

Humans often have many desires, and the fulfillment of one desire tends to lead to temporary satisfaction but more desires to come. To solve this paradox, the Chinese cherish a common idiom: “One who is content with what one has is always happy,”²⁸ suggesting that to be happy, less desire is essential. This idea may as well be attributed to Laozi, as he stated in *Dao De Jing*: “One who is content is wealthy” (verse 33),²⁹ that

18 Hamilton, 1860/2009/2015; Krayer, 2001; McCready, 2001; Smith, 2001

19 Wang, 2001, p. 50

20 Wei, 1990

21 Wong, 1998

22 乐极生悲

23 苦尽甘来，否极泰来。

24 祸兮福之所倚，福兮祸之所伏。

25 塞翁失马，焉知非福。

26 Wang, 2001

27 物极必反

28 知足者常乐

29 知足者富

“One who is content will not meet disgrace; one who knows when to stop will not encounter danger; thus one may live a long life” (verse 44),³⁰ that “One who is content with knowing contentment is always content indeed” (verse 46),³¹ and that “No misfortune is greater than discontentment, and no misconduct is greater than extravagant desires” (verse 46).³²

The Chinese concept of contentment coincides with that of French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes (1596-1650), who maintained that happiness is to have a perfectly content mind.³³ A contemporary happiness research likewise shows that Taiwanese people still hold contentment as an important mindset to happiness.³⁴

Nevertheless, Sir Anthony Kenny (2001, p. 228) argued that contentment is a necessary but inadequate statement of happiness. It may be due to ignorance, or from a false assessment of options, or from a deficiency of imagination. In Kenny’s view, this contentment might be termed “the contentment of the unraised consciousness” or “the contentment of the unexamined life,” which Socrates considered not worth living. The Chinese contentment is also contrary to Anglo-American culture that advocates humans to always aim for their maximum capacity or capability rather than being complacent over one’s occasional success.

Zhuangzi (c.369-286 BCE), the second most influential Daoist philosopher, observed that because different people have different inborn nature, they should follow their inherent capacity to fully enjoy themselves, and thus contentment is only relative. Zhuangzi distinguished perfect happiness (至乐) from happiness (乐) through his keen observations in life. As for most people, happiness means the possession of such mundane things as wealth, honor, longevity, tasty foods, fine clothes, admirable home, beautiful companions, pleasing music, and the like. To him, these substances are hollow vanity but not true happiness because they are external to the real value of life.

Zhuangzi considered perfect happiness as beyond common values; it is a state of mind free from any confinement.³⁵

Zhuangzi further developed Daoist notion of spiritual freedom in his mystical writings. To him, living according to the Dao is to respect its natural laws, including that of dying. A sage who possessed highest wisdom is no longer affected emotionally by the cycle of life in the world, not because he/she has lost sensibility, but he/she has risen above it.³⁶ Like Christian humanist notion that real happiness could only be achieved in the afterlife,³⁷ Zhuangzi viewed death as the “perfect happiness.”

A well-known story tells that when Zhuangzi’s wife died, Huizi went to express his condolences, but he found Zhuangzi sitting with his legs sprawled out, pounding on a tub and singing. Huizi was very surprised and asked: “You lived with her and she brought up your children. It should be enough simply not to weep at her death. But pounding on a tub and singing, isn’t it going too far?” Zhuangzi replied:

“You’re wrong. When she first died, do you think I didn’t grieve like anyone else? But I looked back to her beginning and the time before she was born, before she had a body, before she had a spirit. In the midst of the muddle of wonder and mystery a change happened and she had a spirit, a body, and she was born. Now there is another change and she’s dead. It’s just like the changing of the four seasons. She’s going to lie down peacefully in a vast room. If I were to follow after her bawling and sobbing, it would show that I don’t understand anything about fate. So I stopped.” (*The Complete Works*, Chapter 18)

To Zhuangzi, death is another form of life that one should blissfully experience rather than mourning about it. In the Works of Zhuangzi, he observed: “Life is the companion of death, death is the beginning of life. Who understands their workings? Man’s [/Woman’s] life is a coming-together of breath. If it comes together,

30 知足不辱，知止不殆，可以长久。

31 知足之足，常足矣。

32 祸莫大于不知足，咎莫大于欲得。

33 Krays, 2001, p. 151.

34 苦尽甘来，否极泰来。

35 Wang, 2001, p. 48

36 Ching, 1993; Girardot, Miller, and Liu, Eds., 2001; Journey of Civilization, 2014b; Kohn, 2008.

37 Krays, 2001, p. 140; Montgomery, 2013, p. 22

there is life; if it scatters, there is death. And if life and death are companions to each other, then what is there for us to be anxious about?" (Chapter 22: Knowledge Wandered North; translated by Watson, 1968, p. 235). Hence in Zhuangzi's view, life and death is a natural cycle. If one sees this true nature and understands the Dao, one is not far from real happiness.³⁸

The Search for Health

Health is fundamental to the sustainability of humankind. The Chinese characters for health include 健康 (*jiankang*), 康宁 (*kangning*), or simply 康 (*kang*), with its associated words such as 长寿 (*changshou*, "longevity") or 寿 (*shou*). Traditional Chinese philosophy holds that every living organism in the universe is derived from the endless cycle of the sun fire and earth water, thus fire and water constitute the basic substance of life. This idea established *Yin Yang* theory, and *Yin Yang* balance is a basic concept in traditional Chinese medicine to sustain life.

Chinese philosophical view is that the eternal cycle of the four seasons helps sustain life. This way of nature is the Dao. In seeking the real Dao, Laozi suggested in *Dao De Jing* a purification of one's senses because "Colors blind the eye. Sounds deafen the ear. Flavors numb the taste. Thoughts weaken the mind. Desires wither the heart" (verse 12; translated by Mitchell, 1999). His writings intend to awaken the readers to an inner, spiritual release, freeing from the repression of conventional and conservative ways of looking at and thinking about things. Religious Daoists strived for immortality of the whole person as well as the active and contemplative practices associated with the quest.

Neo-Confucianism as a confluence of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist principles started in the Tang dynasty (618-907) and became dominant in the Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. It brought together all the previous schools of thought in a single philosophy and returned to the original basis of Chinese beliefs by absorbing certain Daoist naturalist legacy and Buddhist ceremonial practices, metaphysics, and

spirituality into its own system.

Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist philosophies all teach the complementarity of human processes, which help open people's mind to the possibility of reconciling with the alternate.³⁹ Hence, it was not difficult to find that people in China believed and practiced multiple ideologies. For example, some may have followed Confucian rituals in the society, contemplated Daoist harmony at home, and worshipped Buddha in a temple on a regular basis.

For the most of the last thousand years, Neo-Confucianism had become the major philosophy for China, and contributed to the liberation of Chinese women's place in the hierarchical feudalistic society and the patriarchal family system, where the wife was considered subordinate to the husband in every way.⁴⁰

Christianity was introduced to China four times between the 7th and the 17th centuries, but each time the missionaries found difficulty in making their belief penetrating China, because the Chinese feared that their teachings were a threat to the Chinese heritage and disruptive to Confucian social stability,⁴¹ despite the shared values between the two faiths.⁴²

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, China and the West had more regular contacts, and the 19th century was a period of growth in Christian missions as well as political and economic expansion by the West. England and the United States, followed by Germany and France, sent out the most Protestant missionaries. The first Protestant evangelist to reside in China was Robert Morrison (1782-1834), who arrived in Guangdong (Canton) in September 1807. By the 1890s, the number of Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries in China reached 2,000.⁴³ They served as mediators of Western civilization, hoping to "save" China by Christianizing the Chinese nation through giving speeches in streets and sending fliers via mails. However, the missionaries found their efforts were achieving a minimum result as the total number of converts was less than 1 percent, which forced them to turn to education.⁴⁴

Missionaries hoped that by establishing schools they

38 Lu, 2001; Wang, 2001

39 Wong, 1998

40 Ching, 1993

41 Ching, 1993; Johnson, 2017

42 see, for example, Davies, 2014

43 Lutz, 1971

44 Lutz, 1971

could spread the Christian messages more effectively thus gaining more membership in the church to raise the popularity of Christianity among the Chinese. Calvin Mateer (1836-1908), a missionary to China with the American Presbyterian Mission, was one of the earliest advocates of higher education. The institution he founded in 1864 later became a part of the Cheeloo University in Shandong province,⁴⁵ which later merged with other colleges to form the present Shandong University.

Other missionaries also set up schools, colleges, and even opened classes in their homes to provide special training in English, science, mathematics, history, geography, and Christian doctrines for a small group of Chinese. Nevertheless, the Chinese families who could afford a traditional education for their children paid little attention to these Western institutions. Only those less fortunate families were attracted to the free admission of these missionary schools that offered the language of instruction in English.

The May 4th Movement in 1919, in a broader sense often referred to as the New Culture Movement during 1915-1921, called for an end to the patriarchal family in favor of individual freedom and women's liberation. Through a re-examination of Confucian texts and ancient classics using modern textual and critical methods, it established democratic and egalitarian values, and launched an orientation to the future rather than the past, to name some initiatives among many. The Movement was more important for the establishment of modern universities in China than any other event. The reputable Tsinghua/Qinghua University was founded in Beijing in 1926 as a national institution.⁴⁶

Thus, the most significant contributions Christian missionaries made to China were the initiation of higher education, training women in modern medicine and nursing, and the founding of hospitals.⁴⁷ These schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals gained popularity as Chinese attitude towards Western civilization changed, and the Christian colleges prepared a high percentage of students to go to England and the United

States for further training.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Communists rejected Christianity and adapted Marxism from Germany and Leninism from Russia. Mao Zedong (1893-1976), the first Chinese Communist Party leader, was very much influenced by Karl Marx's (1818-1883) class struggle theory and believed that Communism is a fair society that everyone would contribute to it what he/she could and would take from it only what he/she needed – an idealism developed by Marx and Engels.

Marx was interested in economic and political relations in human society and stressed on collective rather than individual efforts. In their famous Manifesto, Marx and Engels called for a revolution: "Workers of the world unite.... You have nothing to lose but your chains."⁴⁸

The Chinese Communists assumed Marx as the greatest philosopher the world ever had, and his philosophy was better than any of the previous.⁴⁹ Marxist influence thus had penetrated every cell of Chinese society. Since 1949, Marxist "Dialectical Materialism" as atheism was the major theme in Chinese textbooks of primary, secondary, and tertiary educations,⁵⁰ and religion in China was regarded as a little higher than mere superstition.

Because Confucianism promoted tolerance, collectivism, and adaptability, the Chinese easily accepted Communism to achieve social reform, until the Communist radicals launched an extreme case of political abuse during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). A mass mobilization begun in 1966, which included urban youth – the Red Guards, later also workers and peasants, led by Mao and his wife Jiang Qing. Mao alerted people to grasp revolution and promote production. He closed schools and encouraged students to join the Red Guards, which persecuted Chinese intellectuals and enforced Mao's personal cult. The motives of the urban workers and the rebellious students were similar: fighting against inequality, authoritarianism, and capitalist tendencies that they believed to be embodied in factory managers. The movement for criticism of party officials, intellectuals,

45 Lutz, 1971

46 Hayhoe, 1999

47 Lutz, 1971; Johnson, 2017

48 Feibleman, 1984, p. 159

49 Ching, 1993

50 Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2018a, 2018b

and bourgeois values turned violent, and the Red Guards split into factions. Many people died in the ensuing purges. When the military itself threatened to factionalize, Mao dispersed the Red Guards, and began to rebuild the Party. The long-established Confucian humanism and social stability, as well as Daoist harmony and tranquility, were entirely replaced by Marxist class struggle theory, acts of violence, and a complete social chaos. The Communist revolutionaries rejected anything traditional, including Confucian philosophy and various religions. They launched an Anti-Confucius campaign in 1973-1974.

Art and literature were promoted to serve the proletariats and heighten their political consciousness and labor enthusiasm,⁵¹ as Mao (1967) declared:

In the world today all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake.... [Our purpose is] to ensure that literature and art fit well into the whole revolutionary machine as a component part, that they operate as powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy.... In literature and art criticism there are two criteria, the political and the artistic.... But all classes in all class societies invariably put the political criterion first and the artistic criterion second. (pp. 299-302)

Mao's such theory had a big impact on the themes and subject matters of Chinese art and literature during the Cultural Revolution. The result was a chief dictatorship over the arts, which had severely restricted creativity and artistic inventions at the time. Despite all the mischief, Mao (1967) made a correct assertion regarding study:

Complacency is the enemy of study. We cannot really learn anything until we rid ourselves of complacency. Our attitude towards ourselves should be 'to be insatiable in learning' and towards others 'to be tireless in teaching'.... Knowledge is a matter of science, and no dishonesty or conceit whatsoever is permissible. What is required is definitely the reverse – honesty and

modesty. (pp. 310-311)

The above statement has promoted life-long learning for Chinese people. Since 1987, China's revised educational policy has allowed adult learners to be admitted to universities if they pass the grade requirements in the National Entrance Examination.⁵²

The Action for Healing

After the decade-long political and social turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which had damaged Chinese education enormously, China entered a new stage of cultural restoration and social healing. How can China proceed with this healing process? Laozi in his *Dao De Jing* explained that the objective of the practice is to "become one with the Dao" (verse 23), or to harmonize one's desire with nature to achieve "inaction contrary to nature" (*wu wei*). This "nature" may also refer to the laws of human nature.

Wu wei is a very important Daoist principle and is the practical aspect of Laozi's living according to the "Way," and the idea also has a profound implication for today's world since contemporary global culture overemphasizes industrialization, technological and economic development; we have witnessed humans attempting to conquer and control nature; there has been less concern for the effects of human actions on the earth, as evidenced in the environmental disasters and climate change observable everywhere around the world today.⁵³

Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200) considered that the circulation of *qi* ("cosmic energy" or "material force"), *yin yang*, and that of the four seasons produce and sustain the order of life. In Neo-Confucianism, time is characterized as a circle of the *qi*. Patterns such as trees growing, and flowers blossoming are the four aspects of life: spring is its generation, summer is its growth, autumn is its completion, and winter is its storage. These four phases of life correlate to the continuous functions of time, and the collapse of these cyclical functions would result in the failure to sustain lives.⁵⁴ As such, a way of honoring the natural order is by celebrating seasonal change (e.g., festivals), which one may comprehend less through words than by

51 Hayhoe, 1999

52 Chinese National Commission for UNESCO and Chinese Adult Education Association, 2008

53 Zhang, 2009

54 Kuwako, 1998; Miller, 2017; Weller and Bol, 1998

immersing himself/herself in the rhythms of nature.⁵⁵ Buddhists focus on salvation as they consider everything in this world is fleeting and so nothing is eternal,⁵⁶ therefore healing is possible. The core of Buddhism is expressed in the Triple Refuge (*trisharana*, also called the “Three Jewels” or the “Three Treasures”). Every practicing Buddhist recites the Triple Refuge daily: “I go to refuge to the Buddha; I go for refuge to the Doctrine (*Dharma*); I go for refuge to the Community (*Sangha*).” Mostly concerned with suffering and achieving freedom from the suffering, the Buddhist teachings are summarized in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Paths (Table 1). The Eightfold Noble Path offers ways to eliminate all past demerits, avoid accumulating new demerits, and increase merits for a favorable rebirth. Nevertheless, a perfect path means the final escape from the cycle of death and rebirth into Nirvana.⁵⁷

Table 1. The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path in Buddhism

Four Noble Truths	1. Life involves suffering (<i>dukkha</i>)	
	2. Suffering arises from desires (<i>samudaya</i>)	
	3. Suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases (<i>nirodha</i>)	
	4. Suffering can be vanished by practicing the Eightfold Path (<i>marga</i>)	
Eightfold Noble Path	Wisdom (<i>panna</i>)	1. Right View (<i>samma-ditthi</i>)
		2. Right Intention (<i>samma-sankappa</i>)
	Ethics (<i>sila</i>)	3. Right Speech (<i>samma-vacha</i>)
		4. Right Action (<i>samma-kammanta</i>)
		5. Right Livelihood (<i>samma-ajiva</i>)
	Meditation (<i>samadhi</i>)	6. Right Effort (<i>samma-yayama</i>)
		7. Right Mindfulness (<i>samma-sati</i>)
		8. Right Contemplation (<i>samma-samadhi</i>)

Note: The author’s summary based on various sources.

Buddhist teachings are much more compatible with the Daoist ones in their metaphysical tendencies and a language of negation, so Daoists were able to appreciate

Buddhist asceticism and monasticism, eventually, Daoist terminologies were applied in the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, resulting in a blending of Indian and Chinese thought.⁵⁸ As the Indian Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna (100-200 BCE) summed up the Middle Doctrine of emptiness in an eightfold negation: “Nothing comes into being, nor does anything disappear. Nothing is eternal, nor has anything an end. Nothing is identical or differentiated. Nothing moves hither, nor moves anything thither.”⁵⁹

For Buddhism, speculations concerning the origin of the universe are held to be immaterial. The goal for Buddhism is emptiness, or the absence of good and evil. As Masao Abe explained: “It overcomes all duality completely and attains a non-dualistic position...and thus reaches the religious dimension, which is entirely free from even the notion of absolute good.”⁶⁰

Conclusion and Implications

This paper examined Chinese educational philosophy that has influenced its pedagogical system since ancient time to the present, with a focus on the notion of self-cultivation in Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Communism.

Daoism teaches people to be in harmony with nature and promotes a holistic view of the world from the universe. Confucianism concerns human relationship with humans and advocates the idea of an upright moral person (*junzi*) who has the courage to take social responsibility in a society. Buddhism considers the world as fleeting and nothing eternal; it seeks to escape from the illusory world and learn to let go.

The history of China shows that Buddhism and Christianity as foreign ideologies have managed to coexist relatively peacefully in China for many centuries, as the Chinese were tolerant of different faiths and beliefs. They regarded all the schools of thought were of equal validity, which may be attributed to the nature of Confucianism. As a philosophy of humanism, Confucianism has the capacity to tolerate, accommodate, and influence various ideas, beliefs, and religions.

55 Knowles, 1998, 1999; Neville, 1998

56 Journey of Civilization, 2011b, 2012b

67 Journey of Civilization, 2011b; Reagan, 2000, p. 143

68 Ching, 1993; Journey of Civilization, 2011b; Nelson, 2017

69 Ching, 1993, p. 133

60 Reagan, 2000, p. 145

Since the 1990s, Confucianism has regained popularity in China and continues to influence the development of Chinese society, although in more subtle and indirect ways. For the intellectuals living in the Communist China, Daoist philosophy has offered something of inner harmony and of survival in difficult times. In recent years, Daoism has also reemerged in China and continues to fulfill the human need of harmony with nature and spiritual liberty. Daoism seems to have the capacity to allow much freedom of the mind, which is very essential for any creative imagination to flourish in the realms of art and philosophy. The moral and ethical teachings in Chinese philosophy are China's invaluable cultural heritage to be preserved. To respect the past is to honor the future. China's educational practices should incorporate all the schools of thought in their contemporary curricula.

With the rise of China as the world second largest economy and superpower, since 2004, Chinese culture has spread worldwide following the founding of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms. As of December 2017, there were 525 Confucius Institutes and 1,113 Confucius Classrooms established in 146 countries (regions) across the globe.⁶¹ Most of these Confucius Institutes and Classrooms are housed within the existing colleges and universities in the host countries. However, in the United States, for example, there is an acute shortage of professors teaching Chinese philosophy, the deep root cause of the problem is the Eurocentric and superiority given to Western philosophy in American universities today.⁶² In contrast, Christianity in China is reviving and flourishing.⁶³

In the TV documentary series, *The Rise of the Great Nations*,⁶⁴ Yale University Professor Paul Kennedy maintained that what makes a great nation in today's world may ultimately be a cultural attribute. In the same program, former President of France, Giscard d'Estaing asserted that the rise of a great civilization possessing a great cultural tradition and wisdom may be conducive to the progress of the whole world.

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62 Van Norden, 2016, 2017

63 Johnson, 2017

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