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Daoist Harmony as a Chinese Philosophy and Psychology

Abstract

Based on Lee's prior research on Daoism (Lee, 2003; Lee, 2004; Lee, Han, Byron and Fan, 2008; Lee and Hu, 1993; Lee, Norasakkunkit, Liu, Zhang and Zhou, 2008), this article first introduces Laozi, Dao, De and Daoism in relation to harmony. Then, Daoist harmony is elaborated in the following areas: (1) the yin-yang oneness, (2) the way it is (natural), (3) wei-wu-wei (or nonintervention), (4) water-like characteristics, (5) love for peace, and (6) tolerance and appreciation of differences. The article concludes with a suggestion for harmony with the external world as well as with fellow human beings.

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DAOIST HARMONY AS A CHINESE PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY

Yueh-Ting Lee, Honggang Yang and Min Wang

Abstract

Based on Lee's prior research on Daoism (Lee, 2003; Lee, 2004; Lee, Han, Byron and Fan, 2008; Lee and Hu, 1993; Lee, Norasakkunkit, Liu, Zhang and Zhou, 2008), this article first introduces Laozi, Dao, De and Daoism in relation to harmony. Then, Daoist harmony is elaborated in the following areas: (1) the yin-yang oneness, (2) the way it is (natural), (3) wei-wu-wei (or nonintervention), (4) water-like characteristics, (5) love for peace, and (6) tolerance and appreciation of differences. The article concludes with a suggestion for harmony with the external world as well as with fellow human beings.

Introduction

The Dao produced the One,
The One produced the Two;
The Two produced the Three;
The Three produced All Things.
All Things carry Yin and hold to Yang;
Their blended influence brings Harmony. (Laozi, Chapter 42)

These are some of the well-known Daoist quotations. However, what are “the One,” “the Two,” and “the Three” in this context? This is an easy and difficult question at the same time. It is easy because almost everyone understands “one,” “two” and “three” numerically. It is difficult because “the One,” “the Two” and “the Three” have different connotations in various contexts. According to Laozi, “The One” which is produced by Dao (or the natural course) means the entire universe. “The Two” means the yin-yang, and “The Three” means heaven, earth, and human which produce “All Things.” “All Things” also have Yin and Yang whose influence brings “Harmony” (Fei, 1984; Lee, Han, Byron and Fan, 2008). Life, or universe, is full of harmony produced by Yin and Yang that are in balance.

This article attempts to address harmony from a Daoist perspective in three parts. First, it introduces Laozi and his philosophical and psychological ideas of Daoism. Second, the authors focus on these ideas regarding harmony in connection to the yin-yang oneness in Laozi's framework of reference. Simply speaking, what is the Yin and Yang oneness? What do Dao (or Tao) and De (or Te) have to do with human beings internally or externally? Is controlling, competition or fighting an answer to human existence in the world? What can human beings learn from water? Can Daoism help us become more tolerant of each other and appreciative of human differences? This discussion leads to a plain conclusion that addresses several harmony-related challenges, such as minimizing human conflict and respecting the natural world.

Laozi, Daoism and Harmony

Clarifications and Specifications

Several clarifications and specifications are in order. First, the name of Laozi is spelled in various ways in English in the West, such as Lao Tsu, Lao Tzu and/or other ways. In this article, the authors use the standard Chinese, i.e. pin yin (Lee, 2003; Lee, Han, Byron and Fan, 2008). Similarly, Laozi's classic book *Dao De Jing*, and two key terms 'Dao' (i.e. harmony with the natural world or the external universe) and 'De' (harmony with fellow human beings), and Daoist/Daoism (instead of Taoist/Taoism) are also spelled in pin yin.

Second, readers may run into various English versions of Laozi's book *Dao De Jing* (or *Tao Te Ching*) by Blakney (1955) or Lao Tzu (1993) for example, which may be different from each other in their translations due to philosophical and linguistic complexities of the book. For the purpose of understanding Laozi's ideas accurately, this article has quoted Laozi's *Dao De Jing* based on the translations by Wing (1986) and Shi (1988) who provided readers with both English and Chinese versions. But the authors also modified and adjusted their translations when examining other original versions of Laozi's *Dao De Jing* in either modern or classic Chinese (Fei, 1984; Laozi, 1961).

Third, the article primarily focuses only on Laozi's Daoism in his *Dao De Jing* due to the scope and nature of our exploration. However, his student, Zhuangzi (or Chuangzhi or Chuangzhou) is referred to when diversity and tolerance are discussed.

Fourth, Daoism is secular, different from the Daoist religion in China. According to Laozi's *Dao De Jing*, life followed by death is nature's course and humans should follow this course calmly. The Daoist religion (or 'Dao Jiao' in Chinese) was developed much later, contemplating how to avoid death, which is against nature and Laozi's philosophy. Thus, the article focuses only on Daoism ('Dao Jia') as a philosophy or as the way of harmonious life or harmonious universe (Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008).

Finally, and most importantly, the conception of "harmony" is "hexie" (pronounced as "ho shie") in Chinese consisting of two characters that could be translated directly into English – peaceful coordination and interaction in divergent settings. "Harmony" needs to be understood in a Daoist context; otherwise it may be either misleading or inaccurate. For example, harmony is meaningful in relation to Dao (i.e. harmony with the external universe) and De (i.e. harmony with fellow human beings) as discussed below.

Who is Laozi? What are Dao and De in Relation to Harmony?

According to classic and recent research (Lee, 1991; Lee, 2000; Lee, 2003; Sima, 1994; Yan, 1999), Laozi was born in the central part of China near the Yangtze River over 2500 years ago and his real name was Li Er. Laozi, who used to work as an official

historian for the Zhou Dynasty, was regarded an originator of Daoism full of dialectic philosophical perspectives.

It is important to understand a pair of key concepts: Dao and De. Generally speaking, Dao means harmony with the external world. More specifically, according to Lee (2003), Dao may mean a road, a path, the way it is, the way of nature, the Way of Ultimate Reality, and the Rules/Laws of Nature. According to Blakney (1955), in the eyes of Chinese, Dao does not only refer to the way the whole world of nature operates but also signifies the original undifferentiated Reality from which the universe is evolved. In another translation (by Addiss and Lombardo, 1993), Dao means a “way” in both literal “road” and metaphysical “spiritual path.” It can also, more rarely, mean “to say,” “to express” or “to tell.” According to Burton Watson (in the introduction to Addiss and Lombardo’s 1993 translation), Dao literally means a “way” or “path” and is used by other schools of Chinese philosophies to refer to a particular calling or mode of mindset and conduct. But in Daoist writing, it has a far more comprehensive meaning, referring rather to a metaphysical first principle that embraces and underlies all beings – a vast Oneness that precedes and in some mysterious manner generates the endlessly diverse forms of the world. Thus Dao often lies beyond the power of language to describe (Lee, 2003; Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008).

What is De? Generally, it means harmony with fellow human beings. More specifically, De means humanistic behaviors, virtues, characters, influences or moral forces. The Chinese character De consists of three parts: (1) an ideograph meaning “to go”, (2) another, meaning “straight”, and (3) a pictograph, meaning “the heart.” Put together, these imply motivation by inward rectitude (Blakney, 1955; Lee, 2003). Burton Watson (introduction to Addiss and Lombardo translation, 1993) defined De as a moral virtue or power that one acquires through being in accord with the Dao, i.e. what one gets from Dao (Lee, 2003; Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008).

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Daoist Harmony is Based on the Yin-Yang “Oneness”

To understand Laozi’s Daoist harmony, it is necessary to expound on the Chinese yin-yang theory on which Daoism is largely based. According to Chinese philosophy, everything in the world consists of the paired yin-yang opposites. Yin and Yang stand for paired opposites of any sort: heaven/earth, hot/cold, light/dark, up/down, wet/dry, male/female, internal/external (Black, 1992; Lee and Hu, 1993). Below (Figure 1) is a visual illustration of the typical Chinese yin and yang symbol.

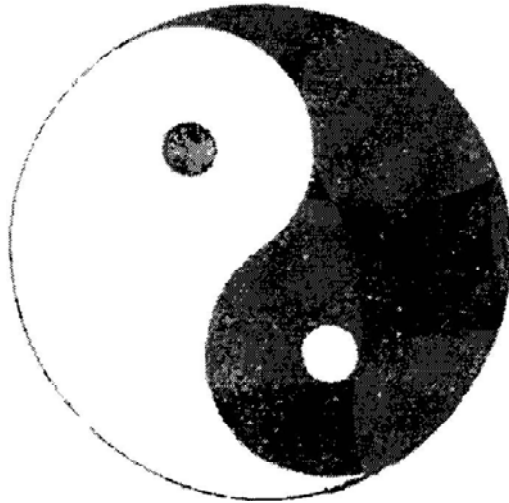


Figure 1. *The symbol of Chinese yin and yang* (Source: Lee and Hu, 1993).

In this figure, there are two parts: the dark as yin and light as yang. These two parts are pictured as two fish chasing each other constantly, symbolizing that human life or the universe continuously goes on. There is a small dark spot in the light area whereas there is a small light spot in the dark area. This means that yin always includes yang. Meanwhile, yang always contains yin. They cannot be separated from one another. The “S”-shape line marking a distinction between yin (dark) and yang (light) stands for a harmonious state or balance. They work together, which creates the balance or the harmonious oneness as a whole (Lee and Hu, 1993).

For example, an individual’s mental or physical health can be strengthened and life could be prolonged if one’s yin and yang are in a harmonious state. Diseases occur if one’s yin and yang are out of balance. Similarly, natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes, volcanoes, tornados or hurricanes) occur if the natural world is not in harmony (one force is more powerful than the other). Based on yin and yang, oneness (yi in Chinese) is harmonious. Laozi stated in his Chapter 39 as follows:

Heaven in harmony with the One becomes clear,
Earth in harmony with the One becomes stable,
Spirit (inclusive of God/Goddess) in harmony with the One becomes inspiring,
Valleys in harmony with the One become full,
All Things in harmony with the One become creative (Laozi, Chapter 39).

Therefore, the yin-yang oneness is the foundation of Daoist harmony. In other words, harmony is based on the ancient Chinese yin-yang oneness.

Harmony is the Way it is (Natural)

Humans are modeled on earth,
Earth is modeled on heaven,
Heaven is modeled on the Dao (the Way it is),

And the Dao is modeled on nature (the way on that which is naturally so).
(Laozi, Chapter 25)

According to Laozi there is an order among human being (ren), earth (di), heaven (tian), nature (zi ran), and the Dao (Lee, 2003; Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008). Conceptually, according to Shamanism (Lee, 2001; Lee and Wang, 2003; Wang, 2000; Xu, 1991; Yuan, 1988), human being (ren) means person; earth (di) means land, Mother Nature, or yin which is parallel to heaven (tian); heaven (tian) means sky, father nature, or yang which is parallel to earth (di). Another meaning of tian is the natural world outside human beings (ren). Nature (zi ran) means the objective principle of universe or the way of life (i.e. anything external to human beings). Being complicated, Dao is part of nature, follows nature, and produces almost everything in the universe, as can be seen through Chapter 25.

From Laozi's perspective (as described in Chapter 25 of *Dao De Jing*), first we human beings should follow or be consistent with the way Earth works (ren fa di). Second, the way Earth works follows or is consistent with the way Heaven works (di fa tian). Third, the way Heaven works follows or is consistent with the way Dao works (tian fa dao). Finally, the way Dao works follows or is consistent with the way Nature or Universe works (dao fa zi ran) (Lee, 2003; Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008).

In this regard, Daoism differs from the Western cultural beliefs and spiritual practices. For example, lots of Western churches are often built in the center of cities or at a busy public place, and the top of their architectural structures is often sharp, standing out. Chinese temples (miao) are typically located in the middle of big mountains where there are trees and water. In this way it is close and harmonious with the external world. Daoists do not think that humans are the center of the universe above all things or that they can conquer almost anything (Fung, 1948; Johnson, 1985). Daoism and other Chinese philosophies hold that human beings are just a small part of the natural world or universe.

However, Laozi's philosophy focuses on being in harmony with nature, the universe or the Dao. People should follow the principles of nature, striving to conduct themselves in such ways that their behaviors are in harmony with the Dao. The Chinese people call this an optimal state: "Tian Ren He Yi" which means the human world and the external universe are united into one (Lee, 2003; Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008). In different ways to the Western version, Daoist harmony focuses on harmony with fellow humans and with the natural universe.

Harmony Means wei wu-wei (non-intervention)

Wei wu-wei means "going with the grain, rolling with the punch, swimming with the current, trimming the sails to the wind, taking the tide at its flood, and stooping to conquer" (Watts, 1975, p. 75). It is the flow or well-being that allows one to be in harmony with all (Lee, 2003). Literally, "Wei [follow or do] Wu-Wei [without doing or without acting; wu = not]" implies "noninterference" or "non-action" and allows things to be or to act within the true nature of things:

The Dao never acts,
And yet is never inactive. (Laozi, Chapter 37)

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To pursue artificial discovering (to learn), add to it daily,
To pursue the Dao, subtract (interfere less) from it daily
Subtract and subtract again,
To arrive at non-action,
Through non-action nothing is left undone. (Laozi, Chapter 48)

Act without action; work without effort.
Taste without savoring.
Magnify the small; increase the few.
Repay ill-will with kindness.
Plan the difficult when it is easy;
Handle the big where it is small.
The world's hardest work begins when it is easy;
The world's largest effort begins where it is small.
Evolved/Wise Individuals (or Sages/Saints), finally take no great action,
And in that way the great is achieved. (Laozi, Chapter 63)

As can be seen above, wei wu-wei does not mean inertia, indifference, laziness, status quo, laissez-faire, pessimism or passivity. On the other hand, being too concerned about the outside means too much subjective intervention, unilateral control, or propensity to overdo. The more we control, the less we can control.

Those who would take hold of the world and act on it,
Never, I notice, succeed.
The world is a mysterious instrument,
Not made to be controlled (or handled)
Those who act on it spoil it,
Those who seize it lose it. (Laozi, Chapter 29)

Too much action or too much intervention may produce opposite outcomes. Daoism holds a belief that there exists an indigenous way in things themselves and there is an internal strength in people facing hardships. There is no need for imposing solutions from outside. Human beings follow Earth which follows Heaven; Heaven follows Dao which follows the Nature or Universe. All this means we should be natural, avoiding intervening too much: wei wu-wei (Lee, 2003). As Laozi stated in Chapter 32, "Heaven and Earth would unite to generate timely rain or dew, and people would naturally cooperate without command."

Harmony Means Water-like Characters (Daoist Big Five)

The most effective way to comprehend Daoism is to focus on a metaphor that links Daoism with water (i.e. water-like characters). To Laozi, the best quality or value is like water. In his writings, Laozi used water as a metaphor many times to explain a leadership style of the Sage. More specifically: water is altruistic and always serves others; water is also modest, flexible, clear, soft, yet powerful (or perseverant) philosophically and psychologically (Lee, 2003; Lee, 2004; Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008). These characteristics are essential to all. This is what we call the Daoist model of "water-like" or "wateristic" characters (Lee, 2003; Lee, 2004; Lee, Norasakkunkit *et al.*, 2008; Watts, 1961; Watts,

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1975) which includes five essential components: (1) altruism, (2) modesty/humility, (3) flexibility, (4) transparency and honesty, and (5) gentleness with perseverance. These five characters (Daoist Big Five) are generated from Laozi's Dao (i.e. harmony with the universe) and De (i.e. harmony with others) (see Lee, Han *et al.* 2008). This model is summarized in Figure 2 (below).

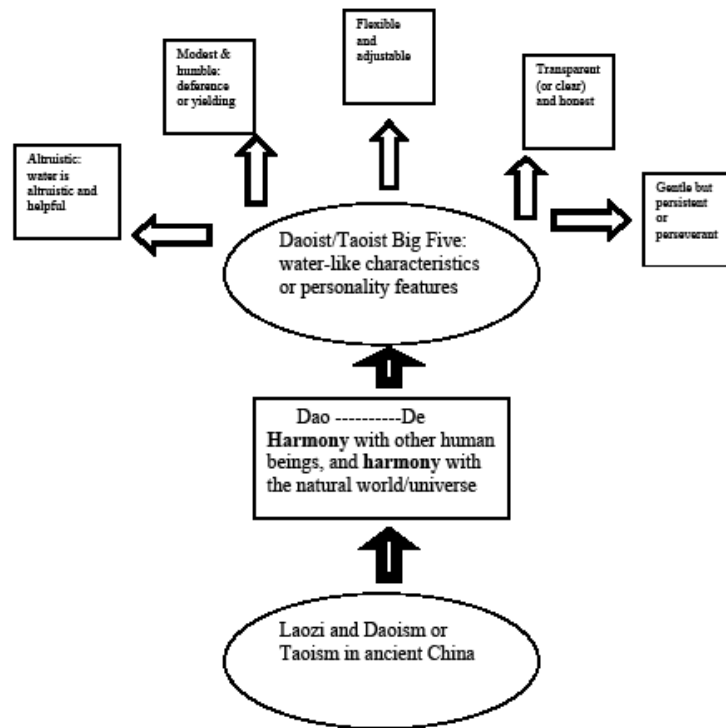


Figure 2. *The Daoist/Taoist model of wateristic personality (Taoist Big-Five)* (Source: Lee, Han, Byron and Fan, 2008)

First, water is *altruistic*. All species and organisms depend on water. Without water, none of them can survive. What does water get from us? It gets almost nothing. A true Daoist should be as altruistic as water. For example, Laozi advocated for a “water-like character.” We, as human beings, should learn from water that always remains in the lowest position, never competing with others (Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008), and is helpful and beneficial to all.

The highest value (or the best) is like water,
 The value in water benefits All Things
 And yet it does not contend,
 It stays in places that others despise,
 And therefore is close to Dao (Laozi, Chapter 8).

Daoism recognizes that the ultimate goal of humans is to serve their people without the desire to gain for personal benefit. Laozi stated in his book, “The best are like water, good at benefiting all things without competing for gaining” (Laozi, Chapter 8).

Second, water is *modest and humble*. In his time, Laozi observed that human conflict and suffering (e.g. fighting, killing, violence, war) were most likely to occur if everyone wanted to compete and go after his or her own self-interest (e.g. fighting for more materials, bigger fame or higher rank). Thus, if we are humble as well as altruistic, like water, human conflicts might be reduced. As we can see from the above quotation (i.e. Laozi, Chapter 8), although water benefits all things, it always stays in the lowest places that others despise. Being humble is necessary to appreciate and understand the Dao of things and to always be ready to learn and be alert to overconfidence in the self (Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008). While many non-daoists often value and enjoy a sense of authority, assertiveness, aggressiveness or competitiveness, Laozi encouraged people to develop a water-like characteristic – that is, to maintain a low profile and to be modest, especially in the face of the Dao or nature, and to be helpful or beneficial to others:

The rivers and seas lead the hundred streams,
Because they are skillful at staying low,

Thus they are able to lead the hundred streams (Laozi, Chapter 66).

In Laozi's opinion, those who are humble and modest not only exist in harmony with others, but they are effective leaders, just like the rivers and seas. The sea, for instance, can govern a hundred rivers because it has mastered being lower. Being humble is important for leaders in that it enables them to accept people's goals as their own and to attract and unite people together. Just as the sea accepts and embraces all rivers joining – muddy or clear, large or small – leaders who humble themselves before people draw people towards them and gain people's trust (Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008). That is why Laozi said "S/he who knows how to motivate people acts humble. This is the virtue of no rival and uses the strength of others" (Laozi, Chapter 68).

Third, *water is adaptable and flexible*. It can stay in a container of any shape. This flexibility or fluidity lends a great deal of wisdom to our success. People may be more effective if they can adjust themselves to any environment and situation just as water does in a container (Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008). Lu Jin Chuan, a contemporary Daoist philosopher, once said that water has no shape of its own but that of the container (Lu, 2001). Maintaining flexibility and adapting to the dynamics of change, like water following its natural path, are probably the best options for human beings.

Fourth, water is *transparent and clear*. As human beings, we should be honest and transparent to each other. The most honorable individuals are usually honest and transparent like water. Though Machiavellian approaches might work temporarily, being honest and transparent is one of the significant ethical concerns in modern society (Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008). Water itself is clear and transparent if no one makes it muddy. In Chapter 15, Laozi stated, "Who can (make) the muddy water clear? Let it be still, and it will gradually become clear." Metaphorically, human beings by nature are innocent and honest. Social environment and competition (like muddiness) make them unclear. Water's clarity, transparency, and honesty are most appreciated by Laozi.

Finally, water is *soft and gentle*, but also persistent and powerful. If drops of water keep pounding at a rock for years, even the hardest rock will yield to water. Over time water can cut through the hardest rock, forming valleys and canyons. The style of individuals should be similarly gentle and soft, but perseverant and powerful. Here is an example of what we could learn from water:

Nothing in the world
Is as yielding and receptive as water;
Yet in attacking the firm and inflexible,
Nothing triumphs so well (Laozi, Chapter 78).

Since there is nothing softer than water, yet nothing better for attacking hard and strong things, there is no substitute for it. Its softness enables it to tolerate all kinds of environments, gathering strength without wearing it out at an early stage. And the resolute perseverance of water helps it to cut its path through hard rocks and wear away mountains. It is important for a leader to know the dialectical relationship as such and to acquire the persevering characteristics of water (Lee, Han *et al.*, 2008). So-called “soft power” discussed in the Western political science (Nye, 1990) entails the ability to obtain what you want through attraction, in contrast to coercive-based “hard power.” However, Laozi’s approach went well beyond, recognizing other parties’ needs and embracing the natural world, instead of staying self centered to try to get what “I” want. Daoist soft power is in harmony with others like water in light of natural interconnections between oceans and rivers.

A cautionary note is in order here. Though we should learn from water because of the Daoist Big Five as described as above, what about negative aspects of water such as floods or storms? When Mother Nature is not in a balance (i.e. yin and yang), floods or storms occur with external forces. Water cannot lead to a flood or storm by itself without external forces. Floods or other water-related disasters take place when yin and yang are out of the balance as described in the section of the yin-yang oneness. Similarly, water is usually clear and transparent, except (notably) when it is polluted.

Harmony Means Opposition to Violence and Coercion

Laozi lived in the Spring-Autumn times of ancient China when people and states waged wars with one another after the Zhou Dynasty. He was unhappy with widespread violence. Thus Laozi decided to live in a mountain as a hermit. He resigned from his official position as a historian in the Chinese Imperial Capital in Luoyang near the Yellow River in central China and traveled west with his ox through the Han Ku Pass (Lee, 2003; Sima, 1994). There is no doubt that he was a strong advocate for peace in opposition to war and violence.

Let the people value their lives
and yet not move far away.
Even though there are boats and carriages,
There is no occasion to use them.
Even though there are armor and weapons,
There is no occasion to display them. (Laozi, Chapter 80)

When all the people in the world follow the Dao, they are no longer busy preparing for wars but focused on their farming or livelihood.

When the world possesses the Dao,
Even the fast horses are used for their dung
When the world is without the Dao,

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War horses are raised in the suburbs. (Laozi, Chapter 46)

When armies are positioned

Thorny brambles are produced.

A great military always brings years of hunger. (Laozi, Chapter 30)

The finest weapons can be the instruments of misfortune,
and thus contrary to natural law. (Laozi, Chapter 31)

From this ideal depiction at the time, we can understand that harmony fosters peaceful life for human beings without violence of any kinds. In a sense, human history, unfortunately, is full of killing, oppression, and violence. War is an extreme example of destruction of human life and civilization, which is diametrically against Dao.

Harmony Means Tolerance and Appreciation of Differences

According to Laozi, the natural world is so complex and human beings are so diverse that we must be open to, and tolerant of, difference. Being open and tolerant is a crucial aspect of Daoism (Lee, 2001; Lee, 2003). Laozi wrote:

The one with great De (or humanistic virtue)

Tends to be tolerant and open to everything

Because the one must follow the Dao. (Laozi, Chapter 21)

In other words, openness and tolerance are the essential ways (Dao) for human beings. Without openness and tolerance, it is difficult for human beings to be in harmony with nature and with each other.

The cycle of destiny is called the Absolute:

To know the Absolute is called insight;

To know the Absolute is to be tolerant;

What is tolerant is fair (or impartial);

What is fair (or impartial) is powerful;

What is powerful becomes natural;

What is natural becomes Dao. (Laozi, Chapter 16)

Our real power is to follow the natural Dao, which must be based on insight, tolerance, and fairness. Thus, open-mindedness, tolerance, and fairness are important both for harmonious individual interactions and for harmonious group interrelationships.

One of the Laozi's followers, Chuang Tzu (or Zhuangzi, 369-286 B.C.) lived in the Warring Period in China as a leading thinker whose ideas were also central to the Daoist School. Enriched by brilliant imagery, making sportive use of both mythological and historical personages (e.g. Confucius), Zhuangzi's major writings include seven "inner chapters" and fifteen "outer chapters." All his writings stress Dao (the way of Nature or the way it is).

Following Laozi's ideas in *Dao De Jing*, Zhuangzi valued people's inner virtues (i.e. De) more than their physical appearance. In Chapter 5, "The sign of virtue complete", of his "Inner Chapters" Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu, 1964) regarded the physically "abnormal" people as the figures greater than sages. For example, Wang Dai, whose foot was cut off,

had more students or followers than Confucius had. Confucius spoke highly of Wang Dai at that time because Mr. Wang, the crippled person, had great virtues. Also, Mr. Lame-Hunchback-No-Lips talked to Duke Ling of Wei. Duke Ling was so pleased with him that when he looked at “normal” people he thought their necks looked so lean and skinny. Therefore, “if virtue is preeminent, the body is forgotten. But when human beings do not forget what can be forgotten, but forget what cannot be forgotten – that may be called true forgetting” (Chuang Tzu, 1964, p. 71).

Also, in Chapter 1, entitled “Free and Easy Wandering”, Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu, 1964) linked differences between animals to those between humans. Big birds (like Kun or Peng in ancient China) or little birds (like cicada or dove) are naturally different birds and each has its own functions and uniqueness. They should not laugh at or look down upon each other. What do these two (big and little) creatures understand?

Little understanding cannot come up to great understanding; the short-lived cannot come up to the long-lived. How do I know this is so? The morning mushroom knows nothing of twilight and dawn; the summer cicada knows nothing of spring and autumn. They are the short-lived. In the South of the Chu Kingdom, there is a Ling Gui (i.e. a special turtle) that counts five hundred years as one spring and five hundred years as one autumn. Long ago there was a great rose of Sharon that counted eight thousand years as one spring and eight thousand years as one autumn. They are the long-lived. Yet Peng Zu, the person who lived a long time (about five hundred years as per Chinese legend) is famous today for having lived a long time and everybody tries to admire or ape him. Isn't it pitiful! (Chuang Tzu, 1964).

Why is it pitiful? First, it is against Dao. Everyone is different. If one person looks one way, it does not mean everyone else in the world should become that way. If the other person is tall, it does not mean everyone else should become tall. It is unnatural and it is against Dao. Second, Peng Zu lived a long life, but whether his life was ultimately long or short is relative, depending on the comparison with other different species. Thus harmony implies tolerance of human differences and also means understanding and appreciating human differences.

Conclusion

This article attempts to address harmony from a Daoist, relational, humanistic, and naturalistic perspective. The Dao and De mean harmony with the external world and harmony with fellow human beings. As Laozi opposed wars, harmony embraces peace that is much broader than the ordinary concept based on recent research (Han, 2008; Jia, 2008).

What is Daoist harmony? Simply put, Daoist harmony is: (1) based on the yin-yang oneness, (2) the way it is (natural), (3) wei-wu-wei (or nonintervention), (4) water-like characters, (5) love for peace, and (6) tolerance and appreciation of differences. When we say Daoism, it means harmony and it means inclusion.

Daoism as an enlightening perspective is going to become increasingly understandable and appreciable in a global village. Today we, as global citizens, are facing tough human issues (e.g. intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup/cultural relationships, ethnic conflict or cleansing, genocides, hate crimes, discrimination against women or

minorities, domestic violence, inequality and oppression) as well as ecological challenges (e.g. pollution, destruction of the natural environment, etc.). If we follow Dao and De, it will help us tackle the human challenges and environmental issues. We acknowledge that practicing Daoism is not easy; indeed, it is particularly challenging in the socio-economic contexts where individualism is a core cultural value.

Yet when human beings arrive at mutual appreciation, we are in harmony with each other in the world. When human beings treasure the natural environment just as their own, we will be in harmony with a universe that will survive and sustain. Let us conclude with a lasting quote from Laozi:

Those who esteem the world as self
Will be committed to the world;
Those who love the world as self
Will be entrusted with the world! (Laozi, Chapter 13)

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