

CHINESE WAYS OF LIVING

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This work begins with an idea presented by Thomé H. Fang. In speaking of Confucianism, Taoism and Mohism, Fang says that recognition of a common ground, a view of life comprehensive and profound, would indicate the highest achievement of Chinese thought. Fang says:

I firmly believe that the point of convergence among these vital systems of thought should be found in the affirmation of life and its precious values. From this vantage point we may come to see clearly the common ground of Chinese moral life.¹

Confucians come to think of life as originating in Heaven and they elucidate the meanings of benevolence, justice, propriety and wisdom on the basis of nature that has been conferred by heaven.²

Lao Tzu begins with the primordial root of life for the purpose of showing that Tao together with Teh is a living spring of moral excellence, along with benevolence, justice and propriety.³

Chuang Tzu says that life is comprised within justice; the justice within virtue; the virtue within Tao; and Tao is comprised in Heaven.⁴

Mo Tzu develops a theory of universal love identifying all purposes of life with the will of Heaven.⁵

We see that the ground of morality is found in the universal life that is permeated with values. We come to see that Tao or Heaven is equally the primeval origin of life. The metaphysical implications of this are that all things find their origination in the Tao or Heaven and live incessantly and continuously through the process of transformation from what is actual to what is spiritually ideal. Tao or Heaven asks for nothing but embraces all things.

Now we will look into the nature of a common moral standard. Fang presents a description of morality:

Morality is the essence of life inasmuch as it is the concrete embodiment of the values of life.⁶

Two themes stand out, for Fang, in each system of thought: for Confucianism measures of moral life are found in empathy and sympathy;

for Taoism measures of moral life are found in compassion and kindness; for Mohism measures of moral life are found in love and benefit:

...that the Mohist principle of identifying all purposes of life with the will of Heaven, the Taoist attempt to bring all things within the embrace of Tao, and the Confucian endeavour to subject all the cosmic activities to the originating power of Heaven are only different versions of what I have called the principle of comprehensive harmony or the doctrine of sympathetic unity in spirit.⁷

These six themes: empathy; sympathy; compassion; kindness; love; and reciprocal benefit as measures of moral life are of integral harmonious relation.

Empathy is a going out of oneself. It is identifying oneself with others in thought, feeling and action. Sympathy is the entering into community as a whole with all forms of existence. It is an all-pervading unity. Compassion and kindness are expressing the same spirit of love, benevolence and beneficence. Love is the basis of benevolence and justice; and reciprocal benefit is identifying all purposes of life with the will of heaven. In this way one contributes to the world all one has in oneself.

These six themes share basic characteristics of Chinese thought: the realization of human perfection; inclusiveness; and complementariness.

Human perfection, within and without is basic to Chinese thought. This inclusive view naturally places the emphasis on ethics and the spiritual life. The cornerstone of Chinese morality is familial virtues. With love and respect, the beginnings of perfection are established in children through the parents.

Inclusiveness of views rather than exclusiveness leads to a spirit of harmony. This brings forth tolerance and sympathy. Complementariness looks for harmony in different modes of life and brings them together into a whole. Tolerance for the thoughts and actions of others promotes sympathy and appreciation.

Notes

- 1) Thomé H. Fang, *The Chinese View of Life* (Taipei: Linking Publishing Co. Ltd., 1980), p. 98-99.
- 2) *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 3) *Ibid.*, p. 102.

- 4) *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 5) *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 105.
- 6) *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 115.