

Using Taoist Principle of the Unity of Opposites to Explain Conflict and Peace

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This article explains the principle of the unity of opposites in Taoist psychology and its implications for understanding social cognition and the meaning of Taoist awareness in human domains. In addition, it describes the distinctions between personal awareness and Taoist awareness. It is maintained that psychological conflict stems from applying the personal awareness to evaluating, explaining, and adjusting our mental and interpersonal relationships, whereas peace stems from following the Taoist principle.

TAOIST PHILOSOPHY OF THE UNITY OF OPPOSITES

Taoist philosophy is elaborated in such texts as *I Ching* (*The Book of Changes*, 1967), *Tao Te Ching* (Lao Tzu, 1954), and *The Art of War* (Sun Tzu, 1988); it has provided a unique perspective from which to examine a range of psychological issues in the West. These issues include psychotherapy (Craig, 2007; Ehrlich, 1986), social psychology (Sun, 1995), Jungian psychology (Coward, 1996; Rosen, 1996), transpersonal psychology (Gross & Shapiro, 1997), and humanistic psychology (Chang & Page, 1991; Jenni, 1999; Lee, 2003; Rahilly, 1993; Rosen & Crouse, 2000). Although the Taoism-based research has explored the theme of how to follow *Tao* to reach peace and overcome conflict, there are different interpretations about the Taoist awareness and approach in the human domain.

This article examines the importance of the central principle of Taoist philosophy, the unity of opposites (the oneness of yin and yang) for

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understanding psychological activities and experiences. Specifically, this article postulates that this philosophical framework characterizes both the internal operation of social cognition and the nature of interaction between the fundamental yin and yang systems (the cognition and human reality), which produces psychological experiences in the human domain (e.g., conflict and peace). Although the notion of the *unity of opposites* is valuable in understanding psychological issues, it has not been investigated in the previous research. Before examining the issues in detail, however, it is helpful to introduce how the principle permeates much of Taoist literature and delineate the unique characteristics of *Taoist philosophy* that separate it from *Taoist religion* and *Confucianism*. Both are important aspects of Eastern tradition.

As symbolized by the tai chi diagram, this Taoist principle epitomizes life's basic opposites (yin and yang) and the connection between the two interdependent components. *I Ching (The Book of Changes)*, 1967, the earliest Taoist text, presents the concepts of yin and yang and their interactions by depicting two kinds of lines (divided and solid) in each of the 64 hexagrams, and the two trigrams that constitute each hexagram. It suggests that the inner (yin) and outer (yang) systems, their interplay, and their changes symbolize how we interact with self, others, and environments (Watts, 1994; Zhang, 2004). As Jung (1967) commented, the essential Taoist idea in *I Ching* suggests that all of the ingredients make up the observed moment. Understanding human experiences involves recognizing a special interdependence of objective events among themselves, as well as with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer or observers.

According to Lao Tzu, "All things carry Yin and hold Yang, with the interacting energy to balance the relationship" (1954, chap. 42). Namely, the paradigm of the unity of opposites operates in both the natural world and human domain. It includes the oneness of feminine and masculine forces, internal and external, water and fire, night and day, passive and active, as well as receiving and approaching. It indicates that all apparently separate or opposite systems (e.g., self, others, nature) are part of the whole universe (Lao Tzu, 1954) and are governed by the same oneness or *Tao* that transcends the boundaries of all individual entities (e.g., self, others, and situations).

It should be noted that although Taoist philosophy influenced the formation of Taoist religion (Xu, 1991) and the two are frequently perceived as synonymous, their contents and practices are not exactly the same. Taoist philosophy reached maturity around 500 BC (Smith, 1994; Watts, 1994). The Taoist religion, which integrated a belief in immortality, meditation, and the practice of alchemy with some notions of Taoist philosophy, was formed in China around 100–200 BC (Xu, 1991). Taoist philosophy, which

represents a much broader scholarly system than Taoist religion, was also instrumental in creating Zen (Chan) Buddhism in China by modifying Buddhist ideas introduced from India between the second to the sixth centuries. The humanism and naturalism in Zen Buddhism, its origin, and its development all reflected the view of life in the philosophy of the Tao (Watts, 1994).

Taoism and Confucianism embody the major native philosophical traditions that have shaped and permeated Chinese culture—and those Asian cultures affected by China such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam—for more than two millennia. However, the unique content of Taoist philosophy makes it more suitable than Confucianism for examining psychological issues. For example, Confucianism emphasizes tradition, ethics, social order, and social responsibility. In contrast, Taoism advocates the importance of aligning life to the rhythm and the patterns of evolving nature, the unity of yin and yang in all nature, and the interdependence and balance among all entities (Jenni, 1999; Smith, 1994). Because of its insight into the way of the universe and human life, philosophical Taoism has profoundly influenced Eastern sciences, healing arts, literature, and the understanding of the mind and psychological activities (Sun, 1995).

This Article Examines Four Issues

According to Taoism, to create and maintain mental and interpersonal harmonies, we must understand and modify our deviance from Tao and create our connection with Tao (Lao Tzu, 1954). This is because Tao (synonymous with ultimate reality and its patterns) regulates and governs all interacting and opposite systems, including interacting pairs in the human domain, such as the self as the subject and object, self and interacting others, and self and environments (Hagen, 2002; Sun, 2006). Therefore, the application of the Taoist principle of the unity of opposites in reaching peace can be simplified as (a) understanding Tao or the ultimate reality in human interaction, (b) discerning how actions and attributes of the interacting opposites (e.g., self, others) are inconsistent from Tao (ultimate reality and its patterns), and (c) creating the unity or oneness by connecting the entities with Tao.

This article uses this characterization of the unity of opposites to examine four closely related issues, namely: (a) a Taoism-based cognitive model, (b) Taoist awareness in human interaction, (c) separating Taoist awareness from personal awareness, and (d) overcoming conflict and reaching peace in the mental and interpersonal domains.

First, this article analyzes how the principles shed new light on the (social) cognitive structures (schemas) and processes. It should be noted

that, although there is no Western word for the Tao (Zabriskie, 2005) and Taoist philosophy does not use the modern psychological vocabularies such as *cognition* and *schemas*, Taoist literature contains many similar vernaculars, such as *consciousness*; Taoist awareness, or *Te*. and mental conditions (Jung, 1977; Sun, 1995; Yan, 1991; Zabriskie, 2005). Therefore, it is appropriate to examine the cognitive issues by using the principle.

Second, this article elucidates that following the Tao or Taoist awareness involves comprehending that the relations (inconsistency and consistency) between our cognition and evolving reality determine our psychological activities and experiences. Specifically, the mind and reality become opposites when the mind misunderstands or mismatches the reality of interaction. This condition can be described as *subjective unity* with *objective opposites*, because the perceiver is unawareness of the incongruity. *Unity* is created by the congruent awareness and interaction between the two systems (*I Ching*, see Liu & Lin, 1993; Lao Tzu, 1954; Yan, 1991).

Third, this article distinguishes between two types of awareness (cognition): Taoist awareness and personal awareness. The Taoist awareness utilizes the relations (inconsistency and consistency) between the mind and Tao (defined as the ultimate reality and its patterns) to evaluate, explain, modify, and predict psychological experiences and activities (e.g., conflict and peace). On the other hand, personal awareness is defined as the cognition that is ignorant of its disconnection from the reality.

Fourth, this article explains how the two types of awareness are related to the issues of conflict and peace. The Taoist model regards *conflict* (depression, anxiety, anger, frustration, discord, tribulation and calamity) as being generated by following the personal awareness. On the other hand, the model views *peace* (mental healing, balance, tranquility, and interpersonal harmony) as being created by applying Taoist awareness (Lao Tzu, 1954; Liu & Lin, 1993; Sun, 1995).

The Unity of Opposites Characterizes Cognitive Structures and Processes

The cognitive structures (schemas). The principle of the unity of opposites regards the perceived Tao as the most vital component of the cognition that regulates psychological experiences and activities, because the mind attempts to balance the mental and interpersonal relationships by mirroring the universal patterns or oneness of yin and yang in the larger cosmos.

Specifically, our cognition includes our perceived opposing entities (self, others, social situations, and nature) and their interplays and evolutions. Namely, our cognitive structures contain the mental representations of

(a) the self as the subject and the object of evaluation, (b) others and their mental structures and processes (e.g., how and why they perceive and react to our communications), and (c) physical and social contexts (time and space, and evolving situations that facilitate and/or block human interactions).

Second, our cognitive schemas comprise the perceived Tao, or universal patterns that govern the operations of the entities and their interactions. As Lao Tzu avowed, Tao is the ultimate reality and universal patterns, and is the source of everything. Highest awareness is the one consistent with Tao. Tao permeates everything (Lao Tzu, 1954). The contents of the perceived Tao may vary with individuals, but they always refer to the cognitions of the reality of interaction, patterns, standards, rules, criteria, norms, regulations, and other belief systems that define, govern, and regulate human experiences and interaction.

In other words, the perceived patterns denote implicit or explicit understanding and explanations of the causal structures of everyday experiences, the world, and human behavior, involving the perceiver's mental representation of why the self and others act the way they do and why they have certain experiences. The perceived Tao functions to organize and integrate the other entities in cognition, and regulates cognitive processes (e.g., evaluation, explanations, judgments). Both the intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions, rather than being direct, are mediated and regulated by the perceived Tao.

Cognitive processes. Cognitive processes refer to the application of cognitive structures or schemas to make sense of social experience and shape the living environment by administering such mental processes as encoding, evaluating, recalling, reasoning, perceiving, and decision-making (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1989; Fiske & Taylor, 1991, 2008).

However, the Taoist perspective views the cognitive processes in human interactions as the activities of assessing, understanding, and modifying the inconsistency and creating the congruity between our mental Tao and the entities of evaluation. People's cognitions about the relations between their attributes/behavior and their perceived patterns/rules determine how they evaluate, explain, interpret, and understand their positive and negative experiences, as well as peace and conflict.

For instance, our interaction with our self is mediated by our perceived relations (consistency/inconsistency) with our mental Tao or standards. Our positive assessment of ourselves (e.g., self-confidence) arises from our perceived consistency between our attributes and the guiding principles to which we subscribe. In the same way, our negative evaluations and related emotional sufferings (e.g., low self-esteem, depression) are decided by our

perceived distance from those patterns. Although our experience of success prompts us to see our actions as consistent with the Tao, our experience of frustration and invalidation forces us to adjust our actions by directing our attention to the self's deviation from the internal criteria.

Interpersonally, our perceived relations (consistency/inconsistency) between our perceived Tao and the attributes of social entities (self/others) also determine both how we interpret human communications (e.g., acceptance, rejection, or denial) and how we evaluate, maintain or modify, and predict self's and interacting others' actions and experiences. In other words, our perceived reality in relation to Tao shapes how we validate or invalidate one another's communications. For instance, our passive interpersonal activities—such as withdrawal, fear, and the perception of being defenseless when faced with either mental imprecation or external retaliation—result from perceiving our attributes as deviant from our mental Tao. In contrast, our active interpersonal engagements, such as love, acceptance, or feeling invincible are generated by viewing our attributes or actions as consistent with our internal guidelines or Tao. Our experience of frustration in interpersonal situations impels us to see the self as “out of the ordinary” or to see the other person as “abnormal,” compared with the standard. In either case, we use our relations with our mental Tao to understand and balance our interaction.

From the Taoist perspective, cognitive processes are based on our mental “unity of opposites,” because we recognize that each of the opposing systems (e.g., self, others, environments) in the human domain has the capacity to validate and invalidate communication from the other entities. Only through understanding one's digressing from and connecting with the Tao, or the universal patterns that govern the interacting systems, can we balance our internal and external relations. We compare both our consistency and inconsistency with our perceived patterns of reality as the vehicle for understanding mental and human interaction, not because they are internal beliefs, but because we assume that the cognitions mirror the Tao, or universal law(s) regulating interaction between the self, others, and situations. Consequently, we use the deviation from our mental Tao to explain our experience of obstruction or invalidation. In contrast, we think that maintaining our link with internal oneness enables us to overcome any invalidation generated by the self, others, or adverse conditions. Oneness will validate our negotiations with the mental and interpersonal entities. In short, we use perceived Tao and our internal relations with it to regulate our evaluation and other cognitive and psychological activities.

Understanding the mind as the internal unity of opposites is a necessary condition for evaluating and explaining the self and others' activities and experiences. However, the Taoist model maintains that only by

understanding how the mental system interacts with human reality (i.e., recognizing and changing the discrepancy between the *perception* of the Tao and the Tao) can we overcome conflict and achieve peace.

TAOIST AWARENESS

According to Lao Tzu, the greatest Te, or Taoist awareness, is to follow Tao (1954) both in the process of perception and in the course of interaction. Therefore, the Taoist awareness involves the insight that our incongruous and congruous relations with Tao (the evolving reality and its patterns) determine our actions and experiences.

Our Levels of Awareness Regulate our Actions

Taoist awareness views each individual as a being of awareness and regards his or her actions as regulated by a degree of awareness of the human reality (see Lao Tzu, 1954; Liu & Lin, 1993). A low level of the awareness denotes an incongruous interaction between the mind and reality, characterized as subjective unity with objective opposites. That is, the perceiver employs categories, beliefs, or other misrepresented cognitions of the social world and its patterns to explain mental and interpersonal experiences, with the unawareness of the discrepancy. As Fritjof Capra summarized in *The Tao of Physics* (2000), the Taoist sagacity involves the recognition that all the concepts or categories we use to describe the world and regulate our activities are not features of reality, as we tend to believe, but are creations of the mind; they are parts of the map, not of the territory.

A typical example of the subjective unity with objective opposites involves confusing one's value judgments with the comprehension of reality, assuming positive or negative moral or other value judgments of personal or interpersonal reality as a scientific understanding of the reality or as a complete or accurate knowledge of human actions. For example, a person may explain the self's mental conflict and interpersonal frustration as generated by his or her deviance from a moral value or a standard of beauty. In fact, the conflict results from the misunderstanding of the interpersonal reality and the Tao governing human interactions. In fact, all value judgments operate on our perceived reality and their validity for creating interpersonal balances is hampered by our level of awareness of the reality.

The distorted cognitions include not only misconceptions of *how* self and others interact, but also misrepresentations of *why* others act in the way they do. For example, our misperceptions comprise our distorted cognition of how interacting partners perceive and react to one another's communications

and how situations block or facilitate our communications. We may perceive others' greeting and love as signs of hostility and rejection, thus disallowing their kindness or love by invalidating their goodwill. Similarly, we may see others' disdain as a mark of admiration, thus continuing a dysfunctional interaction with them. In addition, people's misunderstanding of contexts may be at odds with the changing universe and natural patterns.

An individual may misconstrue his or her communications as appropriate when, in fact, they generate, sustain, or exacerbate conflict. This is because the perceiver often incorrectly assumes that if the self perceives the interaction (approach and defense) as effective or ineffective according to the self-perceived Tao, or reality and its patterns, others will see the communication in the same way. The perceiver is oblivious to the disparity between the self's cognition of interpersonal reality and others' perception of the same reality, which sustains the validation or invalidation of the perceiver's messages.

The mind and reality become disconnected because of the following factors: The cognitions that administer our psychological activities operate at a certain level of awareness of the human reality and physical world, but we tend to construe our limited or distorted cognitions about the self, others, and nature, as well as their interaction patterns as the complete and accurate truth for evaluating and understanding our experience. This type of unawareness can explain why our motivation (including honorable or unyielding motivation) and value judgments cannot guarantee the validity of our efforts and actions, because they can only activate the available choices within the spectrum of our cognitive understanding of reality, but cannot execute assessments and actions that are beyond our mental gamut; just as convincing elementary school children about the importance of calculus and motivating them to do it does not give them an understanding of the subject.

Changing our Actions and Experiences Depends upon Connecting the Mind with Tao

Another aspect of the Taoist awareness emphasizes that the internal system that misrepresents the reality of interaction and its patterns does not have the power to transcend the boundary and invalidation generated by the self, others, and/or adverse conditions. The true uniting power for our mental and interpersonal relationships involves discerning and rectifying the cognitive distortion for the self and others, and connecting our microcosm with the transforming macrocosm (Lao Tzu, 1954). In addition, instead of using an internal belief system or categories as the Tao to evaluate and explain one's experiences, the Taoist awareness applies the types of interactions

(incongruous and congruous) between the cognitive system and the reality to define, evaluate, explain, predict, maintain, and/or adjust our mental and interpersonal activities and experiences.

It is possible to change distorted cognitions through human interactions because of two reasons. To begin with, although the contents of the cognitive system vary with each individual, they are presumed only to be the substitutes of the reality of interaction and its patterns. People must revise their perceptions of Tao and of their relations with Tao when their conceptions are incapable of making sense of their experiences. Therefore, individuals must rely on the interactions that validate or invalidate their perceptions of the reality to verify, and revise their cognitions of the reality and adjust their behavior. Furthermore, people possess the motivation and capacity to reach greater awareness of human reality.

We need to recognize that there are two types of human interaction: the interaction that sustains or validates distorted cognitions and the one that invalidates or modifies the misrepresentation of reality. It should be noted that the terms *validation* and *invalidation* are not defined by our unilateral belief, but by the way in which the recipient's participating consciousness (intentional, relevant, and active perception) interacts with our communication. For example, an individual's dysfunctional thinking and action may be validated by an interaction that reinforces his or her distorted perception when the communication falls within the range of the perceiver's comprehension. In contrast, an action or nonaction will revise the perceiver's action and perception when the interaction allows the perceiver to discern and adjust his or her mental disparity with human reality. In interpersonal situations, the process of validation and invalidation are applicable to the cognitive distortion of both the self and the interacting partners. That is the true meaning of Lao Tzu's words, "Knowing the others is wisdom and knowing the self is enlightenment" (1989, chap. 33).

TAOIST AWARENESS AND PERSONAL AWARENESS

To overcome conflict and achieve peace, it is necessary to differentiate between two types of awareness: (a) personal awareness and (b) the Taoist awareness in the human domain (Lao Tzu, 1954). These two types of cognition relate to lower and higher levels of awareness of human reality, respectively. The distinction between the two types of awareness facilitates the analysis. In fact, our awareness of human reality falls within the low-to-high continuum.

Personal awareness refers to the mental structures (e.g., beliefs, categories) and processes that operate at the premise of misrepresented reality.

The misrepresentations include the unawareness of the distorted cognitions of the self and/or others that regulate the psychological activities and how human interactions corroborate or nullify the cognitive distortions. Consequently, individuals experience mental, interpersonal, and other types of conflict because they use their distorted cognitions of human reality to evaluate, explain, and modify the self's and others' attributes and actions.

Taoist awareness, however, views psychological activities and experiences as determined both by the mental system and by the two types of interaction (congruent and incongruent) between the cognition and reality. It uses two types of interaction to define, evaluate, explain, maintain, and adjust the mental and interpersonal experiences.

The following discussions elaborate on how personal awareness serves as the psychological basis for mental and interpersonal conflicts and how to apply Taoist awareness to create and maintain peace. Taoist insight can explain why all things in the universe are interdependent and connected (see Hagen, 2002), but there are various conflicts in the human domain.

USING TAOIST AWARENESS TO UNDERSTAND CONFLICT AND PEACE

Mental Conflict and Peace

Taoism postulates that although various symptoms of mental conflict (e.g., depression, anxiety, self rejection and alienation, guilt, and incapacity to expurgate past hurts) are associated with negative self-concepts (Beck, 1991; Ellis, 1993) and repeated frustration, failure, and other damaging experiences, they are caused neither by negative self-concepts nor by destructive encounters. Rather, mental conflicts are engendered by the use of criteria detached from Taoist awareness to evaluate and explain the self's experiences of frustration and invalidation.

Mental conflicts may result from viewing the self-concept as both the source of and the solution to mental conflicts, unaware that either positive or negative self-evaluations are the product of perceived Tao. For example, mental conflicts may result from the perceiver's application of his or her personal awareness (by using beauty, wealth, power, social status, distorted cognitions, or other belief systems as Tao) to define, evaluate, explain, and subsequently adjust the self's experiences and attributes. Personal awareness, itself, is insufficient to recognize that the mind operates on a certain level of awareness of human reality. Internal consistency with one's mental Tao may dwell on misperceived reality (the subjective unity with the objective opposites). In that case, the person's inability to bring the self out of the

current mental or situational impasse stems from the unawareness that the self's distorted cognition of the human interaction is responsible for the experience of frustration and invalidation.

On the other hand, letting go of past hurts and attaining inner harmony entail following the Taoist axiom that "Knowing the self is enlightenment" (Lao Tzu, 1954, chap. 33). This maxim views mental conflict as generated by distorted cognitions of the reality of interaction, which serves as the false understanding and criteria to evaluate and explain the self's experiences. Additionally, knowing the self implies defining the self as a being of awareness that is capable of growing. The self must also admit its emotional pain and recognize it as caused by a misunderstanding of human reality and the Tao, rather than denying any mental conflict.

Recognizing the self's disconnection from the Tao entails revising and ascending our mental microcosm according to the Taoist pattern governing our psychological activity. The Taoist approach includes receiving and validating the communications of others whose mental microcosm accurately mirrors the developing human reality (including the reality of our mental structure and processes). It also means discerning and invalidating their cognitive system if it deviates from reality. Moreover, abiding by human reality and natural patterns means differentiating between blockages and opportunities by following the Taoist axioms that the Tao is connected if the movement and stillness match the changing patterns (Liu & Lin, 1993) and "Victory is based on knowing when to engage and when to detach from conflicts" (*Sun Tzu*, 1988, chaps. 3 & 8).

Interpersonal Conflict and Peace

Similarly, communications that cause or sustain interpersonal conflict have more to do with the application of the incompatible personal awareness than with the lack of desire to balance our relationships. In other words, we experience interpersonal conflicts because we fail to use the Taoist awareness about the relations between the mind and reality to evaluate, explain, understand, and revise self and others' interpersonal activities and experiences.

Our distorted cognition and related interactions (e.g., the use of false rules and the misperceived reality regarding self, others, situations) may produce two types of interpersonal conflict. We may jeopardize others' affection for us when we fail to receive and validate their desire for connection. In addition, we may uphold others' propensity toward aggression when we react in a similar mode and digress from the Taoist axiom against violence ("A good warrior does not use violence, a good fighter does not get

angry, and a good winner does not get vengeful," Lao Tzu, 1954, chap. 68). Their antagonism may also be sustained or even intensified by our avoiding authentic communications if we repress so-called "negative" feelings of being hurt, and thus mollify, rather than admonish the aggressor. In the situations, our interaction facilitates others' belligerence and willingness to block our communication or justify their transgressions, because our communication reinforces their misperception of interpersonal reality, which reinforces their aggression.

Interpersonal conflict is generated by opponents who follow their distorted cognitions. Therefore, we need to view others' bellicose actions as determined by their conformity to their internal criteria that belie interpersonal reality, rather than by their intentional rejection of positive values and other standards. In addition, we can raise their awareness of their misperceptions of interpersonal reality by following the Taoist principle. In Lao Tzu's words, we can use the Taoist approach to stop antagonism and pugnacity, "not because the opposing forces are not mighty, but because they are transformed into harmless ones" (Lao Tzu, 1954, chap. 60). Just as in tai chi sparring, Taoist strategies to diminish animosity do not rely on using force or unilateral assertion. Instead, they rely on revising the offender's personal awareness that sustains his or her actions. Taoist interaction involves discerning a discrepancy between the self's internal system and human reality, in addition to conveying, through action and nonaction, the information about our intentions, feelings, perceptions, actions, and contexts that is misrepresented in the other's cognition of reality.

For instance, Lao Tzu's maxim that "the universal Tao is to know how to use the *extra* to mend the deficiency" (1954, chap. 77) suggests that to invalidate and transform others' mental fallacies, we must develop greater awareness (the psychological *extra*) of human reality and detect any cognitive deficiency in this area. To begin with, if the belligerent actions of others are guided by their ignorance of our psychological reality, the most appropriate strategy to elevate their awareness is to communicate our feelings of being hurt, our expectations of them, and the reasons for our actions. In addition, if others' antagonism is initiated under a pretext, communications that reveal the emotional conflict they want to conceal will negate their misperceptions about our insight of their true motivation. Furthermore, Taoist nonaction or detachment in conflict situations can deflect others' encroachment by contradicting the perceptions and expectations of those who exacerbate the situation. These methods include applying calm to subdue the obstreperous (Sun Tzu, 1988), and using stillness to overcome fervor (Lao Tzu, 1954). Another method is to avoid the strong points and target the weak points (Sun Tzu, 1988, Chap. 6).

CONCLUSIONS

This article maintains that the cognition consists of perceived interacting entities (e.g., self, others, situations) in relation to the mental Tao, which regulates and administers evaluations, explanation, adjustment, prediction, decision-making, and other psychological activities. There are two types of perceived Tao, defined as the Taoist awareness and the personal awareness. The Taoist awareness views human activities and experiences as determined by the interactions of the mental system and evolving human reality. In contrast, the personal awareness assumes that the use of self's belief systems or categories can understand and overcome invalidations generated by the self, others, and situations, with the unawareness of the incongruity between the mind and the reality.

This model suggests that we can transform our personal awareness into Taoist awareness through interacting with human reality, because the mind intends to understand, predict, and balance mental and interpersonal experiences. The mind must reexamine its relation with Tao when it encounters invalidating interactions. In addition, the growth and operation of the mind are shaped and expanded by its connection with the evolving reality.

It should be noted that the paradigm examined here is a Taoism-based cognitive model, which is stimulated and enriched by the research of several forerunners (e.g., Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1989; Kelly, 1955) on cognitive approaches. For example, according to Kelly, individuals use hypotheses derived from their personal construct systems about themselves and the world to balance their interactions, to make sense of their experiences, and to predict life events. Individuals think differently because the contents and organizations of their personal constructs differ. Individuals with more complex cognitive systems have better well-being because their personal constructs allow for more opportunity for alternative ways of construing and acting.

The Taoist model differs from other cognitive approaches in several ways. The Taoist model views the content and organization of a cognitive system as consisting of three basic components, as follows:

1. the mental representation of the self, others, events, and nature;
2. the mental Tao or perceived patterns that regulate the social and natural entities; and
3. perceived relations (consistency/inconsistency) between the self/others and the Tao.

This cognitive microcosm is different from Kelly's (1955) cognitive framework of bipolar dimensions, which represent similarities and contrasts

among events or roles (e.g., mother, father, boss, and/or teacher). It also differs from other cognitive models (e.g., Beck, 1990; Ellis, 1993) concerning self schemas. The Taoist model emphasizes that our psychological activity and experience are determined by whether our cognition is disconnected from or united with human reality in the interaction process.

In addition, the Taoist unity of opposites represents a unique holistic approach to cognitive research. Although early Western psychological researchers, such as Gestalt psychologists and Kurt Lewin, emphasized some holistic approaches to psychological issues (for review, see Fiske & Taylor, 2008), there are few recent attempts to integrate various social-cognitive issues, such as self, attitude, outgroup, person perception, attribution, prejudice, social inference, attention and encoding, decision making, goal-directed behavior, affect and emotions, memory, social categories, and information processing from the perspective that emphasizes how these cognitions are interrelated.

Consequently, Taoist psychology suggests that conflict at the mental and interpersonal levels is produced by opposites without unity. The lack of connection is engendered by following and applying misperceived reality and patterns as the guidelines for evaluating, explaining and adjusting experiences. In other words, discord, animosity, and frustration stem from mistaking some belief systems based on a limited or distorted awareness of the reality of interaction as universal truth. Conversely, mental peace and consonance with others and nature can be achieved through understanding the schism (the lack of unity) between one's microcosm and the universal system, and through discerning and bridging the disparity between the two systems in the interacting process. As a Chinese medical proverb says, disconnection causes ailments, whereas connection (recognizing and connecting the disparity) leads to healing and well-being.

In brief, this article suggests that psychological research on the issue of the mind, peace, and conflict can be enriched by integrating the Taoist principle of the unity of opposites, which represents a scintillating perspective for creating peace in human relationships.

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