

Cross-cultural Talks of *Dao* in the Cultivating of Critical and Creative Thinking

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This paper aims to go into the *Dao* of critical and creative thinking (CCT) through a comparison and contrast of a number of scholars' remarks. Cultural differences lead to varying understanding of thinking patterns, entailing the distinct displaying of critio-creative thoughts. This can be revealed in the terms of intellectual standards by the Western scholars; on the other hand, it can be mirrored in the Chinese terms of *Dao*, *De*, *wu* (无), *you* (有), *xin* (心), *xing* (性), *qi* (气), and *zhen* (真). *Dao* of myriads of generating lives with each other, a harmonious disagreement. Intellectual standards, defining the basics and fundamental of fresh views, contribute to the coming of new ideas. *Yijing*, Book of Changes, and *Dao De Ching*, are two great books in the ancient Chinese philosophy, both of which handle creating and generating powers. We can see the reverse thinking and the weak over the strong in *Dao De Ching*, the creating and producing of being *Dao* in *Yi* thoughts, as well as *yin-yang* approach in these two. They are the driving force of the becoming of all things. The focus of *Dao*, a transforming process, is hidden in the field of critical and creative field in the Chinese unity of nature and humans. Focus-field theory can effectively and efficiently interpret the CCT. The *Dao* of CCT is *wu* (无), beyond words; whose *you* (有), being, just is a habit, a lifelong learning. The heart of it is *supu* (素朴), a just-do-it job, and the operating is the flow of *qi*, *yin-yang* going. The *zhen* (真) of it is of freedom, free thinking.

Keywords: cross-cultural, *Dao* and *De*, critical and creative thinking

Introduction

What is the magic of *Dao*? How about the myth of critical and creative thinking? What are the links of the variety of cultures? Does system of law and order rely on external forces or the internal cooperation, such as moral cultivating? What is the *Dao* of enhancing one's mental or moral well-being, the perfection of the soul?

Dao, in the ancient Chinese, is basically and fundamentally the path; and then has it ways to the extended usage. *Dao*, which can be interpreted, is not the verifying *dao*, an open term for all. This is the philosophy of *Dao*. So, the *dao* of critical and creative thinking also is a chaotic item, carrying the sameness or similarity of vagueness, closed to nobody and nothing. Yet, one point shall be clear; cultural domains make a man. The theoretical matrices in different worlds can be complementary, but involve an adaptive learning. The self-other handshaking renders the harmony of the internal forces and the external ones.

The skeptics reveal the value of criticizing all. In philosophy, it represents no yielding of the strong, the authority, and the power, challenging the traditional theory, the authoritarian or even totalitarian-oriented in

particular. Seeking out the internal conflict of the tradition through a critical eye, we shall be finding out an alternative for the questions, laying aside the prerequisite for the followers.

The traditional Chinese culture focuses on the “the continuity and inseparability of the human and the cosmic orders” (*tianrenheyi* 天人合一) in which the human being must step up to assume the status of co-creator with the heavens and the earth¹. The Confucianism always demands for self-reflection, criticizing ourselves before blaming others. And the Christianity requires absoluteness, all yielding to God.

The Daoist Bible, *Dao De Ching*, is the unity of Dao and De, based on the principle of *wu* (无), non-being, harboring the value of *ziran* (自然), spontaneity. In this ongoing process, *heerbutong* (和而不同), living with the differences, is the key and critical part in the thinking model. Such a thinking mode benefits our understanding of the differences, contradiction as well as the harmony of the world.

Qian, S. Y. Zhang, Cheng, X. M. Zhang, and Wu (2019) put forward the argument of *dadaoheshengxue* (大道和生学), the great *Dao* with harmonic creation. *Dao* reins the world, inviting harmony along with the creative process. It is a lifelong learning to study of critical and creative thinking, of sky and man, and of *Dao* and *De*. What it matters is the unity of theory and practice.

Understanding of Critical and Creative Thinking

Critical thinking is a mental habit and power, purposeful thinking, excellent thinking, serious thinking, aimless thinking, daydreaming, fantasizing. It involves judgment, reasoning, always with more than one arguable answer. There are sensible debates, along with questions of well supported or poorly supported. Slow thinking, long and hard thinking, full of imagination in the process of critico-creative thinking (Wagner, Johnson, Fair, & Fasko Jr., 2018). This is a thinking of all sorts. It involves thinking for all and thinking to all, inclusive of all thoughts, inviting mutual denying and supporting. On the one hand, such a model demands thinking reflectively and precisely, requiring an open-mind to consider novel speculations, behaving in a dexterous way, also a deep and dexterous moral thinking. On the other hand, the vague or ambiguous thoughts can be useful and practical supplemental materials to enhance the loophole.

Creative thinking is artful, hypothetical, and driven by wonderment. Critico-creative thinking, broadly conceived, is the engine of creation and ultimate review. It constitutes the process of the Great Conversion of Humankind (Wagner et al., 2018). It invites deep thinking, thinking about thinking, to think better, better at thinking, effective thinking, about big questions, higher-level thinking.

The critical and creative functions of the mind are so interwoven that neither can be separated from the other without an essential loss to both.... There is a natural marriage between them (Paul & Elder, 2021). Criticality entails a process of assessing or judging others' products, and creativity matters a process of making or producing our own. The very definition of the word “creative” implies a critical component (e.g., “having or showing imagination and artistic or intellectual inventiveness”). When engaged in high-quality thought, the mind must simultaneously produce and assess, both generate and judge the products it fabricates. In short, sound thinking requires both imagination and intellectual standards (Paul & Elder, 2021). Creativity implies the generative power, criticality judiciousness. Philosophy is to criticize, and critical thinking is philosophical. The Chinese philosophy highlights intuition, the whole picture, while the West prefers scientific, rational and

¹ Wen Haiming's (温海明) speech in the section of “2021 Confucian Studies Online Summer Institute” jointly held by the International Confucian Association and Beijing Foreign Studies University.

analytical philosophy. And the Marxist philosophy is the integral mixture of these two. The intercultural analysis aims to cope with such relations.

In short, except in rare circumstance, creativity presupposes criticality, and criticality creativity (Paul & Elder, 2021). There is a reciprocal logic to both intellectual creation and critical judgment. There is an intimate interrelation between the intellectual making of things and the ongoing critique of that making (Paul & Elder, 2021). In the philosophical view, these two events, overlapped, interconnected, each containing the other. First, the thing itself, while growing there comes the criticizing reflection, then its improvements; with the somewhat new one, more challenging created, the newer one comes into being. Time and again, being is becoming older, bringing up the new creature.

Distorting reality is common in human life. Much of our perspective is unconscious and uncritical and has been influenced by many forces—including social, political, economic, biological, psychological, and religious influences (Elder & Paul, 2021b). It is tempted to distort the world. Some are out of our beliefs, values, attitudes, others from our thinking modes, some via no clear reasons. To err is human; to distort the truth is human.

Intellectual Standards

There are at least nine intellectual standards important of conducting affairs of everyday life. These are clarity, precision, accuracy, relevance, depth, breadth, logicalness, significance, and fairness (Elder & Paul, 2021b) These big nine items are the focus in the field of intellectual criteria. Such a focus-field analysis will render profound result for the logical study.

The first is clarity, accuracy, precision (CAP). Clarity: Understandable, the meaning can be grasped; to free from confusion of ambiguity, to remove obscurities. Accuracy: free from errors, mistakes, or distortions; true, correct. Precision: exact to the necessary level of detail, specific (Elder & Paul, 2021b). The big three can be the cap of the policy in identifying the intelligence. They are the requisites of the rest, presupposing the others. The mastery of them reveals the core of the critic-creative thinking. First, it must be clear, and accurately and precisely clear, to be distinguished. If unclear, there must be confusing points, worse communications.

The second is RDB. Relevance is bearing upon or leading to the matter at hand, implying a close logical relationship with, and importance to, the matter under consideration. Depth contains complexities and multiple interrelationships, thoroughness in thinking through the many variables in the situation, context, idea, and question. Breadth is encompassing multiple viewpoints, comprehensive in view, wide-ranging and broadminded in perspective. With only clarity, beating around the bushes results in tiredness, dull. However, no more views, just a few superficial comments generate less impression. Deeper interdisciplinary digging has the profound knowledge on the filed with the eye-catching focus. Vertical and horizontal investigations broaden the view, triggering much more fresh fields to go through.

Finally is the ISF. Logic induces the parts make sense together, no contradictions in keeping with the principles of sound judgment and reasonability. Significance is having importance, being of consequence; having considerable or substantial meaning. Fairness ensures free from bias, dishonesty, favoritism, self-interest or injustice (Elder & Paul, 2021a). Logical analysis, one by one for the better consistency, requires the key and critical points, which are the leading factors. Plus, it involves causality, or multi causal links. And the last one is how to be a fair player. Fair game, bias-free, is the bottom line.

The levels mentioned above can be probed in the perspectives of philosophy, math, culture, law, ethics and morals, or going along with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. Confucian and Daoist views are also helping hands in demonstrating their functions. Philosophical reflection is sure to highlight the standards. The relatively clear standards in the West can go well along with the profound beliefs in the Chinese traditional culture.

Critico-creative Thinking of the Daoist Ecological Philosophy—*qi*'s (气) Bathing Myriad of Things and Their *Dao* and *De*

Just like the Christianity, focusing on the integrity of body, mind and soul, Daoism stresses its *Dao* and *De*. *Dao* can be the most fundamental and essential term. It is recognized that *Dao*, *you* (有), being, and *wu* (无), non-being, are three of the most significant statements. Of those, Feng Youlan (冯友兰) mentioned that these three are the core concepts in Daoist cosmology. *Dao*, a unique and inclusive term, is originated in the path or way. This interpretation entails a kind of direction, representing a clear value; as for as the way itself, it reveals a type of a specific ideal order. *Laozi* (老子) regarded *dao* as the origin of all the things in the cosmos, a provider of the value and order. Confucians advocated that the Confucians should harbor the dream of *dao*, based on *De*, virtuous, depending on *ren* (仁), the goodness and benevolence, skilled at *liuyi* (六艺), the six arts (rites, music, martial arts, horing manipulating, reading and writing, mathematical capacity like calculating). *Dao* is everywhere, which can be revealed in the Daoism and Confucianism. *Dao* of the sky and earth owes to the *Dao* of humans. *Dao* is the player of the Chinese world and life view, of the Chinese essential understanding of cosmos, politics, society and life order (Wang, 2013).

Dao interpreted by the distinctive scholars in the pre-Qin era (the Paleo-lithic era-221 B.C.) mainly covers two schools, Confucianism and Daoism, each of which is consisted of two branches, the Confucian and Mencius of the former, *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* (庄子) of the latter. *Laozi* stressed order, from cosmological to political, and *Zhuangzi* enhanced the cosmological to life “mindset”, *xiaoyaoyou* (逍遥游), free trip of the mind.

In the modern society, *Dao* still is the critical symbol of the Chinese culture. Yet, distinguished from the ancient implications, the current *Dao* is discussed in the dimension of Sino-western background with today's interpretation. For the neo-Confucianism, they are more concerned about the relationship of the Confucian tradition with democracy and science originated from the West. Under this knowledge, *Dao* is inseparable with every being in the world, where life is empowered beyond food and living. This demonstrates *Dao* is the base and basis of the lifeline. Living in the world is the growing and developing of *Dao* instead of the flow of life.

The philosophy of *Laozi* fully reveals the Daoist doing-as-it-is. Such a personality focuses on *Dao*'s bearing and nurturing of myriad of things, on which the things gain their requests, living their own lives without any intervention. This non-intervention with no “supervisors” contradicts with what is described in Christianity, of which God is the creator, the created subjected to its master for the whole life. The naturalness and spontaneity of *Dao* overthrows the creating and overruling theory of God (Chen, 2008).

The philosophy of *Laozi* is fully interpreting the personality of the Daoist spontaneity and non-intervening. The creating of the term of *Dao*, in itself, is a mythical creation, triggering the followers of generation on generation producing numerous interpretations to this troublemaker.

The *Wu* (无), Non-being, of *Dao*

The Daoist *wu* (无), non-being, is actually valuing *wu* with a highlighting *you* (有), being. For the Confucians *li* (理) (Neo) school in the dynasties of *Song* and *Ming* (960-1644 AD), *you* is mainly referred to *xin* (心), mind, and *li* (理), reason. The school of *li* also talks about *wu*, but to *xuanxue* (玄学) in China's *Wei* and *Jin* Dynasties (220-589 AD), the profound and mysterious school, a kind of metaphysics, *wu* means assumptions. The ontology of the Chinese characteristics in the Daoism is quite different from the Western thoughts, distinguishing from the term *being*, where *wu*, other than being, is an order, a relationship between things of the root and its extension, the performance of the applied is created for *wu*, which is described with the term metaphysics in the Chinese context. The reflection of the order and its metaphysics is worth digging deeper. *Wu* (无), nonbeing, proclaims the non-action of the authority, if it comes to the political issue, so that the general public can do as it is (Wang, 2013).

Except the Buddhism, the most thorough analysis of the void and *wu* (*xuwu* 虚无) in Chinese philosophy owes to *Zhuangzi*. He claimed the unity of things (*qiwu* 齐物), employing the term heart and mind of voidable *wu* (*xuwu* 虚无) to break through the boundary, differences, and contradiction, and others between and among all things. Such a view focuses on *xiaoyaoyou* (逍遥游), a free mind without being self-centered, ignoring fame or name. This is another life style, distinguished from the seeking of the profane life and Confucian tradition (Wang, 2013).

Wu (无), non-being, making something from nothing, can be an equivalent of *Dao*. Its vagueness and fuzziness is crying for *you* (有), being, to support its value. The giving birth of *you* (有) is a good proof of reverse thinking, self-reflection.

Xin (心), Heart-Minding, of *Dao*

The organ of the heart and mind is heart-minding (心之官则心). The harmony of the body and mind and heart makes a man (心身合而自我成). How can we say the return of native human propensities (*xing* 性) and heart-minding (*xin* 心) 心性之归? It is not a matter of good or evil in terms of such human propensities, nor in the light of subject. The stress of simpleness and originality (*supu* 素朴) reveals the reflection of the real nature of things. The Daoist argument for heart-minding actually concentrates on nothing about oneself (*xu* 虚). No focus on self is where the heart-minding lies (吾丧我, 心宅).²

In the ancient Chinese culture, spirit, *shen* (神) drew more attention than heart-minding; the relationship of heart-minding and body is just like the king and the ruled.³

Dao of any kind mainly talks about the minding of the heart, so does the practicing *ru* (儒), of the Confucianism. Reading of the typical classic, training of rites (*li* 礼) and music (*yue* 乐). Heart and mind is a place or the nutshell of manifesting and reaching *De*, virtue. The heart-minding of character (*dexin* 德心) is the showing of heart and mind's growing, the reach of its cultivating. The heart and mind stands for the status of subjectivity of oneself.⁴

² Wang Bo's (王博) speech in the section of "The Tendency and Popularity in Today's Philosophical World Online Lecture" (August 12-13, 2021) held by Zhengzhou University, China.

³ Wang Zheng's (王正) speech in the section of "The Tendency and Popularity in Today's Philosophical World Online Lecture" (August 12-13, 2021) held by Zhengzhou University, China.

⁴ Kuang Zhao's (匡钊) speech in the section of "The Tendency and Popularity in Today's Philosophical World Online Lecture" (August 12-13, 2021) held by Zhengzhou University, China.

It is recognized that Mencius *siduan* (四端: 恻隐, 羞恶, 辞让, 是非), four playing roles of the heart and mind, like sympathy, shame, yielding and knowing of good or bad, are figuratively described as the limbs of human body. *Dao* of heart and minding, the humbling mind, is a way of spiritual world, as is the core of Zhuangzi's thoughts. The heart is the center of all the other organs of the body, a dominating role.⁵

Human heart and mind is just like a pool of water, purifying, silent and bright. The internal central part of human is the heart, the describing of which and its recognition is similar to that of water or mirror. There lies the soul, spirit and *qi* (气). Heart is the *Dao*'s dwelling place, whose emptiness needs to be maintained. *Xu* (虚), can be of empty-like tranquil, nihility, and void. In Chinese culture, voiding room reflects the white mood. *Po* (魄), in Chinese, is consisted of *bai* (白), white, and *gui* (鬼), spirit, the white color carrying the connotation of such a character of *po* (魄). *Hunpo* (魂魄) takes the implication of the white spirit, the sainting myth. The color of the human heart is *baixin* (白心), the symbolic of purification. White can display the inner state of a human. The modest mind, a hearty mood, needs to be purified. Meanwhile, white is the represents of cleanness. *Mingbai* (明白), mirror-like brightness, can be well going along with the cleanness of the room. Also, this term can be incorporated into *su* (素), a reflection of whiteness, the origin of a description of silk. *Bai* (白), *su* (素), and *zhen* (贞) are three identities of whiteness in ancient Chinese, the last term *zhen* (贞) which can be found its popularity in the *Book of Changes*.⁶

The *xin* (心) of *Dao*, heart-minding, is heart mining, the polishing study. If it is undergoing with *qi* (气), another ontological term in traditional Chinese culture, *Dao* can be promoted significantly. It is recognized that *qi* dominates the Chinese culture in the perspective of physical, psychology, or philosophy, almost in every field. It originates from the medical view. There are *qi* of *dao*, *yin* and *yang*, and others. The Confucian ecological categorical terms includes *qi*, *tong* (通), throughness, *he* (和), harmony, *shengsheng* (生生), creating-generating, *shi* (时), timing and opportunity, *dao*, *ren* (仁), benevolence.⁷ *Qi* (气), another equivalent of *Dao*, is shaking hands with *xin* (心). *Xinqi* (心气), a marriage of *xin* and *qi*, is driving along with *Dao*, without whom *Dao* will be non-existent.

Zhen (真) of Dao

Laozi and *Zhuangzi* both show high respect to *zhen* (真), realness and truth. The former handled it in two aspects, one pointing to the carrying of *Dao*, the ontological interpretation, the other emphasizing of the character of virtue of *Dao* and *De*. And *Zhuangzi* mainly talks about it in the perspective of human good moral integrity (Chen, 2008).

*Wang Rongrong*⁸ exerts profound analysis of *zhen* (真) in a wealth of fields. She argues that 真 (*zhen*, real and true) is the intrinsic value of beings, things and humans. *Zhuangzi* claims a special type of human being called *zhenren* (真人, perfected or genuine being), the highest rank of human being that can be attained.

There is a link of *zhen* (真) & transformation/generation (生). *Zhen* is the state of the 真 nature as it is, which is also the way of life. It is a kind of change; with transformation; there are generations and generations.

⁵ Chen Zhibin's (陈之斌) speech in the section of "The Tendency and Popularity in Today's Philosophical World Online Lecture" (August 12-13, 2021) held by Zhengzhou University, China.

⁶ Li Wei's (李巍) speech in the section of "The Tendency and Popularity in Today's Philosophical World Online Lecture" (August 12-13, 2021) held by Zhengzhou University, China

⁷ Qiao Qingju's (乔清举) speech in the section of "The Tendency and Popularity in Today's Philosophical World Online Lecture" (August 12-13, 2021) held by Zhengzhou University, China

⁸ Wang Rongrong's (王蓉蓉) speech in the section of "2021 Confucian Studies Online Summer Institute" jointly held by the International Confucian Association and Beijing Foreign Studies University.

Its actuality in Daoism is undergoing with the real human, criticizing our own acts for the reach of the entity and notion of humans, the ontological truth coming into being.

We are also concerned about the relationship of *zhen* (真) and *shan* (善), goodness. The pursuit of realness mostly is to attain the criteria, benchmark, the root of good life, or the most important stand of regulating humans' ideas and behaviors. Thus, the seeking of truth, in theory, is to obtain the happiness and development of humans themselves. The goodness and the beauty are real, and badness or ugliness is false. Truth is the supreme goodness, seeking truth being for goodness.

Zhen (真) and desires can be good brothers. It is recognized that needs, wants, and demands are acceptable in the economical term, while desires are the products of social influences, which is a type of change subject to the social standards. Nowadays, it seems that hunger for desires is going beyond the seeking of truth. The restudy of Laozi and Zhuangzi is an open realization, the stick to desires being the satisfaction of some specific functions.

Zhen (真) based values include uniqueness, creativity and to be united with the cosmos. *Zhen* must contain a paradoxical character. *Zhenren* (真人) is constructed in a rich vocabulary of non-qualities in the course of constant transformation and paradox.

Such terms or concepts as mentioned above are demonstrating a vividness of producing. The devices of these Chinese characters, in themselves, are a myth of making and giving, which lay the base of cosmological organism.

Dao of Critico-creative Thinking in the Traditional Chinese Culture and Its Reflecting in the Daily Life

Dao is the unity of *yin* and *yang*. The Book of Changes, *Yijing*, on the flow of changing, is of a conversation of generating and creating. The self-so *Dao*, non-intervention of governance, etc. are all talking about critical and creative thinking. The supreme goodness is akin to water, which is bathing all things calling for no compliments. The goodness, realness, and charming character of water are flowing with the going of *Dao De Ching*. Thus, we can see this book is a type of reverse thinking, critico-creative thinking, ignoring the traditional beautifying of courage and aggressiveness but for the worship of gentleness, the weak over the strong. This is of creative spirit, a reversing argument. Obtaining achievement is inviting retreat, the *Dao* of the sky; retreat is forwarding, a kind of political philosophy, a philosophy of *Dao* and *De*, of life, ecology, culture, as well as a philosophy of *yin* and *yang*, *taiji*. This is also a focus-field philosophy, the focus of critic-creative in the field of *Dao*. What it matters is how to find the focus in such a field.

***Wu* (无) and *You* (有)**

The ontology of critic-creative thinking is of *wu* (无), non-being, which is hard to define, in theory, as a habit, thinking mode, inborn in the mind. Such a *dao*, whose *you* (有), being, inputs everybody and everything. Do not take it for granted, with a critical eye, challenging any points, values or beliefs. To the eastern people, Chinese for example, owing to the historical exploited for thousands of years, the ruled in particular, tend to be the order followers. They have no such habits to question others, no challenging of the ruling class.

Xin* (心), *Heart

The heart of such thinking is to be a no man, instead of a yes man. The goodness and simplicity of *Dao*, *supu* (素朴), in such a thinking context, should be "self-centered", with the priority of own points. Originality,

initiative, innovation, etc. can be the preference.

Self-other is nothing to the critical mind, challenging everybody and everything, self included.

Benevolence is not just the subjective mind, but the objective Dao of heaven. In truth, it is a guiding line of the integrity of subjectivity and objectivity, the stand of unity of heaven and man.

Benevolence is the driver of creating myriads of things by the sky and the earth. Creating is on the changes, the *Dao*, and heart-mind activity. The better performance entails the mastering of the fundamentals; where there is a will, there is a way, a *dao* of dealing.

Qi (气)

The *qi* of critico-creative is the employment of *yin* and *yang*, understanding in the positive and negative angles. The SWOT analysis is about the internal and external study. Strength and weakness tell about the inside, while opportunity and threat are generally focusing on the out. Inside-outside collision and conflict spurs the going and coming. SWOT has its derivatives, such as WSOT, TOWS, OTWS, WSTO, WOTS, and others. Any alteration of the letters can be an alternative, carrying the varying transfer and distinct foci.

Zhen (真)

Common sense might warrant more profound inquiry. *Zhen* (真), the realness, of the critical thinking is to seek truth, paying no attention to the subject or power, the authority. What matters only is one's own thinking, without any needs, wants or desires beyond the truth. The trueness of *Zhuangzi* stresses the process, the ongoing study. Anything has it being, its capability, Under *Dao*, they are of one. All is one. All the things, the different focuses, is in one field of the *Dao*. Hence, oneself is not necessarily to criticize others' views having differing features. The tacit and explicit integration of heaven and earth and human being is of full understanding and free critical thinking, forgiving and forwarding.

Concluding Remarks

The critical and creative thinking is mirrored in the Western culture, and Dao is the supreme term in the traditional Chinese culture. The focus on reason or causality of the West can go well along with the metaphysical *dao*. Thinking of variety reveals reverse ways, diverging fields, like reflections. The useless lumber holds big powers. Philosophies of West and East make one unity, with changing focus in the growing fields. The international influences bring about the developing mixture in the global matrices. Focus-field finders are fun for focus-field fundamentals in the focus-field forest, flirt with each other, forgetful about their identities, just forwarding.

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