

A Comparative Study of Lao-tzu's "Xu Jing" and Buddhism's "Stillness"

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"Stillness", as the Vimoksha state of Buddhism's Nirvana state, is the ultimate experience of religious practice. It has rich connotations. Firstly, "Stillness" is an ultimate aesthetic experience; secondly, "Stillness" means transcending real society, the secular world and utility. In Lao-tzu's thought, "To the Ultimate, You Yourself Empty", "Remain in Silence and Clarity", "Anātman", etc., are presented, showing that Buddhism and Lao-tzu have some commonalities. Based on the text, this article will make a simple comparative analysis, after separately discussing Lao-tzu's "Xu Jing" and Buddhism's "Silence", in order to show their similarities and differences more fully and objectively.

Keywords: "Xu Jing", "Stillness", Lao-tzu, Buddhism

Buddhism's "Stillness"

Sānta, as an important concept of Buddhist philosophy, has two meanings. The first level means silence. The second level means tranquillity, such as "silence of all organs". The meaning of "silence" here is taken as the state of Vimoksha of Buddhism, Nirvana, which is the ultimate experience of religious practice and rich in connotation. It is not only an external objective state that can be experienced, but also a subjective feeling and an inner aspiration. "Silence" is a universal category in philosophy that is closely related to religious practice. Traditional Indian religions take Vimoksha as the ultimate goal, and peace of mind is an important symbol of Vimoksha. The "stillness" state of religious practice has been reflected in ancient yoga practice in India. A lot of yoga and dhyāna characterised by stillness are discussed in the *Upanishad* (奥义书). *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (歌者奥义书) said, "Dhyāna is a link in self-knowledge" (Huang, 2010, p. 205).

The original meaning of Dhyāna is contemplation and meditation. After it was introduced to China, it was transliterated as "Dhyāna", which is the highest state of yoga practice, characterised by the elimination of all ideas and consciousness, and then attaining the unity of subject and object, the unity of man and God, and the state of "Brahman One". Buddhism, as a traditional Indian religious culture, inherits and develops the Indian tradition of advocating "Stillness" and pursuing Vimoksha, and at the same time inherits the traditional Indian practice of yoga, emphasising dhyāna and samādhi among them. Buddhism, however, denies the existence of God, I, and Brahman. Its samadhi is generally expressed as a state of "tranquility", and its essential characteristic is the inner peace of the practitioner.

Although "Stillness is a common aspiration in ancient Indian religions, only Buddhism raises it to the level of philosophical ontology. Buddhism regards "Stillness" as a synonym for "Nirvana" and considers it to be the

highest state of Vimoksha. In Buddhist circles, "Stillness" and "Nirvana" are sometimes used interchangeably, as Xiong Shi-li said in *Fo Jia Ming Xiang Tong Shi*, "Nirvana, the meaning of 'Stillness' is to reject and name the original mind. That is, the original mind of 'Stillness' is Tathātā, that is, the original mind of 'Stillness' is the physical manifestation" (Xiong, 1985, p. 51). There are many treatises on "Stillness" in the Tripitaka. For example, the Śrmaṇa in Dhammapada (法句经——沙门品):

Chang Neile made up his mind to keep a line of silence... Without Zen there is no wisdom, and without wisdom there is no Zen. The Tao comes to the Nihuan from Zen wisdom. When learning reaches heaven, live quietly and stop thinking. In the place where you are alone, observe the Dharma with one heart. (Fa, 1934, p. 572)

In the Chinese translation of the Tripitaka, "ji (寂)" and "jing (静)" are sometimes expressed separately and sometimes used together, both expressing a state of "tranquillity" which includes not only external tranquillity and the quiet natural environment, but also the spirituality of the subject of practice. At the same time, the state of living in peace and tranquillity also includes the inner peace of the subject's mind, the stillness of the heart, the extinction of "nirvana", and the state and condition of religious practice, such as the emptiness and tranquillity of the unity of the inner and outer. Although Buddhist "silence" includes the silence of the external environment, "silence" comes mainly from the experience of the subject's religious practice. Therefore, the description of "silence" in the Tripitaka is mostly internal. For example, in the volume of the Sutra of Enlightenment (圆觉经), there are many treatises on "Stillness" in the Tripitaka. Buddha spoke of three ways to achieve enlightenment without hindrance: Śamatha, Samopatti, and Dhyāna. For example, the Śrmaṇa in Dhammapada (法句经——沙门品):

If all bodhisattvas (菩萨) realize the pure and perfect enlightenment, take the pure enlightenment mind (以净觉心), take the tranquillity as the action, clear the thoughts, realize the troubled movement, and the tranquillity and wisdom will arise, the physical and mental objects will disappear forever, and you will be able to feel peaceful and peaceful inside. Because of the stillness, the worlds of the ten directions (十方世界诸如来) such as the coming mind appear in it, like an image in a mirror. The person with this convenience is called Samatha (奢摩他). (Fo, 1934, p. 917)

Both Śamatha and Dhyāna are characterised by the search for stillness. "Stillness" as the state of Vimoksha is not only an external and objective state that can be experienced, but also a subjective feeling and an inner pursuit of subjectivity. Therefore, there are many explanations of the connotation and meaning of "tranquility" in the Buddhist classics. Buddha, who had just attained samyaksambodhi, summarised the Dharma he had demonstrated, which included peace, tranquillity, Nirvana, and so on. It can be seen that the essential characteristic of Buddha's Dharma is "tranquility", and at the same time Nirvana and "tranquility" are also known as one of the three universal truths of Buddhism, also known as Three Universal Truths. All phenomena are impermanent. All Dharma are not-self. The eternity is Nirvana. It is called the seal because it is to certify whether it is the Buddha's teaching or not. Also see Four Seals. Nirvana is a transliteration of Sanskrit, and its free translations include annihilation, Vimoksha, Asaṃskṛta, no birth, peace, Parinivana, etc. In terms of end, it can be called Vimoksha and peace, and in terms of means, it can be called annihilation, extinction, and extinction. In terms of realm, it is Asaṃskṛta, not born and passed away.

"Stillness", strictly speaking, is the Dharma state of the Nirvana realm. Nirvana is not born of the laukika nidāna; it is the realm of the unborn and undead lokottara Asaṃskṛtā-dharmāḥ. Only by extinguishing all kṛllā, ending the karma of life and death, and freeing oneself from the suffering of duḥkha in traī-lokya Saṃsāra, one can realise Asaṃskṛtā-dharmāḥ and thus attain the wonderful state of Nirvana Vimoksha, that is Nirodha extinction, extinction, Li, Miao (灭、尽、离、妙). The original Buddhist understanding of Nirvana refers mainly

to the supreme Vimoksha realm of ethics and psychology in practice, which refers to the incomparable happiness attained without birth, old age, sickness, and death, the supreme Vimoksha attained by eliminating rāga dveṣa Moha and kleśa dirt, thus proving attained Arhat Arahantship. Āgamas Sutra often describes Nirvana as "Stillness", extremely cool, extremely peaceful, etc. Therefore, Nirvana is not death but happiness, the highest Vimoksha and the most perfect state in Buddhism.

Lao-tzu's "Xu Jing"

The realm of "Xu Jing" pursued by philosophical Taoism includes the theories of "Silence, the ruler of movement (静为躁君)" and "Great music has the faintest (大音希声)". Tao is also characterised by "It was soundless; it was formless, independent and changeless (寂兮寥兮)". In particular, as stated in Chapter 16 of *Tao Te Ching* (道德经), it said:

To the utmost, you yourself are empty. Remain in silence and clarity. All things develop together, so I see the cycles of life continuously. This return to the root is called stillness; it is the fulfilment of one's destiny. That everyone must fulfil their destiny is the eternal pattern. To know the eternal pattern is to be enlightened. He who knows it will not be withered by misfortune. (Ma, 2016, p. 23)

What is the real connotation of "xu" and "jing"? Wei Yuan said, "'Xu', there is no desire. Without desire there's no 'Jing'. If the outer things cannot enter, the inner heart will not come out" (Wei, 1987, p. 12). Gao Ming pointed out: "'Xu', no desire, 'Jing', I do, this is the most fundamental cultivation of philosophical Taoism (Gao, 1996, p. 299).

It concisely shows that "Xu Jing" is the normal state of movement in life, and if you do not follow this normal state, your actions will lead to danger. Both "Zhi" (致) and "Shou" (守) indicate that a good mental state requires long-term practice, which is to continuously sublimate daily spiritual activities so that one's false and cunning mind can melt into the ocean without prejudice. To remain still is to consolidate the achievements of "Xu" and to regard each step towards the Tao as a step on a journey of a thousand miles. This state is similar to Nirvana in Buddhism; rāga dveṣa Moha is eternal.

Firstly, we learned "for the fu, not for the mu (为腹不为目)" by "Xu Ji Jing Du" (虚极静笃). After listing several situations that can harm a person's body and mind, as stated in Chapter 12 of *Tao Te Ching* (道德经):

Colour's five hues from the eyes their sight will take; music's five notes the ears as deaf can make; the flavours five deprive the mouth of taste; the chariot course, and the wild hunting waste, make mad the mind; and Treasures high-prized make human conduct bad. Therefore the sage seeks to satisfy (the craving of) the belly, and not the (insatiable longing of the) eyes. He puts from him the latter, and prefers to seek the former. (Ma, 2016, p. 19)

Lao-tzu came to the conclusion that a person is a sage because he pays attention to his inner spiritual defence and does not easily lose his mind. In its basic meaning, "belly" refers to the stomach. In its expanded meaning, it means the inside, more specifically, the mind, energy, and spirit of the human body. The basic meaning of "Mu (目)" is the eyes, and by extension it refers to the outside, that is, all the temptations of society, delicacies, fame, and fortune, and so on. Whether it is the enjoyment of the senses or the venting of the spirit, it will eventually harm one's body and mind, or make one blind or deaf, etc. Therefore, the sage governs the world, including the body, with the principle of "serve the belly, not the eyes" and makes clear decisions. In short, calm and pure heart, tempered appetite. In this way, "we will follow the zhen qi (真气), guard (内守) the spirit, and keep the disease safe" (Wang, 1963, p. 3).

Secondly, "Xu Ji Jing Du" (虚极静笃) lies in "Di Chu Xuan Lan" (涤除玄鉴), the purification of one's soul, even the process of realising "Xu" and "Jing". Lao-tzu proposed "Di Chu Xuan Lan" (涤除玄鉴); can it be flawless? Mr. Gao Heng believes:

Washing dirt is called washing, and removing dust is called removing. Desires in people's hearts are like dirt on a mirror, which is heart disease. That is why it is said, "Pursue Xuan Lan, can it be faultless! The intention is to get rid of desire. (Gao, 1956, p. 24)

The heart is like a bright mirror that is easily covered with dust. The mirror must be clear and the dust must be removed; the heart must be clear and the heart must be washed. To purify the mind is to eliminate desires and false views and return to inner clarity and Jing. Only then can the heart be grateful. "To see Tao is to experience Tao, and to experience Tao is the highest spiritual state" (Feng, 1984, pp. 55-56).

Finally, "Xu Ji Jing Du" (虚极静笃) lies in "Gui Gen is called Jing" (归根曰静). Lao-tzu put forward the principle of raising "Jing"; the key point is "Gui Gen" (归根). *Tao Te Ching* (道德经) said:

When things (in the vegetable world) have displayed their luxuriant growth, we see each of them return to its root. This returning to their root is what we call the state of stillness; and that stillness may be called a reporting that they have fulfilled their appointed end. The report of that fulfilment is the regular, unchanging rule. To know that unchanging rule is to be intelligent; not to know it leads to wild movements and evil issues. (Ma, 2016, p. 23)

So what is the Gen? From the point of view of imagery, the lush growth of plants lies in their "Gen". Human vitality also has its "Gen", and this "Gen" is spirit. In order to maintain good health, one should cultivate one's own energy and spirit. Only by grasping this foundation can life have sufficient motivation. However, "Gui Gen" depends on "Jing"; "Jing" can store energy and nourish energy to restore the energy used in movement.

Differences Between Lao-tzu's "Xu Jing" and Buddhism's "Stillness"

The "stillness" of Buddhism is obviously different from the "xu" (emptiness) and "jing" (static) pursued by philosophical Taoism. Lao-tzu is the pursuit of stillness from the ultimate height of cosmic mind. And Buddhism is of: Firstly, the pursuit of "Stillness" in Buddhism is related to the religious practice of being outside the world, which is reflected in the pursuit of "Jing" from noise; and secondly, the pursuit of "Stillness" in Buddhism is related to the ultimate goal of Vimoksha. The goal of Vimoksha is to reach the state of "Stillness" in Nirvana. When Buddhism was introduced to China, the Dhyāna way of pursuing tranquillity was the first to be accepted by the Chinese people. After the Sui and Tang Dynasties, all the schools of Chinese Buddhism attached importance to Zen and thus formed the Sīla Dhyāna Prajñā sikkhā, which emphasised holding Sīla in Dhyāna and sending out Prajñā from Dhyāna. Thus Dhyāna, characterised by "Stillness", was carried forward in Chinese Buddhism.

It can be seen that the so-called Dhyāna Prajñā is, in a sense, the pursuit of the realm of "Stillness". Zen is the most Chinese of the Buddhist sects and advocates becoming a Buddha by seeing one's own nature. Although it still aims to seek "Jing" as its characteristic, it downplays the external environment of "Silence" and emphasises its spiritual meaning. For example, Zen Master Yongjia Xuanjue questioned the practice and lifestyle of living in mountains and seeking tranquillity. Therefore, when one sees the Tao and forgets the mountain, the world is silent; when one sees the mountain and forgets the Tao, the mountain is noisy. It can be seen that "Stillness" is the nature of Tao, and the state of "Stillness" is the experience of Tao in the inner mind. Such "silence" has the meaning of the ontology of philosophy.

First of all, Buddhism's pursuit of stillness is a natural attitude to life. Following the natural rhythm is the original meaning of "silence". Second, from the perspective of value theory, "Silence" as a category of philosophy points to the other world and is transcendent. Zong Baihua pointed out:

Zen is the extreme "Jing" in movement, and also the extreme movement in "Jing". Zen is when Chinese people come into contact with Mahāyāna Buddhism, realise the depths of their own souls, and develop brilliantly into the realm of philosophy and art. (Zong, 1981, p. 65)

"Silence" means the transcendence of real society and worldly utilitarianism. Again, the joy derived from Stillness is Vimoksha joy, and such a free state can only be attained in peace of mind.

Similarities Between Lao-tzu's "Xu Jing" and Buddhism's "Stillness"

Both pursue "Jing"; "Xu Jing" and "Silence" are both ultimately "Jing". Lao-tzu believes that the movements and changes of all things in the world are temporary, that they all come to a standstill in the end, and that only "Jing" is the most fundamental. From the perspective of the subject world, he urged people to "Xu" their minds to the extreme and keep still. However, Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, which were first introduced to China, both advocate "Jing" and have no desire to see. It is also consistent with Lao-tzu's "Xu" and "Jing", which emphasise the cultivation of the mind from subjective consciousness. It can be seen from the above that Buddhism introduced into China is not only understood by traditional Chinese thought, but that traditional Chinese thought, such as Lao-tzu's thought, also has some similarities with Buddhism itself in some aspects.

Conclusion

Indian Buddhism was introduced into China during the Han Dynasty. Before the Wei and Jin Dynasties, it took root in China through philosophical Taoism, and with the washing of Buddhism by Chinese indigenous culture, it completed the self-reform of Buddhism, which had a great influence on Chinese culture. Its far-reaching influence also makes it an important part of Chinese traditional culture.

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