

Tao, the essence of chinese philosophy

الطاو، جوهر الفلسفة الصينية

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Abstract:

Taoists believe that the origin of the world is the Tao. Within the Tao, the first distinction between existence and non-existence appears in the form of yin and yang. From the impulse resulting from the opposition of yin and yang, the five elements of wood, fire, metal, water and earth could be born. From these life-forming elements, Taoists believe in the beginning of the universe. According to Taoist philosophy, each individual can only represent himself and must know how to channel it, recognising the impact his actions can have on the rest of the world. The aim of the research is to introduce the essence of Chinese thought and philosophy, which is more concerned with the individual, his consciousness, and his spiritual and contemplative life in his search for harmony with nature and the universe. The work concludes by explaining the status of the Tao as the source of all wisdom, the source of purity and purity, and as a philosophy of life and religion. The Tao is the guide of chinese man.

Keywords: Tao, philosophy, civilization, China, history

ملخص:

يعتقد الطاويون أنَّ أصل العالم يتمثل في الطاو. المبدأ وراء كل الموجودات، وإنَّ داخل الطاو يظهر التمييز الأوَّل بين الوجود وعدم الوجود على شكل بين ويانغ. من النبض الناتج عن معارضة الين واليانغ أصبح من الممكن أن تولد العناصر الخمسة وهي الخشب والنار والمعدن والماء والأرض. ومن هذه العناصر المكونة للحياة يعتقد الطاويون في بداية الكون. وبالنسبة للفلسفة الطاوية، لا يمكن أن يمثل كل فرد إلا نفسه ويجب عليه أن يعرف كيف يوجهها، مدركا التأثير الذي يمكن أن تحدثه أفعاله على بقية العالم. هدف البحث هو التعريف بجوهر الفكر والفلسفة الصينية التي تهتم أكثر بالفرد ووعيه وحياته الروحية والتأملية في بحثها عن الانسجام مع الطبيعة والكون. ويخلص العمل إلى تبيان مكانة الطاو في أنَّه مصدر كل حكمة، مصدر الصفاء والنقاء، وأنَّه فلسفة حياة ودين. الطاو هو دليل الانسان الصيني. كلمات مفتاحية: الطاو-فلسفة-حضارة-الصين-تاريخ

Chinese cosmology is based on the belief in the existence of a well-organised cosmic system, which the Chinese consider to be the source of all existence and a rule governing all cosmic changes. This system is known as the Tao. The pursuit of it was a fundamental goal shared by all Chinese philosophers, and under this cosmological theory, the Tao also governs human affairs. It thus takes on a normative connotation when it refers to the right path of human affairs and the guiding principle of human behaviour.

Taoism is at once a philosophy, a thought, a reason, a doctrine and a religion, a moral. It emphasises the need to do what is natural, original, true,

pure and spontaneous and to go with the flow, in accordance with the Tao, a cosmic force that flows through, passes through and flows through all things, binding and freeing them.

Taoism had great influence, impact and power under the Tang dynasty (618-907 EC), and the dynasty's imprinters decreed it the state religion, in other words, the belief, the cult of the state, requiring people to have Taoist writings in their homes. It is a system of life and a way of living that is embodied in the glorification of nature in food, clothing and everything else. Taoism fell out of favour with the decline of the Tang dynasty and was replaced by Confucianism, the morals of the Chinese philosopher Confucius, and Buddhism, which came from India. But this philosophy is still practised in China and many other Asian countries today.

Throughout Chinese philosophical history, various schools have had their own distinctive answer to the quest for the truth of the Tao. How is this concept one of the pillars of Chinese philosophy? And how it can also be considered its essence as the first concept on which Chinese thought as a whole is built.

"Like most ancient peoples, the ancient Chinese worshipped aspects of nature. The most important manifestation of this worship was the fear of the supernatural and the spirits inherent in all things, and the reverence for the terrible images on earth and their ability to produce and reproduce. Hence, they worshipped the wind, thunder, trees, mountains and snakes, and believed that each of these sanctities had a spirit that must be worshipped, but at the same time they recognised the principle of singularity and believed in the existence of a higher power controlling the world, the Supreme God, and described him as extremely just and wise"

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It is the Tao. If anything, this indicates the Chinese attempt to understand the cosmic, political and social order. Lao Tseu occupies a great place in Chinese thought, his ideas and way of thinking have been passed down for thousands of years, and his influence on life in Asia in general has set a path for Chinese philosophy, which we can say was born with the birth of Taoism, or the totality of the ideas expressed by Lao Tseu.

The sage Lao Tseu was a contemporary of Confucius :

¹¹ سعدون محمود الساموك. (2006). موسوعة الأديان والمعتقدات القديمة. الجزء الأول: العقائد. دار المناهج للنشر والتوزيع. عمان. الأردن. 2006. ص. 114.

"A philosopher who resorted to asceticism, solitude, austerity and quiet contemplation of nature. He preached compassion, patience, gentleness and kindness to others, and advocated tolerance and repayment of offence with kindness"¹.

"In his view, the first duty of people who want to live a true virtuous life is to believe in Tao, the way of God, and then the world will take care of itself. Confucius, on the other hand, was not interested in knowing anything about God and his names and attributes, but rather put his effort into reforming people and making them happy in their world"².

Both traditions, Taoism and Confucianism, have permeated Chinese culture for thousands of years, and their concepts generally share many ideas, the most important of which is the emphasis on the Chinese individual and his role in the universe.

Lao Tseu says : *"Man follows the earth, the earth follows the sky, the sky follows the way, and the way follows and is self-evident"³.*

"It is the way or path, which has no form, colour or name"⁴.

It is also defined by a group of philosophers and researchers in Chinese thought as :

"The beginning, the first origin of all, the first mover, the first mover, the latency, the essence of latency. He created everything"⁵.

In other words, he is the source of everything, the first cause :

"The Tao is the result of the development of spiritual beliefs in China"⁶.

In other words, the diligence of the Chinese in educating themselves and reforming themselves led them to discover the Tao which is :

"An intuition of absolute reality that can only be the truth itself"⁷. "It is a fundamental principle"⁸. "It is a wellspring that opens : You always have something to say"⁹. "It is a calm, immaterial, self-existent, unchangeable,

¹ سعدون محمود الساموك، موسوعة الأديان والمعتقدات القديمة، المرجع السابق، ص، 115

² المرجع نفسه، ص، 117

³ Lao Tseu. (2009). *Le Canon de la Voie et de la Vertu*. Essai de traduction par Jean-Claude Lebensztejn. Éd. TH. TY. p.26

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.96

⁵ ه. فان براج. (1998) *حكمة الصين*. ترجمة موفق المشنوق. الأهالي للطباعة والنشر والتوزيع. الطبعة الأولى. دمشق. ص. 46

⁶ Antony Tao. (2003). *Dieu et le Tao ; L'Occident et la Chine*. Éd. L'Harmattan. p.11

⁷ Patrick Carré. (1999). *Le Livre de la Cour Jaune : Classique Taoïste des IV-Vème Siècles*. Traduit du chinois par l'auteur même. Ed. Inédit Sagesse ; Editions du Seuil. p.11

⁸ Jean Grenier. (1973). *L'Esprit du Tao*. Éd. Flammarion. Paris. p.21

⁹ François Jullien et Thierry Marchaisse. (2000) *Penser d'un Dehors (la Chine) ; Entretiens d'Extrême-Occident*, éd. Du Seuil. Paris. p.285

*omnipresent, indestructible principle that can be regarded as the mother of the world"*¹.

The fundamental essence that flows through everything in the universe.

*"Just as any individual can recreate himself as a perfect being"*².

Since he is connected to the world and the rhythm of this world is inherent in himself, he can be a supreme being. Living under the laws of cause and effect is ideal because such a life will have the most positive impact on the world.

*"One could call the Tao the Order of Nature, the power within and behind the universe"*³.

This means that the Tao is the principle of order that explains the universe, or the principle of order that expresses the origin of the world. It indicates the right path that leads to the truth, or, more precisely, the method or way in which all things follow their course, as Taoists see the Tao in everything they do. It is a principle that governs human mental activity, an inner spiritual path, a system of thought, a way of being, and a proposal for a comprehensive view of the world.

The search for wisdom in China is fundamentally based on harmony, and for Taoists, this harmony is found through belief in the Tao, the same way as nature. Man and nature actually form a unique community.

The ancient Chinese grew up in a primitive form of nature worship and developed a sense of admiration and affection for the natural world around them. From their agricultural experiments, they understood that the laws of nature are the cornerstone of the universe, and that by following and respecting them, they would achieve the harmony that leads to immortality. Their search for the laws of the universe is in fact a search for immortality.

In his book *A History of Religious Beliefs and Philosophical Views in China*, Léon Wieger explains :

¹ فريديريك لونوار. (2012). *المصنف الوجيز في تاريخ الأديان*. ترجمة محمد الحداد. دار سيناترا. تونس. ص. 122

² Vincent Goossaert. (2013). *La Quête de l'Immortalité*. Collection. Le Monde Des Religions. Éd. Albin Michel. Paris. p.27

³ جوزيف نيدهام. (1995). *موجز تاريخ العلم والحضارة في الصين*. ترجمة محمد غريب جودة. الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب. ص. 148

"The Tao Principle was self-existent, eternal, infinite, complete and omnipresent. It is also impossible to name it in order to define it, because human terms apply only to sensory beings"¹.

"The Tao, as the Absolute First Principle, is absolutely without attributes or characteristics. Since it is itself without attributes or properties, it is the source and condition of all attributes and properties, and in this sense it is nothingness, but it is not simply nothing. This is because it is the source of everything. It precedes all existing things, gives them life and significance, and constitutes the oneness that is the basis of all diversity and multiplicity in the world "².

We understand that the Tao is the essence of everything, it is the origin of all existence, but it can represent more than that, it is the source. This concept is too broad to define and can mean many things.

Taoism is a humanistic philosophy, predominantly metaphysical, that introduces man into a primarily contemplative world, seeking harmony with nature and thus the universe, as understanding the Tao is understanding the universe.

"In ancient times, all people were upright and did not know that they had practised fairness. They loved one another and did not know that they practised humanity. They were honest, and did not know that they practised honesty. They kept their promises, and did not realise that they practised fidelity. All peoples were equally honest and virtuous. In the centuries that followed, the rise of vice taught them to recognise moral beauty. The appearance of evil taught them to recognise goodness. And when the age witnessed corruption, beauty and goodness appeared even more splendidly"³.

"The beauty of morality and vice, or good and evil, can be shown in opposition to each other. As soon as you see the virtuous spirit, you realise the existence of vice. As soon as you observe goodness, you realise the existence of evil" ⁴.

This is the basic idea of Taoism. The principle of oneness recognises the unity and coexistence of opposites, and knowing this helps the individual to

¹ Léon Wieger S.J. (2007). *Histoire des Croyances Religieuses et des Opinions Philosophiques en Chine depuis l'Origine jusqu'à Nos Jours ; Première et Deuxième Périodes : jusqu'en 65 après J.-C.* Collection. Les Classiques des Sciences Sociales. Éd. Canada. p.165

² جون كولر. (1995). *الفكر الشرقي القديم*. ترجمة كامل يوسف حسين. عالم المعرفة. الكويت. ص ص. 363-362

³ Lao-Tseu, *Le Livre de la Voie et de la Vertu*, Op. Cit., p.98

⁴ Ibid.

guide his or her behaviour. From the metaphysical principles of Taoism emerge its ethical principles. This is the first building block of the concept of Yin-Yang.

The ancient Chinese posed this metaphysical question, and tried to answer it through many philosophies. The goal of the intellectual exercise was to fuel rational thinking in an attempt to explain cosmic phenomena. This metaphysical vision expresses the universe that results from the interaction of two complementary vital energies, and the ideal person inspired by the harmony and creativity of the universe must emulate this pattern.

One of the main ideas of ancient Chinese thought is the belief in the balance of forces or yin and yang, and these ideas represent identical pairs, such as light and darkness, heat and cold, good and evil, which work together and correspond together towards a cosmic unity. Yin and Yang show that everything in the universe is connected and that there is no single and single thing. This world is made up of many different forces, but these forces can coexist and even complement each other. Sometimes, opposite forces in nature depend on each other to exist. The nature of yin and yang lies in the exchange and interaction between the two components. The alternation between day and night is just an example that there can be no shadow without light.

Vladimir Grikouriav says in his book on oriental philosophies that "*a system has been developed to understand reality in the simplest but also most productive way, the yin-yang system*"¹. This shows that Chinese minds believe in yin and yang, which is the dominant philosophy, so it:

*"Chinese philosophy is dominated by the concepts of yin and yang"*².

The Chinese also noted that in nature there are five basic elements that are closely interrelated, and through interaction among them the world is created. It is with us that we can understand this world. Earth, metal, wood, fire and water rotate among themselves.

Wood creates fire, and through fire the earth is nourished with earth, and metal is formed inside it and in turn emits water that finally feeds the wood, so nature flourishes and life is born. Wood also absorbs the earth with its roots, and the earth in turn absorbs water, which can extinguish the fire that melts the metal, and with metal the wood can eventually be cut.

¹ Vladimir Grigorieff. (2005). *Les Philosophies Orientales ; l'Inde et la Chine*. Éd. Eyrolles. France. p.163

² Marcel Granet. (1968). *La Pensée Chinoise*. Éd. Albin Michel. France. p.72

This cycle of formation or cycle of creation is an attempt to explain the origin of the world and assets. We can eventually establish a law for the process of creating the world by means of the five-element theory.

This is the idea by which the connection of nature with the human world was explained. Thus, society is constantly changing, and the cycle of the five elements is embodied through the sequence of historical events. Nature has a great influence on human society.

The Chinese interest in nature based on the idea of Taoism led them to discover five basic components, on which the ecosystem depends, and whose existence cannot be independent of human existence. Some philosophers have therefore looked for the link between these essential elements, and their role in the environment first and in human society second.

"The theory of the five elements is, in essence, an answer to the question of the structure of the universe"¹. "Both the theory of the five elements and the theory of Yin Yang influenced the emergence of neo-Confucianism"².

In human behaviour, good and evil are complex topics due to the lack of a specific definition, but many thinkers believe that what is right is what brings lasting happiness, while what is bad causes pain and hardship. For Lao Tseu :

"The Tao represents the universal constants, and in knowing them, man can triumph in achieving wisdom, self-satisfaction and inner peace. In its ignorance, disaster befalls man and society"³.

This means that by realising the secret of this existence, the Chinese man can live peacefully in the midst of nature, because he has come to understand its laws and follow its regulations. This idea is reminiscent of Stoic philosophy, which calls for man to live in harmony with nature, as it is nature that leads us to virtue.

The Tao represents the cosmic constants and in knowing it, man achieves spiritual credit, which he earns by performing right and ethical actions. Lao Tseu also says :

"The saint uses the Tao to rebirth the world and all created beings need his support"⁴.

¹ جون كولر، *الفكر الشرقي القديم*، المرجع السابق، ص، 324

² المرجع نفسه، ص، 325

³ عمر عبد الحي. (1999). *الفلسفة والفكر السياسي في الصين القديمة*. المؤسسة الجامعية للدراسات والنشر والتوزيع. الطبعة الأولى. لبنان. ص.

⁴ Lao-Tseu, *Le Livre de la Voie et de la Vertu*, Op. Cit., p.99

*"When his merits are realised, he considers them as if they were alien to him and is not attached to them. He does not boast of his ability, he does not care about his competence, that is why he is worthy and that happiness and virtue accompany him"*¹.

In Chinese culture, a saint is characterised by great humanity and exemplary behaviour, and is venerated after his death because of the spiritual perfection he achieved during his life and his influence on society.

The sage Lao Tseu describes the virtuous qualities of a saint :

*"He renounces music, glamour and wealth, the delights of the table, and the splendour of palaces and towers. Having suppressed these three things, sufficiency, luxury, and opulence. He practices non-responsiveness and the empire changes of its own accord"*². *"The saint maintains the great image of the Tao, and all the people of the empire flock to him, and he gives them peace and tranquillity"*³. *Because he who acts wisely will know the truth about himself, he will feel happy in his movement of thought and his ability to act with ease "*⁴.

It is as if the sage Lao Tseu is trying to define the Tao through the qualities of the saints, and that they are the first to understand the origin of the universe. The saint is the epitome of the Taoist.

The saint then gives an example to society in honesty, in work, in fraternity and solidarity, in generosity, kindness and humanity through the Tao. Non-responsiveness means abandoning thinking. Saadoun Mahmoud Al-Samouk says in the "Encyclopedia of Ancient Religions and Beliefs":

*"Lao philosophy focuses on the abandonment of thinking, as he believes that there is no good in it for argument or debate, as it harms life more than it benefits it, and that one's happiness is gained through solitude, austerity and quiet contemplation of nature rather than thinking"*⁵.

The abandonment of action and inaction is embodied in renunciation :

*"Nature does everything, and man has only to refrain from doing anything, because nature takes care of it "*⁶.

This means that man should follow the movement of nature and live in accordance with it. But can his philosophy be considered a negative philosophy,

¹ Lao-Tseu, *Le Livre de la Voie et de la Vertu*, Op. Cit., p.100

² *Ibid.*, p.145

³ *Ibid.*, p.70

⁴ رؤوف شلبي. (1983). *الأديان القديمة في الشرق*. ط2. دار الشرق. بيروت-القاهرة. ص. 153

⁵ سعدون محمود الساموك، *موسوعة الأديان والمعتقدات القديمة*، المرجع السابق، ص، 113

⁶ عمر عبد الحى، *الفلسفة والفكر السياسي في الصين القديمة*، المرجع السابق، ص، 170

if we want to criticise it? Because if everyone is isolated, according to the Chinese sage, society would have no value and would not even exist. All human beings cannot live in isolation from society, it is necessary to think about it and constantly try to organise it and succeed in adapting within its surroundings. This is what Confucian religion and philosophy, along with other schools, such as the School of Law, have focused on.

By escaping to nature, the Taoists may have intended to practice meditation, which is a mental activity whose main goal is to help the mind get rid of bad thoughts, as meditation can develop a person's attention and sensitivity to better understand the world around them and find answers to many questions. Thus, nature has led man to the knowledge of the truth. If one understands the laws of nature, it is easier to integrate into the system that runs the world.

In general, the Taoists believed in this, in the power of nature, that all questions about nature have their answers in nature itself, and that only man's surroundings can preserve the human being, of which he is a constituent.

Lao Tseu speaks of a virtue he calls ti and its role in man's following of the Tao :

*"The virtue (Ti) , which emanates from the Tao , invites man to simplicity until he becomes the perfect man or sage who is enlightened by the eternal Tao and fused with it in a cosmic unity , thus transforming man into the calm , sober , self-knowing sage"*¹.

This idea implies a profoundly mystical view of the nature of things and forms the basis of Taoist ethics, as Chinese civilisation and philosophy cannot be understood without addressing Taoism and the Tao.

This virtue calls for the practice of inward looking, i.e. measuring the quality of the mind and spirit, and this simplicity advised by the sage Lao Tseu helps to give up short-term and fleeting pleasures to achieve long-term success.

Simplicity is the Chinese being content with what they have, and when they are content, they are happy. This virtue directs man towards nature, and in nature there are all the secrets.

In contrast to the saint is the sage, Henri Van Praag says :

"For the sage , the true science is not the science of tangible things , but the science of the absolute truth that transcends tangible things , the science of

¹ عمر عبد الحى، الفلسفة والفكر السياسي في الصين القديمة ، المرجع السابق، ص 80-81

the Absolute, which the Taoist school calls Tao. It is not acquired by study ; those who wish to obtain the Tao seek what study does not give, those who wish to obtain it by effort seek what effort does not give, and experience alone allows the attainment of the Tao" ¹.

Experience is the contemplative life and the practice of metaphysics, and this is the way to attain the Tao.

Indeed, philanthropy often requires a great deal of effort and enthusiasm, and wise people have long mastered the practice of virtue with love and determination. They have the strength to be able to weigh the pros and cons and be as fair as possible to everyone.

For a sage :

"Tao is a philosophical attitude, and the best way to learn is to observe, read and meditate" ².

"Sages have pondered this world and found nothing more precious than life" ³.

"Individuals valued the sages, ambition was born in the human heart, and for the first time we saw the spirit of struggle and fight" ⁴.

This makes us validate the position that it is not the strong individuals who achieve the most, but those who keep their eyes fixed on the sky, on nature, who let the Tao guide them, and are always willing to dare the unknown and risk danger for the sake of others.

"In Chinese philosophy, the sage has integrated a system of harmonious relationships between man and the universe" ⁵. "In the Chinese tradition, the sage or philosopher can rise by an effort of meditation and reasoning to the source of truth itself" ⁶.

From this perspective, we need to understand what is the difference between a saint and a sage.

Confucius has the answer to this question :

"Both the saint and the sage are endowed with reason and the light of insight, as are all other persons. But the saint never strayed even a little from

¹ ه. فان براج، حكمة الصين، المرجع السابق، ص، 45

² Lao-Tseu, *Le Livre de la Voie et de la Vertu*, Op. Cit., p.100

³ Ivan Kamenarovic. (1998). *Printemps et Automnes de Lu Buwei*. Traduit du chinois par l'auteur même. Collection. Patrimoine ; Confucianisme. Éd. Du Cerf. Paris. p.44

⁴ Lao-Tseu, *Le Livre de la Voie et de la Vertu*, Op. Cit., p.100

⁵ Maxime Kaltenmark. (2012). *Dictionnaire de la Pensée Chinoise Traditionnelle*. p.79

⁶ Albert Nader. (2003). *Courants d'Idées en Islam du Sixième au Vingtème Siècle*. Éd. Médiaspaul. pp. 68-69

*the straight path, while the sage did not always succeed in this task because of the various obstacles he encountered in the practice of virtue"*¹.

A saint is one who is characterised by spiritual elevation and exemplary behaviour, and a sage is one who is characterised by intelligence, common sense, eloquence, knowledge and philosophy. For Confucius, the saint is the Taoist and the sage is the Confucian philosopher. This is proof that Chinese philosophical doctrines are related to each other and coexist peacefully with each other.

*"The proclamation of moral and political reform by Confucius constitutes a complete teaching, a method capable of transforming the ordinary individual into a Shun Tzu. It does not matter who can become a "true man" as long as they learn ceremonial behaviour in accordance with the Tao"*².

A good man follows a set of necessary qualities and behaviours, collectively called virtue, and acting in accordance with virtue is following the path of the Tao. The Tao, then, is the path or way, the path of life and the way of nature. A universal principle that explains life and man's role in it.

Zhuāng Zhōu (about the IVe century BC), the Taoist Lao Tseu, was a philosopher who was influenced by nature to the point of isolation from people and living among it. He emphasised:

*"He emphasised man's unity with nature or with the Tao because he found in it man's attainment of complete liberation in existence. Chuang Tzu's philosophy was based on the idea of the complete unity of man with the Tao, which is based on complete and total spontaneity and surrender to nature in which nothing ceases to move and be active. Chuang Tzu believed that the Tao is the eternal law and essence of nature, which is not perceived by the mind, but is felt by the human being with his blood and instinct, and is the eternal and timeless Tao. In his view, the Tao existed from time immemorial, before heaven and earth existed. He saw in it the only way to believe in the complete and absolute freedom of man"*³.

This belief, in allowing life to unfold in accordance with the Tao, does not, however, extend to Taoist rituals. The rituals of Taoist practice are absolutely in accordance with Taoist understanding, but they have been influenced by Buddhist and Confucian practices, so that today they are

¹ De Valade. (1783). *La Morale de Confucius Philosophe de la Chine*, Imprimerie De Valade, Paris, p. 102

² ميرسيا إلياد. (1987). *تاريخ المعتقدات والأفكار الدينية*. ترجمة عبد الهادي عباس. الجزء الثاني. دار دمشق. الطبعة الأولى. ص. 24

³ المرجع نفسه، ص، 123

sometimes quite elaborate. Every prayer and incantation that make up a Taoist ritual or festival must be precisely pronounced and every step of the ritual must be perfectly observed. Taoist religious festivals are presided over by an officiating Grand Master, and these celebrations can last from a few days to more than a week. During the ritual, the Grand Master and his assistants must perform every action and recitation in accordance with tradition, otherwise their efforts are in vain. This is an interesting departure from the usual Taoist understanding, which aims to 'go with the flow' without worrying about external rules or elaborate religious practices. Taoist rituals aim to honour the ancestors of a village, community or town.

The most profound interpretation in philosophy is that of the cosmos, or the origin of the universe, which for the Chinese is manifested in nature. Thus, the philosophical and spiritual text of Chuang Tzu proclaims the cosmic Tao, which is the source of the universe. Various themes arise from this idea, such as the continuity of nature and humans or the interaction between the world and human society. This constant rhythm and transformation of the universe comes from the Tao. However, he differs from Lao Tseu in his emphasis on sensory perception or sensory experience, which is the ability of man to direct his actions and know his environment based on the data provided by his senses, and this stage is achieved before the experience of mental perception. Man can reach the truth through the senses before the mind, which means that there is something that can be distinguished from the mind, which is the role of the senses. However, the term senses is used in a broader sense and can refer to the role of the heart in the cognitive process, meaning that the Tao can be accessed and perceived through the heart.

This idea is consistent with Pascal Blaise's theory in the Christian religious faith that the knowledge of God or the truth of truths, which corresponds to the Tao in Taoist philosophy, is a knowledge that we can access through sensation, through emotions before reason or rational perception, as the heart has its own reasons that the mind does not perceive. The heart, unlike the mind, can access knowledge without evidence or proof, and it is through the heart that a person can realise their humanity.

Taoism focuses on nature while Confucianism is more concerned with human society, as will be shown in the following, but both are considered by the Chinese individual to be wise ways of dealing with the universe.

Unlike Buddhism (which came from India but became very popular in China), Taoism grew out of the observations and beliefs of the Chinese people. The principles of Taoism had a considerable impact on Chinese culture because they came from the people themselves, and were a natural expression of the Chinese way of understanding the universe. The concept of the importance of the harmonious existence of balance corresponded well with the equally popular philosophy of Confucianism.

It is assumed that Confucius, the father of Confucianism, was a contemporary of Lao Tzu, the founder of the Taoist path, because Confucianism is not a religion, it is a moral and social teaching, its aim being for man to find his balance and behave in accordance with several virtues. The Confucian way of life is designed for people who are involved in society, in the group, in the community. The Taoist way of life, on the other hand, is for Chinese people who are involved in the whole world, in all of nature, or rather in the universe.

For Confucius, man should seek harmony, rightness, righteousness, wisdom, obedience, justice, charity and goodness, and should follow the essential values of education and moral rectitude. It attaches importance to the example and imitation of virtuous people, reliable, correct and honest people to virtue and insists on the value and greatness of the teacher. Virtue implies filial piety, respect for authority and moderation. The ideal life proposed is simple, clear, sincere and frugal, devoted to musical culture, rituals, ancestor worship and personal relationships. Balance and social sustainability are based on the importance of the first nucleus of society : the family and respect for hierarchy.

It establishes a highly hierarchical social order, with each individual having to respect the person above him in the hierarchy : the son owes respect to his father, who in turn owes respect to his master, and the master in turn owes respect to his emperor. At the top of this pyramidal hierarchy is the man with almost absolute authority, who is of course the emperor, charged with ensuring harmony, fairness, balance, harmony, well-being and happiness for his people. Confucianism thus prioritises the interests of the group over personal interests, legitimising political power, which is supposed to represent the interests of the people, of society. But the Confucian social order was at the service of the imperial system and justified the domination of the emperor and his administration, thus contributing to the construction of an authoritarian political system and a state bureaucracy that lasted for centuries in China. It is here that Confucianism is criticised for being the official sponsor of the empire and of the

emperor's absolute rule. This status has caused it to lose its reputation among young people influenced by the Western civilisation of the modern era.

Le confucianisme a connu son plus grand rayonnement cinq siècles avant J.-C., soutenu par la dynastie des Han. Il devient la philosophie du royaume et de la féodalité et le reste jusqu'à la chute de l'empire en 1911. Dès lors, il sert de base à l'éducation et à la formation des élites du pays. Après avoir perdu de son influence au profit du bouddhisme venu de l'Inde, une nouvelle dynastie, celle des Song (960-1279), permet à la doctrine de revivre. L'école des lettrés, disciples de Confucius, décide de faire ressurgir la tradition confucéenne, en y apportant quelques modifications. Aidée par l'avènement de l'imprimerie et soutenue par l'empire, qui encourage le développement instructif, cette nouvelle avancée est telle qu'elle est connue sous le nom de néo-confucianisme. La multiplication des écoles publiques et des concours de fonctionnaires, ainsi que la création d'une académie impériale, ont permis une transmission en profondeur des valeurs confucéennes dans la société.

"Confucius viewed the Tao as the path taken by the ancient emperors and legendary people, which can be defined as following the path of right morality, i.e. following the Tao of humanity. Confucius's view of the Tao was different from that of Lao Tzu, who treated it in relation to nature. Confucius understood the Tao as the path or approach, the Ren gene of humanity, the kindness of the human heart and the love of others, which is realised by following the essence of one's humanity, and all goodness, happiness and virtue are realised if its conditions are adhered to"¹.

We understand from this that for Confucius, the Tao is virtue, and to follow it is to follow the path of virtue. The excellence of a Chinese man is measured by his virtues. Virtue is the ability to live by principles and values that uplift society and elevate the individual to a high rank in his relations with others. Anyone can become a good human being or at least come close to the ideal through study, learning and relentless practice.

But while Confucianism brought its intelligence and logic to China, Taoism aims to ensure that man is in harmony with nature and the cosmos, through both body and mind.

For Greek philosophers, such as Socrates, the goal of virtue is to do good, and with good, individuals and society are upright. For Plato, it is a natural

عمر عبد الحي، الفلسفة والفكر السياسي في الصين القديمة، المرجع السابق، ص، 71¹

privilege that makes it possible to organise an ideal society. From an Islamic perspective, Al-Farabi tried to propose a project of a virtuous society in a virtuous city as opposed to ignorant cities. Or simply a city of God, as St Augustine tried to do around the fourth century AD. The practice of virtue ultimately leads to a moral life. The Chinese have a long tradition of philosophical enquiry concerned with the ultimate nature of the universe, its origin, its components, its way of life, and so on. In this sense, we can speak of metaphysics in Chinese philosophy. Its central issues revolve around man's relationship with nature.

Overall, Taoist philosophy is characterised by the importance of values such as pity, kindness, mercy, ethics, values, reflection, harmony with nature, altruism and magnanimity. It advocates man's harmony with the Tao and believes in the ethereal course of things. The Tao exalts immobility as a means of achieving harmony. It believes in and seeks immortality. It is said that immortality should not be understood literally, but rather as the attainment and enjoyment of longevity.

For the Chinese, the Tao is the order of the universe, the source of the universe, and this idea can only be understood through real experience, such as trying to understand good and evil, and the role of the saint and the sage in Chinese society. The Tao must be realised by the human mind in order to achieve virtuous practices, and is the living witness of an immense current in Chinese thought: Taoism.

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