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Daoism Confucianism

Daoism: An Introduction

China has contributed immensely towards the culture of the world, some significant contributions include T'ang culture which is Buddhist influence in art and the same is predominant in the field of sculpture and numerous other masterpieces which are well admired all round the world. One such masterpiece is Daoism, the term may sound complicated but in reality it is not as complicated as it sounds. This paper will discuss the evolution and the principles of Daoism.

Daoism has a native connection like another term which is Confucianism, the spirit of the Chinese people is reflected by Daoism. It evolved from the ancient Chinese society and it portrays the beliefs and ideology of the Han nationality. The source of its origination is from the worship of gods and spirits. Daoism is regarded as philosophical tradition of China along with Confucianism. Daoism encompasses thought and practice that sometimes are viewed as philosophical, as religious, or as a combination of both. While modern scholars, especially those in the West, have been preoccupied with classifying Daoist material as either philosophical or religious, historically Daoists themselves have been uninterested in such categories and dichotomies. (IEP. UTM 1, September 2008)

Scholars across Europe have been working meticulously on how to classify Daoism, whether it constitutes to philosophy or religion. The confusion has prevailed for quite some time now. During the time of the Han Dynasty, Daoism was not in existence but early texts like Daodejing and the Zhuangzi

triggered off the beginning of Daoism. There is a common belief among the people that a teacher by the name Laozi founded the school and also wrote himself all the major works called as Daodejing, the same is also known as Laozi. Daoists were the people who followed Daoism; they firmly believed that immortality was not a gift from god. They also believed that this is a connection between the nature and their bodies. People who though like this were believed to be living in the mountains and considering the same they considered their bodies to be mountains and walked on the path of immortality. They involved themselves in interesting activities such as physical exercises, discovering new sexual postitions to make sure that the flow of energy is greater than what it was in the earlier position, they also tried their hands at Chemistry but many of them died because of over experimentation. Not only did they die but a few emporers who followed in their footsteps also met with the same fate as the Daiosts. Get help with your essay from our expert essay writers...

Daoism always wanted people to cultivate the quality of self-cultivation in them. The teachings that were later called Daoism were first known under the name of Huanglao Dao in the 3rd and 2nd cent. BCE. The thought world transmitted in this stream is what Sima Tan meant by Daojia. The Huanglao School was a center of Daoist practitioners in the state of Qi (modern Shandong). Huangdi was the name for the Yellow Emperor, from whom the rulers of Qi said they were descended. When Emperor Wu, the sixth sovereign of the Han dynasty (r. 140-87 BCE) elevated Confucianism to the status of the official state ideology and training in it became mandatory for all bureaucratic officials, the tension with Daoism became more evident. And

yet, at court people still sought longevity. Wu continued to engage in many Daoist practices, including the use of alchemy, climbing sacred Taishan (Mt. Tai), and presenting petitions to heaven. (IEP. UTM 1, September 2008).

Principles of natural order as first established in ancient Chinese philosophy

To define the principles, a step by step approach towards learning a few new concepts is required. The most important term is Dao, translating the Chinese word into English is very difficult because no word in English exactly gives the Chinese meaning but the english word which comes closest is the way, the meaning is the right path, the word describes the nature of the world in the true sense. People believe that Dao keeps the universe balanced, it is a strange belief but the sentiments of the Chinese people are attached with it. Knowing the key terms is very important as it paves the way in understanding Daoism better. The term Dao should not be misunderstood, it is not treated as god or a guiding figure, it is merely the path which should be adopted by an individual. The term is also perceived as a road. By this it is understood that the Chinese believed in changes, where as resisting changes is human nature, so from this it can be made out that the Chinese were unlike other people who had this feeling of resisting changes.

The next important term is Wu Wei, this is the core of Daoism or in other words it will not be unfair to say that this forms the center of Daoism. If the literal meaning of this term is taken, it means without action or in other words doing a task effortlessly. The main goal of Wu Wei is to align with Tao, hence it can be made out that the two terms are related in more ways than

one. Wu wei should be the way of life, because the dao always benefits, it does not harm (ch. 81) The way of heaven (dao of tian) is always on the side of good (ch. 79) and virtue (de) comes forth from the dao alone (ch. 21). What causes this natural embedding of good and benefit in the dao is vague and elusive (ch. 35), not even the sages understand it (ch. 76). But the world is a reality that is filled with spiritual force, just as a sacred image used in religious ritual might be (ch. 29). (IEP. UTM 1, September 2008).

The next term is Pu, the terms sound really strange because these are taken from Chinese language and any language which is not familiar creates a strange impact on people. The term means simplicity; it is all about passive reception. This is perception of people leaving prejudice out of the equation, which is very difficult in any circumstances. Prejudice plays a key role in anyones perception and leaving it out of the equation is a very very big ask for all the normal people. The term Pu is all about being content with what is available with a person. The fourth and the last principle is De, the concept is very very complex and obviously very difficult to understand. To simplify the concept and understand it better it is fair to say that De is nothing but the expression of personal integrity. So the four terms aim at developing four qualities in a person namely oneness, all are equal and no differentiation of any kind should be shown towards anybody, harmonial action aims at maintaing harmony among the people, dynamic balance focusses upon bringing stability in the people and cyclic growth makes sure that the people grow as individuals which is imperative for any individual, everyone should always strive to grow, there should not be a standstill as far as growth is

concerned. All the four principles have their aims and all are meant to instill some quality or the other in an individual.

How the style of poetry conforms to the basic ideals of the Daoists

The poems written by the Daoists were called the Ci-poetry; it followed strict rhymic notes and lines. It was also made sure that the words used in the poetry were precise and made good sense. The Daoists composed Ballads, a musical poem which tells a story. The Book of Laozi's Conversion of the Barbarians also collects 18 pieces of Ci of the Venerable Sovereign's 16 Transformations. They belong to Daoist tales about deities' transformation. Tales about deities' transformation are a means of relating the transformation of deities. " Daoist tales about deities' transformation" refer to the style of relating the transformation of Daoist deities. In order to be adapted to the need of reciting and singing, this genre always adopts the form of " yunwen" (i. e. literary composition in rhyme). For example, Ci of the Venerable Sovereign's 16 Transformations is a piece of yunwen. The author arranges the plots according to the changes in orientations, and the shifting in places is based on the positions of the Eight Trigrams ⁴ in nine palaces of " change". The Eight Trigrams represent the eight directions, and two cycles of the Eight Trigrams produce 16 pieces of Ci of transformation. (Eng. Taoism, 1 September 2008). The concept of the poems generally focussed upon immortality, ways to become immortal and what it takes to be immortal. Poetry was very influential in shaping up the people at that time.

Conclusion

Classifying the term Daoism as philosophical or religious causes an ambiguity, let the scholars decide that but the positives can be taken and applied in day to day life, results will surely be visible if people stick to the four principles of Daoism which focus upon oneness, harmony, growth and dynamic balance.

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