

EDUCATION BEYOND RATIONALITY

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Let me start with a story from Indian tradition. A well-known svāmī was asked by a poor mother of a sugar addicted son to help her and the entire family, which was brought on the verge of economic collapse by the unhealthy manners of the boy, whose health was already ruined. After various doctors, therapists, and wise men tried to persuade the boy to change his unhealthy manners, the woman finally sought the advice of the svāmī, who immediately sent the mother and the boy home and ordered them to come back in two weeks. After two weeks they visited the svāmī again. Following this encounter the boy was completely cured of his self-destructive behavioural pattern. The surprised mother gratefully returned to the svāmī and asked him why did they have to travel the long way after two weeks again. Could he not help them the first time? The svāmī explained her that in order to persuade the boy, he first had to try to live without sugar himself, to try and be sure that he himself was able to carry out and incorporate the learning which he was trying to hand over to the boy.

What kind of education are we able to transmit to the children if we ourselves do not engage in some kind of spiritual training which would enable us to embrace life in all its manifestations and provide us with necessary flexibility for survival and growth through various crises, setbacks, illnesses, etc., which represent important tests of our daily living?

From the perspective of the so-called socialist ethical orientation, which was dominant in various countries of the 20th century, I will try to show how such one-dimensionality as a by-product of an ideology might be transcended by insights of Asian spiritual traditions, which might help to provide tools for the young people in the search of their own way and the generation of their own well-being also in the times of crises which are necessary part of the growing up process.

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Allowing myself to reflect on the dilemma of education and rationality, or, rather, on the search for the most suitable ways of education, I find it to be a general problem to do with quick growth of science, on one side, and the availability of experts (real teachers or professors), on the other: professors who are in a position to be able to catch up with the new knowledge and to be able to impart it to the younger generation in a way of a multidimensional spirituality. At the same time real teachers should be able to overcome the conservative trends, which long ago gave up their scientific and pioneer spirit and are just trying to hold on to their status and feeling of self-satisfaction. Somebody who is genuinely working for science and education and their development has to accept the fact that one should nurture the pioneer role all the time. At the other end, somebody who has reached the status of “respected professor” and is only reproducing the same curriculum is not just a dry bough, but a very dangerous root, which endangers the whole tree of scientific knowledge and spiritual education. We are also confronted with the phenomenon, that in these transitional periods some unqualified people without real knowledge and experience are flourishing and are carrying science into the area of improvisation. One of the constitutional acts of my *Alma Mater*¹ stated that a university is not an institution whose sole purpose is to give the country and the nation a certain number of bureaucrats, doctors, lawyers, and judges, but it is a higher spiritual place, where permanent spiritual dimensions are formed; it is the free and public property of a free nation. The fact that, in the Europe of the Middle Ages, the universities included theology and philosophy in their programme is explained by a basic need of the thinking being: to be able to catch one’s essence and one’s role in this world first and, then, to mobilize one’s intellect to understand what is there in the environment to be changed and what should be taken as it is. At the same time, the high mission of university as a self-critical institution which should be the highest place of the spirit and the creator of permanent spiritual values should not be endangered by supporting the programme of the political parties which have been the closest to its ideology; it should, however, avoid the reductionism and political contamination and should lead towards humanity and harmony in the area of rich pragmatism offered by the universities in today’s world. Various political ideologies should not be allowed to infiltrate themselves into the

¹Ljubljana University, Slovenia, Europe.

programme and management of the university, which is also partly seen from the trends in general education. Such ideological support can obviously not make any scientific and spiritual contribution or creativity and make the life of university any richer, especially in the spiritual sense.

This was even more true for the secularised societies, where creation of moral-ethical norms was entrusted to the political forums and Marxist philosophy, which pledged that any “misfortunes” in life, which constantly appear, should be constantly changed into valuable human contexts, whereby each individual can take part in the making of humanity. In the fight for the moral quality of the act, the people were asked for “constant self-formation” and constant process of distancing from oneself and others. No wonder that such one-dimensional rational ethics got into crisis. Ethics is at least two-dimensional. It is a theoretical and philosophical practice, which can be well-defined and formulated in a series of norms. On the other hand, it is also an intimate, hardly describable inner feeling that something is good and right from the viewpoint of humanity and the cosmos, sometimes similar to what Socrates named as “daimonion.” One cannot define this coordinate with rational definitions, nor can one approach it with logical measures. It can only be perceived, experienced as a mystical flash, for which the conditions and the atmosphere can be created with a certain meditative preparation. The ethical decision – the one that would free a person from various doubts – can be met where the alert rational judgement accords with that intrinsic feeling. There should be some space left for another, meditative, mystical dimension, which does not even depend on whether “one believes in God or not...” in the Euro-American sense and thus, cannot be a monopoly of this or that church or party.

Different movements and upheavals that can be perceived are in this sense stimulating, even though at the present stage they are seemingly anarchic. Could they be understood as an analogy with the formation of Neo-Confucianism in China, which has grown – if such a simplification would be permitted – as an alloy of orthodox Confucianism with mystical Daoism² and Buddhism? The problem of wisdom and liberation are the main concerns of these two central Chinese philosophical schools, Confucianism and Daoism. Confucius stressed the importance of

²The Pinyin transcription for Chinese characters has been used; therefore, Daoism instead of the older transcription Taoism, Dao instead of Tao, etc.

benevolence (*ren*) in relation to ritual and rules of propriety (*li*). The self-realisation can be achieved and the wishes should be fulfilled in the specific ethical context. Daoism, famous for its use of paradox, which should bring the adept to a higher level of understanding and experiencing the reality, understood the Truth as *purity and sincerity of the highest degree*. The Superior man is able to reach the *Dao* and one's own liberation through meditation, intuition and congeniality with the feminine.

As for the notion of truth and education in its spirit, we can seek the truth more or less obsessively, or we can knowingly evade it, distort it deliberately, or flee from it through anxiety or fear. We can perhaps erase it from the consciousness, and may pronounce extreme states in one direction or another as 'sick'. We can also practise it, as happened in Asian traditions, without devoting logical thought to it. Do differences in cultures exist in relation to these different characteristics on a continuum: *truth-lies?*

There is, in fact, keenly present in man's consciousness, a conflicting inclination between truth and a tendency to lie, especially when it comes to accepting the inescapable fact of life, sickness, and death not only on an intellectual, rational level, but with the participation of the whole personality, with all its emotional and spiritual accompaniments. History and a cross-section of modern systems of values show considerable differences from this point of view. Even if we do not enter the realm of "border situations" (*Grenzsituationen* as Karl Jaspers named them) and remain on the level of more or less codified forms of awareness and "protocol" in the context of everyday or occasional meetings in human society, we come across interesting differences in relative manifestations in the Asian world, on the one hand, and European-American world, on the other. Profound analysis reveals the difference and roots of these in the collective subconscious of the world of human spirituality.

Anxiety about existence pushes mankind everywhere into striving for insurance against every sort of frustration in life, whereby they frequently overstep the border of the rational, in the search for an elixir of longevity, or even (illusory) immortality. In the subconscious world, even modern man has not succeeded in overcoming this illusion. Philosophy, religion, and education in a broader sense are intended to offer man wisdom by which he can support his life struggle, and which enables him to understand and emotionally accept the law of man's life and remain open for the Path among people who have grown up in the European-American

cultural background and those who have been part of the Asian cultural traditions. The theme is somewhat more topical because the moment is approaching when the philosophy and methods of overcoming the Path to “enlightenment” or “salvation” of the European and Asian worlds will meet and, thus, in creating unity help also in preserving individual differences. This is even more important in the era of the breakthrough of European and American rationalism, as well as its interaction with some Asian theoretical and practical approaches in education. In this framework, a critical analysis should be offered to the question of modernisation and rationality. Development in a certain direction deserves special attention because of the complexity of the theme, and because of the specific problems of the influx and interaction of Euro-American rationalism in the Asian perspectives and the theoretical currents which are either receptive or are rejecting them. I will try to show the problem of rationalism, the modes of transcending it in education and in a philosophical position, as well as in a way of thought. It became established alongside neo-Confucianism and its approach to rationality and education with the central attention in the field of methodology and the transformation of the neo-Confucian tradition into a strictly rationalist orientation. By rethinking this stream of thought and education, one might come closer to the movements related to the levels of consciousness that were activated in philosophical undertakings in various Asian philosophical schools which from the beginning through various stages of their development have attempted to put the inexpressible into words. The awareness of the insufficiency of words brought many original solutions. In the Song dynasty, for instance, China produced a variety of diagrams (*tu*), by which the philosophers and practitioners represented their theories, which often arose on the basis of meditation techniques and could not be fully transmitted by means of language alone.

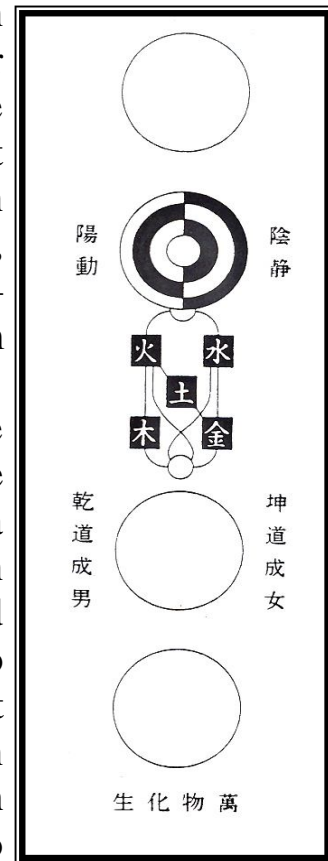
In the following I shall present it as an example of trans-rational representation of the Truth and education in it, a case of Chinese spiritual topography from the Song dynasty (960-1279). Zhou Dunyi's (1017-1073) *Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained (Taiji tushuo)* and in Zhu Xi's (1130-1200) commentary to it, brings us once again to the problem of the possible Buddhist origin of the diagram. It contains a graphical presentation of the progressive awakening to the Truth, a distinct form of Buddhist cartography of spirit, formed by half-black, half-white circles. Not entering the question of its origin (be it Buddhist or Daoist) and who

borrowed it from whom, I would rather reflect upon the question of what significance it might have for education beyond words, especially in regard to the dimension of practice or practical philosophy. Is it possible that such diagrams indicate that at a certain point of describing the way to the revelation of Truth, the philosophers and practitioners gave up words – which later commentators of the diagram reintroduced?

Before concentrating on the diagram, it might be instructive to have a look at one of the possible readings of the text, namely a Buddhist stand on a non-Ego, trans-Ego approach to the world, based on the realization of the fact that the things and phenomena in the world exist and cease according to their own rules and because of themselves, and not because of ourselves and in accordance with our own laws and expectations. A liberating thought, which might also be read in the following passage by Shao Yung (1011-1077):

Look at things from the point of view of things, and you will see (their true) nature; look at things from your own point of view, and you will see (only your own) feelings; for nature is neutral and clear, while feelings are prejudiced and dark!³

If we look at the central preoccupation of Neo-Confucians – the ways of attaining sagehood and incorporating it into their own lives, which means that it was not only a theoretical speculation based on ancient methods, but also a realizable state of existence – we might take Zhou Dunyi as the author who stressed the importance of tranquillity in education and self-cultivation. There are other passages by Zhou Dunyi, in which he states that the original nature of human beings is pure and tranquil. The question of tranquillity will also serve us as a gateway to Zhou Dunyi's *Taiji tushuo*. Whether or not this very short work, so important for Neo-Confucian metaphysics and so instructive for education beyond pure rationality, has brought anything new to Chinese thought or not, is not a



³See Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956, 2: 456.

question to be discussed here. Since it opened up a period of such broad and differentiated speculation in the Song dynasty, it will rather serve us as an example of a text which, although loaded with Buddhist tones, directed a different orientation in Chinese intellectual history, namely the Neo-Confucianism. As such it is important for education and its understanding, since it displays clear trans-rational characteristics and is an example of a diagram deriving from and used for meditative purposes and self-knowledge.

To recapitulate briefly: *Taiji tushuo* is an explanation (*shuo*) of the diagram (*tu*) of Supreme Ultimate (*taiji*) deriving from Ultimate of Non-Being (*wuji*) and producing *yin* and *yang* or the universal active and tranquil cosmic forces which, in union with the Five Elements, engender all things, of which the human being is the most intelligent. It is a cosmological scheme that has been produced by the imaginative word of this “most intelligent” of beings, who have also been endowed with wisdom that the subtlest thoughts of the mind cannot be expressed in words. As in the *Yijing (The Book of Changes)*, where the images are the sort of steps in impermanence to the eternal end, so here we deal with a form of imago where an element of human personality is already present, and the image formed by its specific laws of experiencing and imagining the world and one’s place in it. Thus, it is already a mediated view, since the objective Truth is not possible. The formation of any idea is already a shift from anything that might be called ‘Truth’.

The important point in Zhou Dunyi is the *wuji* being the origin of *taiji*. This statement can also be found in the *Dao de jing* (chapter 40), as well:

Reversion is the action of Dao.

Weakness is the function of Dao.

All things in the world come from being

And being comes from non-being.⁴

Wuji is the great emptiness from which the original Beginning is born and which is situated before the Five Elements. In Zhou Dunyi, the empty circles at the bottom and on the top of the diagram create the middle space as a contrast to tranquillity – the middle space of the diagram is a realm of

⁴See the English translation in *The Way of Lao Tzu (Tao-te thing)*, translated with introductory essay, comments, and notes by Wing-tsit Chan, New York: Macmillan, 1985, 173.

change. We should, however, not forget at this point that according to Buddhism, the notion of change is proof of unreality. The myriad changes are all man's creations. In reality there is just one thing, or rather nothing – a supreme void – symbolized by an empty circle. The void circle might also indicate the possible dissolution of the boundary between the self and the non-self, which in its consequence leads to tranquillity bound to bliss and happiness. The boundary is important because it divides the 'real' world from the 'illusory' (phenomenal) one, which is void. The Great Void without any physical form, a paragon of perfect impartiality and a field of complete lack of Ego-interests is the above-form realm beyond-form in which the world of changes becomes irrelevant.

However, it is the world of human beings which is the very place of purification, since, with all its resources of the impure and obstructions, it offers a person the very possibility of spiritual transformation. In this dimension of the cultivation of mind, we see the necessary dimension of tranquillity so stressed by Zhou Dunyi, the master of quiescence, and often referred to as a source of a possible strain of quietism in Song thought. If Zhou Dunyi regarded tranquillity or stillness as fundamental, made it his main consideration, it is instructive to look at the polarity between stillness and movement in the *Yijing (The Book of Changes)*, one of the books from which he drew his inspiration. He adopted the *Yijing's* assumption of a polarity between tranquillity and movement as its complement and, therefore, with the change, achieved continuity, and with continuity illusory permanence.

As for education we might look at the *Taiji tushuo* and Zhu Xi's commentary to it, and see that the 7th chapter is the most representative with regard to tranquillity. Here, tranquillity is the condition for the renovation of reality, nature. The heart should be tranquil and at rest without any desires. This heart is the heart of the superior man who, with his equanimity, is able to meet life's events without being affected or overrun by them. In this sense, one masters a situation. Only from such a stand can any activity begin. Although activity is indispensable for any being, when one takes a human being into consideration, it is tranquillity, which, according to Zhou Dunyi, is central and vital.

Looking at the diagram, we realize that it is *wuji* which is the central point around which any process of cosmic life and development is centred and from which the myriad phenomena derive and to which they return. It is the graphical presentation brought to the metaphysically ontological

level of ultimate reality as perceived through the meditative experience of the enlightened mind. So, the middle level represents the transitoriness of the phenomenal world in its myriad forms and appearances. It represents the level of a constant change. Philosophically, we see here the Buddhist notion of change contrasted with the real void nature of the world. It is the meditative experience brought into language as a diagram when the mind encounters the diverse phenomena of the world. So, the diagram in its form and content is a formulation for this occasion, based on the Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen Buddhist notion that ultimately denied the possibility of words in language to articulate the enlightened mind adequately. So, the Buddhist voidness is visually represented by the void circle. It is the metaphysical timeless nature of all things which is represented by the *wuji* in the form of a void circle. It also represents the pivotal point of the mind in the stage where there is no feeling or awareness of anything, no notion, thought or images anymore. It is the consciousness state where the universe reflects its original nature of nothingness. This is the central point of consciousness and, at the same time, also the central point of universe represented by the *wuji* point, the infinite, beyond which there is nothing, the “no ridgepole” if we borrow Lao Zi’s or Zhuang Zi’s words.⁵

This text, inaugurating Neo-Confucian metaphysics, is bound to Buddhist spiritual training, metaphysics, and religious philosophy, not to Buddhism in its “life-denying” dimension, which was sometimes been attributed to it. Meditation is far from being an otherworldly undertaking. It is the most ‘here-and-now-ish’ practice we can imagine, though ontology based on it derives from the possibility of overcoming insatiable desires, including the desire to live and to stop the usual thinking process, which in its Western context, is connected to life itself. Therefore, for some western exegetes, the process of meditation means a threat to the essence of the life process itself, which in its original Buddhist context is rather a life-attesting than a life-denying dimension. It includes, however, a human quest for transcendence and ultimacy and spiritual development often very closely connected to the inner alchemy of Daoism. So, we should be aware that with authors like Zhou Dunyi, although obviously influenced by Buddhism in spiritual dimensions and cultivation, we deal

⁵Chen Guying, *Laozi shizhu he pingjie*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984; Chen Guying, *Zhuangzi jinshi jinzhu*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983.

with spheres that can sometimes be autonomous Neo-Confucian cultivation levels and not just Buddhist or Daoist influences.

A view of the diagram and the *wuji* being the source of the manifold world which returns to it might remind us of the position of physical drives, emotions, desires and imagination in Buddhist meditation practices that form the basis of the physical or spiritual internal purification and transformation. It is, however, not clear if Zhou Dunyi really turned these dimensions to a purely ethical direction. It is true that inner tranquillity became the foundation of proper moral activity, but we might also take into consideration that Zhou Dunyi was a philosopher much too closely related to Buddhism and Daoism to limit the manifold human mind to the ethical dimension only. Only the fact that he has chosen the diagram (*tu*) – a form of esoteric topography describing various meanings in the spiritual sphere, as the centre of his work – points to some other qualities of the mind.

This very stress on tranquillity was later supplemented by Zhu Xi with his theory of mindfulness. So, the first attention that Zhou Dunyi as the author of *Taiji tushuo*, as the cornerstone of Neo-Confucian metaphysics, deserves should always be concerned with its practical application to education and to spiritual self-cultivation in its path to ultimate personal fulfilment. He remains the first to write an explanation of the graphical presentation, starting with the empty circle and, finally, returning to it. So, the conceptualization of reality is one with the unity of everything symbolized with the void circle representing the ultimate nature of everything – namely, its voidness. So, through various steps of the *taiji* in its multitude of forms (despite the fact that *taiji* has been identified with changes through the history of thought), everything returns to its basic and original nature – voidness. The *tu*, thus, remains an object of meditative process, the instruction for the praxis of meditation and the way of purification of mind-and-body as the very foundation of our daily experience and the presentation of this process itself.

The various diagrams, in their historical development, gave priority to the graphical, imaginary abstractions in regard to the characters as a form closer to the “verbal expressions.” Later, it became a form of psycho-spiritual self-education offered as a way of practice to the emperor. In the diagram, a dimension is presented that might be painted, known in deep meditation but not verbalized or known by pure knowledge. It reflects the Chan statement of the insufficiency of words, although later the diagram

became of secondary importance – it was used for visualization of the dimensions expressed in words. We might presume that diving into the diagram meant a specific bliss, although its transmission was reserved for the enlightened one. The texts and books were a medium for transmission of the Dao, but very often it was those very books and texts that obscured it as well.

In this regard, we are dealing with a specific know-how of the Way or principle, advocating an approach to self-cultivation based on the mind's direct intuitive grasp of the proper Way, which was directly opposed to an emphasis on the need for diligent study or the "investigation of things." Such a form of autobiography of spirit offers a different form of discourse, bound rather to the practice of life than to its various theoretical insights. Since the diagrams were forms of "cartography of the spirit," they pointed at relation of a direct nonverbal image of a spiritual experience as transmitted with a *tu* and the explanation of it, which, in its word-form, causes a shift to the rational level, whereas a *tu* still has an affective note. So, experience of a *tu* is happening on another level – not just on the rational one – and is relying on the doctrine of mindfulness as well as its emphasis on tranquillity.

We can see the diagram as an important tool in education and a creative reinterpretation of the Buddhist quest for transcendence over the mundane, but, at the same time, taking an active part in governing it – an original Neo-Confucian project, connected with serious ascetical practices deriving either from Daoist inner alchemy or the Buddhist path of ultimate personal fulfilment, based on a self-possessed, recollected state of mind, not allowing external objects through desires to the master's way. In the diagram – from the void, through multitude, back to the void – we see how the Confucian reality of manifoldness is embraced within the Daoist unity in the ruling dimension of the original form of everything – voidness.