



Tao is hidden and nameless: Exploring the mysticism path of Laozi and Zhuangzi



Authors:

Yue Sun¹ 
Yuehua Chen¹ 

Affiliations:

¹School of Philosophy,
Zhejiang University,
Hangzhou, China

Corresponding author:

Yuehua Chen,
chenyuehua@zju.edu.cn

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The contemporary interpretation of Lao-Zhuang's thought reveals a multidimensional dialogue between tradition and modernity, the local and the exotic, and East and West. The interaction between Lao-Zhuang's thoughts and Western religious philosophy can be explored through the lens of mysticism. By examining the non-material nature of the Tao, the transcendence of language, and the cultivation goal of the unity of nature and humanity, we can discern the relationship between the cultivation practices in Lao-Zhuang's thought and religious mysticism. The chaos, uncertainty, infinity and nothingness associated with the non-physical Tao present a subtle and mysterious depiction of nature. The silence of the perfect man, who sees things in terms of the Tao, along with their conversion to the Tao, steadfastness to the Tao, flexibility in treating things according to the Tao and freedom to be one with the Tao, provides an ethical realm of inner cultivation. Through the dialogue between Lao-Zhuang's philosophy and Western religion, we can uncover the commonalities and differences between Chinese and Western cultures, as well as the significant value of Lao-Zhuang's thought in contemporary cultural and philosophical discussions.

Contribution: This article examines the relationship between cultivation practice in Lao-Zhuang's thought and religious mysticism from the perspective of cross-cultural research. By discussing the immateriality and infinity of 'Tao,' as well as the relationship between Tao and name, speech and debate, it presents the mystery of Tao. Through the non-cognitive practice mode of real people, they experience 'Tao' and achieve the realm of 'Harmony between nature and man,' demonstrating the mystery of cultivation efforts.

Keywords: Laozi; Zhuangzi; religion; mysticism; cross-cultural.

Introduction

There are two sources of Western philosophy: one is the Hebrew civilisation, which was deposited into the Bible text and Christian thought, and the other is the Greek civilisation, which shaped the speculative tradition of Western philosophy with the rational spirit. Both of them indirectly led to the dialogue with Lao-Zhuang's Taoism thought because of the English translation and interpretation of Lao-Zhuang's thought. Lao-Zhuang's philosophy has been widely considered and studied in the Western academic world. Since 1868, the number of English translations of Laozi has exceeded 140.¹ Since the end of the 19th century, there have been more than 30 English translations of Zhuangzi, including full translations, stanzas and excerpts.² The interpretation and translation of Laozi and Zhuangzi enlighten the differences and tension in the interaction between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy and religion.³ This article attempts to view the dialogue between Lao-Zhuang's thought and Western philosophy and religion from the perspective of 'mysticism'. From the perspective of cross-cultural research, 'mysticism' is a common concern of Eastern and Western philosophy and religion studies. Chen Yuehua points out that from the perspective of religion and philosophy, 'mysticism' is related to people's ultimate concern, and its 'mystery' is aimed at whether the methods and ways of knowing the

1. Julia M. Hardy divides the interpretation of the Tao Te Ching in the Western world since the 18th century into three major historical phases: the first phase was the comparison of the Tao Te Ching with Christian doctrines in the 18th–19th centuries; the second phase was the use of the Tao Te Ching as a reflective critique of the values of Western thought from 1915; and the third phase began in the late 1970s with the rigorous scholarly study of the Tao Te Ching (Hardy 1998:165).

2. Bao Zhaohui reviews the general situation of Zhuang studies in the English-speaking world (Bao 2004:76–86). Jiang Li summarises the main theses in the study of Zhuangzi in the English-speaking world into three broad areas (Jiang 2018:114–121).

3. Taken together, research in the English-speaking world centred around the philosophy of Lao-Zhuang includes: bibliographic and textual studies, the question of the identity of Laozi and Zhuangzi (e.g. dialectical deconstructionists), initial chaos and spiritual transcendence (e.g. Zhuangzi's idea of transformation of the mind), skepticism and relativism, as well as a comparative study of Lao-Zhuang and Western philosophers (Wang 2017:53–54).

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truth or Tao are fully open to human reason. And 'mysticism' specifically refers to 'those doctrines that hold that the supreme truth cannot be known by human reason but only through divine revelation, direct consciousness or oneness experience' (Chen 2019:1). In this sense, the Taoism of Lao-Zhuang shows that 'Tao' is immaterial and transcends language, and points to the cultivation goal of the unity of heaven and man, which has much in common with religious mysticism.

Taoism and mysticism

Mysticism is derived from the Greek word 'mysterion'⁴, which is rooted in the verb 'myein', meaning 'to close', and that is 'to close one's eyes'. The essential attribute of mysticism can be summarised as transcending perceptual experience, obtaining the mystical experience of the unity of heaven/god/nature and man's intuitive means. W.T. Stace divides the characteristics of occult experience in the East and West into two categories: extrovertive experience and introvertive mysticism. The common characteristics of extrovertive mystical experiences can be summarised as the more concrete apprehension of the One as an inner subjectivity or life in all things, however, The common characteristics of introvertive mystical experiences tends to the unitary Consciousness, it is nonspatial and nontemporal (Stace 1961:131).

Many Western scholars associate Taoism with mysticism. There is a section on 'Tao and Mysticism' (Chapter 7, section 3) in Max Weber's 'Confucianism and Taoism' (Weber 1951:179). Yearley Lee of Stanford University in the United States makes a distinction between two types of mysticism: intraworldly mysticism and unitive/escapist mysticism. He considers Zhuangzi's philosophical mysticism to be worldly mysticism, where the goal of Zhuangzi's cultivation is to be fully immersed in nature rather than just unity with some unchanging, monistic principle (Yearley 1983:130). Roth (2009), professor of Religious Studies and East Asian Studies at Brown University in the United States, argues that there is a kind of bimodal mystical experience in Zhuangzi's philosophy in his book. Among them, 'the first type is the inward oneness consciousness, where the practitioner is fully oneness with the Tao':

The second type is transformed outward consciousness, where the practitioner returns to the real world and continues in daily life the deep feeling of oneness previously experienced in the inward mode. This experience requires the ability to live in the world without being bound by a limited, tendentious view of one's self. (p. 99)

Benjamin I. Schwartz, a famous American sinologist, also saw Zhuangzi's philosophy as a mysticism that did not exclude 'order'. He believed that Lao-Zhuang Taoism reached the status of mysticism by means of the metaphor of 'order'. At the same time, the focus on the relationship between existence and non-existence is a characteristic of

4.Fu Peirong translated 'mysticism' as '密契主义' in his translation of the book《The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes》by the American scholar Louis Dupre. Yang Rubin translates 'mysticism' as '冥契', and he translates Walter Terence Stace's《Mysticism and Philosophy》as《冥契主义与哲学》.

Taoism mysticism, which is different from the opposition between the individualised world and the ultimate world in Western mysticism. He says:

Nature resides in Tao, and in nature there is no distinct break between non-being and being. In so far as its non-being aspect is concerned, the non-action aspect of nature is the manifestation of Tao, by which nature resides in Tao. (Schwartz 2003:210)

The German philosopher and theologian Albert Schweitzer pointed out that Zhuangzi's philosophy was an ethical and life-affirming mysticism. Regarding the core concept of 'non-action' in the philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi, he argued (Schweitzer 2009 [1999]):

The ultimate idea of non-action is that man no longer has intentions according to his own plans, but must become an organ of the forces that determine the changes of the objective world. What people have to give up is not only doing, but also giving up rational thinking in order to achieve certain goals. The conclusion can be reached simply by the inner feeling. Follow the mysterious inspiration of nature, which like a bell that rings when struck, and thus acts in the right way. (p. 61)

In a nutshell, mysticism generally consists of three aspects: belief in a hidden supernatural power or transcendent, attaining a state of peace or ecstasy through non-cognitive practices, and then becoming one with the transcendent. From this point of view, we can assume that 'Tao' has the characteristic of mysticism, experiencing Tao rather than knowing Tao has the characteristic of mysticism, and the state of 'unity with Tao' has the characteristic of mysticism. For example, some scholars have pointed out that Plotinus, as a typical representative of mysticism, can compare his thought of 'The One' with Zhuangzi's 'Tao Theory' (Chen 1991:54). Plotinus took the original 'The One' of the world as the highest object of knowledge and fused the state of 'ecstasy' with 'Tai-Yi' to observe an eternal world of goodness and beauty. Zhuangzi took 'Tao' as the origin of the world, and adopted the method of 'sitting and forgetting' to achieve the realm of 'the same as Tao'. Both of them show similar characteristics in the understanding of the world, cognitive method and spiritual realm. It is based on this meaning that Plotinus and Zhuangzi adopted the method of mystical intuition.

Jonathan Z. Smith, a historian and theorist of religion, has raised fundamental questions about the nature of religion and the challenges of comparing it across different cultures. He emphasised the significance of interreligious comparison. Smith (1982) states:

It reminds us that comparison is, at base, never identity. Comparison requires the postulation of difference as the grounds of its being interesting (rather than tautological) and a methodical manipulation of difference, a playing across the gap in the service of some useful end. (p. 35)

This is also where the perspective of comparative philosophy and comparative religion (through mysticism) interpret Lao Zhuang's thought: comparison helps to clarify differences and interact in commonalities. So this article tries to reveal the important characteristics of Lao-Zhuang's thought and

clarifies the significance and value of the meeting and combination of Lao-Zhuang's thought and mysticism through the interpretation of Laozi and Zhuangzi from the perspective of mysticism.

The transcendental uncertainty and indeterminability of Tao are mysterious

The Tao in Lao-Zhuang's text has a solid level of meaning, and the specific connotation of Tao has different pertinence based on different contexts, thus forming a rich lexical system to discuss Tao. Generally speaking, Lao-Zhuang's Tao theory contains three connotations: original meaning, prescribed meaning and infinite meaning, and the infinite meaning can symbolise the essence of Tao theory.⁵

Firstly, the original meaning of Tao was called 'The base from which Heaven and Earth sprang' [天地根] and 'Holy vessel' [神器] by Laozi, meanwhile, Zhuangzi called it: 'The creator' [造物者], 'Chaos' [混沌], 'The chaotic state before the creation of all things' [物之初], 'Genuine dominator' [真宰], 'The true course of heaven and earth' [天地之正]. Tao, in its original sense, can be deduced to the final extremity of the tangible and the intangible and is associated with the following words: firstly, the supreme, upper, high, extreme and great, such as 'That existed before heaven and earth' [先天地生] 'It is above the zenith' [太极之上]. Secondly, the prescriptive meaning of Tao is embodied in the relationship between Tao and things, that is to say, as the prescriptive existence of everything, the expression is that Tao does not exist without things and things do not exist without Tao. From the perspective of the text context, the prescribed meaning of Tao can correspond to the following words: Emperor, father, mother, root, essence, essence, etc., namely, 'As a substanceless image it existed before the Ancestor' [象帝之先], 'The very progenitor of all things in the world' [万物之宗], 'Return to the root from which they grew' [复归其根], 'Give birth to everything in the world' [万物之父母], 'The most fundamental principle' [大本大宗] and 'The very substance of the things' [物之质].

The infinite meaning of Tao means that Tao has infinite openness, and the function of Tao on things is endless. In this infinite righteousness, Lao-Zhuang describes Tao as 'infinite and endless' [无穷无止], but also 'not full' [不满] and 'inexhaustible' [不竭]. At the same time, Lao-Zhuang also describes and presents this 'infinite' inclusiveness through imagery. For example, Lao-Zhuang's words to describe Tao are often: 'quiet' [窈窈], 'dead' [冥冥], 'faint' [昏昏], 'silent' [默默], 'continuous' [绵绵] and 'trance' [惚恍], which symbolise a definite but subtle state. Meanwhile, in addition to the natural object (water) as the symbolic image of Tao, there are also some unique words, such as 'Chaos' [混沌], 'The land of nothingness' [无何有之乡], in order to compare

5. According to Wu Gen-you, 'Tao' has four meanings and, in its entirety, expresses infinite openness (Wu 2014:144).

the infinite field of Tao. That is, the infinite of Tao is contrasted by a kind of uncertainty and indeterminability.⁶

There are many views on the translation of Tao and the comparison with Western philosophy and culture. Alexander translates Tao into God.⁷ Regarding the relationship between Tao and God, Paul Carus argues that Laozi mentions God many times in the Tao Te Ching, calling it 'the arch-father of the 10000 things' [似万物之宗], 'the Lord' [象帝之先], 'the ancestor of words' [言之宗] and 'the master of deeds' [事之君]. In addition, Tao is compared to mother, such as 'I prize seeking sustenance from our mother' [贵食母], 'Reason becomes the world's mother' [以为天下母], And 'the great carpenter who hews' [代大匠斫者]. As for Laozi calling Tao 'the father of the doctrine', it can actually be seen as 'the father of truth' (Carus 1954:22). John Chalmers refers to Laozi as a Chinese philosopher, and his concern is how similar the 'logos' of the New Testament is to the 'Tao' of Laozi (Chalmers 1868:xi). Paul Carus's English translation of Te Ching argues that Tao has the same connotation as the Greek term logos (Carus 1954:8). Further, Tao's meaning is consistent with 'principle', 'rationality', 'reason' and 'the right way' or 'truth' (Carus 1954:14). However, Frederic Balfour argues that reason and way cannot accurately translate the meaning of Tao, and he compares Tao to an independent variable X with an open meaning (Balfour 1884:II). Thus, the non-physical Tao cannot be accurately located and is mysterious.

The practice of transcending cognition is mysterious

In view of the relationship between Tao and name, Tao and speech, and Tao and argument, Lao-Zhuang's philosophy internally unifies the dual judgements of no-name and name, nonspeech and speech, and nonargument and argument, between no-name and name is manifested as 'Tao is always unknown' [道常无名] and 'things have name' [始制有名]. The relationship between nonspeech and speech is represented by 'knowing people do not speak' [知者不言] and 'trying to speak' [尝试言之]. Between non-argumentation and argumentation, it is manifested as 'the good person does not argue' [善者不辩] and 'the argumentation of non-argumentation' [不言之辩]. The groups of relations can be constituted as the duality of Lao-Zhuang linguistic view:

- Tao is nameless: no name, no words, no debate and no discussion.
- Things have names: can be named, can be discussed, can be debated and can be discussed.

In other words, the perspective of 'Tao is always unknown' [道常无名] is an essential judgement, that is, Tao cannot be exhausted and there is no completely appropriate language expression [大道不称]. The perspective of 'things have name'

6. Li Wei believes that only when the Tao is in the uncertain state of chaos and trance can it have latent inclusion, for example, as an uncertain shape but latent in all possible shapes (the shape of formlessness), and as an uncertain object but latent in all possible objects (the image of nothingness) (Li 2015:134).

7. We believe that any impartial person who might be asked, what word in our language would best apply to the Being of whom all this can be said, would be compelled to answer, "by the word God, and by none other!" (Alexander 1895:xiv).

[始制有名] indicates that people always need to understand and express their understanding of things and Tao through language. Therefore, the moderation and balance of language are the focus of the inherent tension between 'Tao is always unknown' [道常无名] and 'things have names' [始制有名], just as Graham believes that the problem of words is not that they are not appropriate at all, but that they are always not completely appropriate. Only when each inappropriate expression is balanced by an opposite that deviates in different directions can it help us approach Tao (Graham 2003:255). In this regard, Cheng especially emphasised the symbiotic premise between 'saying' and 'not saying', as well as the tension between the way of knowing and the practical cognition (Cheng 2019:50). This means that people should restore and surpass the language itself in the concept, and return to the real life and the natural life state. At the same time, this tension can also be said to be the difference between 'normal Tao' [常道] and 'objective Tao' [对象性的道]. Compared with the infinity and inexpressibility of 'normal Tao', the 'objective Tao' is a nominable range for specific themes and contexts.⁸ Lao-Zhuang believes that 'Tao is often nameless', that is, Tao cannot be exhausted and there is no completely appropriate language expression, which fundamentally reflects Lao-Zhuang's negative view of famous sayings.

The perspective of 'Tao is often anonymous' means that based on the distance between the language symbol and the human spiritual world, meanwhile, the multiplicity of the meaning of Tao makes a complete and stereoscopic description impossible to achieve perfectly, so Laozi chooses a 'negative method' [负的方法].⁹ On the one hand, 'negative method' shows the contradictory dilemma in language logic, on the other hand, it highlights the Tao experience in individual practice, thus intuitively perceiving the bias of balancing rational cognition, and hopes to directly enter the realm of Tao. In the texts, 'Tao is always anonymous' is embodied in that Tao cannot be named, cannot be spoken of, cannot be debated and cannot be discussed.

Firstly, Tao cannot be named. Laozi says that 'Tao is eternal, but has no fame/name' [道常无名], 'Tao is hidden and nameless' [道隐无名], Tao is also known in this sense as 'The blankness of the Unnamed' [无名之朴]. Secondly, people who knows does not speak. In Lao-Zhuang's thought, 'no words' contains two connotations: Tao transcends words [道不言] and real people transcend words [真人不言], among which the expressions related to 'It is the way of heaven not to speak, but none the less to get an answer' [天之道不言而善应], 'Tao cannot be spoken of' [道不可言], 'The heaven and the earth have the highest virtue, but they do not speak a single word' [天地有大美而不言]. Expressions related to 'real people transcend words' are: 'Those who know do not speak' [知者不言], 'Understanding Tao but remaining silent about it' [知而不言], 'The perfect speech is absence of speech' [至言去言],

8.Lin Guanghua distinguishes between the 'normal way' and the 'object-oriented way' and then explains the respective boundaries of the articulable and the unarticulable (Lin 2015:46).

9.Feng Youlan put forward 'positive method' and 'negative method' in 'New Knowledge', in which 'positive method' refers to definition and logical analysis, while the 'negative method' is sensual experience and intuitive realisation.

etc. Thirdly, the good does not argue. Lao-Zhuang's thought of 'no argument' is elaborated as follows: 'The greatest eloquence like stuttering' [大辩若讷], 'The good man does not prove by argument' [善者不辩], 'The great argument goes beyond words' [大辩不言]. According to Zhuangzi, a natural state is 'The sages set aside without discussion' [存而不论].

Lao-Zhuang's negative attitude towards knowledge and speech implies the difference between Chinese 'image thinking' [象思维] and western 'logical thinking' [逻辑思维]. Wang Shuren points out that 'image thinking' is different from 'logical thinking', which is the best way to explain the characteristics of Chinese philosophy, and also the best way to explain Lao-Zhuang's philosophy theory and Tao. Among them, 'image' includes 'the image of external perception' and 'the image of internal perception'. At the same time, it also has infinitely rich levels from 'some kind of weather or image of the whole connotation of a small universe' to 'the original image or the whole image of a large universe' and so on. From the root point of view, image thinking is precisely through the flow and transformation of images to achieve the grasp of being connected with the whole image of the big universe or the Tao. Therefore, it is necessary to enter image thinking from conceptual thinking, which means to train the practice of stopping conceptual thinking. Lao-Zhuang's 'experience Tao' [体道] is this kind of effort.¹⁰

In the past 20 years, the 'body metaphysics', led by Yang Rubin and other Taiwan scholars, has helped to investigate the mysticism in Lao Zhuang's thought. Taoism's spirit of life is the transformation of the separation of body and mind, the state of the separation of things and myself, and the integration of heaven, earth, people, spirit and body. Meanwhile, Zhuangzi's method of 'sit and forget' – the bodily mediation here offers rich material for a comparison with bodily meditation techniques of Western mystics as explored by Chidester. Chidester said this spiritual practice takes three steps. Firstly, this method of prayer required a particular bodily posture. Secondly, this method required control over breathing. Thirdly, as breath merged with prayer, the practitioner was directed to enter into the heart (Chidester 2000):

As both a physical and a spiritual exercise, the practice of Christian prayer in hesychasm resembles techniques that have been developed in other religious traditions. Like hesychasm, the practices of Hindu yoga Buddhist meditation, Taoist alchemy, and many other religious disciplines. (pp. 244–245)

It can be seen that beyond cognition and language, the practice of experiencing Tao is mysterious.

The realm of 'unity with Tao' is mysterious

Louis K. Dupre valued the 'sense of oneness' of being united with God in mystical experiences. In particular, he emphasised that the fundamental principle of all religious

10.Wang Shuren thinks that such as 'Zhouyi' and the Yi scholar's 'image to the full' kung fu, there are Taoism experience of kung fu, such as 'The skill of killing cattle' described in 'Zhuangzi', and the poetic or allegorical expression of 'Laozi' and 'Zhuangzi', that is, the expression of the meaning of the words; there is also the Zen technique of 'gestures', 'strokes' and silent gestures (Wang 1998:44–45).

life is the unity of the individual with the transcendent (Dupre 2006:532). Corresponding to it, Lao-Zhuang's philosophy emphasised 'unity with Tao' or 'harmony between nature and man'.

One of the most important topics in the realm of spiritual experiences is whether the person who suffers mystical union also receives an ontological change. To be more precise, the mystical union with Tao happens on the ontological or willful level, or even both levels. For example, the Christian faith does not accept that humans can be transferred into God ontologically, so Christian theologians believe that the mystical union with God only happens in 'willingness' (in Thelema). Andrew Louth (2007) indicates that:

Within the Platonic framework, the soul's search for God is naturally conceived of as a return, an ascent to God; for the soul properly belongs with God, and in its ascent it is but realizing its own true nature. (p. xiii)

Compared with Lao-Zhuang's philosophy, the realm of 'unity with Tao' is also at the spiritual and spiritual level, not at the ontological level, that it merges with the Tao. The practice theory of Lao-Zhuang's cultivation has an absolutely clear direction of action, that is, the direction of Tao and taking Tao as the law, because Tao is the prescriptive existence of everything. At the same time, Tao without action is the natural philosophical basis of sages without action, and Tao without action is concretely manifested as: 'Tao never does; Yet through it, all things are done' [道常无为而无不为], 'The heaven and the earth do nothing and there is nothing they cannot do' [天地无为也而无不为也]. Therefore, inaction is man's attitude towards life consciously established in accordance with the state of Tao's way. Inaction is not to remove all of their thoughts but to be able to transcend their own selfish heart [灭其贼心]. Paul Callus believes that 'Do' does not just mean 'to do something', it also means 'to act', 'to make a show', 'to show off', 'to pose', 'to parade oneself', etc. So 'to act without acting' means to do without posing, that is 'acting with non-assertion', synonymous with 'to act without acting/posing' (Carus 1954:16).

The sage's inaction in the context of Laozi is expressed as follows: 'The Sage relies on actionless activity' [处无为之事], 'Acts without action' [为无为] and 'The man of highest power neither acts nor is there any who so regards him' [上德无为]. The inaction of perfect people in the context of Zhuangzi is shown as follows: 'To act by doing nothing' [无为为之], 'To explain by saying nothing' [无为言之], 'Invigorated everything by doing nothing' [无为而万物化], etc. Thus presenting the state of unfettered freedom in which perfect people do nothing: 'Emptiness, peacefulness, quietude and non-action' [虚静恬淡寂寞无为] and 'Absolute freedom implies taking no action at all' [逍遥无为也].

Meanwhile, Lao-Zhuang's conscious cultivation of perfect people with the rule of Tao is expressed through some action words [体、反、归、复、同、合、抱、守、安、定、因、缘、顺、应、游、化、容、养], showing the four dimensions of freedom, that is always caring for the Tao, firm in holding the Tao, flexible in

responding to things with the Tao and unity with the Tao. Among them, caring for the Tao focusses on six words [体、反、归、复、同、合], which are concretely shown as follows: 'Experience the bounteous Tao' [体尽无穷], 'The inborn nature returns to virtue' [性修反德], 'This return to the root is called Quietness' [归根曰静], 'There is always the interchangeability and uniformity of things' [复通为一], 'I can identify myself with Tao' [同于大通] and 'Both his discourse and his physical form conform to the mighty Tao' [合乎大同]. The firmness of holding Tao is concentrated in the four words [抱、守、安、定], which are concretely manifested as: 'Preserves his natural state of mind' [体性抱神], 'Keeps his breath in its purest state' [纯气之守], 'Contented with the inevitable' [安之若命] and 'Settles his mind at ease' [至人之心有所定]. The flexibility in responding to things with the Tao is concentrated in the four words [因、缘、顺、应], which are concretely manifested as: 'It will spread far and wide' [因以曼衍], 'He follows the natural course of events and has kept his natural instinct' [缘而葆真], 'Follow the natural course of events' [顺物自然] and 'Open in behaviour' [应物无方]. The freedom of unity with Tao is concentrated in the four words [游、化、容、养], which are embodied as follows: 'A travel to gather the genuine nature' [采真之游], 'Adapts himself to the times without sticking to anything' [与时俱化], 'He has a pure and all-embracing heart' [清而容物] and 'The heaven and the earth provide the same nourishment to everything in the world' [天地之养]. The above four dimensions of Lao-Zhuang's practice theory highlight the efforts of perfect people to converge, and the direction of its actions is to give everyone returns to the centripetal force of Tao. It can be seen from this that the realm and state of 'unity with Tao' are mysterious.

Conclusion

In Laozi and Zhuangzi, Tao has multiple meanings, including its primordality as the universe, the rules of all things, and its infinite openness, which transcend conventional perceptual experience and constitute a mysterious existence. The infinity of Tao and its difficulty in fully expressing itself in words further strengthen its mystery. The philosophy of Lao-Zhuang deeply explores the complex relationship between Tao, name, speech and argument, and emphasises the realisation of unity with Tao through non-cognitive practice, which enables perfect people to always experience Tao, firmly hold Tao, flexibly apply Tao to things and finally realise the free state of unity with Tao. Through the doctrine of 'mysticism', we can have a deeper understanding of the intercultural dialogue between Lao-Zhuang's thoughts and Western philosophy and religion. The similarity between Lao-Zhuang's thought and mystical experience provides us with a unique perspective to examine and compare the understanding, pursuit and experience of ultimate or transcendental truth in different cultural contexts.

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