

New corrected version with **ADDENDUM**

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# THE CHINESE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-RESTRAINT FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS

A reflection on the Ji Kang paradox and the Tai Chi Chuan Principle

By Pierre Beaudry, 7/16/2016

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## **FOREWORD:**

When is an idea valid for all of mankind? Is it when it becomes accepted by the majority of the people? No. Why not? Because deductive forms of thinking based on public opinion are always false.

Similarly, the deductive thinker believes that a new scientific experiment is validated when it proves that the current scientific theory is correct. That is also wrong. In fact, a new experiment is validated only when it shows that the current scientific knowledge is proven false by means of a performative truth.

Contrary to all popular logic, new ideas become valid when they go against public opinion, by means of a three-step-test of truthfulness: First, when the truth of the new idea starts seeping through the fibers of society under a hidden form until its time comes to change the past; secondly, when its detractors start making up lies about it in order to hide the danger of its truthfulness; and thirdly, when its detractors finally self-destruct under the load of their own lies.

The ancient Chinese idea of *self-restraint for the sake of others* is about this principle of change, and that's what is presently emerging around the planet as the new governing paradigm for the future of mankind. See the latest EIR: [\*The Common Future for Mankind\*](#) and [www.newparadigm.schillerinstitute.com](http://www.newparadigm.schillerinstitute.com).

## INTRODUCTION

In China, there is an old knowledge that has been cultivated for a very long time, but whose time has now come to spread all over the world. Its principle has been discovered by many leaders who have mastered it through the well known self-restraint art of character building known as Tai Chi Chuan. Most people in the West have failed to understand and master this art, because it can only be acquired in a paradoxical manner. It is a knowledge whose application can only be known if it is executed for the benefit of others. However, very few people are willing to impose this discipline on themselves, because it requires self-sacrifice.

Although Tai Chi Chuan may not have existed as a common practice during the period of the Jan Dynasty, the method of behavior control it teaches is in the spirit of *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*, which the poet and musician, Ji Kang (223-262 A.D.), had created as an organization of self-discipline in accordance with a principle that became known as *self-restraint for the sake of others*.

As far as I know, China is the only country in the world that has been able to successfully apply such a principle to its governing bodies throughout most of its history. It may be that the Chinese were so successful because they have continuously been able to change and adjust their governing principle by changing the past through focusing on the future.

Although it appears that the past has already existed and, therefore, cannot be altered in any way, the improvement of our knowledge of what should have been known but has not yet come to be, can and must change the way that man has been looking at himself, if mankind is to survive. Changing the past means changing what happened into what should have happened.

The idea I wish to demonstrate, here, is how the Chinese made the social change of such a past by developing the principle of *self-restraint for the sake of others*, as it manifested itself during one of the bloodiest periods of Chinese history. The discovery of this principle is a truly exceptional experiment which can be identified as the Ji Kang Paradox.

## 1. THE PRINCIPLE OF OTHER-ORIENTATION BY SELF-RESTRAINT

In 213 AD, during the last period of the Han Dynasty, the Northern part of China came under the control of the warlord, Cao Cao, the Imperial Chancellor of the last Han Emperor. Three years later, in 216, Cao Cao was appointed king of the Wei. The Southern part of China had already been divided into two areas which were also controlled by two warlords. The whole of China was divided into Three Kingdoms that were rife with civil warfare.



On March 15, 220 AD, Cao Cao died before he was able to unify China, and his son, Cao Pi, succeeded him as the King of Wei, putting an end to the Han dynasty by making the claim that he was the founder of the Wei dynasty. For a period of 40 years, Cao Pi's claim to the throne was contested and in 265, the Wei dynasty was overthrown by its last Imperial Chancellor, Sima Yan, grandson of Sima Yi and son of Sima Zhao, who then became the founder of the Jin Dynasty.

The following story is about the conflicting relationship between Sima Yi and Ji Kang, the leader of *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*.

**Figure 1** Ji Kang, (223-262 AD)

Ji Kang, was born in 223 AD to a well to-do family during the transition period of the Wei-Jin dynasties. As the grandson-in-law of Cao Cao's brother, he became a prominent figure by birth right. However, since after the coup of 249 the governing aristocracy of China had become corrupt under the guise of practicing a mere formal type of "Confucianism," Ji Kang created a resistance movement, which came to be known as the group of *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*.

The seven sages were, **Ji Kang, Liu Ling, Ruan Ji, Ruan Xian, Xiang Xiu, Wang Rong, and Shan Tao.**

Most historical reports on *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove* have identified the Grove as a group of drunkard individualists who rebelled against the feudal government of their time, and who refused to serve for public office because they could not put up with the degeneracy of the court. That is only partly true.

Their refusal to serve is probably true, but the reason for their refusal to serve is not well understood, because corruption in the leadership of a nation has never been a reason not to serve mankind. Moreover, the identification of the group as being individualist rebels is suspect, in the very least, because individualists are not generally concerned about governing principles. So, for a serious investigator, this qualification of so-called “seditious bad guys” should sound like a musical dissonance that hides some untold truth that has been kept hidden and should come to light. My question, therefore, is: What is the truth that resonates behind *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*? Since Ji Kang was an intellectual who would stop at nothing to make the truth known, what is it that was kept hidden for two thousand years and which must now be told to the rest of the world?

It is reported that the location of the bamboo grove was near the country house of Ji Kang in Shanyang, where a few intellectuals of the time gathered to make music and recite poetry. There seems to be no historical evidence that these individuals existed as a group, but what remains of their writings is enough to assert that they did exist as a resource for the betterment of future generations. Although it is unknown how much of what has been written about the Seven Sages is true or fabricated, the one thing that is certain is that the Bamboo Grove is a model of wisdom for later Chinese intellectuals and civil servants alike, throughout history, and has become the subject of hundreds of inspiring paintings for centuries. However, a collection of stories have also been told about the seven sages that seem to have been written for the purpose of debasing them as degenerate fools and civil trouble makers.

In a recently published book, [\*YIELDS OF TRANSITION\*](#), authors Wang Yi and Fu Xiaowei revealed a very insightful truth about Ji Kang and the “original Chinese value” of society that he had mastered for the benefit of the World. The revelation had been hidden in plain sight in a well known letter that Ji Kang had written to a fellow member of *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*, Shan Tao, his superior both in age and in government. Here is how the authors posed their axiom busting revelation in the middle of Chapter Twelve of this book:

“Members in the other-oriented society are encouraged to put the interest of others ahead of seeking their own interest. Those who live up to this norm will obtain recognition from the community and thereby naturally win their own interest. It is exactly what is described in *Daodejing*: ‘It is because the sage has no personal and private ends, therefore, such ends are realized.’ Those who make frank possessions of striving for their private ends usually receive contempt and pressure from the community. By contrast, the individualist cultural circle acknowledges that ‘the interests of the individual are or ought to be paramount, and that all values, and duties originate in individuals...’ So strong is this notion that words such as self-abnegation, self-dispraise, self-sacrifice and self-restraint are often associated with a person lacking of self confidence or a healthy ego (Samovar, 2000, 62).” (Wang Yi and Fu Xiaowei, *Sincere Treatment or Serving Friendship? The Chinese Original Value in Ji Kang’s Letter to Shan Tao*, in [\*The Yields of Transition: Literature, Art and Philosophy in Early Medieval China\*](#), edited by Jana S. Rošker, Nataša Vampelj Suhadolnik, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK, 2011, Chapter Twelve, p. 247)

In his letter to Shan Tao, which Wang Yi and Fu Xiaowei used as a model of the Chinese principle of “*Other-orientation by self-restraint*,” Ji Kang identified the paradox of the unity of the opposites to be resolved: “*Serving the world while maintaining your own integrity*.” (*The Yields of Transition*, p. 245). This is the paradox which characterized the social interest of many scrolls and paintings representing *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove* throughout Chinese history. This is also a principle that is represented by the literati of the Bamboo Grove, and

most emphatically, by Ji Kang, the host of the group. The axiomatic change that I will now discuss is about the relationship between Ji Kang, Shan Tao, and General Sima Yi, in accordance with the revelations of Wang Yi and Fu Xiaowei.



**Figure 2** *The Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi*. Brick Tomb found in Xishanqiao, Nanjing in 1960. VIDEO: [Seven Sages of the Bamboo-Grove](#). Ji Kang's portrait is the first on the bottom left.

The best way to exemplify the value of other-orientation is by going through a Peace of Westphalia axiomatic change; that is, *the change of a third person by means of eliminating the difference between two others*. Here, the cast of characters includes the sages Ji Kang, Shan Tao, and General Sima Yi. The process of the axiomatic change can be demonstrated, most notably, with Ji Kang's Letter to Shan Tao, which was actually intended to change the mind of a third individual, Sima Yi, a military general who was also regent of the state of Cao Wei during the

Three Kingdom period. The real intention of the letter was to set an example of self-sacrifice for posterity by using the device of a diversion of attention away from Shan Tao and toward Ji Kang. Unfortunately, the experiment failed and Sima Yi had Ji Kang executed for what he attempted to do. Obviously, the Chinese rulers of the day had lost the “mandate of heaven.”

There is a story about general Sima Zhao, the grandson of Sima Yi, which says a lot about the spirit of the time. Sima Zhao was so fearful of a coup against his dynastic rule that he had the following message circulating throughout the country: “Everyone on the street knows what is in Sima Zhao's mind.” (司馬昭之心，路人皆知), meaning that the wise man of the street must beware that all hidden intentions are known to him. However, there is at least one street intention that Sima Zhao did not take into account, and that was the voice of leaders such as *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*.

As the story goes, Shan Tao had taken a position of Attendant on the Board of Officials in the government, and when he left his post, he recommended that Ji Kang take his place. In response, Ji Kang wrote Shan a long letter in which he rejected the proposed government position. The central issue of the letter is the question of principle of *other-orientation by self-restraint*. Look at this *Letter to Shan Tao* as a sort of *Purloined Letter* in which the self-centered reader (in this case Sima Yi) is being misled into believing that the intention is about severing a relationship of friendship between Ji Kang and his friend Shan Tao, while in reality, it is about self-sacrifice for a friend.

To go directly to the point, at the beginning of the letter, Ji Kang wrote the following: “*In my reading, I used to come across people, who were serving the world while maintaining their own integrity, and I rather doubted their existence, but now I am convinced they exist.*” The anomaly is perfectly translated by the authors, Wang Yi and Fu Xiaowei, but Western translations of that section are usually faulty. For example, British translator, R. J. Hightower rendered the same statement as follows: “*It used to be that when in my reading I came upon people resolutely above the world, I rather doubted their existence, but now I am convinced that they really do exist after all.*” Why doesn't that translation make

any sense? Because the intention of the principle of “*other-orientation*” has been deliberately excluded.

The point that should not be missed, here, is that the principle of a higher geometry cannot be understood from the vantage point of a lower geometry. It either carries the day or its detractors try to destroy it. The geometry of a person committed to the improvement of others is superior to the geometry of a self-centered individual; and, it is the all-inclusion of the others which makes the whole difference. The irony is that such a principle is precisely the win-win orientation that has been giving direction to the whole of the Chinese society for more than three thousand years; and the rest of the world has either paid very little attention to it or have attempted to prevent it from taking its natural course.

The powerful argument that Wang Yi and Fu Xiaowei make in their article is the following: the meaning or “original value” of “*other-orientation by self-restraint*” is the paradigmatic value of all other Chinese social value; the key value which has been determining and directing the behavior of all individuals in Chinese society throughout history.

There existed, up until the time of Franklin D. Roosevelt, similar values in the United States, which were established by the fathers of the American Revolution over two hundred years ago, but they no longer exist. One of them was called “general welfare,” and was attached to the American Constitution. However, that principle has been abandoned since World War II, only to be remembered by a handful of Americans today.

So, I ask myself: What is the unique property that Ji Kang’s letter identifies by the action of “*serving the world while maintaining your own integrity?*” That obviously cannot be the idea of success of a man who pursues fame and fortune. It cannot be either the idea of a man who seeks favor from influential people. He could only be someone who, in modest and self-effacing manner, is associated with a lofty purpose of improving the lot of mankind. But, why would Ji Kang write such a lengthy letter to a friend, if it were simply for rejecting his offer and severing his friendship with him? What was the real intention of that letter? The letter was meant to be for recruitment purposes.



The letter was meant to be read by someone who is seeking to discover the Chinese Original Value, internalize it, and live by it. In the introduction to [\*YIELDS OF TRANSITION\*](#), the editors added a useful note about Wang Yi and Fu Xiaowei's article. They said:

“The prevailing aesthetic value-orientation in the Wei Jin era clearly advocated purity, with the philosophical debates of the time facilitating the emergence of free thought. New ideas resulting from ethnic, political and economic diversity were also expressed in the common search for the ideal personality, leading to various social-political transformations. By using the “original Chinese value” as an instrumental concept to interpret Ji Kang's *Letter to Shan Tao*, Wang Yi's article shows that despite the turbulent political situation, the sharing of the same moral standards still preconditioned the modes of self-cultivation in human relationships, and how this translated into certain effects and behaviors at both the personal and political levels.” ([\*YIELDS OF TRANSITION\*](#), p. 5)

This old principle of conduct, however, opens the door to a very important paradox, which I would call the Ji Kang paradox:

*On the one hand, there are people whose character cannot endure the mediocrity of others, even under patient self-restraint. So, it is better not to force that acceptance on them.*

*On the other hand, there are people whose character can endure anything, including the mediocrity of others around them, because they are sycophants.*

*How can you free yourself from both conditions?*

I don't know how this paradox is formulated within each of the three different religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism; but the fact that the principle of *self-restraint for the sake of others* is common in all three religions is sufficient to indicate that the differences between them can be resolved from a higher standpoint.



This paradox raises the question of real freedom: *“How can you serve the world while maintaining your own integrity?”* This is the question that Ji Kang formulated in his letter for Shan Tao and the Sima regime to resolve. The answer is found in the spirit of the Bamboo Grove, which was created for the purpose of solving such problems. This is the reason why, in his letter to Shan Tao, Ji Kang wrote: “A cup of unstrained wine, a song to the lute: this is the sum of my desires and ambitions.” In a word, the objective of *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove* was to become “Rabelaisian axiom busters.” The real intention of the letter, therefore, was aimed at causing an axiomatic transformation in the mind of the reader of the letter.

What most people don't understand about politics is how to find the balance between opposites; that is, between self-interest and public good. What is ignored is the fact that the core of a culture is formed by the values a society sets for its future generations, or for maintaining a fictitious control over its people, either by cheating or by imposing some moral Kantian form of blackmail on its civil servants. A society dies or survives depending on whether these values are human or not; that is, accepted or not by self-constraint. Either such human values as loyalty and forgiveness, universal love, and helping others become primary over self-interest, or society will go from crisis to crisis until it gets destroyed.

**Figure 3** Ji Kang playing the Zither moments before his execution.

As Wang Yi and Fu Xiaowei reported: “Ji Kang was accused of defiling the Confucian faith and was executed for mistreating his parent (a false accusation), a heinous crime against the Confucian filial duty. However, he took the risk to speak out for Lu an, a falsely condemned friend. In this act alone, he showed himself a better Confucian than the sycophantic ‘upholders of the faith’ who then condemned Ji Kan himself, because he would not join them.” (Ibidem, p. 255) You ask: What is the point of all that?

According to Wang Yi and Fu Xiaowei it was those who confessed their allegiance to the Confucian faith who actually defiled it, because they used Confucianism for their own personal gain. However, those who murdered honest people for their own benefit, such as Sima Yi having Ji Kang executed, used the false motive of “anti-Confucianism” for fear of rivalry. In face of his execution, Ji Kang played on his zither a song he had composed for the occasion and which died with him. (See **Figure 3**)

The point to be made, here, is that axioms must be replaced by principles and the most stubborn of all axioms to be gotten rid of is the axiom of deductive reasoning, because it has all of the appearance of being logical, non-contradictory, and most of all, self-evident. The problem is precisely that deductive logic must be true because it appears to be true. A fact is a fact because it appears to be such. And, that’s the fallacy of scientific knowledge today; it is based on what appears to be true, therefore, it must be true. On the other hand, principles are not self-evident; they are uncomfortable, illogical, and contradictory in nature, because they move you. Take the principle of change, for example. Change is true because at the limit, it is constant, and that’s what shakes you up.

It is important to understand these principles in the governing bodies of another country’s history, because similar situations take place in our own country without our knowing it. The reader can make the appropriate comparisons with the deductive behavior and the lack of principle of the candidates currently running for the Presidency of the United States.

## 2. THE SEVEN SAGES OF THE BAMBOO GROVE AND THE JI KANG LETTER TO SHAN TAO

*“Thus there are those who stick to the court and never emerge, and those who enter the wilderness and never come back.”*

Ji Kang, *Letter to Shan Tao*

There is no doubt that the period of the Three Kingdoms was a troubled time that called for an axiomatic transformation in Chinese society as a whole; but this was not a time for free thinkers. Indeed, why would an elite group of poets, musicians, and scholars retire into a secluded area and live together if it were not to improve human life? Why would such a group wish to escape the corruption of court politics? Why didn't they decide to join a Taoist, Confucian, or Buddhist monastery instead?



**Figure 4** Zhou Wengui (907-960), *Gathering of the Literati*. Chinese sages rediscovering what their past should have been by looking up into the future.

My response to these questions comes down to a single answer. The purpose was: *self-constraint for the sake of others*. The group's mission was to establish a code of conduct for government, which could never be put in written form, and which involved three fundamental principles of action: compassion, self-sacrifice, and humility for the sake of others.

What the seven sages brought to China was something that no other nation succeeded in establishing anywhere else on this planet: an altruistic governing principle. In other words, there is, at the core of all three Chinese schools of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, a single most enduring value that is shared by all three great philosophies which united them under one single purpose. This is a principle of government that has been in existence in China for thousands of years which is the only principle that can explain the longevity of Chinese society. No matter what differences among these three philosophies, the unique and original Chinese principle which has united all three during more than three thousand years is the *other-oriented value* of discovering the freedom of the true self by willfully giving one's talent and one's life for the benefit of mankind.

This principle of conduct is the same as the Christian idea of charity, or the Principle of the Peace of Westphalia known as the *benefit of the other*, but it is fundamentally different from Christian charity by the fact that it is not a religious principle, but a political governing principle.

China may be the only nation in the world whose people are foremost members of *another-oriented society*. This is what Chinese people see and look for in other people. This is not merely a matter of choosing between egoism versus altruism, or between individual and social behavior. This is a means of discovering and understanding how a society reaches maturity as a whole, and this value is the fundamental feature of the Chinese cultural and scientific renaissance of today. This is the principle of the Moon rover *Chang'e* and its extraterrestrial mission. The paradox this value poses for any human being, and especially westerners, is how one can serve mankind and remain free at the same time. That's the core issue of *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove* and of Ji Kang's letter to Shan Tao.

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## LETTER FROM JI KANG TO SHAN TAO

*“Some time ago you spoke of me to your uncle, the Prefect of Yingchuan, and I must say I found your estimate of me just. But I wondered how you could have come to so accurate an understanding without really knowing what my principles are. Last year when I came back from Hedong, Gongsun Chong and Lu An said you had proposed me as your successor in office. Nothing came of it, but your proposal made it obvious you really did not understand me at all.*

*“You are versatile: you accept most things and are surprised at little. I, on the other hand, am by nature straightforward and narrow-minded: there are lots of things that I cannot put up with. It was only chance that made us friends. When recently I heard of your promotion in office, I was upset and unhappy, fearing that the cook would be shy of doing the carving by himself and would call in the Impersonator of the Dead to help, handing over a kitchen knife soiled with rancid fat. Hence I am writing to make clear what may and may not be done.*

*“It used to be that when in my reading I came across people resolutely above the world, I rather doubted their existence, but now I am convinced that they really do exist after all. One can be so constituted that there are things one cannot endure; honest endorsement cannot be forced. So it is perhaps idle to talk about the familiar "man of understanding" who can put up with anything, who takes no exception to vulgarity around him but who still preserves his integrity within; who goes along with the vacillations of the times without ever feeling a twinge of regret. Laozi and Zhuang Zhou are my masters: they held mean positions. I would hardly criticize them. And Confucius, out of his love for all, was ready to hold a coachman's whip; and Ziwen, with no desire for the job, was thrice prime minister: these were gentlemen whose minds were bent on saving the world. This is what is meant by ‘in success, he shares the benefits with all and does not vacillate; in obscurity, he is content and not depressed.’*

*“From this point of view, Yao and Shun's ruling the world, Xu You's retirement to the hills, Zifang's helping Han and Jieyu's singing as he walked all add up to the same thing. When you consider all these gentlemen, they can be said to have succeeded in doing what they wanted. Hence all the various modes of conduct of the gentleman take him to the same goal by different paths. He acts in accordance with his nature and rests where he finds his ease. Thus there are those who stick to the court and never emerge, and those who enter the wilderness and never come back.*

*“Moreover, I am filled with admiration when I read the biographies of the recluses Shang Ziping and Tai Xiaowei and can imagine what sort of men they were. Add to that the fact that I lost my father when young, was spoiled by my mother and elder brother and never took up the study of the Classics. I was already wayward and lazy by nature, so that my muscles became weak and my flesh flabby. I would commonly go half a month without washing my face, and until the itching became a considerable annoyance, I would not wash my hair. "When I had to urinate, if I could stand it I would wait until my bladder cramped inside before I got up.*

*“Further, I was long left to my own devices, and my disposition became arrogant and careless, my bluntness diametrically opposed to etiquette; laziness and rudeness reinforcing one another. But my friends were indulgent, and did not attack me for my faults.*

*“Besides, my taste for independence was aggravated by my reading of Zhuangzi and Laozi; as a result any desire for fame or success grew daily weaker, and my commitment to freedom increasingly firmer. In this I am like the wild deer, which captured young and reared in captivity will be docile and obedient. But if it be caught when full-grown, it will stare wildly and butt against its bonds, dashing into boiling water or fire to escape. You may dress it up with a golden bridle and feed it delicacies, and it will but long the more for its native woods and yearn for rich pasture.*

*“Ruan Ji is not one to talk about people's faults, and I have tried to model myself after him, but in vain. He is a man of finer character than most, one who*

*never injured another. Only in drinking does he go to excess. But even so the proper and correct gentlemen with their restrictions hate him as a mortal enemy, and it is only thanks to the protection of Generalissimo Sima Zhao that he survives. But I, without Ruan Ji's superiority, have the faults of being rude and unrestrained, ignorant of people's characters and blind to opportunity, not careful like Shi Fen, but driven to carry things to their end. The longer I was involved in affairs the more clearly would these defects show. I might want to stay out of trouble, but would it be possible?*

*“Furthermore, in society there are prescribed courtesies and the court has its rules. When I consider the matter carefully, there are seven things I could never stand and two things which would never be condoned. I am fond of lying late abed, and the herald at my door would not leave me in peace: this is the first thing I could not stand. I like to walk, singing, with my lute in my arms, or go fowling or fishing in the woods. But surrounded by subordinates, I would be unable to move freely - this is the second thing I could not stand. When I kneel for a while I become as though paralyzed and unable to move. Being infested with lice, I am always scratching. To have to bow and kowtow to my superiors while dressed up in formal clothes - this is the third thing I could not stand. I have never been a facile calligrapher and do not like to write letters. Business matters would pile up on my table and fill my desk. To fail to answer would be bad manners and a violation of duty, but I would not long be able to force myself to do it. This is the fourth thing I could not stand. I do not like funerals and mourning, but these are things people consider important. Far from forgiving my offense, their resentment would reach the point where they would like to see me injured. Although in alarm I might make the effort, I still could not change my nature. If I were to bend my mind to the expectations of the crowd, it would be dissembling and dishonest, and even so I would not be sure to go unblamed - this is the fifth thing I could not stand. I do not care for the crowd and yet I would have to serve together with such people. Or on occasions when guests fill the table and their clamor deafens the ears, their noise and dirt contaminating the place, before my very eyes they would indulge in their double-dealings. This is the sixth thing I could not stand. My heart cannot bear trouble, and official*



*life is full of it. One's mind is bound with a thousand cares, one's thoughts are involved with worldly affairs. This is the seventh thing I could not stand.*

*“Further, I am always finding fault with Tang and Wu Wang, or running down the Duke of Zhou and Confucius. If I did not stop this in society, it is dear that the religion of the times would not put up with me. This is the first thing which would never be condoned. I am quite ruthless in my hatred of evil, and speak out without hesitation, whenever I have the occasion. This is the second thing which would never be condoned.*

*“To try to control these nine weaknesses with a disposition as narrow and niggling as mine could only result in my falling ill, if indeed I were able to avoid trouble with the authorities. Would I be long in the world of men? Besides, I have studied in the esoteric lore of the Taoist masters, where a man's life can be indefinitely prolonged through eating herbs, and I firmly believe this to be so. To wander among the hills and streams, observing fish and birds, is what gives my heart great pleasure. Once I embarked on an official career, this is something I would have to give up forthwith. Why should I relinquish what gives me pleasure for something that fills me with dread?*

*“What is esteemed in human relationships is the just estimate of another's inborn nature, and helping him to realize it. When you see a straight piece of wood, you do not want to make it into a wheel, nor do you try to make a rafter of a crooked piece, and this is because you would not want to pervert its heaven-given quality, but rather see that it finds its proper place. Now all the four classes of people have each their own occupation, in which each takes pleasure in fulfilling his own ambition. It is only the man of understanding who can comprehend all of them. In this you have only to seek within yourself to know that one may not, out of one's own preference for formal clothes, force the people of Yue to wear figured caps, or, because one has a taste for putrid meat, try to feed a phoenix a dead rat.*

*“Of late I have been studying the techniques of prolonging one's life, casting out all ideas of fame and glory, eliminating tastes, and letting my mind wander in stillness: what is most worthwhile to me is Inaction. Even if there were*

*not these nine concerns, I could still pay no attention to your wishes. But beyond this, my mind tends toward melancholy, increasingly so of late, and I am personally convinced that I would not be able to stand any occupation in which I took no pleasure. I really know myself in this respect. If worse comes to worst and there is no way out, then I shall simply die. But you have no grudge against me that you should cause me to lie lifeless in the gutter.*

*“I am continually unhappy over the recent loss of the company of my mother and elder brother. My daughter is thirteen, my son eight years old - neither grown to maturity, and I am in ill health. This is another fact that pains me so much I cannot bear to speak further of it. Today I only wish to stay on in this out-of-the-way lane and bring up my children and grandchildren, on occasion relaxing and reminiscing with old friends - a cup of unstrained wine, a song to the lute: this is the sum of my desires and ambitions.*

*“If you keep on relentlessly nagging me, it can only be because you are anxious to get someone for the post who will be of use to the world. But you have always known what an irresponsible, bungling sort of person I am, not at all up on current affairs. I know myself that I am in all respects inferior to our modern men of ability. If you think me unlike ordinary men in that I alone do not find pleasure in fame and distinction, this is closest to my true feelings and deserves to be considered. If a man of great ability and endowments, able to turn his hand to anything, were able to be without ambition, he would be worth your respect. But one like me, frequently ill, who wants to stay out of office so as to take care of himself for the remaining years of his life - in me it is rather a deficiency. There is not much point in praising a eunuch for his chastity. If you insist on my joining you in the king's service, expecting that we will rise together and will be a joy and help to one another, one fine day you will find that the pressure has driven me quite mad. Only my bitterest enemy would go so far. The rustic who took such pleasure in the warm sun on his back, or the one who so esteemed the flavor of celery that they wanted to bring these things to the attention of the Most High: this showed them to be well-meaning, but it also showed their complete ignorance. I hope you will not do as they did. This being the way I feel about it, I*

*have written to explain it to you and at the same time to say farewell.”* ([LETTER TO SHAN TAO](#), translated by J. R. Hightower)

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In summation, the letter to Shan Tao is about the fact that there are two opposite types of human beings in the world: those who can put up with anything and those who cannot. The question is: How can you understand and resolve that opposition and go beyond both? Depending on what extreme type of individual a recruiting officer has to deal with, or any variable in between, the key is to understand the nature of the “nine weaknesses” that Ji Kang has identified in his letter, and find the ways to change that condition humanly.

So, the question that Ji Kang addresses is how to correct the weaknesses of someone who refuses to serve for the common good. Ji Kang’s letter is a self-deprecating way to resolve the problem by becoming the inverse of what he appears to be. Thus, the question is: how does one become free of all human weaknesses? And, the answer is simply: by doing the opposite of what you think is good for you.

The point that Ji Kang made, in a complete performative manner, is to demonstrate that freedom is not liberty to do what you wish to do or say; freedom is liberating man from the shackles of his own stupidity. And, that can only be done by inversion; that is, by a willful self-sacrifice. *It is only by sacrificing yourself that your self will save itself.*

However, this is a knowledge whose secret cannot be known unless it is self-imposed; and very few people are willing to inflict this on themselves, because they prefer to hold on to their weaknesses. In other words: *It were better that people be other-oriented by inner-directedness, rather than being self-oriented by other-directedness.*

### 3. WANG YUN AND THE LANDSCAPE OF CREATIVITY



*“One day Liu is naked at home. Someone comes to him and ridicules him on it. But Liu replied: ‘I use the sky and the Earth as my house, and use my living room as my pants. What are you doing in my pants?’”*

Liu Ling (刘伶), one of *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*.

There may have been little chance for one of the Seven Sages, Liu Ling (221-300 AD), and the painter Wang Yun (1652- 1737 AD) to get together, but there is something incommensurably alike between the two; they both are provocative and ironical in their universal understanding of the human mind. In other words, both have reached a universal state of mind which transcends all social relationship to traditional Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism. They have reached a level that is beyond all schools of thought and all ideologies, when they speak directly to the human mind.

Figure 5 [Wang Yun](#) (1652- 1737), *The Fanghu Isle of the Immortals* (1699)

Fanghu is one of several mythical islands traditionally considered the home of immortals, situated somewhere in the Eastern Sea off the coast of China. A close look at the oddly-shaped rock formation shows an island apparently inhabited by Taoist monks, whose red-and-green palaces with gold roofs are visible among the misty vapors of the Ocean, and among hidden caverns and waterfalls, which are all in accordance with the mythology of the folk tales of Fanghu Island. But, like any good artistic composition, there is something else on Wang Yun's mind. There is an anomaly in the painting. Wang Yun is provoking the spectator into experimenting an axiomatic moment of change in the way he thinks.

As the tale is told, Fanghu Island is a Taoist myth based on the quest of physical immortality; however, Wang Yun went a step further by identifying a higher quest for mankind: spiritual immortality. In his painting, he generated a singularity within the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. Can you discover that anomaly before you read any further?

Taoists like to say: "Heaven and Earth and I live together." (*Daodejing*) Such harmony has been traditionally illustrated by many Chinese artists throughout history with a unity of balance among such things as mountains, waterfalls, vegetation, and human beings. But, human beings usually end up being very small and dominated by the towering mountain scene above them.

The irony that Wang Yun introduced, however, is that he has inversed the order of relationship between man and nature. He didn't make man small, and he didn't exclude him from nature. He made the human element greater than nature itself, by locating the general form of a sitting thoughtful man under the oddly-shaped rocky island.

It is as if the sitting man were dressed up as the rocky island itself, and was holding the palaces on his chest, on his knees, and on his lap. Man had become the subject of the landscape. Maybe Wang Yun's idea was to hide the true function of man within the universe; that is, by implying that man's role is to become the discrete master behind the universe. As the ancient philosopher, Zhuangzi stated:

"Heaven, earth and I are born of one, and I am at one with all that exists (天地與我並生, 萬物與我唯一)" At any rate, Wang Yun would not be far from the truth, if that were his thought, because, in doing so, he performatively succeeded in demonstrating the human creative power within the universe as a very ironical and unique device.

The Wang Yun painting is also a discrete reference to one of *The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove*, Liu Ling, who used to walk around his house naked and considered the heaven and the earth to be his only clothing. The discovery of principle, here, is that the Wang Yun painting generates the palimpsest of a higher geometry similar to Ji Kang's letter to Shan Tao; that is, the palimpsest of the creative mind. Thus, the principle to be discovered is as follows:

*The striking effect of this Wang Yun idea is such that, once you have imagined the underlying presence of a thoughtful human being behind The Fanghu Isle of the Immortals, you will no longer be able to imagine the painting as representing anything else. You will have changed your former way of thinking. You will have changed the past. Your mind will be captured by the performative effect of the gestalt in such a manner that every time you look at that painting, at some future time, it will be this idea of an underlying but hidden human being, which will come into view in your mind, and nothing else. This is the way the mind is uplifted through the higher path of creativity. That is the*

*pathway of how an axiomatic principle of change is revealed to the human mind.*

## CONCLUSION: THE PRINCIPLE OF CHEN-STYLE TAI CHI CHUAN



*“Nothing under Heaven is more pliable than water but when it amasses, there is nothing that can withstand its force. That the soft overcomes the hard, and the yielding conquers the unyielding is a fact known to all men – yet utilized by none.” (Daodejing)*

There are five styles of tai chi, (Chen, Yang, Sun, Wu, and Woo) , all of which can be traced to their historical origins to Chen Wangting (1580-1660 AD), a Ming Dynasty general who founded the Chen Tai Chi Chuan as a practice of *self-restraint for the sake of others*.

**Figure 6** Chen Wangting (1580-1660 AD), founder of the Chen-style Tai Chi Chuan in his village of Chenjiagou.

The successor of Chen Wangting was Chen Changxing (1771-1853) who became the teacher of Yang Luchan (1799–1872), the founder of the Yang style of

Tai Chi Chuan. The Yang style, also called Tai Chi Chuan, was taught to the Palace Battalion of the Imperial Guards, in 1850. The practice of Tai Chi Chuan was rejected from 1966-1976, during the Cultural Revolution.

## MIND AND BODY POSTURES FOR CHEN TAI CHI CHUAN

- **Keeping the head upright** (虚领顶劲, xū lǐng dǐng jìn)
- **Keeping the body straight** (立身中正, lì shēn zhōngzhèng)
- **Drop the shoulders and sink the elbow** (松肩沉肘, sōng jiān chén zhǒu)
- **The chest curve inwards and the waist pressed forward.**(含胸塌腰, hán xiōng tā yāo)
- **Sink the energy to the dantian** (心气下降, xīn qì xià jiàng)
- **Breath naturally** (呼吸自然, hū xī zì rán)
- **Relax the hip and keep the knees bent** (松胯屈膝, sōng kuà qū xī)
- **The crotch is arch shaped** (裆劲开圆, dāng jìn kāi yuán)
- **keep the mind pure and clear** (虚实分明, xū shí fēn míng)
- **The top and bottom works together** (上下相随, shàng xià xiāng suí)
- **Adjust hardness and softness** (刚柔相济, gāng róu xiāng jì)
- **Alternate fast and slow** (快慢相间, kuài màn xiāng jiàn)
- **The external shape is curved** (外形走弧线, wài xíng zǒu hú xiàn)
- **The internal energy travels a spiral path** (内劲走螺旋, nèi jìn zǒu luó xuán)
- **The body leads the hand** (以身领手, yǐ shēn lǐng shǒu)
- **The waist is an axis** (以腰为轴, yǐ yāo wèi zhóu)

Dantian centers are the three centers of concentration of your energy flow. The Lower Dantian center is the most important because it is the center of gravity of your body. It is the focal point for breathing, physical balance and finding the unity of opposites; it is the center of concentration of the mind or spirit for the control of thoughts and emotions.

Dantian centers are similar to Indian Yoga Chakras centers. Acting from the Dantian center is the highest state of awareness and the highest unity of mind and



body. The Middle Dantian and the Upper Dantian centers are located at the level of the heart and of the forehead, respectively. They are very important for Yoga, but less important for Tai Chi Chuan.

The Lower Dantian is more important for Tai Chi because it is the seat of one's internal energy, which radiates outward throughout the entire body. The Lower Dantian is the center core of all physical motion as demonstrated in Leonardo's Vitruvius Man. It is both the center of the circle and of the flowing action of the circle and the sphere.

From the standpoint of epistemology, Tai Chi is the highest conceptual principle of unity between the body and mind. As the source of the unity of the opposites, Tai Chi is what creates yin and yang as two opposite extremes of motion, right and left, which always require to be brought together as one. The yin and the yang are not opposite choices to be made. Neither one nor the other is valid in itself. There exist no pure yin and no pure yang. The point is to unify the opposites through the core of the lower Dantian. The function of Tai Chi is to transform the yang into the yin and the yin into the yang by causing the unity of the two. The purpose is to achieve the unity of the two, not the separation of the two.

Therefore, Tai Chi is the generating principle of the primal beginning, similar to the Platonic ontological principle of the One and the Many. The oneness of the Tai Chi principle excludes all gnostic-dualistic types of interpretation as the origin of the universe. In that sense, Tai Chi is a hylozoic force that is against the world of opposites, a means of solving paradoxes.

Tai Chi Chuan is an all-inclusive unifying process whose closest physical manifestation can be found in physics, today, as the principle of Magnetohydrodynamics (MHD); that is, in the plasma process which has so little resistivity that it can be treated as a perfect conductor.

**FIN**

**ADDENDUM**

Mike Billington wrote me a note about some conflicting views between Confucianism and Daoism which is important to pay attention to, here. He warned me against the Taoist philosophy of non-action and retreat from the world versus the creative action in Confucianism. This is precisely the crucial difficulty to be surmounted.

There are conflicting points among Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and such differences should be overcome by an ecumenical perspective such as the principle of *the benefit of the other* of the Peace of Westphalia. That is precisely what the traditional Chinese principle of *self-restraint for the sake of others* attempts to do by going beyond the axiomatic divisions among the three religions, and by connecting all human beings beyond sectarian positions into an all-inclusive common purpose for mankind.

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