

## The Enlightenment of Lao-Tzu's Humanism to Mental Health Education of Contemporary College Students

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**Abstract:** In the era of knowledge economy, it's urgent to study mental health education intending to cultivate the students with healthy personality. Based on the current situation of contemporary college students' mental health, the crucial impact of Lao-Tzu's humanism is to be discussed in the article. Lao-Tzu's humanism contains profound wisdom, and it offers rich cultural resources to quality education. It's suggested that contemporary college students take the initiative to study Taoism, get some spiritual nutrition from it, make full use of Lao-Tzu's idea of "rebirth" and "cherishing life", and learn from his wisdom in life; therefore, they'll enhance their overall physical and mental qualities and have sound personality and good social adaptability. As contemporary college students shoulder the heavy responsibility of modernization, mental health education should learn from Lao-Tzu's life philosophy and aid the students to behave decently and grow to be the useful talents at last.

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, with the development and popularization of higher education, College students, as a group with higher social and cultural levels in China, have gradually stepped out of the ivory tower and returned to real life. The university is no longer a dream journey, but more carries the contradiction and conflict between ideal and reality. In recent years, the rate of committing suicide in colleges has been on the increase, and the suicide has contributed the most to the death of college students. According to Ministry of Education, more than 50 per cent college students have suspended or quitted their studies for their mental barriers or illnesses.<sup>[1]</sup> On the noon of July 15, 2003, a sophomore girl, who is known as "pigeon" and is good at singing and dancing, leaped down from the ninth floor of the dormitory building.<sup>[2]</sup> At about 10 p.m. on November 24, 2004, a boy from Northern University of Technology fell from the fourth teaching building of the building and died instantly. In the first half of 2005, more than ten people committed suicide in Universities in Beijing.<sup>[3]</sup> In the first half of 2005, there're about 10 college students killing themselves in Beijing.<sup>[2]</sup> Through the questionnaire concerning college students' mental health and conducted by SSIC (Social Survey Institute of China), it's found that, among 1000 respondents in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Nanjing, and Wuhan, there're a quarter of them once considered suicide. In the middle 1980s, the number of college students with mental barriers was 23 per cent; however, it reached 25 per cent in 1990s and 30 per cent in recent years.<sup>[4]</sup> Haiyang Liu, a student in the Department of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering of Tsinghua University, threw sodium hydroxide (commonly known as "caustic soda") and sulfuric acid solution on the national protected animal bear at Beijing Zoo on January 29 and February 23, 2002. The case of Jiajue Ma, which shocked China in 2004, is still a grim one. It is heartbreaking and thought-provoking that the life of the flower-like jade suddenly disappears and the brilliant future suddenly stops. College students' suicide is a tragedy of individuals and families, and also a great loss of society. Obviously, the situation of mental health education in colleges in China isn't positive. To some degree, it's the neglect of mental health education that has led some college students to depreciate themselves and others and show no appreciation and respect to life for their lacking in cultivating compassion and personality. In other words, when those students are frustrated by troubles, they will either suffer mental disorders or even hurting themselves or others. Lao-Tzu is one of the greatest philosophers of nature in ancient China. Owing to its broad content and profound spirit, *Tao Te Ching* has been of

paramount importance for China more than 2000 years. There're 81 chapters included in the works in total, and they're mainly involved in the interrelation between Wu Chi Diagram and Tai Chi Diagram and the relation between the natural law and humanity. In the works, it's designed that human beings can learn from following the natural rules and turn back from Tai Chi to Wu Chi. At last, the physical, mental, intellectual, and moral issues of human beings can be thoroughly worked out. In other words, human can be an integral part of nature after mastering the natural law. And the return of humanity can enable human to develop their natural potentials and make full use of those potentials. To be a person with high morality not only benefits the nature, society, others, and the individual but also contributes to the social stability, the nation revitalization, the world peace, and the increased longevity. Humanism of Lao-Tzu is the core of Taoism; in *Tao Te Ching*, "people-orientation" is a constant idea which makes the works be educational. Thus, the exploration of Lao-Tzu's humanism is with high enlightenment to mental health education of college students.

## 2. The Self-education Focusing on the Idea of Rebirth and Cherishing Life

Lao-Tzu's humanism is mainly about rebirth and cherishing life. Lao-Tzu once stated that, "The natural law is extraordinary, the Heaven is vast, the Earth is immense, and human is great." To be illustrated, Lao-Tzu affirms the position and effect of human in the universe and highlights the respect for human, thus casting off the influence of religious ideology on human and manifesting his humanism. And he lays emphasis on life as well. According to him, he's lucky as he's alive. In the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-Tzu points out that, "As I'm alive, it's common for me to suffer the hardships and illnesses; if I've been dead, and everything would have faded away." So Lao Tzu talks about keeping in good health and longevity himself. Life is above everything. Lao Tzu put forward that "if you value being the world, if you can trust it; if you love being the world, if you trust the world" ("Chapter 13"), that is to say, if you treat the world with the attitude of caring for your body, you can give him the responsibility of the world; if you treat the world with the faith of caring for your body, you can entrust the world to him. Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu both believed that "those who are reborn are less profitable, while those who are more profitable are less profitable." Lightweight people will inevitably pursue fame and fortune, abandon themselves and die. How can such people who are insecure govern the world? With the development of modern society, college students are frequently burdened with heavy pressure leading them to suffer mental disorder, for which the potential reason can be attributed to the overemphasis put by the public on fame, fortune, and competition. However, it's advocated by Lao-Tzu that it's extremely disastrous for human to seek fame and fortune. Fame and body, or body and goods, or death or illness? Love is costly, and hide is heavy. Therefore, contentment is not humiliating, knowledge is not perilous, and can last for a long time." (Chapter 44) Only contented people can often experience the joy of contentment. Only when they know how to control their material desires can they maintain their psychological balance. Lao Tzu emphasized "seeing things as they are", did not insist on change, respected nature, acted according to the original rules of things, guided by circumstances, and achieved the goal of doing nothing without doing anything. There's a vital rule of education revealed by Lao-Tzu, and it's that education must be in accordance with the physical and mental development of human. On the basis of the inner needs of human, the cultivation of humanity should be the core of education, and human shouldn't be perceived as the tool of education. It's suggested by Taoism that the relationship between human and nature should be harmonious, so should the relationship between human body and their spirit be. For contemporary college students, they should pay much more attention to their spirit rather than the material objects. Despite the fierce competition, college students should educate themselves by learning the wisdom reflected by Taoism, for instance, no selfishness, few desires, being tranquil, and being exquisite, so as to conquer the possible mental barriers. We should actively learn Chinese culture and Taoist culture, live a quiet and peaceful life, deal with the world without alarm, and reserve a pure land for ourselves in our spiritual home. Laozi taught people to treat life correctly. Life is nothing but success, failure, gain and loss, joy and sorrow. In Laozi's view, everything is Tao. I have the Tao, the heart is natural, the so-called success or failure, the so-called joys and sorrows, all go with him, I

naturally, there will never be madness, light birth and other extreme actions. There are many psychological problems in modern and contemporary college students, such as the enormous pressure caused by study and employment, the psychological depression caused by disharmony in interpersonal relations, vanity, inferiority and emptiness of spiritual life resulting from the pursuit of material life. As far as the mental health education of college students is concerned, we should set up the idea of rebirth and value students and strengthen self-education. The mental education should be people-oriented, and it should be conducive to giving full play to the initiative of the educated. At last, the educated should independently develop and grasp the operation law of human society. All of college students should keep observing their mental state. Especially, when they're frustrated by the hardships of life, they should actively adjust their mental state so as to positively address their own problems, educate themselves, and develop to be mature individuals.

### 3. The Quality Education Focusing on Behaving Decently

There's rich wisdom about behaving decently containing in Lao-Tzu's humanism, which highlights "virtue". It's said by Lao-Tzu that, "The Heaven and the Earth feed all of species equally", and "The saints show no bias to the public". The 2 sentences quoted from the 55<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Tao Te Ching* suggest that it's not advisable for human to deliberately show their sympathy and love to others; however, it's favorable for them to adhere to righteousness and morality. Additionally, in the 55<sup>th</sup> chapter, Lao-Tzu points out that "the holy man is as pure as the newborn baby". Here, Lao-Tzu emphasizes the born virtue of human. What he reveals is not the superficial phenomenon but the deep philosophy about behaving decently, and it's the requirement for inner cultivation of human and high taste of life. Being enlightened by those ideas, contemporary college students should keep their heads, overcome their physical disabilities and mental barriers, and improve their accomplishment and morality so as to better their life and study.

It's advocated by Lao-Tzu that human should be kind-hearted enough to embody their "virtue". In the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter, it says that "The highest excellence is like water which is beneficial to all of species; however, it's superb modest. So, water is natural." It can be illustrated that the most kind-hearted man is like water. He's broad-minded and modest. As he desires nothing, he's natural. Meanwhile, Lao-Tzu praises highly the belief of generosity. In the 63<sup>rd</sup> chapter, it says that "To do something by doing nothing; to address the problems by forgetting them; to taste the flavor by smelling nothing. Though the change means accumulation, virtue demands no complaint." In daily life, college students should care about others, and they should be kind to their parents and friends and the society. Surely, they should know how to share with others and what to devote to others. The key of the mental health education is to improve the morality of the educated. Through various efficient education activities, the students will be educated to obtain the recognition of excellent morality. After mastering the rudimentary rules of behaving decently, the educated will go through sublimation of their intrinsic quality and put what they've transformed into practice.

The development of individuals depends on their quality and accomplishment. Hitherto, personal accomplishment has been playing a crucial role in personal development, social stability, and national fate. The ancients proposed the philosophy of "self-cultivating; family-regulating; state-ordering; then the land great governed". In China, college students are accustomed to being treated as the elites in guaranteeing the national development, leading the social reform, and boosting the national rejuvenation. However, the educated aren't the literate, intelligence isn't wisdom, and degree isn't competence. College life is the most vital and brilliant time for the college students. During that period, college students are cultivated to form the correct attitudes toward the world, life, and values. And they're cultivated to form healthy personality and achieve mental balance. The effect of Lao-Tzu's wisdom on cultivating college students can't be neglected. The thought and morality quality constitutes the core of college students' overall quality, restricts the development of other qualities, and exerts direct influence on the orientation and quality of talents cultivation. Thus, the top priority of mental health education should be the promotion of students' ideological and political quality and their morality quality.

Against the backdrop of current market economy, such unhealthy ideologies as individualism

and money worship are so prevailing that they've negatively shaped talent education. "Mental health exerts direct impact on social development efficiency and stability." [5] Owing to it, the focus of mental health education should be on morality, talents cultivation, and the improvement of students' quality. After being educated, the students have fostered lofty ideals and aspirations; they will keep going forward and grow to be the talents eventually. Contemporary college students shoulder the heavy responsibility of modernization, mental health education; based on the philosophy of Lao-Tzu, mental health education should highlight the effective combination of "behaving decently" and "growing to be talents", of which the former plays a fundamental role, while the latter emphasized.

From the above-mentioned analysis, it can be easily concluded that, for contemporary college students, humanism of Lao-Tzu is of great importance. Therefore, the emphasis should be put on their mental health education. Additionally, the wisdom of Lao-Tzu should be valued and explored again so as to endow it with novel connotations and interpret it in a modernized way.

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