

Feng Youlan's View on *Zhuangzi* and Its Implications for Wang Yangming's Mind-Teaching

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Currently, academic discussions on Feng Youlan and *Zhuangzi* primarily focus on translation studies, while philosophical research mainly addresses the relationship between Dr. Feng's "New philosophy of principle" and *Zhuangzi*. In fact, Dr. Feng's interpretation of *Zhuangzi* is not only related to "New philosophy of principle" but also closely linked to pragmatism, an aspect that has received limited attention from the academic community. Research has revealed that Dr. Feng offered an interpretation of *Zhuangzi* from the perspectives of pure experience and agnosticism, where pure experience aligns with William James' pragmatic category, and agnosticism embodies the pragmatic view of truth. Dr. Feng's pragmatic interpretation of *Zhuangzi* offers enlightening insights into the interpretation of Wang Yangming's mind-teaching.

Keywords: Feng Youlan, *Zhuangzi*, pragmatism, Wang Yangming's mind-teaching

Introduction

Zhuangzi stands at the forefront of Chinese philosophy, and the academic community has produced fruitful modern interpretations of it from various perspectives such as philosophy, psychology, and aesthetics. Among these interpretations, Dr. Feng Youlan's stands out as particularly distinctive. Currently, academic discussions primarily focus on Dr. Feng's translations of *Zhuangzi*. Although research on his interpretation of *Zhuangzi* is relatively scarce, there are still representative studies. For instance, Chai Wenhua and Liu Taoxiu explored the pre-Qin philosophical foundation of Dr. Feng's writing on the history of Chinese philosophy, based on *Zhuangzi*'s "The Chapter of the Universe" (Tianxia Pian 天下篇) deepening the understanding of his views and methodology (2017). Zhao Jingang discussed how Dr. Feng integrated the concepts of chaos and knowledge in *Zhuangzi* into his "New philosophy of principle" (Xin Lixue 新理学), revealing the internal logic of his approach to "knowledge" leading to "the Whole" (2022). Jin Lin (2009) and Liu Luoxi (2010) also emphasized that "unrestrained and free" and "equality of all things" were key points in Dr. Feng's interpretation, pointing out that he integrated *Zhuangzi* into the construction of his New Neo-Confucianism. In summary, while academic research on Feng Youlan and *Zhuangzi* primarily focuses on their relationship with "New philosophy of principle", this paper aims to explore a different perspective—pragmatism—in Dr. Feng's interpretation of *Zhuangzi*.

Pure Experience and *Zhuangzi*

Unlike traditional commentary and annotation research, Dr. Feng's interpretation of *Zhuangzi* is truly unique.

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Its particularity lies in the fact that Dr. Feng, based on a pragmatist standpoint, interprets and analyzes *Zhuangzi* from the perspective of “pure experience”. The pragmatist concept of “pure experience” serves as a significant starting point for Dr. Feng in interpreting *Zhuangzi*. In this regard, Dr. Feng points out that:

In pure experience, the individual merges with the universe. The so-called “pure experience” refers to experience devoid of knowledge. When one has pure experience, the experienter only feels that what is experienced is “thus” (what James calls “that”), without knowing what it is (what James calls “What”). James’s concept of pure experience embodies the “face value” of experience, which is purely perceived without mingling with linguistic distinctions. This corresponds to the Buddhist concept of “direct perception”. The experience of the “true man” as described by *Zhuangzi* falls into this category, and the world he inhabits is similarly a realm of such experiences. The chapter “Qiwu” states, “The ancients had reached the utmost in their knowledge. Where did they reach? Some thought there had never been boundaries. Others thought there were boundaries, but no right and wrong. The manifestation of right and wrong is the loss of the Way. The loss of the Way is the origin of affection.” To have experience without knowing right and wrong, without knowing boundaries (i.e., distinctions), without knowing objects, the more unaware one is, the purer their experience becomes. In experience, the objects that are experienced are concrete, whereas what is referred to by names is abstract. Therefore, what names refer to is only a part of experience. For example, the name “human” only refers to the common characteristics of humanity. It cannot encompass the unique traits and personalities of each individual person. Hence, whenever a name is used, it seems to accomplish something but actually results in a loss. All linguistic distinctions are like this. Hence, we ought to embrace the “face value” of experience, uncontaminated by linguistic distinctions. (2001a, p. 489)

This discussion is excerpted from *A Brief History of Chinese Philosophy*, and it is also found in *Philosophy of Life* and *History of Chinese Philosophy*. It is evident that Dr. Feng’s research on *Zhuangzi* is consistent and coherent, which to some extent indicates his positive attitude towards interpreting *Zhuangzi* from a pragmatist perspective. Specifically, Dr. Feng’s research on *Zhuangzi* emphasizes William James’s concept of “pure experience”. According to William James,

Pure experience is the name which I gave to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories. Only new-born babes, or men in semi-coma from sleep, drugs, illnesses, or blows, may be assumed to have an experience pure in the literal sense—a that which is not yet any definite what, but ready to be all sorts of whats; full both of oneness and of manyness, but in respects that don’t appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or of identity, can be caught. (1920, p. 348)

After accurately grasping that pure experience is a state prior to the subject-object dichotomy and free from human cognition and language, Dr. Feng further regards this state of pure experience as the highest state of unity between man and the universe, namely the state of the “true man” in *Zhuangzi*. The cognition of the true man is an experience that has “never had boundaries” (未始有封), which is precisely the pure experience devoid of linguistic distinctions. Conversely, if the experience acquired by humans has linguistic distinctions, then “its division is its formation; its formation is its destruction” (其分也, 成也; 其成也, 毁也) (*Zhuangzi*: Qiwu Lun). Linguistic distinctions bring about formation and destruction, but pure experience is devoid of both. *Zhuangzi* and even the saints of Taoism advocate a state of detachment from linguistic distinctions and unity with the universe. Therefore, Dr. Feng uses pure experience to analogize and interpret *Zhuangzi*, thereby expanding the dimension of his interpretation of *Zhuangzi*.

Is it appropriate for Dr. Feng to interpret *Zhuangzi* through the concept of “pure experience”? Undeniably, both pure experience and the state of the true man in *Zhuangzi* emphasize an experiential state that has not been dichotomized into subject and object by consciousness. This serves as the footing for Dr. Feng’s interpretation through the lens of pure experience. However, there are indeed differences between pure experience and the state of the true man. From a pragmatist perspective, pure experience is the primary experience acquired by humans,

obtained solely through the senses without the classification or objectification of cognition by human intellect and rationality. For humans, pure experience is neither an object nor a subject but merely potentially capable of becoming either. Therefore, James attributes this experience to infants or people in a semi-coma due to various reasons. Infants can acquire sensory experience about the outside world but lack cognitive abilities, while people in a semi-coma can perceive external objects but also lack the ability for objectified cognition. So, is this primary pure experience the realm of the true man in *Zhuangzi*?

In fact, although the true man in *Zhuangzi* attains a state of experience without the dichotomy of subject and object, this experience is not identical to James's pure experience. Rather, it is a state of pure experience that transcends the dichotomy of subject and object on the basis of a deeper cognition. Dr. Feng is also aware of the distinction between these two types of pure experience:

Laozi several times speaks with approval of the state of the little child. Yet a child, while lacking intellectual knowledge, is certainly not an insensible creature. And when Laozi speaks of one "who knows the male, yet cleaves to the female," etc., this implies that we are not to be in a state of complete absence of knowledge. Likewise, the world of pure experience described by Zhuangzi, while containing no intellectual knowledge, does include experience, so that in it there can be no complete non-sensibility. When Zhuangzi speaks of "forgetting life, forgetting the distinctions of right and wrong," the word "forgetting" deserves our special attention. For this forgetting does not mean a complete nothingness, but only a special attempt to forget certain things. Herein lies the difference between a "clod of earth" and the personality conceived of by Laozi and Zhuangzi. (1952, pp. 157-158)

Both these terms, "Fast of the Mind" and "Sitting in Forgetfulness," refer to the discarding of knowledge and emptying of the mind, so as to "become one with the Infinite," a condition which is one of pure experience. This state is also implied in the "disregard of all worldly matters" and "disregard of all external things" mentioned in the preceding section. (1952, p. 242)

This so-called Mysterious Power is the condition of the True Man (zhenren 真人) in his state of pure experience. (1952, p. 242)

Dr. Feng recognizes that the Taoist emphasis on "knowledge of ignorance" does not lead to a complete rejection of empirical knowledge. Lao Zi's "knowing the strong" and "knowing the bright", as well as *Zhuangzi*'s knowledge of distinguishing, enclosing, forming, and destroying, all belong to the empirical cognition that distinguishes between subject and object. Based on this objectified empirical cognition, Taoism advocates the dissolution of this cognition, thereby achieving the realm of the true man where the Tao is unified. In *Zhuangzi*, the dissolution of the empirical cognition that distinguishes between subject and object is a process of "the fast of the mind" and "sitting in forgetfulness", which corresponds to the concept of daily decreasing for the sake of the Way. As empirical cognition is dissolved, the realm of the true man emerges, transcending the duality of subject and object and integrating humanity with the universe. The experience of this realm of the true man is pure experience. However, this pure experience is not James's original pure experience but rather pure experience that has gone through the stage of duality. In this regard, Dr. Feng states,

What *Zhuangzi* speaks of as absence of knowledge, however, is a state coming after one has already had knowledge, and so is actually a synthesis of knowledge and primitive ignorance. As such, it differs from an originally born baby, for example, who can have experience but no knowledge. The baby's experience is pure experience, which is primitive pure experience. But if someone, having already passed through a state of knowledge, attains once more to a state of pure experience, what he thus attains to a second time is already one stage higher than the primitive state of pure experience. (1952, p. 242)

It can be seen that Dr. Feng interprets *Zhuangzi* through James's concept of pure experience and grasps the essence of the realm of the true man pursued in *Zhuangzi*. However, pragmatism's pure experience specifically refers to original pure experience, while the pure experience of the realm of the true man is advanced pure experience.

It should be noted that the ambiguity in *Zhuangzi* and even the broader Taoist philosophy regarding the realm of the true man provides theoretical space for Dr. Feng's interpretation through the lens of pragmatism's primordial pure experience. In his book *New Understanding of the Human Being* (Xin Yuanren 新原人), Dr. Feng clearly elucidates this point:

Taoism also considers the ideal person to be the sage. The sage they refer to belongs not to the realm of nature, but to the realm of heaven and earth; not someone with the lowest level of self-awareness and understanding, but with the highest level. The sage mentioned as possessing sage-like wisdom, which Taoism opposes, is someone with knowledge only at the level of common sense. Taoism may not distinguish clearly between the realm of the sage and the realm of nature, assuming both to be what people ought to strive for. If this were the case, then the assertion that the realm of nature is what people ought to strive for would stem from confusion in their thinking. Once this confusion is clarified, they would not make such assertions. (2001b, pp. 514-515)

Some interpretations of Taoism often confuse the realm of nature with the realm of heaven and earth. For instance, the ignorance praised by Taoism can be either the ignorance of those in the realm of nature or that of those in the realm of heaven and earth. As stated in the chapter "Journey to the North in Search of Wisdom" (Zhi Beiyou 知北游) in *Zhuangzi*... The ignorance praised here refers to that of those in the realm of heaven and earth, rather than to a chaotic ignorance. (2001b, p. 515)

Here, Dr. Feng notes that Taoism fails to delineate a clear boundary between its highest and lowest realms. Laozi and *Zhuangzi*, the icons of Taoist philosophy, underscore the stage of infancy and champion the wisdom stemming from ignorance. Consequently, the highest realm of Taoist philosophy closely mirrors the lowest natural realm. However, the ambiguity surrounding these realms can spark confusion and even foster a misconception that Taoism merely advocates the pure experience. In truth, the realm espoused by Taoism only superficially resembles the natural realm. This similarity arises because the conduct of a genuine Taoist in daily life mimics the spontaneous natural state. Yet, in essence, this realm is one of heaven and earth achieved through a profound level of awakening and understanding, transcending the wisdom of ignorance that lies beyond mere knowledge.

Agnosticism and *Zhuangzi*

Furthermore, this pure experience in Taoism is essentially a religious experience, and the realm of the True Man is also a mystical realm. In this regard, Dr. Feng points out:

In religious experiences, people awaken from a great dream to see that this world is truly illusory, and that there exists a higher reality beyond it. They also feel their individual selves merging with the "Whole" (the totality of the universe), eliminating the distinction between the self and the external world, as well as between the inner world and the outer world. Those who acknowledge the authenticity of such experiences and attempt to interpret them often start with a metaphysical assumption of idealism. We believe that we can accept the authenticity of such experiences without requiring the assumption of an idealist cosmology. The philosophies of *Zhuangzi* and Spinoza seem to share this view. According to the cosmology mentioned above, all things are constantly changing; yet, the universe remains unchanged. Therefore, all things can be considered illusory, while the universe itself must be real. *Zhuangzi* said, "The perfect man has no self." To achieve "no self" is to merge one's individuality with the universe. Having become one with the universe, in that state, one's perspective on things can be deemed to have reached a higher level. Hence, in that realm, one can truly see that all things are illusory, while the universe alone is real. (2001c, pp. 229-230)

I conduct a conceptual comparison between the pure experience advocated by *Zhuangzi* and James's pure experience. James advocates the pure experience, while *Zhuangzi* advocates a religious experience that transcends the stage of reflection, a state of unity between man and the universe, which is the realm described in

Zhuangzi's Equality of Things as "heaven and earth grow with me, and all things and I are one". Later, Dr. Feng incorporated this realm into the construction of his New Neo-Confucian system. The New Neo-Confucianism uses logical analysis to reformulate traditional Chinese philosophical concepts. While constructing an ethereal logical framework, it also acknowledges that the ultimate realm of this Neo-Confucianism is one that defies logical analysis and verbal expression. According to Dr. Feng,

In "New philosophy of principle," I also refer to this "world of reason" as the "wordless scripture" (Wuzi Tianshu 无字天书). I say, "The wordless scripture, some can read it, some cannot." Those who can read the "wordless scripture" experience a "spiritual realm" when they "read" it, "as if transcending experience and oneself." This experience, of course, is the religious "mystical experience". (2001d, p. 941)

It can be seen that when quoting James's "pure experience" to interpret *Zhuangzi*, Dr. Feng noticed the ambiguity of the highest realm in *Zhuangzi* and the differences between Chinese and Western philosophical thoughts. In this context, he reinterprets James's pure experience within the context of *Zhuangzi*, regarding it as a mystical religious experience. As a result, he not only clarified the confusion between the natural realm and the sage's realm in *Zhuangzi* and even Taoist philosophy but also appropriately introduced Pragmatism's pure experience into Chinese philosophy as an effective method for interpreting it.

Having explored this far, it can be acknowledged that Dr. Feng interprets the sage's realm in *Zhuangzi* as a pure experience, which is tinged with mysticism and constitutes a religious experience. So, what is mysticism? According to Dr. Feng,

Mysticism refers specifically to a philosophy that acknowledges a realm of "the unity of all things." In this realm, the individual and the "Whole" (the totality of the universe) are one, and the distinction between self and other, inner and outer, ceases to exist. (2001a, p. 477)

In fact, this realm is epistemological unknowable, a realm that cannot be objectified and recognized by humans. When interpreting *Zhuangzi*, Dr. Feng starts with James's "seeing", which communicates with the "divine" and carries religious connotations. Consequently, the realm of *Zhuangzi* that he "sees" is also a realm of agnostic views. Regarding this, Dr. Feng conducted comparative studies between *Zhuangzi* and the thoughts of Mencius and Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, stating that:

In Chinese philosophy, both the Confucian school associated with Mencius and the Taoist school of Zhuangzi regard the mystical realm as the highest and mystical experience as the ultimate achievement of personal cultivation. However, the methods employed by the two schools to attain this highest realm differ. The Taoist method involves achieving selflessness through pure experience, while the Confucian method involves eliminating selfishness through the "enterprise of love." Without self or selfishness, the individual becomes one with the universe. If Mencius's philosophy indeed embraces mysticism, then all things are already within oneself, indicating an original unity between oneself and all things. Due to separation, what was originally one with all things now seems divided, resulting in a lack of "sincerity." If one "turns inward and finds sincerity," returning to the realm of unity with all things, then there is "no greater joy." To return to this realm of unity, the method of the "enterprise of love" is employed. It is said that "by practicing forgiveness vigorously, one comes closest to benevolence." Both forgiveness and benevolence aim to eliminate the boundary between oneself and others; when this boundary is eliminated, one becomes one with all things. Whether this interpretation aligns with Mencius's original intention is unknown, but the philosophy of many Song-dynasty Confucian scholars has been influenced by this idea. (2001a, p. 477)

Tracing back to the source, the mystical realms and experiences of both the Confucian and Taoist schools, represented by Mencius and Zhuangzi, are epistemologically unknowable realms and experiences. Dr. Feng's

interpretation of the highest realm of Chinese philosophy as agnosticism is not only reflected in his works, such as *Philosophy of Life*, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, and *Mysticism in Chinese Philosophy*, but also permeates the construction of the *New Philosophy of Principle*. The main body of this philosophy is a metaphysical framework constructed based on logical analysis, yet the highest realm of this framework is the “heart of the universe”. According to Dr. Feng,

For those who have entered the realm of sainthood, transcending experience and transcending oneself, and perceiving that heaven, earth, and all things, as well as oneself beyond the self, are all one, then for them, their heart “becomes” the heart of the universe. (2001e, p. 193)

This indicates that Dr. Feng also incorporated the mystical realm of unity between man and the universe into his new philosophy of principle. Regarding this, he reflected on it in his later years and candidly stated that:

I advocate new realism, but I do not completely reject pragmatism. I once attempted to link the two, both of which are decadent bourgeois philosophical ideas: new realism and pragmatism. Ideally, both idealist philosophies tend towards agnosticism. Due to my desire to maintain a connection with pragmatism, the color of agnosticism was even more prominent in my past philosophical thought. Agnosticism leaves an “unknowable” element, precisely to reserve a “forbidden zone” for religion and open a wide door for mysticism. My past philosophical thought ultimately led to mysticism. The so-called objective idealism of new realism, the agnosticism of pragmatism, and the mysticism of religion are all factors contributing to the decadence of bourgeois philosophy in my past philosophical thought. It was on the basis of these factors that I engaged in the study of the history of Chinese philosophy. (2001d, p. 934)

In *New Philosophy of Principle*, I also referred to this “world of reason” as the “wordless scripture.” I said, “The wordless scripture can be read by some and not by others.” When those who can read the “wordless scripture” do so, they experience a “spiritual realm,” “as if they have transcended experience and themselves.” This experience, of course, is the religious-style “mystical experience.” Religion speaks of prophets and “saints” who have received direct “revelation” from God, obtaining truths inaccessible to ordinary people. The objective idealism of Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi believes that “sages” can “speak on behalf of heaven,” and they can do so because they can read the “wordless scripture” and possess “vision.” This is a more refined form of religion. (2001d, p. 941)

Dr. Feng’s academic confession in his later years serves as evidence that pragmatism never fully retreated from his thought. Regarding “New Philosophy of Principle”, it is generally considered a fusion of new realism and Chinese philosophy, where “Chinese traditional realism (Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming Dynasties) and Western realism (Russell and Moore’s early Platonic realism or American new realism) converge and integrate” (Chen, 2015, p. 849). Among these, the logical analysis method originates from new realism, while the mystical realm of the “wordless scripture” stems from the contemplative tradition of Chinese philosophy. This is almost a universally acknowledged conclusion in the current academic circle. However, paying attention to Dr. Feng’s academic confession directly supports previous research, namely that the mystical realm in “New Philosophy of Principle” and Dr. Feng’s study of Chinese philosophy has, besides roots in Chinese philosophy, a Western philosophical background, namely pragmatism. Pragmatism has been the ideological backdrop for Dr. Feng’s study of philosophy and the history of philosophy since the 1920s, and Dr. Feng was well aware that “the characteristic of pragmatism lies in its theory of truth. Its theory of truth is actually a form of agnosticism” (2001f, p. 179). In interpreting Chinese philosophy through pragmatism’s viewpoints of “insight”, “pure experience”, and “truth”, Dr. Feng cleverly combined pragmatism’s agnosticism with the highest realm of Chinese philosophy: On the one hand, the highest realm of Chinese philosophy, with the help of pragmatism’s agnosticism, is presented in the modern academic context; on the other hand, the mysticism of this highest realm also conceals the underlying agnosticism of pragmatism. Therefore, while it is believed that “New Philosophy of Principle” is

a combination of new realism and Chinese philosophy; in reality, “New Philosophy of Principle” draws from two sources of Western philosophy: new realism and pragmatism. The former constructs the logical framework, while the latter, combined with the contemplative tradition of Chinese philosophy, presents the highest realm of Chinese philosophy as an agnostic mystical realm and a religious pure experience in modern academic discourse.

The Characteristics of Feng’s Interpretation of *Zhuangzi* and Its Implications for Wang Yangming’s Mind-Teaching

When discussing Dr. Feng’s interpretation of *Zhuangzi*, academic circles often focus on his exploration of the categories of “unfettered wandering” and “equality of things” and their relationship with the realm theory of the “New Philosophy of Principle”. Beyond this, Dr. Feng’s interpretation of *Zhuangzi* also exhibits a unique characteristic, namely pragmatism. As mentioned, when interpreting *Zhuangzi*, Dr. Feng adopts a pragmatic perspective, approaching it from the angles of pure experience and agnosticism. In terms of time, Dr. Feng’s exposure to pragmatism dates back to his days at Peking University, where he is well-acquainted with Hu Shi’s lectures on the history of Chinese philosophy, “Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy”, which integrates pragmatism with traditional Chinese textual research methods, potentially giving Dr. Feng the impression that pragmatism is a pioneering approach. Later, before studying in the United States, Dr. Feng consults Hu Shi about the philosophy departments at American universities. Hu Shi’s description of Harvard University emphasizing old philosophy and Columbia University emphasizing new philosophy inadvertently influences Dr. Feng’s decision to choose Columbia University, where John Dewey, a key figure in pragmatism, is located.

Furthermore, Dr. Feng’s interpretation of *Zhuangzi* through the lens of pure experience is a relatively overt modern interpretation from a pragmatic perspective, while his interpretation from the angle of agnosticism exhibits a subtler pragmatic characteristic. However, agnosticism is a crucial aspect of the pragmatic view of truth, which Dr. Feng deeply understands. In his view, pragmatism is a theory of truth. However, pragmatism does not reveal the content of truth; it is a form of agnosticism. From the classical pragmatism of Peirce, James, and Dewey to the new pragmatism of analytic philosophy, how to view truth has always been a central issue. Although the concepts used, perspectives focused on, and theoretical emphases of various pragmatist philosophers vary slightly, they share a relatively consistent view on truth. Here, Dr. Feng grasps the core issue of the pragmatic view of truth and understands it as a form of agnosticism regarding truth. Regarding this, he states:

The characteristic of pragmatism lies in its theory of truth, which essentially embodies a form of agnosticism. It holds that cognition originates from experience and that what people can know is confined to their experiences. As for what lies beyond experience, it is deemed unknowable, rendering any inquiry into it meaningless. This is because, regardless of how the question is phrased, people cannot transcend the boundaries of their experiences to acquire new knowledge. To address this, one must continue to rely on experience. Truth, so to speak, is merely a revelation or interpretation of experience, providing an understanding of complex phenomena. If something can be coherently explained in terms of experience, it is considered truth and is of use to us. What is useful is deemed truth. There is no such thing as an absolute, objective truth. (Feng, 2001f, p. 179)

Regarding the pragmatic view of truth, Hu Shi points out: “Truths are originally made by humans, for humans, and to be used by humans. They are given the beautiful name of ‘truth’ because they are highly useful” (1998, p. 223). Hu Shi’s statement on the pragmatic view of truth can be summarized as “what is useful is truth”. Undeniably, this statement reveals certain characteristics of the pragmatic view of truth: its opposition to a static

view of truth as conformity with reality and its advocacy of using practical effects as the criterion for judging truth, pursuing instead a dynamic view of truth that aligns with reality. However, this statement is a kind of labeling, and its advantage lies in highlighting the distinction between the pragmatic view of truth and the traditional correspondence theory of truth. At the same time, its limitation also resides here, as it somehow reinforces the stereotype that the pragmatic view of truth focuses solely on practical effects. Compared to Hu Shi's interpretation, Dr. Feng's understanding of pragmatism goes further. He not only clarifies that pragmatism opposes objective truth and emphasizes the utility of truth in explaining complex experience but also reveals that the theoretical basis of this view of truth is agnosticism.

Based on Dr. Feng's understanding, pragmatism is a view of truth whose purpose is not to elucidate the connotation, nature, or other aspects of truth but, rather, from an empirical perspective, to regard truth as an explanation of experience. Thus, whether one can provide a coherent and logical explanation of experience, even complex experience, becomes the criterion for judging truth. If a theory can reasonably explain the experiences people face, then it is considered a useful truth that can help people deal with those experiences; otherwise, it is not considered truth. Dr. Feng acknowledges pragmatism's emphasis on the effectiveness of truth but does not treat "what is useful is truth" as a dogma. Instead, he systematically elucidates the fundamental reasons why pragmatism opposes objective truth and advocates the validity of truth. In Dr. Feng's view, pragmatism starts with experience and escapes from the dualistic model of the Western philosophical tradition. They hold an agnostic stance toward experience, believing that people's cognition originates from and terminates with experience, and they cannot transcend the limits of experience to understand objects such as the "essence" behind experience. Based on this agnosticism, if one wants to judge whether a theory about experience is true, the traditional criterion of truth as conformity with reality is no longer applicable. In other words, there is no such thing as an objective truth. Regarding this, Dr. Feng states, "Instead of judging the truth or falsehood of a theory essentially, one should judge it phenomenally. This is because pragmatism does not recognize an objective existence independent of human will" (2001g, p. 1010). This aligns with William James' opposition to the existence of objective truth. Therefore, the criterion for judging truth can only be attributed to practical effectiveness: whether the truth can explain complex experience and whether one can achieve the expected results based on this truth to solve difficulties.

We can summarize the schematic representation of pragmatism from Dr. Feng's perspective: Firstly, experience is the source of cognition, but cognition derived from experience cannot grasp what lies beyond it. The boundary of cognition stops at the level of experience. Thus, pragmatism is a form of agnosticism. Furthermore, this agnosticism dissolves the objectivity of reality and the essence behind experience, also eliminating the possibility of objective truth. Consequently, the criterion for truth shifts from objective conformity with reality to whether it can provide a reasonable explanation for human experience, prompting them to engage in effective actions. This is the so-called "what is useful is truth". To a large extent, Dr. Feng's grasp of the pragmatic view of truth is relatively accurate. Especially compared to Hu Shi, Dr. Feng can break through the appearance of "what is useful is truth", delving into the level of agnosticism in pragmatism, and revealing in detail the relationships among the concepts of experience, reality, truth, and agnosticism, highlighting the truth that conforms to reality. It is worth noting that this truth that conforms to reality is not a static conformity relationship with experience and reality but a dynamic and interpretive relationship. A true concept or theory that can reasonably interpret experience can guide people to effectively interact with it and meet individual needs.

Dr. Feng's modern interpretation of *Zhuangzi* from the perspective of agnosticism, despite the ambiguity and mystery of *Zhuangzi*, cannot exclude the potential influence of pragmatism's agnosticism. Here, it can be affirmed that Dr. Feng's modern interpretation of *Zhuangzi* bears pragmatic characteristics, and these pragmatic characteristics exhibit a trend from explicit to implicit, i.e., from the prominent pragmatist category of pure experience to the pragmatist view of truth as agnosticism. In terms of the modern interpretation of *Zhuangzi*, Dr. Feng's interpretation transitions from a relatively obvious approach of using Western concepts to interpret Chinese thought to a more implicit one, or it can be said that there is a tendency to integrate Chinese thought with Western thought, i.e., a potential convergence between *Zhuangzi* and pragmatism's agnosticism.

To a large extent, Dr. Feng's pragmatic interpretation of *Zhuangzi* provides enlightening value for exploring Wang Yangming's mind-teaching. Wang Yangming constructed his mind-teaching system centered on the three propositions of "mind is principle", "extension of innate knowledge", and "the unity of knowledge and action." Among them, the mind is equivalent to the principle of heaven, which corresponds to Zhu Xi's philosophical meaning of the principle of heaven and is similar to Plato's ideas. This indicates that the mind is a purely good ontological existence, and cognition emanating from the mind is also a kind of innate knowledge that can distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong. This innate knowledge is also an absolutely correct knowledge that cannot err. In fact, the concept of mind advocated by Wang Yangming can be interpreted from the perspective of pure experience, although it differs from William James's concept of pure experience. With the perspective of pure experience, it can be seen that Wang Yangming's concept of mind is a kind of pure experience, but this pure experience is not the pure experience in its natural state before consciousness intervenes. Instead, it is a state of pure experience that always maintains the goodness of consciousness and restrains the evil of consciousness.

Conclusion

The interpretation of *Zhuangzi* is a key area of academic interest, among which Dr. Feng Youlan's interpretation of *Zhuangzi* stands out as quite distinctive. The pragmatist perspective is the hallmark of Dr. Feng's interpretation of *Zhuangzi*, specifically embodied in his interpretation that draws on William James' pure experience and agnosticism as the pragmatic view of truth, thereby revealing different aspects of *Zhuangzi*. Furthermore, Dr. Feng's interpretation from a pragmatist perspective demonstrates a trend from explicit to implicit, which influenced his construction of the new philosophy of principle. That is to say, pragmatism serves as an important and implicit theoretical background for the new philosophy of principle, and its implicit characteristics in Dr. Feng's new philosophy of principle are consonant with his style of interpreting *Zhuangzi*. This indicates that pragmatism is an important theoretical resource and ideological background for Dr. Feng's research in philosophy and the history of philosophy. Dr. Feng's application of pragmatism in the study of philosophy and the history of philosophy provides enlightening insights into the interpretation of Wang Yangming's mind-teaching. As the discipline of philosophy continues to mature, modernized and standardized academic discourse and methods are constantly shaping the discourse and theoretical forms of Chinese philosophy research. Therefore, how to better highlight the characteristics of Chinese philosophy within the framework of modern academic discourse and methods is a contemporary issue worth pondering. Dr. Feng's use of pragmatism offers valuable insights for the modern interpretation of Wang Yangming's mind-teaching, finding converging entry points between Chinese and Western philosophy, and highlighting the characteristics of Chinese philosophy within modern discourse and methods.

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