

## **Compare Chinese and Western ideas of health and wellbeing**

In this essay I will be comparing Chinese ideas of health and wellbeing with that of the west. I will begin by making it clear that my use of 'the west' will be Eurocentric, as this is where I am more comfortable, and so I will be able to go more in depth. I also want to state that I believe that I do not believe that Western and Chinese ideas of health and wellbeing will be in any way similar on the spiritual side, however, on the physical side, I believe it would be quite similar. I believe this because Chinese spiritualism and Western spiritualism are rather different, while medicine is physical, and so will have been tested scientifically, which would make it more consistent over different cultures.

When it comes to health, there is a distinction between philosophy and medicine in the west, in that health is left up to doctors and science, and philosophy stays separate, while in China there is a relationship between the two as doctors are also philosophers, and so practice medicine while also practicing the teachings of one of the multiple Chinese philosophies to supplement this.

In the teachings of Daoism, there is importance on balance, such as Yin and Yang, and so living a balanced lifestyle is key to living healthily. An example of this would be not starving yourself, however also not eating to excess, or making sure not to undersleep or oversleep, either decision isn't beneficial to your health, and so finding a balance between the Yin of undersleeping and the Yang of oversleeping. For maintaining health in the long term, this is a useful idea to have, as the human body thrives on consistency, and balance.

I believe that the idea of finding balance in your life can be compared to the virtues and vices of Aristotle, who talked about how there are virtues that are the mean between an excess and a deficiency. This balancing of excess and deficiency is meant to lead to having a balanced personality that exhibits as many of the virtues as you are able. So while the use of balance in Daoism is for both mental and physical wellbeing, it is purely for the mental side in the case of Aristotle, and his Virtue Ethics. This is to be expected, as China is known for having a complex relationship between philosophy and medicine, while they are often kept separate in the west.

Daoist Yangsheng, or 'Nourishing Life', is an important part to immortality cultivation, and long life, which involves qigong, diet, sleep, meditation, and living in accordance with nature. This cultivates a mixture of both physical health, through the balanced diet, exercise and sleep schedule, and mental wellbeing through meditation and living in accordance with nature. Physical health is also important for mental wellbeing, as being physically healthy is required for mental health. The virtue ethics of Aristotle does not focus on physical health, though I would expect that it is part of his personal life philosophy because his society put importance on exercise, and his mentor Plato was known for being physically fit. This exemplifies the Daoist principle of harmony, as it is a harmony between the body and the mind, achieved through one practice of combined actions.

A problem with many Western philosophies is that they neglect the body, and focus purely on the mind, which does shift some of the weight of focus, allowing more effort to be put towards the mind, but without keeping a healthy body, the health of the mind suffers. It is difficult to exemplify the virtue of courage if you are too physically weak to complete a courageous act, and it is also difficult to be generous when you yourself are starving. This is one of the key areas where Western philosophy differentiates from Daoism, which is that while there are specialties within Daoism, it is broader, and enters more parts of life than Western philosophy.

Ge Hong was a Daoist physician, who became interested in Alchemy, and also in Daoist immortality cultivation practices. He combined Confucian moral cultivation with Daoist study, as he believed that being virtuous was required for Daoist immortality cultivation. This again shows the interconnectedness of Chinese philosophy.

Daoism's use of spirituality for health and immortality cultivation causes me to draw connections with the biggest spiritual philosophy in Europe, which is Christianity. While Daoism has rituals and work towards balance to achieve longevity, Christianity has prayers to God, and also holy sites and relics that believers turn towards to receive healing and there are also stories in the bible of Christ healing by touch. The success of these actions is debatable, however it is the same in the way that it is receiving healing through spiritual means. The lack of many similar philosophies in the west is showing of the separation of spiritualism and philosophy as well as the separation of spiritualism and health. There isn't nearly as much connectedness anywhere in the western world as there is in China.

To conclude, Western society is far less spiritual in regards to medicine compared to Chinese society, and western ideas of philosophy are not as focused on the body, more on the mind, while China is more interconnected in both their philosophies and in the extent that philosophy has on everyday life. Chinese philosophy permeates far more into the life of the average person that western philosophy does, as it enters into affairs of state, medicine, mental health, and family.

## Bibliography

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