

Original Paper

The Concept of International Relations in Taoist Thought

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Abstract

In today's world, exchanges between different countries and regions are becoming more frequent. With the increase in exchanges, interests and disputes have also emerged. We have seen the beauty of mutually beneficial cooperation, but also the tragedy of war. Today's international order is a sovereign state-centered system based on the Westphalian system and the final result of World War II. Various international cooperation organizations established after World War II have promoted exchanges and cooperation between different countries and regions, but we have to admit that most countries still treat each other as their competitors, and national strength is still the most important support for national behavior. With global warming, marine pollution, ecological disasters, transnational The emergence of a series of global problems such as crime requires us to reflect on whether this international exchange model centered on national interests can effectively deal with global problems, and whether we are too focused on human beings themselves and forget that we are part of nature. Taoist thought, especially the system with "Tao" as the core expounded by Lao Tzu in the "Tao Te Ching", has great reference value for our understanding of nature and the relationship between man and nature. He expounded the way and norms of communication between countries with "Tao" as the core, opening up a new perspective for us to understand international relations. This article attempts to explore the concept of international relations in Taoist thought and provide reference for broadening the international relations theory based on Taoist ideas.

Keywords

Taoist thought, Tao Te Ching, international relations

1. Introduction

The representatives of Taoist thought are Laozi and Zhuangzi. Laozi is the founder of the Taoist school. His work "Tao Te Ching" is a complete system. The first half of the book talks about Tao and the laws

of Tao, and the second half talks about how countries and individuals carry out various activities according to the norms of Tao. Zhuangzi deepened Laozi's natural inaction thought, and his contribution mainly lies in how to apply the natural inaction thought to personal cultivation. This article's discussion on the concept of international relations in Taoist thought mainly revolves around Laozi's "Tao Te Ching".

Taoist thought is an important part of Chinese traditional cultural thought. From 202 BC to 134 BC, the Han Dynasty mainly used Taoist ideas to govern the country for about 70 years. The rulers were light on corvee and low on taxes, and social wealth accumulated rapidly. Dong Zhongshu proposed independence. After respecting Confucianism, the rulers of the Han Dynasty mainly used Confucianism to govern the country, and Taoism took a back seat. During the Tang Dynasty, Taoism was established as the state religion, and everyone from the emperor to the common people actively studied Taoist cultural classics. After the Tang Dynasty until the fall of the Qing Dynasty, traditional Chinese culture the core of thought has always been Confucianism. Confucianism was not only the norm for internal governance in ancient China, but also the yardstick for international relations in ancient China, such as the East Asian tribute system established based on Confucianism (Jian, 2009). Although Taoism is not the official mainstream thought, but Taoist thought still has a profound impact on Chinese people's thinking and lifestyle. Taoist thought is a rare thought in traditional Chinese thought that describes and explores the universe and nature. Taoist thought has attracted attention since it went out of China. According to UNESCO According to statistics from the International Cultural Organization, the Tao Te Ching is the cultural masterpiece with the largest number of copies translated into foreign languages after the Bible.

The era when Laozi lived was the Eastern Zhou Dynasty. During the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, the princes of the world rose up. Although the Zhou emperor was still the common ruler of the world in name, the powerful princes no longer took the orders of the Zhou emperor seriously. The princes fought against each other for years, and the people were displaced. Faced with this situation, scholars at that time prescribed a wide variety of "prescriptions", and various thoughts flourished. The uniqueness of Taoist thought is that it takes "Tao" as the most core concept, and a complete ideological system is derived from Tao. Laozi did not take people as the center, nor did he take the monarch as the highest-level power, but included everything in "Tao", believing that all things in the world are equal and have their own operating rules. People are just one of all things in the world. When discussing the relationship between countries, Laozi injected the concept of "equality and unity" into it. On the one hand, he believed that big countries and small countries have equal status, and on the other hand, he unified big countries and small countries into a larger community of Tao, and formulated communication methods and evaluation standards for the communication activities between big countries and small countries. The national communication model designed by Laozi has important implications for easing conflicts

between countries and forming a consensus on development.

2. Exploration of Chinese International Relations Theory

Although ancient Chinese history was not lacking in exchange experience with foreign countries, it did not form international relations theory. China's joining the Western-dominated international system was a process of passive acceptance. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China's diplomatic work officially began. Compared with Western international relations theory research, China's international relations theory construction started later. Although China had some scattered teaching and research on international relations theory before, the real research began after the reform and opening up (Hong, 1989). After the reform and opening up, Chinese scholars have never stopped their efforts in the field of international relations theory, but at present, China has not yet had a theory or a recognized Chinese school that is generally recognized by the international academic community. Sun Jisheng sorted out the development of China's international relations theory since the reform and opening up. He summarized the development of China's international relations theory after the reform and opening up. International relations research can be divided into three stages: the first stage was from 1978 to 1989, during which the focus was on the introduction and study of Western international relations theory, and the development of Chinese international relations theory was a controversial point; the second stage was from 1989 to 2000, during which the study of Western international relations theory was more comprehensive and in-depth, and the development of the Chinese school of international relations theory became a slogan; the third stage was from 2000 to the present, during which the focus was on the innovation of Chinese international relations theory based on the reference of Western theories, and how to create a Chinese school became a topic of common concern among scholars (Sun, 2018).

With the unremitting efforts of Chinese scholars, some representative results have been launched one after another, such as Qin Yaqing's "Relationship and Process Construction: Implanting Chinese Ideas into International Relations Theory", "Relationship and Process: Cultural Construction of Chinese International Relations Theory", "Relational Theory of World Politics", Zhao Tingyang's "The Contemporaneity of Tianxia: Practice and Imagination of World Order", Yan Xuetong's "Transfer of World Power: Political Leadership and Strategic Competition" etc. Ren Xiao pointed out in the article "Rethinking and Re-recognition of the 'Chinese School' Problem" that the Chinese School of International Relations Theory has formed three or four relatively influential theories, namely, relational theory, moral realism, Tianxia system theory and symbiosis theory (Ren, 2020).

Yu Xiaofeng and Zhang Yadi (Yu & Zhang, 2019) believe that harmony is a theoretical paradigm of international relations with Chinese characteristics. It takes "relationship" as its ontological premise, holistic relationalism as its cognitive framework, moderation as its methodological core, and sharing as

its meaning orientation; harmony divides China's international relations theory system into three types, namely premise-based, process-based, and harmony. In the view of Yu Xiaofeng and Zhang Yadi, the phenomenon of human symbiosis and coexistence existed before international relations, so premise-based international relations theory has a common harmony value. Shi Zhiyu (Shi, 2020) believes that both Western international relations theory and Chinese international relations theory believe that there is a commonality between state relations as a premise for interaction, but the content of the commonality believed by both sides is different. He analyzed two representative relationship models in world political research. The first is pre-commonality, which mainly supports multilateral relations. Its members, regardless of whether they exist Interaction or mutual acquaintance, all abide by the same institutional rules or discourse conventions, and operate in the same cosmic order. This universal order constitutes the common identity of all actors; the second model is improvisational commonality, which mainly promotes the practice of bilateral relations without the need to abide by recognized rules or codes of conduct. State actors establish specific relations with all other countries separately, so they need to try to deal with the particularity of each bilateral relationship. Shi Zhiyu pointed out that multilateral relations presuppose that there should be a commonality between countries. This commonality can be partially regarded as a kind of identification of member states. In contrast, in bilateral relations, the interaction mode between countries is formed in the specific situation at that time, and its effectiveness is only within the bilateral relationship, and usually does not involve relations with third parties; Christianity and capitalism provide the basis for the pre-existing commonality between Western members, while Confucianism and the tribute system are improvised according to the specific circumstances of each country (Shi, 2020).

The author believes that the difference in the understanding of premise is a major reason for the different development orientations of international relations theory between China and the West. The premise of Western international relations theory is that each participant in the international system is a sovereign state, equal and independent, and international relations are "created" by sovereign states. Sovereign states themselves precede international relations. The rules, systems and models of communication in international relations are not imposed on participating countries. Participating countries can choose to participate or refuse. A major feature of Western mainstream international relations theory is "individualism", which is a thinking path with individuals as the core. It studies the relationship between individuals from the perspective of individuals. This relationship is defined by rational individuals based on their given interests. Although Wendt's constructivism weakens individualism, the metaphor of the first encounter shows his recognition of the priority of independent individuals (Qin, 2000). Qin Yaqing believes that there is no self-independent of society and others in Chinese philosophical thinking, and there is no Western-style free actor. The identity of the self is always generated and exists in relationships. Without the relationship between the self and others, the

self will have no identity, and therefore no self (Qin, 2009). The existence of the individual self is to obtain identity in collectives such as family, village, society, and country. The self can only have the identity and ability to practice activities in a series of relationship networks. From this we know that the premise of international relations in Chinese thinking is “relationship”. Each country is given an “identity” in international exchanges. This identity is not the result of the country’s own choice. Each country can only feel its “self” in specific international exchanges.

From the literature I have read, the “Chinese School” currently being built by Chinese international relations theorists is attempting to improve the Western-dominated international relations theory in three directions. One is the exploration of the concept of “relationship”. The starting point and the belonging point of the mainstream Western international relations theory are both in the sovereign state itself. Generally, the state is used as the independent variable to observe the impact on international relations. The Chinese School starts from the established relationship, observes the changing process of international relations, and then understands the behavior of the state. Another is the exploration of the concept of “community”. The international system in Western international relations theory is “created” by the state or other organizations, and is “formed after birth”, while the Chinese School attempts to find an “innate community” so that the state cannot exist independently from this innate community. The third is to try to integrate Chinese traditional values with modern civilization values to create a new value system that transcends Western values.

Constructing international relations theory with Taoist thought is a noteworthy research direction. The late scholar L. H. M. Ling has made outstanding contributions in this direction. She criticized the Eurocentric assumptions that support the discourse of Western international relations “realists” and “liberal internationalists”. L. H. M. Ling believes that the current international relations are dominated by Western centrism. As non-Western regions, they can only passively adapt to the rules set by Western countries. In fact, the interests of non-Western regions are not guaranteed in this system. She believes that this is the continuation of hegemony after the end of Western colonial rule. She used the Taoist Yin-Yang dialectics to try to build a balanced, equal and fluid international system to reduce coercion and make global politics more inclusive (Ling, 2014).

L H M Ling’s research is very innovative. Taoism is an important part of traditional Chinese thought, but research on Taoism has always been relatively weak, and research on international relations based on Taoism is even less. Yin-Yang dialectics is an important Taoist way of thinking. L. H. M. Ling creatively uses Taoist Yin-Yang theory to challenge Western centrism and attempts to build an equal and interdependent Western and non-Western integrated world system. This research method is very novel and very inspiring.

The author believes that Taoist thought’s exploration of international relations theory should not be classified into the “relationship” theory advocated by some Chinese scholars. This is because Taoist

thinking is very unique. It has an overall concept of interdependence similar to Confucian thinking, and is also similar to Western thinking. Similar concepts of self-independence. Wang Zhendong (Wang, 2021) explored the influence of Confucianism and Taoism on self-construction systems and ways of thinking through experiments. The experiment used the manipulation method of educational intervention, using the original texts of classics carrying Confucian and Taoist values as cultural intervention text materials, combined with classroom teaching and post-class reflection experimental tasks, to examine the differences in self-construction and thinking styles of subjects who received different ideological and value interventions before and after the experiment. This experiment was conducted on sixth grade students in Shandong, China After eight weeks of ideological intervention, it was found that the self-construction and thinking styles of the groups participating in the experiment had undergone significant changes: (1) Changes in self-construction. The self-construction of the subjects in the Confucianism group developed towards interdependence, while the self-construction of the subjects in the Taoism group developed into interdependence. The self-construction of the test subjects develops towards independence; (2) Changes in the way of thinking, the thinking of the subjects in the Confucianism group and the Taoism group develops in the direction of integrity. Through experiments, we found that the thinking of the students tested in the Taoism group showed surprising the characteristics of combining independence and integrity. Taoist thinking is different from Confucian thinking. In Taoist thinking, there is a self that is independent of relationships, but it does not deny or exclude relationships. Taoist thinking believes that there are other things besides self and relationships. A larger system is Tao. The holistic thinking of Taoism does not submerge the self in relationships, but unifies the self and relationships in Tao. The so-called whole refers to Tao rather than the relationship that Confucianism refers to. From this, the author believes that the international relations system in Taoist thought is composed of Tao, countries, and international relations. The international relations formed by the interaction of countries and countries are both independent and connected, and both belong to Tao. Their behaviors are regulated and governed by Tao. To be bound, to be judged by the Tao.

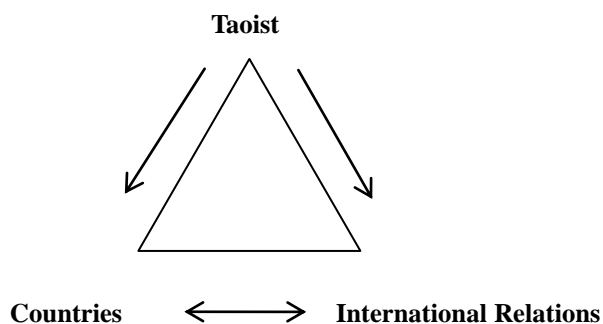


Figure 1. International Relations in Taoist Thought

3. The Concept of International Relations in Taoist Thought

3.1 Equality

Laozi said: “Heaven and earth are not benevolent, and treat all things as straw dogs” (Chapter 5 of “Tao Te Ching”), and also said: “The way of heaven has no relatives, and is always good to good people” (Chapter 79 of “Tao Te Ching”). It means that in front of Tao, all things are equal. A big tree is not more recognized by Tao than a small grass. Even smart humans are just one of the creatures, not more precious than the creatures, nor have a higher status than the creatures. Zhuangzi continued Laozi’s idea of the equality of all things. In “On the Equality of All Things”, he said: “Heaven and earth are born with me, and all things are one with me. “Zhuangzi, like Laozi, believes that all things are born from Tao and are equal. Zhuangzi further pointed out that the various differences and distinctions of all things in the world are made by people based on their own cognition or value needs. Ling Huanming (LHMLing) pointed out that the first of the four key cognitive premises of “Taoist dialectics” is ontological equality when discussing the fundamental difference between the Westphalian international relations theory system and the Taoist international relations theory system. Feng Dawen (Feng, 2018) compared the Taoist “equality concept” with the Western “equality concept”. He believed that both affirmed the true state of individual natural independence. The difference is that the Western concept of equality ultimately rests on the pursuit of personal interests, while the Taoist concept of equality not only sees the “existence” similar to personal interests, but also extends to the affirmation of “nothingness”, and its vision and realm are broader. The author believes that Western thinking recognizes the equality and independence of individuals. After that, when dealing with the relationship between individuals and others, it is believed that people are in a state of competition, so the whole society is in the mode of “equality, independence + competition”. After Taoist thinking realizes that individuals are equal and independent, when dealing with the relationship between individuals and others, it is believed that people are in a state of dependence. The society in Taoist thinking is in the mode of “equality, independence + dependence”. There is no independent individual in Confucian thinking. The mode of getting along with others is to divide the other party into “insiders” and “outsiders” based on the distance of the relationship with oneself, treat “insiders” with an attitude of mutual dependence, and treat “outsiders” with a competitive attitude. Therefore, the social relationship in Confucian thinking is “dependence (insiders) + competition (outsiders)”.

Table 1. Comparison of Taoist, Confucian, and Western Thinking

	Individual	Dealing with the relationship
Western thinking	Independence and equality	competition
Taoist thinking	Independence and equality	dependence
Confucian thinking	There is no such concept	dependence(insiders)+competition (outsiders)

When talking about the relationship between big countries and small countries, Lao Tzu said: “The big country is the downstream, the female of the world, the interface of the world. The female always wins the male by being quiet, and being quiet is the inferior. If the big country is inferior to the small country, it will take the small country; if the small country is inferior to the big country, it will take the big country. So either be inferior in order to take, or be inferior and take. The big country only wants to annex the people, and the small country only wants to serve the people. Both of them get what they want, and the big one should be inferior” (Chapter 61 of “Tao Te Ching”). It means that the big country and the small country have their own desires. The big country wants to annex the small country, and the small country wants to find a big country that it can rely on. So how can the desires of the big and small countries be satisfied? Laozi believes that by “being humble”, that is, by being humble and altruistic, if a big country is humble to a small country and does things that benefit the small country, it can gain the respect of the small country and then have the heart to submit to it. If a small country is humble and does things that benefit the big country, it can gain the trust of the big country and then preserve its own interests. Therefore, “being humble” is a common way for big countries and small countries to obtain satisfaction. Imagine if a big country only wants to obtain the land and people of a small country and is unwilling to treat the small country with a “humble” attitude, it will naturally be resisted by the small country. Similarly, if a small country only wants to preserve its own interests and is unwilling to treat the big country with a “humble” attitude, it will definitely be abandoned by the big country. Therefore, “being humble” is a two-way thing. From this we can see that Laozi has set a judgment standard for the relationship between big countries and small countries, that is, “being humble”, and at the same time believes that big countries play a more critical role in maintaining bilateral relations.

In Taoist thought, countries of different sizes have different pursuits. Laozi does not deny the “desires” of big and small countries, that is, national interests. He believes that pursuing national interests is a very normal thing, but he sets a way to pursue national interests, that is, to pursue national interests in a “lower” way. Seeing this, even some readers who have not read the “Tao Te Ching” can see that Taoist thought opposes the oppression of small countries by big countries and the bullying of the weak by the strong. Of course, if readers can understand the deeper meaning, they will find that Taoist thought also

opposes the weak “bluffing” and distorting the facts by “sympathy”, because it requires small countries to treat big countries with a “lower” attitude, that is, in front of the standard of “lowering” to judge national behavior, big countries and small countries are equal.

Through the above discussion, we can see that the state relationship in Taoist thought is an equal relationship. Although big countries and small countries have different sizes and strengths and different desires to pursue national interests, they have the same judgment standard in pursuing national interests, that is, “being humble”, which provides a basis for us to judge a country’s performance in international relations.

3.2 Pursue Peace and Hate War

The pursuit of peace and aversion to war are clearly reflected in the Tao Te Ching. Chapter 31 of the Tao Te Ching states: “Weapons are ominous tools. People may hate them, so those who have the Tao do not use them. Weapons are ominous tools, not tools for gentlemen. They should be used only when necessary. Tranquility is the best. Victory is not beautiful, but those who value it are those who enjoy killing. Those who enjoy killing cannot achieve their goals in the world. Treat them with funeral rites. Kill many people with sorrow and weep, and treat victory with funeral rites”. Chapter 30 of the Tao Te Ching states: “Those who assist the ruler with the Tao do not use weapons to conquer the world. Strong weapons will destroy, and strong trees will break”.

Laozi believed that war was an ominous and unlucky thing. One should not start a war easily unless it is absolutely necessary. If one wins the war, it is not a glorious thing. If someone regards this as a capital for showing off, then this person is actually a person who loves killing. A monarch who loves killing cannot gain the world. If many people are killed, one should pray for the dead. Even the winner should pray for all the lives lost in the war. From this passage, we can see that Laozi has a very clear understanding of the nature of war. War is a way to resolve disputes, but it is by no means the only way or even the worst way. It should not be used unless it is absolutely necessary. War is a means to achieve the goal. When it is used, the damage should be minimized as much as possible. The winner must give awe and sorrow to the lives lost in the process. If there is no awe and respect for life, then victory has no meaning. It only satisfies the desires of the killers. People who use the rules of Tao to assist the monarch do not rely on powerful military forces to conquer the world. A political system that relies on military forces to force people to obey will eventually go to destruction, just like a too rigid wood that is easy to break.

Therefore, the international relations constructed in Taoist thought pursue peace and hate war. A good international system is to maintain and promote the healthy development of each member country. In Taoist thought, everyone’s life is equal, and the weight of their life does not differ because of the different countries they live in. Taoists regard war as the worst choice for dealing with state relations, and their original starting point of thinking is to cherish life itself.

3.3 *Community of Tao*

In Chapter 25 of the Tao Te Ching, it describes the situation before the emergence of heaven and earth: “There is a thing that is mixed and formed, born before heaven and earth, independent and unchanging, and circling without end”. This means that Tao already existed before all things appeared, and Tao has its own laws of operation. All things are born from Tao, Tao gives birth to one, one gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, and three gives birth to all things. All things form a community, and this community is Tao, that is, the community of nature.

Human beings are part of nature. Although a country composed of humans is not directly grown from nature, it is also a re-creation of humans to adapt to the natural environment.

From the perspective of Taoist thought, the natural community has existed since the birth of the universe. Although countries have different interests, they are all subject to the laws of the natural community. Before the great geographical discoveries, the various parts of the human world were relatively independent, but even under relatively independent circumstances, the natural community has already connected humans together, such as Russian swans wintering in China; for example, in South Africa every June and July, hundreds of millions of sardines migrate northward from the east coast of South Africa to spawn. These animals are the food source for people in many different regions. People in many regions may have been eating the same group of fish, but have never met each other. However, we cannot assume that there is no connection between them just because they have never met each other. In fact, it is just that people are not aware of it or are restricted by conditions and have no chance to observe this connection.

Nowadays, with the help of advanced transportation and the Internet, humans have formed extensive connections. Although the international community is in an “anarchic” state, with the help of Taoist thought, we can see that the community of Tao has long been formed. Taoist thought can overcome the negative idea of Western scholars that government is a “necessary evil”, because according to that idea, the international social organization that emerged to coordinate international relations and conflicts is also a “necessary evil”, and this “burden” often produces an irreconcilable rejection and disgust. If we use Taoist thought to look at the current international community, each country will have a new understanding of the international social organization, whose purpose is to promote harmonious coexistence between humans and humans and nature. The international social organization is not a “necessary evil” but a “possible good”.

3.4 *Balanced Symbiosis*

Chapter 73 of the Tao Te Ching says: “The way of man is to take away what is insufficient to make up for what is abundant, while Heaven knows how to take away what is abundant to make up for what is insufficient”. This means that people often want more and are never satisfied. Even if they are already quite wealthy, they still want to exploit those who are scarce. The way of Heaven is to make surplus

resources make up for the scarce resources to achieve balance. Lao Tzu also said: “Things grow old when they grow strong. This is called not following the Way. Not following the Way has already happened”. Here, “Things grow old when they grow strong” does not mean that things will decline when they grow strong, but that things will decline when they develop beyond their own laws of development. For example, Japan in World War II sent troops to China and Southeast Asia at the same time, and then to the United States. This is a typical example of failure caused by overexpansion that broke through its own laws.

Lao Tzu said in Chapter 27 of Tao Te Ching: “The sage is always good at saving people, so there is no one to be abandoned; he is always good at saving things, so there is no thing to be abandoned. A good person is the teacher of a bad person; a bad person is the resource of a good person. If you do not respect your teacher and do not cherish your resource, even if you are wise, you will be greatly confused”. This means that a person who has attained the Tao, because he is good at discovering the advantages of everyone, in his eyes there is no one to be abandoned, because he is good at discovering the advantages of things, in his eyes there is nothing to be abandoned. A person who is good at doing something is the teacher of a person who is not good at doing something, and a person who is not good at doing something is the resource of a person who is good at doing something. If a person who is not good at doing something does not respect his teacher and a person who is good at doing something does not cherish his resource, then these two people are both superficially wise but actually stupid. This passage tells us that everyone has his own shining points and everyone has his own unique advantages. The key is that we must be good at discovering the advantages in them. We and those who are weaker than us are symbiotic beings that can achieve each other, and the two are not in a competitive relationship.

In the view of Taoism, big countries and small countries in international relations have their own advantages and characteristics. Although big countries have large land areas and large populations, the problems they face are more complicated. Although small countries have small land areas and small populations, the problems they face are relatively simple. Developed countries have technologies that developing countries need, and developing countries have markets that developed countries need. Both have areas that deserve attention from each other, so they should respect and cooperate with each other. International relations under Taoism are balanced and symbiotic international relations. This cognition is even more precious today when global problems are surging. Human beings live on the same planet, and we cannot turn a blind eye to the status of other countries. The hunger problem of African children should not be just an internal problem of Africa, and in fact the impact of this problem will not be limited to Africa itself. The increasing number of illegal immigrants from Africa in Western Europe is the spillover of similar problems. Taoism allows us to think about the principles of international relations from the perspective of the world and all mankind. Taoism gives birth to all things, so good

international relations are to allow the whole world to survive and develop well. How to achieve it is to balance symbiosis. For human beings, the relationship between us humans and between humans and nature is not a competitive relationship, but a symbiotic relationship.

3.5 Tao is the Universal Value and the Highest Law

Chapter 25 of the Tao Te Ching states: “There are four great things in the universe, and man is one of them. Man follows the earth, the earth follows the sky, the sky follows the Tao, and the Tao follows nature”. This means that in the universe, man must abide by the laws of the earth, the earth must abide by the laws of the sky, and the sky must abide by the laws of the Tao. This is the natural state of the Tao. In other words, only by abiding by the laws of the Tao can the heavens, the earth, and all things show their true original appearance, which is in line with the Tao.

Since Tao is a universal value and the highest law, the international relations constructed by Taoist thought will also take the value of Tao as the pursuit value of international relations and the law of Tao as the law of international relations. So does everyone know Tao the same? We can speculate that the answer to this question is affected by at least two factors, the first is the ability to know Tao, and the second is the willingness to abide by Tao. The first is a question of ability, and the second is a question of choice. Therefore, when constructing international relations under Taoist thought, we must fully explore the cognition of Tao and the cognition of the law of Tao. Although everyone’s interpretation of Tao will add their own cognition, after all, there is the most basic value orientation in the “Tao Te Ching”. We can seek the greatest common divisor to make the cognition of Tao and the understanding of the law of Tao universally recognized. Of course, the Tao Te Ching explains at the beginning that we cannot completely and thoroughly understand Tao, but we can get infinitely close to the truth of Tao. This also reminds us that the cognition of Tao will not be immutable. It is like the scientific truth we discover, and it is constantly being improved in exploration.

3.6 Governing by Doing Nothing and Acting without Contention

“Governing by doing nothing” is probably the most misunderstood concept in Taoist thought. “Governing by doing nothing” is a method to achieve governance. In ancient China, governance means running well. So does “Governing by doing nothing” mean running well by doing nothing? Obviously not. The “doing nothing” emphasized by Lao Tzu does not mean doing nothing, but calling the way of doing things according to the laws of things “doing nothing”. To achieve “Governing by doing nothing”, at least two points need to be achieved. The first is to be able to understand the laws of things, and the second is to be able to do things according to the laws of things.

To act without contending means that a person acts according to the rules of Tao and achieves results but does not boast. Because Tao “clothes and nourishes all things but does not dominate them; all things depend on it for life but refuse it; it accomplishes its work but does not take credit for it” (Tao Te Ching Chapter 34). Tao has done so many things that benefit all things, but it never gets carried away

and never thinks that it is its own achievement. Lao Tzu reminds us to be as humble as Tao and not take credit for ourselves.

In international relations constructed by Tao, whether it is sovereign states or international relations formed by the interaction of sovereign states, they should be governed by inaction and act without contention like Tao. Sovereign states use this method to shape their behavior, and international relations use this method as their own operating rules. Sovereign states and the international relations system also use this method when interacting, so that they can conform to Tao.

4. Conclusion

Starting from the emerging global issues, this article considers how Taoist thought can deal with this situation. The article sorts out the development of China's international relations theory and introduces scholars' exploration of international relations theory using Taoist thought. The article believes that the international relations theory in Taoist thought should not be classified into the "relationship" theory proposed by some Chinese scholars, because Taoist thought includes both holistic thinking and independent thinking. The international relations system under Taoist thought is composed of Tao, sovereign states, and international relations. The concept of international relations in Taoist thought includes equality, pursuit of peace and aversion to war, unity, balanced symbiosis, Tao is a universal value and the highest law, inaction and governance, and action without contention. Taoist thought is an important part of Chinese traditional thought. As one of the few Chinese philosophical thoughts that thinks about the country and individuals from the perspective of the universe and nature, it has established a complete "Tao, Heaven, Earth, and Man" system, and used Tao to establish the operating rules of the entire system. Using Taoist thought to construct international relations theory is a possible research direction.

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