Unity of innate energy and free will in children

: Somatic interpretation of “ACT” in Tao Xing-Zhi

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Introduction

‘Human existence just means that human beings need the ‘active energy.’ This means that human beings need ‘active life.’ And this in turn means human beings need ‘act.’” (25) so says Tao (1891-1946), a leading educator in modern China, who attempted to solve the problem of how children attain their true nature in the age of the Chinese revolution. (1) (2) (6) (9) (26) (32) (34) This statement presents humanity, here represented by the concept as well as the phenomenon of “act,” not only as a source of inspiration of man’s mystical experience but also as a model for his physical activities.

This study has confirmed to make a somatic interpretation on the understanding of nature of act in children in modern China. To make research into the somatic interpretation of act, it has been pointed out, we should not confine ourselves to the view that the idea of act is a phenomenon regarding the body alone, nor to the view that it is only one function of a struggle or an expression in the traditional terms of spiritual attainment and enlightenment. (26) (27) (30) It is very instructive to note that the idea of act can include a problem of the intrinsic value of a man. (12) The study of the act. to be a scientific study of human beings, has to be the scientific theory of human existence. The important attitude to assume in the above understanding is one in which we see act not only from a standpoint that participation in act has an aspect of physical and mystical embodiment of an organic body; instead each has its own dimension of truth in the presence of the other. (11) (28) (29) One of the most important aspects of act is that it holds an organic relation with all aspects of one’s way of life. (31)

On this viewpoint, we can get a lot of important suggestions from Chinese philosophy. Act, historically, has been allied with life, and it does serve to represent
general Chinese philosophy as a whole\(^4\). Any approach to understand the nature of act is dependent upon underlying philosophical assumptions. These assumptions reflect what man’s life should be and how man should live right.\(^3\)\(^4\)

More specifically, they help to provide us with some type of answer to fundamental questions such as. What is the nature of humanity? Of the children? Of being? And How is it that we may acquire the way to act?

Here we touch on the important problems. This paper has two purposes: a) to identify and describe Tao’s concept of children and b) to examine the relationship between innate energy and free will in Tao’s concept of act. We try to attain these purposes by illuminating what is Tao Xing-Zhi’s image of children and his idea of the contribution of act. In conclusion, I hope to make clear that the inter-relationship between innate energy and free will in children is crucial for their development, and hope to provide any real explanation or support for the edifice of act experience.

1. Basic notion of humanity behind the concept of children

To understand Tao’s concept of humanity, the first thing that we have to clarify is the difference between children’s Innate Nature and True nature. These two ideas must be kept separated from each other. Tao draws a sharp line between Innate Nature, — a primitive and unconscious which stems from one’s innate disposition, and True Nature, — a conscious activity which stems from one’s awareness of human value which is acquired through training.\(^2\)\(^0\) Tao understands that these two are equal in that they are two aspects of children’s life, and he never gives more weight to either side.

The first characteristic of Innate Nature is that it is prescribed as a congenital entity which is inherent in children and given by nature. We must, therefore, purify Innate Nature without giving it any significance or value. Tao strongly denies the idea that the intrinsic and inborn value of children crucially determines one’s course of life fatally.\(^2\)\(^2\)\(^2\) Tao, on the one hand, denies \textit{a priori} intrinsic value, but on the other hand, he admits that children have the capacity to realize human value in Innate Nature.\(^5\)

“All child has a germ of natural possibility in him or her.”\(^2\)\(^2\)

In this view, the second characteristic of Innate Nature can be pointed out, it
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has a possibility of realizing human values. The third characteristic is that it springs spontaneously. It is able to exist without external influence and stimulus, because of the natural power inherent in it.

The first characteristic of one's True Nature is that it develops gradually in the course of one's lifetime. This True Nature is acquired through growth or training. It doesn't exist a priori but develops a posteriori. The second characteristic is that True Nature is formed by means of proper training. True Nature cannot be realized until it acquires the influence of the external action, while Innate Nature is realized with its own internal power. The important condition of True Nature is the value which the person is conscious of. Hence, when Tao claims that the process of "forming" True Nature during one's lifetime is important, he has an intention to pursue human value. But this value cannot be separated from Innate Nature since it is the absolute norm which prescribes one's True Nature transcendentally. And the human value one pursues is formed on the basis of child's Innate Nature under circumstantial influences. This process of realizing value can be regarded as the third characteristic of True Nature. We can conclude that Tao's concept of children consists of two sub concepts: Innate Nature which is concerned with human existence and True Nature which means the pursuit of human value.

Before applying these ideas to the research of act, it should be noted that the concept of humanity which Tao pursues is independent of who is free from any social domination. Next, we will proceed to consider a children's real existence and examine Tao's idea of it.

2. Active energy in children

Tao's basic notion of children is that they have the impulse to act. In other words, this means that children develop by self-fulfillment. Tao emphasizes the importance of act in this process of self-fulfillment.

The diagram of figure 1 shows Tao's idea of children. The most important point in this diagram is the notion of "active energy." Active energy is, in short, a innate desire or impulse in children. According to Tao, there are three directions for this innate desire. In his article Threofold Criteria of the Yu Tsai School, Tao makes mention of three directions respectively as absorbing, understanding and
loving. The word “absorbing” means the impulse to be absorbed in certain activities. “Understanding” means the children’s power to know anything they are interested in and “Loving” means the natural desire to help others voluntarily. If we look deeper at the somatic content of Tao’s theory, then we can see that these three concepts indicate the natural activity of life innate in children. They are the embodiment of the natural life that we can recognize empirically.

The three components are expected to develop into “wisdom, humanism and courage,” respectively. Therefore these are the goal to be attained and the problem to solve in the process of self-realization through the medium of physical and mental development.

“Wisdom, humanism, and courage are an important legacy in China. In the past, it was recognized as an accomplishment of universal virtue, and it has been an important guiding principle in one’s ideal life today.”

Tao doesn’t put any emphasis on the normative implication of the term wisdom, humanism and courage. It includes many constituent elements of character such as discernment, consideration, emotion, will and so on.

Tao’s wisdom means the mind filled with wisdom. It is not the intrinsic norm, but the active process of thinking. Tao’s notion of humanism is not an intrinsic norm, either, but a general sense of value which cannot be realize without proper function of wisdom. Tao’s notion of courage is the voluntary self-control power. Tao says children aim at the unitary realization of these three principles. Tao claims “wisdom, humanism and courage” are not the highest good itself but a manifestation of it. When Tao values “wisdom, humanism and courage” highly as the guiding principle in one’s ideal life, he is both reminding us the flexibility with which one can adapt oneself to the circumstance and stating the whole nature of man — both of the innate nature and the true nature. He doesn’t mean the restraint by any fixed rule or norm. As against “absorbing, understanding and loving,” “wisdom, humanism and courage” are the personal character which bears fruit through efforts, learning and training. The important thing about the active energy in children is their feeling not their actions, for these are only reflections of the feeling.

The key point that Tao emphasizes is that children make a constant development with self-consciousness, and “wisdom, humanism and courage” as an
ideal of humanity, therefore, are the dynamic energy of “actor” who is constantly stepping forward to the goal — the perfection of humanity.\cite{23}\cite{24} Never is it a static and finished object. And he regards child’s existence as a dynamic process of developing the indwelling possibility.

The next problem is on the role which act plays in realizing the ideal life.

3. Act

In Tao’s theory, the power of the free will is important as the controller of active energy.\cite{14} Tao emphasizes that act is a relationship; in form.\cite{13} Act creates a certain frame of mind. Act cannot be taught by any system specifically designed for the purpose. But there is a natural method which can be shared and awakened in the mind that leads one to act. Tao seizes children’s life as the progressive process in the interaction with the environment. And children as the subject of life should realize one’s own ideal life through the medium of act.

“So long as the activity of innate energy and free will are divided, no progress and invention are possible. So neither activity is true act. True act is to exercise the mind and body at the same time.”\cite{14}

In this view, Tao criticizes the “malformed” human life which arises from division of the innate energy and the free will. And the normal way of life is to have the dynamic relation with various circumstantial objects.\cite{13} Two factors — the innate energy and the free will — are always one and the same and inseparable. So the realization of act, as the unity of the innate energy and the free will, is to determine the meaning of one’s own activity on the point of view that the close relationship between the innate energy and free will is crucial under the whole circumstantial conditions. That is the function of searching the values of the situation which contains the person and of exhibiting one’s successive process of development through the whole body.

Incidentally Tao claims the suppression of the Chinese people by the dominant class resulted in the separation of the innate energy and free will.\cite{14} The dominating represented the mental power while the dominated represented the physical action. This separation, in turn, caused the loss of will in life and identity among the dominated.\cite{20} The principle of the unity of energy and will is pictured by a poem.
entitled *Brain and Hand Unite*.(12)

"Two treasures with us life-long remain:
A pair of free hands and a great brain.
He who does not use his hand,
Belongs to the dethroned King's band.
He who does not use his brain
Has to endure hunger and pain.
He who uses both his brain and hand
Can create a new world on exploited Land.
Treasures we have two:
Hands and brain will do,
He, using no hand,
Will soon lose his stand.
He, using no brain,
Will face hunger and pain.
He who uses brain and hand,
Can create a new world on exploited Land."

In the age of Chinese revolution, children have been deprived of every leisure for cultural growth.(19) They have been forced to exist with the appearance of a "small head and a pair of big hands." And students have acquired a store of undigested and unrelated knowledge without being able to identify them with realities.

To evaluate the unity of energy and will of "actor," Tao asks us to focus on one of his most important negative targets in *The people's education movement*:

"They seem to have a big head which cannot think accurately in terms of the objective world."(19)

Act is the action with a definite purpose. Act is the capacity for understanding the aim and meaning of one's own action and finding the best solution to the problem he is confronted with. By doing this, he can get the "brain-directed hands and hands-motorized brain." So he can be the ruler of his own life, and can unify the innate energy and the free will. It offers "actor" a source of energy and possibility, trust and love.

Furthermore, act means the change of value.
"Act is to move, to think and then to create a new value."^{(16)}

Here we find some of the most important keystones of the concept of act. Tao’s concept of creation means not to make being from nothing, but to change the existing meaning and value of things and to make use of the new value in one’s own activity.^{(20)} Act is not only the change of physical and mental movement but also the manifestation of the change in one’s recognition. Act is meaningless unless one grasps the meaning of the whole situation that surrounds act. It is also meaningless unless newer and deeper questions arise exercising.

"Act should be taken in a broader sense than the common usage of the word implies. ‘Act’ is invention, creation, experimentation, construction, production, destruction, struggle and search for a way out."^{(16)}

Act is an integral part of creativity. It may be only the means for movement, understanding and visual art, but without proper act their expression founders. We can certainly conclude from this that act, as the unity of the innate energy and free will, is the constructive action with the definite purpose of driving and improving the reality, and it mediates the continuous development of children.

**Conclusion**

This paper has proposed a theory to describe the process of forming humanity shown in the realization of act. As was noted, Tao pursued the unity of the innate energy and the free will. The desire or impulse to be absorbed, to understand and to love is the children’s true nature. It follows that the function of act is to attain the power of control of children’s nature by self-consciousness. In Tao’s theory of act, it is necessary to detect the clue to the ideal life of the unity of the innate energy and the free will. The proper inter-relationship between the innate energy and the free will in children is crucial for their development. The ideal life is to seize the meaning of the relation between oneself and the environment through one’s whole body, and to realize the forming process of humanity, which one seeks to find by means of this relationship. Thus, the process of forming humanity is shown in the realization of act. This idea of act which has significance in the way of life gives us a new perspective of act, which should be understood in the context of the realization of humanity.
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Figure 1. Tao's concept of children and act