



LIFE AND DEATH IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

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The issue of life and death is one of the most important topics in Chinese philosophy. In the past, almost all famous Chinese philosophers and schools explored this issue, and in modern China the problems of how to recognize the meanings of life and how to resolve the problems arising from death has become again not only a significantly theoretical question but also an urgent practical problem. This paper, therefore, will be concerned with the following aspects: 1. The emergence of eternal hope and the efforts of surpassing death; 2. Confucian Views of life and death; 3. Taoist understanding of life and death; 4. Life and death in Chinese Buddhism; and 5. Theory and practice in relation to Life and Death in contemporary China.

### 1. The Emergence of Eternal Hope and the Efforts in Surpassing Death

Life and death are with human beings from the very beginning. However, human consciousness of life and death happened only in a much later stage. Since then, concerns about the value of life and the meaning of death have been central to the thinking of the world and of human ourselves, underlying all philosophies, ethics and religions. A systematically philosophical deliberation on life and death started about two and half thousand years ago. Tracing the history of humanity and the development of philosophy of life and death, we may observe that human hope for

eternity emerged from their efforts in surpassing death.

In the philosophy of life and death, the significance of life is closely related to the understanding of the meanings of death. How do we think of life is also how do we think of death, vice versa. In daily life, almost all people desire and respect life but hate and fear death. What we have done and are doing is mostly around how to create a happy and long life, to continue our life, and to avoid death. This does not mean that all the people have the same attitude towards life and death and their understandings remain the same through out the history. On the contrary, views about life and death are contingent upon time and upon nations.

Reports from anthropologists tell us that the primitive peoples do not understand death as a necessity thing but see it as an accident resulting from supernatural power. So, these peoples tried hard to avoid supernatural powers and accidental death. On the one hand, various primitive myths record the primitive people's desires for life and their eternal hopes. On the another hand, different kinds of primitive magics and witchcraft are part of their practical efforts in extending their life span and avoiding death. Very much like in the West, a lot of such myths exist in traditional China. For example, Hou Yi searched for elixir of long levity and Chang-E flew to the Mount to avoid death. These myths record the unconscious efforts made by ancient Chinese to extend their life and to avoid death.

Along with rationalistic waking-up, humans understand that the death of psychical body is a natural and unavoidable thing. They begin to search for the ways of exceeding death in mental and spiritual terms. Relationship between body and spirit, between matter and consciousness, thus became a basic philosophical problem and ontological question, haunting all great philosophers, whether they like or not. According to the different replies to the question, the philosophers may be classed into different schools: Materialism, Idealism, and so on. Based on the different kinds of ontology, various philosophies of life and death come into being, demonstrating this or that view of life and death, and putting their views into practice, which in turn change the way of life.

In the history of Western philosophy, it is well-known that Socrates calmly faced death and philosophically went for his own death. His respectable attitude to life and death left very valuable and unforgettable heritage to late generations: a philosopher, a real lover of wisdom, does not fear death of their body, because in searching for the truth, their spirit can reach a kind of perpetuation. Starting from

him, searches for spiritual perpetuation became the main trend in the development of philosophy of life and death in the West.

In Chinese philosophical tradition, the philosophical thinking of life and death is a kind of ultimate concern or ultimate thinking (Zhong Ji Guan Huai 终极关怀). The aim and tasks of the ultimate concern are to search for the eternal meanings and the supreme value of life and death. From the philosophical view of points, the ultimate concern can be roughly divided into three kinds according to their objects: the ultimate concern based on a religious belief in, such as, God; the concern based on ontology, say, about the Origin of the World; the ultimate concern based on humanity, concern with people's destiny.<sup>1</sup> All of the three kinds of the ultimate concern have their delegations both in the West and the East.

As far as death is concerned, the understanding in the West has gone through four stages:

---Wondering of death. In the primitive time, people did not know the cause of death, and they felt very strange about death;

---Longing for death. In the Middle Ages, Christians believed in "The resurrection of the dead in Christ" and therefor longed for death.

---Being indifferent to death. In modern times, rationalist philosophers rationally demonstrated their faith in immortality, but others had different opinions about death.

---Face to face with death. Today's Continental philosophers take the death as the main topic of philosophy and have done deep researches about the significance of death.

---Marxist philosophy provides death with special meanings and functions.<sup>2</sup>

Compared with the philosophical development in the West, Chinese philosophers are more directly involved in the ultimate concern of human destiny, and especially in teaching people how to deal with the problems of life and death.

Generally speaking, the traditional Chinese philosophy can be divided into three parts: Confucianism, Taoism, and the Chinese Buddhism. Each of them has its unique understanding of life and death. Let's discuss them one by one.

## 2. The Viewpoints of Life and Death in Confucianism

Confucianism is the main part of Chinese ideology and Chinese

philosophy. It was the ideology governing the Chinese people for along time, and it pushed forward the Chinese thinking of the world and of life. The key ideas and chief characteristics of the Ultimate Concern for life and death in Confucianism are as follows.

1). Regarding high of life and its significance

Confucius, the so-called founder of Confucianism, once said something to the effect that: "If we do not know anything about life how can we know about death?"<sup>3</sup> Between life and death, he was first concerned with, and thought of, life. Confucianists emphasize the values and meanings of life and ask all people to create the significance of their life. They see human life as the most active and greatest part of the World. In the world, there are three main parts: Tian(天, Heaven), Di(地, Earth) and Ren(人, Humans). Among these three, only humans can act as the Subject to inter-communicate with Tian and Di, and to realize the unity of these three. The unity between the three is the real meaning of human life. So Confucianism raised the significance of life to the ontological level and explored their ideas of life and death in a philosophical depth.

According to Confucianism, the meaning of human life is to know the principles of the world, which is manifested as Tian Ming(天命, the Mandate of Heaven) and Tian Tao(天道, the Ways of Heaven). The yardstick by which the significance of human life can be measured is whether or not humans have really known Tian Ming and consciously acted according to Tian Tao. In this sense, all the purposes of life are to know Tian Ming and to realize Tian Tao. Confucius said: "If we know the Tao in the Morning, it is worthwhile to die in the Evening."<sup>4</sup>

How can humans really know and effectively practice Tian Ming and Tian Tao? Confucianism calls for a positive and active attitude towards life. That is Ren(仁, Benevolence). "Benevolence is the nature of humans." Benevolence is to love people and the World.<sup>5</sup> So it is also the inter-communication between people and the inter-perception of life. In order to become a benevolent person, people must have four kinds of moral senses: the sense of compassion and pity; the sense of shame; the sense of modest and courteous; the sense of distinguishing between right and wrong.<sup>6</sup> Meng Ke specially stressed people's moral senses and respectability. He think them as the criteria of the inner values of humans. There respectability of personality is believed to be the most important quality of a noble person. To him, respectability is all the meanings of his life, so it is much more important than his physical life. Life can get its meaning only when a person becomes noble and respectable. A noble

person should prepare to die for his respectability. From this point of view, Confucianists define the meanings of life in terms of respectability. Respectability is the highest aim of human life. It is based on the subjectivity of human life, it is possible to have the unity between Tian and Ren (天人合一, the Unity of Heaven and humanity).<sup>7</sup> In the last analysis, therefore, Tian Tao and Tian Ming in Chinese philosophy are actually Ren Tao (人道) and Ren Ming (人命). Confucian philosophers actually stress humanity more than nature.

## 2). Searching for the Ways of Spiritual Eternity

Since they know physical death is inevitable and unavoidable, Confucianists try hard to search for the ways of spiritual immortality. They think and hope the spirit, as a part of human life, can be kept forever after the death of their body. This is their hope for eternity, which is the important part of Confucian philosophy of life and death: Dead but Immortal (死而不朽).

The realistic existence of human life is basically of two models: collective groups and individual persons. Related to the two models, there are two main ways in Chinese philosophy to reach immortality and eternity: Xiao (孝, Filial Piety,) for the collective immortality, and De (德, Virtue), Gong (功, Contribution), Yan (言, Intelligence) for individual immortality.

### (1). Xiao and Collective Immortality

To Confucianism, Xiao is most basic and important principle in family life and in blood relationship. In traditional Chinese culture, social relationships are of five main pairs: that between monarch and minister; between father and son; between husband and wife; between elder brother and younger brother; between friend and friend. In these five relationships, three belong to blood relationship, namely, between father and son, between husband and wife, and between brothers. If the relationship between monarch and minister is understood as an extension of that between father and son, and the relationship between friends as that between brothers, then all of the five kinds of relationships are those of the family, and all social rules and regulations are made on the foundation of the family and suitable for the need of blood relationship. The life of an individual person is very limited. However, his life could be continued in the eternal development of his ethnic and his family. In this sense, he is immortal. That means, the finite life of an individual becomes a link of the infinite continuity of ethnically collective life.

How could the finite individual life join in the infinite ethnic continuity? The first and most important way is Xiao. From the viewpoint of ethnic immortality, the basic responsibility of an individual is to ensure the continuity of ethnic life. To realize the responsibility, all individuals must behave according to the requirements of Xiao. Xiao becomes not only the core of Chinese ethics, but also a key of Chinese philosophy of life and death.

As an ethic regulation, Xiao means that all children should be filial to their parents, and the younger should be in obedience to the elder. In this sense, ancestral worship plays a very special social role in Chinese history. Through the function of Xiao, the traditional cultures can be transmitted to new generations.

As the key idea in Chinese philosophy of life and death, Xiao is actually the possible way for ethnic continuity. Its primitive function is to guarantee the reproduction of life. "Among three kinds of un-xiao (against-xiao, no filial piety), the worst one is to have no children (不孝有三, 无后为大)". No matter what kind contribution you have made for the society, if you did not bear any child, you can not be thought that you have been of filial piety to your ancestors. It would be shameful to see your ancestor when you died, because you did not play your responsibility to continue your family and your ethnic. It is through the way of Xiao, the limited and finite life of individual person joins in the unlimited and infinite life of ethnic, the individual person surpasses his death and contributes to the continuity of ethnic groups.

However, Xiao is also part of feudal ethics in the past. It has some side-effects on contemporary society if we do not take this into account. We should have a right understanding of it, put it on the right position, and consciously prevent its side-effects.

(2) Virtue, Contribution, Intelligence and the individual spirit immortality

While Confucianists try to find the possible ways to continue their physical life in the continuity of ethnic groups, they also try to find the ways for the immortality of an individual spirit. In this aspect, it is the same in the West and the East. In ancient western cultures and western philosophies, the ideas of individual spirit immortality have occupied an important position. People hope their name would be of glory, their contributions could last to the future and been remembered by their descendants forever. This is another kind of "dead but immortal"--The body of an individual may have died, but his name, contribution and spirit will



be alive in the heart of his posterity forever.

Though the Western and Eastern people are searching for the individual spirit immortality, but they had different ideas about how to reach the goal and about what should be left to their future. In China, there is a well known viewpoint for individual spirit immortality called "three kinds of immortality".<sup>8</sup>

In Chun Qiu time (722-481 BC), Shu Sun-bao, a ancient Chinese scholar, explained the meanings of the topic of "Dead but Immortal". He distinguished immortality from that of high position, handsome, emolument, and rich incomes. He said that all of the above were not possible for immortality, only the three kinds of things as follows were valuable for immortality:

----the first class of value for individual immortality is Li De(立德)----reaching the virtue and respectability of morality. De is the highest level in the spirit life. It is only possible for some ancient holy kings and emperors, such as Huang Di, Yao Di and Sun Di in Chinese history;

----the second class value for individual immortality is Li Gong(立功)---- making special and meritorious achievements to society. Gong is the biggest contributions to the development of society and history. It could be reached by successful heroes and experts, such as Da Yu and Hou Ji in Chinese history;

----the third class value for individual immortality is Li Yan(立言)----making the special contributions in terms of intelligence, wisdom, and philosophy. Yan is the important achievements to the development of human wisdom and intelligence. It could be reached by successful intellects. The achievements, such as articles, fine arts, books, paintings as the objectivity of intellects' ideas and feelings, can leave for long time and influence the future forever.

De, Gong, Yan are the three kinds of standards to judge the contribution and achievements of individual persons and to see if it is possible for him to be immortal. To attain to the goal, people should work and struggle very hard for all the time and all of their lives. It is the realm for the up class Chinese people. Through these three ways, an individual's spirit life could be continued and everlasting.

### 3. The Viewpoints of Life and Death in Taoism

Taoism is a native religion originated in China. Compared with Confucian rationalist attitudes towards life and death, Taoism take the irrationalist or non-rationalist attitude to life and death. Based on their cyclist outlook of life, they ignore the distinction between life and death, and imagine to be able to attain immortality by join in the perpetual cycle movement of the cosmos. The Taoist theory of life and death is founded on its ontology of Tao. To a Taoist, Tao is the origin or arch of the World. "Tao produces 1, 1 produces 2, 2 produces 3, 3 produces all things of the World." <sup>9</sup> So all of the world come from Tao. Tao contains, produces and includes all things in the world.

What is Tao? There are different explanations in the history. Originally, Tao is road or way. Then Tao transferred to mean objective laws or patterns. After that, Tao was used to refer to the regulations of people's action.

How can people act according to objective laws? Because people are the cream and spirit of the World. According to Taoism, people are the highest existence of the life world. They absorb and melt all intelligence and spirit of the world in their life. So they have all abilities to know, to feel, to practice, to act according to the requirement of the objective law---Tao. It is the essential reason of the inter-unity and the integration of humans and Tao. The world is in permanent and cycle movement and changing. That is the Tao, the Law of the World. Since the people is the same with Tao, so Tao asks and also allows people to join in the cycle movement of the World. Since the movement of the world is in period and in cycle, and the life of individual person is only the part of the whole movement of the world, so birth and death are merely the ways for individual person to take part in the whole movement of the World. Birth is worth of congratulations, but death is not necessary to be feared or to be felt sad, since it is possible for re-birth and re-living one's life, if one could really reach Tao. Through the cycle ways of birth, death, re-birth, an individual person's limited life joins in the permanent cycle movement of the universe. That is the way for people to be in immortality and everlasting.

Compared with Confucian attitudes of "respecting life and fearing death", some Taoists seem to have an opposite attitude of "respecting death but detesting life". Zhuang Zhou, a famous Chinese philosopher, had this kind of attitude to life and death. He had a metaphor about life and death: being born is like to add cancer and disasters to life, only death is the way to cure the disasters. He made an allegory of human skeleton.

In the allegory, Zhuang Zhou had a discuss with a skeleton about life and death in a dream. The skeleton vividly described the happiness and freedom of the dead and resolutely refused Zhuang Zhou's suggestion to send him back to the living world.<sup>10</sup> By the allegory, and specially by the attitude of skeleton, Zhuang Zhou expressed his detesting attitude towards life.

However, not all Taoists hold such an absolutely detesting attitude to life. Most of the ordinary Taoists have very strong desires for real life and wish to be able to have a long life. Their wishes are not only to be able not to grow old but also to be able to live forever. "Not to grow old and to live forever" (长生不老) is an ideal in the theory of Taoism. They call for the people who can live forever as Xian(仙, immortal) or Shen Xian(神仙, immortal or god). According to Taoism, there is a Shen Xian world where many Shen Xian live; the world is above the ordinary life world. To be a Shen Xian is the highest ideal of Taoist. It is also the most attractive force to attract people to believe Taoism.

How can one become a Shen Xian? The only way is to learn Taoism and to practice according to the requirements of Taoism. Taoism not only provides its believers with theories and regulations, but also designs lots of practical programs to cultivate their life. So, the practice of Taoism is both for spirit and body, both a theory and activities. From the spiritual aspect, study of Taoism can greatly benefit people with rich mentality, perfect morality, social peace and tranquillity. From the physical aspect, the practices of Taoism is greatly helpful to dispel diseases, to drive away disasters, to keep fit, and to extend life.<sup>11</sup> Taoists would spend much time to search for the medicines of extending their life. They called the medicine as the anti-death medicine or the against-age medicine. They collect some traditional Chinese herb and smelt them into a ball named Dan(丹). The medicines are really very much helpful for health and curing some illnesses. The techniques of making medicines was primitive chemical examination in China. Some of them still be used today. Now the traditional Chinese treatment and Chinese medicines have spread in the World.

#### 4. The Viewpoints of Life and Death in the Chinese Buddhism

Buddhism originated in India. Indian Buddhism entered China in about 2000 years ago. After a long time of reform and reconstruction, it

was transformed into Chinese Buddhism. Chan(禅宗)and the Pure Land(净土宗) Buddhism are two major schools of Chinese Buddhism.

In the sinologising process, Indian Buddhism had to get accommodated to Chinese cultural background and to be accepted by Chinese people. In the process, Chinese people understood and interpreted the doctrines of Buddhism, and the contents of Confucianism, Taoism and traditional Chinese cultures were consciously or unconsciously absorbed into Buddhism. Chinese Buddhism is actually the variant of Indian Buddhism in Confucian China. The contents and the forms of Chinese Buddhism were the combination of Indian Buddhism with Chinese traditional Cultures. Buddhism in China not only has its historical connection with Indian Buddhism but also has its Chinese contents and Chinese styles. So we call it as Chinese Buddhism.

As far as the viewpoint of life and death is concerned, Chinese Buddhism keeps the basic doctrines of Indian Buddhism, such as Buddha, Brahma, Elision World, Samaras, Dukkha, Asceticism, Reincarnation, and so on. However, the Chinese Buddhism has his special contents and styles with Chinese characteristics.

---The ideas of Xiao entered the doctrine of Chinese Buddhism. As we have explained, Xiao is one of the basic ideas of Confucianism and also one of the basic moral principles in Chinese society. After long time's reform, the doctrine of Xiao was replanted into Chinese Buddhism and became a part of the doctrine of Chinese Buddhism. The moral ideology with Xiao became more and more important in Chinese Buddhist doctrine.<sup>12</sup> Some Chinese Buddhists listed Xiao as the first admonish of Buddhism. They took Confucianist doctrine of Zhong(忠, loyalty) and Xiao(孝, Filial Piety) as the doctrine of Chinese Buddhism. Following this, family temple and family grave yard have become very popular in China since then.

---The idol of Buddhist has been changed. Idol is one of the key elements of religion. The status of idol reflect the psychological states of believers. Since the idol of Buddhism was transferred into China, the appearance of Buddhist idols became more and more Sinologist. Some scholars find that, comparing with the status of Buddha in north west temples which entered China in the early time, the appearance of status of Buddha in Leo Yang Grotto(洛阳龙门石窟) are more like Chinese people. The contemporary Buddhist status looked real like pure Chinese face. Another important change is the function of idols. They become the protector of the real benefits of Buddhists. For example, to satisfy people's need of giving birth to children, Chinese Buddhists create a

special goddess named Song Zi Guan Yin(送子观音). She looks very kind and benevolent. Her special function is to help women to get pregnant. She is in woman's face and body and has very high reputation in Buddhist and Chinese society.

----One more change was that religious practices became more and more socialized. The regulations of praying became simpler and simpler. Praying activities often were entwined with social affairs and family life. Buddhists more frequently take part in social economic life and become an important part of social production. Some temples own vast territory and join in commercial activities. They gave up their mysterious glory, and intended for economic benefits. Chinese Buddhists paid more attentions to daily life and material benefits and become more and more socialized and commercialized.

## 5. Theory and Practice in Contemporary China

After a long time's revolution and social reform, Chinese people learned more about life and death than any time in the past. They become wiser from the study of the experiences and the lessons in the history and reality. Now the problem of life and death have become a very important part in their theoretical investigation as well as in their life experiences. Chinese people are faithfully going to their future.

### 1). On the Theoretical Level

At the theoretical level, based on the introspection of the series of mistakes made after 1949 and specially during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, philosophers and intellectuals are rethinking the experiences and lessons related to people's social position and their life. They have reached following common ideas.

First, all social member's willing and desires should be absolutely respected. It is the basic principle of any democratic society specially for Socialism. All social members should be equally treated as real man. Some scholars stressed that humanism should be the first or at least one of the most important principles of Socialism. Some scholars asked to re-understand and reconstruct Socialism. The emergence of Deng Xiao-ping's theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is an important results of this need.

Furthermore, humans are not only the start-point but also the final goal of any theoretic investigation and research. The Science of

humans and the Philosophy of humans have become obvious parts in humanities and philosophical research in today's China.<sup>13</sup> For example, The National Research Society for the Theory of Humans in China has been established recently. The First National Conference on Philosophy of Man has been held in Beijing in Nov. 1996.<sup>14</sup> More and more scholars join in the research of the theory of Man.

Thirdly, in the research of Man, both life and death have equal important position in a rational understanding of the nature of Man. In the past, influenced by Confucianism, Chinese scholars unconsciously paid more attention to the life of Man. Respecting actual life is the basic tendency of Chinese people and Chinese scholars. They unconsciously ignored the theoretical research of death, however. Now awakened by un-rational death in the Cultural Revolution and other times, Chinese scholars recognized that the views of death have more powerful influence to people's view to life. Only when people rationally understanding death, they could really respect and love life and to alive better. So more Chinese scholars paid their attentions to the research of philosophy of death. Many books and papers have been published. Because of their academic values, some books and papers on life and death have had very wide influence and earn the important awards in China and abroad.<sup>15</sup>

Fourthly, the main tasks of the research are to rightly recognize nature and to rationally evaluate the meaning and significance of Man. To set up the rational ideas of value and the criterion of evaluation is the key points in research and practices. In the philosophical circle in mainland China, there is a new branch of philosophy called Axiology. The values of Man is the most important topic in the research of Axiology.<sup>16</sup> There have been some achievements made in the area.

Various investigations of humans, human life and death achieve certain successes, which help enhance people's consciousness and provide all level leaders with the theoretical foundation for social policy and decision making.

## 2). On the Social Policy Level

Starting with the discussion of "Practice is the only Criterion of Truth" in 1978, the Communist Party of China(CPC) gradually gives up the Dogmatic understanding of Marxism and illusionary understanding of Socialism. Under the guide of Deng Xiao-ping's theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Chinese government began to carry out its Reform and Open Policy throughout China. After Deng Xiao-ping's speech during the trip to the Southern Part of China, CPC started to set up the Socialist

Free Market Economical System in 1993. This is one of the most important social policies in China to participate the international economical system. It clearly defines the direction of the Reform and Open Policy and greatly influences all other social and political policies. The establishment and development of free market economy calls for reform in political system and a set of related social policies. It also requires further liberation of Chinese people in both mentality and productive force. Respecting the personality of individuals, allowing free will, raising up life quality, promoting social administrations, and so on, become the basic guiding ideology of all policy making institutions from the central to local government in China.

—The diversified ownership of property are allowed, and the private ownership of productive materials are protected by the Constitution of China. This is the economic foundation of an individual's rights.

—The master position of social members and the social responsibility of individuals are respected and protected by the Chinese Law. The system of rule by law are greatly improved in recent years. This is political and legal foundation of an individual's rights.

—The freedom of belief, specially religious beliefs, of all people are allowed and protected by law and social policies. This is the important reason why the number of believers quickly increased in mainland China recent years. The research and administration of religions are greatly improved.<sup>17</sup>

—Under the name of enhancing the construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization, on the one hand, the virtues, such as selfless, good, respectability, self-giving, self-sacrifice for the sake of others, are still highly admired and encouraged, on the another hand, public morality, such as respecting the aged, loving the younger, helping the disabled and weakling, and so on, have been relived and re-stressed in the whole society. A new moral environment suit for the need of Socialist Free Market Economy is being set up and plays its positive functions.

—The social insurance system and social relieve system have been established and played important roles in social reform process and social life. While family planing policy is still executed, the policy of eugenics, the high quality education system, public health service, and the service for the Aged have developed and full played in the country.

3). On the Life Practical Level

Although with a long time's struggle for social reform and social development, China is still facing many difficulties and severe problems, but we should objectively say that now Chinese people are in the best period of their history and are in the most faithful mental state to their future. They are going on with their life-long road to a bright future.

----The productive force and the economic situation of society are greatly improved. Though Chinese people are still very poor according to the standards of developed countries, but most of them have said good-bye to poverty. Some of them are going to be rich. This is the most important economic pre-condition to improve the living conditions of Chinese people.

----The living condition, including house, facilities, furniture, hygiene equipment, transportation, food, drinking water, and so on, are greatly improved in all cities and in most parts of countryside. The material quality of daily life hugely improved.

----The spirit life are much richer than ever before. By all kinds of public medium, such as newspapers, magazines, televisions, broadcasts, radios, videos, and so on, the inter-communication between people and people are enhanced, the contents of entertainment become much more rich than past.

----The quality and the quantity of health service are greatly improved. Most of the disasters can be cared in today's China, so people's life age are greatly extended in recent years. Now there are some very special and traditional methods for keeping fit and enhancing health----Qi Gong(气功). A vast number of masses take part in the exercises and have greatly benefited from it. Some patients with serious illnesses have extended their life by the very special and mystical functions of the exercises.

----General speaking, since the religious tradition in today's China is relatively weak, most Chinese people do not really believe in the reincarnation or regeneration. They naturally intend to have a good realistic life. The main trend in China is to live better. Now Chinese people become much more pragmatic.

However, following the Confucianist tradition of individual immortality, many Chinese people are trying their best to attain to one of the "three kinds of immortality". They want to reach perfect virtue and respectability( Li De ), or to make special contribution to the nation( Li Gong ), or to leave their splendid ideas and intelligence to future( Li Yan). It is by these ways, Chinese people are looking for their



spiritual immortality.

At the national level, all Chinese people have a common dream to let their Nation and Country become richer, stronger and independent in the contemporary World. Chinese people should and could make greatest contributions to the developments of Humanity and the future of the World. This is the eternal hope of Chinese people.

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**Notes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Zhang Dai-nan: The Thinking of Ultimate Concern in Chinese Philosophy, THE FORUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, No. 1, 1993.
- <sup>2</sup> Duan De-zhi: *Philosophy of Death*, Hubei People's Publishing House, 1991 .
- <sup>3</sup> Confucius: Lun Yu . Xian Jin(《论语·先进》)。
- <sup>4</sup> Confucius: Lun Yu . Li Ren(《论语·里仁》)。
- <sup>5</sup> Confucius: Lun Yu . Zhong Yong(《论语·中庸》)。
- <sup>6</sup> Meng Zi: Gao Zi Shang(《孟子·告子上》)。
- <sup>7</sup> Tian Ren He Yi ----The Unity Between Heaven and People is the most important doctrine in Chinese philosophy. It is delegated the main characteristics of Chinese philosophy.
- <sup>8</sup> Zuo Zhuan . Xiang Gong Er Shi Si Nan(《左传·襄公二十四年》)。
- <sup>9</sup> Lao Zi. Chapter 42(《老子·42章》)。
- <sup>10</sup> Zhuang Zhou: Zhuang Zi . Da Zong Shi(《庄子·大宗师》)。
- <sup>11</sup> Tai Ping Jing He Jiao(《太平经合校》)。
- <sup>12</sup> Yan Yao-Zhong: *Chinese Religions and the Philosophy of Existence*, Xue Lin Publishing House, 1991, p243.
- <sup>13</sup> Ouyang, Kang: The Characteristics of Man's Values and the Research Methodology of the Science of Man, JIAN HAI FORUM, No. 2 1989.
- <sup>14</sup> The author of this paper is a member of the Executive Director Board of the Society and took part in the first Conference in Beijing.
- <sup>15</sup> For example, the first book named *Philosophy of Death* in Chinese, written by Duan De Zhi, were awarded in the Third National Publishing Prize and the First National Prize of Humanities and Social Science in China.
- <sup>16</sup> Ouyang, Kang: The Research of Axiology and Man's Seeking to Values, GAN SHU SOCIAL SCIENCE, No. 3, 1991.
- <sup>17</sup> It is also partly explaining the reason why we established the Department of Religions Studies in the College of Philosophy of Wuhan University. It is the second department of religion studies in mainland China. The first one is in Beijing University.

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