Abstract

This thesis argues that Lin Yutang's brand of "hedonism", as expressed in his book "The Importance of Living", is highly related to today's hectic world, as Lin emphasises the need to enjoy the simple pleasures of life, which is too often neglected. This essay further points out the realist elements that Lin has input into his own unique philosophy through a comparison with philosopher Zhuangzi's thinking, which remains relevant till today.

The author, Lin Yutang (1895-1976), as discussed in this essay, is a well-known writer and scholar in the history of modern Chinese literature. He has written many English books on the Chinese culture in an attempt to bridge the gap between the East and West, one of which is "The Importance of Living" (1937), a bestseller in the United States in 1938. The book expresses "an idle philosophy born of an idle life" and how one should enjoy simple pleasures of life such as friendships, tea drinking, nature and traveling. As reflected from the book, Lin's philosophy of life is essentially hedonistic. Hedonism, generally a derogatory term, typically means to lead a life of pleasure and indulge in creature comforts, turns to take on a new positive meaning in Lin's context.

Despite spending most of his life in the United States, Lin was very much influenced by the Chinese culture, particularly Taoism. In the book, he wrote about Zhuangzi, the famous Taoist philosopher, who has discovered himself and the way to live a life of inner peace and happiness. Traces of Zhuangzi's influence on Lin's philosophy in the book is evident.

This thesis aims to study two important areas of Lin's philosophy: Lin's hedonistic view of life and a comparison between Lin's "hedonism" and Zhuangzi's philosophy. The essay consists of six chapters.
Chapter 1 is an introduction to this study. Chapter 2 points out the tragic undertone that lies behind Lin's optimistic "hedonism" view of life, as opposed to Zhuangzi's detached view of life and death. Chapter 3 explains that life itself is the foundation of Lin's "hedonism". Both Lin and Zhuangzi have similar emphasis on the value of life and individuality. Chapter 4 states that Lin's "hedonism" is a pursuit of happiness and real happiness within one's soul is best attained through the fulfillment of material and biological desires, in contrary to Zhuangzi's quest of shedding all worldly wants. Chapter 5 illustrates that the true enjoyment of life is to appreciate the natural world as well as the nature of things and to create a harmonious relationship between human and nature, so as to achieve the ultimate goal of inner peace and freedom. Zhuangzi conveys a similar message but through a different approach. Chapter 6 summarises the elements of Lin's "hedonism". It also concludes that despite their close relationship, Lin and Zhuangzi's philosophy remain fundamentally different.