Abstract

Chuang Tzu (莊子) is one of the greatest philosophers in the history of Chinese philosophy. His writings sparkle with wit and he was no doubt the Wittiest man in the history of Chinese philosophy.

Chuang Tzu embodies the wisdom of 'Nature'. He respects the rules of Nature and lives according to them. To Chuang Tzu, living harmoniously with 'Nature' is the most important thing in his life.

Everything, whether living or nonliving is equal in 'Nature', and therefore is equal in the world. Since there is neither superiority nor inferiority, the concepts of big and small, good and bad, beautiful and ugly are flexible and relative.

Chuang Tzu suggests to us an easy life without sophisticated thoughts and materialistic desires. He believes in 'Tao' and in order to follow the 'Tao', one should not try to do things that may violate the rules of 'Nature'. In another words, one should not be over-doing. This is his principle of non-action (無為). In his view, non-action is the only way to get things done without interfering with individual private freedom and without disrupting the course of 'Nature'.

Because of his principle of equality and non-action, people who do not really understand him and his philosophy tend to regard him as pessimistic and lazy. Therefore, the aims of my study are to assess and to analyse major aspects of the philosophy of Chuang Tzu in order to clarify the misconceptions held by others as well as to prove that the philosophy of Chuang Tzu is in fact neither pessimistic nor lazy, but rather
'neutralistic'. By neutralistic I mean neither pessimistic nor optimistic, but in between.

The first chapter is introductory. Chapter two deals with the life of Chuang Tzu and his writings. Chapter three concerns the neutralistic nature of the concept of '逍遙遊' (Free and easy wandering) of Chuang Tzu and shows that '逍遙遊' is not pessimistic. Similarly, in chapter four, certain aspects of the concept of '齊物論' (The principle of equality) of Chuang Tzu are revealed and discussed. In all these discussions, it is argued that Chuang Tzu's '齊物論' is in fact neutralistic thought. In the next two chapters, the concepts of '養生主' (The secret of caring for life), '心齋' (mind fastening) and '坐忘' (sitting in forgetfulness) are dealt with respectively. The next chapter discusses the concept of '無為', and the last chapter is a summary and conclusion.

Among all the philosophers in the Spring and Autumn era, Chuang Tzu is no doubt the most outstanding one. However, to know Chuang Tzu is easy, but to appreciate Chuang Tzu is not that simple. That is why so many misconceptions about him and his philosophy have occurred.

The purpose of this Academic Exercise is to correct some of these misunderstandings, particularly the one regarding whether his philosophy is pessimistic or optimistic.