

Cultivating the Flow

A CONCEPT OF EVOLUTIVE WELL-BEING THAT INTEGRATES
THE CLASSIC TRADITIONS AND QUANTUM SCIENCE

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The Issues

Approaching the end of the 20th century, we are confronted with a number of fundamental issues regarding the quality, if not the general purpose, of human existence. One of them is the gradual demise of the Western-scientific health care system, which has fostered a revival of the age-old discussion about the nature of health, illness, and well-being. In the process of developing alternative approaches to healing, holistic medical discourse has consistently emphasized the “diseased” quality of illness and its therapeutic implications, i.e. the consequent restoration and maintenance of “ease.” However, definitions of the ease state often fail to go much beyond the biochemical aspects of well-being, and thus end up being classified according to the same parameters they were trying to overcome.

Recent news from the frontiers of scientific research have given firm grounds to the growing suspicion that the scientific parameters most modern health care professionals adhere to may be conceptually flawed. As has been extensively documented since the late 1970’s, the mechanics of modern medical “science” seem archaic when viewed in the light of quantum physics, while the “mythical truths” of archaic traditions become transparent as a very advanced way of thinking. This applies especially to the health sciences. In the following argument, I have highlighted relevant findings in modern research disciplines, and interfaced them with some of the fundamental scientific concepts of ancient Greece, India, and in particular, China.

From the overlapping cross points emerges a highly dynamic concept of well-being, which hinges upon the creation, maintenance, and evolution of a continuous “flow.”



Flow Science: Movement in Classical Chinese Thought

All times and cultures have regarded the capability of reflective thought as the most important factor distinguishing human beings from other forms of organic life. Science is deeply rooted in our compelling urge to explore the origins and the nature of the universe, and perhaps most importantly, our own role within it.

In a very literal sense, it was the desire to find out “what makes the world go round” which prompted the early humans to scrutinize their environment for cosmological clues. It appears that all great scientific systems set out on their journey by observing the movements of the heavenly bodies, then discerning a pattern behind these movements, and finally formulating theories that articulated the relationships between them.

In the Western tradition, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus first articulated the concept that “everything moves.” His fragmentary ideas were succeeded by Pythagoras and his followers who tried to describe the intrinsic harmonies of universal movement in an elaborate system of mathematical and musical ratios. However, as time went by Greek philosophers took the phenomenology of movement to increasingly more abstract levels. Mainstream science became preoccupied with the task of idealizing changing phenomena, identifying them as non-dynamic truths that can be expressed in the “absolute” symbols and numbers of geometry and mathematics. It was only during the 20th century that Werner Heisenberg, David Bohm, and other exponents of modern physics put the reductionist view of science into perspective by describing a universe that is the conglomerate of highly complex, dynamic, and unpredictable processes, and essentially affirming that, indeed, “everything moves.”

The revelations of the relatively new science of flux, however, seem to have done little to bring about significant improvements in our everyday lives. This was very different in ancient traditions, where scientific theories about life and the universe had very direct implications for the integrity and well-being of its people. In the context of our topic, it seems particularly appropriate to take a look at the ancient Chinese system of scientific thought. For it is the Chinese who have left behind the most detailed documentation about the different states of the universal flow, and who consequently established every branch of science and every aspect of their everyday lives upon it.

Just like the ancient Sumerians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Greeks, the Chinese set out for their scientific quest by observing the movements of the heavenly bodies. Chinese archeologists have recently unearthed stone circles dating back 7,000 years ago, which have been identified as primitive observatories. Summarizing the findings from these archaic observations, the first Chinese book of knowledge was the *Yijing*, known to most of us as the Book of Change. The character yi—change—was originally a pictogram of sun and moon, and the character jing—meaning both “universal path” and “classic”—depicts the warp and woof of their movements. Considering the philological implications of jing, all of the Chinese classics are texts which expound universal paths of movement, whether it is the path of the sun and the moon in the *Yijing*, the path of human beings in the *Daodejing* (Tao Te Ching) or the path of human qi and body fluids in the *Neijing* (The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine). In a more literal sense, The Book of Change can thus be rendered as the Classic on the Principles of Celestial Movement. Considering the particular focus of our discussion, it is also very important to note that another meaning of yi is “ease.” In other words, the *Yijing* can also be interpreted as the

Classic on the Principles of Ease, or the Path That Things Have to Move On In Order to Be at Ease, or even Documentation of the Universal Truth That Ease is Movement.

Drawing from the conceptual fountain of the *Yijing*, Chinese thinkers believed for centuries that the shape and quality of all material things are only an expression of their present state of movement, reflecting their inherent vibratory quality. According to this view, it is its particular state of movement which causes an object to appear hot or cold or red or green.

In a very rudimentary way, the *Yijing* had thus preconceived many of the puzzling findings of modern physics. It was a tool to estimate the rhythmic patterns of movement, and very much like Nobel laureate Stephen Hawking once described the science of quantum mechanics, it never “predicts a single definite result for an observation; instead, it predicts a number of different possible outcomes and tells us how likely each of these is.”

The Chinese phenomenology of movement recorded in the *Yijing* entails a variety of sub-topics that are of particular interest to the focus of our examination:

- 1) Holism. First of all, there is the fundamental assumption that smaller units move according to the movement patterns of the bigger ones. This is, in essence, the message of the *Daodejing*: “The movements of human beings are determined by the movements of the earth, the movements of the earth are determined by the movements of the celestial forces, the movements of the celestial forces are determined by the universal principle of movement, and the universal principle of movement just is.”

The title of the *Daodejing*, a text which is often regarded as the most universally read of all classics, refers directly and programmatically to the relationship between the patterns of macrocosmic movement (Dao) and its microcosmic ramifications (De). Reflecting the ancient meaning of the pictograms involved, the title, *Daodejing*, can be translated as: The Classic on the Relationship Between Macrocosm and Microcosm, or spelled out in even greater detail: The Universal Principle of How Human Beings Can Utilize the Binding Relationship Between Macroscopic and Microscopic Movements to Further Their State of Well-Being.

- 2) Energy. Secondly, it is the movement of energy (qi) rather than matter which is the object of scientific scrutiny. In the context of the *Yijing*, the material moon was regarded as an energy field vibrating at the lower end of the material frequency scale, while the material sun was considered to be an energy field vibrating at the higher end of the scale. Their movements or celestial paths, moreover, indicate the path of a guiding energy that is vibrating beyond material frequencies and therefore remains undetectable by the bare eye. In other words, the celestial bodies move where the celestial qi moves, just as the blood in the human body moves where the qi of the human body entices it to go. If we want to track the hidden energy lines of heaven, we just have to trace the path of the moon or other visible objects in the sky.

According to Chinese scientific thought, matter is therefore just a particularly dense form of energy, an energy form vibrating at a rather slow and stable speed. Or, in the terminology of quantum physics, matter is the explicate particle reality which has unfolded from the purely energetic wave aspect of reality that David Bohm called the implicate order.

Bohm, a former protégé of Einstein and one of the world’s most respected quantum physicists, is the author of what is undoubtedly the most articulate presentation of the world as a “frequency domain.” His book, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, postulates the existence of an implicate order and an explicate

order, which by now have become technical terms in physics and most other sciences, with the notable exception of medicine. The manifestation of all forms, according to Bohm, is the result of countless enfoldings and unfoldings between these two orders. According to this concept, for example, an electron is not one thing, but a totality enfolded throughout the whole of space. Bohm thus likes to refer to the universe as a holomovement. Instead of calling different aspects of the holomovement “things,” he calls them relatively independent sub-totalities. His views are accompanied by the passionate argument that our current way of fragmenting the world into parts is not only unscientific, but may even lead to our extinction.

- 3) Relativity. Thirdly, ancient Chinese philosophers were acutely aware of the limitations of human consciousness. Therefore, they contended that science as the foremost product of human consciousness can never spell out the absolute truth about movements, but only determine in what way they are related to us. Traditional Chinese science is the exploration of relationships; the relevant lines, numerical symbols, and verbal terminology used by its adepts, do not purport to enshrine the “true nature” of things but rather express their relationship to us. For instance, Chinese astronomers of the early Han dynasty figured out that the sun does not travel on a path around the earth. They were, however, hardly disturbed by this discovery and continued to work with the system of the eight trigrams (which is based on the old cosmological model of the “covered heavens,” featuring a moving sky moving around a static earth) for 2,000 years thereafter, since it adequately described the relationship between different states of motion and, most importantly, their immediate effect on human beings.

One of the products of this highly pragmatic approach was the development of wuyun liuqi (Five-Six Phase Model of Cosmic Energy Movement), an intricate system used to describe the movements of “heavenly qi”—gravity, cosmic radiation, light and temperature fluctuations, etc.—and their physiological impact on us. It would go far beyond the narrow limits of this paper to describe the concrete calculations that this model entails. Suffice it to say that it was first presented two millennia ago in the most important of all Chinese medicine classics, the *Neijing*, and that it constitutes a kind of energetic calendar, approximating different aspects of the heavenly forces that we are exposed to.

- 4) Complexity. Since ancient Chinese thinkers assumed that there really are no solid things with clearly defined boundaries, the concept of singular causalities never occurred to them. From the perspective of quantum physics, traditional Chinese scientists saw the world as complex interference patterns. Calculating our energetic exposure on earth, the Chinese thus posited different energetic factors in the sky which combine to produce the fluctuating heavenly influence. This dynamic force field was then believed to interact with the manifold geomagnetic patterns generated by varying earth terrain, generating an even more complex interference pattern with the individual force fields that constitute every human being. Concrete calculations were done by interfacing two overlapping energetic cycles which were believed to have the strongest effect on humankind: the more stable five movements (wuyun), that is a combination of cosmic forces represented by the movements of the five planets (Mercury, Saturn, Venus, Jupiter, and Mars), and the six qi (liuqi), which mostly describes the influence of the sun. By interfacing these two cycles, the Chinese arrived at a great energy circle of sixty years which in combination with the geographical position of the Yellow River basin yielded information about the weather, patterns of plant growth, and diseases which are specific to each year.

Modern Chinese researchers have announced that the sixty year cycle corresponds very closely to the rhythm of sun-spot activity, which is intimately related to our prime weather maker, the solar wind. Prior to switching to the international method of keeping time in 1911, the Chinese year was counted by combining a five phase symbol and a six phase symbol. By simply looking at the two characters Ding-

Chou, for instance, a knowledgeable Chinese farmer would be able to draw conclusions about the general weather patterns of the year 1997. He would further be able to complement his findings with a popular store-house of rich experimental data, relating the weather pattern to diseases which are particularly prone to grow rampant under the predicted circumstances, and to certain plants which experience has shown to grow particularly lush in years with the energetic label Ding-Chou. It is characteristic for the holistic nature of Chinese thinking that ancient scientists assumed these plants to be particularly effective remedies for the space-time related diseases that frequently occur during this year.

It is precisely this sense of inner balance which is at the heart of complexity. As University of Chicago professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has eloquently pointed out:

Complexity is often thought to have a negative meaning, synonymous with difficulty and confusion. That may be true, but only if we equate it with differentiation alone. Yet complexity also involves a second dimension—the integration of autonomous parts. A complex engine, for instance, not only has many separate components, each performing a different function, but also demonstrates a high sensitivity because each of the components is in touch with all the others. Without integration, a differentiated system would be a confusing mess.

In sum, it is the movement of things which determines their nature. Or, to put it more directly, things are movement. We can only fully appreciate this type of cosmology if we assume the point of view of a modern physicist. According to these conceptual creators of the super-collider, reality is essentially an amalgam of interference patterns—vibrational base patterns that constantly merge with other vibrations to produce ever changing and new vibrational forms. When Tao of Physics author Fritjof Capra summarizes the pioneering “holomovement” theory of his colleague David Bohm, he also spells out the core principle of traditional Chinese scientific thought:

The holomovement is a dynamic phenomenon out of which all forms of the material universe flow. The aim of this approach is to study the order enfolded in this holomovement, not by dealing with the structure of objects, but rather with the structure of movement, thus taking into account both the unity and the dynamic nature of the universe.



Science, Prejudice and Obstructed Mind Flow

We may ask the legitimate question why, if there is so much evidence from scientists throughout all ages and cultures, so little of this vibrant view on life has filtered down to the level of our everyday lives. Why do people know about the enormous cost of super-colliders, but would be shocked by the “outrageous” idea that their favorite toy or food or person was “only” a frequency blur? It is probably for the same reasons that the researchers of the frequency domain were at first vehemently attacked, and then often ignored by their less inquisitive colleagues. Ironically, the flow model itself may be able to explain this peculiar phenomenon, which proponents of new theories have encountered since the dawn of scientific activity.

From a physicist’s perspective, matter can be interpreted as an inertia in energy movement, a habitual vortex resisting the flow. In the same way, our thought patterns can stagnate and form strong opinions. Yale surgeon Bernie Siegel, for instance, has observed on many occasions that people seem to be addicted to their beliefs. This is why, he says, people act like addicts when you try to change their belief system.

Early on, both David Bohm and Stanford neurophysiologist Karl Pribram had contemplated the cerebral tendency to “get stuck” in certain habitual thought patterns. Transposed into the language of the flux model, our entire system of esthetic and moral convictions seems to operate according to the principles of resonance. In the course of our lives, certain habits and cultural beliefs are impregnated in our minds, and when we encounter them again—possibly disguised in a different, but related frequency—a resonance effect occurs and we feel agreement, pleasure, or a sense of beauty. But if we encounter an image, thought, or belief that is vibrating at a fundamentally different rate, we instinctively fear the chaos that might be created if we should resonate with the unfamiliar pattern and thus “erase” or at least alter the old pattern which we had so safely encoded in our brain.

A prominent voice on this subject is psychiatrist David Shainberg, associate dean of the Postgraduate Psychoanalytic Program at the William Alanson Institute of Psychiatry in New York. He thinks that the same tendency toward stability exhibited by energy vortices is what causes certain vortices of thought—ideas and opinions—to become occasionally cemented in our consciousness. Providing us with important clues for a definition of well-being, Shainberg feels that the permanence of some of these vortices is detrimental to our growth as human beings, creates blockages in the creative process, and makes us feel disconnected from the general flow of things. We should not allow the same vortices to take form repeatedly, he warns, otherwise we may be erecting a barrier between us and the “holomovement.” As a positive example of the uninhibited nature of the unfolding-enfolding process of consciousness, he appropriately cites the sparkling aliveness of children, who are usually free of prejudice.

All of this alerts us to the importance of overcoming stagnating thought patterns for the benefit of our physical, mental, and social well-being. According to the premise of the flow model developed in this paper, well-being thus includes freedom from prejudice and preconceived notions about our environment. It is movement that keeps both our minds and bodies healthy and well. University of Chicago psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi cites the rhythmically evolving lifestyle of the Shushwap Indians as a prime example of “flow” cultivation:

The Shushwap region was and is considered by the Indian people to be a rich place: rich in salmon and game, rich in below-ground food resources such as tubers and roots—a plentiful land. In this region, the people would live in permanent village sites and exploit the environs for needed resources. They had elaborate technologies for very effectively using the resources in the environment, and perceived their lives as being good and rich. Yet, the elders said, at times the world became too predictable and the challenge began to go out of life. Without challenge, life had no meaning.

So the elders, in their wisdom, would decide that the entire village should move, those moves occurring every 25 to 30 years. The entire population would move to a different region of the Shushwap land and there, they found challenge. There were new streams to figure out, new game trails to learn, new areas where the balsamroot would be plentiful. Now life would regain its meaning and be worth living. Everyone would feel rejuvenated and healthy.

Aimed at this type of rhythmical renewal, the Eastern civilizations feature many rituals that remind us of the transience of our cultural structures, including habitual thought patterns as well as actual buildings. The Great Shrine of Ise south of Kyoto, for instance, has been ritually taken down and resurrected every twenty years for centuries.



The Body and Its Flowing Field

Ancient cultures have always given the human body a special place in their understanding of the frequency domain. According to the Chinese view, for instance, human form (ren) is the product of heavenly (tian) and earthly (di) interference patterns. Modern research has shed new light on this “mythical” assessment. The French hydrology and engineering professor Louis Claude Vincent, for example, documented that the intricate balance of our biochemical terrain is dependent upon electromagnetic forces emanating from the universe as well as from the body itself. According to Vincent, these forces are “oscillations which are actually caused by the continuous movement in the whole universe.”

Coming from an entirely different field, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi comes to a similar conclusion: “The integrated cells and organs that make up the human organism are an instrument that allows us to get in touch with the rest of the universe. The body is like a probe full of sensitive devices that tries to obtain what information it can from the awesome reaches of space. It is through the body that we are related to one another and to the rest of the world.”

Prompted by the revolutionary findings of quantum physics and their stunning affinity to classical concepts, a small group of European physicians and engineers began to explore the human body as the ultimate frequency domain in the 1970’s. Similar to the nature of inorganic matter, they assumed, we should be able to measure a living organism energetically by understanding it as a distinct frequency pattern. The first person to explore this aspect of life forms had been the Russian biologist Gurwitsch, who discovered more than half a century ago that certain properties of living organisms can be transferred by electromagnetic means. He succeeded to transfer virulent properties of bacteria through a glass screen, and proved that those same properties could not be transferred through a plexiglass screen. It was only decades later, however, that the German and Swiss physicists B. Heim and J. Muheim substantiated the claim that matter, and organic matter in particular, obeys superior energetic forces.

The German biophysics engineer Fritz-Albert Popp, moreover, showed in years of meticulous research that the enormous amount of information needed to maintain a living organism can only be transmitted via radiation, i.e. oscillations that move at the speed of light. He first introduced the concept of this organic info-flow in his pioneering books, *Electromagnetic Bio-Information and Biology of Light*, and coined the now widely used term, biophoton luminescence. “Frequency means information,” his colleague Bodo Kohler elaborates this concept; “in the case of disease this process of transformation is blocked, so that the oscillations ‘stagnate’ on the same level.” Kohler is the leading voice of a growing contingent of European physicians who put Popp’s findings into clinical use by applying bioresonance therapy, a modality aimed at harmonizing the biophysical field of the body.

In the United States, the most ardent and articulate voice proposing an energetic approach to healing has been the Detroit physician Richard Gerber. In his prolific study, *Vibrational Medicine*, he explicates in great detail the crucial relationship between the material and the field aspects of the body. Linking ancient Eastern wisdom with Bohm’s holomovement approach, he claims that the human energy field is the body’s own version of the implicate order. Illness, he says in unison with his European colleagues, first manifests here before becoming structurally visible. Body Electric pioneer Robert O. Becker and his famous salamanders, which re-grew severed limbs after electrical field modulation, are another part of this controversial but growing tradition of “quantum thinking” in U.S. medical science.

Returning to the original question of well-being, physical health according to the concepts of bioelectromagnetism can be defined as the stable condition where the uninhibited transmission of all

information within the body can take place in the most efficient manner. This is another parallel to the Chinese doctrine of movement, which postulates that the most important aspect of physical and mental well-being is the absence of blockages along the pathways of “qi” and “blood.” In Chinese medical terminology, the terms “blood stagnation” and “phlegm” refer to structural accumulations, while “qi stagnation” implies the obstructed or inefficient transmission of bodily information.

So great is the Eastern belief in the powers of this hidden informational flow, that traditional Chinese doctors never adopted surgery as a major therapeutic option. Instead, in cases of severe structural deformation, methods of flow restoration such as acupuncture, massage, or “blood and qi vitalizing” herbs are prescribed. I have personally witnessed how several Chinese physicians healed severe splinter fractures by applying gentle massage and/or herbal therapy alone. In one particularly impressive case, the highly “chaotic” splinter pattern had found its way back together and, as x-ray pictures showed, completely mended in only four days.

Again, similar observations have been made by quantum physicists. Bohm once saw a device on a BBC television program that inspired him to rethink our general preconceptions about chaos and order. An ink drop submerged in a cylinder filled with glycerin would disappear into the greasy substance when a handle was cranked in one direction, and then completely reassemble into the shape of the original ink drop when the handle was cranked in the opposite direction. An intrigued Bohm wrote:

This immediately struck me as very relevant to the question of order, since, when the ink drop was spread out, it still had a “hidden” order that was revealed when it was reconstituted. On the other hand, in our usual language, we would say that the ink was in a state of “disorder” when it was diffused through the glycerin. This led me to see that new notions of order must be involved here.



Flow and Consciousness

While the field based model of medicine gives us information about pathological energy patterns in the body’s organs, it cannot always provide adequate explanations about body-mind processes. To get beyond the temporary nature of the state of well-being we thus have to look into the meta-realm of “the mind” and the related rituals of culture. This is where the concept of consciousness and consciousness control enters the plan, which plays such an extraordinarily important role in all traditional sciences, particularly in India and China.

Since our brain is a frequency transformer in which imagination and reality are ultimately indistinguishable, it should not surprise us that mental images affect the body as strongly as their material counterparts. Psychologist Jeanne Achterberg, former director of research and rehabilitation science at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Dallas, Texas, has written extensively about this phenomenon. Not only did she prove that mental attitudes can affect biochemical changes, but also that the physiological effects of imagery can be very specific. In one study, she taught two groups of college students how to image either neutrophils or T-cells, which both belong to the larger category of white blood cells. In all cases, students elevated only the particular type of white blood cell they had been visualizing.

UCLA kinesiology professor Valerie Hunt has contributed another piece to the complex body-consciousness relationship puzzle. She discovered that an electromyograph, a device used to measure the electrical activity in the muscles, can be used to detect certain qualities of the human energy field. The results of her research reveal that a person’s state of consciousness is reflected in the frequency spectrum contained in his or her

field. The electromyogram measured field frequencies close to the body's biological frequencies of 250 cps when her subjects' focus was on the material world, but detected frequencies of 400-900 cps in people with "extraordinary" abilities such as healing or going into trance. In some people, whom Hunt classified as "mystical personalities," she found frequencies of up to 200,000 cps.

All of these findings seem to confirm several fundamental assumptions of classical Indian and Chinese science: a) our state of consciousness directly affects the energy field of the body; b) highly conscious and mentally evolved individuals "vibrate" at a higher rate than normal people; c) consciousness control is the key to modulating the energy field, and thus influencing the biochemical and structural reality of the body.

It thus appears that the state of well-being includes uninhibited flow within all three of the presented realities of human existence—the structural body, the energy field, and consciousness. It is also evident that there is a distinct chain of command, with "consciousness" at the top. Although changes on any one of these levels will necessarily impact the others, the magnitude of change appears to be much greater if we act in accordance with the natural hierarchy of this command structure. It is unlikely that the physical removal of a tumor will eliminate the pathological field information or enhance our state of consciousness. From the perspective of the flow model, surgery may be able to enhance the quantity of physical life, but rarely the quality of our general state of well-being. On the other hand, consciousness control will always affect the two subordinated aspects to a certain degree.

Rather than evoking the image of a body mechanic, ancient traditions have always emphasized the role of the physician as a teacher of life-style, diet, and mental attitude. Modern experts from various fields are beginning to advocate the same. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the leading scholar in the newly developed field of optimal experience, has spent the last twenty years analyzing the anatomy of psychological well-being and developing a blueprint for the ideal state of mental existence. The main word associated with his concept is "flow," which has now become a technical term in the field of intrinsic motivation. Although the research underlying Csikszentmihalyi's flow concept is generally limited to the description and classification of psychological states, it can be used to illuminate the missing piece in a more comprehensive flow concept which transcends the boundaries of narrowly defined scientific fields.

Csikszentmihalyi's descriptions of flow are particularly relevant, because they do not focus on the extraordinary feats of a few individuals. After questioning thousands of people from Arizona to the Alps and to Bangkok, Csikszentmihalyi and several of his colleagues concluded that a) flow is a sought after sense of inner harmony—happiness, satisfaction, serenity—which seems to occur in people as diversified as Chicago housewives, Korean nuns, and Japanese motorcycle gangs; b) flow can be brought on by a diverse range of activities, such as working, tending the garden, helping others, reading, praying, or chemically induced "trips."

In general, Csikszentmihalyi's definition of flow is characterized by intense concentration, clarity of goals, and effortless action leading to a sense of inner growth through intrinsically rewarding interactions with some aspect of the outer or inner environment. The psychology of optimal experience, therefore, clearly advocates the cultivation of consciousness as a vital element of the flow experience. Csikszentmihalyi's blueprint of well-being thus parallels the concepts of Taoism and other Eastern sciences. Taoist daoyin, that is modern qigong, practices are exactly what their name promises: "exercises that entice the qi to flow" by means of focus and consciousness control. Laozi's doctrine of "doing nothing" (wuwei) is actually the conscious induction of (internal) movement by (externally motionless) meditation techniques. The same principle is found in Buddhist teachings. Images of the contemplative, i.e. practicing or focusing, Buddha almost always include the lotus flower—the Oriental symbol of the "heart" which is considered the seat of consciousness.

The highly complex and detailed ways of modulating the human energy field via the processes of the mind is really the essence of Eastern “training,” which has been called both a religion and a science by Western commentators. In order to induce the cherished sense of synchrony between our own rhythms and the universal pulse of universal movement, all of the schools in question teach how to “absorb” cosmic energy—qi, ki, or prana—in the most efficient manner.

An important aspect which has not been mentioned by Csikszentmihalyi is the inductive function of faith. Ancient adepts realized that before we can absorb universal energy with the aid of focusing techniques we must first believe that there really is this qi out there, and that it is worth our while to invest in the long and sometimes exhausting training. Cosmic frequencies, or “information,” are called xixi in Chinese—a combination of the characters xin (believing) and xi (absorbing). When I interviewed many eminent qigong masters in China’s Sichuan Province between 1990 and 1992, all of them contended that the mystical elements surrounding Taoist practices are nothing but scientific ways to make the adept “believe,” so that he or she will completely relax and “absorb” most efficiently.

It is the same mechanism of consciousness which is responsible for the fact that third world cultures, children, lowly educated people, and the mentally retarded respond significantly better to treatment, particularly in serious diseases such as cancer. The educated city dweller stands less of a chance, since he or she believes in scientific statistics. It was again imagery researcher Jeanne Achterberg who documented this universal phenomenon in an American context.

Taking this into account, it becomes more and more clear why human beings exhibit a built-in need for a limited belief structure, be they of a religious, scientific, or cultural nature. As demonstrated above, completely static beliefs are intrinsically detrimental to our state of well-being. Yet from another angle, a less rigid form of belief seems to be necessary to help us keep our focus. As Csikszentmihalyi adequately describes this phenomenon:

Cultures prescribe norms, evolve goals, and discover beliefs that make human action more fit to tackle the challenges of existence. In so doing they must rule out many alternatives, and so limit possibilities; but this channeling of attention to a limited set of goals and means is what allows effortless action [flow] within the self-created boundaries of culture.



Conclusion

There are several messages that emerge from these deliberations: 1) traditions are a powerful way of developing focus, which is one of the most important preconditions for the flow experience; 2) traditions should never be allowed to deteriorate into empty rituals, but should always involve the element of consciousness; 3) certain traditions seem to be more successful than others in the universal attempt to optimize the conditions for flow. Csikszentmihalyi and his wife Isabella have eloquently verbalized this last point:

Some of the classical civilizations may have succeeded in . . . evolving a set of goals and rules so compelling and so well matched to the skills of the population that its members are able to experience flow with unusual frequency and intensity . . . Athenian citizens, Romans who shaped their actions by virtues, Chinese intellectuals, or Indian Brahmins moved through life with the intricate grace of ballet dancers, and derived perhaps the same enjoyment from the challenging harmony of their actions as they would have from an extended dance.

This assessment is highly appropriate. It does not drive a dividing wedge between the traditional cultures of East and West, which were both highly evolved in their understanding of universal movement and, most important for us today, in their concrete application of this knowledge for the purpose of general well-being. In the sense of the Chinese jing literature, traditional cultures are “classic” because they have cognized and lived the “universal way” in an exemplary manner. The rift which has developed between the flow-oriented mode of thought and our more structurally oriented state of existence is therefore historical rather than cultural. Today, we live in a world where machines and computers do the work for us, and where this void is filled by watching TV and the engagement in other non-conscious activities. The classic traditions may still be valued as cultural icons, but for most of us they represent dead, static concepts. They are generally looked upon as “backward” or at least not worthy of emulation, for their material achievements seem so far behind when compared with CT scans, space stations, and other feats of modern science. Unfortunately, we seem to have forgotten that it is the human body/mind complex which is and will always be the most advanced of all devices, and that the greatest of human movements—our own evolution—can only proceed in and through it.

However, as the example of Popp’s biophoton research demonstrates, our machines have become sensitive enough to detect the sublime reasoning behind the rituals of many experience-based traditional sciences. We have reached a time when we may actually be ready to reclaim some of our lost heritage. Although we evidently have forgotten the mastership of well-being, our structuralist type of science has taken on a life on its own and shown us, resistant though we are to accept it, that some of the ancient scientists knew a long time ago what we are “discovering” only now. In the spirit of the spiral-shaped form of the evolutive holomovement, we have gone forward in time, yet moved in a circle and thus reached a point where we have already been before—only on a higher, potentially more evolved level.

In this light, many areas of “scientific life-style” as practiced in classic cultures are worthy to be considered according to the specific needs of our times. It would go far beyond the narrow limits of this paper to describe in detail all the classical rituals of well-being which could potentially inspire us. The important point to make is that it is our way of thinking which fosters the evolutive process of well-being. As this essay may have helped to clarify, well-being is first of all a dynamic process, not a static state that can be measured and described by the often inflexible terms of modern science.



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