

A Comparison between the Western Understanding of Logos and the Asian Understanding of Dao

Shu Wang

Southeast University School of Humanities, Southeast University, Nanjing, China

Abstract. The comparative study of Logos in the West and Dao in China has never stopped in academic circles. In a sense, Heraclitus' Logos and Laozi's Dao, which came into being in the same axial era, can be regarded as the starting point of Chinese and western philosophy respectively. They are similar in meaning, both of which are constant and contain Dialectic, But whether viewed from the perspective of ontology or epistemology, the differences between them are extremely obvious. This paper intends to make a comparison between Dao and Logos from the different aspects of Chinese and Western ontology, and point out the differences between them from the purpose and way of cognition, as well as the value orientation and development path in the process of cognition. Clarifying this problem will not only help us to deepen our understanding of Logos and Dao, but also help the academic community to deeply explore why the starting points of Chinese and Western philosophy are very similar but have completely different cultural paths.

Keywords: Logos; Dao; Differences; Similarities.

1. Introduction

Laozi was born around 571 BC. He was a philosopher and thinker in the Spring and Autumn Period in China and the founder of Taoism. Laozi believed that all things in the world operate according to the Dao. Dao is everywhere and omnipotent. It nurtures all things but is not easily perceived. It is the specific way that all things operate [1]. His work is the *Tao Te Ching*. Heraclitus was born around 540 BC. He also made some assumptions and descriptions about the origin of the world. He first proposed the concept of Logos, which Heraclitus used to "seek wisdom" by observing all things to find causes and pursue laws. Heraclitus believed that the world is full of vitality and development due to opposition [2]. In his ideology, he put forward philosophical propositions such as "an ever living fire," "the flux of river," "Logos," and "the conflict of opposites." It is evident that over 2,000 years ago, different philosophers from different countries discussed the proposition of the generation and operation of the universe.

Many Chinese and foreign scholars are very interested in Logos in the West and Dao in China. In the *Career of the Logos: A Brief Biography*, Daniel H. Williams particularly mentioned the Chinese thoughts of "Dao" "natural law or nomos" and "principle"[3], which echoed the Chinese academic circle's argument that "Dao" and "Logos" are Mutual Interpretations. *The Career of the Logos: A Brief Biography* explains the intricate relationships between philosophy and religion from two perspectives. The coherence of Dao and Logos is an exploration of the intersections between Chinese and Western thought and their respective classic literary works. The " Mutual Interpretations " between "Dao" and "Logos" explores the intersections that have existed between Chinese and Western thought and their respective classic literary works[4]. From the perspective of Chinese and Western cultures, Zhang Longxi advocated transcending the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and adopting the strategy of "seeking common ground". He believed that Dao and Logos were the same. He believes that both Dao and Logos embody the duality of thought and speech within a word. He concluded that China also exists Logos centralism[5]. However, François Jullien believed that Dao and Logos were two different things, and the similarity obtained through simple comparison between China and the West could not be established[6]. Diao Junchun believes that the main difference between Dao and Logos lies in the fact that "Dao" not only establishes a system but also deconstructs it. Because there is no "center", no "superior" or "inferior", only circularity and

complementarity. In other words, this "Dao" subverts the Logos center in the opposing system, opens up the system, and makes the opposing sides mutually dependent and transformable. Therefore, the differences between Dao and Logos are specifically manifested in the harmony, transformation, complementarity, and decentralization of Dao[7]. Pan Tianyang elaborated on the emergence and differences between Dao and Logos from the social and historical backgrounds of Laozi and Heraclitus[8]. Pei Yumo elaborated on the differences between Dao and Logos from ontological perspectives, epistemological perspectives and axiology[9].

This paper also makes a comparative study of the similarities and differences between Dao and Logos, and attempts to analyze the similarities and differences between them from two perspectives of Chinese and Western philosophy to see the different charm of Chinese and Western philosophy in ontology, epistemology and Axiology.

2. The Difference between Dao and Logos

2.1. Differences in Ontological Perspectives

It can be said that both Dao in Laozi's theory and Logos in Heraclitus's theory are proposed and explained as the origin. Laozi stresses the distinction between existence and non existence, while Western philosophy classifies the origin from the perspective of material and spirit. Therefore, we also discuss the ontological differences between Dao and Logos from two different perspectives of Chinese and Western philosophy.

2.1.1. From the Perspective of "Existence" and "Non Existence" of Chinese Philosophy

Laozi said in the *Tao Te Ching*: "The namelessness is the beginning of heaven and earth; the named is the mother of all things." [1] The distinction between existence and non existence here is not simply tangible or intangible, but refers to the two states in which all things exist. "Invisible but tangible, silent and five tone sounding... Therefore, existence arises from nothingness, and reality arises from emptiness." [1] It is not difficult to see that Laozi believed that all things began with "nothingness", and that everything was in a state of being from nothingness. However, in Laozi's *Tao Te Ching*, it is mentioned that "The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao; The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The namelessness is the beginning of heaven and earth; the named is mother of all things." [1] Therefore, Dao is the beginning of all things, It must also be a form of "nothingness", where "Dao" has a sense of transcendence, an infinite transcendence of time and space, and its own fullness.

However, in Heraclitus' theory, the origin of the world is a kind of "existence". He believes that the origin of the world is an eternal live fire, burning and extinguishing in a certain degree, while Logos is the rule followed by fire, the law of the movement of all things and the internal origin, which is obviously a kind of "existence" in Lao zi's theory of being or not.

2.1.2. From the Perspective of "Material " and "Spirit " of Western Philosophy

From the perspective of Western philosophy ontology, we need to explore whether Dao and Logos are the origin of matter or spirit. Similarly, let's start with Laozi's Dao. The debate about whether Laozi's Dao is material or spiritual has never stopped. Some scholars believe that it is the spiritual origin, the "nothingness", and the beginning of all things. Some scholars believe that Dao has both material and spiritual qualities, but the author believes that "Dao" may still be a material origin when viewed as the origin. In the previous text, we have also explained that Laozi's distinction between existence and nothingness does not simply correspond to tangible and intangible or material and spiritual, Therefore, it cannot be said that it is a spiritual origin just because it is a "non existence". Laozi clearly stated the material nature of the Dao: "There is a mixture of things, born naturally. It is lonely, independent and does not change, and can be the mother of the world. I do not know its name, but the strong word is ' Dao '." [1] It is not difficult to see that Laozi believes that the Dao is a "chaotic" material that exists before heaven and earth, and operates endlessly between heaven and earth, The

intangible and nameless nature of the Dao is due to our inability to speak, so we can only reluctantly name it the Dao. If the Dao can be described as tangible and tangible, it cannot be called the eternal Dao. It can be said that in Laozi's view, similar to what we often refer to as "HunDun", it is the fundamental foundation for the transformation of all things.

Heraclitus' Logos is obviously a spiritual origin, which can be said to be the starting point of western metaphysics. Heraclitus regards Logos as the internal origin of the world and a principle. He believes that Logos, which dominates the sensible movement, is imperceptible and can only be grasped by thought. It is not difficult to see the spiritual nature of Logos. Logos later exists as metaphysics in the process of continuous development of Western philosophy as reason and principle and has been quoted by many philosophers.

2.2. Differences in Epistemological Perspectives

It can be said that, from the perspective of epistemology, the difference between Dao and Logos is huge. Both their cognitive purposes and ways have deeply exposed the differences between Chinese and Western philosophical thinking ways and ultimate interests.

2.2.1. Differences in Understanding Purposes

"Chinese philosophy is ethical. The core of the philosophy system is the theory of ethics and morality. The noumenon of the universe is the metaphysical entity of ethics and morality. The reason of philosophy is the moralized practical reason. Therefore, people say that western philosophers have the demeanor of philosophers, while Chinese philosophers have the demeanor of sages." [10] This paragraph summarizes the core purport of Chinese philosophy and explains the great difference between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy in understanding purposes. It can be said that when Laozi talks about the "Dao", it is ultimately to seek a holistic virtue, and ultimately to pursue a philosophy centered on ethics. Whether it is the Dao that follows nature or the rule of inaction, it is a practical path that Laozi considers for the world. Through understanding the Dao, he ultimately hopes that people can live a good life in this world. It can be said that Laozi's theory starting from the Dao is still within the framework of the ethical pursuit of Chinese philosophy. It is a practical philosophy that should be practiced in the last place in understanding and practice. Laozi finally regards understanding the Dao and then cultivating morality as the focus of his theory.

But this is not the case in Western philosophy. From the perspective of Heraclitus' Logos, Heraclitus advocated motion, change, and dynamic interactions—arguing that struggle is the father of all things, and everything emerges from motion and change." [11] Heraclitus valued struggle more. Heraclitus emphasized that the world is inherently disharmonious. The struggle is an indispensable element of this world. Zhou Ying and Wei Chenchen argue that Laozi emphasizes harmony and Heraclitus values the contradictory nature of struggle [12]. Heraclitus emphasizes that struggle is the root cause of changes in things. And in Heraclitus' view, "Logos affirms that human wisdom can transcend its limitations and grasp various laws of the universe." [13]

2.2.2. Differences in Cognitive Methods

Chinese and Western philosophy not only have vastly different purposes of understanding, but also have vastly different ways of understanding. Laozi believes that Dao is difficult to say in words, so it can only be summarized by "Dao". Therefore, if you want to know and grasp Dao, you need to know it intuitively through personal experience. It is also the "mystery and mystery" of Dao that makes the way of knowing it more or less unspeakable, and it is also the customary temperament of Chinese philosophy. The way to know Logos is to need the participation of human rationality. As mentioned above, it emphasizes a logic norm, which requires the steps of exploration, inquiry, analysis and inference to get the truth.

In other words, Logic stresses a kind of scale and discretion, advocates understanding things through wisdom, analyzing things through reason, seeking a universality, a common form through a logical way, and finally obtaining a complete theoretical system consisting of concepts, propositions,

assumptions and proofs.[14] Thus, along with the foundation laying role of Heraclitus Logos, Aristotle finally completed this theoretical system. Western philosophy gradually went farther and farther on the road of constantly seeking truth, and finally paralleled with science, taking speculation and seeking truth as the purpose of cognition. To grasp Logos is to know Logos with various methodologies under the glory of human rationality in the pursuit of truth, The unique independent spirit of the West shown by human reason has greatly influenced the development path of Western philosophy and is the unique charm of Western philosophy.

3. Similarity between Dao and Logos

3.1. Semantic Similarity

Logos in Modern Greek is a polysemous noun. In daily use, it mainly refers to: (1) the original and central meanings, representing language; (2) One of the derivative meanings, representing thinking, i.e. spiritual laws; (3) Derivative two, representing numbers, i.e. natural laws.[15] In Shuowen Jiezi, Dao originally means road, and walking along the established road can also be derived from doing things according to laws and principles. From this we can see that they have similarities in word meaning. First, as philosophical categories, Dao and Logos both have the meaning of laws and principles; Second, the original meaning of Logos is the truth of utterance, and Dao also has the meaning of utterance in Chinese; Finally, from the perspective of the etymological path of Chinese Dao, Logos can also refer to a path of thought.

3.2. As the Eternal Origin of the World

The original meaning of Dao in Laozi's theory and the original meaning of Logos in Heraclitus's theory have been fully clarified in the first part. Laozi said that Dao originates from heaven and earth, and generates all things in a cycle. It always exists in the universe, and is an infinite and eternal existence. Similarly, Heraclitus' Logos is also the rule and yardstick of eternal existence in the burning and extinction of the material primitive fire, as the internal primitive eternal existence and the operation law of regulating the world.

3.3. Similarity in Dialectic

Heraclitus put forward the generative Dialectic, which means to become something. He saw that in the process of the generation of things, there is opposition and unity. There is unity in opposition, and there is opposition in unity. Both sides of the opposition can transform each other. So he explained several associations that exist in things through examples:

(1) There is unity in opposition. He believes that "the path of rise and the path of decline are the same path." He affirms the unity in opposing things. There is opposition in the system. He said, "We exist and do not exist." "Immortality is decadent, there is decadence." In these assertions, he affirmed that there are opposing ideas in unity.

(2) The opposing sides transform into each other. He said, "All things become fire, and fire becomes all things." "All things are constantly changing, and nothing remains. Just like a person cannot step into the same river twice." This expresses the idea of mutual transformation between opposing sides.

(3) The coexistence of opposing states or properties. He emphasized the coexistence of opposing states or opposing properties, resulting in harmonious thinking and different criteria for choosing between different subjects regarding a particular aspect of things. He believed that without struggle and opposition, the world would perish.

Similarly, Laozi's thought is also full of Dialectic. Laozi believes that everything is opposite and complementary to each other, and his so-called "movement of the opposite path" is the essence of this idea. Things are both mutually transformed and harmoniously unified:

(1) The relationship of mutual transformation. Just like the most famous sentence in "Laozi": "Misfortune is where fortune lies; fortune is where misfortune lies"

(2) A harmonious and unified relationship.

"The world knows that beauty is beauty, and it is evil. The world knows that good is good, but it is not good. Therefore, whether there is mutual growth or not, it is difficult to make it easy, the length is similar, the high and the low are inclined, the sound is consistent, the front and back follow, and the constant." This sentence coincides with Heraclitus's example of tone consistency, both of which reflect the harmonious and unified relationship between opposites.

4. Summarize

It can be said that it is very necessary to compare Laozi's Dao with Heraclitus's Logos, but we need to make clear that the significance of the comparison is not to distinguish who is better and who is worse, but to explore the speculative significance of the problem itself. The article is divided into two parts for explanation, namely the differences and similarities between the two.

The first part explores the differences between the two from the perspective of ontology and epistemology, and finally draws a conclusion: Firstly, both Chinese philosophy ontology and Western philosophy ontology have obvious differences in essence. From the ontological perspective of Chinese philosophy, Laozi's Dao is a kind of "nothing", while Heraclitus is a theory of "being"; From the perspective of Western philosophy ontology, Dao is a material origin while Logos is spiritual. Secondly, from the perspective of epistemological argument, Dao and Logos are different in the purpose and way of cognition. The Chinese Dao needs to be grasped by the way of intuitive understanding, and then achieve the goal of moral cultivation through understanding, so as to achieve the transformation of a perfect personality. Logos is about the existence of reason. Driven by the western independent spirit, he advocates understanding by wisdom and analyzing by reason. Ultimately, the goal of seeking truth through speculation is achieved through human rationality. If Western philosophy pays more attention to knowledge, then Chinese philosophy puts the final foothold on the practical level, which is also the unique charm of Chinese and Western philosophy.

The second part, from the perspective of similarity, respectively explains the similarity of word meaning between Dao and Logos, the similarity of the same eternal world origin, and the similar Dialectic thoughts shared by them. From the perspective of word meaning, both Dao and Logos have the meaning of road, rule and speech, and both of them are eternal and unchangeable primitives, and both of them are constantly working in the universe. Similarly, Laozi's thought of opposites and complements is similar to Heraclitus's generative Dialectic, which emphasizes the mutual transformation and harmonious unity of all things.

In general, through the analysis of the differences between Dao and Logos, we can further explore why Chinese and Western philosophy diverged from each other at similar starting points, and see the different charm of Chinese and Western philosophical thinking; Through the analysis of the similarity between Dao and Logos, we can further explore the inevitable reason why the two theories in the same axial era are interlinked, which will also lead to a new round of exploration.

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