

Taoist Wisdom on Individualized Teaching and Learning

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Abstract:

We live in an era when individuality has been increasingly emphasized than ever before. The development of science and technology has provided technical support for the realization of individuation. However, we argue that in an examination-oriented education system, the education model has not put enough emphasis on individuality. The modern education industry focuses much on the massive production of college degree holders. Student's unique talents are mostly neglected, and their personality and creativity are not taken enough consideration in the teaching process. It is time to emphasize individualized teaching and learning in the contemporary paradigm of education. Taoist wisdom of individuality, pluralism, and diversity has great philosophical value and practical revelation to the modern education. In this paper, we provide an eastern perspective on the understanding of individualized teaching and learning. We argue that school should not be an industrial factory, but a nurturing garden where students' nature as humans are understood and their individual differences are respected. We try to present some Taoist transformative paradigms for the future pedagogies. We hope that this paper would provoke arguments and be constructive for the future of higher education in an age of disruption. At the end of this paper, the author introduced some Taoist Practices for a better understanding of individualized teaching and learning.

Key Words: Taoism, Pluralism, Diversity, Individualized Teaching and Learning

1. Introduction

Where we live today is a rapidly changing world of pluralism and diversity, and the individuation has been increasingly emphasized. The development of science and technology has provided technical support for the realization of individuation. For example, big data, cloud computing and electronic commerce make personalized

marketing possible—customers’ needs and merchandise could be matched easily; social media, smart phone and high-speed wireless internet access together make We-the-Media possible—anybody could be a reporter; Industry 4.0 makes customization possible—anybody could be treated as a VIP. However, we argue that in an examination-oriented education system, the education model has not put enough emphasis on individuality. The modern education industry focuses much on the massive production of college degree holders. Student’s unique talents are mostly neglected, and their personality and creativity are not taken enough consideration in the teaching process. In such settings, it is necessary to rethink the educational paradigm, from curriculum to pedagogy. It is time to emphasize individualized teaching and learning in an age of disruption.

2. Taoist Wisdom on Individuality and Self-cultivation

Much has been written about respect for the individuality and diversity of students. “We tried to grapple with the concerns of educators and the government, to understand why ‘individual differences’ is such a great issue” (Lo & Pong, 2005. p. 1). Some modern educational theories have supplied theoretical support for individualized teaching and learning. For example, Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences expands the concept of intelligence to multiple categories beyond the traditionally recognized verbal and computational intelligences (Gardner, 1999). Gardner proposed eight intelligences:

- Musical-rhythmic,
- Visual-spatial,
- Verbal-linguistic,
- Logical-mathematical,
- Bodily-kinesthetic,
- Interpersonal,
- Intrapersonal, and
- Naturalistic.

Later he added existential and moral intelligence to the list. According to Gardner’s theory, for example, it is inappropriate to use logical-mathematical pedagogy to teach students with special ability in sports but without interests in mathematics. Hence we argue that individualized teaching and learning might be an alternative approach to match special pedagogy with special intelligence. There are a number of other theories admitting the differences in learning. Marton and Booth’s Theory of Variation (1997) sees learning as the ability to discern different features or aspects of what is being learned. Different ways of experiencing a phenomenon may be understood in terms of which aspects or features of the phenomenon are discerned,

and not discerned, in people's awareness of it (Marton and Booth, 1997). In learning, individual students make sense of new concepts in different ways, according to their existing understandings and frameworks of knowledge (Tong, 2012). In our opinion, acknowledging the differences and containing individualities are the precondition for implementation of individualized teaching and learning.

In fact, the thought of respect for individuality can be traced back to about 2500 years ago in *Tao Te Ching*, a Chinese classic text written around 6th century BC by the sage Lao Tzu (or Laozi, in pinyin). Consisting of 5000 Chinese characters and 81 short chapters in a poetic style, the *Tao Te Ching* (or other English translations *Daodejing*, or *Dao De Jing*, also simply referred to as the *Laozi*) tried to describe the Way of Nature and practical wisdom for people. *Tao Te Ching* has a paramount influence in China on schools such as Taoism, Legalism, Confucianism, and Chinese Buddhism. Many Chinese artists, including poets, painters, calligraphers, and martial artists, have used *Tao Te Ching* as a source of inspiration. Its influence on Chinese culture is pervasive, which also reaches beyond China. Next to the Bible, *Tao Te Ching* is the most translated work in world literature (Chan, 2013). Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche compared the *Tao Te Ching* to be “just like a well which never dries up, is fully loaded with treasures, can get it easily when you lay down your drawing bucket” (The Laozi's Great Dao Universal Net, 2013, para 14). Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel remarked that “Laozi is the spiritual representative of the ancient eastern world, his works, especially his *Dao De Jing*, are the most worshiped by the people” (ibid, para 12).

Tao Te Ching is a classic Chinese Taoist text dating from the Spring and Autumn period (approximately 771 to 476 BCE). Traditionally, Lao Tzu is considered as the author of the *Tao Te Ching*, so *Tao Te Ching* is also called *Lao Tzu*. Tao means the Way of the cosmos, or one of its synonyms, indicating the essential, unnamable process of the universe, a principle of order. Te means “virtue,” “integrity” or “good character.” Te is Tao reflected in human society. Ching as it is used here means “canon,” “great book,” or “classic.” The text of *Tao Te Ching* ranges widely in content, from universal wisdom to the personal practice.

The researches on *Tao Te Ching* are numerous, however, Taoist philosophy as an educational inspiration has not received attention it deserves. Even in China where *Tao Te Ching* was born, Taoism are discussed primarily as a philosophy, or religion, rather than educational ideas. Literature review shows that there are a few studies connecting Taoist ideas with education (see, for example, Chen, 2008, Glanz, 1997; Mackinnon, 1996; Roberts, 2012; San, 2006; Slater, 2004; Zigler, 2007). However, with the advent of the fourth industrial revolution, the extensively use of wifi, big data,

and AI (artificial intelligence) has changed the environment of schooling. Education is facing new challenges which have never emerged before. For instance, an increased need for individualized teaching and learning. However, this issue has seldom been discussed from a Taoist perspective. Meanwhile, the former researches on this issue are not adequate. As an attempt, this paper tries to argue that Taoist philosophy might be an inspiration for individualized teaching and learning.

2.1 Taoist Understanding on Diversity and Individuality

Taoist perspective on diversity is different from Confucius and Mencius doctrines. Confucius and Mencius are believed to be the main stream of Chinese traditional official culture. “Benevolence, Justice, Courtesy, Wisdom, Faith” (仁义礼智信), the five most basic ethics, are highly praised by Confucius and Mencius. They hope every citizen could be educated to achieve these five ethics.

But the Taoist see this in a different way:

When everyone considers beauty as beauty,

There arises ugliness.

When everyone considers good as good,

There arises evil.

(Tao Te Ching, Chapter 2)

Taoist philosophy argues that it is not a good thing when everyone’s opinion or evaluation criteria are totally the same. So-called good and not good can transfer mutually. “It shows that there is strength in weakness and that by not forcing things, much can often be achieved” (Roberts, 2012, p.945). We may find a number of such expressions in *Tao Te Ching*, for example, in chapter two Lao Tzu states:

Being and non-being produce each other;

Difficult and easy complement each other;

Long and short define each other;

High and low oppose each other;

Voice and sound harmonize each other;

Front and back follow each other

(Tao Te Ching, Chapter 2)

Tao Te Ching describes that we live in a world which consists of pluralism and diversity. Being and non-being, difficult and easy, high and short, etc., all exist relatively and dependently. Without the contrast of being short, there is no concept of being long; without the contrast of back, there is no front. *Tao Te Ching* tells us that two apparently opposite or contrary forces are actually complementary,

interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world, and how they give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another. Relate this to education, we might have a better understanding of some interconnected education factors through an alternative Taoist perspective. For example, in an examination-oriented education system, cognitive intelligence (IQ) is often believed as the primary determinant of success, therefore most of curricula and exercises are planned to enforce IQ. As a result, the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ) is neglected. But experts recognize that IQ is not the only determinate of life success. Instead, it is part of a multiple array of influences that includes EQ among other things (Cherry, 2017). In Taoist opinion, the greatest benefit may lie in teaching and learning in multiple fields, rather than focusing on which factors might have a more dominant influence.

Why we need a colorful and diverse world? Or in other words, why we should not absolutely support one camp while suppress the others? We may find the answer from Taoist Tai Chi world view. Tai Chi philosophy can be traced back to the period of ancient China 6000 years ago (Ming, 2009) and its original expression began to take shape 2500-3000 years ago in the text of *I Ching* (also known as the *Classic of Changes* or *Book of Changes* in English) and *Tao Te Ching*. The word of Tai Chi (literally, “supreme ultimate”) was firstly introduced in the Taoist classic *Zhuangzi* (Circa 3rd century B.C.E). Tai Chi also appears in the *Xici*, commentary to the *I Ching*, about the 3rd century B.C.E.. According to Tai Chi philosophy, the world is composed of two complementary opposites: yin and yang. Yin and yang can be thought of as complementary (rather than opposing) forces that interact to form a dynamic system of balance. In Taoist perspective, all sorts of elements which make up our world can be divided into two camps: yin and yang. The classic representation of this idea is the yin and yang model——Tai Chi.

All things carry the yin at its back and the yang in front.
(*Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 42)

In nature, yin and yang combine in patterns of light and dark, male and female, acidity and alkalinity (PH), and so on. If our world is only full of yang without yin (for example, full of men without women), or vice versa, it will lose balance and may lead to disaster. If yin and yang are “without unity, all things cannot be produced and will become extinct” (*Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 39). Opposites in Taoism are complementary rather than irreconcilable; they work together to form a unity (Glanz, 1997, as cited in Roberts, 2012, p.944).

From Taoist Tai Chi yin and yang perspective, we might much more easily understand why “*When everyone considers beauty as beauty, There arises ugliness. When everyone considers good as good, there arises evil*”. So called beauty and

ugliness, good and evil, are all maintaining a harmonious relationship of yin and yang. Absolute yin or yang would lead to an extremely situation which would be a disaster. Basing on this Taoist logic, it is easily to understand those pairs of relationship such as “being and non-being, long and short, high and low, etc.” In short, Taoists believe that all existence has its reason. Existence is reasonable. This world is made up of colorful elements, and we should respect pluralism and diversity.

Respecting pluralism and diversity, Taoism argues that it would have disadvantages to set sole standard to ask others to follow or pursue. Non-Tao people usually believe that setting role models is important to build a positive society, which would help people become the person they want to be and inspire them to work hard. Similarly, propagating something (such as a gold medal in a sport game) is rare and precious would encourage people to do their best to achieve it.

But *Tao Te Ching* does not agree with this opinion——

Not to honor wise people will keep the people from contention;

Not to value treasures hard to obtain will keep the people from committing theft.

(Tao Te Ching, Chapter 3)

In Taoist opinion, if wise people are excessively praised, they would become role models and be imitated by others. The criterion to judge whether a person is a wise one would be rather exclusive. Likewise, if treasures are overvalued, they would lure people to obtain them illegally. Taoism argues that if we only use one criterion to judge all the things, it will cause negative impacts. An ancient Chinese story may interpret this phenomenon: In Spring and Autumn period (Lao Tzu period), the King Ling of Chu consider people with thin waist were beauties, hence people in the palace dieted to slim down, and many of them starved to death (楚王好细腰，宫中多饿死).

Back to education, from Taoist view, each student has her (his) unique personality. If we sing high praise for the student with the highest grade in an academic test, it will suppress other students with other intelligences which are described by Gardner in his theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999), such as musical (music, sound, rhythm), bodily-kinesthetic (body movement control), spatial-visual (images and space), interpersonal (other people’s feelings), intrapersonal (self-awareness). Teachers are the tutors for students, not merely in academic sense. Teachers’ criteria to judge what is good or bad influence students profoundly. As pilots of life, teachers ought to apply diverse criteria to guide a wide range of students. Similarly, in educational case, if all the students and their parents consider a specific major as the most popular specialty, it is obviously not a good

thing. For example, if the major of finance become the most popular one, other majors (STEM, arts, humanity, and so on), will be suppressed.

2.2 Taoist Self-cultivation and self-awareness

Lao Tzu prefers self-cultivation rather than being educated by others, which differs from Confucius. Confucius and Lao Tzu lived in the same period (Lao Tzu is believed to be the teacher of Confucius). Throughout Chinese history, Confucius is widely considered as the one of the most influential educators. His teaching and philosophy greatly impacted Chinese people. One of his most famous educational idea is to deliver education to students in accordance with their aptitudes (因材施教). I argue that Confucian pedagogy is a teacher-centered one. Students' talents, interests, characteristics are passively distinguished by teachers. It might be possible in a small class. But it would be very hard for a teacher to be familiar with each student if the student-teacher ratio is high. More seriously, even a teacher has energy and time to know each of her (his) student, who could guarantee that the teacher's judgements are totally accurate? Students' future depends on teachers' judgement, for this reason, it is dangerous if teacher's judgements are not comprehensive or even not correct.

By contrast, Taoism encourages people to transform by themselves, other than by others. "Therefore, the sage says, I take no action, and the people become good by themselves; I prefer doing nothing, and people are rectified of themselves" (*Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 57). We would like to call this idea as "self-cultivation with non-action" (无为自化). Based on this philosophy, Taoism believes that "all things with their transformations and changes are considered to be self-regulating, self-expressing in their natural form." (Nations online, n.d. para 12) Inspired by this Taoist self-cultivation idea, we insist that students are not crude materials waiting to be found, selected and produced by teachers. Each student has its unique talent, and every student may transform from within by themselves.

Critics might argue that there would be many limitations if executing Taoist non-action pedagogy through giving much more academic freedom to students. First, they worry about that students do not know what to learn, what to seek for. In other words, they are anxious about that students would get lost in learning. Second, in an examination-oriented education system, they worry about that Taoist self-cultivation approach would result in a cost of reduced teaching efficiency, especially in terms of a decline in testing results. Third, they assume that self-cultivation depends on self-regulation. Without teachers' custody and supervision, chaos would arise on campus.

In our opinion, the above worries come from traditional teacher-centered

perspective. It has been proved that self-cultivation is an alternative approach in education. Via self-cultivation, many university dropouts, such as Bill Gates (co-founder of the Microsoft Corporation), Steve Jobs (co-founder of Apple Inc.), Michael Dell (the founder and CEO of Dell Technologies), Mark Zuckerberg (co-founder of Facebook), etc., have achieved magnificent success too. These rebuttals of evidence show that it's quite probable to apply Taoist self-cultivation idea in education.

Taoist self-cultivation idea advocates that students might transform through their own efforts. Students could know themselves well, acknowledging their own characteristics, goals, potential talents, strengths and weaknesses, and so on. **To approach self-cultivation pedagogy, the first thing is to encourage students to achieve self-awareness.** *Tao Te Ching* underlines self-awareness:

*Those who know others are clever;
Those who know themselves are truly wise.
Those who conquer others are strong;
Those who conquer themselves have true power.*
(*Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 33)

In Lao Tzu' opinion, the highest level of wisdom is knowing oneself; the most powerful success is conquering oneself; the most everlasting people is those who can hold their own center. Non-Tao people identify with externals. They do not know who they are, they compete with others. They lose their center and change their will just to cater others.

It might be argued that encouraging students to acquire self-acceptance would make students easily satisfied with current academic performance, even conceited. Taoism do not agree with this opinion. *Tao Te Ching* integrates self-acceptance with humility

*The sage knows herself;
But makes no show.
Accept herself;
But is not arrogant.*
(*Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 72)

The Tao people have overall subjective emotional evaluation of their own worth. It is a judgment of oneself as well as an attitude toward the self. They are confident in their own merit as an individual person, being humble and introverted. The Tao people have self-respect and accept themselves, but they are neither conceited nor self-abased. *Tao Te Ching* advises people to develop self-awareness and self-respect,

beyond ego, discarding flaunt and arrogance.

2.3 Taoist Principle and Pedagogy for Individualized Teaching and Learning

Respecting individuality and personality, Taoist self-cultivation idea comes from Taoist non-action philosophy. One of Taoism's most important philosophy is non-action. The word "non-action" (无为) appears in *Tao Te Ching* for thirteen times. The idea of non-action, expressed or implied, runs through the whole text. Lao Tzu preaches that non-action is very necessary and powerful, for example:

- *Therefore the sage: manages affairs without action; preaches the doctrine without words. (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 2)*
- *When he acts with non-action there is nothing ungoverned. (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 3)*
- *The Tao never does, yet through it everything is done. (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 37)*
- *The teaching without words, and the benefit of taking no action, are without compare in the universe. (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 43)*
- *Therefore the sage says, I take no action, and the people become good by themselves. (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 57)*

Some people may argue that non-action philosophy is too negative and passive to apply in educational practice. In their opinion, non-action equals to doing nothing or letting it be. But in fact, non-action does not mean doing nothing, but a paradoxical "action of non-action"—the action of trusting, guiding, consulting, helping, adapting, and not disturbing.

Differing from doing nothing, Taoist non-action pedagogy is kind of positive and proactive one. Respecting every student, this Taoist pedagogy suggests teachers to adapt to the unique characteristics of each student, never let any student left behind. How to adapt to each and every student? We once published a paper that introduced a Taoist Tai Chi model beyond the dichotomy of student-centered and teacher-centered teaching and learning (Yang & Lin, 2016). According to Tai Chi philosophy, student may be considered as yin, while teacher as yang. We argue that Tai Chi model of education has advantages in building a harmonious, democratic, and dynamic relationship in teaching and learning. A Tai Chi model focuses on adapting and coordinating, which helps to match teaching method and students' individual unique needs, interests, and talents. We hope Taoist Tai Chi model may help educators to deal with educational challenges with highly personalized approaches (Yang and Lin, 2016, pp 44-55).

3. *Tao Te Ching's* Inspiration for Individualized Teaching and Learning

Taoist wisdom on individuality, pluralism, and diversity, has great philosophical value and practical revelation. Specified to education realm, it sheds a significant light on individualized teaching and learning from an eastern perspective. Individualized teaching and learning is a joint effort of teachers and students. For convenience's sake, we would like to discuss this topic from three sides separately: student-teacher-university.

3.1 For Students: to be Self-confident and Discover One's Unique Talent

To be self-confident, the first step is self-accepting. Educators may make students acknowledge that we cannot find two same leaves or snowflakes in the world. In nature everything is valuable, everything has its place. A tree, a squirrel, a sparrow, a tiny ant, each species holds its potential differently, each has its own expression, each flower has its own color, each bird has its own song (see Dreher, 2000). We human beings live in the same world with other species. We are just plain members and citizens of biotic communities, so we ought to follow the same rule of self-acceptance. With greater self-acceptance, a student could be more mature and happier. Actually, the process of education is an approach to make students more mature and tougher, physically and mentally. Just like what Lao Tzu said in *Tao Te Ching* that the Tao person knows herself, and accepts herself.

In order to be more self-confident, a student should learn to evaluate oneself and try to find one's unique talents, even these talents are yet currently potential. To help students gain self-esteem, teachers may encourage students to ask themselves, for example:

- What makes me different from the people I know?
- Am I musical? Good with figures? Enjoying sports?
- What is my real interest?
- Whether have I forced myself to perform just to cater for others?

I would like share a story about myself. When I was a high school student, I once forced myself to watch football matches just because other boy students around me were football fans. One of their most popular topics was football. If I could not chat with them about their favorite topic, I felt that I was an alien, and I was afraid of being isolated from them. When I learned to be myself, gradually I came to know who I was, and I began to achieve self-acceptance. With self-acceptance comes peace. Nowadays, I do not watch football matches, without caring about whether I am an alien. One day several years ago I attended a dinner with eight other friends. They all enjoyed analyzing the trends of stock market except me, because I was not interested in stocks and shares at all. With self-acceptance, I just listened to them with smile. I felt I was

watching an opera, or a talk show contest. I was the only audience and judge. What they did was just to cater for me by proving their analysis sounded reasonable. Because I was centered, neither criticism nor flattery upset me. Now, the comments of others do not disturb me when I am confident and achieve self-acceptance.

3.2 For Teachers: Not use one standard to forge every student

Let aside whether it is good or not, modern education is full of competition. It is a joint promotion of teachers, students, schools, communities, families and state policies, especially in a career-oriented education paradigm. Excessive testing is one of the signs of competition. This is a common phenomenon globally, even in the United States where the education system is widely acknowledged as advanced. Over the past two decades, state and federal efforts to improve American education have been centered on the development of test-based accountability systems that reward and sanction schools on the basis of their students' performance on state assessments (West, 2012). In order to demonstrate excellent performance under specific criteria, teachers ask students to drill to meet the requirements of the criteria at the cost of suppressing students' personalities and uniqueness. "The pursuit of 'tough standards' can corrupt everything it touches—not least, the results" (Holt, 2002. p. 266). Individual differences are neglected when standard assessments are enforced by specific evaluation criteria.

Even though teachers are partially responsible for this issue, Taoist teachers do not pass the buck. They would take grassroots actions to transform teaching and learning. Taoist teachers do not think the result of academic exams is the only criteria to tell whether a student/teacher/school is good or not. They do not teach for test. They neither sing high praise for those who excel in academic exams, nor criticize those with poor performance in tests. (*Not to honor wise people will keep the people from contention; not to value treasures hard to obtain will keep the people from committing theft-Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 3). Taoist teachers appreciate individual differences and work for each and every student. They understand that each student has unique potential talents, individual needs, and a personal learning style. Applying Taoist Tai Chi philosophy to pedagogy, they work hard to provide different proposals that recognize those difference, to design a suitable teaching plan for each student, and to use multi-criteria to help every student (*Therefore the sage always excels in saving people, and so abandons no one- Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 77). Taoist teachers try to support different achievements and personal development, and equip students with the ability and confidence they need to be happy, healthy and successful, both inside and outside classroom, in school and after they graduate. The teacher's role should be transferred "from sage on the stage to guide on the side" (King, 1993). As a result,

more and more students would gradually benefit from this transformation.

3.3 For University: Work for Each and Every Student

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, with rapid development of educational technology, individualized teaching and learning is urgently needed. Inspired by Taoist non-action philosophy, universities should not restrain students in specific majors, for they couldn't meet the varied demands of different students by offering just a few majors. Universities may break the traditional paradigm of majors by developing more individualized concentration programs. After receiving general education, the advanced curricula are not organized around specific majors, but according to special programs or projects. Maybe in the future, the concept of major might disappear, and it is possible for one student participate in one special concentration.

Can universities keep up with rapidly changing technological advancements, such as the popularization of MOOCs (massive open online courses), flipped classroom, and plenty of handy knowledge via accessing the internet anywhere and anytime? We call for disruptive innovations in pedagogy for the future universities. Some universities might be transferred to be supermarkets of courses, offline experience stores for teaching programs, and experiment centers for individualized demands in learning process. Every student could select interested courses, seek academic consulting, design individualized labs, and so on. Critics may argue that these transformations rely on self-regulation of students, or might trigger a chaotic educational environment. However, we fully acknowledge that reforms will be accompanied by criticisms. Through dealing with limitations step by step, we believe that the trend of individualized teaching and learning is inevitable.

4. A Brief Introduction to Taoist Practices for Better Understanding of Individualized Teaching and Learning.

Non-Tao person is easily influenced by externals. Self-awareness is the barycenter of a soul. Without barycenter, people do not know who they are. When their external circumstances change, or when they encounter conflict and competition, they are easily thrown off-balance. We can maintain our barycenter in reflection or meditation. We argue that Taoist meditation is great way to help you to maintain yourself, embrace pluralism, acknowledge individuality and diversity, inspire you to resolve conflicts, and do well what matters most to you.

We argue that some Taoist contemplative practices are alternative approaches towards self-awareness, nurturing one's unique talents, as well as a better understanding of individualized teaching and learning. Tai Chi Ch'uan is such a

contemplative exercise. Tai Chi “provides a linkage between Western understanding of physiological movement and Chinese understanding of internal motion and change” (Mei, as cited in Barbezat and Bush, 2014, p.167). The applying of Tai Chi philosophy in Chinese martial art has developed a variety of styles, such as Tai Chi Ch’uan (Ch’uan means fist), Tai Chi Sword, and Tai Chi Palms, etc. Tai Chi is a kind of mind-body practice for psychological well-being and a source of creative inspiration. In the process of practicing Tai Chi, consciousness and body are required to be harmonious together. The whole process of practicing Tai Chi requires breathing evenly, gathering Qi into Dan Tian, and eliminating all distractions. When you practice Tai Chi and experience continuousness of action, you might fathom out the combination of softness and hardness, the complementation of yin and yang. Many impulsive and pessimistic people become calm, positive and inspired after practicing Tai Chi. It is not only the result of physical exercise, but also the result of mental training. The emphasis of Tai Chi practice is laid on the equal importance of movement and quietude, without any preference of one to the other. Students learn about movement and quietude, regulating breathing and heart beating, ignoring distractions and exercising both externally and internally. Daily practicing Tai Chi may help educators to deal with educational challenges with highly personalized approaches. When teachers practice Tai Chi, we argue that their understanding of the relationship between teaching and learning might become better than before. Respecting the difference of each student, Tai Chi philosophy acknowledges that every individual possesses a unique blend of multiple intelligences. The teaching style may transform in accordance with the different aptitude of individual students as well as the different developmental stages of the students. In other words, education is a highly individualized process. Even in the same class with the same teacher, the pedagogies should be dynamically tailored according to the individual difference of each student. As each student is different, each educational strategy should be tailored to the individual student’s needs. Students will be better served by a broader vision of education, wherein teachers use a variety of methodologies, exercises and activities to reach all students, not only those who excel at linguistic and logical intelligence.

5. Conclusion

The Tao students know themselves. With greater self-acceptance, they are more of themselves, not an imitation of someone else. They try to discover their unique talents and develop these aptitudes. The Tao teachers know their students. They would respect the diversity of every students and tailor individualized teaching plan for each and every student, allowing their real talents to express themselves.

Inspired by *Tao Te Ching*, we would have a better understanding of the issue of

individualized teaching and learning from an ancient eastern angle. Each student has some talent that makes her (him) unique. Their “quality” should not and cannot be evaluated by specified criterion. Each student ought to be a work of art. A university should not be an industrial factory, but a nurturing garden where students’ nature as humans are understood and their individual differences are respected.

Individualized teaching and learning is an inevitable trend in the future. We try to present some Taoist transformative paradigms for the future pedagogies. We hope that this paper would provoke arguments and be constructive for the future of higher education in an age of disruption.

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