

Exploring on the Poetic Pragmatic Structure in Chinese Classical Philosophical Texts

Mingzhen Wen^{1,a,*}

¹*Malvern College Qingdao, Qingdao City, Shandong Province, China*

a. 20201130734@stu.sspu.edu.cn

**corresponding author*

Abstract: In Chinese classical philosophical texts, the use of poetic explications to convey concepts is a unique and fascinating phenomenon. Unlike Western philosophy, where conceptions are often explained by definition of connotation and extension. Classical Chinese philosophy relies on direct experiential understanding through poetry and metaphorical language. This pragmatic structure in Classical Chinese allows for a deeper connection between the reader and the text, even opening up the possibility of personal interpretation. By recalling or forming certain experiences, even mystical ones, readers can gain a more profound understanding of the concepts being discussed. This article explores the ontology of the unity of heaven and man(天人和一) that is preset in these texts and makes this process (what people called tiwu(体悟)) possible. Taking the Five Elements as an example, this article reveals unique concepts born on the basis of this pragmatic structure that is different from Western philosophy.

Keywords: Chinese philosophy, Poetry, Classical Chinese text

1. Introduction

It is important to clarify that while we use the term 'poetic' to describe these philosophical texts with this pragmatic phenomenon, it should not be equated with poetry. Similar to poetry, it liberates words from their conventional meanings and associates them with a specific type of experience. The distinctive aspect lies in the fact that this particular kind of experience is always directly connected to ontology.

It can be said that these texts capture the knowledge of ontology that is inherent in human consciousness through words and concepts.

The attitude of these philosophical texts is also very different from the approach of traditional western philosophy like Socratic midwifery, which is to clarify concepts through continuous questioning and communication, they do not point to monotonous, centralized connotations, but allow texts to exist independently and arouse people's experiences, and this kind of pragmatics structure is not just a difference in expression style, in Chinese classical philosophy text, there are concepts that can only be expressed through this poetic and indirect approach.

The attitude that leave ambiguity to exist and see them as poetic puzzle is similar to Heidegger's point that he mentioned in his speech on ἀλήθεια(Aletheia) of Heraclitus that the Greeks[1] cared for

beings, "resettle them under a mysterious veil. " Ancient Chinese do not suppress becoming things by a certain center, but care for and liberate them.

What is “体悟”?

This realization process called “体悟” in Chinese, “体” is the corporeal body, It means that this is related to sensation, directly related to real experience, rather than just being constrained by the chain of signifier and signified. “悟” is close to realize, In ShuoWenJieZi, the first Chinese dictionary, compiled by Xu Shen, 121 A. D, “悟” is described as “悟, 覺也。从心吾聲。”[2].

“悟” is understanding from voice of heart, yet this is not direct understanding of the meaning of the text, but an indirect one, where the meaning is summoned through the text, it's fair to say that text is intermediary here.

We may say that in realizing this realization process, the existence of 天人合一(the unity of nature and man) must be assumed. In other words, self-consciousness is closely connected with the ontology, world itself, and essential intuition can be obtained through the exploration of inner consciousness. In a way, this theory is similar to that of mystics such as Master Eckhart or Suhrawadi about the correspondence between large and small universes. In this sense, the process of reading classical Chinese philosophical texts is closer to spiritual practice than to understanding and memorizing knowledge.

The process of “体悟” could be illustrated as Figure1:

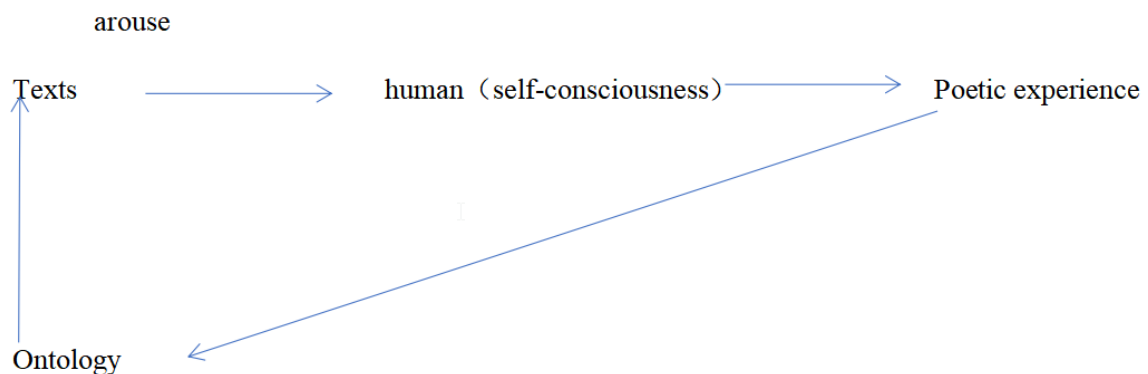


Figure 1: The process

2. The Overview

This kind of pragmatics structure is not just a difference in expression style, in Chinese classical philosophy text, there are concepts that can only be expressed through this poetic and indirect approach.

Wu xing:

Classical Chinese philosophy texts deliberately choose to not be too detailed and objective expression, taking this quote from Shang Shu Hong Fan introducing the WU XING as an example.

“水曰润下，火曰炎上，木曰曲直，金曰从革，土爰稼穡。润下作咸，炎上作苦，曲直作酸，从革作辛，稼穡作甘。”

(The nature of) water is to soak and descend; of fire, to blaze and ascend; of wood, to be crooked and straight; of metal, to yield and change; while (that of) earth is seen in seed-sowing and in-gathering. That which soaks and descends becomes salt; that which blazes and ascends becomes bitter; that which is crooked and straight becomes sour; that which yields and changes becomes acrid; and from seed-sowing and in-gathering comes sweetness. '[3]

When a Chinese philosopher emphasizes that the Wu Xing is the essence of the world, he is not saying that the material composition of all things can ultimately be traced back to these five elements, like the theory of four elements. Instead, it means that all existence exists in these five states, representing different tendencies or interactive relationships. (actually, the original meaning of Xing is to move, to change) And these states can be found in various fields, for example, in Chinese music theory, where the Wu Xing correspond to the five notes: Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi, Yu.

This is not definitions of the WU XING (Five Elements) or explaining what it includes, it connect the conception of WU XING with gustatory experience, what's more, if people look at “炎上”“润下” they are actually poetic expressions or metaphors rather than definition of attribute, it also connect WU XING with poetic experience. “炎上” is associate with upward, positive power like a constantly beating flame, (as people know that WU XING wasn't real water, fire or etc, the names of themselves could also be seen as poetic metaphor[4])

3. Consequences

If people do not accept the unity of nature and man, Chinese classical philosophy has a text-centered tendency because of its dependence on poetic understanding

谷神不死，是谓玄牝。玄牝之门，是谓天地之根。绵绵呵！其若存！用之不堇。(Dao De Jing)(6.1)[5]

The valley spirit dies not, aye the same; The female mystery thus do people name. Its gate, from which at first they issued forth, Is called the root from which grew heaven and earth. Long and unbroken does its power remain, Used gently, and without the touch of endless.

玄

幽遠也。象幽而入覆之也。凡玄之屬皆从玄 《说文解字》 [6]

All that's enigmatic, from mystery it springs, a cosmic dance in the shadow of unseen things

As an expression of black, "Xuan"(玄) is different from "mo"(墨) and is juxtaposed with "chi-red"(赤), pointing to black as a color. "Xuan" points to the absence of light. The universal certainty of light forces things to appear in only appearance. In the deep and serene of the "xuan", there is no light to press the thing against the only image, making it possible for the thing to retain the expression of various image. "pin"(牝) is the care of Xuan as mother nature.

Although this text may be an ontological work, an account of the "the root from which grew heaven and earth. " it can still constitute an inspiration for the understanding of classical Chinese philosophical texts. These texts are not written on the basis of a single chain of signifier and signified, but with a text-centric tendency that allows for divergence (Derrida). [7] The text has the nature of "xuanpin", and the realization that emerges is not centralized or single, but "Used gently, and without the touch of endless. "

There are still lots of studies about poetic structure, which should be further discussed [8-10].

4. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the poetic structure in classical Chinese philosophical texts such as the Dao De Jing and Shang Shu, which provides a unique insight into these profound works. By examining the conception of tiwu (体悟), people can further appreciate the distinctive writing style found in these texts, one that is completely different from Western philosophy and its developed concepts, such as the "Five Elements. "

In exploring the poetic structure of classical Chinese philosophical texts, it becomes evident that they possess a remarkable depth and complexity. The use of metaphors, symbolism, and imagery

allows for multiple layers of interpretation, inviting readers to engage with their own understanding and reflection.

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