Chapter **11**

# Naive Dialecticism and the Tao of Chinese Thought

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> All of Chinese roots are in the Taoist tradition.
> Lu Xun, Chinese writer, 1918.

> A Chinese thought without Taoism is like a tree without roots
> Joseph Needham, 1990

Recent cross-cultural work on Chinese cognition, particularly research comparing Chinese and Western (mostly American) reasoning and social judgment, has revealed substantial and fascinating differences in the ways individuals from these two cultural groups make sense of their everyday environments (see Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Peng, Ames, & Knowles, 2001 for reviews). This line of work has shed light on differences in how Chinese and Western individuals evaluate themselves (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, Wang, & Hou, 2004), attribute causes to events (e.g., Lee, Hallahan, & Herzog, 1996; Morris & Peng, 1994; Peng & Knowles, 2001), interpret physical phenomena (Peng & Knowles, 2003), and make judgments and decisions (e.g., Ji, Peng & Nisbett, 2000; Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Yates, Lee, & Shinotsuka, 1996; Yates, Lee, & Bush, 1997). These empirical findings support claims frequently made by scholars in a variety of academic fields concerning the different intellectual traditions of the West and East (see reviews by Lloyd, 1990; Nakamaru, 1964; Needham, 1954), which have been characterized as contrasts between abstract and concrete (Nakamura, 1964; Northrop, 1946, 1966), analytic and holistic (Moore, 1967; Nisbett et al., 2001), linear and circular (Hang, 1966), Laplacean and fatalistic (Phillips & Wright, 1977; Wright & Phillips, 1980), person-centered and situation-centered (Hsu, 1981; Yang, 1986), dispositional and contextual (Morris & Peng, 1994), argument-constructing and argument-abhorring (Liu, 1986; Yates & Lee, 1996), synthesis-oriented and dialectical (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004), and so on.

However, explanations of the differences between the East and West have relied almost exclusively on theoretical constructs generated in Western cultural contexts, based on Western concepts, and used by Western scholars. For instance, early theories regarding Chinese reasoning have included notions of national character (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985), values (Kluckhorn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Schwartz, 1992), social systems (Parsons & Shils, 1951), morality (Shweder, 1982), religion (Bakan, 1966), ecology (Berry, 1976, 1979), child-rearing patterns (Barry, Child, & Bacon, 1959), economic development (Adelman & Morris, 1967), modernity (Berger, Berger, & Kellner, 1973; lnkeles & Smith, 1974), and, more recently, individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Triandis, 1989, 1995), and independent-interdependent self construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The significant contributions of these pioneering attempts are hardly disputable: If one-fourth of the world's population is thinking and reasoning in ways different from what we have learned from current psychology (which is largely based on American samples), then our understanding of human reasoning is at best incomplete and at worst culturally biased.

Given the fact that few of the above theories were proposed by Chinese scholars or based on Chinese concepts, the question then becomes: How would the Chinese think about their own ways of thinking? In other words, would a Chinese theory of cultural differences be different from a theory centered on Western concepts?

The idea of using Chinese concepts to explain Chinese psychological phenomena is not entirely new. There have been genuine efforts in psychology, particularly by psychologists from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and China, to develop theories and research paradigms based largely on Chinese cultural concepts, a pursuit of an *emic* approach to Eastern psychological phenomena that has been proudly labeled *indigenous psychology*. For example, Francis Hsu, a China-born and -educated American cultural anthropologist, shifted from the use of Western Freudian notions to the use of Chinese *ren* as the central theme of his theory on Chinese psychology (Hsu, 1953). In addition, two influential social psychologists in Asia, Kuo-shu Yang and Michael Bond, have used Confucian value systems to explain Chinese social behavior (Bond, 1987, 1997; Yang, 1986), and several other East Asian psychologists (such as Yang Zhong-Fang, Leung, David Ho, Huang Guang-guo, etc.) have used other indigenous Chinese concepts, such as *zhong yong, mianzi* (face), and *guanxi* (connection) to explain a variety of psychological phenomena. These efforts have made a strong impact on mainstream psychology and on the general public in the West. For instance, two Chinese concepts, *guanxi* (connection) and *mianzi* (face), have been appropriated into the English language, and have been popularly accepted as fundamental to the operation of Chinese society (e.g., Gold, 1996).

Yet one important aspect of Chinese culture has been consistently over-looked. For years, Chinese philosophers and historians have suggested that whereas Confucianism presides over Chinese *social* life, Taoism may play an equally important role in Chinese *mental* life (Lu, 1918; Needham, 1990; Zhang & Chen, 1991; Zhou, 1990). Indeed, the observation that Chinese are Confucianists in public and Taoists in private may reflect the essence of Chinese psychology (Shen, 1985). In other words, whereas Chinese sociol-ogy and, to a certain extent, social psychology, may be based on Confucian teachings (Bond, 1997), Chinese cognitive psychology, or the thinking and reasoning of Chinese people, may be best seen as reflecting Taoist teachings. Lu Xun, one of the most prominent Chinese writers of the 20th century, claimed that all roots of Chinese thinking are in the Taoist tradition (Lu Xun, August 8, 1918, Letter to Xu Shou-tang). He is not alone in believing that the essence of Chinese thought is Taoist. For instance, British Sinologist Joseph Needham wrote in his classic book *History of Chinese Science and Technology*, "A Chinese thought without Taoism is like a tree without roots" (Needham, 1990, p. 198). Chinese philosopher Jing Yu-ling further argued that the epis-temological principle of Chinese intellectuals is to "Practice the Tao, under-stand the Tao, and master the Tao" (Jing, 1987, p.16). The Tao is considered to be the highest goal of intellectual life and the defining motivation for Chinese thinking and behavior. As Chinese philosopher Hsu Dao-jing claimed, "The Tao has become the core of Chinese cultures, the beliefs of Chinese people and the foundation of Chinese societies" (Hsu, 1994, p. 1).

This paper attempts to introduce the indigenous concepts of Tao into mainstream cultural psychology. We suggest that Chinese are naive Taoists in spirit and that Chinese thinking and reasoning are guided by folk ver-sions of Taoism, which we label *naïve dialecticism*. Such folk beliefs consti-tute the foundation of Chinese implicit theories of knowing. We summarize ethnographic evidence that supports the existence of a folk version of Taoism in Chinese culture and then discuss the practice of folk Taoism in the everyday lives of Chinese people. We argue that because of Taoist tra-ditions, Chinese reasoning and thinking can be regarded as more contex-tual, flexible, holistic, and dialectical as compared with Western thinking and reasoning. We conclude with a Taoist's view of cultural psychology and cross-cultural research on human cognition and a discussion of an indigenous Taoist view of cultural differences in reasoning and thinking.

## The Essence of Taoism

Taoism is one of the three teachings–Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism–in Chinese culture. However, Taoism has rarely been referred to as a religion, as it deals more with the art of living. In many ways, Taoism is concerned with understanding the nature of the world, knowl-edge, and human life, which is, in part, what folk psychology is all about.

### *The meaning of Tao*

Although there can be no equivalent in English for the word *Tao* (道), loosely translated, it means "the way" or "the path." In *Tao Te Ching*, the great Lao-zi asserted that "The Tao is not the Tao" (570-490 BC/1993). That is, the term *Tao*, which is expressible in words, is not the same as the *eternal Tao*: a name that can be spoken cannot capture that which is intangible. It is nothing and everything at the same time. The word *Tao* is just a convenient way of describing a construct that is, in essence, nameless. Lao-zi compared the Tao to water: Water flows naturally, without interference, and does not attract attention. In its weak, unnoticed actions, water (in the same way as the Tao) is able to overcome the strong.

Even in contemporary Chinese, *Tao* has multiple meanings. According to a national survey of Mandarin, the term has over ten different definitions (Liu, 1990). In addition to its common meaning of "the way," *Tao* also means "rules," "patterns and laws of nature," and "an epistemologically driven means of understanding." Typical English interpretations of Chinese *Tao* include "method," "nature," "spirit," "rules," "truth," "pattern," "metaphysics," and "perspectives" (Liu, 1990, p. 1). None of these interpretations allows Western audiences to fully grasp the Chinese concept of Tao.

### *Basic concepts of Taoism*

It is somehow inappropriate to discuss basic concepts of Taoism, since Tao is a holistic construct that cannot be decomposed. Nevertheless, it is possible to summarize Lao-zi's essential points that inform the classic *Tao Te Ching*, including the ideas of non-duality, two poles (yin-yang), perpetual change, the five elements, and non-action.

*Non-duality*. The first notion of non-duality refers to the belief that "matter is spirit" and that "spirit is matter." The Tao is at once the void and all matter that confronts us. If we say, "it is the void," we are claiming that it is not matter, which in fact it also is. Thus, to understand the void, we must also understand matter.

*Two poles*. The ontological foundation of Taoism is the concept of yin and yang. According to Taoism, the Tao operates through the interaction of yin and yang. Yin is the negative, passive, and feminine, whereas yang is the positive, active, and masculine. Neither can exist without the other, and neither is inferior to the other.

*A full circle of perpetual change*. The rational basis of non-duality is the notion of perpetual change. All things in the universe are seen as constantly changing in orderly cycles. Taoism teaches observation and exploration of these various cycles of change. Contemplation leads to understanding; tranquility is achieved when pain and loss become as essential as pleasure and gain.

*Three treasures. Ching* (essence), *chi* (vitality), and *shen* (spirit) are the three substances of energy in the Taoist view of life, and hence, the essence of Taoism. These three substances are believed to be active at all levels of being, from the tiniest organism to the vast universe itself.

*Five elements* (*wu hsing*). It is the Taoist belief that the natural interactions in the universe can be characterized into the interaction of five elements (*wu hsing*): metal, wood, water, fire, and earth.

*Non-action* (*wu wei*). The notion of non-action does not mean that people are to do nothing, but rather, they are to avoid doing anything that is not spontaneous and should always adjust to the situation. They should act effortlessly, like a tree that bends towards the sun when it needs sunshine. Upon reaching *wu wei*, people attain freedom from greed, anxiety, and other mundane troubles.

## *The essence of Taoism: The mutual dependence of two opposites*

One of the most fundamental of Chinese beliefs is the notion of the mutual dependency of two opposites, which is deeply rooted in the basic teachings of Taoism. *The Book of Lao Zi* (also known as *Tao Te Ching*) has a number of passages that deal with the importance of the mutual dependency of two sides of a contradiction. In Chapter 2, Lao-zi (570?-490? BCE/1993) states:

> When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty,
> There arises the recognition of ugliness.
> When they all know the good as good,
> There arises the recognition of evil.
> And so, being and nonbeing produce each other;
> Difficulty and ease complete each other;
> Long and short contrast each other;
> High and low distinguish each another;
> Sounds and tones harmonize each other;
> Front and back accompany each other.
> Thus, the sage manages affairs by non-action,
> And teaches by saying nothing. (p. 16)

Therefore, according to Taoist teaching, the two sides of any contradiction exist in active harmony; they are mutually opposed, and at the same time, mutually connected, controlling, and dependent.

## FOLK TAOISM IN CHINESE CULTURES

There is a notable difference between Confucianism and Taoism in that the former is more officially sanctioned in social practice and belief systems, whereas the latter is more relevant to folk beliefs and practice

(Chen, 1996, Yang, 2001). Hence, Taoist thought has in fact a broader base of appeal among lay Chinese, but has received less attention in elite philosophers' discussion of Chinese history. Chinese scholars have only recently begun to study the influence of Taoism on Chinese life and systems of thought, such as Yang's discussion of Taoist teaching methods (Yang, 1996) and the influence of Taoism among ethnic minorities in China (Deng, 2000). These authors, to a certain degree, are pioneers in introducing the concept of Taoism to the field of cross-cultural psychology. Chinese systems of thought are, of course, much more complicated, multifaceted, and obviously the result of the blending of different religious and cultural heritages. But there is a folk version of Taoism extant in Chinese thought and belief systems (*naive dialecticism*). It can be studied through empirical psychological methods of inquiry.

One way to demonstrate the existence of a folk version of Taoism is to examine folklore, or public representations of Taoism. In our studies, we have consistently found an apparent connection between Taoist teachings and Chinese folklore, notably in Chinese proverbs. Anthropologists believe that proverbs are distilled embodiments of folk wisdom (see Arewa & Dundes, 1964). They are defined as short expressions of cultural wisdom, truth, morals, and norms that exist in a "metaphorical, fixed and memorable form" that are "handed down from generation to generation" (Mieder, 1993, p. 5). Thus, one way to see the significance of Taoism in Chinese mental life is to identify Chinese proverbs that emphasize Taoist teachings, particularly the notions of change, connection, compromise, covariation, context, and contradiction (the mutual dependency of two opposites). Empirical research has shown that such proverbs are indeed numerous. For example, in a content analysis of Chinese proverbs compiled by Lian (1964), close to 20% were found to be Taoist in nature (Peng, 1997). For example, with respect to the notion of context, Chinese believe that "even a ferocious dragon cannot beat the snake in its old haunts" and "ice three feet thick is not due to one day's cold." With respect to the notion of contradiction, Chinese believe that "a wise person can be victim of his own wisdom," "there is no sweet without bitterness," and "failure is the mother of success." Other proverbs exemplify the notion of covariation. Chinese believe that "if there is peace in one's home everything will prosper" and "there are no poor soldiers under a good general." With respect to the notion of change, Chinese suggest "one learns a lesson each time one suffers losses." Finally, Chinese warn that "when two tigers fight, one is bound to lose," exemplifying the notion of compromise. These proverbs are not just thought-provoking. Rather, they serve many of the same functions that culture does: Proverbs can summarize a situation, pass judgment on another's behavior, recommend a course of action, or serve as precedents for current action.

## Naïve Dialecticism as Collective Representations of Taoism

As cultural psychologists, it is not our job simply to recount folklore or resurrect broad descriptive claims about Chinese culture made by philosophers, anthropologists, historians, and other scholars in the humanities. Rather, the role of the cultural psychologist is to answer questions concerning *how* and *why* Chinese people think and reason differently from individuals in other cultures. The first question to be addressed is whether differences in philosophical traditions between Chinese and non-Chinese are located at the broad cultural level or at the level of the individual. That is, do the differences outlined here concern cultural ideology or psychological phenomena? We argue that Taoist teachings exist both as cultural ideology and as individual, cognitive representations. We can connect the Taoist teachings with individual psychology by studying individual representations of the Tao, and by studying how these individual representations affect individual psychological processes.

If psychologists agree that it is a matter of individual psychology, the question then becomes: What sorts of mental processes or structures are the source of these cultural differences? We argue for representational differences, or differences in folk theories, as the fundamental causes of many cultural differences in reasoning. There is mounting evidence in psychology connecting cultural theories with individual psychology (see Morris, Menon, & Ames, 2001; Peng et al., 2001, for reviews). Culture-specific theories are shared mental representations among members of different cultures–theories that are part of a culture's "collective representations" (Durkheim, 1898).

What are the Chinese collective representations of Taoism? It is difficult to identify the major components of Chinese representations of Taoism precisely because they are Taoist in nature, and hence highly flexible with multiple meanings and functions. This paper takes a rather non-Taoist approach in decomposing Chinese dialectical epistemology. Nevertheless, we believe that this epistemology can be identified and summarized into distinctive principles by comparing it with central themes of Western thinking and reasoning. This approach, admittedly, is analytic and reductionistic, and fundamentally inconsistent with the spirit of Taoism. The principles identified herein may also not cover all aspects of Chinese collective representations, but only those that lend themselves most easily to abstraction and analysis in empirical studies. Because in some ways these naïve dialectical principles resemble characteristics of Hegel's dialectics (without its idealism and method of dialectics: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis), we refer to them as *naïve dialecticism*.

### Principle of change (Bian Yi Lu)

The principle of change holds that reality is a process. It does not stand still; it is in constant flux. An example of the principle of change that most readily comes to mind is the Taoist attitude towards concepts or words that reflect existence and knowledge. Because reality is dynamic and flexible, concepts that reflect reality are also active, changeable, and sub-jective. For instance, Zhuang-zi explicitly claimed that concepts should not be taken literally because they are not fixed. Zhuang-zi asserted, "The Tao has never known boundaries (of concepts); words have no con-stancy" (Zhuang-zi, 370-301 BC/1968, p. 43). That is, boundaries and dis-tinct categories are associated with the impairment of the Tao and are foreign to the Tao. Accordingly, Zhuang-zi said that the sage does not discriminate among ideas and that "those who discriminate fail to see (the Tao)" (Zhuang-zi, 370-301 BCE/1968, p. 44).

### Principle of contradiction (Ma Dun Lu)

The principle of contradiction argues that reality, particularly the reality of life, is not precise and cut-and-dried, but rather, complex and full of con-tradiction. The principle of contradiction among contemporary Chinese is commonly expressed as "dividing one into two" (that are contradictory to one another). This saying has been widely misattributed to (and officially propagated by) Chairman Mao's philosophical thinking (1937/1962). However, the ideas behind this saying can be readily traced to the *Yi ling / I-Ching* (Book of Changes), in which the principle of contradiction is clearly expressed. For example, its basic theme is that "Yin and Yang make up the way," such that the world is simply a single, integrated entity. According to the *Yi ling /I-Ching*, the differentiation and separation of things is but an expression of the interaction between opposites (yin and yang); the moti-vating energy for both parts of the contradictory pair of yin and yang all come from the Tao (or origin of the universe) and revert to the Tao.

### Principle of relationship or holism (Zheng He Lu)

The principle of holism maintains that in reality, as well as in human life, nothing is isolated and independent; rather, everything is relational and connected. If psychologists really want to know anything fully, we must know all of its relations–how it affects and is affected by everything else. The Chinese holistic mode of thought is epitomized in two basic assump-tions of Taoism: the two poles (yin and yang) and the five elements. The ideal state of human thinking is "the unity of heaven and humanity" (*tian ren he yi*) that considers heaven and humanity as two sides (*xiang fen*,

meaning separation) of an organic whole (*he yi*, meaning unity), but not as independent parts of an integrated whole.

The straightforward translation of this principle is that our understanding of even a simple event must depend on all sorts of complex relationships, because everything in the universe is related to everything else in some way. One can understand nothing in isolated pieces. The parts are meaningful in their relations to the whole, just as individual musical instruments are to an orchestra. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. We must understand the whole to understand the parts. Anything taken in isolation is out of context, and hence distorted.

We suggest that these Taoist principles are shared mental representations of Chinese people. They are interrelated, coherent elements of naive dialecticism. The principle of change is the logical foundation of naive dialecticism: The notion of change leads to a belief in contradiction, and contradiction comes as a result of a belief in change (if all phenomena in the universe are constantly changing, then what is true today may not be true tomorrow). Holism, in turn, is the consequence of a belief in change and contradiction. In many ways, these three principles are somewhat at odds with the basic laws of Aristotelian logic, the building blocks of naïve Aristotelianism. These basic laws include the *law of identity* (if something is true, then it is true; thus A = A), the *law of non-contradiction* (no statement can be both true and false; thus A ≠ not A), and the *law of the excluded middle* (all statements are either true or false; thus (A v B) & (A & B)). Such fundamental differences in thinking lead to interesting and important cultural differences for psychological research.

For instance, there are various models in the psychological and anthropological literature that describe and analyze differences between Chinese and Western thinking and reasoning. Most of them are related to the principles of naïve dialecticism. It has been suggested that the Chinese, in contrast to Westerners, have little interest in abstract reasoning. Their way of thinking is more concrete, confined largely to the realm of the immediately apprehended (Northrop, 1946). The Chinese way of thinking is also described as utilitarian and pragmatic (Nakamura, 1960), focusing on concrete real-life problems rather than general theories or ideas. The psychological evidence for this argument has been the fact that Chinese prefer to use concrete rather than abstract traits to describe themselves. This may reflect precisely the naïve dialectical view that nothing is absolute and stable, and hence can be abstracted. Research did find that abstract self-description and concrete self-description may be two independent dimensions in East Asian cultures (Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995). In other words, East Asian participants can respond abstractly or concretely to the "Who Am I?" question, depending on the context in which the question is asked (Cousins, 1989). In a recent study, we found that the Chinese not only used more concrete self-descriptions, but more changeable, contradictory, and holistic statements when

describing the self (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). Chinese and European-American participants' responses on the TST were coded for any type of transition (e.g., recent, ongoing, or desired change) in their personality traits, physical characteristics, goals, etc. For example, the free-response "I am someone who tries hard not to lie" represents a dynamic self-statement relative to the static self-statement "I am honest." In accordance with the principle of change, Chinese listed three times as many dynamic self-statements than did European-Americans. Consistent with the principle of contradiction, Chinese listed a greater proportion of contradictory self-statements (e.g., "I am young, yet old at the same time"), contradictory paired self-statements (e.g., "I am hardworking" listed on line 2 and "I am lazy" listed on line 8), and not-self statements (e.g., "I am not from a wealthy family"), than did European-Americans. Finally, in accordance with the principle of holism, they cited more holistic self-statements (e.g., "I am one but many") on the TST. These findings suggest that a greater amount of dialectical self-knowledge is retrieved spontaneously from memory among Chinese than European-Americans.

However, we have to point out the fundamental difference between the Chinese naïve dialecticism and the commonly understood dialectical thinking in the Western thought. In Western intellectual domains, dialectical thinking usually refers to three levels of analysis, including dialectic dynamics at the societal level (e.g., Hegelian or Marxist dialectics), dialectical argumentation at the level of interpersonal discourse, or dialectical integration at an intrapsychic level. However, Chinese naïve dialecticism is different from all three types of Western dialectical thought. Western dialectical thought is fundamentally consistent with the laws of formal logic and aggressive in the sense that contradiction requires synthesis rather than mere acceptance. The key difference is that the Chinese naïve dialecticism denies the reality of true contradiction, and never sees those contractions as logically opposite. Hence, it tends to accept the unity of opposites, and regards the coexistence of opposites as permanent. Chinese tend to view people who believe in genuine contradiction as having made a kind of error, or as short sighted or narrow minded. Western dialectical thought, particularly the Marxist dialectic, treats contradiction as real and long lasting. As Lenin (1961) put in the *Philosophical Notebooks*, the unity of opposites is temporary, transitory, and conditional. Equilibrium and harmony are temporary; conflict, contradiction, and the struggle of opposing tendencies are permanent (Peng & Ames, 2001; Peng & Nisbett, 2000).

## Implication for Theories Concerning Cultural Differences between East and West

An important theoretical argument made here is that cultural differences between American and Chinese people in the domains of thinking and

reasoning can be attributed to differences between Western and Eastern folk epistemologies. American folk beliefs of knowing, or understanding of the nature of the world and human life are Aristotelian in spirit, emphasizing constancy (identity), synthesis (non-contradiction), and extremes (no middle ground). In contrast, Chinese emphasize a dialectical approach that values change, contradiction, and relationships. These important cultural differences have broad implications for the ways in which psychologists understand and theorize about cultural differences in general.

As discussed at the beginning of this paper, cultural differences between the East and West have been understood in many different ways. These differences are numerous and complicated, and each of the above constructs may encompass different aspects of cultural variation. On the other hand, none of these constructs can provide a coherent story to explain all of the observed cultural variation. Even the relatively prominent theories characterizing cultural differences between Chinese and American people would have difficulty explaining some specific cultural variations, or would explain them in a way that is too sweeping. For example, individualism-collectivism (or the independent-interdependent self) alone cannot explain why Chinese tolerate contradiction in their thinking and reasoning, because there are some collectivist cultures that might not embrace dialectical approaches (e.g., Mexican American culture), and some cultures that value dialectical thinking are hard to characterize as individualistic or collectivistic (e.g., Jewish American culture).

From a dialectical perspective, the common views of individualism-collectivism and independent-interdependent selves, are, by their very nature, examples of Western models of explanation, which are based on all-or-nothing dichotomies that treat individuals and collectives as two opposing entities. This perspective assumes that a culture must be *either* individualistic *or* collective (or possess either independent-selves or interdependent-selves), but not both. In our opinion, this polarized dichotomy is, in itself, a reflection of Western formal logic that cannot tolerate contradiction, even at the risk of exaggerating certain aspects of a culture (e.g., individualism) or discounting the other aspects of the culture (e.g., collectivism).

The Chinese model of explanation presupposes a part-whole approach. Thus, parts exist only within wholes, with which they have inseparable relations. As applied to people, the Chinese perspective rejects an atomistic explanation of individuals' behaviors, and instead refers to individuals' relations to some whole, such as the family, society, Tao, principles, or pure consciousness (Hansen, 1983; Munro, 1985). Therefore, Chinese explanations of cultural differences would not be based on dichotomies, but rather rely on a holistic model in which each culture has a relatively differentiated affinity to or distance from the whole. Therefore, a Chinese understanding of this paper would not conclude that Chinese are dialectical in dealing with contradiction and

Americans are not, but that all cultures can be more or less dialectical, and the Chinese happen to be more prone to thinking dialectically than people from other cultures, because of their Taoist folk epistemology.

We admit that it is unlikely that the single concept of naïve dialecticism can explain all Eastern-Western distinctions, and it is not intended to do so. Naïve dialecticism instead attempts to provide an intermediate level of explanation of cultural variation, a bridge between macro-level explanations (e.g., individualism-collectivism) and micro-level explanations of cognitive differences (e.g., person-centered versus situation-centered cognition). We believe that ecological or ideological differences between East and West produce different social theories about human behavior, such as individualism-collectivism. These social differences, in turn, facilitate the growth and development of culture-specific epistemologies (e.g., naïve dialecticism) that affect people's views about the nature of existence and knowledge, as well as their understanding of logic and rationality. Culture-specific epistemologies then lead to more direct causes of cognitive variation among cultures, such as folk wisdom, education, parenting styles, and customs (micro-level variables). Thus, a specific cultural difference in cognition can be explained by its direct causes, people's culture-specific intuitive theories about the events being studied, as well as the logic of one's reasoning. Cultural differences in cognition can be, and in many cases have been, explained by culture-specific social theories and ecological differences. However, these explanations must be tested and proven, not assumed. A multilevel approach, we believe, is more constructive and informative than simplistic, categorical explanations of cultural variations. It recognizes the complexity and relativity of cultural differences and its predictions are concrete and falsifiable.

## Normative questions

So, which style of reasoning is better, the American or the Chinese? If the indigenous line of research seeks to accomplish anything, it is a new perspective on studying cultural differences. Instead of making normative claims about which culture-specific ways of reasoning are better or worse, the indigenous approach argues for the mutual dependency and complementariness of both. The focus is on understanding the paradox of universality and culture-specificity of cognitive processes, and the new evidence that across cultures there are different cognitive styles that organize cognitive functions in different ways. The cultural and social implications of this line of research may reach beyond purely intellectual exploration. This research may provide evidence that cultural diversity has important practical advantages: The European approach may be excellent for many purposes, and the East Asian dialectical approach, excellent for many other purposes.
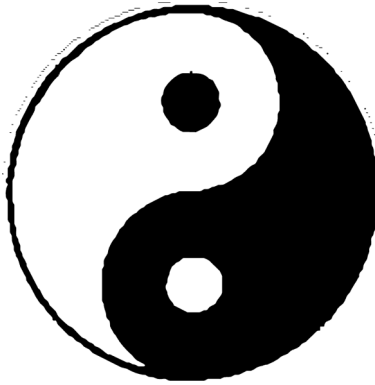
Figure 1.  The symbol of Tao (*yin yang tai ji tu*)

Let us close with a symbol of Chinese culture, the symbol of Tao (yin-yang *tai chi tu*), in which two famous cognates of Chinese dialectical episte-mology, yin and yang, stand for the opposite qualities of human and nature–a symbol of harmony between two extremes (see Figure 1). It is, in our opinion, a symbol of naïve dialecticism. The wave shapes reflect con-tinual movement, which is the essence of the principle of change. The prin-ciple of contradiction is represented by the fact that there is a white spot inside the black shape, and a black spot inside the white shape, which is natural and logical according to Chinese naive dialecticism. The principle of holism is apparent, because the beauty of this symbol can only be appre-ciated holistically, as the whole generates and regulates the cycle of changes between yang and yin. If we use this symbol, in a loose way, to character-ize the cultural differences found in cross-cultural research, then the rea-soning styles represented by Americans would be "yang," because of its forceful, linear, and persistent style, which is optimal for scientific explo-ration. On the other hand, the dialectical reasoning represented by Chinese would be "yin," because of its tolerant, comprehensive, and flexible style, which is optimal for intelligently negotiating in complex social interactions. Therefore, the ideal state or ultimate strength of human thinking should be a combination of both yin and yang, a synthesis of many different ways of thinking. Perhaps this is the real meaning of multiculturalism.

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