

Tai Chi Philosophy and Nursing Epistemology

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This article analyzes the philosophy underpinning Tai Chi practice in light of nursing epistemology. The first half of the article reviews the general characteristics of major Chinese philosophical traditions that have been merged in Tai Chi: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. In the second half, themes of integration and praxis in Tai Chi are linked with Carper's fundamental patterns of knowing in nursing. Tai Chi is a practical fusion of humanistic philosophy with an experiential dimension of movement in a nondualistic foundation. The author argues that TC philosophy can be applied to integrated knowledge development and nursing praxis. **Key words:** *Buddhism, Carper, Chinese philosophy, epistemology, integration, knowledge development meditation, mind-body, praxis, Tai Chi*

DOES Tai Chi (Tai Ji) have a legitimate place in today's healthcare practice? Can it contribute to healthcare and human flourishing in postmodern living? If so, in what ways, and how can we explicate this mysterious yet increasingly popular phenomenon?

In one sense, Tai Chi (TC) is a series of physical movements that originated as a powerful martial arts system in China, evolving over time into a gentle form of health practice.¹ Many turn to it for physical benefits, such as maintaining flexibility and balance, preventing falls, and dealing with cardiovascular illnesses and joint problems^{2,3}; others practice TC for different reasons.⁴ TC exercise is a complex fusion, representing a legacy of 5000 years of Chinese thought. The distinct cul-

tural flavor of TC reflects a syncretic merging of 3 major Chinese philosophical traditions: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Ethics and aesthetics, combined with social sciences, Chinese medicine, and cultural history are interlaced with the centrality of body in this moving meditation.¹ Thus, in this article, Chinese philosophy and TC are used interchangeably.

While more than 400 studies on the physiological benefits of TC are available,³ there is a lack of philosophical analysis in the healthcare literature. Considering the increasing popularity of TC practice, a better understanding of its philosophy is needed to link it to nursing knowledge and practice. This article is focused on the philosophy of TC; physiological analysis will be extremely limited. First, I provide a summary of the general characteristics of 3 Chinese philosophical traditions that ground TC practice. In the second part, I discuss nursing and healthcare applications of TC philosophy, by linking it to knowledge development in nursing viewed through Carper's lens.⁵ In particular, paralleling concepts of integration and praxis are explored in TC philosophy and nursing epistemology. TC philosophy is a profoundly rich source that can be applied to integrated-nursing-knowledge development and praxis.

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A DIFFERENT METAPHYSICS: ANCIENT CHINESE COSMOLOGY AND THE *BOOK OF CHANGES*

In discussing Chinese philosophical traditions I begin with 2 distinctly different basic metaphysical positions compared to our familiar Western traditions. In sharp contrast to the common Western dualistic understanding of the world as divided into material and spirit, absolute and nonabsolute, hell and heaven, and good and evil, the first difference is that Chinese people have an all-inclusive view of the world. For example, Chinese tradition does not recognize a particular need to separate theology from philosophy; philosophy and religion are merged as one. Chinese philosophy is an integrated totality of human reality, neither 2 as in accordance with the Cartesian bifurcation of material and spirit or mind, nor 3 as in the tripartite model of Plato's soul. All parts of human experience, including religion, philosophy, culture, social science, ethics, aesthetics, and medicine, are tightly interwoven into one integrated whole.^{6,7}

For example, appreciation of a Chinese painting involves not just artistic considerations but also integrated interpretation from all other aspects of human life. When looking at a symphony of gracefully flowing lines, one considers how the theory of change in Confucianism or the flow of nature in Daoism becomes more coherent and relevant to life, and, in turn, how the painting becomes richer in its philosophical context. Similarly, reading Chinese poetry immediately helps one better understand Chinese philosophy. Thus, it is said that Chinese philosophers, as the products of a culture of the all inclusive, are first poets and artists before being philosophers. While Western thinking historically has often involved analytical dissections, Chinese thinking since ancient times has been all-inclusive, welcoming phenomena of seeming opposites. It can present paradoxes and perplexities that result in misinterpretations and premature dismissal of the philosophy.^{7,8,9}

The second strikingly different point for traditional Western dialectic thinkers is the

absence of an absolute outside God figure. Instead, the universe is divided into 3 categories: heaven (the sky), earth, and human beings in the middle. For Chinese people, the notion of a power outside of a human being not encompassed by Nature is nonsensical (The capital letter "N" is used to indicate a broad sense of Nature as in Spinoza's Nature = Universe = God). This does not mean the Chinese philosophers deny a higher form of spirituality. Divine life and ordinary human life are not far apart; rather, they are fluid in everyday existence, waiting to be discovered through appropriate human endeavor. Chinese philosophy differs with its distinction of human character as participatory in fusion with the spirituality of the universe.⁸ The 3 enterprises of heaven, earth, and humanity are complementary and cocreative in their dynamic proceedings. The force from each is part of the architectural structure of the universe, maintaining stability and continuously interacting in a creative process. "Greater importance is assigned to human activity that harmonizes with the cosmic patterns of an impersonal Heaven rather than passive expectations of divine intervention on behalf of human beings."^{9(p13)}

This cosmology of a peer relationship with the spiritual universe is a significant foundation for the development of an early value orientation in Chinese culture and is responsible for the strong tradition of self-cultivation methodologies of Chinese philosophies today. The belief in the practical potential for transformation of each individual through self-cultivation is at the core of Chinese philosophical development.^{7,8} Chinese philosophy is one of correspondences between humans and Nature. Clarke uses correlative thinking to postulate the idea of Chinese homologies in his Daoism text. Nature and humans are conceived as "interlocking correspondences of different levels of reality brought into symmetry with each other by complex and detailed analogical correlations."^{10(p69)} Through this interaction, humans find significance in value, position, structure, and function in their social, personal, and political dimensions,

correlating with a world of wider cosmic order.

The theme of cosmic correspondence is captured in terms of interactions of natural forces in the metaphorical language of “yin” and “yang” in *The Book of Changes*¹¹ (spelled *Yi Jing* or *I Ching*). *Yi Jing* is the oldest written source available in the study of Chinese cosmology that brings the well-known Eastern mandala of the yin-yang symbol. This ancient TC diagram “Grand or supreme Ultimate”^{9(p49), 12(p107)} symbolizes undifferentiated fusion, the world of the primordial wholeness. Put briefly, it represents the cyclic nature of movements of forces, the mutuality of the opposites. According to *Yi Jing*, the different phases of yin and yang, which are continuous, are the basis of human experience. Wawrytko⁹ contends that yin and yang can be thought of as positive and negative electrical charges in the nature. They are opposites yet complementary and mutually interactive, together manifesting completion as light. Yang energy symbolizes the force of sky (heaven), representing strength, motion, bright, and active. Yin energy is yielding, dark, gentle, receptive, and nurturing; it symbolizes the Earth-like force. The initial assumption of TC practice involves understanding the mutuality of opposites and learning to balance these 2 forces within and around the person.^{1,10,11}

Increasing numbers of contemporary scholars maintain that the dynamic interplay of these archetypal poles of Nature is comparable to modern physics, with the world seen as a psychophysical structure. In place of a personified God, Natural forces in operation are the foundational system of Chinese metaphysics. Yin and yang are neither good nor bad but are a polarity that strives to complement the other in each human experience. Any given moment is the expression of multiple layers of complex psychophysical energy interactions in micro- and macrocosmic dimensions into events and situations of the phenomenal world.¹⁰⁻¹³

Accordingly, a person’s health is also a manifestation of yin and yang interactions within

a person’s interior and outer environment. The natural tendency of polar opposites is to seek their own completion; thus, a person’s interior environment maintains the homeostatic ground, constantly striving toward balancing itself, toward health, that is, the original wholeness. This self-restorative property of forces toward equilibrium is the basis of Chinese medicine and the current healthcare research interest. From a biochemical standpoint, this homeostasis is a concept familiar to healthcare professionals. The intricate networking of the body systems toward equilibrium keeps humans alive at each moment, by enabling fluid regulation to maintain optimal blood pressure, regeneration of skin cells every 2 weeks, rebirth of red blood cells every 4 months, and continuous defense against foreign bacterial entities.^{14,15}

The Chinese metaphysical system was firmly established when Confucian commentaries were added to the ancient systems of *Yi Jing* and the major existing philosophical lore of the time. Legend has it that the mystical hexagrams were interpreted and organized into a systemized written form in *Yi Jing* during 1100 BCE by the philosopher-king Wen and his son during the Zhou dynasty, and they were used to govern their kingdom. But after a few hundreds years of peace and prosperity, ancient China devolved into warring states, fighting emotionally charged religious battles; irrational beliefs were rampant, influencing the governments to militancy.⁸ Against this social chaos, Confucianism arose as a moral force of fairness and virtue, with doctrines of harmony and equilibrium as pillars for political and social welfare. Wise and practical philosophers perceived the rise of the Confucian movement as a form of rescue from irrational religiosity. Confucian became the voice of reason and wisdom, welcomed by the Chinese people since 600 BCE. To date, some 2600 years later, Chinese people continue to revere Confucius as the greatest teacher and the father of ethics, virtue, and wisdom, providing guidelines for the individual, family, society, and the state.^{8,9}

DAO, PERVASIVE UNITY, AND THE EXALTATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Reviewing 5000 years of Chinese philosophical history, Fang^{7,8} emphasizes 3 interwoven concepts that represent Chinese philosophy as a whole. They are "Dao," "Pervasive Unity," and "Exaltation of the Individual." Dao is the primary source of all things, the process of the universe itself. It is the fundamental, simultaneously ultimate reality to be realized by human endeavors. Dao can be artificially separated into 2 aspects: a dynamic continuity of the universe and an energy substance of practical function in the phenomenal world.

Dao pervades all things at all times as a subtle form of detectable energy in human existence. This subtle form of energy is called "qi." The concept of qi (also referred to as "chi," "ki," or "dan") permeates every aspect of Chinese culture. Written sources describing qi can be found as early as 300 BCE by the Confucian scholar Mencius, who thought qi was moral energy and advised nourishing or "husbanding" one's "flood like qi" to achieve human excellence and potency.^{16(p19)} The Taoist scholar Zuangzi expressed qi as the material force of the universe that is involved in the cycle of transformation of human life and death.¹⁶ In the West, qi has been variously defined as inner life force, bioenergy, or vital energy. Joseph Needham reluctantly defined *qi* as "matter energy" and advised that it is best to remain untranslated. Some argue qi is the corresponding link between macrocosmic and microcosmic events of the world.^{10,12,14} A more recent definition from Nagatomo^{15,17} translates Yuasa's concept of *qi* as "invisible psychophysical energy" in a living body. Yuasa argues that qi is a "conscious awareness of one's own body,"^(p173) which can be approached psychologically. This notion of qi as a form of energy in a living body is the foundation of traditional Chinese medicine and all moving meditation practices.¹⁵ While a detailed discussion of qi is beyond the scope of this article, here it can be thought as the functional aspect of Dao. Qi harmonization is a promising research area for

better healthcare at personal and professional levels.^{12-14,18}

Pervasive Unity is the all-world inclusive principle reflected in the theory of organicism. The relationship between penetrating Dao and Pervasive Unity of the world is expressed in this statement by Confucius: "The Dao inherent in me is that of an all-pervading unity."^{8(p23)} Chen Hao's organicism monism explains Pervasive Unity as the sameness of the nature of the human and the universe. Thus, he identifies human nature as "unperturbedness under any circumstances."^{8(p9)} In other words, a person of Dao expects natural, spontaneous, and fearless sharing of one's creative process with the universe. Thus, Confucius stated that when he reached the age of 40 years, he stopped perplexing about life events. Explaining the practicality of the philosophical tradition between man and the universe, Fang⁷ calls Chinese philosophy a transcendental-immanent, implying its immediate application back to the phenomenal level of human reality. The metaphysical aspiration pervades everyday possibilities; this philosophical tradition allows the unique development of self-cultivation to reach spiritual heights from various walks of life.

While the inclination and the method toward attaining the state of Dao are different in the 3 Chinese traditions, Exaltation of the Individual represents the highest expression of self-development in which human potential is actualized. Because humans are participatory and cocreative with Nature, the possibility of transformation is inherent. When the transformation occurs, it is thought that the individual changes association with self and the world, and ultimate enjoyment of life can ensue.^{7,17} Thus, with exaltation of the individual, the pursuit of self knowledge leads to better enjoyment of life, attaining wisdom for the maximum benefit. It involves organizing human life to taste the noblest joy. Yutang in his book *The Importance of Living* expresses this unconsciously assumed priority for all Chinese philosophers:

How shall we enjoy life, and who can best enjoy life? No perfectionism, no straining after the

unattainable, no postulating of the unknowable: but taking poor, mortal nature as it is, how shall we organize our life that we can work peacefully, endure nobly and live happily.^{19(p95)}

Closely connected with exaltation of the individual is aesthetic aspiration. The person of Dao in all 3 philosophical traditions comprehends life as cosmic beauty in its sublimity. The underlying poetic psychology of Chinese philosophers is a significant means to harmonize with the universe and an important concept of Chinese aesthetics. Consider the marked contrasts with some Western thinkers who are suspicious of “the seductions of the beautiful,” and fear distraction from beauty when they abstract “higher truths of the real world.”^{8,9(pp42–43)}

Confucianism encouraged a belief in human greatness through the moral achievement, with a goal of social harmony and virtue. The Confucian role model is *JunZi*⁹ (profound person, exemplary person), which is analogous to Plato’s philosopher king. Under the doctrine of harmony and equilibrium, anyone could be JunZi, a wise ruler of Confucian society, as long as the proper ideals were inculcated through proper self-cultivation. By developing the ideals of luminous virtue, refining character with emotional maturation and moral achievement, and building leadership skills for social and political aims, one attains the sage-like wisdom of JunZi. The Confucian model of exaltation is in the idealized possibilities becoming reality in JunZi personalities in the family, the community, and the state.^{8,9} Exaltation of noble accomplishment and elaborate pursuit of life enjoyment in beauty and self-knowledge are the Confucian ideal. Social harmony as an extension of family life and the foundational virtue practice in Confucian system are still visible and important in TC communities today.

In contrast to human-centered Confucianism in a social nexus, the Daoist model of exaltation of the individual comes from the great joy of letting go of worldly ways through harmony with Nature. Daoist de-cultivation involves a process of eliminating conventional knowledge, replacing it with intuitive wis-

dom. By dropping knowledge accumulated by social construct, Daoists recall the original state of Natural Wholeness. This intuitive knowledge is associated with harnessing the power and beauty of Nature. Daoists believe when diminution of knowledge has been realized toward nothingness, the perfect balance with Nature will occur and the mysterious Dao will appear in one’s life as “wei-wu-wei”^{16(p45)}: everything is done, flowing effortlessly in the most spontaneous manner. By letting Nature balance itself within and around the person, the polarity of the opposite forces will find a complementing harmony rather than conflict. A flow of qi is revealed as natural completion of forces in balance. TC practice is a means to expedite the balancing of this polarity in a spiraling fashion for spiritual development.^{1,13,14,16,20}

While the Confucian man of Dao is sage-like with his role based on family and society, the Daoist model of exaltation is the image of an aesthetic poet who, having attained freedom from the relativities of the world, transcends to the beauty of infinite space, to the Dao of infinite Nature.^{7,8} Lao Zi’s principle of life as the “art of perpetual creativity” captures the notion of Daoist aesthetics: “to play the sport of bliss in lyrical enchantment, to enter into a world of sympathetic unity with the soul of men and things, to set forth rhythmic vitality in unison with creative Nature, to make men great in the achievement of beauty and the sublime.”^{9(p41)}

This aesthetic sensibility of Daoism is evidenced in the graceful postures and artistic ideals of TC. Chinese philosophy does not separate material and spirit or mind and body; instead, the Chinese sense of beauty is always merged into the rhythms of life. Genuine artistic expression is consonant with Nature’s beat: the flow of life itself, free from mind-body dichotomy. The artist becomes fused with the object of the art, overcoming barriers between Nature and the artist. Exaltation comes from the transformation of the object of the art and the artist. This artistic concept is seen in TC practice. The gentle TC movements exemplify the softness principle stated in several chapters in *Dao De Jing*,

which states, "hard and rigid are the companion of death; supple and soft are the companion of life."^{9(p142)} Many TC postures emulate nature scenes and human activity with nature, such as golden crane standing on one leg, embracing the tiger, and hands in the clouds, all reflecting metaphors of oneness with Nature.^{1,20}

BUDDHIST EXALTATION, EMPTINESS, AND TAI CHI

The Buddhist idea of exaltation revolves around attaining liberation from human suffering, which is termed "enlightenment." While there have been variations in hermeneutical interpretations and the focus of methodology, the fundamental teachings of Buddha remain the same. This section provides a brief review on the concept of emptiness with dependent (relational)-origination of phenomena, nonself (*anatman*), and the resultant Buddhist view of interconnectedness and interdependence.

In comparison with Confucianism and Daoism, Buddhism focuses on finding a direct phenomenological solution for human suffering. Buddha was thought of as a specialist in the disease called suffering, just like a physician who diagnoses and treats certain illness. The path for liberation involves 2 aspects of cultivation: practicing virtue, more accurately, acquiring wisdom through reading and understanding *sūtras* (Buddha's teaching), and practicing meditation for spiritual purity on the basis of "emptiness." The concept of emptiness relies on the basic teaching of the "Four Noble Truths." The discourse of the Four Noble Truths is a goal as well as a basic assumption in accordance with which self-cultivation practice occurs.²¹⁻²³

The first Noble Truth is the acknowledgment of suffering, "dukkha," as an unavoidable fact in human living. The contemporary Buddhist philosopher Thich Nhat Hanh²⁴ interprets this first noble truth as "touching of our suffering."^(p9) The second truth is "samudaya," the causes of suffering. The most com-

mon interpretation of the second truth states that suffering comes from clinging to objects of desire, whether they are one's mental images or physical phenomena. The third, "nirodha," means there is a cessation of suffering; this is done by ending the root causes of the second doctrine. Clinging arises from ignorance of the true nature of self; by getting rid of the illusion of the self as a permanent substantial self, one can end the suffering cycle of desire and frustration. Since all is empty, there will be nothing to cling to, nor is there any self who does the clinging and suffering. The fourth noble truth involves "marga," the 8-fold path of guiding method that will lead to liberation from suffering. Thus, Buddha's Four Noble Truths are his method toward *anatman* (nonself); they free one from suffering by deconstructing the claim of self as an illusory ego identity.²²⁻²⁴

The Buddhist understanding of human suffering is analogous to the existential notion of the human condition, "thrown into" the world and left anguished,^{23,25(p37)} but it is optimistic rather than pessimistic in outlook. While similar in the description of human condition, Buddhism posits a specific way of coping. Rather than being thrown into and left anguished, Buddhism offers a systemic methodology to transform the individual and resolve the suffering. When Buddha was tormented with the issue of human suffering, he divided the question into 4 distinct inquiries: birth, disease, getting old, and death. His groundbreaking research involved experimenting with the only instrument available to him at this ancient time: direct observation of his mind. The result of his lifetime endeavor was organized into the Four Noble Truths and the Eight Fold Paths. The main premise is that the freedom is inherent in everyone's original nature and it can be cultivated. A few centuries later, his techniques migrated to China, where Chan Buddhists exclusively refined the methodology of meditation for liberation, known as Zen (Sôn) today. A more contemporary translation of this style of meditation is mindfulness meditation or *vipassana*. *Vipassana* means seeing as they really

are. Mindfulness meditation can be explained as nonjudgmental observation of mind's activity, cultivation of a nonconceptual knowing. Relentless mind activity is replaced with mind-watching or self-observation; one's breath or internal dialogues are observed as leaves in a gently flowing river or floating clouds in the vast sky.^{9,26-28}

Philosophical discussion of selfhood is not intended or justified in the limited scope of this article. However, the "Emptiness" doctrine may shed some light on Buddhist notion of self. The doctrine of emptiness was articulated with the theory of dependent origination by a Buddhist scholar, Nagarjuna, during the second century. To state his argument simply, all phenomena lack independent identities, but they all arise dependent upon one another. In other words, the subject and the object of our knowledge cannot be separated; a self-sufficient thought process is an illusion empty of real substance that can be upheld as self or truth.^{29,26,30,31}

In a Buddhist sense, the self as "I" is void of real substance, nothing more than collected views that are constructed upon the criteria of previously collected ideas. The concept of self is the habitual interpretations of feelings of one's world conditioned by the social material context of that person, and it is a chain of falsely bounded structure in which one is self-imprisoned, yet unaware. Each moment, this notion of self-changes, but only within the radius of the habitual viewing reference; the cycle continues unless some kind of deconstruction breaks the pattern. Meditation is the Buddhist method of freeing these chains of narrow confines of oneself, to eliminate suffering and to experience a wider human reality. Thus, Buddhist notion of exaltation begins with acknowledging the *annica* (ignorance of the assumed nature of self), then empties this false structure to see the original self, which is essentially a void. A theoretical understanding of this selfless philosophy must accompany meditation practice for the discourse to become intrinsic.^{23,24,29,26,31}

It is worthwhile to note that general meaning of individuality in Western term is an-

tithetical to Buddhist's *anatman* (nonself). Consider *Heart Sutra*, one of the main Buddhist texts, which states, "there is no aging and death; further, there is no extinction of aging and death."^{30(p1)} In the Buddhist view, true self-nature (Buddha Nature) in each person is birthless as well as deathless, therefore making aging and death essentially irrelevant. This double negation indicates that Buddhism empties its own body of doctrine to be truly present for the infinite depth of "here and now."^{24,31}

The psychological dimension of emptiness provides freedom from preconceived views and fixated emotions, giving space for a fresh openness to the world. Habitual tendencies vanish, allowing new patterns of thinking and perceiving to emerge. In a practical sense, the wisdom of emptiness counteracts rampant human emotions such as greed, anger, fear, anxiety, and hatred in today's society, all of which lead to suffering. Seeing these mental constructs as egocentric and empty assists in letting go of these feelings. In the place of injurious emotions, a birth of inner peace and kindness to others can arise. The awareness of others in mutually dependent predicaments gives rise to new sense of collaboration and morality, encouraging compassion toward others and sustaining social harmony.^{24,32}

The psychological benefits described above have been recognized since 1970 in the United States, when Kabat-Zinn, a molecular biologist, brought mindfulness meditation to patients, doctors, and nurses at a university hospital. Since Kabat-Zinn's pioneering work, this meditation method has been investigated and employed at healthcare institutions, business firms, law schools, and medical schools. Influential cognitive behaviorists in the United States have adopted mindfulness meditation into their practices with continuing positive results. Rampant internal dialogues can be causes for low self-esteem and undesirable behavioral patterns; identifying these automatic thinking patterns and changing the clients' relationships with their own thought patterns are steps in cognitive-behavioral therapy.^{24,27,28}

Hanh²⁴ provides an alternative interpretation of meditation. Thinking means, we think about or of something; when we are happy, we are happy or angry about or toward something. Every object comes in our minds, in the very moment we cognize, the mind becomes occupied by that phenomenon. From a Buddhist's view, "I am thought" matches ordinary human mind activity better than Descartes' "I think, therefore I am." According to the dependent arising of the emptiness doctrine, the mind cannot be defined or grasped; only objects in the mind possess the mind in intense temporality. Cognition is codependent; without an object of cognition, the subject cannot be. From a Buddhist standpoint, the Cartesian "I" here is equally problematic, as is the entire thinking process, which tends toward delusions by fixating on concepts.^{9,29}

TC can be understood as mindfulness meditation in motion. The observation is simultaneously directed inwardly and outwardly with a flow of movements. This slow motion series enables one to unite one's mind activity with one's movement at each moment, making it possible to experience unity of body, mind, and environment in the present space. With repeated practice of TC postures, one develops a sense of life as a dynamic flow analogous to the TC forms: life as a simple continuation of one movement to the next. As a result of repeated meditation practice, radical cognitive restructuring follows a change in one's perceptual pattern, redefining normal reality^{1,9,20,27,28}.

The secret of seeing things as they are is to take off our colored spectacles. That being-as-it-is, with nothing extraordinary about it, nothing wonderful, is the great wonder. The ability to see things normally is no small thing; to be really normal is unusual. In that normality begins to bubble up inspiration.^{9(p135)}

Developing nonconceptual self-awareness (mindfulness) from meditation does not mean one becomes a nonthinking being. Increased capacity for being here now does not indicate one becomes amnesic of the past or forget-

ting the future all together. It is important to note that emptiness is different from nihilistic meaninglessness. The empty bowl analogy is useful here. By emptying out muddy water, the possibility of filling in clear water increases; the thinking process becomes more intuitive, reflective, clearer, and more absorbent, optimizing the joy of experience. Ames and Hall term this "getting the most out of one's ingredients"^{12,13,15,16(p21),19}

Finally, Buddhist ethics arise from the concept of dependent origination of the world. Meditation upon emptiness allows the emergence of the relational view of the world, helping understand the interconnectedness with others and the community. The Buddhist notion of relational or dependent origination of self and others promotes a deeper understanding of human condition that awakens to important values such as kindness, peace, and compassion.^{21,22,24,32}

In TC, one must understand the interdependent nature of body's function in the living body first and then realize the body-mind relationship to a wider dimension with the world. A body scan allows one to locate tensions in the body to neutralize and align it with Nature. The human body is made of the same elements as the universe: water, air, fire, and earth. For example, when we are mindful of the heartbeat, we can be aware of the water element (blood) and the fire element (warmth) that affects heat regulation. We can easily recognize the elements of air and water in the process of breathing. In contrast to the body-mind dichotomy assumed in the West, the TC body is an integrated expression of human reality. Body is no more or no less of an illusion than the mind, yet a reality ingredient present in each person. The unity of body, mind, and spirit of the person is the basic assumption of TC, and its philosophy encourages cultivation of this integrated reality.^{1,14,24}

In conclusion, 3 Chinese philosophical traditions form an intricate and rich-colored tapestry that underpins TC practice. The fabric of TC weaves Confucian social harmony through moral achievement and wisdom

in JunZi philosophy, Daoist de-cultivation for beauty, intuition, and natural wholeness through nourishing and balancing of qi, and Buddhist meditation on emptiness and interdependence. As we will explore in the next section, this fabric offers practical yet transformative tools for nursing practice and theory.

NURSING EPISTEMOLOGY AND TAI CHI PHILOSOPHY

Two important concepts from TC philosophy resonate with nursing philosophy, integration and praxis. While efforts to theorize and formulate these 2 essential concepts continue, more recently, the concept of praxis is finding its way into many nursing professionals' hearts, bearing a sense of urgency as a notion central to patient care. The layers of implications in these 2 closely interrelated concepts sustain authentic meaning and spirit of the discipline and are naturally apparent in evolving nursing epistemology.³³

Epistemology requires reflection; it involves complex questions such as "What is the meaning of a particular knowledge?", "How did the knowledge get here?", and "What is the value of that knowledge?" When the theory of knowledge is developed for the purpose of nursing practice, it contributes to praxis. Carper's seminal work, *Fundamental patterns of knowing in nursing*, established epistemic diversity within the discipline.⁵ The mutual relationship of integration and praxis is implicitly foundational in the patterns of nursing knowledge development: it is the activity of "the knowing and doing"^{34(p15)}.³⁵ For Tarlier, Carper's recognition of epistemological diversity within nursing confirms the ontological nature of the discipline, that is, the complexities of holistic nursing practice involving "a reciprocal, conscious, reflective bond between epistemology and practice" as the basis of nursing praxis.^{33(p128)}

Carper's patterns of nursing knowledge represents the synchrony of each nursing ac-

tivity that can transform nursing reality into a meaningful whole.^{5,34} TC philosophy, the collected wisdom from thousands of years of Chinese cultivation, has important implications for knowledge development in personal, aesthetic, ethical, and empirical knowing.

Personal knowing in nursing

Carper's⁵ epistemological approach emphasizes personal patterns of knowing in nursing. The nursing profession, with its unique professional domain of intimate caring of others, directly or indirectly deals with human vulnerability during periods of intense uncertainty. The nurse's personal dimension is unavoidably engaged in each encounter, which frequently involves sensitive issues of mortality and morbidity. The self applied in this context, which Carper terms "therapeutic use of self,"^(p19) is a reciprocal relational process of interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of nursing practice. Carper's therapeutic use of self is a process of cocreation with another human, not predicted but only lived through within the nursing context. The unfolding process of self makes the self an open system that is devoid of generalizations and assumptions that may interfere with recognized values. It maintains the integrity of the nursing encounter in a milieu of collaboration. Becoming an "authentic self" in a nursing professional relationship affects the pursuit of growth and human fulfillment. This emptying of predetermined categories or classifications is termed "sacrifice of form" or "unknowing"; it can provide a clearer and broader perception of nursing situations owing to openness to relational encounters.^{5,34(p182)},³⁵

The unknowing or sacrifice of form relates to the emptying practice of TC philosophy. In general, emptying of ego-self and centering in meditation contributes to heightened perception of situations. This perceptual capacity is possible when the practitioner attains a formless or unknowing state of mind, soundly detached from previous concepts. It allows full presence in the sense of openness and clarity, enabling mindfulness and respect for self

and others during the encounter. In a direct parallel with Buddhist notions of emptiness and exaltation, the practice of therapeutic use of self allows the skilled nurse to remove the "colored spectacles" in nursing situations. Colored spectacles here are the preconceived notions and judgments, which become baggage for patient care to the professional.^{9,35}

If nursing is to be a profession of human science rather than a biological science, it demands keen ontological understanding, beginning with exploration into the professional's self-identity.³⁶ Increased self-knowledge opens up the possibility of deeper understanding concerning others. The self-process in personal knowing is essential to nursing professional development, specifically because it involves healing and relationship issues with patients, which are the ground for transformation opportunities for the patients and nurses.^{5,34}

Aesthetic knowing in nursing

Carper's aesthetics in nursing epistemology explains nursing as an expressed art, that is, as a form of experience.⁵ The nurse's aesthetic knowing gives access to an intuitive and transformative act. Aesthetic knowing enables the nurses to see beauty beneath the surface by spontaneously expanding perceptual capacities. Aesthetic knowing connects us to deeper meanings in each unique situation, transforming it into a different level of experience than otherwise would have been possible. According to Carper, aesthetics is the nature and expression of beauty that conveys the sense of perceptual harmony, a "dynamic integration and articulation of the whole."^{5(p17),34}

The aesthetic philosopher and pragmatist Dewey³⁷ views art as experience; in the essence of the aesthetic experience, parts coalesce into immediate appreciation, a qualitative integration of meaning and value. Dewey argues that form and matter in art are better understood in a dynamic context of adjustment and integration, instead of standing separate side by side. He emphasizes that the creator and the appreciator are cocreators of art

as experience, rather than seeing the artist as a creator who completes the art while the audience passively receives it. The work of art proper is realized only through engagement with the audience.

Art as experience suggests valuable notions for defining the art of nursing, which resides in the dynamics of the ontological plane of lived experience. Nursing as an art of lived experience integrates all patterns of knowledge in a care context, bearing infinite transformative potential for each encounter. Nursing activity, fused with altruistic virtue in a common pursuit of wellness between patients and multidisciplinary colleagues, is a world of sympathetic unity advancing toward simple beauty of health and wholeness. It is a coparticipatory, cocreative transformative activity rooted in the humanism of care.

Chinn and Kramer³⁴ note that when all knowing patterns are integrated in perfect flow, "working" together in cocreative wholeness and harmony, the nurses can experience elements of mystery in their practice. Sometimes this can be manifested as an unexpected speedy recovery of a patient or sudden unexplainable calmness in a severely distressed patient after an attentive intervention. It is perceived in the moment, with spontaneous immediacy from an intuitive level of existence. Carper⁵ states that empathy is an important tool of aesthetic knowing; more skilled nurses will be able to perceive, empathize, and connect.

These programmatic nursing themes of aesthetics, integration, and transformation are central to TC. The movements themselves are integrative, intuitively present, and flowing free of tension, and are enmeshed in the beauty of Nature. The philosophy underlying TC elaborates these movements and gives them a context and purpose of beauty. Similarly, Bostick,³⁸ in her phenomenological study of dance movements and their rhythmic effect on nursing practice, found an increased sense of connection along with spirituality and relaxation in their work.

Fang describes Chinese art as metaphorical in its expression of human spirit,

immediately requiring a philosophical process; the Chinese artistic ideal of great beauty is a fusion of “philosophical reason and artistic impulse.”^{8(p41)} Just as Chinese art is embedded in a philosophy to guide its creation, so is the philosophy of reflective caring in nursing, expressed as praxis, guiding the practice of nursing. Borrowing Fang’s sentiment, then nursing can be expressed as the fusion of “philosophical reason and altruistic impulse.” Thus, the nursing art promotes the transformation of human experience, paralleling the art and philosophy of TC.

Ethical knowing in nursing

The practice of nursing involves daily ethical decisions involving values and controversies with significant consequences for both patients and the profession. The nursing code of ethics as a patient advocate, in the midst of healthcare politics with multiple professions and power structures, demands substantive ethical guidance and continuing development of ethical knowledge of nursing practice.³⁹

In terms of broader healthcare ethics, McDonald and McIntyre⁴⁰ identify a chronic ethical issue in society. Body marginalization, a pejorative way of treating the body, exists within medical and nursing care; the body is highly objectified and stripped of embodied emotions. This easily devalues the meaningful creation of embodied relational experience in nursing activity. The body-mind separation casts the body as inferior, further leading to stereotyping against ill and aged bodies. This improper conceptualization of body in relation to self undermines the nursing discourse of subjective embodied experience of caring, as well as minimizing the patients’ lived experience of illness. Many nursing scholars recognize this symptom as a by-product of body socialization stemming from Cartesian epistemology. The mechanical body, though a sensational biological discovery during the 17th century when presented by Frances Bacon, persists today as a dominant and limiting paradigm for nursing care.^{41,42}

Nursing practice is about dealing with the embodied experiences of people, often involving reflection on human frailty. The caring activity is generated from the epistemologically privileged knowledge of nurses in their professional encounters.⁴² To resolve this magnitude of an ethical issue in healthcare, perhaps we need an alternative means to begin re-socialization of our body, restoring the dignity of a person as an integrated unity. Mind-body unity in TC philosophy can be a source to provide this new direction. Elevation of body instead of denying or denigrating it reinstates embodied awareness and values, thus welcoming ethical knowledge development, which embraces each person as a nonsplit harmonious whole, away from body marginalization.

Chinese ethics^{8,9} are embedded in the philosophical traditions as a system of self-cultivation. The Confucian system of value education on fairness, the doctrine of equilibrium and harmony, and the JunZi’s self-cultivation process of luminous virtue in the individual can be applied to guide ethical principles of nursing. Buddhist ethics from understanding emptiness and attaining freedom through selfless philosophy promotes honesty, courage, and compassion.

Empirical knowing in nursing

Empirical knowing is a critical part of nursing science. All nurses are educated in concepts of objectivity and quantification from the beginning of their education, in keeping with the current healthcare paradigm. However, empirical knowing is an unsettling epistemological notion in nursing development for philosophical and professional reasons, and it has undergone revisions over the years. The early conceptions of empirical knowing equated it with traditional quantitative methods, including an emphasis on randomized group designs and traditional inferential statistics. This trend was epitomized in nursing models that emulated a positivist model of biomedical science. With Dr Cochrane’s

emphasis on evidence-based medicine, nursing pursued evidence-based nursing practice, without a proper evaluation of its meaning for nursing.^{5,34,43}

Soon it became clear that a traditional science model alone was too narrow to explain nursing work, let alone using it programmatically for nursing practice.⁵ Florence Nightingale presaged a problem with this approach. Nursing was much broader than medicine, with the breadth coming from the mobilization of internal and external sources of individual patients and nurses in the healing process. In addition to knowing disease dynamics, nurses get extensively involved in the process of disrupted human lives of the patients: their physical pain, psychological conflict, troubled spirit, and familial distress, as well as related environmental and sociopolitical healthcare issues. These factors can easily be hidden in group designs, and they are difficult to translate into numbers. Reductionism in the positivist empirical tradition is in direct conflict with the holistic philosophy of caring in nursing. The characteristic of nursing profession is both philosophical and scientific. Nurses are confronted with existential issues of life and death; at the same time, nurses have to apply empirically sound knowledge to each patient's specific context. Nurses are neither knowledge peddlers nor mechanical repairpersons; but the essence of nursing lies in the way in which scientific knowledge manifests itself in the pursuit of wholeness in the context of the health-illness continuum. To achieve the nursing agenda, each nursing activity requires not only scientific knowledge of human physiology and sound clinical decisions but also strong moral and ethical knowledge founded on integration and praxis. This fused characteristic of the discipline is not sufficiently expressed in traditional empirical theories, risking imbalanced knowledge development in nursing professionals.^{5,34,36}

In 1978, Carper noticed the shift from the biomedical focus to a more mature empirical science within the profession. She predicted that empirical knowing in nursing would ultimately evolve to "highly integrated abstract

and systematic theoretical explanations."^{5(p15)} Indeed, postmodern empirics have expanded beyond strict hypothesis testing and quantitative data analyses. Current empirical research employs complex phenomenological and field ethnographic inquiries, critical and hermeneutical patterns, and other means of generating theories.³⁴

Harmon, Polanyi, and other scholars argue that current epistemological assumptions of Western science cannot adequately explain human activity and experiences to the full extent. They maintain that we need to find a better way to inquire into our subjectivity, consciousness, and intuition.^{44,45,46} Behind logical objective reasoning remains non-conceptual awareness, and this awareness in the process of reasoning itself is not measurable. Twenty-first-century postmodern scholarship acknowledges inadequacies of certain knowledge formulations. Mature empiricists now understand that there is no absolute objectivity, and that research is always interpretive to some degree.^{46,47}

Consider, for example, the word *evidence* as the crux of empirical expression. From an epistemological standpoint, the question arises, how do we assign evidence as a believable knowledge base for our profession? French's⁴³ epistemological review in healthcare literature between 1992 and 2002 found no consensus among professionals on the meaning of the term *evidence*; some were even contradictory, with each author assigning different meanings to "evidence-based practice." Meanings were largely subjective opinions, though well-informed. Consequently, it is difficult to see evidence as a stable construct; rather, it can be construed as a "novelty effect in basically political scenarios." French argues that viewing evidence as an absolute leads to increased fragmentation and disenchantment of professionals pursuing knowledge development and practice.

As Chinn and Kramer³⁴ note, the older narrowly compartmentalized interpretation of empirics persists among even highly regarded nursing academicians. The notion of "science" in a positivistic sense symbolizes

power for some nursing professionals. Political and financial gains take away the integrity of balanced knowledge development within the profession.⁴⁶ The historical lingering of a male-dominated traditional empirical paradigm not only interferes with current model of egalitarian multidisciplinary collaboration in healthcare but also contradicts emerged trend of integrated knowledge development and praxis within nursing.⁴⁷

Instead of pursuing black and white absolutes of evidence, 21st-century nursing empirics focuses on research purposes rather than on methodological debates on quantitative versus qualitative.³⁴ This postmodern openness toward the purpose of inquiry itself, rather than the forms of instrumentation, is in line with practicality of TC philosophy. The orientation in TC system is a dynamic nonstatic model of processes, in which the "One and the Many are accommodated."^{9(p59)} Rather than a rigid division of right and wrong, or this or that, a fluid method is advocated for maximum benefit.^{9,14,16}

TC practitioners appreciate and utilize new knowledge of physical benefits from quantitative research data,³ integrating the information into their worldview with TC principles of balance and inclusion. Similarly, nursing can apply TC philosophy to welcome the new empirical focus; rather than insisting on a prescribed methodology, professionals can enjoy the fluidity of diverse expertise and orientations, without losing academic rigor, legitimacy, philosophical meaning, and their unique professional identity.³⁴

In summary, a historical review of empirical knowing and its current development shows that nursing continues to strive to find its satisfying identity by integrating cutting edge science, yet it is extremely watchful in protecting and preserving the humanistic core of the profession. Common vocabulary that shares meanings and aspirations in nursing such as praxis and integration needs to be established to reinforce a new direction of knowledge, one that embraces diversity in humanistic foundation. TC philosophy and prac-

tice can be a source for such inclusive and expansive principles.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The essential nursing concepts of integration and praxis in TC philosophy resonate with postmodern nursing. The essence of TC is exaltation of the individual through praxis, making this life significant and meaningful. In contrast to some Western approaches, human feelings and the body are not treated as inferior to rational thought, but treated as equally important. The common denominator in defining the nursing profession in the literature is that nursing is a holistic practice of human caring.^{34,41,42,47} As we viewed through Carper's lens, TC is an embodiment of integration of empirics, ethics, aesthetics, and personal knowing steeped in a philosophy of self-cultivation;⁸ nursing professionals may be able to utilize it to bring meaningful results to healthcare.

In terms of nursing education, the curricula can benefit from some philosophical additions. TC, as a nondualistic practical philosophy, offers not only a methodology for refining and detailing nursing epistemology but experiential components. This phenomenological dimension of movement and meditative practice offers opportunities for students to develop embodied awareness of praxis early in their educational process. Aesthetic knowledge development is advanced by TC's emphasis on intuitive growth in the perception of beauty in the present experience. For personal knowing, the meditation effort to understand self in TC philosophy provides a vehicle for nurses to refine therapeutic use of self. TC cultivation of mind-body unity promotes ethical development, leading to examination of broader social issues such as body marginalization. TC philosophy can guide empirical knowing in integrated knowledge development so that the nursing community embraces current understanding of empirical knowing.

In conclusion, TC philosophy and practice provide an opportunity for fluid

inclusive knowledge development at personal and professional levels. Considering the nursing shortage and proliferation of overly accelerated nursing educational programs, it is imperative for leaders in the field to develop an effective guidance system that reinforces respect for individual dignity and embraces human flourishing. To continue

to build a nursing society that honors all patterns of our knowing, including knowledge patterns to be named in the future, we must actively explore alternative systems that provide a new knowledge base that promotes integration, implants praxis, and deconstructs Cartesian hegemony, if nursing is to survive as a science of human caring.

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