

On Mature Happiness: Life Thrives in Sorrow and Calamity

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As a senior researcher who has devoted all his academic career to the development of indigenous psychology, it is my great pleasure to contribute a chapter for this Festschrift in honor of Dr. Paul Wong's 80th birthday. His long-term work in the field of existential psychology has inspired numerous colleagues and followers to reflect on the nature of mainstream psychology; particularly, his efforts in advocating the importance of "mature" happiness has made significant contribution to contemporary psychology by encouraging many psychologists to seek to remedy Western scientific psychology with Eastern philosophies, including Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Mature Happiness

According to Wong and Bowers (2018), as a part of modern Western culture, scientific research on happiness primarily focuses on the pleasant life (hedonic wellbeing) and the flourishing life (eudaimonic wellbeing), with little attention on the third type of happiness, which can best be described as "mature" or "noetic" happiness (Wong, 2017), a positive mental state of inner serenity, harmony, and connectiveness resulting from disciplined self-cultivation of spiritual-existential capabilities. Wong argues that true happiness is a consequence of learning how to live a meaningful life and maintain inner harmony regardless of the circumstances; it is a by-product of seeking meaning (Frankl, 1985).

In his article on Chinese positive psychology, Wong (2016) discusses the position of disciplined self-cultivation in Chinese cultural heritage that may facilitate the mental state of mature happiness. Being the largest nation with the largest history in the world, the cultural heritage of self-cultivation has endowed Chinese people with the character strengths of endurance and patience. Such a cultural heritage has demonstrated itself again and again in their collective history of having survived natural disasters, oppressive regimes, and foreign occupations. Wong (2016) argues that Chinese cultural beliefs, which stem from Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, have provided wisdom to cope with the complexity and vicissitudes of life.

Mencius on How Life Thrives in Sorrow and Calamity

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I strongly agree with Wong's argument. For the sake of explaining how a cultural tradition may have influence on an individual, I developed an epistemological strategy of two steps for constructing culture-inclusive theories: First, construct the universal models of *self* and *social interaction*; second, use those models to analyze a particular cultural tradition (Hwang, 2015a, 2017). In this chapter, I would like to endorse Wong's argument by using my *Mandala* model of self (Hwang, 2011, 2015b) as well as my psychodynamic model of *Self-nature* (Hwang, 2018a, 2018b) to analyze one passage of Mencius' famous sayings on self-cultivation, namely the chapter on "Life Thrives in Sorrow and Calamity" (生於憂患章), which is very popular in Chinese culture:

When Heaven is going to bestow a great responsibility to a particular person (故天將降大任於斯人也), it first trains his mind with various difficult problems (必先勞其心智), exhausts one's muscles and bones (勞其筋骨), starves one's physical flesh (餓其體膚), empties one's body with fatigue (空乏其身), frustrates and confounds all his undertakings (行拂亂其所為).

All those means are designated to exercise one's mind with an ability to control one's temper (所以動心忍性), so as to enhance one's capability to handle problematic situations, which was beyond one's ability before (曾益其所不能).

A person may reform oneself only when he reflects on his own mistakes constantly (人恒過，然後能改), because solutions can be worked out only after the problem has distressed his mind and perplexed his thoughts (困於心，衡於慮，而後作); the whole situation can be understood after things have been evidenced in others' looks and set forth in their words (徵於色，發於聲，而後喻).

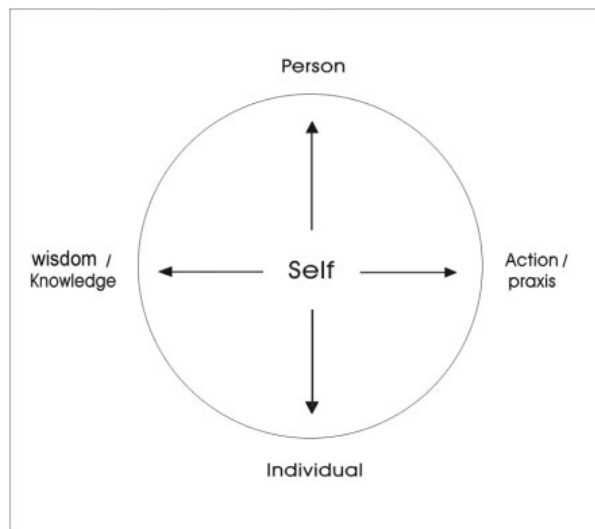
If a state does not have a strong team of legal advisors in court to cope with external calamities from hostile countries, the state will generally come to ruin (入則無法家拂士，出則無敵國外患者，國恒亡). From all these things, we see how life thrives in sorrow and calamity and perishes in ease and pleasure (然後知生於憂患而死於安樂也).

Mandala Model of Self

This passage of Mencius' sayings has been frequently cited by Chinese people for self-encouragement or for the encouragement of others in difficult circumstances and hard times. It consists of three parts: the first two parts can be well-explained by the *Mandala* model of self and the psychodynamic model of *Self-nature* respectively, while the third part is the conclusion of his discourse. First, I would like to present my universal *Mandala* model of self (Hwang, 2011).

In Figure 1, *self* in the circle is situated in the center of two bi-directional arrows: One end of the horizontal arrow points toward *action* or *praxis*, the other end points toward *wisdom* or *knowledge*. The top of the vertical arrow points to *person* and the bottom points to *individual*. All of the four concepts are located outside the circle but within the square. The arrangement of the five concepts indicates that one's *self* is being impinged upon by several forces from one's lifeworld. However, all the five concepts have special implications in cultural psychology, which can be elaborated on with a consideration of Mencius' chapter, "Life Thrives in Sorrow and Calamity."

Figure 1. Mandala Model of Self (adapted from Hwang, 2011, p. 330).



The distinction between *person*, *self*, and *individual* was proposed by Grace G. Harris (1989). Based on an intensive review of previous anthropological literature, she indicated that the triple structure of personality can be found in most cultures worldwide, but these three concepts have very different meanings in the Western academic tradition.

As a biological concept, *individual* regards each human being as a member of the human species who is motivated to pursue resources to satisfy their biological needs, which might be no different from those of other creatures in the universe.

Person is a sociological or cultural concept. A person is conceptualized as an agent-in-society who takes a certain standpoint in the social order and plans a series of actions to achieve a particular goal. Every culture has its own definitions of appropriate and permitted behaviors, which are endowed with specific meanings and values, which can be passed on to an individual through various channels of socialization.

Self is a psychological concept. In the conceptual framework of Figure 1, self is the locus of experience that is able to perform various actions in different social contexts, while also able to indulge in self-reflection when blocked from goal attainment.

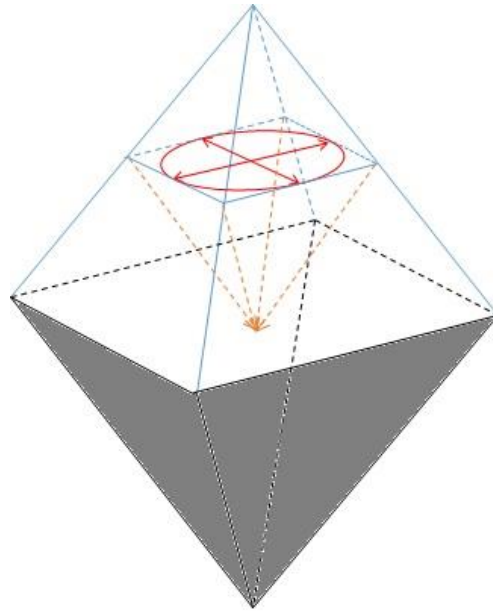
Exercise One's Mind and Control One's Temper

The dual belief in Heaven (天) and spirits (鬼神) is the metaphysical foundation of Confucian morality (Hwang, 2014). Heaven is the transcendent source of Confucian value; its interaction with Earth (地) may have produced everything in the world, including human beings (人). When an individual dies, his spirit may become either god (神) or ghost (鬼), depending on his moral performance or conduct of immorality in the world, but it is impossible for him to become Heaven.

One's fortune or misfortune is determined by the Heaven; therefore, it may "exhausts one's muscles and bones", "starves one's physical flesh", "empties one's body with fatigue"; however, the meaning of an *individual's* biological sufferings is interpreted by one's *self*. If he identifies himself with a sociological *person* and believes that he has been bestowed a great responsibility by Heaven, the meaning of frustration for *actions/praxis* in one's lifeworld might be understood as Heaven's training program, which contains various difficult problems that may "frustrate and confound all his undertakings". At this time, one may find that his *knowledge* is insufficient for his *wisdom* to deal with the problematic situation. If he believes that all these means are designated to exercise one's mind with an ability to control one's temper, he should make up his mind to enhance his capability, which was previously beyond his ability.

The construction of the *Mandala* model of self was inspired by my visit to the Borobudur Temple located 40 kilometers northwest of Yogyakarta, Indonesia (Hwang, 2011). The *Mandala* itself can be conceptualized as a cross-sectional slice of the Borobudur tower, which is actually a tridimensional Mandala. Nevertheless, as I indicated in my article on the "Psychodynamic Model of Self-nature" (Hwang, 2018b), from the perspective of Jung's psychology, even a tridimensional Borobudur tower cannot represent the structure of the whole personality adequately. In the last chapter of Jung's (1969) *Aion*, which was completed in his late years, he tried to depict the structure of the *Self* by quaternary. Among many figures made by Jung, there was an ogdoad composed of two pyramids (see Figure 2). I believe that it can be used to denote the formal structure of *Self-nature* (自性, *zixing*) more adequately.

Figure 2. Ogdoad: Formal structure of Self-nature.



The formal structure of the ogdoad is composed of two pyramids. The tip of the lower upside-down pyramid denotes the moment of conception when one's life begins, while the tip of upper pyramid means the ultimate goal of one's life, which had been defined in various ways by different religions. The quaternity of their common base denotes the moment when a baby was born (Figure 2). The *Mandala* model of self in Figure 1 represents one's *punctual self* (Taylor, 1989), existing at a particular moment of one's life, which should be conceptualized as a tridimensional model like a Borobudur tower or a pyramid.

A complete psychodynamic model of Self-nature is composed of two pyramids: The upper one represents one's course of life, while the opposite one represents one's *collective unconscious*. All previous experiences are stored in the *personal unconscious* with the passage of time from the moment of birth. Thus, the formal structure of the ogdoad represents the topography of *conscious*, *personal unconscious*, and *collective unconscious*.

Capability of Problem-Solving

The second part of Mencius' chapter on "Life Thrives in Sorrow and Calamity" can be interpreted in the context of my psychodynamic model of *Self-nature*. When an individual is facing a very difficult problematic situation which has been defined as extremely important to one's self, he has to mobilize all resources or *knowledge* stored in his *personal unconscious* or even *collective unconscious* to seek for a tentative solution by various means of trial-and-error. He certainly may make mistakes in the process of seeking for a solution; therefore, Mencius emphasized that "a person may reform oneself only when he reflects on his own mistakes

constantly ... because solutions can be worked out only after the problem has distressed his mind and perplexed his thought”.

Sometimes, the problematic situation is much more complicated because it may involve many interpersonal conflicts. In this case, Mencius suggested that one must take into consideration all parties involved for “the whole situation can be understood after things have been evidenced in their looks and set forth in their words”. His suggestion is most applicable to the interaction between a prince and his ministers for discussing affairs of state in the court. This is the reason why Mencius argued that if a state does not have a strong team of legal advisors in the court to cope with external calamities from hostile countries, the state will generally come to ruin.

Conclusion

Conceiving in the context of the psychodynamic model of *Self-nature* (Hwang, 2018b), the mental state of one’s *punctual self* as described by the *Mandala* model (Figure 1) is located at a particular time (t1) in the tridimensional model of *Self-nature* (Figure 2). The *Mandala* model describes one’s time-engaged self, while the model of *Self-nature* depicts one’s whole personality. The Confucian discipline of self-cultivation may expand his *knowledge*, enhance his capability of coping with problems, and transform one’s *self* to a new mental state that enables him to deal with difficult problems easily at a later time (t2), when he may experience mature happiness with inner serenity, harmony, and connectiveness as described by Wong and Bowers (2019).

In this short article, I reinterpret Mencius’ chapter on “Live Thrives in Sorrow and Calamity” in terms of my *Mandala* model and psychodynamic model of *Self-nature* for the sake of illuminating Wong’s idea of mature happiness, which is a significant contribution to the contemporary study of positive psychology. I hope this article may help people to understand Dr. Paul Wong’s contribution in bringing the Asian treasure of wisdom to the West.

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