

Taoist Anchoretism and Intrapersonal Communication: A *Pentad* Approach

Peter Y. H. Chen

National Taipei University, Taiwan

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to suggest adopting Burke's *pentad* theoretical construct to analyze and reshape the anchoretism in Taoism as the tenet in intrapersonal communication. Based on Burke's *pentad*, this paper interprets and discusses briefly (1) The Anchoretism in Taoism as an Act, (2) The Anchoretism in Taoism as a Scene, (3) The Anchoretism in Taoism as an Agent, (4) The Anchoretism in Taoism as an Agency, (5) The Anchoretism in Taoism as a Purpose, (6) The Anchoretism in Taoism as a "Ratio"—the relationships among the elements of the *pentad*, (7) The Contemporary Implications of the Anchoretism in Taoism, (8) Tentative Principles for Intrapersonal Communication as evolved from the Contemporary Implications of Anchoretism in Taoism, and (9) Conclusion. The analysis suggests that the proposed wholesome principles of intrapersonal communication as drawn out from the contemporary implications of Taoist anchoretism would lead to a cognitive and affective foundation on which the interpersonal, group, organization, and mass communications can be feasibly built for the whole human communication mechanism in both theory and practice.

Introduction

At the dawn of the 21st century, when people worldwide are still suffering from terrorism, war, earthquake, SARS, racism, economic recession, and ideology clash, it is a natural tendency for people today to seek a retreat, if available and later feasible, as an anchorite and to conceive anchoretism in its notion and practice which may lead to individual peace and mental equilibrium. It is thus a process as conceptualized in intrapersonal communication in which the inspiring anchorite in relationships, groups, organizations, and societies create, transmit, and use needed mental and physical information to organize with the environment and him/herself. Bearing in mind this process of intrapersonal communication in the realm of anchoretism, the author is drawing on the concept and practice of classical Chinese Taoist anchoretism, represented mainly by *Lao-Tzu* and *Chuang-Tzu*, as the point of departure while applying the *Pentad* framework as submitted by American rhetorician Kenneth Burke to

analyzing the Taoist anchoretism in a systematic and interpretive manner. It is expected that through this application of Western *Pentad* framework approach to the Chinese Taoist Anchoretism could the contemporary inspiring anchorites be enlightened in constructing their own ways of pilgrimage to the desired goal during their intrapersonal communication.

Method

Adopting a qualitative research method (Berg, 1998), this study defines, describes, orientates, interprets, and analyzes the nature and essence of Taoist Anchoretism through Burke's *Pentad* framework with a view to building up intrapersonal communication concept as applied to becoming a contemporary anchorite. The main reasons for selecting Burke's *Pentad* as the tool of analysis for this study are as follows.

First, Kenneth Burke is academically recognized as one of the most unorthodox, challenging, and theoretically sophisticated American literary critics and rhetoricians of the twentieth century. Burke's investigations on how language operates in literary and other discourses as "symbolic action" (Burke, 1966) and how interpretive systems attempt to account for the motives that determine such action may serve adequately as an interpretive and analytical approach to orientating and interpreting the Taoist anchoretism as an intrapersonal discourse and inspiring action evolved from a static textual reading of anchoretism to a dynamic physical engagement in being an anchorite. Besides, since Burke's body of work is interdisciplinary in nature and is a criticism of the discursive behavior of myriad cultural languages, it seems to be methodologically appropriate to interpret Taoist anchoretism, as a purely cultural language, as put in Burke's terminology.

Second, based on what Burke calls "dramatism" (Burke, 1945), which posits five terms necessary for any complete analysis of motive, *Pentad* tends to be a solid, systematic, and practical framework adopted to expound the individual motive Taoist anchoretism, which appears to be abstract, visionary, and even paradoxical in its nature and essence. The *Pentad* scheme is thus a complete conceptual link between Taoist anchoretism and intrapersonal communication. In other words, it is meant to provide a critical vocabulary for isolating individual's motivation in the discourse of becoming a contemporary anchorite whenever applicable and feasible. Readers of little or no background on Taoist anchoretism, in particular, would find *Pentad* particularly helpful in leading their ways systematically to the realm of Taoist anchoretism through their individual process of intrapersonal communication.

Other methods of studying Taoist anchoretism should be appropriate as well in the realm of intercultural communication studies, but Burke's *Pentad* is surely highly recommended to that end.

Definition

By Burke's *pentad* it means "the five key terms of dramatism"—"Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, and Purpose" (Burke, 1945, xvii). Burke refers the Act to "what took place, in thought or deed," the Scene to "the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred," the Agent to "the person who performed the act," the Agency to "means or instruments the person used," and the Purpose to "the final goal of the act to be reached." The anchoretism analyzed and reshaped in *pentad* perspective is to be reconstructed with a view to establishing principles of the intrapersonal communication (the process of communicating within oneself) in terms of retiring to a solitary place for a life of religious seclusion, when desired and practiced by contemporary anchorites, if any, under the Taoism communication context of simplicity, naturalness, and noninterference with the course of natural events in order to attain a bliss of existence in harmony with the Taoist anchoretism.

Analysis and Discussion

The Anchoretism in Taoism as an Act

The anchoretism in Taoism, on which the Taoist Anchorites is mainly based to develop their notion and to practice their deeds of anchoretism, has been fundamentally associated, both physically and mentally, with the traditional tenet of Taoism. The Taoist anchorite's "solitary life in the woods" and the "withdrawal from the world" (Weber, 1968) taking place in thoughts and deeds result from being in compliance with the tenet of Taoism. It has been well known and widely comprehended that the essence of Taoism, when applied to the anchoretism, converges on four dimensions (Lau, 1984; Lin, 1948; Zhu, 1995): (1) impartiality and pure resignation to naturalness (*bu pian bu shi, chun ren zi ran*); (2) doing things by letting things take their own course (*wu wei er wu bu wei*); (3) being void of desire and competition (*wu yu, bu zheng*); and (4) sticking to gentleness and staying humble (*shou rou, chu xia*). A faithful explorer of these four dimensions in Taoism leads to making a well-prepared and pragmatic Taoist anchorite. Wherever and whenever they are, the Taoist anchorites bear in mind that nature treats them as well as other creatures in the world equally, regardless of treating them kindly or unkindly. Even if "Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs" (*Lao Tzu, V*) and even if "It is the way of heaven to show no favouritism" (*Lao Tzu, LXXIX*),

they behave themselves in a manner of willing acceptance. They believe in simplicity because they comprehend that “Man models himself on earth, Earth on heaven, Heaven on the way, and the way on that which is naturally so” (*Lao Tzu*, XXV) and thus they need no excessive or affected doing but follow the “modeling.” Moreover, when the Taoist anchorites engage themselves in the state of no desire and no competition and when they bow to gentleness and stay humble, they live a solitary and seclusive life in which “he is without thought of self that he is able to accomplish his private ends” (*Lao Tzu*, VII) and in which “the supple and the weak are the comrades of life” (*Lao Tzu*, LXXVI). As manifested, the Taoist anchorites, in terms of Burke’s Act, are then in possession of thoughts or deeds of anchoritism bathed in Taoism theme.

The Anchoritism in Taoism as a Scene

Burke’s scene is referred to “the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred,” and it is sometimes explained in rhetoric as “when and where” an act takes place. Generally speaking, the anchoritism in Taoism in historical times happened when people were reaching the old age, when they were seeking “salvation,” as submitted by the mystics, Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu (Weber, 1968), and when they prefer being an anchorite to taking office in the court. For politically frustrated literati, in particular, the situation was that “the anchorite existence was considered the normal form of retirement from politics rather than committing suicide or petitioning for punishment” (Weber, 1968). Almost all of the anchorites retired to a solitary life in the woods or simply to their hometown, where they could withdraw from the “world” and gave their time and strength for “thinking” as well as for mystic feeling (Weber, 1968). In this sense, unlike the anchoritism in Confucianism, in which the anchorites were “forced” to retire to the woods, the anchoritism in Taoism was in a scene of willing and natural self-seclusion. In other words, it could be well-perceived that the background of the anchoritism in Taoism was beyond any specific time and beyond any particular place; it was in the Taoist anchorites’ mind and motivation that determined and shaped the scene of the anchoritism in Taoism.

The Anchoritism in Taoism as an Agent

An agent is “the person who performed the act” according to Burke. As an agent in the anchoritism in Taoism, the Taoist anchorites reveal, reflect, and revive the anchoritism in Taoism in such a way that they adhere firmly to the Way. They treat themselves as part of nature. Besides those four dimensions, simplicity and a spirit of “sparing” as in “In ruling the people and in serving heaven it is for a ruler to be sparing” (*Lao Tzu*, LIX) are also assets of these

Taoist anchorets. They are, however, not rulers of any kingdom, but they themselves are the rulers of their own spirit and mind.

To be expounded further, the anchoretism in Taoism as an agent begins with a sense of negativity and ends with a positivity, as manifested in “He does not show himself, and so is conspicuous; He does not consider himself right, and so is illustrious; He does not brag, and so has merit; He does not boast, and so endures.” (*Lao Tzu*, XXII). This mental process from negativity to positivity characterizes mainly the way of living of the Taoist anchorets when performing the act of the anchoretism in Taoism. Although anchorets have always existed in China, but, in fact, it is the Taoist anchorets, in particular, that perform the essence of anchoretism in that they still cultivate themselves through the process from negativity to positivity in the Way of self-realization and self-revelation.

The Anchoretism in Taoism as an Agency

How the Taoist anchoretism can be reached underscores the agency as “means or instruments the person used,” in Burke’s sense. Previous analyses have paved the way already to locate the key to this question. The means or instruments used by the Taoist anchorets to enter the realm of Taoist anchoretism are by all means those of imitating and merging ourselves with the Way itself. To be more specific, the prerequisite lies in twofold. One is one’s willingness to trace the originality, or “mother of the world” in our universe as stated in “There is a thing confusedly formed, Born before heaven and earth, Silent and void It stands alone and does not change, Goes round and does not weary. It is capable of being the mother of the world” (*Lao Tzu*, XXV). Another one consists in attaining “stillness” as stated in “I do my utmost to attain emptiness; I hold firmly to stillness. The myriad creatures all rise together And I watch their return. The teaming creatures All return to their separate roots. Returning to one’s roots is known as stillness” (*Lao Tzu*, XVI). Both the willingness of tracing the originality and attaining the stillness lead the Taoist anchorets “forsake” themselves from the secular world, a world full of quenching thirst for fame and fortune and full of noise that stifle our hearing the sanity and contentedness. Bearing the prerequisite in mind, one finds that agency, or means or instruments, to be used by the Taoist anchorets are not something concrete but something abstract, something one fails to master well without adopting an attitude of recognizing and accepting the Way in advance. The true Taoist anchorets never fail to do so.

The Anchoretism in Taoism as a Purpose

Burke’s concept of purpose is reaching “the final goal of the act to be reached.” The anchoretism in Taoism as a purpose is actually to reach the realm of the Way, where the Taoist anchorets find their final destination in life. It is a

life, however, of endless self-cultivation in the process of intrapersonal communication because it is an enduring quest for spiritual rather than material bliss. This is conceivably the ultimate purpose for Taoist anchorites regardless of temporal and spatial constructs.

The Anchoritism in Taoism as a “Ratio”

Burke (1972, 1945) introduces the term “ratio” to describe the relationships among the elements of the *pentad*. He submits that all of the terms are consubstantial in that they share in the substance of the act. An act inevitably implies, for example, the idea of an agent, and the idea of an agent who is acting implies the idea of a scene in which the act takes place. Adopting this concept of ratio, the Taoist anchoritism is actually an amalgam of all dimensions in Taoism. The Taoist anchorites may, however, put different emphasis on certain elements in the Taoist anchoritism *pentad*. When the Tao anchorites stress more the “scene-act” ratio, for example, they would, despite the temporal and spatial constructs, look for the “right” time and “concrete” places to perform the “most appropriate” act of retirement or seclusion as a Taoist anchorite.

If the Tao anchorites stress more the “agent-agency” ratio, for example, they would, despite the temporal and spatial constructs, identify and equip themselves in advance with all Taoist anchoritism tenets through all Taoist anchoritism means or instruments as analyzed in Section IV before they start reaching a solid realm to accommodate a Taoist anchorite in deeds and thoughts. In this sense, ratio notion is a non-principle principle to which the Taoist anchorites may live up to determine their own measurement of attaining Taoist anchoritism. What is significant and contributive to Taoist anchoritism here lies in that, under the umbrella theoretical construct of “Taoism,” any aspiring Taoist anchorites are able to take or leave their own ratio naturally and freely at any time and place as long as they can arrive at their final goal of Taoist anchoritism.

The Contemporary Implications of the Anchoritism in Taoism

Following the *pentad*-approach analysis and description of Taoist anchoritism, it appears that the Taoist anchoritism is genuinely inseparable from the Taoism. It implies that, particularly for contemporary people who live in the early 21st century, we are not in need of concretizing a tangible temporal (old age) and spatial (solitary woods) anchoritism to escape from terrorism, war, earthquake, SARS, racism, economic recession, and ideology clash with a view to locating a realm of bliss of existence similar to that in the time of Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu. Culturally or interculturally, the Taoist anchoritism is located in our mind and within our own process of thinking and feeling regardless of our cultural backgrounds. It is, however, an attitude of combining willingness with stillness in Taoist anchoritism, which must be adopted in advance and which,

when transformed to act, must be studied, acquired, and cultivated later endlessly. We are in need of an anchoretism based on such an attitude.

It implies further that the true ramification of Taoist anchoretism for the contemporary people who live in the early 21st century lies in that something in universe does remain unchanged and enduring as illustrated by Lao-Tzu whose lessons have been passed down for centuries. We are thus in need of comprehending and adhering to such a status of being unchanged and enduring in universe by which we find a genuine wisdom which goes beyond Taoist anchoretism and which is beyond words of description. It is a Taoist anchoretism *pentad* without mental and physical boundaries and even “ratio-free” in the long run. Without this approach of essential ramification in Taoism, can we not attain the genuine existence of contentment, be we Taoist anchorites or not.

Tentative Principles for Intrapersonal Communication as evolved from the Contemporary Implications of Anchoretism in Taoism

Based on and evolved from the *pentad*-approach and contemporary implications of Taoist anchoretism as analyzed above, this paper is to suggest several tentative principles for intrapersonal communication process through which the aspiring Taoist anchorites may follow to attain their final goal in their self-constructed anchoretism in Taoism.

First, it is individual-oriented. The aspiring Taoist anchorites adopt their own attitude to interpret the Taoist anchoretism through *Pentad* framework to communicate with themselves. It is of no necessity to consult other peers to reach “consensus” of interpretations of Taoist anchoretism. Personal growth in experiencing the Way may be differentiated but should be strongly encouraged.

Elaborated further, the essence of this principle consists in the individual act of personal dedication to and interpretation of “the four dimensions”— (1) impartiality and pure resignation to naturalness; (2) doing things by letting things take their own course; (3) being void of desire and competition; and (4) sticking to gentleness and staying humble as mentioned earlier, the anchoretism as an act. It varies both mentally and physically for the aspiring Taoist anchorites to engage themselves in the intrapersonal communication process within the realm of the four dimensions in quality and quantity. Temporal and spatial concerns in this respect are also dependent upon the free will and the free agency of the individual aspiring Taoist anchorites. Therefore, conformity and groupism are off limits here in this principle since the Taoist anchorites are unable to limit individual free will and free agency in their individual enlightenment in Taoist anchoretism. Above all, this principle should be followed especially when the Taoist anchorites determine how they intend to set

the “ratio” in Burke’s *Pentad*I, by which the Taoist anchorets themselves locate the ultimate “combination” to reach their goal.

Second, it is systematically knowledge-based. By “systematically,” it means that the aspiring Taoist anchorets should still be in need of a thorough reading of *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu* both cognitively and affectively on a regular basis in the conceptual scheme of *Pentad* with a view to grasping the tenet of Taoist anchoretism and practicing it in daily life in later days. Wisdom of Taoist anchoretism does not come from knowledge itself but come from a systematic approach to it, especially for the “novice” in becoming a Taoist anchoret.

To be specific, this principle would be both educationally feasible and physically constructive if the aspiring Taoist anchorets could read *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu* in a continuum of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Following this principle of gaining Taoism knowledge, they should read, analyze, interpret, and reflect upon the texts of *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu* from time to time prior to becoming a Taoist anchoret. It is thus advisable that the aspiring Taoist anchorets absorb and perceive the meaning of the original texts of *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu*, chapter by chapter and consult and respond to theme-relevant criticism as rendered by, for example, Lau (1984), Lin (1948), and Weber (1968). The more the aspiring Taoist anchorets do the regular readings of *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu*, the better they respond to Taoist anchoretism in theory and practice in a systematic manner. In nature, this principle provides a way to organize one’s mind in enriching the self-perception of the Taoist anchoretism.

Third, it is a process of acquisition based on comparative studies. Sticking to this principle, the aspiring Taoist anchorets should first of all study all relevant forms of anchoretism in all human culture domains in the world in addition to Taoist anchoretism with a view to building up a holistic realm of anchoretism. The “other” relevant forms of anchoretism in all human culture domains may include the Eastern and the Western canonical texts, such as those literary works on Confucianism and Buddhism, the Bible, and the Koran, whenever applicable. The next concrete step is to compare the anchoretism texts of various cultural backgrounds with one another through the intrapersonal communication process as concretized in *Pentad* framework. This step may step into the field of comparative literature, but it is of great significance for the aspiring Taoist anchorets to enrich and enlighten themselves in both theory and practice. In essence, this intercultural principle functions the most effectively especially when people living the 21st century on earth are anxious in finding a universal solution to easing inevitable burdens and depressions upon their exploration of Taoist anchoretism in a contemporary construct.

Last, it is a constant-exposition-based principle of self-realization and self-cultivation. This principle suggests that the aspiring Taoist anchorets must have

a concept that so long as they start searching for the wisdom in the Taoist anchoretism through following the Way, they are constituting an endless and everlasting dialogue within themselves, which will lead to an enriching and updated self. This self is ultimately merging with the Tao. Whenever the process of intrapersonal communication remains in fluidity and fluency in mentality, it paves the way for one to bathe oneself in a wholesome Taoist anchoretism. More specifically, the last principle is focused on being “constant,” the aspiring Taoist anchorers’ goal is actually the one that can be hardly really reached. Day after day, they continue searching for the exposition of Taoist anchoretism throughout their life span in terms of *Pentad* framework, that is, the act, the scene, the agent, the agency, and the purpose in the entire realm of Taoist anchoretism. The exposition of all of these five key elements is thus *constantly* edified by the aspiring Taoist anchorers themselves through their intrapersonal communication process.

To sum up, these tentative principles are expected to be pragmatically functional only when the aspiring Taoist anchorers are willing to humble themselves as an individual self, gain knowledge in a systematic and comparative manner, and look for an endless self enlightenment applying Burke’s *Pentad* conceptual scheme.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that a *Pentad*-approach interpretation of Taoist anchoretism as applied to intrapersonal communication, the very point of departure for all human communication contexts and intercultural understanding, lies in a well-prepared, non-formulaic, and highly adaptive attitude with which one chooses to become a contemporary anchorer. Fundamentally viewed, this attitude is still that of Taoism, which is focused on impartiality and pure resignation to naturalness; doing things by letting things take their own course; being void of desire and competition; and sticking to gentleness and staying humble in whatever communication contexts. It is a mindset, which is by no means a fixed “Tao.” It is rather a mobile “Tao,” a way which “is to the world as the River and the Sea are to rivulets and streams” (*Lao Tzu*, XXXII) in its flowing of naturalness. What remains to be explored further is the *intercultural ratio* to be determined in the *Pentad* continuum by the contemporary aspiring Taoist anchorers while constituting their individual inner monologue and dialogue on human retreat. Ultimately, it is a constant task of study.

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