

“LOVE” AND THE EASTERN SPIRIT: A PHILOSOPHIC PERSPECTIVE

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Philosophy

The human dilemma of love versus hatred has existed throughout development of both Western and Eastern civilization. “Love” is a central concept, a basic ideal and an important practice in Eastern culture. It is a loose term, however, and troubles researchers not only because of its wide range in everyday usage, but also because it is one of those words charged with emotional content. Any systematic examination of love in Eastern civilization would have to take into account the way cultural differentiation has been moved by the complex associations of interpretation, explanation, conceptualization, and theorization of love. For this purpose, this article examines the Eastern concept of love through the following five spiritual sources: Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Moism.

“Devotional Love” in Hinduism

Hinduism emphasizes four ends of life: Kama (love or pleasure), Artha (material possessions), Dharma (moral law or duties), and Moksa (final liberation). Kama, as one of them, is fundamental term in Hinduism. Like Cupid, Kama, also as a personalized god of love with flower-bow and five flower arrows, sends desire quivering into the heart. In *Rig-Veda*, Kama is likened to “the desire of the thirsty steer for water.” In *Brahmanas* and *Upanisads*, He is given an erotic role. For example, when Shiva (one of three basic gods) was engaged in meditation, Kama discharged an arrow at him, to divert his attention to his wife Parvati, but Shiva reduced him to ashes with a glance from his third eye. In response to the plea of Kama’s window Rati (the goddess of affection and the embodiment of wifely love), Shiva restored Parvati’s husband, representing true love. Kama and Rati, attended by Vasanta (spring), denote love’s season. Kama who is linked with Visnu and hence figuratively with love and union embodies the attitude of the sexes, and also, as “bodiless” (Ananga), hovers between lovers intangibly through the mystery of sex. Mystically, Kama is the essence of magic love known and preserved in esoteric doctrines, profoundly inspired by the holy mystery of life.

Bhakti Yoga (one of the four Yogas) is a religious practice to attain Divine Being through devotional love. Feeling devotional love would be a transcendent experience, as *The Bhagavad Gita* says: “I love you well, I will tell you what’s in your best interest. Keep me in your mind, love me, worship me. Sacrifice to me and prostrate yourself before me. I promise you this, in all sincerity, for you are dear to me. Give up thinking in terms of laws. Turn to me and make me your only refuge. I will deliver you from all evil, so have no fear of all evil, have no worries” (Gita, XVIII. 64). Kama, as a Sanskrit noun, denotes the mystical experience within the sphere of love and sex on a divine basis. In *The Atharva-Veda*, love-life means family and married life. The principle and original aim of this doctrine is to make this love-life a success, and to produce a happy and harmonious family—an ideal relationship between a husband, his wife, and their children denoted by phrases as “a love spell with a sweet herb”; “to secure a woman’s love”; “to command a woman’s love”; “the incantation of the lover entering the girl’s home by night”; “two charms to win a woman’s love”; and “to win and fix a man’s love with a plan.” For instance, in the Hindu wedding ceremony, bride and groom are clad in festive garb and sit before a sacred fire, emblem of the love and holiness into which they are entering. *Gita* describes godly love: “He who hates no living creature; who is loving and compassionate, without selfishness and self-seeking, who holds pain and pleasure equally; who is patient, contented, always loyal, full of self-control and steady determination; who fixes his mind and his reason on me and loves me; he is dear to me” (Gita, XII. B, 14). There is a basic virtue for

the Hindu monk—to abide pervading the entire world by love, with great immeasurable freedom from hatred.

In general, love in Hinduism is for a divine purpose. The final end of life is relief from samsara (rebirth), or transfer from the ordinary to the holy life. This liberation or transition combines Atman (the self) with Brahman (the final supernatural being). Devotional love plays a determinative role in the whole religious practice; family love, married love and all secular forms of love are subordinate to the divine love or emotional love of God. Some Hindu romantic ideas are of unadulterated enjoyment. But to be in love with Diving Being or a human being is to expose oneself to many rejections. To an extent, the distinctive nature of Hinduism resides in the caste system, and “love” is also defined in a hierarchical order, and is restricted by this social structure.

“Universal Love” in Buddhism

Sakyamani (Buddha) criticized Hinduism, and emphasized religious equality and universal love. Human life is dukkha (suffering, unhappiness or dissatisfaction) which has two causes—ignorance and desire. Men are bound by three fetters: passion, hatred, and stupidity which could be broken by wisdom and love (or compassion). *Dhammapada* (the Way of Righteousness) discloses: “Never in this world appeased by hatred; It is only appeased by love—this is an eternal law.” (3-5, 201). Only by love, the Way of Righteousness is convinced, will hatred cease. *Majjhima-hikaya* (Middle Collection) states: “if someone curses you, you must repress all resentment, and make the firm determination that my mind shall not be disturbed, no angry work shall escape my lips, I shall remain kind and friendly, with loving thoughts and no secret spite; if you are attacked with fists, stones, sticks, or swords, you must still repress all resentment and preserve a loving mind with no secret spite.” The purpose of Buddhism is to save people from suffering life, to help them share enlightenment, and to purify those whose minds have been in false views arising from hatred.

Buddha enthusiastically advocated a universal love, and did not approve of special love for particular things; “Those who love nothing in the world are rich in joy and free from pain.” Individual love is no good, because it means a limitation of freedom from everyday life. Buddhist inner perfection, purification self-realization, and finally salvation must be guided by the principle of love. One of ten basic virtues which the Mahayana bodhisattva practices during his career is love.¹

In Buddhist view, “the joy of right love or the love of the good,” and “love for Buddha-truth” are two important principles. There should be some kind of consistency among love and self-concentration, self-purification, or self-liberation. On the whole, compassion, sympathy, mercy, and benevolence are “right kinds of love.” For Buddha, the love his disciples cultivate for all humankind must be universal, and different from the individual love—a very emotional, prejudicial, narrowed or illusive love. Unreal love causes suffering and unhappiness; so real love must be the outcome of an infinite withdrawal from ordinary life.

Non-universal love must be given up, for it is one of ten fetters and twelve Nidanas (the linked chain of causes and effects) by which beings are bound to the wheel of existence. Unreal love has same negative meaning as lust, thirst, avidity, and desire, and is interpreted as “coveting and defiling attachment,” and is also defined as a love toward wife and children, or a love toward one’s teachers and elders. This love is the illusion, falseness or unreality of desire, the root of desire, which produces the passions. A personal loving heart is a mind dominated by desire; it is drowned in the ocean of desire, or is born in the fire of desire, or put in prison of desire; from the seed of desire, would get the fruit of desire and attachment—suffering. One of eight sufferings is of being separated from those whom one loves. Unreal

love is just like poison which harms devotion to Buddha. Karma of love which follows desire forces human being into the bondage of rebirth by love of life. When dying, the illusion of attachment fertilizes the seed of future Karma, producing the fruit of further suffering. Unreal love is a cocoon of desire spun about beings, or a wheel of desire which turns men into the same paths of transmigration. In Buddhist stories, the demon of love, as a personified evil power, controls human motives, intentions and behaviors.

The transition from an everyday to an enlightened life is the transition from non-universal to universal love, and only universal love can help human being achieve enlightenment; even the Bodhisattvas (Mahayana saviors) achieve nirvana only through universal love. Universal love comes from the merciful light and the over-spreading cloud of the Buddha's compassion, which means with compassion all things succeed. Bodhisattvas are asked to apply universal love as water nourishes life. The Buddha had a former incarnation—king of merciful power (Maitribala-rajā)—during which, as all his people had embraced the vegetarian life, Yaksas (wild demonic beings who are hostages of people) had no food and were suffering; the king fed five of them his own blood. Avalokiteshvara is the power of the Buddha, appears as his helper and embodies one of the two fundamental aspects of Buddhahood—universal love (mahakaruna), and helps all beings through his limitless love, such as protecting from natural disasters and grants blessings to children. Interestingly enough, Avalokiteshvara switched from a male in India to a female figure in China and Japan, becoming the Goddess of Mercy with the Chinese name Guan-Yin and the Japanese name Kannon; perhaps because the mother's love is boundless and unconditional. Indeed, in the Far East, the Goddess of Mercy—the universal mother, is almost a household word to everybody, as an incarnation and embodiment of universal love.

“Natural Love” in Daoism

The purpose of Lao Zi's Daoism is to emphasize a balance or harmony between Dao (the Way, Final Being, or Ultimate Power), De (Universal Virtue, Supreme Moral Power or Function from Dao), Wanwu (Natural Being or All Things), and Ren (Human Being). De is an infinite chain which links the final being, natural being and human being. De includes six “sub-moral powers”: Ci (the great love, sympathy or compassion), Pu (“uncovered wood” or the great simplicity), Ming (the great brightness or enlightenment), Zhi (the great wisdom or intelligence), Wang (the great transcendence or forgetfulness), and Wuwei (the great creative quietude, actionless action or doing-in-non-doing). Ci—great love—is the most basic of six, as Lao Zi says: “There are three basic precious treasures which I would preserve forever: The first is love (Ci). The second is frugality. The third is humility. Love creates courage...Love can win when fighting, and also can defend a position strongly. Heaven would save those who have love.” (Ch. 67).

Love-naturism and Pan-lovingness are two characteristics of Lao Zi's theory of love. For Lao Zi, “The way of Heaven does not have unequal love.” (Ch. 79). Unlike human beings, nature loves all things (Wanwu); unlike ordinary people, the sage loves all people. The person who has this great love unselfishly saves or helps others. In contrast, if a person's love is for material interests and reputation, he will waste energy and time. Politically, the ruler should “love the people and govern the state without knowing.” (Ch. 10). Self-love is recognized, but it must be combined with “universal love”; “if one loves all people as he loves himself, he could be entrusted to rule the world.” (Ch. 13).

Zhuang Zi, the second founder of Daoism, reconstructed theory of love in a more complete way. He supported Lao Zi's theory illustrated by such expression as “loving all things without favorites,” (*Zhuang Zi* CH. 33) and “favorable love is caused by the destruction of Dao.” He also advocated the following viewpoints:

1. **Love-mysticism.** Zhuang Zi, following Lao Zi's point "loving the people and governing the state without knowing," emphasizes "loving without knowing" (Ch. 12). In an ideal society, all people love each other without knowing what love means. By knowing more, one would be involved in more empirical material interests and physical enjoyment. Supreme love is to love the Way of Heaven which is the final father of all things and all human beings, and will be realized through mystical feeling and communication with Dao. In the final analysis, Dao of love is an integration and balance of Yin and Yang--two cosmic and universal forces.

2. **Love-relativism.** In Zhuang Zi's view, anything finally is a kind of transformation of Dao. There are various transformations and interactions between Heaven-Dao, Holy-Dao, Spiritual-Dao, Material-Dao and Human-Dao and other general or concrete Daos. There is not any absolute standard for these Daos, and also not any absolute standard to judge the Dao of love. For example, if the head of a gang of robbers guesses that there are treasures in a house, it is "intelligence"; if he then gets inside first, it is "courage"; if he gets out last, it is "righteousness"; later, if he distributes the booty fairly, it is "love." Ironically, any great robbers might have the five "virtues." Similarly, tigers and wolves really have "love," because their family members love each other. So the standards of love are really relative, depending on time, place and actual situations.

3. **Love-nihilism.** Zhuang Zi emphasized a transcendent point about love, and assumed that self-purification is "sitting and doing forgetfulness." Most human love actually is not real love. Those ancient saints or sages had absolute freedom without the heavy burden of love, and purified themselves without regard to love. In many cases, to love people is a starting point for harming them, and also the destruction of the lover's own nature.

4. **Love-criticism.** Zhuang Zi's love is based on anti-Confucianism. He criticized Confucius' Ren (love), and defined Ren in a different way. Ren is following the nature of human being and things with impartial love. However, Ren is against nature, and destroys human nature. Good human nature occurs through a natural way, not the artificial moral teachings of Ren. Ren is a lie and a spiritual tool for the rulers. For example, a thief is executed just for stealing little things, but those who "steal" the whole country are titled princes with the name of Ren.

"Humanistic Love" in Confucianism

Unlike Hinduism, Buddhism and Daoism, Confucianism emphasized human affairs and "this life" other than God, gods and "after life." For Confucius, Ren is a central concept and starting point in his thought. Ren can be translated as love, goodness, heartedfulness, or humaneness. Confucian love is much more active, particular and concrete than Hindu, Buddhist and Daoist love. To some extent, Ren is the determinative principle for the harmony, balance and equilibrium among human being. *Analects* says: "only the truly virtuous (Ren) know what to love or hate in others" (IV. 3); "Ren (Human-heartedness) is to love everyone." (XII. 22). Everyone should play a certain "love" role in social relationships or human interactions. Love is a duty, a virtue, a moral conduct, a rational choice, and a social responsibility. Confucius' social ideal is to transform an ordinary man into a superior man, who is called "Jun-Zi" (Superior Man, True Manhood or Man-at-His-Best). Love is one of five basic virtues for Jun Zi. Only from Ren, can Jun-Zi, as a possible member of the ruling class, handle the arts of peace (Wen), the golden mean—correct decision making (Zhong Yong), rectification of names (Zheng Ming) and rule by virtue or the arts of governing (Ren Zheng or De Zhi).

Ren is also the fundamental standard for five basic social relationships: 1) love between ruler and people through Ai-Min (loving the people) and Zhong-Jun (being loyal to the rulers); 2) love between parents and children through Ai-Zi (loving the children) and Xiao-Jing

(respecting the parents by filial piety); 3) love between elder and younger brothers through Ai-Di (loving the younger brother) and Zun-Xiong (respecting the elder brother); 4) love between husband and wife through En-Ai (conjugal or affectionate love in a couple) and also through Yang-Qi (taking care the wife) and Cong-Fu (keeping chastity for husband); 5) love between friends and even strangers through Yi-Qi (righteousness, friendship or brotherhood). Besides, love between the master (the teacher) and the disciple (the student) through Ai-Sheng (loving the student) and Zun-Shi (respecting the teacher) is also very important. Ren (love) is a combination of special and all-around virtue, or a combination of individual and universal love. Ren is general and universal, such as "all men are brothers", and also specific and concrete. Love may be classified and defined through different standards: some kinds of love are more fundamental, significant, and emphatic than others.

Mencius, as a Confucian thinker, says: "He who loves others is constantly loved by them" (*Mencius*, 4b28). Ren is the core of good human nature. Although human nature is good originally, it can become evil through bad influence; "All men have a mind which cannot bear (to see the suffering of) others...If now men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress...the feeling of commiseration...Let them (all men) have their complete development, and they will suffice to protect all within the four seas. If they are denied that development, they will not suffice even to serve one's parents." (2A6). "The rule by love" is a ideal political system; so a good ruler must be virtuous and practice humaneness to people. If a ruler adopted "the rule by force", he would lose his people's heartfelt support, and would be destroyed by the people.

Later, neo-Confucianism continued to reconstruct the theory of love for new social needs. Ren is identified and also unified with love, but it, as a measurement or judgement of love, is variable in an actual context through a rational approach. According to Zhu Xi (the most important neo-Confucian thinker), Ren is a kind of rational love, but love, a kind of emotional Ren; it is the rational basis of love, but love could be expressed by the individual's passion, feeling or intuition. Zhang Zai, a neo-Confucian scholar, discussed Ren or love on a more cosmic or metaphysical basis, not only confining it to the concrete social life. Cheng Hao, another neo-Confucian scholar, asserted that the meaning of Ren is that one feels a oneness with the whole universe and all other virtues as parts of Ren—righteousness, decency, wisdom and honesty. Therefore, universal love is a prerequisite for sagehood. In general, neo-Confucianism examined love through a more cosmic, universal and rational perspective, and some of them also explained love for actual socio-political needs and preserving the moral order.

"All-embracing Love" in Moism

Mo Zi, the founder of Moism—a non-Confucian school after Confucius, criticized Confucius' theory of love profoundly. Mo Zi also considered Ren and Yi (brotherly love, friendship or righteousness) central concepts, but recognized them as an all-embracing or universal love. For him, to follow Ren and Yi is to practice all-embracing love which is a mutual love based on social equality without discrimination, and not determined by any difference between individuals, families, groups, classes, races, religions, professions, or nations.

Accordingly, the father loves himself, and does not love his son, therefore wronging his son, and seeking his own advantage. This kind of problem could similarly occur between brothers, couples, strangers and any other social relationships; it can even explain the reasons of crimes. For example, the thief loves his own house, and does not love his neighbor's; he therefore steals from his neighbor's house to benefit his own. The robber loves his own person, and does not love his neighbor: he therefore assaults his neighbor to benefit himself. Politically, the greater officer loves his own family not his neighbor's; he therefore

throws the neighbor's family into disorder to benefit his own. The prince loves his own state, and does not love his neighbor's; therefore he attacks his neighbor's state to benefit his own. The final cause of all social disorder is a lack of mutual love. Suppose mutual love prevailed throughout the country and men loved others as they loved themselves. Would there be those who were unkind? Universal mutual love will lead to a country's happy order and social harmony. So "We must above all inculcate the love of others." (*Mo Zi*, Ch.2).

All-embracing love is beneficial to all social members. In order to overcome conflicts, problems, crises and other socio-political troubles, the law of all-embracing love by the interchange of mutual benefit must be followed. If one loves others, he will garner benefits; if one hates others, he will garner troubles. People always return love and benefit, or hatred and trouble, to each other. One who loves others will be loved, and one who hates others will be hated; so an ancient poem can give important advice: "Every word finds its answer; every action its recompense. He threw me a peach; I return him a plum."

Mo Zi believed that all-embracing love is advantageous and easily practiced. The only reason it is not practiced is that superiors or rulers do not take pleasure in it. If they encourage it by rewards and praise, and deter those against it by punishment and fines, people would move toward it. All-embracing love is the way of the sage kings, the principle to secure peace for rulers and politicians, and also food and clothes for the myriad people. According to Mo Zi's love-utilitarianism, all-embracing love can provide benefits or utilities to more people and even the whole society, and establish a happy, harmonious order in the long run.

For Moists, all purposes aim at obtaining benefit and avoiding harm. When one cuts a finger in order to preserve a hand, this is to choose the greater benefit and the lesser harm. If on meeting a robber, one loses a finger so as to save one's life, this is a benefit. To love men means to love all men, and not to have all-embracing love is not to love men; otherwise, one cannot consider oneself as a loving man. "When riding a horse, one need not ride all horses in order to regard oneself as riding a horse. For, if one rides only a few horses, one is still riding horses. But when not riding horses, one must ride no horse at all in order to regard oneself as not riding horses. This is the difference between all-inclusiveness (in the case of loving men) and the absence of all-inclusiveness (in the case of riding horses)." (*Mo Zi*, Ch.44). This is a typical Moist reasoning for "all-embracing love."²

Conclusion

The dimensions of Eastern love have been expanded by the tendency of Westernization and modernization, further creating a new basis for cultural differentiation from most Eastern countries. First, capitalization, industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, democratization, human rights, freedom and rule by law, and other social progress or development have established a Westernized value system of love. Second, revolutions, mass movements, political and economic reforms, racial and class conflicts, increasing population and poverty, environmental pollution, and other social changes or crises have demanded a suitable new value system of love. Third, the traditional value system needs to attract the younger generation, and to reform and reconstruct new interpretations and explanations of love. For these reasons, some kind of Westernization of traditional Eastern love, or of Easternization of Western love will be realized in modern Eastern countries.

Notes

1. Mahayana and the Theravada (Hinayana) have different emphases on love. The former stresses universal love to save more people from suffering, but the latter emphasizes self-love in order to purify oneself and attain personal enlightenment.

2. Mencius found the fundamental difference between Confucius' and Mo Zi's love, and criticized Mo Zi by the following: 1) All-embracing love aims to benefit others, and also oneself; but even mutual benefit is too material to be involved in the moral life. 2) It does not recognize classifications of love, such as self-love, family love, and patriotic love. So there will not be any loyalty, filial piety, fraternal piety, and chastity; but one should love his son, family, home town and country much more than others.

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