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Abstract: "Identity" has become a magic word in the disciplines of social sciences and humanities, in which, due to the impact of globalization, scholars examine the concept from different perspectives, including personal, intergroup, cultural, critical, and postcolonial approaches. Unfortunately, the plethora of research seems to further obscure and enigmatize the meaning and nature of identity, and worse, advocates of the importance of establishing, authenticating, or negotiating one's own identity seems to encourage people to tightly hold their own identity. Like a cocoon, this can weave a stronghold, preventing a person from penetrating into the identity of others. Facing this dilemma on the research of identity, this paper offers a critical overview of this line of study and proposes a different view on the nature of the self and identity from the Asian cultural perspective, specifically from the Taoist view. [China Media Research. 2009; 5(4):109-118]

Keywords: Identity, identity theory, self, social identity theory, Taoism

Introduction

"Identity" has become a magic word in the disciplines of social sciences and humanities, in which, due to the impact of globalization, scholars examine the concept from different aspects and encourage people to find, maintain, and negotiate their identity from personal, group, cultural, national and global perspectives. Unfortunately, the plethora of research seems to further obscure and enigmatize the meaning and nature of identity, and worse, the aggressive advocate of the importance of establishing, authenticating, maintaining, or negotiating one's own or group identity seems to encourage people to tightly hold their own ego. Like a cocoon, this has the tendency to weave a stronghold, preventing a person from penetrating the identity of others. Facing this dilemma on the research and practice of identity, this paper first offers a critical overview of this line of study from social sciences' perspectives and then proposes a different view on the nature of the self and identity from an Asian perspective by focusing on the Taoist thinking.

An Overview of Identity Research
Disciplines of Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology

Identity has been a crucial subject in the research among social science scholars. Identity theory and social identity theory represent the two main perspectives in this line of research started in the 1960s. As Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) indicated, identity theory originated from the discipline of sociology, and as a micro sociological theory, it "deals with the structure and function of people's identity as related to the behavioral roles they play in society." Social identity theory originated from the discipline of psychology. As a social psychological theory it "deals with the structure and function of identity as related to people's membership in groups" (p. 265).

Both theories treat the self as constituted by rather than independent of the society and both emphasize the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of the self that intervenes in the relationship between individual behavior and social structure. However, the differences between identity theory and social identity theory, including the level of analysis, the role of intergroup behavior, the relationship between roles and groups, and the salience of social content and identity demarcating the two theories, led Hogg, Terry and White (1995) to argue that it is not advisable to attempt to integrate the two because of such a wide difference between them.

Identity theory mainly conceives the social nature of self as derived from the role positions a person occupies, and the role identities vary with respect to their salience (Stets, 2006; Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker, 1968, 1987; Stryker & Serpe, 1982; Wiley, 1991). Unlike the symbolic interactionist view (Mead, 1934), identity theory treats society as a differentiated but organized system rather than as an undifferentiated whole, thus the self is a multifaceted and organized social construct emerging from one's roles in society, and the variation in self concepts is dependent on the diverse role identities. It is the self-defining role identities that provide meaning for self, though meanings acquired by role identities are originated from social interaction.

In addition, role identities are related to affective and behavioral outcome, and some are more salient than others based on their hierarchical structure in the self concept. The higher position of role identities in the hierarchy of salience represents the closeness to behavior, which would have a different impact on one's affect and behavior in social interaction, including, e.g., one's relationship with or perception and evaluation of others (Callero, 1985). Hence, the salience of role identities is determined by one's commitment to that specific role. In other words, the stronger the affective and behavioral commitment a person has to the role

identity, the stronger the identity salience will be (Stryker, 2003; Stryker & Stratham, 1985).

Social identity theory, originated from Tajfel's (1963, 1969, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) studies on social and cultural factors in perception, cognition and beliefs, mainly deals with the subjects of social self, group processes and intergroup relations. The tenet of social identity theory stipulates that the social category a person identifies or feels they belong to defines who the person is (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg, 2003; Hogg & McGarty, 1990; Turner, 1982). The theory was integrated with self-categorization theory developed in late 1980s (Turner, 1985, 1991; Turner, et. al., 1987), which indicates that one's social identity is dictated by how the self and others are categorized into in-group or out-group. This de-personalized and self-categorized process transforms a person into a group member and individuality into group behavior. As a theory of social group, social identity theory does not construct group process from an interpersonal perspective, but is closely intertwined with intergroup relations. It incorporates role identities in group context and opens up studies on a range of group behaviors, such as conformity, discrimination, ethnocentrism, stereotyping and prejudice (e.g., Condor, 1990; Hogg, 2006; Perez & Mugny, 1990; Turner & Reynolds, 2004).

Although some scholars believed that it is not possible to reconcile the differences of the two theories, more and more scholars felt the need to establish a general theory that can integrate the two theories to avoid the redundancies of studies on the different aspects of the self and the identity. For example, Stets and Burke (2000) argued that the differences between identity theory and social identity theory have more to do with emphasis than in kind, thus the two theories can be linked to establish a more complete picture of understanding the self, which in turn will lead to a stronger social psychology. Stets and Burke further pointed out that an integrated theory needs to consider not only the role and the group, but also the person, as the basis of identity, because the person can provide "stability across groups, roles and situations" (p. 234). In the way role identities penetrate group identities, personal identities represent a set of meanings that make the self an individual and these meanings may overlap the meanings of role identities, though meanings of different identities are from different sources (Stets, 1995). In addition, some aspects of social identities may be based on personal feelings and values, thus one's personal identities can become part of characteristics of social identities (Deaux, 1992). Hence, role identities and social identities are always closely related to personal identities.

More specifically, Stets and Burke (2000) suggested that the fusion of identity theory and social identity theory can be reached from macro-, meso-, and micro-level social process by addressing "agency and reflection, doing and being, behaviors and perceptions as central aspects of the self" (p, 234). For instance, on the macro-level, scholars can investigate whether the participation in a social event is enhanced when an individual is linked to the categories of role identities, group identities, and personal identities. On the meso-level, scholars can discover intragroup and intergroup relations by examining how different assumed roles in a group affect one's identification with the group or attitudes towards out-group members. Finally, on the micro-level, through the integrated analysis of the role, the group and the person, an individual's motivational factors such as self-esteem and authenticity can be better understood.

The entangled relationship of the study of identity between psychology and sociology is even worse if we look at the study from traditional approaches. According to Cote and Levine (2002), identity formation and identity maintenance are the two major traditions for the study of self and identity in psychology. The two traditions were originated from Erikson's (1968, 1980) works, which mainly dealt with the three concepts of ego identity, personal identity and social identity. These three concepts represent the three forms of continuity, including the sense of identification of the self with itself, the relationship between the self and the other, and the integration between other and other.

The line of research on identity formation was further elaborated by Marcia's (1966, 1980, 1993) identity status paradigm, and the line of research on identity maintenance, or self-psychology, stemmed from the works of Colley (1902), James (1948), and Mead (1934), and was further developed by Gergen (1971, 1972, 1991) from a postmodern perspective, in which he identified the romantic, modern, and postmodern as the three periods scholars in the West used to study the self. Unfortunately, the progress of the research on the self and the identity from the psychological perspective continues to suffer from the problems of being unable to fully appreciate Erikson's classification of the three different identities (i.e., ego, personal and social) and to adequately theorize the concept of "social" (Cote & Levine, 2002).

The sociological approaches to the study of identity, according to Weigert, Teitge, and Teitge (2007), were also inspired by Erikson's early works on identity and developed five distinct sociological traditions. First, the Chicago School of symbolic interactionism, represented by Blumer (1969), Goffman (1959), Hewitt (2006) and Srauss (1959), focuses on the emergent and procedural nature of social reality. Second, the Iowa School of symbolic interactionism, represented by Kuhn and McPartland (1954), McCall and Simmons (1978), Stryker (1968), Tajfel (1981) and Zurcher (1977), puts an emphasis on the structural and fixed nature of social

reality. Third, the sociology of knowledge and interpretive sociology, represented by Berger and Luckmann (1966), emphasizes that the social reality is embedded in cultural and historical circumstances and directly influences the well-being and survival of human beings. Fourth, the structural-functionalist perspective, rooted in Durkeim's (1964) works and represented by Parsons (1968), argues that social order and continuity are maintained by the interdependent subsystems of the society, thus social identity is embedded in the society's institutional structure. Finally, the critical theory of the study of identity developed by Habermas (1974) stipulates that identity is grounded in the relationship between individual and social development, and the interactive-communicative, the cognitive-affective, and the social-structural represent the three levels of analysis in the study of identity.

The abundant tradition of sociological approaches demonstrates its theoretical richness to the study of identity. However, this theoretical richness also reflects the lack of empirical correspondence in many of its theoretical claims (Cote & Levine, 2002). The lack of empirical evidence inevitably led to the difficulty of reaching a consensus among scholars regarding the study of identity. Similar to Stets and Burke's (2000) argument for the integration of identity theory and social identity theory, Cote and Levine (2002) also advocated for the convergence between psychological and sociological approaches to the study of the self and the identity in order to better understand the process of identity formation and maintenance, especially through the examination of the relevance of "structure" and "agency" and the extent of "inner" versus "outer" origin when conceptualizing identity.

In the discipline of anthropology, the study of identity is tightly tied with the concept of culture and related concepts such as boundary, space, place, authenticity, ethnicity and community originated from culture (e.g., Auge, 1995; Barth, 1969a;, 2000; Cohen, 1985, 2000a; Gupta & Gerguson, 1992). According to Cohen (2000b), the formation, expression, management and stability of collective identities are discriminated based on the cultural boundary. Cultural differences usually create a boundary that distinguishes people on both sides not only by degree, but by kind. Thus, the identity within the boundary is construed as being authentic and absolute by people in the group.

The authenticity of the social or cultural identity can be enhanced by the presence of the other, however, through the cross-boundary interaction, the identity may become contingent and fluid, in that what seems peripheral to the center of a culture may not be noticed across the boundary line and therefore becomes the center in the peripheral area. Hence, the ascription of a group or cultural identity is possibly subjected to the cross-boundary struggle for control, which indicates that the cross-boundary interaction may contest the collective identity within the group itself.

Identity is then encapsulated by the boundary which marks the beginning and the end of a group or community, and the cultural experience of the group is a bounded symbolic whole covering with a range of meanings for the development of norms and values that in turn provide a collective sense of identity (Cohen, 1985). The sustainment and maintenance of a coherent collective identity must be through time, such as a collective memory and lived and shared traditions, and space, such as a mapping of territory and the principle of inclusion and exclusion (Morley, 1995). Barth (1969b) further pointed out that ethnic boundaries exist despite the interaction of people between two different communities, thus geographic and social isolation are not the critical factors in sustaining cultural differences, though the bounded ethnic group and the management of ethnic identity are influenced by the presence of significant others and subject to the on-going negotiations of boundaries between groups of people. Barth (2000) further argued that boundaries provide a template in which distinct categories of the mind are separated. When dealing with the boundary relations, it is then important to tend to members' lived experiences and cognitive categories attributed by interacting with those who are across boundaries. Therefore, ethnic identities are interdependent, and they are the product of a continuous process of ascribing and self-ascribing and are maintained through a relational process of inclusion and exclusion.

The emphasis on the concept of culture diverts anthropologists' attention from the aspect of self and individual in the study of identity (Sokefeld, 1999). It is ironic that, given the importance of the concept of culture in anthropology, scholars in the discipline are unable to give a more focused view on the cultural perception of the self or person and how it affects the emergence of identity. Furthermore, many questions regarding the study of identity from the discipline of anthropology are still left unanswered. For example, if identity is fluid and changes over time and is reshaped by interactions with members of different ethnic groups, could we say that a group really possesses an identity and this chameleon-like identity can be considered as being authentic (Cohen, 2000)?

The Discipline of Communication Studies

The study of identity in the communication discipline is mainly conducted from the intercultural communication perspective, which extends the line of research in social sciences, specifically from the traditions of Tajfel's social identity and Barth's ethnic identity. Intercultural communication scholars basically agree that identity is socially constructed, interactive, negotiated, relational, multifaceted and space claimed

(e.g., Collier, 1997; Drzewiecka & Nakayama, 1998; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1988; Hecht, 1993; Jackson, 1999, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1993). On the basis of this perception of the nature of identity, research on this subject from communication scholars tends to lean toward the investigation of how identity is constructed through and affects interaction and how it is influenced by dominance and power from the aspects of intergroup approach, cultural approach, critical cultural approach and postcolonial approach (Shin & Jackson, 2003).

The intergroup approach applies social identity theories to explain the role social identity plays in the process of inter-ethnic communication from the perspectives of uncertainty reduction and ethno‐lingusitics (e.g., Giles & Johnson, 1987; Gudykunst, 1993; Gudykunst & Lim, 1986; Kim, 1986). The cultural approach treats communication competence as a culturally and ethnically specific variable. Identity in this approach is considered a cultural product and is formed through culture embedded in group members' interaction. Thus ethnic or cultural identity as the feeling of belonging to an ethnic culture is defined by competently using the cultural symbols and affirming the beliefs, norm and values in that specific cultural context (e.g., Carbaugh, 1996; Collier & Thomas, 1988; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau, 1993; Philipsen, 1975, 1992).

The critical cultural approach is grounded in the sociological perspective of critical theory and further developed by Hall (1990, 1996) through his studies on media presentation of race, identity, culture and ethnicity. This approach views identity as an ideological construct and representation of power structure, which mirrors the political inequality and oppression towards class, gender and race (hooks, 1984, 1992; van Dijk, 1991). Employing the critical cultural approach, intercultural communication scholars have tried to deconstruct the discursive formation of identity and to demystify the structural oppression of marginal groups in the United States (e.g., V. Chen, 1997, Nakayama, 1997; Mendoza, 2002; Orbe, 1998). The approach was also extended to study the ethnic identity of Asian-Indian immigrants (Hedge, 1998), gender identity (Houston, 1992; Jackson & Dangerfield, 2002; Moon, 1999), and the dominance of whiteness (Nakayama & Martin, 1999; Rowe, 2000). The challenge of Eurocentrism from Afrocentric and Asiacentric paradigms is also a strong trend embedded in this approach (e.g., Asante, 1980, 2006, 2007; Chen, 2006; Chen & Miike, 2006; Dissanayake, 1988, 2003; Gunaratne, 1991, 2005; Halualani, 2008; Miike, 2003, 2007).

Finally, Shin and Jackson (2003) proposed a future direction of identity research from a postcolonial approach, which can be treated as an extension of the critical cultural approach and is based on the works of Bhabha (1983, 1994) and Spivk (1986, 1987), as an alternative to the Eurocentric or white-centric perspective. The basic assumption of this approach to the self and the identity is that, according to Shin and Jackson, "the *other* identity is imposed and inscribed by power structures (or colonizers) in a hegemonic way that needs to be *de*-scribed toward reconstruction of a self" (p. 224).

Thus, the postcolonial approach toward identity claims that the forgotten or erased true self should be recovered through cultural discourse, by which cultural differences of class, culture, gender, race and skin color can be recognized and deconstructed through the process of rejecting the other. The formation of cultural identity from this perspective is then based on an authentic, unique and indigenous self, where a cultural space is claimed and the collective selfhood can be interplayed with in-group and out-group elements. Most studies from the critical cultural approach previously mentioned show the tenet that the reconstruction of the self is the fundamental principle of reconstituting cultural identity.

The inheritance of research outcomes from other disciplines of social sciences and approaching identity from the intercultural communication perspective gives communication scholars an advantage in perceiving the concept of identity from interactive and relational aspects and in seeing the tension between the self and the other. However, the cross-cultural advantage did not give intercultural communication scholars advantages in conceiving the foundation of identity, i.e., the self, from an angle that is different from traditional social sciences. In other words, the way to treat the concept of the self and the identity is still confined or dominated by the Western thinking and practice. In order to remedy this problem, the following section attempts to provide an alternative view on the study of the self and the identity.

An Alternative View on the Self and the Identity

As Geertz (1979) indicated, the Western culture conceives the person as a dynamic center of awareness, emotion and action. As a unique and bound universe, the self has a clear sense of direction, purpose and volition, and through the realization of the true selfhood, the individual identity is established. Hence, the self from the Western perspective is characterized as autonomous and egocentric, and it is then important to attend to the self, to assert the self, and to emphasize one's difference from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Ho (1995) also pointed out that this Western individualistic self is treated as the center of the universe through which the world is perceived, and to develop a sense of personal control becomes essential for building and holding the centrality and sovereignty of the self.

In addition, a sharp demarcation between the self and the other and a clear distinction between subject and object or the duality of self-as-subject and self-as-object are made. On this basis, identity is the same as the self, which makes a human being a person, and inconsistency

between the two means the loss of identity and the challenge of individual existence. The extension of similarities between the self to others through sharing certain characteristics of the same group therefore makes up the social, group or ethnic identity (Sokefeld, 1999).

Being a subject of inquiry in the disciplines of social sciences, the Western conceptualization of the self and the identity has been facing challenges from the perspectives of cross-cultural study, feminism, social constructivism, systems theory, critical theory and deconstructionism (Sampson, 1989). The cross-cultural research has provided alternative views on the self and the identity from different cultural traditions. Feminists propose distinct views of person through the reconceptualization of the patriarchal way of perceiving human life. The social constructionists assert that the self and the identity are socially and historically constructed rather than occur naturally. The systems theory sees the self and the identity as being relational rather than independent entities. The critical theory argues that the self and the identity are created for ideological purposes. Lastly, deconstructionists challenge the centrality and the sovereignty of the self and its relationship with the society. These counteractions to the study of the self and the identity open up a venue for exploring the subject from different points of view. This section provides a different view from Asian cultural traditions by focusing on the Taoist perspective.

Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Taoism form the foundation of Asian philosophical and religious thoughts, and each of the four traditions provides a specific view on the self and the identity. As the dominant paradigm of social life in Far Eastern areas, Confucianism postulates an ethic guideline, based on *wu lun* (the Five Codes of Ethics), which governs the five basic human relationships of ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and between friends. The structure of these relationships is particularistic, hierarchical, reciprocal, interrelated, formal, and ingroup-outgroup distinct (Chen & Chung, 1994; Yum 1988).

The self is demonstrated through the role one plays in this relationship network. Ho (1995) indicated that the Confucian self is a relational self, which emerges only in the social presence of other interactants. The Confucian identity is then a relational identity defined by one's social relationships. The self in Confucianism is therefore a subdued self; to realize the selfhood through self-cultivation in a harmonious relationship is the ultimate goal of human life (Tu, 1985). This relation-centered perception of the self dictates that the meaning of a person's life is not complete without the presence of the other, which will lead to the loss of meaning of one's identity.

Hinduism considers the self an illusion originated from ignorance; thus an individual identity has no way

to exist. If there is a true self, it will be identical with the ultimate Brahman. To Hinduism, the realization of the true self, or Atman, means the total loss of individual identity or a surrender of the self to the absolute, ineffable and ubiquitous Brahman (Ho, 1995). Similar to Hinduism's deconstruction of the ego, Buddhism, originated from the doctrine of Hinduism, holds a view of nonduality on the distinction of the subject and the object and the self-other demarcation must be negated. The Buddhist goes one step further to claim that the realization of selfhood cannot be sought, because the self doesn't exist at all. The nonself view denies the very existence of the self and therefore the individual identity. The universe is in constant flux; there can be no permanent entity.

In other words, the Buddhist thought of *anicca* (impermanence) dictates that everything that comes into existence will also cease to exist at a certain point in time. The temporary existence of things is subject to the law of *paticcasamupada* (causes and conditions), when the causes change, so the things will change, too. Although these causes step up together and dependently originate or conditionally co-produce (*paticcasamupada*) the transient existence, the interrelatedness of causes of all things provides Buddhism a chance to advocate that people should liberate themselves through meditation to reach the state of nirvana, in which there is the total detachment from or no more transmigration of the impermanent self or identity (Watts, 1957).

Taoist View on the Self and the Identity

Compared to the views of Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, the Taoist takes a different route to deal with the self and the identity. Unlike Buddhism and Hinduism, Taoism recognizes the existence of the self and the identity, but not like the Confucian relational self, which is an extension of or defined by social relationships. Instead, the self is but a manifestation of the Tao; it is identical with and equally co-produces with the universe. To the Taoist, the duality of subject and object and the demarcation of the self and the other are negated in the oneness of the Tao. This negation of the duality doesn't imply the undifferentiating between the self and others, but refers to no fixed ideas of the self or to selflessness by giving a total freedom to the individuality or individual identity, which allows the interpenetration and interfusion between the two polarities (Starosta & Chen, 2003). This is different from Hinduism, because after being identical with the Tao, the self or the individual identity will not be lost.

Transcending one's egocentricity results in freedom from partiality and partisanship and achieving equalitarianism among the co-existences. In order to reach this co-existing state within the Tao, the great empathy of the self needs to be acquired (Chen & Starosta, 2004). The great empathy completely rejects

the distinction between subject and object through the process of *wang wo* (forgetting myself), which leads to the transformation of all things, as Chuang Tzu indicated in the chapter of *Qi Wu Lun*:

> Once I, Chuang Chou, dreamt that I was a butterfly and was happy as a butterfly. I was conscious that I was quite pleased with myself, but I did not know that I was Chou. Suddenly I awoke, and there I was, visibly Chou. I do not know whether it was Chou dreaming that he was a butterfly or the butterfly dreaming that it was Chou. Between Chou and the butterfly there must be some distinction. [But one may be the other.] This is called the transformation of things. (Chan, 1963, p. 190)

Through the process of transformation, "The universe and I exist together, and all things and I are one" (p. 186). In other words, things are identical rather than relative, for "this" and "that" produce each other, imply each other, and are identical with each other. As Chuang Tzu further stated:

> There is nothing that is not the "that" and there is nothing that is not the "this."…Therefore I say that the "that" is produced by the "this" and the "this" is also caused by the "that." This is the theory of mutual production.… The "this" is also the "that." The "that" is also the "this."…When "this" and "that" have no opposites, there is the very axis of Tao. (pp. 182-183)

Being aware of the identification and interpenetration of opposites or polarities is the key to releasing the tension between the self and the other or between two individual identities. It forms the realm of *da tong* (grand interfusion), mirroring a picture of wholeness of parts that shows the unity of dualities, the reconciliation of opposites, and a unity in multiplicity. Thus, the Taoist teaching of cultivating egoless selfhood aims to free a person from the four great hindrances of preconceptions, predeterminations, obduracy and egoism stipulated by Confucius in order to bring out what is hidden within the self to activate the process of concrescence or unity within multiplicity (Chang, 1963).

According to Chen and Starosta (2004), the achievement of great empathy that leads to the state of grand interfusion requires two human abilities: creativity and sensitivity. Creativity is the basis of egolessness. It refers to being free from the entanglements of time and space, while at the same time it identifies with all those that are temporal and spatial with common essence. The interaction between the detachment from and identification with the self and the other therefore produces abundant potentialities and

possibilities within the realm of Tao. More specifically, creativity is moving from one to many by expanding the unity to diversity, and engenders the manifold diversities of existence.

Sensitivity, on the other hand, contracts the diversity into unity by moving from many to one through the process of differentiation and discrimination, and provides a field where creativity can produce and reproduce potentiality and possibilities. In the process of interaction through sensitivity an individual is able to obtain "shared communication symbols and project the self into another person's mind by thinking the same thoughts and feeling the same emotions as the person" (p. 13). Hence, the contraction and expansion between sensitivity and creativity manifests the infinite interfusion and interpenetration of diversities in unity and the potentiality of unity in each diversity (Chang, 1963).

It is here we see the potential contribution of Taoist thinking in presenting an alternative view on the self and the identity that is different from the Western practice and other Asian philosophical and religious thoughts. The free movement between subject and object or between the self and the other demonstrates the ability to release the stronghold of the ego, penetrating the cocoon, overcoming the boundary, and diminishing the wall between two or more individual or group identities.

Conclusion

The rapid increase of intercultural communication due to the impact of globalization has impacted the meaning and the study of the self and the identity. The dominant Western value of individualism indicates that an individual should strive for independence from others by attending to the self and asserting and manifesting one's unique personal attributes. The emphasis on differences between the self and the other is likely to deepen the misunderstanding in the dynamic process of intercultural interaction if both parties are not equipped with the abilities of empathy or sensitivity. In order to project a distinct identity, a person may be subdued to hold oneself as a castle or cocoon by building a wall or an impenetrable boundary to exclude the other.

In contrast, the Taoist advocates the importance of attending to the self and the other simultaneously by fitting in and being harmoniously interdependent with each other. The authenticity of each other's identity is held and then both identities are integrated into one within the Tao through the process of interpenetration and interfusion, which is based on the abilities of creativity and sensitivity. The Taoist method of treating the self and the identity not only avoids the pitfalls of Western's individualism and over-emphasis of the self and individual identity, but is also free from the potential oppression of the self in Confucian teachings,

which aim to cultivate oneself for the purpose of being defined by the other, and from the annihilation view of the self and identity advocated by Buddhism and Hinduism.

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