

Value Implication of The Aesthetic Education Thought of The Tao Te Ching

Zeng, Xiaohui¹ & Peng, Ngoi Guat^{2*}

^{1,2}Sultan Idris Education University, Tanjong Malim 35900, Perak, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: gpngoi@fbk.upsi.edu.my

Received 15 March 2025, Revised 29 March 2025, Accepted 12 April 2025, Available online 13 April 2025

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.53797/ujssh.v4i1.35.2025>

Abstract: The idea of aesthetic education in the Tao Te Ching has profound implications, not only the in-depth portrayal of aesthetic experience, ideal personality and aesthetic realm, but also the right vivid interpretation of the cultural essence of "educating people with beauty". The ideas of aesthetic education contained in Tao Te Ching can profoundly influence the active factors in the principles, profound contents, educational goals, and practical approaches of modern aesthetic education. The idea of aesthetic education contained in the Tao Te Ching has important value implications such as building an aesthetic personality, cultivating self-awareness, strengthening goal guidance, and motivating self-education. The excavation of the value implication of the aesthetic education ideology of the Tao Te Ching is an important practice to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of the excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Keywords: Tao Te Ching; aesthetic education; value implications; natural harmony; self-education.

1. Introduction

Lao Tzu advocated the problem of human alienation in the society at that time to deal with the problem of "Taoism and nature" and "rule by inaction" and believed that the natural state of human beings is free and positive. In the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu maintains the pursuit of "Taoism and Nature" and "Governance by Inaction" on individual people, who as individuals in society and a part of nature, must struggle against their inner desires, emphasizing the freedom of people to pursue ideals at the spiritual level (Laozi, 1996).

Although the aesthetic education thought in the Tao Te Ching has a tendency to overindulge in spiritual freedom and prevents the imprisonment and suffering of reality, it has an essential feasible illumination for modern aesthetic education consideration, such as people in modern society must cultivate their unique sense of consciousness, develop aesthetic thinking, and mold their own capabilities, and the aesthetic education thought of the Tao Te Ching that encourages humans to provide constructive momentum and motivation for the growth of modern society by emphasizing self-care and self-improvement (Laozi, 2009).

Instead, they enjoy the natural splendor of existence, which is like heaven on Earth. The Tao Te Ching is essentially a transmission of this soul-liberating truth. It asserts that the sage prioritizes three virtues above all others: humility, moderation, and compassion. Tao Te Ching, a religious scripture published in China approximately 600 BC, advises practicing non-action by contemplating the nature of the world. Tao Te Ching initially expressed the concept of Wu Wei, which means to do nothing, and orderly would triumph (Bai and Lee, 2023). The Tao Te Ching, commonly referred to the text of the Way, serves as a perennial guidebook on living. Its principal character, the Master, lives in perfect harmony with the Tao, the universe's irreducible core. Giving yourself a life to the Tao, as demonstrated by the Master, leads to completeness and inner peace (Rattanapun, 2025).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Abandon excessive utilitarianism and build an aesthetic personality

For human beings, how to pay attention to people's hearts after satisfying their basic survival needs such as clothing, food, shelter and transportation, and what is the true meaning of human existence in society? This is an important topic of the times that our modern society needs to solve, and the aesthetic education thought contained in Tao Te Ching can

*Corresponding author: gpngoi@fbk.upsi.edu.my

<https://ujssh.com/> All right reserved.

fully demonstrate the inexhaustible vitality and vitality of the aesthetic education thought of the Tao Te Ching (Jian and Lay Kee, 2024).

Lao Tzu emphasized in the Tao Te Ching that it is a "poetic" aesthetic way of life, believing that it is necessary to live with an aesthetic attitude, adhere to people's own "natural" heart consistently, build a good aesthetic personality with the "scale of beauty", subvert the inert thinking brought about by the difficulties and imprisonment of real life with poetic sensibility, promote the free and all-round development of people, and help build a true, good, and beautiful aesthetic personality for people in modern society (Xie and nasir, 2024).

(a) Guide the construction of an aesthetic personality that unifies truth, goodness, and beauty. Lao Tzu's pursuit in the Tao Te Ching is an aesthetic personality, and the essence of aesthetics lies in transcendence, so that people can detach themselves from the temptation and limitations of objective fame and fortune in society, to form people's natural attitude towards life, and get rid of the restrictions of fame and fortune, objective conditions, and physiological conditions. When an individual person experiences this aesthetic transcendence, the spiritual world of man is filled with a sense of nature. It is only when people truly feel this spiritual freedom that it is possible to construct an aesthetic personality that is the unity of truth, goodness and beauty.

In the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu respects the legitimate value of "non-action" for individual survival, rather than judging personal value only based on the "promising" criteria of "benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, and faith" at that time. We can see from Lao Tzu's descriptions of different identities such as "people", "kings" and "saints" in the Tao Te Ching that what Lao Tzu pursues is spiritual freedom, the aesthetic personality of truth, goodness and beauty. "The spirit of beauty is the pursuit of freedom and transcendence, beauty lies in the freedom of the practical subject, and the aesthetic pleasure lies in the fact that people take care of their own transcendence of necessity or destiny in the object" (Tan Chuanbao, 1996).

Lao Tzu aestheticized life and showed an "aesthetic spirit", but the construction of an ideal personality must be deeply rooted in the background of social development and the times and be based on the real material world. The idea of aesthetic education in the Tao Te Ching puts forward the proposition that "goodness is like water", believing that water is good at nourishing and growing all things, but it does not fight or grab, and is in a place that everyone hates and does not want to go, but it is precisely because of this that water is the closest to the "Tao".

Eventually, Tao Te Ching admonishes us to maintain a humble attitude like "water", not to be troubled by world fame and fortune, to be too conceited and arrogant, and to emphasize that self-centeredness is not conducive to the way people get along with each other. The way people get along with each other is related to whether individual people can construct an aesthetic personality that is unified with truth, goodness and beauty.

(b) Promote the all-round development of human morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor. Following an extended time of development and expansion, someone fellow humans in contemporary society are completely distinct from animals in the natural world, and human beings have been treated as competent to control their instincts to satisfy material inclinations, germinate and progressively develop self-improvement, self-esteem, self-love of human nature, and a sense of accountability and objective for the community, society, and even the entire natural world (Sankheangaew, 2023).

These are the valuable qualities of "people," and the aesthetic personality traits represent the condensing and sublimation of such important characteristics, while the overall development of human morality, intelligence, physical fitness, beauty, and labor is a complement and tribute for the beautiful aspects of these human natures. Aesthetic objects provide spiritual freedom and all-round growth that is no longer confined by materialism, and aesthetics is a method of awakening individuality (Jeng et al., 2022).

Sigmund Freud split the personality into three parts: the "id," the "ego," and the "superego," with the "id" serving as the personality's basis, representing nature's primordial urges and wants. The "id" has nothing to do with the so-called "good" and "evil" rulers and is frantic to pursue worldly interests, whereas the "superego" is the moral "me". It adheres to what is called the "morality" concept, and the "self" is the true "me" who not merely has to fulfill its own wants but additionally adheres to societal standards, managing the "id" and "superego" (Sibi, 2020).

According to Sigmund Freud, personality is realized via the harmony and unity of the three. Lao Tzu's "Tao Te Ching" emphasizes that people must constantly surpass "self" in order to achieve holistic growth, strengthen the standard of individual's spiritual realm, foster a harmonious growth of humans and others, society, nature and human beings, as well as encourage the complete growth of human morality, intelligence, physical fitness, art, and labor (Shiyu, 2024). "Integrity," as the cornerstone of human existence, is not just a traditional character of the Chinese people, yet an essential component in developing an ideal aesthetic identity. Tao Te Ching promotes for individuals to restrict their subconscious desires for wealth and adhere to the "noble words of virtue," assuming that individuals ought to possess positive characteristics and virtues such as kindness, integrity, intelligence, strength, and elegance, and that they should not only be rigid with themselves, yet additionally deal with other people with sincerity, demonstrating a harmonious "human beauty" (Loway and Nurochman, 2023).

2.2 Strengthen the guidance of goals and advocate natural harmony

As contemporary civilization approaches the age of "digital survival," it symbolizes great scientific and technical development for humanity, yet there additionally exist certain adverse effects, such as isolation and hostility between man and environment, as well as the breakdown of humanist principles. The appreciation and search of natural beauty, the valuing of human beings, the search for human spiritual liberty, and the enhancement of human creativity and skill, among other things, confront fact alongside an aesthetic attitude and demonstrate the vital authority that makes one a human being, ensuring that each of us have no longer been restricted to the restriction and opposition of actual existence (Sankheangaew, 2023).

(a) Encourage people's spiritual independence via the "beauty of harmony". According to the average human being's lifespan, it is just a hundred years, yet in that little amount of time, there are sometimes thousands, if not thousands, of decades of thinking and grief. As members of society, people will undoubtedly become engaged with the quest for power and money, as well as the search for notoriety and wealth in their everyday lives (Hua, 2023).

In this situation, people frequently demonstrate a psychological disorder of "losing their hearts to things and losing their ambitions to the world". And Lao Tzu's focus on "harmony" in the "Tao Te Ching" is precisely the proper remedy. The notion about "harmony" in Lao Tzu's "Tao Te Ching" is not simply a straightforward figurative timid agreement; every individual is capable of being at tranquility, nevertheless not solely in their external way individuals acting in the world at large, yet within one's internal aesthetic cultivation and psychological state, which is a manifestation of "impulse and harmony" (Zu, 2023).

(b) Enhance people's perception of life with the "beauty of life". The Tao Te Ching asserts that "man is the law of the earth, the earth is the law of the sky, and the heaven is the way of the law," implying that humans should obey natural laws. This notion is expressed in the content of modern aesthetic education as the pedagogical concept of getting back to fundamentals. Considering preservation as well as functioning of existence is the foundation of every one of human acts, with mankind ought to keep an optimistic mindset regarding his individuality and self-consciousness, if man's "body" no longer exists, anything that survives will be stripped of its primordial significance (Liang and Segalas, 2024).

As a result, Lao Tzu advises individuals never to give up optimism about existence and to make the most of their short time. The "rebirth of noble form" recommended in the Tao Te Ching is favorable to the creation of a right viewpoint on living for young individuals along with human societies, confronting the critical relevance of "form" for individuals and truly grasping the "beauty of life" that individuals possess (Xiaolong and Sisi, 2023).

(c) "Simple beauty" might assist individuals improve their aesthetics. In the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu contends that "seeing simplicity and embracing simplicity, less selfishness and few desires", "plain" and "simple" constitute a condition that reflects validity and purity without alien and unnatural embellishments. The term "simple beauty" refers to an aesthetic characteristic with foreign and unnatural carvings that stems from the natural splendor of objects (Bai and Lee, 2023).

Lao Tzu once pointed out in the Tao Te Ching that "the five colors make people blind, the five tones make people deaf, and the five flavors make people feel refreshed." This kind of "five colors," "five tones," and "five flavors" only damage people's natural simplicity and authenticity and try to rebuke artificial, excessive, and coercive pretentiousness, among which the important goal of aesthetic education is to make people get rid of these distorted values that are deeply trapped in "material desires" to pursue the "simple beauty" that embodies the inner true aesthetic character (Sankheangaew, 2023).

(d) Stimulate people's innovation ability with "invisible beauty". The Tao Te Ching describes "virtuality" and "reality" as two essential elements in traditional Chinese visual appeal, and Lao Tzu used the illustration of "virtual heart, real belly" to illustrate these aesthetic qualities. Which includes the more recent Zhuangzi and Taoist experts from all monarchies, additionally they promoted "invisible beauty," considered "elephant invisible" and "great sound Xisheng" as "supreme beauty," believed that the real "beauty" is invisible and imageless, and did not force the specific form and content of this "invisible beauty," yet allow individuals wander easily in an endless and enormous fictitious globe, so as to completely believe the real significance of "invisible beauty" (Jia and Wu, 2024).

Contemporary aesthetic education is capable of helping individuals surpass their constraints for the breadth of existence by soaking up the "invisible beauty" in the Tao Te Ching, allowing individuals to move without restriction in tranquility, and individuals will additionally actively utilize conceptual thinking in their minds in this endless tranquility, which significantly induces individual's capacity for creativity and possibilities, and profoundly comprehends the appeal of "invisible beauty."

2.3 Cultivate aesthetic thinking and motivate self-education

In the Tao Te Ching, aesthetic education is characterized as "educating people with aesthetics" by "teaching without words," fostering "self-education," and supporting peaceful synthesis. The result is going to lead current aesthetic education to continually seek an elevated spiritual world, nurture aesthetically pleasing pondering, and inspire independent learning during aesthetic education behavior, resulting in individuals with really aesthetic thinking and aesthetic ability, as well as promoting individuals' autonomous and comprehensive growth (Bai and Lee, 2023).

(a) Develop an aesthetic mindset and offer aesthetic education. People's method of thinking is critical; it serves as a lighthouse guiding people to comprehend and alter the world, as well as determining people's awareness and appreciation of the world within which they reside. In the fifty-fourth chapter of the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu states unequivocally, "Therefore, we should look at the body by ourselves, the family by the family, the township by the township, the state by the state, and the world by the world" (Xie and Nasir, 2024).

This statement emphasizes that if a person has both virtue and conduct, he can reflect others with his own body, from one family to ten thousand families, from one country to all countries, and from the present world to the future world. As for why I have insight into the world, it is precisely because of this principle that this is the embodiment of intuitive aesthetic thinking.

What does "intuition" imply in this context, then? The instinctive aesthetically pleasing approach to thinking signifies that the aesthetic subject can immediately contrast the aesthetic object not depending on any rationalization and evaluation. This "empathy ability" which stimulates human creativity and relationships to instantaneously comprehend the core concept of the aesthetic challenge possesses non-logical attributes (Zhang, 2024). "Intuition is defined as the process of capturing the significance, value, or foundation of a challenge or circumstance with not undoubtedly depending upon the scientific body of personal skills."

There, the term "illogical" describes a logical behavior that is concealed as opposed to nonexistence. Knowing the "Tao" is a prerequisite for cultivating aesthetics and contemplating, according to Tao Te Ching's aesthetic education theory. The phrase "I wander in the beginning of things" refers to Lao Tzu's interpretation of "Tao." Zhuangzi illustrates the self-nature of the intuitive aesthetic method of reasoning on the Haoliang coast by using the "man and fish" dispute to study things via objects and have an acute insight into the "joy of man" and "the joy of fish" (Zeng et al., 2024).

(b) Encourage self-learning and the shared development of teachers and students. Tao Te Ching's aesthetic theory of education reveals that developing aesthetic thinking may inspire self-education. Insisting on "teaching without words" is crucial for educators (Bai and Lee, 2023).

First, according to Tao Te Ching, the "unspoken teaching" is that humans should absorb lessons from nature and consider everything in heaven and earth to be a teacher. Instead of forcing their individual aesthetic preferences as well as aesthetic personalities on the educated, aesthetic educators should completely appreciate the many aesthetic personalities and interests of the educated and cater to their aesthetic requirements (Zu, 2023).

Second, "not speaking" does not mean the educators represent the mute since "dialogue" is the foundation of aesthetic education; however, its "words" are a form of heuristic aesthetic education instruction rather than immediately appealing to the educated. The educator does not impart information, and the educated do not require knowledge; in reality, the educator frequently teaches "non-action," while the educated engage in "promising" learning (Zhang, 2024). This is represented in the aesthetic education of educators as well as those who are educated.

Third, as educators, we should focus on "teaching by example" to influence and mentor the educated. With the goal to effectively influence the aesthetic notions and methods of the educated in the "dialogue" with the educated, aesthetic educators must set an example, possess excellent educational skills, and have a thorough understanding of the fundamental principles and principles of aesthetic education. Everyone may achieve the goal of "witnessing and saving" aesthetic education in this manner (Xie and Nasir, 2024).

Finally, educators should be showing the educated in non-verbal ways to lead and motivate them more effectively. The term "non-verbal" teaching refers to the educator's mood and behavior during a "dialogue" with the educated, which has a significant influence on the educated. Because, during the "dialogue" involving the two, the educator embodies "beauty" to some extent, and his manner and actions serve as role models for the educated (Zeng et al., 2024).

3. Conclusion

To put it simply, the article exploring the value implications of aesthetic education thinking in the Tao Te Ching provides a thorough examination of the way Taoist philosophy interacts with aesthetic principles to support an all-encompassing approach to education. The Tao Te Ching, with its focus on naturalness, simplicity, and harmony, provides a unique perspective on promoting individual and societal well-being. The paper persuasively contends that aesthetic education, as inspired by the Taoist worldview, fosters a profound connection with the natural world while also instilling virtues like humility, temperance, and a fondness for delicate beauty. The article also emphasizes that aesthetic education, as drawn from Taoist teachings, goes beyond traditional concepts of beauty to encompass the cultivation of traits associated with Taoist principles such as versatility, spontaneity, thus and a sense of balance. While the paper clearly shows the intellectual complexity of the Taoist aesthetic, nevertheless, is still the issue of incorporating these abstract ideas into

modern educational settings. Tao Te Ching-inspired aesthetic education has the potential to revolutionize current instructional methods, but it would need to be carefully adapted to different cultural situations. Finally, the paper provides a thought-provoking study of how Taoism's aesthetic insights might help to shape a more nuanced, harmonious perspective to education in the modern world.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the Sultan Idris Education University for their support in providing both facilities and financial assistance for this research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Bai, X., & Lee, S. (2023). A study on the inspiration of the *Tao Te Ching* on Chinese cultural self-confidence. *Asian Culture and History*, 15(2), 64–64. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ach.v15n2p64>
- Hua, F. (2023). Life and destiny – moon the guidance of destiny philosophy of *Tao Te Ching* to life. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 6(3), 66–70. <https://doi.org/10.54097/ijeh.v6i3.4183>
- Jeng, C.-S., Ho, S.-J., Lin, W.-L., & Chen, F.-H. (2022). On Lao Tzu's ethics as the inspiration and practice of education for sustainable development. *Sustainability*, 14(14), 8313. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14148313>
- Jian, L., & Lay Kee, C. (2024). Aesthetic education and personality cultivation among college students. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Education and Society*, 6(2), 443–453. <http://myjms.mohe.gov.my/index.php/ijares>
- Jia, X., & Wu, D. (2024). Beauty and Dao: The transcendental expressions of nature from Emerson's prose and the *Zhuangzi*. *Religions*, 15(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010081>
- Laozi. (1996). *Tao Te Ching*. Wordsworth Editions.
- Laozi, Le Guin, U. K., & Seaton, J. P. (2009). *Tao Te Ching: A book about the way and the power of the way*. Shambhala.
- Liang, N., & Segalas, J. (2024). Taoist-inspired principles for sustainability transitions: Beyond anthropocentric fixes and rethinking our relationship with nature. *Sustainability*, 16(14), 61–65. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16146165>
- Liu, J., & Chang, T. (2024). A study on college counselors' professional well-being based on *Tao Te Ching*. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(6), 495–504. <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i6.3745>
- Yang, Fan. "Taoist wisdom on individualized teaching and learning—Reinterpretation through the perspective of Tao Te Ching." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 51.1 (2019): 117-127.
- Loway, S., & Nurochman, A. (2023). An analysis of id, ego, and superego by Sigmund Freud through Kat Stratford's character in *10 Things I Hate About You* movie. *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan*, 2(1), 7–10. <https://doi.org/10.56127/jushpen.v2i1.517>
- Pizzolante, D., Pelowski, M., Demmer, T. R., Bartolotta, S., Sarcinella, E. D., Gaggioli, A., & Chirico, A. (2024). Aesthetic experiences and their transformative power: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1328449>
- Rattanapun, S. (2025). The impact of aesthetic education and academic management on the innovative development of higher vocational colleges in Yuncheng City, Shanxi Province, China. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 13(12), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v13i2.8459>
- Xu, Kaixin, and Hiromu Ito. "The Relationship between Shanxi Merchants and Spatial Structure in Yuncheng Ancient City, China." *Asian Culture and History* 17.1 (2025): 35-48.
- Sankheangaew, P. (2023). *Tao Te Ching*: The unity of moral and social action for peaceful life. *Journal of Namibian Studies: History Politics Culture*, 34. <https://doi.org/10.59670/jns.v34i.1689>
- Sibi, K. J. (2020). Sigmund Freud and psychoanalytic theory. *International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal*, 5, 75–79.
- Winer, Jerome A., and James W. Anderson. *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, V. 29: Sigmund Freud and His Impact on the Modern World. Routledge, 2013.

- Shiyu, L. (2024). The charm of Freud's psychoanalytic theory: A study on reasons why it always has new interpretations in different times. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 29(10), 31–36. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2910033136>
- Niaz, Azadkhan, Sultn Mohammad Stanikzai, and Javed Sahibzada. "Review of Freud's psychoanalysis approach to literary studies." *American International Journal of Social Science Research* 4.2 (2019): 35-44.
- Xiaolong, B., & Sisi, L. (2023). A study on the inspiration of the *Tao Te Ching* on Chinese cultural self-confidence. *Asian Culture and History*, 15(2), 64–73. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ach.v15n2p6>
- Xie, W., & Nasir, S. (2024). The application of Zhuangzi's "nature and inaction" aesthetic thought in contemporary art design: A systematic review. *Advanced International Journal of Business, Entrepreneurship and SMEs*, 6(19), 171–184. <https://doi.org/10.35631/AIJBS.619013>
- Chen, Qiuyue. "Zhuangzi's "aesthetic mind" theory from the perspective of art theory." *2024 International Conference on Humanities, Arts, and Cultural Industry Development (HACID 2024)*. Atlantis Press, 2024.
- Yulin, M. (2024). Li Zhi – The beauty of music, from nature. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(9), 1494–1506. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v14-i9/22944>
- Li, Yu Kun, et al. "Exploring the multidimensional construction of cultural identity through music elements of Chinese Suzhou Pingtan." *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 14.6 (2024)
- Zeng, Y., Hallas, B. O., & Saele, O. O. (2024). Intercultural dialogue on ecopedagogy between Daoism and Naess' ecosophy: Comparing and integrating Chinese and Western ecological wisdom. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 56(12), 1229–1240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2376636>
- Zhang, W. (2024). Exploring Daoist principles for personalized learning and adaptive pedagogy in China: Fostering whole-person growth. *Global Journal of Arts Humanity and Social Sciences*, 4(6), 379–395. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11520630>
- Zhang, Wei, and Shuzhen Xie. "Global Journal of Arts Humanity and Social Sciences." (2024).
- Zu, L. (2023). Being in harmony with nature: A systemic view of Taoism. In *Responsible Management and Taoism* (Vol. 2, pp. 165–173). <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83797-639-320231009>