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RESEARCH ARTICLE

YANG Juping

Behavior and attitude towards the world: A comparative analysis between the Cynics and the School of Zhuangzi

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Abstract During the fourth and third centuries B.C., both the ancient Greek and Chinese civilizations evolved into key periods of social transformation. The Cynics and the School of Zhuangzi responded most acutely to these great social changes. Both of them denied the legitimacy of the existing political systems, denounced the upper rulers and felt disappointed at the comprehensive reality of societies, and were indifferent to fame and gain, and willing to live simply and smile at death. But compared with the Zhuangzi School, the Cynics were more extreme and defiant. Viewed from both macro and micro perspectives, the differences in civilizations, geographical conditions, and historical traditions determined the difference in behavior and attitudes of the two schools in terms of their behavior in the world. Nevertheless, their similarities outweigh their differences because of the similar development stages of their civilizations, similar socio-historical periods and similar social and living problems confronted.

Keywords Cynics, Diogenes, Zhuangzi School, behavior and attitude towards the world

The Cynics was one of the schools of ancient Greek philosophy that flourished in the Late Classical and Hellenistic Periods. The School of Zhuangzi was a group of *Shi* (士, scholar-gentry) living in the Warring States Period of Chinese history. The former is famous for their conduct, by which they detested the world and behaved abnormally, while the latter is known for their aloofness from the world,

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YANG Juping (✉)
College of History, Nankai University, Tianjin 300071, China
E-mail: yjuping@eyou.com

their unique practices[1] and their protestation with thoughts. Geographically, Greece is far away from China, and during the period, the two civilizations had no direct cultural contact or communication. What then made the two schools appear at almost the same time in two different continents, and why did they show similar attitudes and behavior towards the world? The research on the Cynics and the Zhuangzi School, have both gained much, and a lot of relevant works and theses have been published, but to my limited knowledge, there appears no other comparative study made on the attitudes of the two schools towards the world. So I will express my opinions on this topic.

1 Appearance of the Cynics and its main features

It is a common viewpoint that the Cynics, one of the Minor Socratic Schools, appeared in the fourth century B.C. As a particular socio-cultural phenomenon, it lasted, off and on, up to the Late Roman Empire Period. However, three representative figures, Antisthenes, Diogenes and Crates,[2] laid the foundation of the Cynic lifestyle and contributed to the formation of its basic thought and its approach in dealing with the world.

Antisthenes (c.455–360 B. C.) was an Athenian and some scholars hold that the Cynic school derived its name from him. It was said that he had a nickname—a hound pure and simple.[3] Because he used to converse with others in the gymnasium of Cynosarges (white hound), Athenians called him and his followers Cynics. To begin with, he became a pupil of Gorgias, and a sophist. Later on, however, he followed Socrates and had a deep friendship with the latter and kept his company through his life. Owing to the influence of Socrates, Antisthenes twice changed his thoughts, turning from a Sophist into a Socratic and from a Socratic into a Cynic. Subsequent to this he stopped participating in the symposiums which were characterized by voluble and bombastic talk and the practice of being accompanied by female singers and dancers all night. Instead, he started wandering around, initially wearing unique Cynic clothes.[4] But, after having

[1] *Zhuangzi* "Keyi" 庄子·刻意, in Wang Xianqian 王先谦, *Zhuzi Jicheng· Zhuangzi Jijie* 诸子集成·庄子集解 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1996).

[2] To the question as to who is the founder of the Cynics, there are four viewpoints in Western academia: the first one, Antisthenes; the second, Diogenes; the third, Antisthenes and Diogenes the co-founders, and the last, Crates. Every one of these four would be eligible on different aspects, but, in the history of development of the Cynic School for eight centuries long, they all respectively played an irreplaceable role in different periods and especially in its foundation. On account of this, all of them could be regarded as the founders of the Cynics.

[3] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, VI.13 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958. Abbreviated to D. L.).

[4] It is said that Antisthenes was the first to wear the Cynic clothes such as one garment, a staff and a wallet. Cf. D. L., VI.13.

become a Cynic in his late years, Antisthenes still held some features of a Sophist or a Socratic in both thinking and action, and was not able to completely move out of his past. For instance, he made efforts to control his desires, but was not an ascetic.[5] Antisthenes believed that to die happily is the height of human bliss, but when he was dying of disease he didn't want to end his own life to release himself from pains.[6] The incompleteness of Antisthenes shows his complicated personal experiences and his inherent human limitations. However, the incompleteness and limitations disappear completely in his successor, Diogenes.

It is difficult to ascertain the dates of Diogenes' birth and death, but the dates 413/404 B.C. and 323 B.C. are accepted by most scholars. As it is said, he was once a pupil of Antisthenes. This argument has been challenged and absolutely denied by D. R. Dudley.[7] Nevertheless, it is certain that Diogenes was an active advocator and practitioner of the Cynic way of life. According to tradition, Diogenes turned into a Cynic because he had been involved in a case of adulterating the coinage of his city and had to flee out of his fatherland, Sinope. Heretofore or hereafter, he went to Delphi and got the oracle that he was permitted to "alter the currency". And it is in Athens that he began following the Cynic way of life.[8] Diogenes claimed that he would break completely from the existing world, saying "no" to the current political systems, social orders, values, and customs, and he did so on his own and was even proud of his dog-like life.[9] From denying the evils of society to denying everything of it and from breaking away from the secular life to rejecting it, Diogenes carried out Cynicism to the extreme.

Diogenes' extreme tendency was rectified and mitigated by his pupil Crates (365–285 B.C.).[10] He was a rich Theban, who under the influence of Diogenes, gave up his property and became a Cynic. Although still maintaining the basic features of the Cynics, he changed his approach to the world, turning sharp criticism and bitter sarcasm into warmhearted assistance and gentle advice, turning absolute opposition to the world into gradual entrance acceptance into it, and

[5] Cf. D. L. VI.3, 11.

[6] Cf. D. L. VI.5, 18–19.

[7] D. R. Dudley considers that the two men meeting was impossible at Athens, and, according to the results of numismatics, Diogenes came probably to Athens after 340 BC while Antisthenes died before 366 BC. Cf. D. R. Dudley, *A History of Cynicism*, (Chicago: Ares Publishers, 1937), 1–3.

[8] D. L., VI. 20–21.

[9] Once, when Diogenes was passing in front of certain people at a feast, they kept throwing all the bones to him, as they would have done to a dog. Thereupon, he played a dog's trick and drenched them (VI. 46.) Although it is a prank, it still shows that his action has some dog-like characteristics.

[10] There is another version that Crates wasn't a pupil of Diogenes. (VI. 85), But it is not commonly received by scholars.

turning excessive demands to others into personal demonstration by himself. Hence, he was welcomed wherever he went and was called "door opener."[11] To a certain extent, this gentle turnaround strengthened the Cynic influence, prevented the Cynics from a likely extermination due to Diogenesic extremity, and might have contributed to the later continuation and existence of the Cynics.

The appearances of the three great Cynics mentioned above, symbolized both the formation of the Classical Cynics and the shaping up of the Cynic attitudes towards life, characterized by detesting the world and its ways of denying all things.

In their eyes, the existing systems, values, customs, and the ways of the world were man-made *Currency* that should be thoroughly changed or abolished. All people in the present world were muddleheaded, running after fame and gain and struggling for their endless desires. It is only the Cynics who were eligible to criticize and rebuke others and society. What they longed for is to establish a republic in which only sophists like them would live. In the proposed republic, all the people were to be cosmopolites, without any discrimination in nationalities, city-states, classes and ranks.

They carried out asceticism and naturalism to the letter, and made a living on begging. Long hair, barefoot, worn-out garment, a shabby bag over the shoulder and a broken stick dragged by hand were their characteristic outside features. In the daytime, they wandered around at any place where the masses gathered, such as streets, market-places and gymnasiums, and looked actively for some one to talk with, and sometimes threw to passersby sharp scolding and ridicule with the scent of humor. At night, they slept on the streets or in the temple. Diogenes once lived in a big wooden barrel. They did not want a household and liked to be single except Crates who had a Cynic marriage with a girl from a rich family and had sexual intercourse with her in public.[12] They scorned money, looking upon it as dung and dirt; and, once having become Cynics, they instantly gave up everything they had possessed previously and became penniless beggar-philosophers. They enjoyed life as well, but they let it take its own natural course. When life progressed into the last stage or when circumstance warranted it, they would end their life voluntarily and happily. Of the Cynic School, Diogenes was possibly the first to commit suicide. He is said to have lived nearly to the age of ninety years. There were many accounts about his death, and the most widely circulated one is that he died voluntarily by stifling. When his friends discovered him, he had been dead in

[11] D. L., VI. 86.

[12] D. L., VI. 97. The story about their sexual intercourse in public appeared in the writing of Apuleius of the second century BC for the first time. See Luis E. Navia, *Classical Cynicism* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), 124; Dudley, *A History of Cynicism*. 50–51; But Navia and Dudley both thought it unauthentic.

his cloak. They supposed that he had deliberately arranged his death in order to be disengaged from it.[13]

The Cynics defied all authority so that neither the political systems of the city-state, religious activities nor authoritative, glorious kings and great men could escape their attacks. Antisthenes once cast ridicule even on the democratic electoral system of the Greek city-state which the Greeks were proud of. He suggested ironically Athenians to vote that asses are horses. When they deemed this absurd, his reply was, "But yet generals are found among you who had had no training, but were merely elected."[14] Facing the arrogant and imperious Alexander the Great, Diogenes looked fearless. Alexander was surprised and asked, "Are you not afraid of me?" Diogenes replied, "What are you? A good thing or bad?" Alexander replied, "A good thing." "Who then is afraid of the good?"[15] Making use of the chance, he satirized this self-aggrandized good *man*. The Cynics would expose the deceptive tricks in religious rituals. When an Orphic priest told Antitheses that if he was to attend rituals of the mysteries he would obtain many good things in Hades, he replied sarcastically at once, "Why then don't you die?"[16]

Vanity, conceit, overconfidence, arrogance and divorce from reality were the other features of the Cynic attitude to the world. They regarded altering existing society as their own holy mission, but how could they change the whole world depending only on their accusatory words? Besides in the prevailing political situation, the Macedonian troops were approaching from the north of Greece, and it was imminent that the empire would replace the city-states and monarchy would substitute the city-state system. How could the Cosmopolis and the Cosmopolite they imagined be put into practice? The Cynics expressed their ideas mainly with their cynical attitude and shocking behavior. After becoming Cynics, few of them wrote books to expound their doctrines. They had not established and never wanted to establish a system of their own ethics. The above-mentioned facts caused the Cynics to loose their own theoretical instruction and support so that they came to have the same influence on the present and future as Stoicism, Epicureanism and other contemporary schools of philosophy. The changes, such as the transformation made by Crates and his followers, its decadency after the second century B.C. and its variation during the Roman Imperial Period, also showed that the Cynics' approach had not been helpful in improving reality but had made the Cynics gradually loose themselves in various cruel realities, finally becoming a mere group of fame-hunted, speculative and despised rascals. It is not unreasonable that Lucian,

[13] Regarding his death, there are other stories: the first one is that he swallowed an octopus raw and died of colic; the second one is that he tried to divide an octopus amongst the dogs and was so severely bitten on the sinew of the foot that it caused his death. (D. L., VI. 76–77).
[14] D. L., VI. 8.
[15] D. L., VI. 68.
[16] D. L., VI. 4.

a philosopher of the Roman Imperial Period, dismissed contemporary Cynics as cheats.[17] This was the tragic end of the Classic Cynics.

2 Similarities and differences between the two schools in behavior and attitude towards the world

The schools of Chinese philosophy during the Pre-Qin periods, such as the Confucianism and the Taoism, generously focused on ethics and morality to help people deal with problems on how to live in society. Why is the Zhuangzi School, which was regarded as a branch of the Taoist School later, chosen as the comparative object with the Cynics? This is because there are some distinctive differences between the schools of Zhuangzi and Laozi in manner and attitude to life and the world in general, in spite of the fact that both advocated that people should live simply, be indifferent to fame or benefit, and let the Being take its own course. Laozi stood for governing with *Wu wei* 无为 (non-action) and overcoming the hard and the strong with softness, and regarded concessions as a means of gaining advantages. But the Zhuangzi School kept a completely negative attitude to all things in actual society, was willing to have a poor life and abide by *Dao* 道 (the Law of Being), enjoyed loneliness, and shared spiritual happiness only with disciples. So the Zhuangzi School is more comparable with the Cynics.[18]

With regard to actual politics, The Cynic School and the Zhuangzi School not only denied the legitimacy of the system but also denounced the upper rulers. Tian Chengzi 田成子 killed the king of Qi 齐君, usurped his state, and acted just like a new prince; while Liu Xiazhi 柳下跖 led the masses to rise up righteously and was vilified as a robber.

To this, Zhuangzi was extremely indignant, and commented angrily, "Those who steal the knives are executed while those who usurp the states become princes."[19] Diogenes once saw the officials of a temple leading away someone who had stolen a bowl belonging to the treasurers and mocked that the great thieves were leading away the little thief.[20] Crates once was asked by Alexander whether he would like Thebes, his native city, to be rebuilt, to which the former answered,

[17] Lucian, *the Runaways* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 16.

[18] About the dates of Zhuangzi's birth and death, in modern Chinese Academia, there are three popular arguments: 375–300 B.C., claimed by Liang Qichao; 369–286 B.C., by Ma Xulun; and 328–286 B.C., by Fan Wenlun, see Cui Dahua, *Zhuangzi Yan Jiu*, Beijing: Renmin Press, 1997, 2–6. According to the arguments above, we know that Zhuangzi lived during the fourth and the third centuries B.C., which is almost the same time that the Cynic School flourished, and so the both are comparable in time, too.

[19] *Zhuangzi*,."Quqie" 胠箧.

[20] D. L., VI. 45.

"Why should it be? Perhaps another Alexander will destroy it again."[21] It is very clear that both schools had similar viewpoints to the rulers of their time, regarding them as great robbers and the source of misfortune. The Zhuangzi School even sniffed at some *Shiren* 士人 (intellectual) who wandered all over the country seeking the favor of the princes. A man of Song 宋 (the name of a state) once showed off by saying that he was sent on a diplomatic mission to another state and rewarded much by the king. For this Zhuangzi attacked him, saying "Prince Qin" 秦王 is looking for some one to lick his hemorrhoids with a reward of five carriages 五乘车马 and you can go to him quickly."[22] In the opinion of Zhuangzi, these men were nothing but hatchet man, fawning over their masters, without any personality or dignity. It happened that there was a similar story in ancient Greece. Plato saw Diogenes washing lettuces and said to him "Had you paid court to Dionysius, you would not now be washing lettuces." Diogenes retorted: "If you had washed lettuces, you wouldn't have paid court to Dionysus." This was a satire to Plato who tried to persuade the king of Syracuse for political reformation.[23] That Zhuangzi and Diogenes oppose similar people and made similar satires is not a historical coincidence, but results from their similar opinions towards those phenomena.

To the current society, the attitude of the Zhuangzi School, like that of the Cynics, was changing and going forward from pessimism and disappointment to extreme denial. They thought of their age as horrible, in which every place was full of misery and unhappiness, each could not ensure whether his destiny would be fortunate in future, and there was no happiness for the people who regarded that it was luckier for them to avoid penalty and corporal punishment.[24] How could such a world continue to exist? Therefore, it should and must be reformed or abandoned completely.

They even proposed such extreme ideas of anti-culture, anti-knowledge and anti-intellect that, in their opinion music, literature, devices used for measuring moral and ethic, and suchlike should be cast away and destroyed, because all of them were misused by ruling classes and those pursuing personal fame and gain. Besides it is unimaginable that they traced the source of massive world tumult back to the human pursuit of knowledge and wisdom.[25] They believed that all the knowledge and wisdom had no use but would do harm to the world for they would corrupt the human spirit and mind. It is their opinion that the "man who employs

[21] D. L., VI. 93; Philostratus, *the Life of Apollonius*. II. ii. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).
[22] *Zhuangzi*, "Lieyukou" 庄子·列御寇.
[23] D. L., VI. 58.
[24] This is a variation of the words of Jie Yu, the crazy man of the Chu, who talked with Confucius. Cf. *Zhuangzi*, "Renjianshi" 庄子·人间世.
[25] *Zhuangzi*, "Quqie" 庄子·胠箧.

an ingenious machine must do ingenious deeds and that a man who does ingenious deeds must have an ingenious mind". Under the direction of this "theory", it is not surprising that they praised the deeds of the old man, who, not using the convenient pitcher 桔槔 (jiegao, a tool of drawing water), would instead "fetch water by digging a tunnel to the bottom of the well and carry it with a jar to water the fields", just like what Yu Gong did 愚公 (the Old Fool who wanted to remove the two huge mountains Taiheng and Wangwu alone with his family).[26]

The attitude of anti-civilization is expressed more thoroughly by the Cynics. Diogenes advocates abandoning the study of geometry, music, astronomy and some similar disciplines because he regarded them useless and unnecessary.[27] He criticized greatly grammarians, mathematicians and orators, for they favored idle talk and were not practical. He blamed particularly the musicians for tuning the strings of the lyre while leaving the dispositions of their own souls discordant.[28] He ironically refuted Plato's *adios* (Idea), holding that there were not abstract ideas but only substantial things. Plato defined Man as an animal biped and featherless, Diogenes plucked a fowl and brought it in front of crowd and said, "Here is Plato's man".[29] In fact, using fault in conception to publicize uselessness of knowledge is a kind of nihilism of knowledge. The anti-intellect attitude of the Zhuangzi School and the Cynics are untenable both in theory and practice. But it is noteworthy that they based their premise of the possible ill consequences of knowledge and wisdom on certain specific conditions or on the misuse of knowledge by specific people.

With regard to individual life, the Zhuangzi School and the Cynics were indifferent to fame and gain, willing to live plainly and smile at death. Zhuangzi stayed in poverty throughout his lifetime. He lived out-of-the-way and in a shabby house, wearing clothes full of patches and having a sallow and emaciated look, and made a living on weaving shoes and once borrowed money from other people.[30] Although he once acted as a petty official at Qiyuan 漆园 (a place in the northern part of Chu state), Zhuangzi was undoubtedly a poor *Shi* 士. But facing the reward worthy of 300 Jin 金 (gold) from Chu King 楚王, he remained unconcerned and refuted flatly, which showed the integrity of the noble scholar who could not

[26] *Zhuangzi*, "Tiandi" 庄子·天地.
[27] D. L. VI. 73.
[28] D. L., VI. 27–28.
[29] D. L., VI. 40. Xunzi 荀子, the philosopher of the Late Warring State Period, also made his own explanation of the conception of human. He pointed out particularly , "What makes a man human does not lie in his two feet or in his having no fur or feather but his *Bian*, the ability to distinguish." The *Bian* here means the class difference, he used the word to emphasize the sociality of human beings. Cf. *Xunzi*, "Fei Xiang" 荀子·非相 (Criticizing Physiognomy), *Zhuzi Jicheng*, "Xunzi Jijie" 诸子集成·荀子集解 (Shanghai:Shanghai shudian, 1996).
[30] *Zhuangzi*, "Lieyukou, Shanmu, Waiwu" 庄子·列御寇, 山木, 外物.

be moved by poverty and lowliness.[31] On death, the greatest challenge of life confronting humans, Zhuangzi looked as a natural thing that would not be changed by human will. "Life and death are destined, just like the eternal succession of day and night; a natural course of events"[32] and "The coming of life cannot be rejected while the going cannot be hindered."[33] These views are the starting point of his life-and-death perception. Now that life goes in this way, why does man think so much about life and death? Therefore, when Zhuangzi's friends came to express their condolences to the death of his wife, they were astonished to see that he was singing while beating on a basin. Being criticized as being unsympathetic and unpitying, he explained, "It is not that I am not sad, but that she came to death is just like the succession of the four seasons; the dead has gone to the place she should go to, but the living will not stops their mourning. Is not it against the nature of the self-being? And so, I am not sad."[34] Zhuangzi even arranged his funeral in advance: he would rather like to be left in the field. His disciples neither understood nor bore it, but he said, "An unburied body will be consumed by birds but a buried body will be eaten by ants. Burying me is snatching food from the mouths of birds to feed ants. Is not it too unfair?"[35] About funeral, the Cynic had very similar ideas with the Zhuangzi School. Diogenes left his last words to his disciples before his death that they should throw his body out unburied so that every wild beast might feed on him or thrust him into a ditch and sprinkle a little dust over him.[36] From the words above, it can be seen that the two schools had similar attitudes to life and death.

On the design of future society, both the Zhuangzi School and the Cynics hoped that an ideal society or country would arise or be established.

The Zhuangzi School imagined that people should come back to "the society of self-being" 自然之世 in primordial conditions. They conceived or cherished many so-called "ideal societies", such as *Hexu shi zhishi* 赫胥氏之时 (the Age of Hexu Family), *Youchao shi zhimin* 有巢氏之民 (the age when people living in the nest), *zhisheng zhimin* 知生之民 (people who knew how to survive), *Shennong zhishi* 神农之世 (the age of Divine Farmer), *zhide zhishi* 至德之世 (the age of Supreme Virtue), *Jiande zhiguo* 建德之国 (the state of virtue), *zhiyi zhishi* 至一之时 (the age of oneness), and so on. Although described somewhat differently, they have some common features in general: (1) these *Societies of Self-being* are in primordial conditions or in matriarchal society, where people "don't know their fathers but

[31] *Zhuangzi*, "Lieyukou". 庄子·列御寇; Sima Qian, *Shiji*, "Laozi Hanfei Liezhuan" 司马迁: 史记·老子韩非列传 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982).
[32] *Zhuangzi*, "Dazongshi" 庄子·大宗师.
[33] *Zhuangzi*, "Dasheng" 庄子·达生.
[34] *Zhuangzi*, "Zhile" 庄子·至乐.
[35] *Zhuangzi*, "Lieyukou" 庄子·列御寇.
[36] D. L., VI. 79.

mothers.";[37] (2) the members of these societies live in accordance with Self-being, enjoying themselves, friendly to each other and without conflict or fight; (3) these societies are far away from the world of reality, being in a certain past time beyond memory or at a certain place not attainable. To the people in reality, these societies are just in sight but beyond their reach. Indeed, the Zhuangzi School also hoped to change the existing society, expecting the birth of *Ming Wang* 明王 (Wise King) and the arrival of *Sheng Zhi Zhi Shi* 圣治之世 (the World ruled by the sage). However, under the current historical condition, these wishes are just daydreams.

About the social ideals of the Cynics, Diogenes in his *Republic* and Crates in his *Pera* expressed their respective dreams, the former stood for a thorough reconstruction of the city-state, while the latter had a great longing for a natural Utopia. According to Diogenes' ideas in *Republic*, the state is not a city-state but the whole world, where there are activities of exchange for currency is still used although it is just made of bones; women are to wear the same clothes as men and should exercise nude in public as men were accustomed to do; and, simultaneously women are to form a community of wives, belonging commonly to all men, and whose children are to be regarded as common offspring of all the inhabitants.[38] Although Crates' *Pera* has only a few lines, he used the pera (the worn bag, one of the signs of the Cynics) as a metaphor for his ideal city and described a picture of the natural Utopia. It is far away from the actual world, located in amidst wine-dark vapor, has pretty scenery, and is abundant in every kind of product, so that all the people there are free from hunger and poverty, and are pure and have no evil thought, living together at peace and not fighting each with other for money or for fame.[39] Apparently, Crates' *Pera* had many things in common with the *Societies of Self-being* of Zhuangzi, but Diogenes' *Republic* had few.

To sum up, it is not difficult to determine that the two schools have many similar points in their attitudes towards the society. But the differences between them also deserve our attention. For instance, although both of them chose and liked the poor life and were happy to adhere to the Law of Being, the Cynics followed asceticism, giving up all their wealth and making a living on begging, but the Zhuangzi School did not do so. They did not break away from the household but married and had children. The family members depended on each other for survival and enjoyed the family happiness. Both were dissatisfied with the society of reality and criticized it. But unlike the Cynics who condemned aggressively everything they met, the Zhuangzi School expressed their own thoughts mainly by means of writing and speaking. They were really against society, but in fact lived

[37] *Zhuangzi*, "Daozhi." 庄子·盗跖.
[38] D. L., VI. 72; H.D. Rankin, *Sophists, Socratics and Cynics*, (New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983.), 231.
[39] D. L., VI. 85.

as others within society. On individual behavior, the Cynics persisted in their own ways, unconventional and unrestrained, even shameless, while the Zhuangzi School followed the general social regulation of conduct as other *shis* 士 did. Therefore, the Zhuangzi School not only did not suffer blame from every class of society including the rulers, but even won their respect. It is reasonable to say that if the Cynics were considered to be heretical by the society they lived in and were called "men like dog," and "Socrates going mad,"[40] then the Zhuangzi School should be regarded as a group which were accepted as members of society.

3 The historical background and source of the similarities and differences of the two schools

There are much more similarities than differences between the Cynics and the Zhuangzi School in their attitudes towards the world. So what caused this co-existing phenomenon of culture? I think it is the similar or the same period and the cultural background they both lived in that made both schools have similar reactions to the political, social and life problems they were confronted with.

Firstly, from the macro angle, during the fourth and third centuries B. C., China and Greece were both in the key era of the development of human civilization. According to the Theory of Axial Age of Karl Jaspers, the German philosopher, almost in the period from c. 800 to 200 B.C., in most civil areas of Eurasia, there emerged unprecedented cultural prosperity with various kinds of schools of thoughts, religious beliefs and cultural masters arising universally. Laozi and Confucius of China, Buddha of India, Thales and Socrates of Greece, Zoroastrianism of Persia and Judaism of Hebrew became the representatives of all philosophical and religious thoughts of this period, and China, India and Greece became the three new centers of classical culture. Since the times of Laozi and Confucius, Buddha, Thales, the contending of thoughts and ideas to different degrees and in different forms began to take place in China, India and Greece. So such a period should be considered as the Axial Age of civilizations for its simultaneous cultural flourishes and thought innovations worldwide.[41] The Zhuangzi School and the Cynics both appeared and were active during this period and each one belonged to those contending schools of philosophy of this period in their respective cultural circles. Therefore, generally speaking, both of them also should belong to the Axial Age.

[40] D. L., VI. 54.

[41] Karl Jaspers proposed and proved the Theory of Axial Age in his book *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* published in 1949. For the basic ideas, see the first chapter (*The Axial Period*) of its English version, *The Origin and Goal of History* (*The Origin and Goal of History*, Conecticut: Yale University Press, 1965), 1–21.

The period from the fourth to third centuries B.C. was also one of the great social changes, under which the cultural prosperities and the thought contentions mentioned in this study, happened. Seen from the Ancient Greek civilization and Ancient Chinese civilization, they both had similar experiences during this period. Greece had gone through the course of the formation, growth and decline of the city-state system and basically completed the historical transition from city-state to empire and from republic to monarchy. Simultaneously, China had gone through the overdevelopment of vassal states, their refusal to obey the leadership of Zhou 周 (the central authority), and their fight for hegemony and annexing each other, and their final unification in the Qin and Han dynasties. By this time China had almost finished the transition from the feudal system to administrative system of Jun Xian 郡县 (province and county) directly under the central imperial government and from patriarchal clan system to centralization. Living in this rapidly changing, and alternatingly divided and united society, the principal part of society, especially the intelligentsia with its sharp mind, necessarily reflected on the social phenomena as well as its consequences, and also formulated their own reactions to them. The philosophers of this period in both cultural circles became obsessed with the relationship between Heaven (Nature) and Man and between individuals, that is the problems as to how to cognize the world and live in it, became their focus. Confucius, Laozi and Socrates did their best to look for the answers as well. Accordingly, it was historically inevitable that the Zhuangzi School, as the opposite of Confucianism and a collateral branch of the Laozi School, and the Cynics, as the faithful successors of Socrates' mission of spirit, appeared in this changing, complicated and disunited period providing the soils and conditions for their births.

Secondly, from the micro angles, the period from the fourth to the third centuries B. C. is a transitive stage, in which there were great social upheavals in Greece and China. In Greece, it equals to the Late City-state Period and Early Hellenistic Age, which was the key era that the city-state system fell and emerged as empire or kingdom. In the middle of the fourth century B.C., Macedonia, a state of northern Greece, grew to become the biggest menace of the city-states in Central and Southern Greece. The Battle of Chaeronea (338 B. C.) shaped the political situation where the Greek world was reined by the kings of Macedonia, and with the founding of the Empire of Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic kingdoms, Greek city-states ceased to exist except in name. Empire replaced the city-state, and citizens became subjects. Confronted with such great social upheavals, it was quite probable that some intellectuals reacted fiercely and detested the world and its ways. In China, the 200 years from the fourth to the third century B. C. belong to the Middle and Late Warring-state Period, during which contending of the vassal states since the Spring and Autumn Period gave way to their annexations by each other and the final unification by a single power. The fights between

different politico-military powers inevitably brought endless calamities to the people of the lower classes, including ordinary intellectuals, and so a part of them would bemoan the disappointed world and pity their own fate, henceforth complaining about reality. As a matter of fact, it was just the social upheavals during this period that caused some intellectuals to disbelieve and criticize the society they were living in. They attacked the world but did not turn their back on it; they were angered by society but did not run away from it. They were not political parties but schools of philosophy, and not statesmen but philosophers, expressing their own thoughts mainly by means of self-continence, even self-maltreatment. Hence, they did not meet the persecution of rulers but received understanding and tolerance of most members of society including the rulers. It is clear that the reason why the Cynics and the Zhuangzi School got an opportunity to form and develop must have something to do with the similar political atmosphere and historical environment.

If the two schools owed their similarities to the similar social backgrounds, the similar problems they faced and the similar answers they formulated, their differences should have arisen from the different civilization systems of ancient China and Greece. Ancient Chinese civilization continued coherently from the times of Yao, Shun, and Yu on to the dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou. China was ruled by kings through this entire period and the political situation at that time could be summarized as "Under the whole heaven, there was no land that did not belong to the king; in all the lands, no one person who was not the subject of the king." Even if the legendary times of Yao, Shun and Yu are not taken into account due to the lack of ample evidence, the patriarchal clan system of the dynasties of Xia, Shang, and Zhou are substantially proved by history. During the Spring and Autumn Period, although Zhou Tianzi 周天子 (Emperor of Zhou) gradually lost power over the vassal states, he was still, in name, the supreme monarch of China of the time. Up to the Warring State Period, the vassals openly declared themselves as kings one after another and set up their own monarchies. It is absolutely different from ancient Greece where the city-state system was founded. Moreover, Chinese civilization, firstly arising in the valley of the Yellow River and later expanding to the valley of the Yangtze River, was a civilization that was terrestrial or agricultural in nature; it was extremely different from ancient Greece, which, facing the seas on three sides, was engaged in agriculture, craft, and trade, and was a kind of oceanic and urban civilization. Therefore, different social, political and economic environments certainly produced different spirits of civilizations and different ways of thinking, acting and living. In the China of the pre-Qin Period, monarchs impossibly could put up with extreme anti-societal actions like those of the Cynic School; on the contrary, philosophers of the Ancient Greek City-state Period could not imagine the pictures of pastoral Utopia where people worked when the sun was up and rested at sun down, men cultivating and women weaving,

without communicating with the neighbors in spite of hearing their cocks crowing and dogs barking; and where the relations between monarchs and subjects were so harmonious and natural that "the superiors were as leisurely as the upper branches in a tree and the people were as free as the deer in the wilderness."[42]

Therefore, the different civilizations, different societies, different histories and different traditions determined their different attitudes towards the world while similar developing stages of civilization, similar socio-historical periods and similar questions on society and life, made similar their behavior in the world. The question why there appeared simultaneously this cultural phenomenon in ancient China and Greece is really worth pondering over.

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[42] *Zhuangzi*, "Tiandi" 庄子·天地.