

NIHILISTIC NATURALISM

IN THE EAST

There are two cultural principles operative in contemporary Japan; one is a relatively new principle derived from the West, and the other a traditional Eastern principle.

These two principles are, at least in contemporary Japan, contradictory to one another: the Western principle is considered to be an anti-naturalistic one stressing technique, while the traditional Eastern principle is essentially one founded on naturalism.

The essence of the anti-naturalistic stand in the thinking of contemporary Japan lies in the policy which leads to the destruction of our natural environment in the attempt to reconstruct a new artificial life-space. Contrary to this, traditional naturalism values obedience to and harmony with Nature. Most contemporary Japanese have a tendency to rate the Western principle above the Eastern one, and by this zealously, cheerfully, and quickly go about destroying our beautiful natural environment. But the results of such a destructive anti-naturalistic stand are contrary to our expectations of being able to reconstruct an ideal, man-made land. What we have achieved in fact is the creation of the most pollution-laden country in the world. Face to face with

this serious damage, we have begun for the first time to rethink our prejudice against the traditional principle, i.e. Eastern naturalism.

It is thought that the most important tradition in Japanese culture is that derived from Buddhism, especially Zen-Buddhism. The recent Zen boom is one expression of this supposition. But it is necessary to reflect on our traditions in a more profound way and in so doing we may be able to find at least two kinds of naturalism in our traditional culture. One is that of Buddhism, and another that of Taoism.

This essay attempts to reconsider Taoism, which has almost been lost in our memory, and will discuss Chuang-tzu, the most brilliant representative of Taoism, in order to restore a forgotten stream of our tradition to its deserved position. The method we will use in this paper will be twofold: one is a comparative philosophic approach, and another is the method of logical analysis.

I. TAOISM AND BUDDHISM

Both Taoism and Buddhism are naturalistic in the sense that they do not admit any transcendent principle which governs the natural world of which man is a part. Their central doctrine may not necessarily be atheistic in the strict sense but they are certainly immanentistic. The Pure Land Sect, a particular form of Buddhism which asserts a belief in one absolute Deity named Amida, is likewise immanentistic, and naturalistic, because the Deity (Amida) is not a transcendent principle which created the natural world and governs it from the outside, but is concerned only as the totality of the natural world which includes human beings.

On this point the two streams of thought, Taoism and Buddhism, agree with one another. And precisely on this point they are both put in contrast with the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition whose chief characteristic lies in the belief in one transcendent God.

Nevertheless, Taoism and Buddhism are different from one another on some other aspects. We will enumerate their differences below. But first we must establish a distinction in the

meaning of the term "Taoism." This term can be used in two somewhat different senses. In one sense it must mean the philosophy which was founded by Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu before the Han Dynasty (i.e. before 206 B.C.). In another sense it means the Chinese religious sect which was established during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-ca. A.D. 220) under the influence of the thought of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu etc. We will call the former "philosophic Taoism," and the latter "religious Taoism." What we will delineate as "Taoism" in this paper will be exclusively that of the former, i.e., "philosophic Taoism."

There are many sects in Buddhism, each of which presents an original thought-school, so that a detailed comparison of Buddhism with Taoism is impossible in this limited paper. Thus I would like to describe mainly the general features of both Buddhism and Taoism.

A. Their Similarities

As far as their ontology is concerned, neither admits any creator god who is transcendent over and above the natural world and governs it from the outside. The absolute for them is not a creator god, but Nothingness or Emptiness. God is an absolute substance which is *in se* and can be conceived *per se*. But Nothingness is absolute non-substance. In this sense both Taoism and Buddhism can be called "philosophy of non-substance."

On phenomenology both assert that the ultimate principle which governs the natural world is not a transcendent God, but the natural law which is immanent in the natural world itself, and is the law of moral action, as well as of physical phenomena. This natural law is not similar to Divine Providence in the Judaeo-Christian religion, because the latter is transcendent and teleological, while the former is neither. So both Taoism and Buddhism deserve the term "philosophy of immanence" and "naturalism."

In epistemology both maintain that the way to the cognition of the ultimate essence of the natural world, i.e., both substancelessness and the natural law, is not by belief, but by a certain kind of knowledge or intellectual intuition which is akin to

Spinoza's *scientia intuitiva*. So both can be called "intellectualism" in a broad sense. We must note that while there are some Buddhist sects which profess belief in a Deity, for example in the Buddha Amida, even this belief is ultimately based on a special Buddhist intellectual intuition called *prajñā*, so that those sects can be also classified as "intellectualistic" in a broad sense.

At the level of moral doctrine both find their ultimate ideal in a hermit-life, in which man renounces the common world and gives up all worldly desires in order to keep his mind tranquil.

Here again we must note that Mahāyāna Buddhism finds its ideal in altruistic deeds, but even in this case the altruism must be founded in this hermit-life.

B. Their Differences

Buddhism asserts that it is necessary for the devotee at the beginning to make up his mind to obey the ultimate truth (*dharma*) i.e., substancelessness and the natural law. This first resolution is not an effect of the intellect, but of the will. So Buddhism demands of the devotee some kind of volitional effort, as well as intelligence. It seems that there is an exception in a Buddhist sect, i.e. in the Shin Pure Land Sect, which teaches that the devotee need not exert his own volitional action to attain Enlightenment. But even this sect demands that the first resolution should obey the ultimate truth.

On the contrary, Taoism does not demand any volitional resolution. It teaches that only some kind of intellectual action is necessary to attain to the ultimate cognition which corresponds to the Buddhist Enlightenment. On this point Taoism is more intellectualistic than Buddhism, because the latter demands some kind of volitional action besides intelligence.

Buddhism establishes a community of devotees (*samgha*) who group together in order to cultivate their minds and to train disciples. This system necessarily leads to a distinction between monks and laymen. The former belong to the community (*samgha*) and the latter do not.

On the contrary, Taoism (philosophic Taoism) does not establish any community of devotees, so that it has no distinction

between monks and laymen. Every Taoist is, so to speak, a layman and lives by some common worldly business, although his mind is beyond such a worldly life and his ideal lies in a hermit-life.

Buddhism, especially Mahāyāna Buddhism, teaches that every man ought to attain his own Enlightenment (cognition of the ultimate truth, i.e. of *dharma*), but at the same time he ought to help others to attain their Enlightenment. In this sense, Buddhism is altruistic as well as egotistic.

On the contrary, Taoism is exclusively egotistic (or ego-centric), even though it may not be egoistic. Every Taoist aims only at his own ultimate awakening which can deliver himself from all sufferings, but cannot help any other man.

Finally, Buddhism teaches as its ultimate ideal the perfect tranquility of mind by means of Enlightenment, so that it demands that the devotee abandon even aesthetic enjoyment, if it be judged obstructive to Enlightenment. In this sense Buddhism is akin to Stoicism.

On the contrary, Taoism is more akin to Epicureanism than to Stoicism, for it demands no volitional effort, but looks on both the world and the self in an entirely indifferent manner. This is a necessary consequence of its pure intellectualism. And this indifferent attitude necessarily leads to the enjoyment of everything. Chuang-tzu, one of the most typical Taoists, "enjoys" even the death of his wife, and even his own death, because for him there is no absolute difference between life and death.

II. IDEAS COMMON TO BOTH LAO-TZU AND CHUANG-TZU

Chuang-tzu is a spiritual successor of Lao-tzu, who is the founder of the philosophic Taoism. So Chuang-tzu's philosophy is in its essence similar to that of Lao-tzu. However, it also has some special features which cannot be found in Lao-tzu. I will first enumerate their common ideas, and then their differences. But I have already described essential elements of their common ideas in the comparison with Buddhism, so that here I will only summarize their common features and treat characteristics of Chuang-tzu in a more or less detailed way.

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The basic thought of both Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu can be called "nihilistic naturalism." The adjective "nihilistic" means "substanceless" as stated above. That is to say, there is no absolute subject or substratum to which all predicates can belong, but there are many special subjects each of which has its own special predicates, but is not capable of assuming all predicates. And the whole of these many subjects is Nature, which itself is not simply a subject having some special predicates. So the whole of Nature can not be predicated, has no name, and cannot be defined. It is the undetermined whole. It is not any thing, so that it is no-thing. Lao-tzu says:

all things return to no-thing (wu-wei).

(Lao-tzu, § 14)

But every part of this no-thing has some special predicates which distinguish it from others, so that it becomes some-thing. So the whole of Nature is no-thing and its part is some-thing, because the former has no name, but the latter can be given its own special name.

Lao-tzu says:

There is no name at the beginning of Nature;
By giving names can all things be distinguished.

(Lao-tzu, § 1)

This proposition expresses clearly the essence of "nihilistic naturalism." It may be said that the structure of this thought is somewhat similar to that of the modern set theory in which every part has a determined characteristic but the whole remains undetermined, because the whole can not be defined, while every part has its own special definition.

From this fundamental structure of "nihilistic naturalism" can be deduced its second important feature. That is to say, this "nihilistic naturalism" is a sort of "philosophy of immanence" which does not admit any transcendent principle. By this name we can call to mind the philosophy of Spinoza. Certainly, Taoism's philosophy of immanence is very similar to that of Spinoza. But there is also a big difference between them: Spinoza asserts that the whole of Nature is an absolute substance, while Taoists

maintain that it is not a substance, but no-thing. So Spinoza's system can be named a "philosophy of ontic immanence," and Taoism a "philosophy of nihilistic immanence."

The third feature of "nihilistic naturalism" is the assertion of the natural law. There is no transcendent principle which governs all things in Nature, but there is only a certain natural order among these things. For example, my cup is on my desk, which is in my room, etc. This order need not be founded on any transcendent principle. So it must be based on an immanent principle, which is nothing but the natural law. This must be so in the moral realm as in physical phenomena, because both morality and physical phenomena belong to one and the same Nature, so that they must obey the same principle, i.e., the same natural law. (In Taoism we do not find an essential distinction between ethical norm and natural law as in the Neo-Kantian School).

A verse of Lao-tzu explains the character of the Taoistic natural law very clearly:

Man must obey the law of the earth;
the earth must obey the law of Heaven;
Heaven must obey the law of Tao;
Tao must obey the law of Nature.

(Lao-tzu, § 25)

The fourth feature of "nihilistic naturalism" lies in the assertion of the relativity of everything in Nature. Everything must be relative, because, as aforesaid, everything in Nature must be determined by its own special predicates, so that there must be some other predicates by which the thing becomes extinguished. In this sense everything in Nature is relative. But everything is relative also in another sense. That is to say, the place, the situation, the value and so on, of everything can be determined by comparison with other things, so that everything is only comparative or relative. Thus everything in Nature is relative either in the sense of determinateness or in the sense of comparativeness.

Lao-tzu says:

If everything once gains force, it becomes necessarily weak.

(Lao-tzu, §§ 30, 55)

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This proposition tells of relativity in the sense of determinateness.

Further he says:

If all people know the beauty of a thing it is already ugly;

If all people know goodness of a thing it is already evil.

(Lao-tzu, § 2)

This proposition means that the beauty or ugliness of a thing is not absolute, so that even the most beautiful thing which all people acknowledge as beautiful may become ugly if man compares it with some other things.

Lao-tzu says clearly:

Man can look upon a small thing as big, and a few things as many.

(Lao-tzu, § 63)

Again he says:

How far is the distance between good and evil? It is not absolute.

(Lao-tzu, § 20)

So this is relativity in the sense of comparativeness.

The fifth feature of "nihilistic naturalism" lies in its denial of teleology. There is no transcendent principle in Nature, so that there is no transcendent purpose toward which all other things must aim. Thus there is also no judgment of value which could be made from the point of view of the transcendent purpose. So the doctrine of "nihilistic naturalism" is not teleological.

Passing on to the epistemological features of the two thinkers, we find that the fundamental feature of their epistemology lies in their peculiar intellectualism. Both assert that the ultimate truth of "nihilistic naturalism" can be cognized only by a certain sort of intellectual faculty which is somewhat similar to Spinoza's *scientia intuitiva*, i.e., a synthesis of intuition and reasoning. On this point, Lao-tzu puts emphasis on intuition, Chuang-tzu on reasoning. But generally speaking, both think that man can attain to the ultimate no-thing (*wu-wu, nihil*) by intuition, and can conceive the natural law by reasoning, so that the truth of "nihilistic naturalism" can be attained only by intuitive reasoning, or *scientia intuitiva*.

Lao-tzu names the faculty of intuition "no name" or "not

naming" (*wu-minj*), and that of reasoning "having a name" or "giving a name" or "naming" (*you-minj*).

So his above-stated principal proposition;

There is no name at the beginning of Nature;
By giving names can all things be distinguished,

(Lao-tzu, § 1)

expresses not only his ontological, but also his epistemological principle.

This intuitive reasoning is a pure intellectual faculty, so that both Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu do not acknowledge any non-intellectual faculty which can cognize the truth of "nihilistic naturalism." So here there is no belief in God as in the case of the Judaeo-Christian religion, and no practical training as is demanded in Buddhism.

On practical features it can be said that their practical doctrine is based on the epistemological principle of "nihilistic naturalism." They think that man can attain ultimate tranquillity of mind only when he cognizes the truth of "nihilistic naturalism" entirely by the faculty of intuitive reasoning. From this cognition result two fundamental modes of practice: no-act (*wu-wei*) and natural act.

Lao-tzu says:

The sage remains in no-act (*wu-wei*), and acts the unnamed teachings,

(Lao-tzu, § 2)

or

Tao is always no-act,

(Lao-tzu, § 37)

or

(the sage) performs no-act.

(Lao-tzu, § 63)

These propositions express clearly the first mode, i.e. no-act.

He says also:

The sage depends upon the nature of all things, and does not perform any artificial act.

(Lao-tzu, § 64)

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This is an example of the second mode. The first mode, i.e. no-act, is the result of the intuitive cognition of no-thing (*wu-wu*; *nihil*); and the second mode, i.e., natural act, is the result of the rational cognition (reasoning) of the natural law of all things. These two modes of act are not separate, but must be unified, because the two cognitions which are the bases of these two acts are not separate. Thus the ideal act of the sage must be the unification of no-act and natural act, or what can be called "the natural act based on no-act."

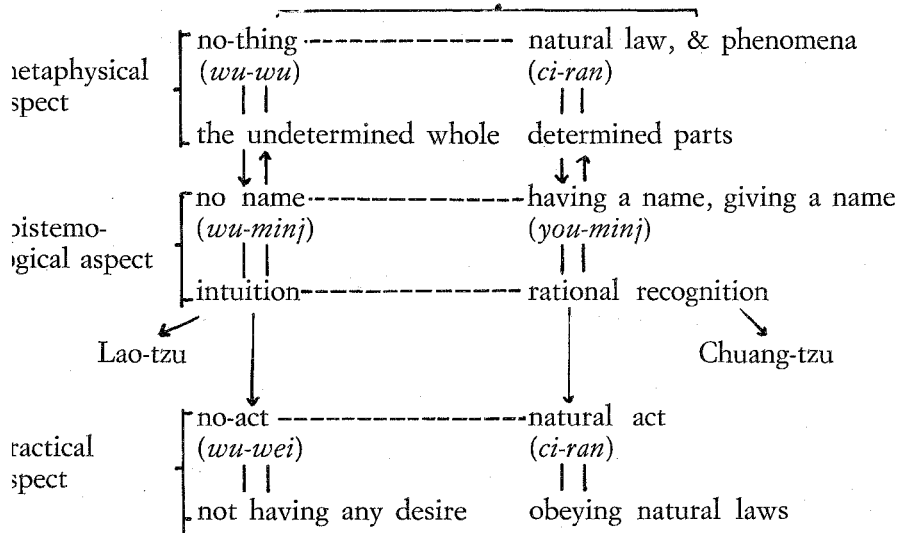
It seems to be difficult for Westerners to understand such an act. But in fact it is not so difficult. The term "no-act" means only that man recognizes the ultimate nothingness in Nature and does not desire any supernatural thing. On the other hand, the term "natural act" means that man recognizes the natural law of all things (or of all phenomena) in Nature and performs only acts obeying this law. So the unification of these two modes of act can be paraphrased as: not having any supernatural desire and obeying the natural law.

This is the ideal practice of Taoism, and this ideal practice always corresponds to ultimate tranquillity of mind. But it will be worth while to notice that ultimate tranquillity of mind is not any result of this practice, but something which arises from a true cognition by the intuitive reasoning. To attain ultimate tranquillity of mind, there is no need of any practice, but only of true cognition. This is a necessary result of Taoistic intellectualism.

It is possible to deduce some other features from this doctrine of practice: first the Taoistic attitude is more passive than active; secondly it is contrary to common sense; thirdly it is, nevertheless, Epicurean.

These features can be shown as more prominent in Chuang-tzu than in Lao-tzu. What we have discussed earlier can be summed up in the following diagram.

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III. THE ORIGINAL IDEAS OF CHUANG-TZU

Chuang-tzu is the most important successor of Lao-tzu. The essence of his thought is, as aforesaid, no other than Lao-tzu's philosophy, i.e., "nihilistic naturalism." But he has some particular features which express his originality and distinguish him from Lao-tzu. We will now select epistemological and practical doctrines which make his particular characteristics stand out.

As stated above, the epistemology of Lao-tzu has a structure which can be called "intuitive reasoning." But Chuang-tzu puts emphasis on reasoning, and his method of reasoning has a special formula, which we can call "relativism by transformation of point of view."

He says:

Chuang Chou dreamed, and in the dream changed into a butterfly. Then he awoke and changed again into Chuang Chou. Indeed is he Chuang Chou or rather is he a butterfly? This can be called a relative change of phenomena (*wuhua*).

(Chuang-tzu, chap. 2)

This prose is a typical example of the above-stated relativism. The logical structure of this prose passage can be analysed as follows. From Chuang Chou's point of view, he is really Chuang Chou and the butterfly in his dream is only an illusion. But from the point of view of the butterfly, he is really the butterfly, and Chuang Chou whom he became upon awakening is rather an illusion. So the distinction between reality and illusion is not absolute, but only relative so long as it depends on one's point of view.

We can analyse this form of reasoning in a more precise way by means of symbolic logic, (i) by using the logical symbols of the Russellian system; (ii) by adopting as undefined elements the following two fundamental predicates:

E1 $ch(x,y)$: means that x changes into y .

E2 $pv(x)$: means that man puts his point of view on x ; and

(iii) by introducing some definitions on the basis of these undefined terms.

D1 $dr(x,y) = df ch(x,y) \cdot pv(x)$: this means that x dreams and changes into y .

D2 $aw(x,y) = df ch(x,y) \cdot pv(y)$: this means that x awakens and changes into y .

(iv) We can deduce Chuang-tzu's relativism as follows, granting the axioms and the theorems of Russell's logical system:

P1 $pv(x) \supset [(ch(x,y) \supset dr(x,y)) \cdot ch(y,x) \supset aw(y,x)]$ (This can be proved by D1 and D2).

P2 $ch(x,y) \supset (pv(x) \supset dr(x,y))$.

(This can be proved by P1 and some theorems of logical transformation).

P3 $ch(y,x) \supset (pv(x) \supset aw(y,x))$.

(This can be proved by P1 in the same way as P2).

P4 $ch(x,y) \supset (pv(y) \supset aw(x,y))$.

(This can be proved by P3 by substitution of x for y and of y for x).

P5 $ch(x,y) \supset [(pv(x) \supset dr(x,y)) \cdot (pv(y) \supset aw(x,y))]$.

(This can be proved by P2, P4 and some theorems of logical transformation).

The last proposition P5 expresses the relativity Chuang-tzu asserts in his allegory. That is to say, one and the same change $ch(x,y)$ can be regarded both as dream and as awakening as different points of view are selected. So the distinction between dream and awakening is not absolute but only relative.

By this reasoning Chuang-tzu concludes that the distinction between reality and illusion is entirely relative according to the selected point of view, so that there is no distinction from the absolute standpoint. So his world becomes twofold. That is to say, Nature has two aspects: the relative discriminative aspect and the absolute non-discriminate one. The former corresponds to the natural law under natural phenomena in Lao-tzu's doctrine, and can be recognized by such a reasoning as stated above, and the latter corresponds to the nothing of Lao-tzu and can be recognized by a sort of intuition. So the whole structure of the natural world can be recognized by intuitive reasoning. This conclusion is the same as the epistemological doctrine of Lao-tzu. But Chuang-tzu's process at arriving at this conclusion is more logical than that of Lao-tzu. (Chuang-tzu further uses some other sorts of reasoning to prove the relativity of the discriminative aspect. But here we can not discuss them in detail for reasons of space).

By this reasoning he has proven the relativity of all sorts of discriminative opposition. Life and death, good and evil, or beauty and ugliness are all only relative discriminations. So there is from the absolute point of view neither distinction between life and death, nor between good and evil, nor between beauty and ugliness. Cognizing this non-discriminate reality from the absolute point of view, man can attain a new attitude toward the relative discriminative world.

Chuang-tzu mentions that there are two sorts of attitude toward the world: the one is to take all discrimination in the world as absolute and to desire only one side of such a discrimination, for example beauty, and to avoid another side of it, for example ugliness; the other is, contrary to this, to recognize the relativity of all relative discrimination and non-discrimination from the absolute point of view, and not to prefer only one side of any discrimination over another, and thus to accept all things fairly and calmly. What Chuang-tzu wants to recommend is nat-

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urally the second attitude. But this can be taken only by the sage who can recognize the truth of nihilistic naturalism by means of intuitive reasoning.

The sage can accept all things in the world entirely fairly and calmly and shows no favoritism towards anything. He accepts the death of his beloved wife so calmly and even joyfully as he enjoyed her presence when she was alive. This is because for him there is no absolute difference between life and death.

Then Chuang-tzu says:

The beginning of her life was no-thing, which changed into her life. Now she has died and has returned to the original no-thing. These changes are the same as those of the seasons.

(Chuang-tzu, chap. 18)

Further he says:

In the absolute sense we neither die nor live.

(Chuang-tzu, chap. 18)

Or he says:

I will agree with one who knows the non-discriminate unification of life and death.

(Chuang-tzu, chap. 6)

These prose lines express clearly that the distinction of life and death belongs only to the relative discriminative aspect, and that there is no distinction from the non-discriminate absolute point of view, so that the sage can accept death as calmly as life.

The attitude of this non-discriminate acceptance is certainly very passive, and not active towards the world. But this passivity is by no means passion. It is not any "passional" passivity but a calm and rational acceptance. So the sage can enjoy all things he accepts calmly, because he does not suffer from any passion. His passive attitude is joyful passivity. This is why he can be an Epicurean. He can enjoy every destiny, as F. Nietzsche teaches, even though it be bitter for him. So he laughs frequently. It is such a laughter as Nietzsche's Zarathustra laughs. His ideal life is to take a walk and to play at will in Utopia.

He says:

(The true king) lets all things enjoy themselves, and he himself plays at will in Utopia.

(Chuang-tzu, chap. 7)

Or he says:

Why not plant a useless tree in a wild field in Utopia and take a rest by its side or lie down calmly in the shade of that tree?

(Chuang-tzu, chap. 1)

These dreamy allegories express well his Epicureanism.

Some say that Chuang-tzu's Epicureanism is based on his mysticism. But this explanation is not exact. For his attitude toward the world is the result of his special method of cognition, i.e., intuitive reasoning, and especially of his peculiar reasoning which can be termed "relativism by transformation of point of view," so that his Epicureanism is based rather on his rational cognition than on his mysticism.

IV. CONCLUSION: CHUANG-TZU AND ZEN

This paper is an attempt at a re-evaluation of traditional Eastern naturalism, and, based on it, at reforming the contemporary tendency towards anti-naturalism, which is the true cause of destruction of our environment in Japan. But, as mentioned above, there are at least two sorts of traditional naturalism; one is that of Buddhism, and another that of Taoism (i.e. of philosophic Taoism).

People tend to regard only Buddhism, especially Zen-Buddhism, and ignore Taoism. Even if they look at Taoism by chance, they do not make any essential distinction between Taoism and Zen-Buddhism, and they often assert their basic similarity. They especially emphasize the fundamental similarity of Zen-Buddhism and of Chuang-tzu. This paper has been an attempt at breaking down this popular misunderstanding, and of clearly distinguishing two kinds of traditional naturalism.

Certainly Zen-Buddhism and Chuang-tzu have some similar features, but at the same time they differ from each other in essence. So, summing up the above discussion, we can say the following:

Both Chuang-tzu and Zen-Buddhism find ultimate mental tranquillity in the intuitive cognition of the non-discriminate aspect of Nature, but the former is more egocentric (egotistic) and more

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speculative than the latter, and especially the former (Chuang-tzu) makes use of precise logical methods in the process of arriving at the ultimate intuition. The latter (Zen-Buddhism) does not adopt such methods at all in order to attain Enlightenment. The strict logical methods used by Chuang-tzu serve as his strong point, and such methods can be applicable in modern ways of thinking.