

## **Research on the Intercultural Philosophical Interaction between French Post-Structuralism and Chinese Taoist Thought**

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**Abstract:** This research examines the intercultural philosophical exchange between French post-structuralism and Chinese Taoist thought. The key findings reveal both similarities and differences between these two philosophies. Notably, their shared emphasis on the interconnectedness of knowledge, identity, and reality offers a framework for nuanced analyses of contemporary global issues. Both philosophies challenge fixed structures and meanings, advocating for holistic ethical frameworks essential for addressing pressing socio-political challenges. Through three case studies, the research demonstrates that while both Taoism and post-structuralism can individually address significant global issues, their integration can yield greater synergies. This combined approach is particularly valuable in tackling the challenges posed by oppressive globalisation, identity politics, and environmental crises.

**Keywords:** French Post-Structuralism; Chinese Taoism; Intercultural Philosophy; Philosophic Synergies; Cross-Cultural Philosophies

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Taoism is one of the core philosophies that significantly shaped the tradition and culture of China. There are different norms and values that are still followed in the country that take their roots from Taoism. Particularly, Chen and Wu (Chen & Wu, 2022) are of the view that the ancient Chinese philosophy teaching of harmony, balance, modesty, interconnectedness, and aligning living standards with the natural order are some of the core concepts that are still practiced in the Chinese culture. Feng (Feng, 2022) and Zhang and Yao (Zhang & Yao, 2022) have asserted that Taoism has not only been the foundation of Chinese culture, but also this ancient philosophy has influenced the cultures and traditions of many Eastern cultures. Accordingly, the ancient philosophy has influenced the rituals and cultures of other regional cultures, including Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Southeast Asian cultures. Furthermore, Rošker,(Rošker, 2010) is of the view that although many people believe that Taoism is a religious philosophy, its core teachings could be observed in the literature, governance, art, tradition, and spiritual practices as well. On the other hand, post-structuralism philosophy has been assuming an important place in the

Western countries, particularly in the French culture. The philosophy emerged during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and it got greater popularity as it challenged the established rhetoric found in the French culture meanings, identity, and authority and presented an alternative perspective and way of thinking (Rošker, 2010). Just like the impact of Taoism is felt in different walks of life, the post-structuralism philosophy also influenced different aspects of French culture, tradition, governance, legal framework, and political system (Huang & Li, 2022). Largely, the concept gained prominence because of the fluidity of concepts and the role of language in shaping reality. Post-structuralism has been influenced by the teaching of many renowned figures, including Michael Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jacques Derrida (Zhang & Yao, 2022). The work of these writers got eminence because they not only questioned established narratives, but also they explored the implication of power and discourse. A casual look at the concept of Taoism and post-culturalism could reveal that the two philosophies are not only practiced in completely different cultural contexts but also that the two philosophies have significantly different and contrasting assumptions (Chen & Wu, 2022). Essentially, Taoism has been supporting the ideas of looking for a better means through which harmonious living could be ensured; however, the post-structuralist philosophy contests such ideas, as it is more critical of the established norms and identity (Huang & Li, 2022). This study aimed to analyse the intercultural philosophical interaction between French post-structuralism and Chinese Taoist thought. Specifically, the study analyses the core concepts of the two philosophies and analyses the points in which the two philosophies intersect and the points where divergence could be found in the two philosophies. On the basis of analysis and discussions presented in the study, a framework for intercultural philosophical dialogue could be coined that could be used as a foundation for enriching the two concepts further. The study is significant as it could not help in the deeper understanding of the two diverse philosophies and how the intercultural enrichment process could be initiated through philosophical dialogue that could be used to address the contemporary global challenges.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Post-Structuralism Philosophy

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the dominant philosophy that shaped the socio-political landscape in the Western countries could be

termed as the structuralist approach. The French post-structuralism was developed as a critical approach to structuralism, as it significantly criticised the structuralism approach for the instability of meaning and the role of language, affecting human experiences. There are different key figures associated with post-structuralism, which include Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze, who have contributed different concepts that led to the development of broader post-structuralist philosophy. In this regard, Jacques Derrida (Derrida, 1997) significantly contested the binary opposition found in the Western philosophies, including structuralism, and presented an alternative deconstruction (Liu, 2020). Through the deconstruction concept, Derrida (Derrida, 1997) highlighted that meaning is deferred, and in most of the situations, the meaning of different words is context-dependent. Derrida (Derrida, 1997) has highlighted that language constructs realities; hence flexibility should be adopted. On the other hand, Michael Foucault (Foucault, 1977) contributed to the French post-structuralism philosophy through power and knowledge of discourse. In his work, Foucault has demonstrated that discourse shaped the societal norms and values, and the rulers within many European countries have used the discourse to shape norms and individuals' identities and leverage such norms and identities for gaining and retaining power. On the other hand, Gilles Deleuze (1994) has also contributed to the development of post-structuralism, whereas he has highlighted that difference and repetition are the means through which identities are formed. Deleuze has rejected the fixed identities concept found in structuralism and has proposed a dynamic nature of existence.

## 2.2 Chinese Taoist Thought

Taoism, which is also many times called Daoism, takes its roots in ancient China. The core principles regarding Taoism could be found in the historical texts called 'Tao Te Ching' and 'Zhuangzi,' as the two texts highlight the key principles of this ancient philosophy (Li et al., 2024). The 'Tao Te Ching' work could be attributed to Daiyun et al. (Daiyun et al., 2022), whereas 'Dao' (The Way) is considered the core principle of the universe (Huang & Li, 2022). The Dao principles promote that one should be obeying the principles of natural order, as this principle is the ultimate reality (Zhang & Yao, 2022). Gu and Chen (Gu & Chen, 2022) have highlighted that another key concept of Taoism is 'Wu Wei' (effortless action), stressing that one should be living in a manner where the least resistance should be posed, just like flowing around obstacles. Taking into consideration the core idea that has been put forward in this historical text,

the author has not only argued for simple living and life standards but also humility and alignment with nature as the means through which better living habits could be formed. On the other hand, the 'Zhuangzhi' stressed the relativity and significance of spontaneity, whereas the fixed meaning and identity have been contested, and dynamic identity formation has been supported (Feng, 2022). The key concept according to Chen and Wu (Chen & Wu, 2022) that has been stressed in this key Taoism text is 'Ziran' (naturalness), which stressed the significance of authenticity, as compared to the adoption of norms and values that could promote interference. However, Nelson (Nelson, 2023) has pointed out that the core concept that has been stressed in 'Zhuangzhi' is 'Yin' and 'Yang' (duality and balance) and that there are opposing characteristics in the universe and one should be looking to balance such opposing characters like light and darkness, softness and hardness. On the other hand, Huang and Li (Huang & Li, 2022) have pointed out that Taoism stressed relativity, whereas the true meaning of words could be discovered from their opposite words.

### 2.3 Similarities between Taoism and Post-structuralism Philosophies

Although the two philosophies emerged in completely different societies and at different points in time, the analysis of the two philosophies could reveal that there are some key aspects on which the two concepts are similar. One of the first similarities, according to Liang and Zhao (Liang & Zhao, 2021), is that both concepts favour fluidity of meaning and have significantly criticised the fixed meaning norm that could be found in other key philosophies. In this regard, Taoism has significantly stressed the ever-changing nature of 'Dao' (the way), which stressed flexibility in terms of knowledge and reality. On the other hand, post-structuralism has also challenged the fixed meaning; however, it has stressed the significance of context and interpretation for the formation of identities. Furthermore, Liu (Liu, 2020) has highlighted that the two concepts have similar perspectives regarding the relativity of knowledge. In this regard, Taoism has been supporting the coexistence of different perspectives at the same time. On the other hand, post-structuralism has been stressing such relativity; however, the core theme in the philosophy is that knowledge is culturally and historically contingent. In addition, Xiao and Wang (Wang, 2021) are of the view that the two philosophies are similar in terms of the deconstruction of identity. Taoism stressed that the self is interconnected with the cosmos, and if the self is better understood, the entire universe is. On the other hand, post-structuralism has criticised the idea of a stable self, as the core theme in the philosophy is that the self is the result of the impact

of social and cultural discourse. Additionally, Wang (Wang, 2021) has pointed out that both Taoism and post-structuralism perspectives stressed harmony and balance perspective, although different means have been suggested for such objectives. In this regard, the author suggested that Taoism stressed harmony with nature, whereas individuals living within a society are expected to align with the nature. On the other hand, post-structuralism has been striving for harmony and balance as it challenged established rhetoric that could lead towards new definitions and meanings that could lead towards new balance and harmony within a society (Liang & Zhao, 2021). Moreover, Wang and Li (Wang & Li, 2023) believe that the two philosophies are also critical of the range of dichotomies that could exist within society. In the case of Taoism, the philosophy challenged the binary opposition, as the philosophy stressed that different matters within the universe are interdependent. On the other hand, in the case of post-structuralism, the dichotomies found in the society are also challenged; however, this is done through the deconstruction process and finding alternative discourse (Liu, 2020).

#### 2.4 Difference between Taoism and Post-structuralism

Irrespective of the above similarities found in the two philosophies, there are a range of differences that could also be found in the two philosophies. For example, Nelson (Nelson, 2023) has pointed out that the two philosophies have significant differences regarding the nature of reality. In the case of Taoism, the core belief is that reality is an interconnected whole, which is governed by the Dao (the way). Unlike this, in the case of post-structuralism, the core belief is that reality is constructed through language social interactions (Chen & Wu, 2022). Thus, as against the Taoism philosophy, post-structuralism philosophy stressed that reality is fragmented, and the cohesive idea that is stressed in the case of Taoism is criticised in the case of post-structuralism. Additionally, the two philosophies also have significant differences regarding the core approach to knowledge. In the case of Taoism, intuitive knowledge and experiential knowledge are stressed as they are the means through which one could better connect with the natural world (Nelson, 2020). On the other hand, post-structuralism has been challenging and critical of the existing understanding and knowledge basis, and through the process of deconstruction, it not only challenged the existing understanding and rhetoric found in a society but also revealed the underlying assumptions in established text and concepts (Xiao & Wang, 2021). The concept of self is

also significantly different in the case of Taoism and post-structuralism, as Huang and Li (Huang & Li, 2022) held that Taoism stressed the fluid nature of self, where self is interconnected to the broader cosmos. When the self is connected and aligned with the natural order, such could help in discovering holistic realities. On the other hand, Zhang and Yao (Zhang & Yao, 2022) are of the view that in the case of post-structuralism, the stable and essential self, found in the Taoism, has been significantly criticised, as the philosophy stressed the role of social and cultural discourse found in the society as the means of establishing identity. This in turn dictates that in the case of post-structuralism, not only is greater emphasis made on the multiplicity of self, but also it significantly stresses the fragmentation of identity. Furthermore, there are also significant differences between Taoism and post-structuralism regarding ethical framework. In the case of Taoism, ethical behaviour is stressed by promoting norms and values like simplicity, harmony, and non-action. However, the core approach in the philosophy is that such norms and values are not imposed; rather, individuals living in the society are encouraged to align with the cosmos. On the other hand, Chen and Wu (Chen & Wu, 2022) are of the view that in the case of post-structuralism, many of the norms and values that are part of the established ethics in a society are questioned, as the core belief within the framework is that it could be the means through which oppressive practices and power dynamics have been established in the society. Thus, rather than accepting norms and values that are part of the society's ethical practices, post-structuralism questioned and challenged them, rather than taking them wholly. The methodological approaches that have been employed in the two philosophies are also significantly different. According to Pohl (Pohl, 2010), the methodological approach used in Taoism comprised metaphors, poetic language, stories, and idioms for communicating philosophical insight. Mediation and contemplation practices are more common to the philosophy, as they are the means through which the philosophy is transformed into practices (Chen & Wu, 2022). On the other hand, in the case of post-structuralism, analytical and critical methodology is adopted, whereas not only the established norms and rhetoric of the society are challenged, but also the process of reconstruction has been suggested (Zhang & Yao, 2022). Unlike Taoism, which is more practical philosophy in nature, post-structuralism is theoretical in nature (Chen & Wu, 2022). Furthermore, Liu (Liu, 2020) is of the view that the two philosophies also significantly differ in their attitude towards tradition. In the case of Taoism, the philosophy has been

greatly valuing traditional norms and values, as their core understanding in the philosophy is that they are the means through which individuals could better connect with nature. On the other hand, in the case of post-structuralism, traditional philosophy and associated norms are challenged. The core theme in the philosophy is that many traditions have been found to ensure power and oppression in societies; thus, it could lead towards destabilisation. As a result, the post-structuralism stressed questioning tradition and rituals.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

The research design that has been adopted for investigating the intercultural philosophical interaction between French post-structuralism and Chinese Taoist thought is a qualitative approach. The findings within the study have been founded on the basis of comparative analysis of the two philosophies, including Chinese Taoism and French post-culturalism, whereas an intersection approach has been utilised in the study. Through the use of a qualitative approach, the study in turn has been ensuring the desired explorations that helped in the in-depth analysis and examination of the core research issue and the practical implications emerging because of the comparisons of the two philosophies, considering multiple case studies that have been explored in this study.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The data collection strategy that has been used in this study could be termed as secondary data analysis, whereas a range of academic sources have been collected that elaborate on the Taoism and French post-culturalism philosophies. The work includes primary texts by Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze writing on the post-structuralist perspective. In addition, primary texts regarding Taoism, including the Tao Te Ching and Zhuangzhi, have been used. These have been coupled with books, academic journals, and peer-reviewed articles in the leading journal to analyse how the two philosophies are intersecting with the passage of time and what core implications this has on the future. For the multiple case studies analysed in the study, contemporary sources, including activist reports and other published sources, have been analysed that helped in the better understanding of the context and situation experienced in the case study and how the integration of the two

philosophical perspectives could better inform real-world practices.

### 3.3 Research Strategy

The research strategy that has been used in this study is the case study approach, whereas multiple case studies have been analysed to see what philosophy has been more relevant and how the integration of the two concepts could further strengthen the future perspective. For this study, three case studies have been selected regarding contemporary issues that the world at large has been witnessing that belong to environmental ethics, identity politics, and social justice movements.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis strategy that has been used in this study comprised thematic and comparative analysis. The thematic analysis that helped in establishing patterns and relationships between different variables was discovered through secondary data. Furthermore, the comparative analysis has been used to carry out textual analysis in the three case studies analysed in this study.

## 4. FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Social Justice Movements

As the trends of globalisation have been gaining importance, this in turn has been leading to the development of greater inequality in different parts of the world. The disparities between the developing and developed countries have been significantly increasing with the passage of time, leading to significant socioeconomic problems witnessed in less developed countries. In fact, Ding and Yu (Li et al., 2024) have argued that most of the development that developed countries have witnessed has been largely at the cost of less developed countries. Social justice movements in this regard have been emerging, whereas the teaching of Chinese Taoism and French post-structuralism could be utilised to better protests against such oppressive practices. Following the Chinese Taoism, the concept of ‘Wu Wei’ could be used to stress a more contemplative approach. Resistance moment could be formed to align oneself with the natural flow of events, rather than forcefully opposing the oppressive practices (Wang, 2021). This in turn means that if the teaching of Chinese Taoism is used for resistance against the significant oppressive practices of advanced industrialised nations, this in turn may imply that the less developed countries, instead of



protesting against the industrialised countries, have to find other means through which they could better employ their resources and capabilities. In particular, through emphasis on human capital development, strengthening of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and providing greater opportunities for innovation and collaboration within and outside the country, the less developed countries could ensure the natural flow suggested in the Chinese Taoism, rather than forcefully opposing them (Huang & Li, 2022). Sustainable actions that lead to wider socioeconomic development could be thus gained through such actions. On the other hand, the policies of French post-structuralism could also be employed to address the existing oppressive power structure that has been contributing to the bad fortune of less developed countries. An example of this could include protesting against organisations like the WTO, which has worked in the past to safeguard the interests and objectives of industrialised countries. As the general belief is that the power dynamics ensured through such rule-setting organisations have contributed to the sluggish socioeconomic development in the less developed countries, the power dynamics could be examined, and effective counter-strategies could then be formulated that could help in overcoming the challenges thus encountered (Fischer, 2021). Irrespective of the individual philosophy and the success it could generate, it could be argued that the integration of the two approaches could lead towards more effective policies and strategies against industrialised nation oppression, and better social justice could be generated through the integration process (Feng, 2022). In this regard, the teaching of French post-structuralism could be used to question the existing policies of organisations like the WTO, while the teaching of Chinese Taoism could be employed to address the foundational-level issues at home that have been contributing to the lower socioeconomic challenges. The integrations of the two philosophies could thus help in more effectively addressing the core challenges.

#### 4.2 Identity Politics

Identity politics have gained greater significance in different parts of the world as social movements are emerging that have been raising voices and concerns regarding issues like race, gender, sexuality, and other forms of oppression found in societies (Fischer, 2021). The Chinese Taoism provides a better framework for identity politics, as the core theme within the approach is that an individual should be interconnected with the cosmos, and through understanding one's role in the broader cosmos, true understanding regarding different concepts could be developed. In

particular, Tao to Cheng and Zhuangzhi, key texts of Taoism, stressed the multiplicity of identities while connecting with nature. While playing the role in the identity politics, one could show such connection with the nature and broader cosmos. Furthermore, the French post-structuralism concept could also be used for playing the role in the identity politics (Miller, 2020). The key theme of the philosophy challenged fixed identity; rather, the core belief within the concept is that identities are formed through interaction with social and cultural discourse and power relations. Using the core theme of post-structuralism, the power relations that have been leading to the oppression of different groups within the society, a more fluid understanding of identity could be formed (Fischer, 2021). Efforts could then be made to shift the identity by bringing change in the discourse and meanings. Although the teaching of the two concepts has been individually employed in different instances in the case of identity politics issues, more effective actions and strategies could be devised through the integration of two philosophies. According to Rošker, (Rošker, 2010), in this regard, the teaching of Taoism could be used to establish a connection with others that could lead towards more concentric actions against the social issues raised in the identity politics, while Miller (Miller, 2020) has pointed out that the French post-structuralism could be used to develop a more nuanced understanding of the identity politics. Thus, greater solidarity and more effective actions amongst diverse groups could be ensured through the integration of Chinese Taoism and the French post-structuralism approach.

#### 4.3 Environmental Ethics

The climatic changes and environmental degradation that are currently witnessed in different parts of the world are some of the significant challenges these days. The challenges thus witnessed could be effectively addressed through the philosophical dialogue of Chinese Taoism and French post-culturalism. The Chinese Taoism is an effective approach for addressing the challenges because this ancient Chinese philosophy stressed the significance of natural ways and harmonious life, whereas one should be aligning with the cosmos. In particular, Taoism stressed a balance between life and environment; thus, although living standards are important, the Taoism philosophy stressed that such should not be at the cost of the environment (Wang, 2020) As per the concept of 'Wu Wei' that is integral to the Chinese Taoism, individuals living within the society are expected to align their living as per the social. This in turn means that if the Chinese Taoism perspective is followed with its full spirit, the majority of

the environmental problems and challenges that the world has been witnessing could be effectively resolved. The core teachings of Taoism are in line with the contemporary perspectives regarding environmental friendliness, sustainability, and conservation found in advanced countries of the world. On the other hand, the core themes of post-structuralism are also important for environmental sustainability and sustainability efforts. Following the teaching of Michael Foucault, the excessive exploitation of natural resources has been the core cause of the environmental problems, whereas the existing power structure found in the society and capitalist exploitation are the core reasons contributing to the environmental challenges. Situations where Michael Foucault is followed, environmental degradation could be stopped, as instead of profit maximisation objectives, business organisations could then be able to prioritise environmental conservation, sustainability, and ecological friendliness instead (Fischer, 2021). Although both concepts could help in addressing the environmental challenges that the world has been witnessing these days, an integrated approach, where the core themes of Chinese Taoism and French post-structuralism are integrated, could help in more synergistic policies that could help in resolving the core environmental challenges that are witnessed these days. In particular, Wang (Wang, 2020) is of the view that the approach that could be devised through the integration of Chinese Taoism and French post-structuralism, a more holistic approach could be devised that could help in addressing the challenges from the foundation level, resulting in more sustainable environmental policies in the future.

## 5. CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of Research

This research analysed the intercultural philosophical interaction between French post-structuralism and Chinese Taoist thought. As per the core findings of the research, there are some similarities and differences between the two philosophies. Considering the interconnectedness of the two philosophies, the shared perspective of the two philosophies, including the interconnectedness of knowledge, identity, and reality, could be used to develop a more nuanced analysis of the contemporary issues that the world has been currently witnessing. In particular, the two philosophies have been questioning the fixed structure and meaning and supporting the development of holistic ethical frameworks that could be vital for addressing many of the contemporary socio-political issues that are

witnessed in the world. As highlighted in three case studies, although Chinese Taoism and French post-structuralism could be individually used to resolve the three core issues that are witnessed in different parts of the world, it has been suggested that through the integration of Chinese Taoism and French post-structuralism, greater synergies could be gained that could be vital for addressing the core challenges witnessed in the form of oppressive globalisation, identity politics, and environmental challenges.

## 5.2 Implications of Research

The core implication of the research is that an interdisciplinary approach could be extremely useful, as such an approach could enrich the philosophical traditions through the integration of Western and Eastern philosophies. Such an approach could enhance intercultural understanding and could help in better resolution of the contemporary challenges that are emerging in a globalised world. The policy-level implications of the research are that the intercultural approach, where the Western and Eastern philosophies could be integrated, could help in better advocacy measures. Particularly, the emerging issues that have cross-cultural implications could be more effectively resolved through cross-cultural integration of Chinese Taoism and the French post-structuralism approach.

## 5.3 Limitations of Research

The findings of the research are based on just two philosophies from the Eastern and Western worlds; however, there are different philosophies that are followed in each of the cultures. This in turn could affect the generalisation of research. Furthermore, the findings of the research are qualitative in nature, which in turn pose challenges in terms of interpretive biases due to a lack of objectivity in the research. Additionally, the findings of the study are based on secondary data, and no primary research has been conducted in the field, which in turn could have affected the focus of the study.

## 5.4 Future Research Recommendations

For future research, it is recommended that rather than limiting the study to just two philosophies, multiple philosophies should be considered. For example, in the Chinese culture, three core philosophies could be studied, which could include Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. On the other hand, in the case of French culture, perspectives like functionalist perspective, like functionalism, structuralism, and post-structuralism, could

be considered simultaneously. Additionally, for future research, quantitative and more scientific research designs should be adopted that could help in overcoming the interpretive biases that could have affected the present study. Furthermore, for the future study, it is also recommended that rather than relying on secondary data, primary data sources should be adopted, as such could help in conducting a more focused study and explorations.

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