

## Naturalistic *Chi(Qi)*-Based Philosophy as a Foundation of *Chi(Qi)* Theory of Communication

Yu-Ming Liu  
National Chengchi University

**Abstract.** The *chi (qi)* concept, originated from ancient China, typifies dialectics with the *yin* and *yang* bipolar. It has been employed to develop a communication theory in general and applied to studies of various communication contexts in particular. However, there have been a number of philosophical schools of *chi* theory, some of which are mystical or overly moral value laden. The different schools can easily confuse those who intend to seek a philosophical grounding for the *chi* theory of communication. This paper explains why the “naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy,” as opposed to the “Holy *chi*-based philosophy,” is the philosophical paradigm which best interfaces with modern social science and communication theory. This assertion will be argued from three properties of *chi*: 1) the universality of the *yin-yang* dialectics in various behaviors and phenomena, 2) the fundamental dialectic structure of communication, and 3) the implicit goal toward harmony in communication contexts. [China Media Research. 2008; 4(3): 83-91]

**Keywords:** *chi(qi)*, Communication, *yin* and *yang*, naturalistic school of *chi*-based philosophy, holy school of *chi*-based philosophy

The traditional East Asian “*chi* theory” has been able to provide materials for the research of history of philosophy, the history of thoughts, and the history of culture. In recent years, *chi (qi)* concepts have been introduced and applied to research of communication (Chung, 2004, 1996, 1995, 2000; Chung, Hara, Yang, & Ryu, 2003; Isaacson & Chung, 2004; Chung & Busby, 2002). Could “*chi*,” a mystical, imprecise, and “pre-modern” concept, be developed into a “communication theory of *chi*”? Could such a theory, which is taking shape, make theoretical and even heuristic contributions to the contemporary humanities and social sciences? That likelihood and potential appear to have been shown and demonstrated in the works of Chung and colleagues. However, there are some issues on the philosophical level of their research in communication theories based on *chi* that need further exploration. This paper thus discusses the linkage between the “*chi* theory” and contemporary socio-scientific studies through examples of organizational communicational dialectics from the position of “naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy” founded by Confucianists of Ming and Qing dynasties of China.

### Which *Chi* Theory is More Appropriate for Modern Society?

Social science theories are often based on a certain philosophy or theory; communication theories on *chi* should be no exception. However, even among *chi* theories, there are various schools, some of which favor ancient ideologies and are biased against modern scholarship. If developing a *chi* theory merely quoting certain ancient philosophy, without paying attention to the different stances among those schools, how can the foundation be solid? The Chinese philosophy community often provides vague, fragmented, and incomplete

pictures for other disciplines. *Chi* theory development thus has been unable to find the most meaningful materials. In fact, the “*chi* philosophies” with modern meanings have emerged in China since the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, labeled the “modern age” in the Western history. The philosophies have provided foundation-building materials for contemporary *chi* theory of communication and other social science research. Without due regard to the modern philosophy, theory-builders will soon turn to the West for theoretical support.

“*Chi* theory” originates from the ancient pre-Chin dynasty of China and evolves along a long period to the contemporary era. Philosophers of the two factions of Confucianism, Mencianism, and Xunism, discussed *chi*. The two sects of Lao-Zhuang and Huang-Lao in Taoism laid out classical tenets. *Yin-Yang* theorists also discussed *chi* issues. In Chinese history, various *chi* theories largely regarded *chi* the elemental material of all things in the world. Scratching through the surface, different philosophical positions emerge. The deliberations of *chi* theories in the Confucian tradition, which has been the mainstream thinking among intellectual strata and the general society since the North Song and South Song dynasties (approximately from 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries), fall into three categories.

The first school of *chi* theory considers *chi* the fundamental element of all things in the universe. Above *chi*, however, there is a “spiritual entity” as the ultimate entity providing *chi* and all things with meaning and value. The spiritual entity makes *chi* transform and flow, serving as origins of all things of the world. Therefore, the “*chi* thought” is based on the assertion that the “holy, spiritual, and ultimate entity” (commensurate to God in the Middle Ages) is a priori to, above, and external to *chi*. Thus, this theory is

merely a “*chi* theory” (theory with positions related to “*chi*”), instead of a “philosophy based on *chi* itself, treating *chi* as the origin of the universe.” Belonging to this category are the *chi* theory in the *li*-based philosophy (or the monoism of *li*, 理本論, philosophy based on *li*/principle of heaven) advocated by Zhu Xi(朱熹) in the Song Dynasty.

The second school of *chi* theory considers *chi* the only origin of the world. But the original *chi* is a “holy primordial *chi*,” and is a holy and spiritual (not in the religious sense) ultimate entity which provides all things in the world with a pure and complete meaning and value. In the process of unfolding and flowing of this holy primordial *chi*, the pure and complete value can be fully released when there is no obstruction or interference. Therefore, this “*chi* theory” is itself a “philosophy of *chi*” based on the “holy primordial *chi*,” and can be termed “holy school of *chi*-based philosophy (神聖氣本論).” Belonging to this category are the *chi*-based philosophy (氣本論) by Liu Zong Zhou(劉宗周 1578-1645), Huang Zong Xi(黃宗羲 1610-1695), and Wang Fu Zhi(王夫之 1619-1692) in the late Ming dynasty and early Ching dynasty.

The third school of *chi* theory also considers “*chi*” the only origin of the world, but differs from the second school in that this school views the original *chi* as merely a “naturalistic primordial *chi* (自然元氣)” or “chaotic primordial *chi* (混沌元氣).” It is only a “natural entity” conceiving limited value or value tendency, that is, “potentially” leaning toward harmony. This entity of naturalistic primordial *chi*, along with the “conception of limited value,” constructs all things in the world step by step, accumulating and enriching its value through the implementation of people. At the same time, this school of *chi* theory is also a “philosophy of *chi*.” To be specific, it is better explained as “naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy (自然氣本論)” based on the “naturalistic primary *chi*.” Scholars such as Luo Qin Shun(羅欽順 1465-1547), Wang Ting Xiang(王廷相 1472-1544), Wu Ting Han(吳廷翰 1491-1559) of latter Ming dynasty and Gu Yan Wu(顧炎武 1613-1682) of early Qing Dynasty propose preliminary principles of this school of *chi*-based philosophy. Dai Zhen(戴震 1724-1777) of Qing Dynasty further elaborates with more sophistication.

The above three *chi* theories are all important relevant sources for research today, but viewed from the stance of modernity, the first two are theories of “holy ontology (神聖本體論),” for *li* or “holy primordial *chi*” is their original substance. They are similar to the Western theology in the medieval age, which, centering on the Almighty God, predisposes a full, perfect, and pre-existing value source. These two schools of

thoughts suppress the ingredients of reality and nature conceived in human lives. Therefore, they are “medieval” in nature (Liu, 2005). The third school of *chi* theory, the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy (自然氣本論), became independent from a powerful and pre-existent source of value, the holy noumenon (神聖本體). It argues that human beings, based on an ultimate reality with limited value and a natural life also with limited value, gradually develop and construct their own civilized values. A line of thinking such as this is close to the modern thinking and, like the Western modern philosophy started in the Enlightenment era, can be characterized by “modernity” (here it refers only to modernity in the context of Chinese culture, which could be regarded as the early modernity of China). Therefore, it is argued in this essay that the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy (which appeared between 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) is the most suitable philosophical paradigm to the research of contemporary social science relevant to *chi*. It goes without saying that we can still benefit from many individual concepts in other theories, such as the first two kinds of *chi* theories mentioned above, traditional *I Ching* (易經) studies in Confucianism, as well as *chi* theory in Taoism -- if we can sift, select and adopt it, based on the paradigm of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy.

All in all, naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy is more suitable than the holy school of *chi* theory to serve as the philosophical foundation of research on contemporary activities and ecologies of groups and organizations, including the “communication theory of *chi*”. I also trust that if the above mentioned “communication theory of *chi*” can be constructed on the basis of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy, it would develop into a theory with modern significance, and can mark the starting point of further research on this subject in the Chinese social science research community.

Scholars familiar to the contemporary studies of Confucianism in Taiwan might disagree with this contention. Contemporary Neo-Confucianism is the mainstream of Confucian studies in Taiwan, which belongs to the lineage of Mencianism (孟學). It agrees with *li*-based philosophy (理本論), *xin*-based philosophy (心本論, a philosophy based on mind/heart) and holy school of *chi*-based philosophy (神聖氣本論). This school of thought disagrees with and neglects the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy advocated by Dai Zen(戴震). In my interpretation, the contemporary Neo-Confucianism in Taiwan is more like a temporary resolution to modern nationalistic and cultural crisis. It borrows from the well established Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties (*Song Ming li xue* 宋明理學) especially Yangmingism (陽明學), in response to the urgent need of a new philosophy to deal with

modern challenges. It successfully aroused enthusiasm and a sense of mission in intellectuals, but is limited in its influence on the general public, and is seldom linked with academic research in humanities and social science. The history of the past three-quarter century has proved that this school of philosophy has not been able to convince the contemporary society to adopt it as an internalized philosophical cornerstone.

Neo-Confucianism (*li xue* 理學), the mainstream thought of the Song and Ming Dynasties, has continued to be the “official thought” in the Qing Dynasty, mainly because it conforms to the Chinese people’s psychomental complex for perfection. Since mainstream thought in Chinese culture often come to form ideologies and is sustained for extended periods of time, the successor of Song Ming Neo-Confucianism, the contemporary Neo-Confucianism, has grown to be the overwhelming majority view in Confucianism in contemporary Taiwan. As a result, naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy since the late Ming and Qing Dynasty has not been recognized enough in Taiwan. Despite this, I still believe that if scholars can be more open to different theories other than Mencianism (孟學), the legitimacy of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy and the early modernity (早期現代性) of China could be recognized. It is my hope that naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy would, in the near future, be affirmed as the philosophical base of communication and other humanities or modern social science theories and research.

As a matter of fact, the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy conceiving modernity has also appeared in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam in recent centuries. Contemporary Japanese scholars Masao Maruyama (丸山真男), pointed out that Ito Jinsai (伊藤仁齋) and Ogyu Sorai’s (荻生徂徠) monoism of *chi* (氣一元論) in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries reflects Japan’s modernity (Maruyama, 1952). Monoism of *chi* also appeared in Korea beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Choe Han-gi (崔漢綺 1804-1877) integrated the western scholarship and proposed a philosophy of *chi* which is very close to the modern scientific thought. What is more significant is that the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam very much likely has inherited the Confucian naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy directly or indirectly. It is clear that the emergence of the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy in East Asia has its significant implication; it signals the pioneering turn and transformation to modernity. Constructing a communication theory based on such a philosophical paradigm is to build the theory on a solid theoretical foundation in the East Asian philosophy.

### The Fundamental Concept of the Naturalistic *Chi*-based Philosophy

Based on the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy from Ming and Qing Confucianism, naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy under the context of modern knowledge and concepts might appear as below.

#### Naturalistic primordial *chi* (自然元氣): Origin of the world

The world originated from *chi*, the naturalistic and chaotic fundamental substance. This primordial *chi* is infinitely ingenious but subtle and pervasive. It has activeness and kinetic energy, conceiving a value tendency, and is able to aggregate into various objects, which can then return to the original condition, the *chi* state. Its actual meaning is open for discussion, and awaits continuous research by scientists of future generations. Contemporary physicists brought up a new theory (or hypothesis), the String Theory, to explain the formation of the universe (Greene, 2000). Before the advent of String Theory, physicists had recognized that there are various types of elementary particles (up quarks, down quarks, neutrinos and electrons form a family, and there are three families of different masses. Furthermore, every elementary particle has an associated antiparticle with the same mass and opposite charges). However, the String Theory advocates that they are just different states of the same strings which are of extremely small in size and are vibrating at various specific frequencies. A particle should be thought of as a tiny elastic vibrating string, rather than a solid particle. When this string vibrates in different modes, it appears as a different particle. So, it is not those various elementary particles, but the only one kind of vibrating string in different modes that could be considered the ultimate existence. We can perhaps get a conceptual idea of the “primordial *chi*” by looking at the vibrating strings.

The primordial *chi* appears in two different states, *yin* and *yang*, therefore *chi* is sometimes referred as the two *chi* of *yin* and *yang* (陰陽二氣). Nevertheless, “*yin/yang*” does not suggest two different *chi*. It emphasizes that primordial *chi* exists in two modes. In other words, *yin* and *yang* are interchangeable *chi*. In the above mentioned String Theory, it is indicated that each elementary particle has an associated antiparticle. This concept is similar to that of *yin* and *yang*. We may say that the primordial *chi* is not a motionless existence. Instead, the existence of the two different modes, *yin* and *yang*, makes it possible for *chi* to change and evolves over time.

There is a further theory of “five phases” or “five agents” (*wu xing* 五行) in Chinese traditional *chi* theory. *Yin* and *yang* evolve into five elements, and the five elements develop into all things in the universe. Therefore everything has a five-phase property, and the relationship and interaction of them can be speculated

by analyzing their special properties. For instance, some phases are considered inter-generating (相生) and some are inter-restricting (相剋). Yet it would be arbitrary and over-simplifying to conclude that the five phases are the only intermediary between *yin -yang* and all things on earth, and their properties can only be explained by the five phases. It is more appropriate to regard the theory of five phases as a metaphor for the organic relationship of the whole creation.

Unlike scientists, philosophers of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy emphasize that the primordial *chi* contains a potential value tendency (價值傾向): “mean (*zhong* 中),” or “middle,” “even,” or “harmonious.” Still, this value tendency is just a tendency, not a definite result. The whole creation would not necessarily arrive at the “mean” status readily, directly or completely. The “mean” itself is merely a plain and simple implication. It can only be enriched and enhanced through continuous exploring, implementing and revising of man. If we were to compare naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy with western philosophy, I would argue that it shares some of the “finite god” conception by William James, who contends that God is not responsible for the sins and natural deficiencies in the world, and the moral choice and action of human beings are decisive and significant (Eames, 1977).

### **Naturalistic Endowed Chi (自然稟氣):**

#### **Origin of human life**

The whole creation is through continuous transformation of the primordial *chi*: primordial *chi* transforms by unceasingly circulating, assembling, dispersing, converting, and making various combinations. The properties of all those different combinations come into being the natural character of all things in the universe. Take human being as an instance. All humans are formed by “naturalistic endowed *chi*,” and the endowed *chi* that forms each person differs in a subtle way. This “naturalistic endowed *chi*” defines the nature of each person. Therefore, there is a potential value tendency of “mean” within every human being. For humans, the “mean” refers to good and righteousness (*shan* 善). Although the intensity of this tendency differs from one another, it is in any case stronger than those of other creatures.

To be specific, everyone’s naturalistic endowed *chi* develops into his or her body, mind and soul, and then evolves into emotions, feelings, desires, conscience, sub-conscience and the cognition that can think, differentiate, and retrospect. The feelings, desires could be either good or bad; and the cognition cannot know all, not to mention the existence of difference in intelligence. This diversity is the “natural (自然)” aspect of human nature. By any means, human minds still lean towards good, and their intelligence can be improved by

learning and training to recognize the goodness. In other words, people need to learn through experience, and persist on adjusting and amending themselves, so as to be able to recognize good from bad and hold fast to righteousness when situation comes up. Human conscience comes from the natural value tendency of mankind, and is an expression of the “consequential (必然)” aspect of human nature. Together, the natural and consequential aspects form the complete meaning of human nature. Nonetheless, the value tendency in each person differs, so sometimes the consequential good does not easily emerge from our minds. Unfortunately, some people do encounter more difficulties in finding the good in their nature, and therefore require clarification, repeated learning, and correction to become clear. They also need external control to keep them from jeopardizing others.

In sum, human life is a consequence of the development of naturalistic endowed *chi* into their body, mind and heart, and there is no sacred reasoning or mystery power as the ruler of human beings. The body, mind and heart, as well as the emotions, desires and conscience which come from our body, mind and heart are a self-contained whole which originates from the naturalistic endowed *chi*. So, the advancement of human life only comes from the self-understanding, self-adjustment and self-transformation of the body, mind and heart. Modern Western subjective philosophies puts too much emphasis on speculative reason and Contemporary Neo-Confucianism in Taiwan excessively praises the completeness of the moral reason. Thus, they both often neglect the presence and involvement of human body, emotion and desire. It is inaccurate to say that emotion and desire are merely negative and troublesome factors which require control and restriction. Given that humans are naturally endowed with a tendency towards good, potential value and truth should exist in the emotion and desire of human beings. In fact human emotion and desire plays an indispensable role, though very different from rationality and reasoning, in the process of the expression and confirmation of the truth.

#### **A *chi*-based life-world which is united but diversified**

As mentioned above, naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy postulates that a primordial *chi* has an ultimate preciseness and self-driven dynamic, which contains a value tendency. Its movement of flowing, solidifying, scattering and changing makes this world a complicated and colorful universe. Every value primarily is only an inner and simple value tendency. Through the gradual development of *chi* and humans’ participation and implementation, the value of all things in the world become uplifted, accumulated and rich. Other than these, there is no level of transcendent sacred field or power that designs and remotely controls the development of human history. In a word, everything in

this world, including all kinds of construction of human civilization, basically developed from the primordial *chi*. Which is to say, the world we live in is made of the *chi* we mutually possess and share; a world of this only level; united but diversified.

The claim that the world is all connected by a continuous flowing *chi* (一氣相貫相通) does not mean things can transform from one into another as described in ancient myths, nor imply that human body may be transferred to another place at an instance as in science-fiction. It simply illustrates that all things in the universe are not tightly bounded but are separable from one another. And it clarifies that since the whole creation is based on *chi*, at a microcosmic level, everything can interflow and communicate with each other in certain degree under a certain mechanism.

Therefore, just as human lives are in a vein of connected and unified whole consisting of “*chi*, body, and mind,” the entire living world is composed of a vein of connected continuous *chi*, nature, human life, society, history, and culture. Nature, individual being, society, history, culture, and other collectivities, all originated and developed from the flow, transformation of naturalistic primordial *chi*. Although they are continuous and interlinked, idiosyncrasy still exists, because even with the same origin, different ways of combination results in dissimilar creatures. Briefly, the relationship between all things in the universe is both amalgamative and diversified.

That “Heaven and people are united *in one* (天人合一)” is one of the major ideas in Chinese philosophy. The holy ontology (神聖本體論) school of philosophy, including Mencianism (孟學), Zhuism (朱子學), and Yangmingism (陽明學), all focus on the powerful noumenon, treating it as the strong link in existence unifying heaven and people in the metaphysical (形而上) level. This school of thought overlooks the diversity at the form (形而下) level, treating it as the weak link of existence. In fact the relationship between Heaven and people in these philosophies could be further described as “Heaven and people *are one* (天人是一).” On the other hand, Xunism and naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy argue that the fully value-laden holy noumenon does not exist. This latter genre of thought recognizes that Heaven and people are continuous and unified, but it does not believe that these two exist *in one*. So, as Liu (2007) points out, the relationship between Heaven and people in this genre of philosophy can be better explained as “Heaven and people are united but also diversified (天人合中有分).”

This ‘unification with diversity’ idea of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy is different from the “human-centered” modern Western philosophy in the way they view the union of heaven and people. The naturalistic

*chi*-based philosophy still presents the common characteristic of Chinese philosophy, the emphasizing wholeness. Nevertheless, regarding its argument about the diversity of heaven and people, the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy is closer to the contemporary Western subjective philosophy; hence it expresses the modernity in the context of Chinese culture. Putting together the perspective of unification and diversity, we may say, in contrast with the Western contemporary philosophy, which over-emphasizes the opposition of subjectivism vs. objectivism, naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy of Ming and Ching Confucianists provides an alternative approach to the comprehension of modern world and society.

### The Extended Usage of the *Chi* Concept

The basic precept of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy and its “early modernity” are briefly explained in the previous section. Based on this precept, a philosophy with such modernity can serve as a philosophical paradigm acceptable to the contemporary people. It can also serve as a foundation of contemporary humanities and social science research.

However, it is necessary to point out that in Chinese language there is another usage of *chi*: employing the word to explain a mental and spiritual expression. For instance, ancient Chinese intellectuals often speak of the *chi* in one’s personality, writings, calligraphy works and paintings. In addition, *chi* in communication activities, as discussed in recent “communication theory of *chi*” falls in this category.

As mentioned above, naturalistic *chi*-based philosophers believe that primordial *chi* is an elementary substance that is infinitely ingenious but subtle, has kinetic energy and value tendency, and is able to aggregate into objects and transform back to its original state. It is the fundamental component of all things in the universe, and everything develops out of primordial *chi*, appearing in different states. After all, all human physiological and psychological activities are powered by *chi*, and are a part of the world of *chi*. Above all, the mental forces of human beings are similar to the flowing, pervading and uncertain properties of *chi* in particular. This is perhaps why the Chinese often use *chi* to explain one’s mental state. It could be said that this is the meaning of *chi* within the context of “function of *chi* (氣的作用).” However, as this becomes a common usage, the word for “function of *chi*” is often mixed up with the word “*chi*” itself.

Obviously, the experience of human mental and spiritual expression varies across different cultures. In Chinese society, people are more likely to understand human mental and spiritual expression from a view of *chi* because they are familiar with *chi* theory and the “Heaven and people united as One” philosophy. In other words, *chi* in the context of mental and spiritual expression is derived from “*chi* theory.” This is why

academic research on subjects like “literary criticism theories on *chi*” and “communication theories on *chi*” emerges from the background of Chinese cultures.

When the Chinese character for *chi* is used within the context of mental and spiritual expression, it is often preceded or followed by a word as a prefix or suffix to further explain this particular mental state of “the flowing *chi* as an integrated and unified one (一氣貫通).” For example, “*zhi qi(chi)* 志氣” is strong and perpetual willpower, “*cai qi(chi)* 才氣” means plentiful talent, “*da qi(chi)* 大氣” describes the immensity and openness of a piece of work, “*qi(chi) yun* 氣韻” is the style and artistic rhythm of one’s work, “*qi(chi) zhi* 氣質” defines one’s character or inner quality, “*qi(chi) du* 氣度” characterizes one’s capacity of tolerance and magnanimity, and “*qi(chi) xiang* 氣象” represents the style and ability to shape up various dynamics of a person or his work. In addition to describing individuals and their artifacts, *chi* can also be used to depict the emotional states displayed in various group activities. “*Ren qi(chi)* 人氣” means the popularity or the ability to rally people to form a congregation. “*Mai qi(chi)* 買氣” tells the popularity of a product and customers’ enthusiasm in purchase. “*Shi qi (chi)* 士氣” is morale in an organization, including armies. “*Min qi(chi)* 民氣” indicates the atmosphere of support of the general public, “*jing qi(chi)* 景氣” implies the vitality of economic activities. “*Feng qi(chi)* 風氣” means the trend and fashion of a period of time. “*Qi(chi) shi* 氣勢” suggests a potential inner mental force.

Among the numerous usage of *chi* mentioned above, the last term, “*qi(chi) shi* 氣勢,” is especially worthy of further studies. It is recognized by scholars that the concept of “*qi(chi) shih* 氣勢” is historically a very important item of aesthetics in Chinese literary criticism (Di, 2002). Chung (2000) separates the concept “*shih* 勢” from the conventional use of “*chi shih*” and treats “*shih*” as a set-up for generating “*chi*” itself in his process of building a communication theory of *chi*.

There are other terms in Chinese language that also express *chi* as mental and spiritual states but do not include the character “*chi*” in the expressions. For instance “*feng gu* 風骨” means uncompromising personality, “*feng du* 風度” is thorough aesthetic act or gracefulness, “*ying mian* 贏面” shows the momentum on the chance of winning, “*zao shih* 造勢” is to build a victorious atmosphere (“constructing *shih*” as coined in Chung’s works), and the word “*zhen* (陣)” in the popular saying “must not have less *zhen* even if we are less in number (*shu ren bu shu zhen* 輸人不輸陣)” refers the display of vigor and impetus shown in a fight

or contest. In addition, “*chang mian* 場面” describes the atmosphere on the site of conflict; “*peng chang* 捧場” is to join a group in a combat to raise their momentum and power. It is easy to conclude that *chi* in the context of mental and spiritual expression is a ubiquitous concept in Chinese cultures.

The *chi* concept in mental and spiritual expression is particularly important in Chinese cultures. Compared with Westerners, Chinese people tend to be more implicit, reserved, and euphemistic in ways of expressing themselves. Their words, speeches and actions are not necessarily consistent with what they actually think. However their emotions and intensions are still often displayed unintentionally by forming a *chi* and showing “*qi (chi) shih* 氣勢.” This is perhaps why “*zao shih* 造勢” (constructing *shih*, meaning gaining momentum and enhancing victorious atmosphere) is considered essential in political election campaigns in Chinese cultures. It is therefore an indispensable issue to observe, fathom, determine, and respond to *chi* in the Chinese cultural sphere.

While the concept of *chi* is quite significant in Chinese cultures, the phenomena of *chi* also exist in the Western world, albeit in a less prominent manner. With further research and interpretation on this concept, *chi* theories will gain generalizability and be able to interpret mental phenomena in the Western cultures.

### The Contrast of *Yin* and *Yang*

As mentioned before, in the conception of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophers, the human world is connected by “*chi* sharing.” Also mentioned earlier, ranging from the “primordial *chi*” to zillions of things or matters, which are formed by primordial *chi*, *chi* exists consistently in two states: *yin* and *yang*. In the notions of Chinese as well as other East Asian cultures, the entire world is a “*yin-yang*” world, and is thus also a “*chi* world.” Specifically, primordial *chi* gradually transformed into all things by means of contrasts and interactions of its own states of *yin* and *yang*, and experienced numerous integrations and disintegrations of *yin* and *yang chi*--within and outside all things--including all kinds of functions and performances. Therefore, all things naturally contain all sorts of contrasts or dialectical relationships.

Wang Ting Xiang (1472-1544) in Ming Dynasty thinks that primordial *chi* itself contains *yin* and *yang* and can not be categorically labeled as either *yin* or *yang*. However, all things, transformed from the primordial *chi*, may have different *yin-yang* ratio. Thus, some are more “*yin*,” and others appear more “*yang*.” Depending on which tendency is more prominent, *yin* or *yang* is thus labeled. Whether one thing is *yin* or *yang* depends on its “tendency” of *yin* or *yang* (Wang, 1989, 3:964). According to his theory mentioned above, Wang

(1989) then brings up four levels of contrasts of *yin* and *yang* as far as form (*xing* · 形) and *chi* are concerned (3:752).

First, in terms of things in fixed shapes, things like the heaven and the earth, men and women, masculine and feminine are contrasts of *yang* and *yin*. (The former are *yang*, the latter *yin*.) Second, in terms of things belonging to air-like (formless) *chi*, things like summer and winter, day and night are contrasts of *yang* and *yin*. (Summer and day are *yang*, while winter and night are *yin*.) Third, viewing the first and second levels together, things that belong to *chi* are designated as *yang* while things in fixed forms *yin*. Fourth, examining closely, things at the levels one and two that belong to *chi* and in fixed forms and can be seen and described are integrated as a whole and labeled *yin*, while the invisible dynamics inside them that cause changes, movements, rises and falls of all things are *yang*.

This shows that *yin* and *yang* are just symbols of all kinds of relative relationships and situations. The meanings that *yin* and *yang* actually carry change with situations, contexts, perspectives, and horizons.

Wang's model of the four levels of *yin-yang* contrast was primarily an analysis of *chi* in the natural world. Applying the model to the studies of phenomena in humanities and social organizations and structures, we can propose the following propositions – with the former classified as *yang* and the latter *yin*:

First, governments vs. people, academic institutes vs. general organizations; Second, board chairmen vs. chief executive officers, conceptual strategies vs. action plans, design departments vs. manufacturing departments, top managerial levels vs. rank-and-file infrastructure. Third, government vs. people, mainstream factions vs. non-mainstream factions, internal vs. external, center vs. peripheral, senior employees vs. junior employees, outstanding performers vs. mediocre employees, organization vs. individuals, etc; Fourth, establishment vs. non-establishment, permanent units vs. temporary units, legal organization vs. illegal organizations, open transactions vs. under-the-table dealings.

Furthermore, *yin-yang* contrasts are seen in general mental and spiritual aspects of human, including organizational, activities. The following are some examples: First, entrepreneurial vs. following-suit, open vs. closed, advancing vs. withdrawing, active vs. passive, superior vs. inferior, evident vs. hidden; Second, public vs. private, aggressive vs. nonassertive, friendly vs. hostile, fair vs. partial, rational (of reason and sense) vs. irrational (of emotion and desire), cognitive vs. intuitive; Third, known vs. unknown, present vs. future, etc.

And the following are relationships of *yin-yang* contrast between the psychological/psychic perspectives and the structural/organizational/practical perspectives. The former are considered “*yang*,” while the latter *yin*.

The first category include trend of philosophical thinking vs. realistic world, entrepreneurship vs. business organization, contracts vs. actual operation, mission statements & strategies vs. action mechanism (Seetoo, 2005), law vs. judicial systems. In the second category are religious doctrines vs. religious denomination, political party ideologies vs. party organization, academic research vs. social practice.

It is necessary to point out that the *yin* and *yang* classification exemplified above is by no means absolute. *Yin* and *yang* are two relative conditions, and with the change of situation, the contrast of *yin* and *yang* are subject to change. For example, when subordinates have important opinions to present to higher authorities, the subordinates become *yang* and the higher authorities become *yin*; when an implementer challenges the mistakes in the decisions, the implementer becomes *yang*, and the decision maker *yin*; when a new employee brings up a new idea that is effective, the new employee becomes *yang* and senior ones become *yin*; when a marginal power plays a crucial role in certain circumstance, that marginal power becomes *yang* and the dominant power becomes *yin*; when we ourselves are in a state of being challenged, judged and made decision upon, our dialectic property changes from *yang* to *yin*. Reason is conventionally considered controlling *yang* and emotion the controlled *yin*. But when emotion or desires are unfairly suppressed by the reason or ration, they may revolt and demand a change. Another example is about the categorization of gender. Females are traditionally classified as *yin*, the inactive. But when they are in a dominant position, females are *yang*, and males are *yin*.

It is noteworthy that in the traditional Chinese thinking there was a notion of “*yang* the superior and *yin* the inferior.” Some adages attest to this notion: “Men superior women inferior,” “value mind and slight body,” “Value the public and suppress the private,” “elevate the moral and demote the desire,” etc. The naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy of the Ming and Qing dynasty has let go the value of “*yang* the superior and *yin* the inferior” in many instances. For example, it does not slight “body” compared with the mind. It does not negate the legitimacy of “privacy,” nor does it negate the legitimacy of “privacy.” *Yin* and *Yang* are placed in an equal or quasi-equal status. This squares with the contemporary notion of gender equality, democracy, and flattened organization. This is another piece of evidence of the modernity of the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy.

*Yin-yang* contrasts of all levels in the “world of *chi*” have penetrated into the deep structure of Chinese and other East-Asian cultures. They have been consciously or subconsciously engaging in the thinking and behaving of the *yin-yang* contrast. It is fair to say that the existence structure and cognitive model of *yin-yang*

contrast are an important cultural foundation of and valuable asset for contemporary humanities and social science research.

Based on the examples mentioned above, in a real situation in an organization, the two sides involved in a conversation, the mental and spiritual performances would gradually form a specific *yin-yang* contrast of *chi*. This will be elaborated in the next section.

### From the Communication of *Chi* to the Communication Theory of *Chi*

As mentioned in the previous section, *yin-yang* contrasts exist in human mental and social organizational structures. In this section, I would like to point out that these dialectical relationships of *yin-yang* contrasts may grow; and *chi* may take shape. When more than one *chi* exists, different *chi* may have *yin* and *yang* contrasts. Two or more communication partners, for example, may have various ethnicities, historical backgrounds, value systems, agenda, and other pre-existing conditions which exhibit *yin-yang* contrasts. During interactions, all sets of *yin-yang* match, combine, transform, intensify, and generate specific relatively steadfast *chi* pairs – in confrontational or concurrence states. *Chi* is aroused and becomes a powerful energy when key figures take the lead to play some contrasts in issues, manipulating with strategies and facilitating with rhetorical designs such as logos, colors, and linguistic strategies. When two sets of *chi* gather along opposite directions, the two become confrontational and even collide with each other. Abundant historical events showcase such *chi* collisions: the Civil War in the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States, the conflicts between the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, and the decades-long debates in Taiwan between the camp which asserts Taiwan as an independent nation and the other which opts for unification with mainland China.

These large-scale sets of *chi* developments and confrontations involve variables of thoughts, ideologies, emotions, determinations, value options, historical memories, geopolitics, and networks. Among these variables, the primary factors are battles for interest or competition for survival. These primary factors are the most powerful appeals in gathering and consolidating *chi*, because the major appeals can integrate arguments given by proponents, opponents, and some other arguments of excuse nature. As long as human beings generate and form specific opposite set of *chi*, communication between sets of *chi* begins. Reversely, when *chi* is aroused to a more intense level, a simplistic communication may be elevated to a level of *chi* vs. *chi* confrontation.

“*Chi*” in reality may contain emotions, intentions (including those subconscious ones) and what not. These elements often precede, or at least, accompany,

rationality, inadvertently suggesting or influencing the course of rational thinking. Thus, “*chi* to *chi*” communication is often intertwined with rationality and non-rationality. Both camps often are unable or unwilling to express their real intentions. Therefore communication becomes the process of exploring, testing, and assessing to seek a balance point. This would compose a complicated rhythm of communication.

At first glance, two features emerge from the paradigm of *chi* to *chi* communication: First, through the perception and thinking modes of *yin-yang* contrast, this paradigm can get a birds-eye-view of factors at all levels of organizational communication and the dynamic process of development. Second, based on the tenet of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy, this paradigm can grasp the relationships of “common thread among differences” and pursue a goal of harmony of an interdependent unity.

It is not my intention to discuss the *chi* to *chi* communication in detail, but I would like to elaborate further why “the communication theory of *chi*” ought to lay its foundation on naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy. According to the stance of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy, the winding process of communication itself is meaningful and merits serious examination. As mentioned earlier, *chi* and all things shaped by *chi* conceive a value tendency, which results in a “definite law of the nature” in all activities of all things. Therefore, as long as we focus on the natural conditions of these activities, regurgitate, and reassess them, we can discover the “*li*” (“principle”, the appropriateness and solution to problems). Furthermore, the solutions are not inherent or self-evident but are earned by constant dialogues, exchanges, trial-and-errors, adjustments, and revisions. This would echo what Lo Chin-shun (羅欽順) of Ming dynasty in ancient China argued, “*Li* (principle) is only the *li* of *chi* and should be observed at the turning points of *chi*” (Luo, 1990). Only down-to-earth exploration into the complex reality can we find out the best resolution to problems. This viewpoint corresponds better with the contemporary mode of thinking than many traditional *chi* arguments do.

A traditional school of *chi*, the *li*-based philosophy (the monoism of *li*, 理本論) and *xin*-based philosophy (the monoism of *xin*, 心本論), for example, believes that as long as human beings return to their original mind and conscience, the principle of universe (or principle of Heaven, *tian li* 天理) can be achieved. Similar to these mainstream thoughts of Song Ming neo-Confucianism, certain orthodox Christians believes that as long as human beings are obedient to God, the answers about the truth can be obtained by praying. Therefore, this line of thinking does not focus on serious investigations and considerations into the process of communication. A third line of traditional thinking moves along the



contention of Lao Tzu, the founding father of Taoism. Lao Tzu emphasizes “reversal is the movement of *Tao*(the Way),” meaning that when things deviate farther away from the *Tao*, all we need to do is quietly doing nothing, and the function of *Tao* will bring things back to its natural course. If we have minimum expectation, have enough time to wait, and can completely take no action, doing nothing might be a good solution. However, in communication nowadays, these three conditions seldom exist.

### Conclusion

This thesis introduces basic viewpoints of naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy in China's Ming and Qing Dynasties, explains its “early modernity” in the context of Chinese culture, and suggests placing it in a modern context to serve as the philosophical basis of “communication theory of *chi*” introduced by Chung etc. This stance contains generality, that is to say, naturalistic *chi*-based Philosophy can nowadays be the philosophical foundation of all the other social science researches, especially in Chinese culture.

Many scholars in humanities and social sciences have been advocating “the modernization of Confucianism” trying to connect the ancient Chinese philosophy with the contemporary Western scholarship. Sometimes, that effort is less meaningful, if not futile, because some paradigms of the traditional Confucianism have been out of touch with today's social reality. The modernity and contemporary values of the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy presented in this essay clearly indicates that the old and the new, as well as the East and the West, can best be connected by following the vein of thought in the paradigm of the naturalistic *chi*-based philosophy. And this contention does not only apply to communication studies but also in other social science disciplines.

### Correspondence to:

Yu-Ming Liu  
National Chengchi University  
Taiwan

### References

- Chung, J. (2004). *Ch'i der chuan bo li run he yu wen tser luieh*. [氣的傳播理論和語文策略 *Ch'i* communication and verbal strategies.] In Chen, G. M. (Ed.), *Zung hua chuan bo li lune yu yuan zer* [中華傳播理論與研究] *Theory and principle of Chinese communication*, pp. 519-539]. Taipei: Wunan.
- Chung, J. (1996). *Nonverbal communication in*

*Ch'i leadership*. Paper presented at the annual conference of Speech Communication Association in San Diego, CA

Chung, J. (1995). *Leadership persuasion and ch'i: A Chinese perspective*. Paper presented at the annual convention of Speech Communication Association in San Antonio, Texas.

Chung, J. & Busby, R. (2002). Naming strategies for organizational communication: The *ch'i-shih* approach. *Intercultural Communication Studies*. Vol. XI, n. 1, 77-95.

Chung, J., Hara, K., Yang, C., & Ryu, J. (2003) Contemporary *ch'i/ki* research in East Asia: Implications to communication research. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, (Japan) n. 15. 41-66.

Di, H. N. (2002). *Qishi lun*. (氣勢論) [On *qi-shi*] Beijing: Min-zu Press.

Eames, S. M. (1977). *Pragmatic Naturalism: An Introduction*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Greene, B. (2000). *The Elegant Universe*. New York: Vintage.

Isaacson, F. & Chung, J. (2004). The Bush vs. Gore rhetoric after the 2000 election impasse: A *ch'i-shih* analysis. *SIMILE*. Vol. 4, n. 2 (May). [www.utpjournals.com/simile](http://www.utpjournals.com/simile).

Liu, Y. M. (2005). Song Ming Qing qibenlun yanjiu de ruogan wenti [Some problems in the research of the *Qi*-based philosophies in Song, Ming and Qing dynasties] In R. B. Yang & P. C. Zhu (Eds.), *Ruxue de qilun yu gongfulun* (pp. 203-246). Taipei: Taiwan University Press.

Liu, Y. M. (2007). He zhong you fen: Xunzi Dongzhongshu tien-ren guanxi lun xinquan [A new interpretation on Xunzi and Dong Zhongshu's concept about the relationship between Heaven and man]. *Journal of Chinese Language and Literature of National Taipei University*(2), 27-50.

Luo, Q. S. (1990). *Kuen zhi ji*. (困知記) [Knowledge painfully acquired]. Beijing: Zhonghua Press.

Maruyama, M. (2000). *Riben zhengzhi sixiangshi yanjiu* [Research on history of Japanese political thought] (Z. J. Wang, Trans.). Beijing: San Lian bookstore

Seetoo, D. H. (2005). Guanli yuansu zhi yinyang biaoli [The yin/yang or internal/external elements of management]. In *Guanlixue de xinshijie* (pp. 90-108). Taipei: Commonwealth Publishing Co.

Wang, T. X. (1989). *Wangtingxiang Ji*(王廷相集) [Anthology of Wangtingxiang]. Beijing: Zhonghua Press.

Copyright of China Media Research is the property of Edmondson Intercultural Enterprises and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.