

INTRODUCTION

This is an exercise (a wholesome one) in perspective shift in thinking, from abstract to concrete, from mental to somatic. Specifically, this essay describes concrete thinking with its tacit bodily matrix. The essence of concrete thinking lies in the concrete mode of thinking. This corrects our prevalent assumption that thinking as such is formal, abstract, and nothing else. The essay calls our attention to the fact that besides a formal abstract thinking there is a body thinking that is concrete, natural and has been routinely practiced in Chinese culture for thousands of years. The latter concrete mode of thinking is fully as coherent as the former formal one, with a proviso that the concrete thinking is somatically systematic, whereas the formal thinking aspires toward having a system.

In all this, the word, "mode," is pivotal. Being human, both Chinese and Western people are subject to the same moods and environmental conditions, and deal with the same kinds of objects of thinking. Whatever Western thinking has Chinese thinking has also, and vice versa. It is in the mode--the way, the how--of treatment of things, of thinking, that they differ.

But difference does not imply exclusion. Precisely the opposite should be the case. Neither Westerners nor the Chinese has a monopoly of truth or perfection. The Western formal thinking must be used to clarify and describe the Chinese concrete thinking; the Chinese concrete thinking must be embodied in fine-tuning the Western formal thinking. Both must thus come together to make up healthy human thinking. But before bringing together, we must be certain about what these two different modes of thinking are. This essay is intended to serve this crucial preliminary purpose.

A much respected philosopher conversant with philosophies both in the West and in China has kindly read my manuscript and forwarded me his comments. They can be broken into seven points, my responses to which should further clarify the main intentions of this essay. The reader says, in effect, that the essay says that:

concrete thinking is the best kind,

body thinking is its symbol and metaphor, and

Western abstract formal thinking is bad;

but the West has also concrete thinkers such as Kierkegaard,
besides

*this essay draws much from Western thinkers, who must then
have something good to offer to the world. Also*

*this essay is written non-historically, and concentrates nearly
entirely on the pre-Han thinkers, hence not concretely
historical. Finally,*

*the Western thinkers treat actuality, therefore they are concrete,
whereas the essay treats thinking and proposes a theory of
thinking, therefore it is not concrete.*

My responses are as follows. The essay does not claim a value judgment; Chinese concrete thinking is not "the best kind" of thinking but merely one that has been undeservedly neglected. It is as full of (opposite sorts of) defects and dangers as the other formal abstract thinking. Both kinds must come together.¹

Concrete thinking has the human body not as "its symbol" or "metaphor" but as a tacit matrix, whose activity and performance concrete thinking is.

Western formal abstract thinking is not "bad" but is a powerful tool, to be presupposed and fine-tuned by Chinese concrete body thinking, which needs it as its corrective.

This explains how and why the essay "draws much from," and is in a constant critico-appreciative dialogue with, Western thinkers, when considering Chinese concrete body thinking.

Concrete body thinking is as natural in our living as our body is. Body thinking is a natural *mode* of thinking. "Kierkegaard" did urge Western thinkers to think on concrete matters, not to play with abstract generalities; in this sense Kierkegaard did "treat actuality." But he had his eyes on *what* we should think about. Kierkegaard's mode of thinking is quite complex, contrived, often even contorted, as his modern progeny of deconstructionists also amply show. They (as he) often rant, push,

¹ See below, 9.1.2.3., 9.2., 9.3., 10.2., 12.3., 14.4.5., 15.4., 16.3.2., 17.2., and Appendixes 3, 10, 11, 13, 22, 27, 29.

and argue copiously ("argue" in both senses of "demonstrate" and "quarrel"). Their metaphors constitute acid wits that are often unnatural, cutting, scary, and acerb, betraying thinly disguised arguments.¹

In contrast, Chinese thinkers quarrel by following nature, dipping in history, peppering their "arguments" (often couched in one image or story after another) with (imaginative) actuality; even their ironies are quite natural and metaphoric.

To cite history is one thing; to argue historically is quite another. To cite history in an abstract argument is what Western thinkers do; here history is an extraneous aside merely to reinforce a self-sufficient argument. To imaginatively have many thinkers in history come together, letting them jostle naturally, is quite a different performance; here historical personage and their words are constitutive of an "argument." This essay engages in not the former logical process but the latter historical performance and delineations.

Finally, if this essay "proposes a theory," it would have produced a separate system, an abstract framework, in terms of which things concrete are seen to hang together. But this essay has no such system. How dare it? Besides, such a performance would have been self-contradictory, both claiming concrete thinking as something concrete-comprehensive (without exception), and thinking theoretically, trans-concretely (which is an exception).

Instead of offering a system, this essay presented a coherent description of body thinking as practiced in China. This is why the essay is an intuitive "bodily" flow, first presenting body thinking in Chinese mode (Division One), then describing it by contrasting it with the Western mode of thinking, in a journal-like manner which reflects the mode of body-thinking (Division Two).

Responding as above to the reader's comments hopefully brings out the real intention of the essay, namely, to appreciatively delineate and thereby call our attention to a concrete *mode* of thinking dubbed "body thinking," routinely practiced in China for many centuries, all too often undeservedly neglected.

Unfortunately, the notion of "body thinking" offends our Cartesian common sense. Thinking operates everywhere and nowhere, indissoluble in chemicals, unanalyzable by empirical science. Body is, in contrast, always somewhere in particular, composed of chemicals and

¹ Kierkegaard's stories and metaphors are conveniently collected and arranged in *Parables of Kierkegaard*, ed. Thomas C. Oden, Princeton University Press, 1978.

so dissoluble in(to) them, and subject to empirical analysis.¹

In response, this essay calls attention to the bodily nature of our thinking and the thinking nature of our body--in actual thinking, as exemplified in "concrete thinking" practiced in China. Yet, as we are oblivious to our body during our manual labor, so we do not notice our body while we think. This is the way the body works. Nor do we, as we engage in manual work, "see" the thinking quality of our bodily operation. That is the way concrete thinking goes. Body thinking is so spontaneous a natural fact of our life that we only notice our body sometimes, and attend only to our thinking some other times. Hence, our Cartesian offense at "body thinking."

The above mentioned two qualities, the offense of "body thinking" (bodily thinking, thinking body), and the unnoticeableness of this natural unity, exhibit two facts, which will be considered in the following manner. One, our offense points to the concrete nature of our thinking that involves thinking body; Part One considers "concrete thinking." Two, our not noticing so concrete a thinking indicates the *tacit* nature of the thinking bodily subject; Part Two treats the "hidden nature of the 'I.'"

But how did we come to such a theme in the first place? Part Three answers the question by considering what enables us to write on this theme of pervasive yet unnoticed body thinking. The answer is revealing: A mutuality between Chinese thinking that innocently practices body thinking, on the one hand, and Western thinking that throws critical suspicion on it, on the other. To realize this fact is to sense the imperative indispensable to our being human, the task of furthering a human community of cultural *differences*.

Division Two is an elaboration on how attending to and taking advantage of these cultural differences yield rich harvests in our understanding of the bodily matrix of thinking. Embodied, thinking body-wise, and always pointing bodily at something, body thinking is our matrix of all thinking (Part Four). Body thinking exhibits fully the twin characteristics of thinking, necessity and universality, bridging the gap between contingent perception and logical analyticity (Part Five). Such a bodily encompassing manifests body thinking as configurative, encircling the part-whole, the analogical-analytical, and the historical-processive character of our cosmos (Part Six, Epilogue). All this is a small step toward exemplifying what body thinking is in China, compared with formal thinking in the West.

¹ Cf. 17.3. below.