

# Dao Embodied – Embodying Dao: The Body as Locus of Personal Cultivation in Ancient Daoist and Confucian Philosophy

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**Abstract**—This paper compares ancient Daoist and Confucian approaches to the human body as a locus for learning, edification or personal cultivation. While pointing out some major differences between ancient Chinese and mainstream Western visions of the body, it seeks at the same time inspiration in some seminal Western phenomenological and post-structuralist writings, in particular from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu. By clarifying the somewhat dissimilar scopes of foci found in Daoist and Confucian philosophies with regard to the role of and attitude to the body, the conclusion is nevertheless that their approaches are comparable, and that both traditions take the physical body to play a vital role in the cultivation of excellence. Lastly, it will be argued that cosmological underpinnings prevent the Confucian *li* from being rigid and invariable and that it rather emerges as a flexible learning device to train through active embodiment a refined sensibility for one's cultural environment.

**Keywords**—Body, Confucianism, Daoism, *li*, phenomenology, ritual.

## I. INTRODUCTION

ON hearing the word “body,” most human products of European culture are prone to immediately think of its antonym, “mind,” “soul” or “spirit”. While constituting together a dualistic whole, these binary notions are nevertheless metaphysically polarized and mutually exclusive in the Cartesian sense of being both incommensurable and hierarchically ordered with body being considered baser than its counterpart. Recent efforts to overcome this persistent dualism have in many ways been effective on the Western intellectual scene, but we are undeniably still by and large subsisting in a Cartesian world. This tendency is likely to change in the future, however, and given that we are presently placed somewhere at the inchoate beginnings of a transitional stage from a modernist dualism to a post-modern non-dualist, non-dichotomous view of reality, the meaning, role and status of somatic notions among cultures devoid of Platonic or Cartesian influences might be indicative of where we may be heading. The ancient Chinese *qi* 氣 cosmology, shared by most if not all schools of classical Chinese philosophy, quite definitively excludes the possibility of a world characterized by body-soul dualism. Tying together the mental and material world by pervading both alike, *qi* runs counter to the distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. As Robin R.

Wang pointed out in her excellent study of yinyang 陰陽, “[t]he fabric of *qi* reality allows us a glimpse of the extensive underlying unity of the universe” [1].

More will be said about the notion of *qi* later in this paper, but its primary object is to work towards succinct distinctual formulations of the role of the body in Daoist and Confucian philosophical literature on education in a broad sense of the term. Since both of these schools are largely preoccupied, each in their own way, with finding but perhaps even more so with configuring the human being's proper place in the world, it is tempting to say that the vast bulk of the literature belonging to them is in one way or another educational or, perhaps more appropriately, edificational in the sense of the German term *Bildung*. The focus here will be restricted in two ways: on one hand to pre-Qin philosophical writings, as these are embedded in a cosmology without “Western” (including Buddhist) influences; on the other hand to writings that explicitly endorse certain ways of being, living and acting according to the worldview of the schools in question. The paper is divided into three parts. First, in a part called “Dao Embodied” the focus will be on Daoist philosophy with some alluring insights from Western phenomenology. The discussion will then move to Confucian approaches in a part entitled “Embodying Dao,” and lastly a general, however brief, conclusion will be formulated in which it is suggested what can be specifically learned from these ancient Chinese ideas and approaches.

## II. DAO EMBODIED

The word-play contained in the title of this paper is certainly meant to express some kind of general distinction between Daoist and Confucian approaches to *dao* 道, implying as well, of course, the varying meanings and roles of *dao* in their philosophies. The headings “dao embodied” and “embodying dao”, however, do not as may initially appear imply any kind of evaluative statement; they are not a reference to passive acceptance in the former case and active adoption in the latter. The differences between the schools are rather marked by focus and emphasis than by incompatible visions. The distinction in the title should primarily reflect the divergent approaches to learning within these two interrelated traditions.

Now, what is it that the Daoists would like us to learn, and what sort of methods do they use? Clearly, to some and perhaps even considerable extent, they want to cure us of some serious civilizational diseases. They attempt to

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counteract an excessive tendency to “cultural learning,” an overly refined and narrow kind of socially determined learning that they regard as alienating and, eventually, life-threatening. Our immersion in socially established logic prevents us, or so they seem to believe, from being able to grasp reality in its manifoldness by steering us into a constricted trajectory that turns out to be a mere cul-de-sac for the healthy evolution of life, whether human or non-human.

Social customs are elaborations on immediately perceived and experienced reality, and it would seem that Daoist thinkers suspect these customs to be too far-removed from that reality to have the capacity to function effectively as models of learning. In this regard, this view may perhaps be compared to Plato’s dismissal of art due to its double distance from the Ideas, though it is certainly not being suggested that anything comparable to Platonic Ideas can be found in Daoist philosophy. In any case, however, the Daoist view is that the model or models must be closer at hand. And what is closer to us than our own body? René Descartes would most probably respond that nothing is closer to us than our own mind, the mind being precisely the substance of our identity as distinct from our body as an extended mechanism devoid of thought – as an entirely “other.” However, an all-encompassing qi-cosmology cannot accommodate a rigid division between incompatible substances. There is no strict border between the internal (*nei* 內) and the external (*wai* 外); both are continuously flowing back and forth through one another according to the yin-yang metaphor for the ceaseless cosmological operations of nature, just as it is stated in the well-known and often-quoted section 40 of the Laozi 老子: “Returning is how dao moves” [2].

The fateful formulation by Descartes of the strict distinction between the two incompatible substances *res cogitans* and *res extensa* has caused many a Western thinker a number of sleepless nights, and quite a few different ways have been (and are still being) proposed to sublimate or overcome them. One of the more intriguing formulations is Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s ontological account of the world, which seems to suggest a kind of sensibility to our immediately lived reality that comes close to the one found in qi-cosmology. In an original and in many ways a non-typical Western attempt to move beyond the subjectivity/objectivity dilemma derived from Cartesian dualism, Merleau-Ponty introduces the intriguing notion of “the flesh” (*la chair*).

The flesh is not restricted to human or living beings. Nor is the flesh simply an expression of materialism as matter, nor “some ‘psychic’ material acting on my body; generally speaking, it is not a sum of ‘material’ or ‘spiritual’ facts” [3]. It is the “elementary tissue,” a “metaphysical structure” or *Weltlichkeit* that holds it all together and simultaneously constitutes a surface of separation and of junction. This involves a “paradox of being” [3, p. 136] in the sense that there seems to be a border between the world and the body. However, the border is porous and resists any strict demarcation, or as Merleau-Ponty puts it in the form of a rhetorical question: “Where are we to put the limit between the body and world, since the world is flesh?” [3, p. 138]. The

flesh is indeed that which makes us a part of the world. Our intertwining with the visible through partaking of flesh is that which enables us to see and touch it, although we are obviously unable to see or touch it in its entirety, and can only interact with a part of it at any given time. For otherwise we could not distinguish between things as we would simply see or touch everything at the same time, and thus not see or touch a thing. This inescapable incompleteness is the prerequisite for the production of meaning. “The flesh is the differentiating matrix that lets being stand forth in difference as meaningful” [4]. One might therefore say that Merleau-Ponty’s task with his ontology was to work towards a general mode of learning to differentiate, to see or sense, for, as he says himself: “he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world that he looks at” [3, p. 134]. True meaning arises from the encounter of the seer and the visible, from a “visibility, a generality of the sensible in itself,” communicating with the “anonymity innate to myself that we have ... called flesh” [3, p. 139], “the common stuff,” as Merleau-Ponty often speaks of it, in which we partake or rather of which we indeed are. Or in other words: “The flesh of the body makes us understand [in French: *entendre* – meaning both ‘hear’ and ‘understand’] the flesh of the world” [3, p. 134].

Leaning on these intriguing formulations by Merleau-Ponty while gradually moving back to the Daoist world of *qi*, it turns out to be our body – though never strictly separate from our minds – that enables us to be in touch with our world. Thus, in our continuous interaction with the world, we are no less our body than we are our minds [5]. Note, in this context, that Merleau-Ponty understands the mind not as an insular entity but rather “the milieu where there is action at a distance” [6]. The mind is not apart from the body but rather a dimension of it as one further aspect of the flesh. In this way, both the flesh and *qi* constitute an ontological vision of the world that avoids its strict demarcation into “body” and “soul” or “subjectivity” and “objectivity”.

Despite the absence of a mind-body dualism in pre-Qin China, one can nevertheless perceive, in the ancient Daoist literature, an effort to counteract a favorable predisposition to a “spiritual” side in the sense of a refined cultural or literary, that is to say, socially established learning through a preference for and celebration of the rawer, cruder and literally more lumpish aspect of physical being. The sagely or exemplary individuals and creatures appearing in the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi* 莊子 are predominantly engaged in continuous interaction with physical nature. They are either animals that survive in the ever-dangerous natural environment by employing their natural talents and instincts, humans who have grown with, adapted themselves to and acquired a keen sense for their natural surroundings, or, in the more “refined” cases, craftsmen who work on and even overcome their particular skills by immersing themselves in the patterns of the natural process, or *dao*. In this sense, it is suggested here, we could say that the aim is “dao embodied,” that is to say, true learning consists in attuning oneself – in a most physical sense – to the way of the world, a way that we cannot easily change or influence, while certainly a way that

can be embodied by us. This aim could hardly be further removed from the Aristotelian telos of human beings to lead a life in silent contemplation. On the other hand, however, being the most evolved, or at least the most complex creatures within the continuous process of the myriad things (wanwu 萬物), this is particularly difficult for human beings as they – both physically and mentally – become heavily socialized early onwards in their lives, and therefore need to unlearn what they have learned in order to learn anew. In this way, the Daoist vision is also profoundly skeptical of the other Aristotelian teleological alternative, that of immersing oneself in social activities. Creatures that rely more upon instincts and sense, or fleshly intuition, do not really need to “learn” how to do this in the usual understanding of the word: this “talent” comes naturally or spontaneously to them and could not come to them in any other manner.

The *Zhuangzi* describes the sages of old who managed to be “unchanging” or to secure their own internal constancy in the stream of external becoming by changing along with things in their continuous flux [7]. Being “unchanging” or “constant” in this sense is not the same as being static or immovable, and in fact, quite to the contrary. By continually reconfiguring their own stance vis-à-vis circumstances that they had not encountered before, the sages always maintained an openness to the range of possible events and thus, when these eventually materialized, were capable of dealing with them in a productive and effective manner. Those who are stagnant are the polar opposites to the sages. They do not change along with things, fail to adapt to new circumstances, but instead cling to some rigid principles, even when these are not suitable or useful any more. On the very extreme other end of the scale, it is certainly possible also to change with the flow of things and simultaneously fail to secure one’s constancy, in which case one submits unconditionally to change and becomes its victim or slave. Thus, the Daoist orientation towards harmonious co-existence with nature is far from being a mere adaptation or submission to its forces. It does not resemble a Stoic kind of inner passionlessness or apathy vis-à-vis the events of our surroundings. It is rather a motion towards cultivating a feeling or sensibility for the process of nature in its entirety, its intricate interconnections and the mutual influences of human beings and their environment. Thus, while “dao embodied” necessarily takes its cue from the physical environment, it is nevertheless an active kind of embodiment that may even surpass, in at least some exceptional human beings, the ability of animals and other creatures more immediately embedded in the natural realm.

### III. EMBODYING DAO

Let us now move to Confucianism in which bodily learning is most clearly associated with li 禮, usually termed ritual or ritual propriety. Li will be referred to as either just li, but sometimes as “ritual” or “ritual propriety,” though the applicability of these latter terms is only limited. And in order to accentuate the difficulty of providing an adequate Western translation of it, it is enlightening to consider the following

note by a French 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary, J.M. Callery, on the character’s formidably extensive range of meanings, which is quoted in the original French by James Legge:

“Autant que possible, j’ai traduit Li par le mot Rite, dont le sens est susceptible à une grande étendue; mais il faut convenir que, suivant les circonstances où il est employé, il peut signifier Cérémonial, Cérémonies, Pratiques cérémoniales, L’étiquette, Politesse, Urbanité, Courtoisie, Honnêteté, Bonnes manières, Égards, Bonne éducation, Bienséance, Les formes, Les convenances, Savoir-vivre, Décorum, Décence, Dignité personnelle, Moralité de conduite, Ordre Social, Devoirs de Société, Lois Sociales, Devoirs, Droit, Morale, Lois hiérarchiques, Offrande, Usages, Costumes.” [8].

It may be expected that Westerners will generally find the notion of “ritual propriety” rather unattractive, tending to understand it predominantly as behavior that is formal, stagnant and predetermined. Interestingly, this is also the sense that li tends to bring out among intellectuals in the People’s Republic of China. Zou Changlin notes that due to political and social events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, notably during the May Fourth Movement and the Cultural Revolution, the notion of li is not only considered with suspicion but regarded as downright “reactionary” [9]. This may also account for the relative lack of consideration given to the term by contemporary Chinese philosophers.<sup>1</sup> Without going into details about the widespread phobia for ritualistic behavior, which is interesting in its own right, it suffices to say that it is clearly a side-effect of the idealized notion of “modernity” or “modernization” with all its implications of values and traits such as individualism, rationality, liberty, originality and so forth. Although many aspects of modernization have been reconsidered in many ways during the last few decades, the word “ritual” is likely to leave a bad aftertaste in most contemporary mouths. Despite this, or rather because of this, the ritualistic element in the notion of li will not be overly de-emphasized here. Certainly, as our French missionary acquaintance demonstrates, li encompasses a much wider range than what is usually understood as ritual; but it entails a sufficient level of formality to count as being to a significant extent “ritualized” on all levels of enactment.<sup>2</sup>

Now “ritual” tends to be associated with invariance. Indeed, the claim is quite common, made by both theorists and performers, that invariance is the defining characteristic of ritual [14]. However, within a cosmic sensibility such as the Chinese, where constant change in time is anticipated and

<sup>1</sup> It suffices to take a couple of examples. In Ge Rongjin’s otherwise ambitious explication of the categories of Chinese philosophy, li does not receive a separate discussion, and is only considered briefly in its relation with zhongyong 中庸 and ren 仁 [10]. In a similar study by Zhang Dainian, li is omitted altogether. The translator notes in his preface that while this may be “the most obvious omission,” Zhang is of the firm opinion that li “is not a philosophical term” [11].

<sup>2</sup> Some commentators and translators appear to attempt to downplay, reduce or soften the ritual aspect of li, perhaps to make it more agreeable to their modern readers. Thus, for example, Liu Shu-hsien calls it simply “propriety” [12] and Chen Jingpan uses “the rules of proper conduct,” though with the important caveat that “the Chinese moral concept of the term Li like that of Jen [ren] has really no exact equivalent in English” [13].

taken into account, being “ritualized” can hardly imply rigorous repetition and unchangeability. Rather, the more ritualized element of li in the early Confucian conception of education and self-cultivation serves to enable students to enhance their performative creativity in the social and moral sphere.<sup>3</sup>

For Confucius and his immediate followers, li is undoubtedly among the strongest representative for cultural continuity. It is li that enables us to get a firm footing in the cultural tradition, and is thus our firmest support in our endeavor to learn how best to interact with our social environment. Judging from its illumination in the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 from the first century CE, li is undoubtedly thought of as a kind of a crutch or a baby walker.

In the *Shuowen*, li is associated with its homophone, li 履 (normally pronounced lǚ), “footwear,” from which the meanings of “treading,” “performing” or “carrying out” can be inferred. A gloss follows in which li is explained as “a way in which to serve the spirits in order to receive good fortune,” which corresponds with its probable application in its earliest days. Commentators elaborate in various ways on the character-association provided by the *Shuowen*. Thus, David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames emphasize the verbal meaning of li (lǚ), arguing that it expresses “the necessity of enacting and ultimately embodying the cultural tradition that is captured in ritual action.” [17]. Léon Vandermeersch, on the other hand, focuses on the meaning of “footwear,” which to him indicates that the “steps” taken in the sphere of moral action are no less in need of support than the feet when physically walking [18]. He quotes, among others, Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735-1815), a prominent Qing Dynasty interpreter of the *Shuowen*, who comments on the passage on li in the following manner:

“Footwear is that which the feet take for their support (by wearing them). By extension, everything that one takes for one’s support (by wearing it) is called “footwear,” simply on the basis of the rule of borrowing one word for another. The boots are footwear, the rites are footwear: in both cases, one behaves according to that which one wears, only in two different senses.” [18, p. 145]

Vandermeersch therefore takes li to indicate a protective means that should prevent those who practice it from “spraining” themselves when entering the moral ground. It is in other words a guideline for behavior considered proper in the relevant social setting. From all these insights when taken together li emerges as a heuristic model for acquiring the skill of successfully realizing the (moral) values of the cultural tradition, and thus for finding one’s place and identity within it. Li is in this sense a pedagogical notion that in all its expansiveness enables socialization, which for Confucians is simultaneously indicative of what it means to become a human being.

Li is further intimately associated with the idea of self-cultivation or personal cultivation (xiushen 修身). The

meaning of the notion xiushen is suggestive for the importance of ritual propriety for the formation of a noble character, an exemplary person (a junzi 君子), who has the potency, the de 德, to effect profound transformations and improvements wherever he or she passes through or dwells [19].

The rich semantic scope of shen 身 includes body, self, life and/or human character. In the *Shuowen*, xiu 修 is explained through shi 飾, meaning “to decorate” or “to ornament.” Based on this etymological association, xiushen could be understood as “decorating one’s character” or as a matter of fact “decorating one’s body,” which points to the way in which one appears and comports oneself. As can be seen from the scope of shen as depicted above, the idea of character cannot strictly be isolated from physical comportment. Just as knowledge (zhi 智) cannot be thought of in abstraction from action (xing 行), there is, as we have already established, no strict border between the internal (nei 內) and the external (wai 外). There is, therefore, a strong relation between xiushen and the performance of a ritual or ceremony (li). Tang Kejing 湯可敬, a contemporary commentator on the *Shuowen*, takes shi originally to mean wenshi 文飾, which can simply mean a ceremonial act [20]. Insofar as “self-cultivation” refers to the body, its relationship with li can be further underscored by pointing to the latter’s cognate relationship with ti 體, meaning “body.” David Hall and Roger Ames suggest that this relationship indicates that “li actions are embodiments or formalizations of meaning and value that accumulate to constitute a cultural tradition.” They further argue as follows:

“Ritual actions, invested with the accumulated meaning of the tradition, are formalized structures upon which the continuity of the tradition depends and through which a person in the tradition pursues cultural refinement. Like a body of literature or a corpus of music, these rituals continue through time as a repository of the ethical and aesthetic insights of those who have gone before. A person engaged in the performance of a particular formal action, taking meaning from it while seeking himself to be appropriate for it, derives meaning and value from this embodiment, and further strengthens it by his contribution of novel meaning and value.” [17, p. 88]

The practice or active embodiment of the li customs is therefore an embodiment of the tradition. In this context we may consult yet another French thinker, Pierre Bourdieu, who speaks of body hexis, individual habits or characteristics, as the embodiment of the habitus, “the system of structured, structuring dispositions” within a culture. Habitus “is constituted in practice [i.e. through hexis] and is always oriented through practical functions” [21].

“The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life. What is “learned by body” is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is” [21, p. 73].

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller discussion of the pedagogical aspect of li, see Sigurðsson [15] and [16].

Thus, body hexis in Bourdieu's understanding signifies "deportment, the manner and style in which actors 'carry themselves': stance, gait, gesture, etc." [22]. This clearly resonates with the thought of Confucius, who says quite explicitly that "without studying li 禮, one will be unable to take a stance (li 立)" [23]. Bourdieu in fact sees the body as a mnemonic device which absorbs the basics of culture in a process of learning or socializing. It is through the physical experience of bodily action that the habitus, the socially constituted bases for practices, is inculcated in a way more effective than through explicit teaching. Richard Jenkins, a Bourdieu interpreter, explains that "it is in bodily hexis that the idiosyncratic (the personal) combines with the systematic (the social). It is the mediating link between individuals' subjective worlds and the cultural world into which they are born and which they share with each other" [22, pp. 75-76].

The argument presented here is that this insight appears to have been just as clear to Confucius and the Confucian thinkers of the pre-Qin period.

In the *Zuo Commentary to the Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳), it says that "li is the stem of character [shen 身]" [24]. Gou Chengyi notes on this sentence that it is a concentrated reflection of the *Zuozhuan*'s emphasis on the person's cultivation of the li customs ... and the first indication of the practical orientation that began in the *Liji* with the words: "From the son of tian 天 to the common people, personal cultivation [xiushen 修身] is the root for all" [25].

The quotation comes from the Great Learning (Daxue 大學) chapter of the *Liji*, arguably the most expressive ancient philosophical treatise on the function and importance of xiushen.

Finally, there are many references in the Confucian classics to external or physical manifestations of "junziness" or "exemplariness." It is believed that someone who successfully manages to embody the tradition in its creative unfolding will manifest it in his or her bodily movements and stance. Mencius, for instance, has this to say about the external manifestations of the virtues of a junzi:

"Whilst a vast territory and a large population are what junzi desire, their joy [le 樂] consists not merely in this. Whilst taking a stand in the center of the world and bring peace to the people between the four seas is what junzi take joy in, their natural dispositions [xing 性] do not consist merely in this. As for these natural dispositions of junzi, great deeds do not add to them, nor do straitened circumstances detract from them. This is because they have already been allotted these tendencies. To their natural dispositions belong communal humanity [ren 仁], appropriateness [yi 義], the observance of ritual propriety [li 禮] and wisdom [zhi 智], which are rooted in their heart-minds [xin 心]. These manifest themselves in the mildness of their faces, amplify themselves in their backs and extend to their limbs, which, in turn, instruct them without uttering a single word" [19, 7A.21].

#### IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In her elaborate research on bodily notions in the Zhuangzi, Deborah Sommer has correctly observed that Zhuangzi has little use for the character gong 躬, as "the gong body is that aspect of the human body or person most closely associated with the ritualized performance and public visual display of character, conduct, and values" [26]. However, her assertion that in the *Lunyu*, the gong body "moves in stylized, nonspontaneous ways guided by ritual conventions" seems misguided [26, p. 214]. Although social conventions are taken as the model for appropriate behavior, this does not necessarily mean that such behavior, any more than the Daoist practice of following nature, must be stylized and nonspontaneous. Ritualistic behavior is a form of learning in much the same way as certain technical training must take place before one acquires a truly profound sense for the task at hand, and can finally let go of the technical training. With regard to li, a person who has managed to internalize the spirit of a certain ritualistic practice applies it spontaneously when responding to new circumstances by adapting its primary or initially "stylized" movements to these very circumstances. The characters of Cook Ding and Woodworker Qing from the Zhuangzi had to spend years to master and then overcome their learned skill (ji 技) to advance to spontaneity, much the same as the adept gongfu-practitioner who needs to learn and embody certain forms of action before being able to acquire a "cultivated instinct" for his opponent's intentions. In the *Liezi*, it is made quite clear that one needs to practice for "nine years" before reaching a stage at which, as it says,

"I thought without restraint of whatever came to my mind and said without restraint whatever came into my mouth without knowing whether the right and wrong, benefit and harm, were mine or someone else's..." [27]

The embodiment of li is essentially of a very similar kind. It diverges, however, from Daoist practice in the same manner as most other Confucian teachings – in focusing first and foremost on society and civilization rather than on natural processes. Thus, practicing the li customs is a method to gradually embody the Confucian dao, which, as is well known, refers to a cultural tradition rather than the cosmic way of the world. It could therefore be seen as a process of education or rather edification in the sense of the German notion of Bildung. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, Bildung was, during the Renaissance period, used to describe when something "takes shape." It then referred to the external manifestation of things, such as the shape of the limbs, and generally to the formation of natural phenomena. With Johann Gottfried Herder, it began to receive its contemporary sense of a process towards cultural sophistication or cultivation, and was then further developed by G.W.F. Hegel in this direction [28]. Though it may have evolved into a more "spiritual" notion through the intensification of body-mind dualism in the West during the modern age, Bildung still exemplifies the indispensable role of the body in learning how to become a real human being, a sage, or even a junzi. For Bildung is formation, and there can be no real formation of persons

without taking bodily behavior, response and stance into account. The Chinese shen 身 seems to indicate something quite similar. Learning is not merely learning with our minds, but requires an active, even “fleshly” embodiment of our environment, authentic immersion in the tasks at hand, and should generate a real sense for other living beings, indeed, the imaginative ability to “embody” them: shu 恕 or a true kind of empathy.

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