

## Yang Inside, Yin Outside

Yang is naturally expansive. Yin likes to clump together. Yang is an ambient force that does not belong any certain place; yin is good at belonging to a place. If these forces only follow their own tendencies, they can't easily produce synergy. When yang somehow gets held within yin, the result is synergistic: yang's expansive energy becomes more focused when contained, so it can accomplish many things. Yin becomes a vehicle or medium that yang can work through. The question is how can yang be enticed to tie itself down, to descend and operate within conditions of yin's coalescence? Intuition tells us that "within-ness" is only one of the states into which yang naturally tries to expand.[1]

Laozi talked about yang being embraced within yin. In Chapter 42 of the *Daode Jing* he says:

The Way gave birth to unity, unity gave birth to duality, duality gave birth to trinity, trinity gave birth to the myriad creatures. The myriad creatures bear yin on their backs and embrace yang in their bosoms. They make space for [mediating] *qi*-energy and thereby achieve harmony. That which all under heaven hate most is to be orphaned, destitute, and hapless. Yet kings and dukes call themselves thus. Things may be diminished by being increased, increased by being diminished. Therefore, that which people teach, after deliberation, I also teach people. Therefore, "The tyrant does not die a natural death." I take this as my mentor.

This verse relates to the question of embodiment. Yang here can be seen as the spirit-nature of a thing, and yin as the material body. In order for something to be alive, the *xingling* must get down within matter. Instead of streaking through the heavens like a beam of light, it now undertakes the work of animating matter; it takes on the burden [*fu*] of embodiment. That is what it means to "bear yin on their backs and embrace yang in their bosoms." For pure yang, in its free state of eternal heavenward expansion, being limited within yin would seem at first to be a phase of self-decrease.

The word *fu* is sometimes translated as "turn one's back on" rather than "take on the burden of." But *fu yin* cannot mean "turn away from yin" here. For one thing, yin-yang harmony is clearly stated to be necessary for life; for another, "take on the burden" fits better with the idea of decrease later in this passage. This passage should be considered in light of decrease as a positive value, which is a theme throughout the *Daode Jing*. (One could argue that "decrease" also has an esoteric meaning as a technique of meditation, i.e., letting go.) In Chapter 48, Laozi tells us that the way of decrease follows the Dao, but the way of increase piles up learning and possessions. For Laozi, increase is almost as bad as rigidity. Men who try to "increase" the practice of benevolence and righteousness often play into the hands of arrogant men. Laozi repeatedly states that rigid, arrogant strength brings an unnatural death. Laozi tells us that rigid, harsh men are the disciples of death, while yielding men are disciples of life.(Ch.76) Why does rigidity lead to death? Because it

violates the harmony that is necessary for life. It outwardly forces its own strength upon other people, instead of trying to move them from within. This is putting yang on the outside. By contrast, the yielding, self-decreasing man furthers harmony because he is outwardly pliable and accommodating. Of course Laozi is not saying that such a person is a weakling. There is an inbuilt consistency to Laozi's way of portraying harmony, both in the individual being and in society. In a harmonious society, we do not push our strength on others (yang is held within). In the vital harmony of a living thing, yang [i.e., spirit-nature] is held and cherished within a body, and *qi* provides a bridge of equilibrium (again, yang is within).

But how can yang be drawn down within yin to create harmony? There needs to be a new zone of interfusion, and that is what mediating *qi* provides. The original source where yin and yang were interfused is what Laozi called "the one." At the source of yin and yang, the vibratory interplay is so complete that there is no yin and yang to speak of, hence a unity. But eventually yin and yang differentiate and emerge from this source. "Unity gives rise to duality." After they differentiate, they begin a big long drama to rejoin. The point where they rejoin is different from the original starting place. Where they rejoin is now a living thing, which provides a new arena for yin and yang to act out their interplay.

By holding its yang within its yin, the living thing animates itself more and more fully, while consolidating its pure yang endowment. It makes space inside itself for harmonizing flows of energy, for interfusing yin and yang through the medium of *qi*. (The phrase *chong qi yi wei he* does not mean that yin and yang are neutralized to achieve harmony. It means that space is allowed for *qi* to exert its harmonizing properties. In Daoist usage, *chong* has always paradoxically referred to emptiness as a positive cause.) When this happens, the living thing becomes a creative source in its own right. A living thing must wrestle anew with themes of coalescence and expansion, in its social relations and in its thinking.

The worldly creation unfolds because the new source-points strike out toward new directions/modes of differentiation. All possible situations will eventually be tried by one living thing or another. This is the philosophy implied in the structure of the *I Ching*. Yang at one level may not be the same as yang on a different level, but the levels of yang grow out of one another. Yang develops through a continuum of energy states--- it defines itself by how it resonates with other states of existence. Thus the condition of a given yang line can be better understood when we learn about its relations to other lines, and even to other hexagrams.

Consider a simple living thing as it is animated by the flows of *qi*-energy within it. It is actually not such a simple thing, because of the many levels of existence included within it. A living thing subsumes many levels of functioning, from inanimate states of matter to the primitive life-force of a cell, to whole-body metabolism, to flows of bioenergy, and even to the higher mental and spiritual functions. Yang acting at the cellular level belongs to the bodily substrate, even though we usually think of the substrate as yin compared to higher functions. The terms yin and yang are relative to the level our experience reaches.

Bodily essence(*jing*) is yin compared to *qi*. Together they make a body alive, and a living body is yang compared to inanimate matter. Between *jing* and *qi*, *jing* belongs to the side of matter, and *qi* is a bridge between matter and *shen*[animating spirit]. The “Great Treatise” of the *I Ching* makes fascinating use of these terms:

The [*Book of*] *Change* contains the measure of heaven and earth; therefore it enables us to comprehend the Way of heaven and earth and its order....Thus we come to know the circumstances of the dark and the light. Going back to the beginnings of things and pursuing them to the end, we come to know the lessons of birth and of death. Essence[*jing*] and vital energy[*qi*] become living things; free-floating souls work their transformation. Through this we know the conditions of ghosts and spirits. (Pt.I, Ch.4)

This also uses yin and yang to talk about embodiment. That is, the yin of *jing* joins with the yang of *qi* to make an organism. Then the coming or going of the *shen* (in this passage called the *you-hun*) takes these yin-yang changes to another level---to the life and death of a conscious being.

The Song-dynasty Confucian philosopher Zhangzai wrote a book called *Zhengmeng*, discussing cosmology in terms of the *I Ching*. He roundly criticizes Buddhist commentators of the *I Ching* who used the above passage to support their ideas of reincarnation. He claims that it is blasphemous to say that this passage is about transmigration of soul-like entities. For him, this passage is about the infinite original nature of human beings, which neither comes nor goes anywhere, but is only more or less manifest. It is interesting that he ascribes to Buddhists a belief in soul-like entities, and he points to “original nature” as a preferable alternative. At any rate, in the original passage we see traces of an ancient homegrown tradition that pictured embodiment and mortality in terms of yin-yang changes.

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May 2004

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Note: [1] Achieving equilibrium by holding yang within yin is a common theme in Chinese religious practice. I can mention two examples. /A. In the religious group called Tiandi Jiao, we speak of two classes of heavenly immortals: unattached immortals [*sanxian*] and respondent immortals [*yingyuan xian*]. Although the unattached immortals are said to exist at a higher level (free to move about in all heavenly realms), they are not as relevant to our earthly condition as the respondent immortals. The respondent immortals are those involved in the work of rescuing human hearts and minds. During a time of imminent apocalypse, they are more likely to come down and take birth among human beings. In other words, the spirit-yang expanding outwardly from us is not as valuable, for our lives, as the spirit-yang that descends

and works within and among us. /B. The Tiandi Jiao text titled *A New Realm* has a chapter about disembodied *xingling* [spirit-entities]. It describes those entities as being composed of spirit-yang with a yin imprint from their previous incarnations; it goes on to say that only the entities which hold their yang at the center will keep their self-determination in a disembodied state.