ROBIN R. WANG

YINYANG

The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture

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Acknowledgments

My research on the work of Dong Zhongshu (179–104 B.C.E.) in 2004 first awakened my interest in yinyang. I was investigating what appears to be a puzzling contradiction: on the one hand, yinyang seems to be an intriguing and valuable conceptual resource in ancient Chinese thought for a balanced account of gender equality; on the other hand, no one can deny the fact that the inhumane treatment of women throughout Chinese history has often been rationalized in the name of yinyang. These two conflicting observations are reflected in divisions within scholarly circles. Some scholars claim that the concept of yinyang can be a primary source for understanding Chinese gender identity and that it has much to offer to contemporary feminist thought. On the other hand, arguments have been given that the denigration and abuse of women in ancient China is a direct result of the idea of yinyang. This puzzle and the theoretical discussions around it led me to wonder what yinyang thought really meant in early Chinese texts, and why Chinese have for thousands of years continued to approach the world through the lens of yinyang. How can we understand the power of a way of thought that is both very simple and almost infinite in its applicability?

This project has been a transformative journey for me, and many minds, hearts, and hands have contributed to its development from those initial questions. I particularly wish to thank the following individuals for their intellectual insights and generosity in assisting me in this journey. At an early stage in its development I benefited much from discussions with Roger Ames, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Livia Kohn, Ronnie Littlejohn, Lisa Raphals, Weimin Sun, Bryan Van Norden, Zhihe Wang, Verner Worm, Wenyu Xie, Brook Ziporyn, and my dear colleagues in China: Su Yongli, Wu Genyou, Ding Weixiang, Zhang Xianglong, Gan Jianmin, Wan Junren, Zhang Zailin, Li Zhonggui, Lu Xichen, and Chen Xia. I owe a particular debt to Martin Schönfeld and Tao Jiang, who have always provided me with inspirational support. Li Ming has been a troubleshooter for me in resolving some obscure difficulties in my research. Special heartfelt

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1 Introduction

> The sage scrutinizes what is appropriate to the Yin and Yang and discriminates what is beneficial in the myriad things in order to enhance life.
>
> Lüshi Chunqiu

> Those charged with recording the Yin and Yang observe their interaction and can bring about order.
>
> Xunzi

What is yinyang? This question is at once utterly simple and wildly complicated. Thorough scholarly attempts to answer this question are surprisingly few, given the prominence of this concept. This may be a result of that prominence itself. People generally think they know about yinyang, although they usually pronounce yang incorrectly (it should rhyme with the English words "tong" or "bong," not with "sang" or "hang"). Because yin and yang are the most commonly known concepts from Chinese philosophy, they have practically become English words themselves. This familiarity may suggest that their meanings are obvious or that the concepts contain little worthy of deep intellectual inquiry. This would be a serious mistake.

Chinese thinkers themselves have recognized the significance of yinyang in Chinese thought and culture since ancient times. In the *Yantie lun* 鹽鐵論 (*Discourse on Salt and Iron*, 81 B.C.E.), one of the most significant texts in early China, we read: "The middle kingdom (*zhongguo*/China) is in the middle (*zhong*) of heaven and earth and is at the border (*ji* 際) of yin and yang (中國, 天地之中, 陰陽之際也)."[1]

[1] K. Heng, 桓寬. *On Salt and Iron* 鹽鐵論, with commentary by Z. Li. 林振翰校釋 (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1934), p. 55.

China is framed here in two contexts: human beings live between heaven and earth and at the intersection of yin and yang. The word *ji* literally means the border or boundary of a land, but it applies just as well to interactions between things. This early text views Chinese culture within the borders of yin and yang. It is also possible to read this claim from the *Yantie Lun* slightly differently, as one contemporary Chinese scholar argues that "middle" and "border" should both be taken as verbs. According to this view, Chinese culture arises from the attempt to stay centered between heaven and earth and to maintain the appropriate relations between yin and yang.[2]

Another early view of the centrality of yinyang comes from a medical text unearthed at the Mawangdui Han tombs that was buried in 168 B.C.E. The "Ten Questions" (十問) begins with a dialogue between the legendary sage kings Yao and Shun:

> Yao asked Shun: "In Under-heaven, what is the most valuable?"
> Shun replied: "Life is most valuable."
> Yao said: "How can life be cultivated?"
> Shun said: "Investigate Yin and Yang."[3]

This statement identifies life itself as the most fundamental value for the myriad things, and the key to fostering life is yinyang. Yinyang is not only offered for matters of basic health but also for the highest levels of self-cultivation. Thus, the oldest extant Chinese medical treatise (written around 200 C.E.), the *Huangdi Neijing*,[4] (黃帝內經) known as *The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic*, states that the "true person" (*zhenren* 真人) is one who can: "carry and support heaven and earth and grasp and master yinyang." (餘聞上古有真人者，提挈天地，把握陰陽).[5]

[2] Chen Yun takes this as the mission of Chinese culture: "Moreover, the 'middle' of the 'middle kingdom' functions as the middle between heaven and earth, and 'border' of yin and yang has a verbal sense, meaning that as a kind of civilization, China has the cultural mission of linking heaven and earth and connecting yin and yang." Chen Yun, "The Death of Hundun and the Deconstruction of the View of China-Centrism" 陳贇 "混沌之死"與中國中心主義天下觀之解構 in Discussion Forum for Chinese Thought, http://www.zhongguosixiang.com/thread-23589-1-1.html, October 7, 2010.

[3] D. J. Harper (trans.), "Ten Questions in Early Chinese Medical Literature," *The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1998), p. 399.

[4] The date and author of this text are debatable. The text consists of two parts: the first is a series of questions and answers; the second section is known as the "Vital Axis," which deals with medical physiology, anatomy, and acupuncture. P. U. Unschuld, *Medicine in China, A History of Ideas*, 25th ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 108.

[5] Y. Zhang 張隱庵 (ed.), *Huangdi Neijing Commentaries* 黃帝內經素問集注 (Beijing: Xueyuan Press 學苑出版社, 2002), p. 7.

> unsympathetically – belongs to a stage which Greek logic put behind it once and for all. By now, however, it has come to seem that wherever you dig down towards the roots of analytic reason, you reach a stratum where thinking is correlative, so that it becomes necessary to look at Yin-Yang from another direction.[14]

Rather than taking it as a primitive form of thought, Graham takes correlative thinking as a fundamental element of all reasoning. In the Chinese context, this correlative thinking is yinyang thinking. For example, yinyang is not just an important tool for grasping the cosmic body, namely the universe; it is also applied to the micro body: "human flesh."[15] The human body bears the same rhythm and properties as the greater cosmic body. Yinyang presents a justification for this association and a conceptual tool for understanding it.

These common views show that yinyang places human flourishing within a rich and deep context involving the interrelatedness of the cosmos and human beings. These interpretations also demonstrate that these relationships and connections must be understood in terms of differentiation between related but distinct forces. This view of yinyang is frequently used to characterize the Chinese worldview as a whole, in a way that situates it in contrast to Western thought: the Chinese focuses on interconnection, immanence, and cyclical changes, whereas Western philosophers emphasize dualism, transcendence, and eternal principles.

Such generalizations are too broad, and they miss the complexity and diversity of both Chinese and Western philosophy. Nonetheless, yinyang can be thought of as a kind of a horizon for much of Chinese thought and culture. It serves as a horizon in the sense that although the terms are invoked in particular contexts for concrete purposes, they imply a deeper cultural background and a paradigm for thinking about change and effective action. Yinyang is a particular term, but it also represents an underlying structure in an enduring tradition. In this sense, we can consider yinyang as a thinking paradigm. Thomas Kuhn develops a concept of paradigm that signifies an exemplary model. He argues that paradigms precede and shape all the operations of rational thinking: methodology, theory building, the determination of facts, and perception. A paradigm is a conceptual configuration that is demonstrated and learned by example, providing a lens through which one can view the world.[16] Yinyang in

[14] Ibid., p. 3.

[15] Ibid., p. 28.

[16] T. Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Chinese culture fits this description. At the same time, yinyang can also be seen as a constellation of lay beliefs and practices, functioning explicitly and implicitly in activities ranging from philosophy to health care and from warfare to a way of life. To capture this broad structure, this book will use the term "yinyang," rather than "yin or yang," "yin-yang," or "yin and yang." This reflects the Chinese usage, in which the terms are directly set together and would not be linked by a conjunction.

Beyond Common Understandings of Yinyang

A careful study of early Chinese texts shows that common accounts of yinyang are far too simple. Yinyang embodies a wide range of linked meanings, many of which are in play simultaneously. The invocation of yinyang itself is always predicated on a particular situation, a unique moment in which we must engage in the world. As Granet points out, "Throughout the period from fifth to third century [B.C.E.], these terms of Yin and Yang are employed by theorists from very different orientations. This very wide usage of these two terms gives the impression that they signify notions inspired by a vast ensemble of techniques and doctrines."[17]

This book illustrates yinyang as a philosophical and cultural paradigm that has multiple dimensions that evolved over time, and lays out the ways in which yinyang works, examining some of the ways in which yinyang functioned as the warp and woof of Chinese thought and culture. The goal is to give a more nuanced, synchronic account of the roles of yinyang within various aspects of early Chinese thinking, while still bringing out common aspects of yinyang as a paradigm and strategy. We can take the metaphor of the tree in the *Huainanzi* to illustrate this. A tree has two basic parts, the roots (*ben* 本) and the branches and leaves (*mo* 末): "It is like the roots and branches of trees: none of thousands of limbs and tens of thousands of leaves does not derive from the roots."[18] Yinyang is like a root (*ben*) of the branches of Chinese thinking: "As soon as you stimulate the root, the hundred branches all respond; it is like the spring rains watering the myriad things."[19] A better understanding of yinyang thus helps to clarify many aspects of Chinese thought and culture.

[17] Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (*Chinese Thought*) (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1968), p. 73. Thanks to Sonya Ozbey who translated one chapter from French to English for this book.

[18] Roth, *The Huainanzi*, p. 241.

[19] Ibid., p. 796.

We can begin by considering three ways in which the common assumptions about yinyang are inadequate or misleading.

Lived Yinyang: A Multiplicity of Relations

The common understanding of yin and yang as related pairs often takes yin and yang as things or fixed qualities of things. In fact, yin and yang are not simply things, entities, or objects. They can be used to characterize structures in which things exist, but they can also be used to analyze the functions of a thing in any given condition. In Chinese terms, yinyang can be both *ti* 體 (structure) and *yong* 用 (function). In both cases, yinyang always applies in particular and relative contexts. As Alfred Forke puts it, "Ultimately, yin and yang do not mean anything in themselves at all, being only employed to express a relation; one notion is the opposite of the other, the one is positive, the other negative."[20] Even at its inception, yinyang was used to denote the function of the sun in the context of a hill, with yang referring to the sunny side and yin to the shady side. If yinyang is the result of the temporal interplay of the sun and the hill, then does yinyang exist in its own right if either the sun or the hill is absent?

Because of this dependence on context, a single thing can be yin in one way and yang in another. Again, Forke provides a nice illustration: "The left hand is Yang, the right hand is Yin, in this no change is possible, but raise both hands, then they are both Yang, and put them down, and they are both Yin, and no matter whether you raise them or put them down, when they are hot they are both Yang, and when they are cold they are both Yin."[21] These are not contradictory labels, and it would be absurd to argue whether the right hand is *really* yang or *really* yin. The qualities only make sense when one specifies a certain context. The fact that anything is simultaneously yin and yang mirrors the fact that things are always implicated in multiple relations at once. Moreover, which relation is in view depends on the particular purposes and priorities of the viewer.

Aside from the fact that yin and yang differentiate things only within particular relationships and contexts, the precise relationship between yin and yang could be characterized in different ways, many of which can be invoked simultaneously. It is important to point out that yinyang is neither dualistic in positing two absolutely independent entities, nor even simply dialectical in projecting one single pattern for change. Yin

[20] A. Forke, *The World-Conception of The Chinese: Their Astronomical, Cosmological and Physico-Philosophical Speculations* (London: Late Probsthain & Co., 1925), p. 214.

[21] Ibid., p. 215.

and yang contest each other in a temporal framework and in multiple ways. To better encapsulate the complexity and multiplicity of yinyang thought, we can generalize these different relationships into six forms.[22]

1) *Maodun* 矛盾: Contradiction and opposition. Although yinyang thought may prompt us to think of harmony, interconnection, and wholeness, the basis of any yinyang distinction is difference, opposition, and contradiction. Any two sides are connected and related, but they are also opposed in some way, like light and dark, male and female, forceful and yielding. It is the tension and difference between the two sides that allows for the dynamic energy that comes through their interactions. It is also this difference that enables yinyang as a strategy – to act successfully, we must sometimes be more yin and sometimes more yang, depending on the context.

This aspect of yinyang is often described in terms of *maodun* 矛盾, which literally means "shield-spear" and originates from a story in the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 (280–233 B.C.E.). A person who sells shields and spears promotes his shields by saying they are so strong that nothing can penetrate them, whereas he promotes his spears by saying they are so sharp they can penetrate anything. Someone then asks him – what happens if one tries to use your spear to penetrate your shield?[23]

The *Hanfeizi* story raises opposites as logical contradictions. In this sense, something cannot be yang and yin (light and dark, masculine and feminine) in precisely the same way, at the same time, and in the same context. This approach to distinctions can be seen as the one of most fundamental in European philosophy. Such an approach, however, works only in the abstract. In reality, we not only find that opposites exist through interaction with and in dependence on each other, but also that the same thing can be considered to have opposite qualities depending on the context, as it is not a logical contradiction to say that one thing is small (in comparison to a mountain) but large (in comparison to an ant). In thinking about opposition and difference, Chinese thinkers concentrate much more on these latter aspects. The best-known modern example comes from Mao Zedong (1893–1976) who took *maodun* as the title of one of his essays, *On Contradiction* 矛盾論 (*Maodun Lun*), which highlights the unity of opposites as a force for class struggle and change.

[22] A further specification of the ways in which yin and yang can be related will be given in the discussion of the body in Chapter 5.

[23] Chen, Qiyou 陳奇猷. *New Annotation of Hanfeizi* 韓非子新校注 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press 上海古籍出版社 New Commentary, 2000), p. 204.

2) *Xiangyi* 相依: Interdependence. One side of the opposition cannot exist without the other. This interdependence can be seen on several different levels. On one level, it points out the interdependence of opposites as relative concepts. In labeling something as "high," one must implicitly label something else as "low." One cannot have a concept of "good" without there existing a concept of "bad" (*Daodejing*, chapter 2). According to yinyang thinking, however, the interdependence of opposites does not simply refer to the relativity of our concepts, but also to how things themselves exist, grow, and function. One way that this interdependence appears most clearly is through the alternation of yin and yang. The sun is the best example of yang – bright, warming, stimulating growth, and giving a rhythm – but when the power of that yang is developed to the extreme, it is necessary for it to be anchored, regenerated, and sustained by the force of yin. The sun must set. Although yang is the obvious, it cannot thrive without attention to yin. This interdependence appears in traditional Chinese medical texts, where the surge of *yangqi* 陽氣 depends on the regeneration of the *yinqi* 陰氣 of the five internal organs. Without the *yinqi* of the organs, there will be no a surge of *yangqi* or its extension outward.

The *Gui Guzi* 鬼谷子(*The Master of Spirit Valley*), a classic text of the school of *Zongheng* 縱橫 (School of Strategy) in the Warring States Period (451–221 B.C.E.), illustrates this interdependence, using an opening and closing door as a metaphor. To be a door, it must be able to open and close as two interrelated modes; otherwise, it will be simply a wall (that does not move) or an open space (that does not close). The *Gui Guzi* gives this a cosmic significance: "Opening and closing are the way of heaven and earth. Opening and closing change and move yinyang, just as the four seasons open and close to transform the myriad things."[24]

3) *Huhan* 互含: Mutual inclusion. Interdependence is linked closely to mutual inclusion. If yin depends on yang, then yang is always implicated in yin; in other words, yin cannot be adequately characterized without also taking account of yang. The same is true of yang – it necessarily involves yin. Regarding things themselves, even something that is strongly yang can be considered yin in some relations, as we have seen. The constant alternation between yin and yang also entails that yang always holds some yin and yin holds some yang. In the cycle of four seasons, summer is the most yang of the seasons, yet it contains a yin force, which will begin to emerge in the summer, extend through the fall, and reach its culmination

[24] F. Xu (ed.), 許富宏 *Gui Guzijishi*, 鬼谷子集釋, *Master of Spirit Valley* (Beijing: Chinese Press, 2008), p. 13.

most literally to the flowing of water, and the character itself contains the image of water on the left. The term for circular or ring is 環 *huan*. We might thus also translate the phrase as "flowing circulation."

The *Huangdi Neijing* often identifies yinyang interplay as a cycle (*huan*) without beginning or end: "Yinyang are mutually connected, like a cycle without beginning. Thus, one knows that attack and defense always follow each other. 陰陽相貫，如環之無端，故知榮衛相隨也." Another passage says: "Yinyang are interlocking like a cycle without limit, *yinyang* follow each other and internal and external interlock each other like a cycle without limit."[30]

We can see now the ambiguity and complexity in saying that two things "are like yin and yang." Everything is bound up in a plurality of relationships at the same time, related both to multiple things and to the same thing in multiple ways. These relations are not distinct but reflect the actual complexity of life and nature. Yinyang claims must be taken as a point of reference that is defined by location (*wei* 位) and time (*shi* 時). This study accentuates these complex, multidimensional frameworks to explore the wide array of practices that constitute yinyang understanding. The defense of this pluralistic picture of yinyang thought illuminates the diversity and variety within the paradigm itself, a diversity that has enabled yinyang to serve so many different functions throughout various aspects of Chinese culture.

Generation 生 *(Sheng) and Emergence*

The common understandings of yinyang, especially the emphasis on correlative thinking, have taken correspondence as their basis, recognizing the important role of yinyang in connecting heaven, earth, and the myriad things. These common views, however, often overlook one of the most important forms of change: *sheng* 生 (generation, growth, life).

The word *sheng* originally referred to a plant growing out of the soil. It can be a noun indicating life itself or a verb that conveys the generative

after developing to its extremes," has become a popular idiom in contemporary China. There is a term in contemporary Western science called "self-organized criticality," which refers to the tendency of large dissipative systems to drive themselves to a critical state, with a wide range of length and time scales. The idea provides a unifying concept for large-scale behavior in systems with many degrees of freedom. It has been looked for in such diverse areas as earthquake structure, economics, and biological evolution. It is also seen as "regression toward means."

[30] B. Niu 牛兵占 (ed.), *Huangdi Neijing*, 黃帝內經 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Science and Technology Press 1993), p. 59.

living process. It is also the term for birth or giving birth. Even though cosmological correspondence is important to the use of yinyang as an explanatory tool, it is also necessary to consider the relationships between yinyang and the generativity that emerges from interaction. In fact, although we often think of yinyang as focusing on polarities, yinyang thought really is a type of triadic thinking centered on the thirdness that results from the interaction between yin and yang. The whole is made of the interactions between parts, not the individual parts, themselves.

Yinyang as a form of correlative thinking is evident in the thought of the Han Dynasty Confucian Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒(179–104 B.C.E.),[31] however, it should be taken as only one of many possible ways that yinyang can explain changes. The contemporary Chinese scholar Pang Pu 龐樸 distinguishes between two types of generation: generation by transformation (*huasheng* 化生) and generation by reproduction (*paisheng* 派生). He describes *paisheng* as a chicken giving birth to an egg and *huasheng* as the egg hatching into a chicken. The products that stem from both of these kinds of generations bring out new phases of existence.[32] Yinyang plays a central role in such generative processes.

The *Huainanzi* explicitly links yinyang to generation and growth (*sheng*):

> Heaven, Earth and the four seasons do not [purposefully] generate (*sheng*) the ten thousand things. Spirit and illumination join, yin and yang harmonize and the myriad things are generated (*sheng*).[33](天地四時，非生萬物也，神明接，陰陽和，而萬物生之).

A passage in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (third century B.C.E.) connects yinyang directly to life itself, referring to living things as "all the creatures taking shape between heaven and earth and receiving vital energy [*qi*] from the yin and yang."[34]

[31] Fung You-lan (1895–1990) claimed that the history of Chinese philosophy could be divided into two periods: the period before Dong Zhongshu ("the period of philosophers") and the period after Dong Zhongshu ("the period of Classical learning"). Dong Zhongshu was instrumental in making Confucianism the orthodoxy of the state at the expense of the other schools of thought and was prominent in the creation of the institutional basis for propagating this Confucian orthodoxy. For more discussion, see R. Wang, "Dong Zhongshu's Transformation of Yin/Yang Theory and Contesting of Gender Identity," *Philosophy East & West*, 55 (2005), 209–231.

[32] Pang Pu, 龐樸, *On Oneness Divided into Threeness* 淺說一分為三 (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 2004), p. 115.

[33] Roth, *The Huainanzi*, p. 803.

[34] B. Ziporyn (trans.), *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2009), p. 69.

It is the movement of yinyang *qi* that leads to the life or death of any living thing. Early Chinese texts tackled structural questions about the universe through yinyang as a way of highlighting the self-generative and self-organizing forces of complex phenomena. As Lauren Pfister contends, there is "an inherent necessity driving for transformation" in all aspects of reality, and "all transformation[s] are born within the hidden, invisible contexts."[35] Yinyang thought appeals to integrated processes rather than divided dualisms. It addresses what we could call a state of complexity, a term widely invoked in the field of contemporary science, particularly in relation to biological systems. The idea of complexity shows "the whole being formed of numerous parts in nonrandom organization."[36] In this sense, complexity is about seeing a thing in terms of its parts in connection with the whole. There is structure or order in the way in which the whole is composed of parts. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Yinyang thought has been a kind of complexity thinking, in which the whole is perceived through multiple interactions. Any given existence is a complex system such that parts are arranged and their relations make its structure. Biological and organic processes, rather than the more abstract disciplines of physics or mathematics, were the favored conceptual sources for Chinese understanding of the world. This contrasts the analysis of the universe through geometrical logic and mathematical order more familiar in the West. This weight on biology prompted Zhang Xianglong 張祥龍, a contemporary Chinese scholar, to promote the idea that Chinese thinking at a fundamental level is gendered and that biological interaction between male and female is the ultimate model for Chinese philosophical speculation.[37]

One other aspect of the generative force of yinyang seen in many classical texts is an emphasis on probable reasoning with an open-end dimension. This again contrasts the common focus through most of the history of Western thought on certainty and universality, something that appears in Classical Greece, where geometry and reason were honed as tools for understanding natural phenomena.[38] This can be seen as reflecting a common human desire for stable and certain knowledge.

[35] L. Pfister, "Philosophical Explorations of the Transformative Dimension in Chinese Culture," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 35:4 (2008), 663–682.

[36] S. D. Mitchell, *Biological Complexity and Integrative Pluralism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 167.

[37] X. Zhang 張祥龍, "The Status and Consequences of 'Gender Difference' in Chinese and Western Philosophy" '性別'在中西哲學裡的地位及其思想後果, *Jiangsu Social Sciences*, 6 (2002), 1–9.

[38] L. M. Lederman and H. Christopher, *Symmetry and the Beautiful Universe* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), p. 121.

At the same time, however, human beings also have a need to develop the capacity for successful prediction to avoid danger. Such predictions are never certain and must go beyond abstract calculations. For the Chinese, the uncertainty involved in our ability to predict regularities was a practical matter of agriculture, not an abstract problem of philosophical skepticism. Facing an unpredictable world, we might lose confidence and feel as if there is no stability at all. Yinyang thinking emerged as a conceptual apparatus to ease the anxiety of lost control by creating ways of predicting and accepting the inevitability of change. At the same time, because there is no way one can exhaust the unknown, one must also have constant concern, *youhuan* 憂患, regarding the future. We will turn to this notion of anxious concern in Chapter 2.

Harmony and Strategic Efficacy

One of the most common ways to characterize yinyang has been through the idea of harmony (*he* 和). In fact, many interpretations of yinyang stop at this point, going no further than the idea of harmony or balance. However, what are the parameters for harmony? Can we give an unambiguous explanation of what constitutes a state of harmony? One might claim that an orderly society is a harmony of policy, institutions, and citizens; a healthy body is a harmony of different bodily functions; a delicious dish is a harmony of all its ingredients.

For example, the current Chinese government has been using "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui* 和諧社會) as a way to deal with the divergence between rich and poor brought out by economic development and to stabilize the Chinese society as a whole. As these examples suggest, "harmony" itself needs further definition and explanation. For example, Alan Chan formulates two models of harmony in ancient China: culinary harmony and musical harmony.[39] Musical harmony pays most attention to hierarchical relationships that require different elements or sounds working together in a coordinated way. In contrast, culinary harmony focuses on an integrated relationship that results from the interaction and blending of different elements. These two models have different practical implications, and both are present in the Chinese tradition.

In explaining yinyang and correlative thinking, A. C. Graham attempts to give a more specific formulation of harmony as it relates to yinyang. He

[39] A. K. L. Chan, "Harmony as a Contested Metaphor and Conceptions of Rightness (*Yi*) in Early Confucian Ethics," in R. A. H. King and D. Schilling (eds.) *How Should One Live? Comparing Ethics in Ancient China and Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), pp. 37–62.

does this by articulating two different kinds of relationships: "paradigmatic relations" oriented around similarity and difference, and "syntagmatic" relations based on contiguity and remoteness, which he takes as also encompassing relations of part and whole.[40] Graham explains:

> The interaction of things are seen as either orderly or chaotic; they are orderly to the extent that in the symmetries of space and cycles of time the harmonious are together and the conflicting apart. To describe a phenomenon in its place and time within this order will be to select from conflicting (as paradigmatic A, B...) and to combine the harmonious (as syntagmatic 1, 2...).[41]

In other words, harmony and disorder are conceived through contiguity and distance, and finding harmony depends on combining contrasting elements into relations of contiguity. Harmony is ultimately a matter of integration, and this is the main function of yinyang thinking.

Although Graham insightfully brings out one important element of how yinyang thought relates to harmony, the function of yinyang cannot be limited to this goal. The most obvious inadequacy with a focus on harmony is that the focal point of yinyang as a strategy is not so much on achieving a static balance but rather on generation and transformation. This is the issue of emergence, which will be significant to this study, as it implies a thinking paradigm directed primarily toward self-organization and complexity.

A second key limit with an exclusive concern for harmony is that yinyang thinking, when considered as a strategy or guide, was used primarily to achieve concrete results, such as victory in battle, cultivating the body to attain longevity, and having constructive sexual intercourse. These goals are all relative to human purposes. The goal of yinyang thinking as a strategy is efficacy in general; harmony is frequently a means toward this goal as well as a manifestation of its success. Even so, from the perspective of nature itself, a long or short life, or the loss or victory in a particular battle, are probably all equally harmonious results.

However, the difference between them is crucial to the actors involved. Thus, an account of the aspirations behind the use of yinyang must go beyond harmony itself. This applies to how yinyang functions. In addition to using balance and harmony, yinyang as a strategy calls attention to and helps to organize the specific elements needed for efficacy, such

[40] Graham, *Yinyang*, p. 19.
[41] Ibid., p. 63.

social order, bodily cultivation, and visual presentation. Here, we will take a walk on a long path of Chinese texts. The flagstones on which we will tread are terms, each seemingly unique and strange. As we walk, however, we begin to notice that each term leads gently and logically to the other because of its link to yinyang. The *Dao* 道 (the way), *qi* 氣 (vital force or energy), *yi* 易 (changes), *taiji* 太極 (great ultimate), *lei* 類 (kinds), *shu* 術 (strategy), *xiushen* 修身 (body cultivation), and *xiangshu* 象數 (images and numbers) are interrelated on the basis of yinyang. These terms have many differences among texts and change over time, as there is not simply one unvarying yinyang position. At the same time, this book arranges these specific texts as paradigms to reveal resemblances that will illuminate consistent elements of yinyang thought and practice, even if these elements are not universal.

This emphasis on philosophy, however, should not obscure the fact that yinyang was not only a source of conceptualization but also a practical guide or strategy. Thus, the third way of approaching yinyang in this book is pragmatic, focusing on the role of yinyang in connection with specific practices, such as *fengshui*, city planning, military strategy, medicine, sexual practice, inner alchemy, and body transformation. This focus will not only specify the ways in which yinyang is applied as a theoretical structure but will also show how yinyang was used to guide actions in concrete contexts.

After the introduction in Chapter 1, the book is organized into five chapters, each centering on key concepts in Chinese philosophy. Chapter 2 highlights *xingershang* (形而上 above forms), a phrase with ancient roots but later used to translate the Western term "metaphysics." This chapter concentrates primarily on cosmology, showing how yinyang thought justifies and explicates a self-generating and self-transforming world. The chapter ponders the connections among four fundamental cosmological concepts: *Dao*, *qi*, *yi*, and *taiji*.

The concept of *Dao*, central to the *Daodejing*, illustrates many of the basic functions of yinyang thinking (although the *Daodejing* itself uses yin and yang only once). *Qi*, vital force or energy, is a key concept used for describing all kinds of natural processes. Yinyang has long been closely connected to the concept of *qi*, a link that goes back at least to the *Shangshu* 尚書 (*The Book of History*, 772–476 B.C.E.). In these cases, the *qi* of yinyang is the generative force underlying all existence and serves an indispensable role in making an ontological link between a unitary source and the diversity of the myriad things, *wanwu* 萬物 (literally, ten thousands of things). *Yi*, change, is in the title of the *Yijing* (*The Book of Changes*), which offers a rich resource for yinyang, both through the

binary structure of the core text and the explicit discussions of yinyang in its various commentaries, particularly the "Xi Ci." These various cosmological views exemplify how the myriad things are tied into an interrelated net through yinyang, which explicates the general rules and the myriad small details.

Chapter 3 examines the world of *xingerxia* 形而下, what is "below forms." Yinyang is an underlying rhythm animating all existence or all things "under heaven," *tianxia* 天下. One of the basic functions of yinyang is as a system for classifying and relating things and events in both the human and natural world. This is based on the concept of *lei* 類, kinds or categories. Everything and every event can be seen either as yin or as yang, and then related with other things on this basis. If the legacy of Greek logic is the Aristotelian deductive pattern of reasoning and the Euclidean vision of geometry, then the legacy of Chinese thought is this kind of yinyang *lei* thinking. It functions by linking phenomena across various levels and forms. This kind of categorizing through yinyang forms a deep-seated way of thinking that is found in political systems, ethical orientations, art, and city planning. Yinyang, thus, supplies a rational and coherent basis for social structures and human behaviors.

The social function of yinyang categorization will be discussed along several lines. The yin and yang distinction is an obvious way to account for the differentiation between women and men, articulated most fully in the work of the influential Han Confucian Dong Zhongshu. Even so, several issues need to be clarified. If yin (woman/femininity) and yang (man/masculinity) are both necessary for any healthy human being, then the devaluation of yin (the feminine) will lead to a weakening of other indispensable parts, that is, the yang (the masculine). This point contrasts the prominence Dong Zhongshu himself gives to hierarchy.

Another question to be considered is the role of yinyang in the field of ethics. In particular, how does yinyang bring together the two sides of proper action, appearing in the two main contemporary Chinese terms for morality or ethics, *daode* 道德 (the way and its power) and *lunli* 論理 (patterned human relations)? On the one hand, yinyang furnished a sense of human connection to broader processes of the universe, which is highlighted in the term *daode*; on the other hand, it structures human obligations through particular human relationships and hierarchies, which is emphasized in the term *lunli*. This leads to an important question: how does yinyang present the integration of human actions with the patterns of the cosmos and the rules of social order?

Yinyang is a way that interweaves being, thinking, and doing. Chapter 4 turns our attention to *shu* 術 (strategy or method). The notion of *shu*,

a strategy or technique, enables one to function effectively in any given circumstance. The development of strategies for functioning effectively in the world is one of the most fundamental aspects of the yinyang paradigm, and this integration of knowledge and action might be the main strength of yinyang thought.[42] As a strategy, yinyang is applied to everything from thriving in different natural environments to succeeding in battles to having skillful sexual encounters. This chapter will articulate several broad kinds of methods or *shu*: *daoshu* 道術 (the method of the *Dao*) and *xinshu* 心術 (the method of the heart/mind). All of these forms of *shu* address living skillfully and efficaciously. While yinyang strategy involves many elements, there are two orientations that are most critical. The first is the skillful use of existing resources, conceptualized as the timing of heaven and the benefits of earthly terrain. The second is a focus on the importance of yin as background and what is non-present or unseen.

Chapter 5 underscores the significance of yinyang in relation to *xiushen* 修身 (the cultivation of body). The term here for the body, *shen* 身, is also the ancient Chinese word for the self, indicating the fundamental importance of the body in Chinese thought. Many classical texts assert that the order of the world lies in sages governing their own bodies well, thus relating the body to the state, family, and self. Yinyang is the hub for understanding what the body is, how it functions, and how it can be strengthened and cultivated. It was a common belief in early China that the human body is a yinyang body, particularly in medical texts and practices. All internal bodily functions are the work of yinyang, according to at least three variables: (1) the rhythm of yinyang (*jiezou* 節奏): either yang or yin is too fast or too slow; (2) the balance of yinyang (*pingheng* 平衡): too much or too little yang or yin; and (3) the transformation of yinyang (*bianhua* 變化): yang or yin changing too much or too little.

Health involves all three factors, establishing proper rhythm, balance, and change. Disease comes when any of these three is disrupted. Given the connection between the body and the self, the importance of body cultivation naturally leads to spiritual transformation. The human body is taken as a gateway for going beyond current physical, mental, and social conditions. This journey is not simply becoming attuned to the hidden cycles of nature, but is also a kind of spiritual conversion.

[42] Paul U. Unschuld comments, "The yin-yang and Five Agents doctrines are relational science. They may be well suited to explain some relationships and their effects in society and in humankind's natural environment. They may even explain a Chinese superiority in social, economic and military strategies over the west." Unschuld, *Medicine in China*, p. xxix.

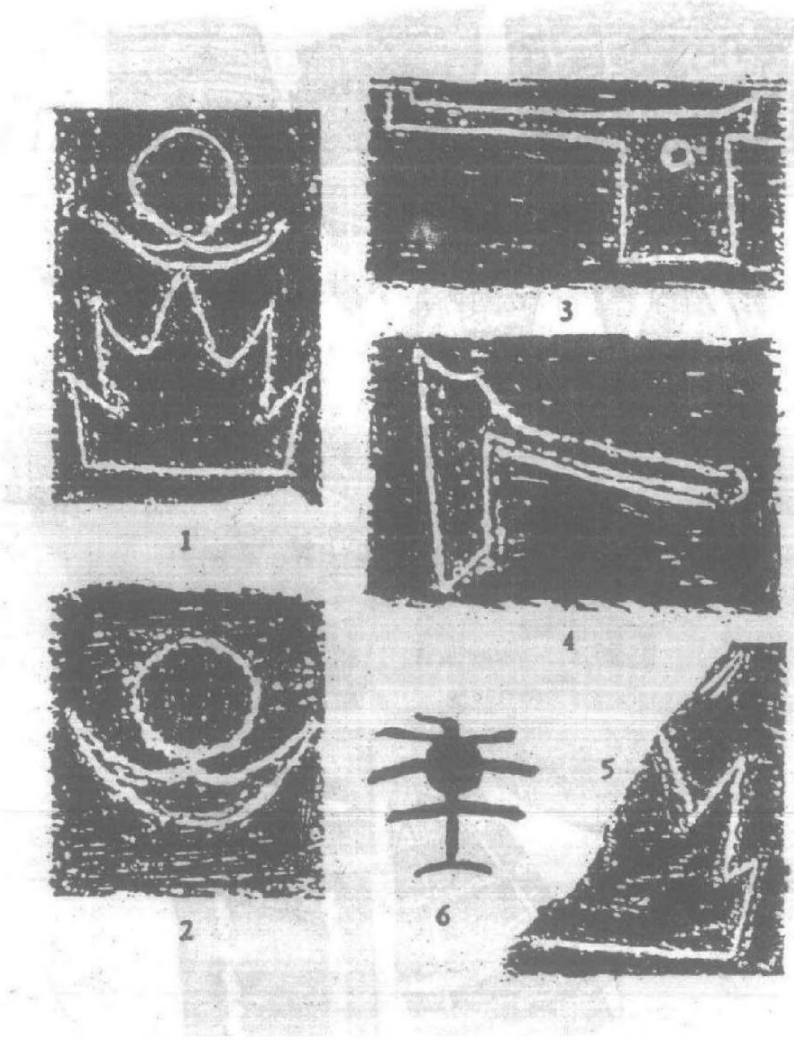
Chapter 6 moves into the field of visual presentations, something called *xiang* 象 or "image" thinking, an approach that has been dominant in the interpretation of the *Yijing*. *Xiang* thinking is basically a kind of analogical reasoning in which one image schema is used to conceptualize another domain and, thus, derives implications from it. This chapter will map out the image-making tradition of *xiangshu* (images and numbers), which has often been neglected in Western academic work because of its complexity and peculiarity. The aspiration will be to recognize how yinyang was represented and what these representations reveal. This will guide us in determining how to "read" the famous yinyang symbol. Beyond indicating various characteristics of yinyang, there is a thinking model presupposed in this symbol, suggesting a type of visual thinking. The yinyang symbol is a graphic representation of an image schema, the circle with the growing colors visually depicts the dynamic forces involved, and the seeds of the opposite color symbolize the shift from one to the other that occurs when one reaches its largest point, leading to a circulation without end. The yinyang interaction itself goes beyond yinyang as merely reciprocal, complementary, and interdependent. The symbol itself depicts the emergence of thirdness as the result of this interplay. This discussion of yinyang as shown in the yinyang symbol will serve as a conclusion of the book.

The Origins of Yinyang in Relation to the Sun

There are three main written sources for learning about early Chinese culture. One are the oracle bones, primarily from the Shang (Yin) Dynasty (seventeenth–twelfth century B.C.E.). The second are the bronze inscriptions from the Western Zhou Dynasty (twelfth century–770 B.C.E.), and the Spring and Autumn Period (770–221 B.C.E). The third are transmitted written texts, primarily the *Shangshu* 尚書 (*The Book of History*) and the *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Book of Odes*), parts of which go back to the Western Zhou and continue through the Spring and Autumn Period.

The terms *yin* or *yang* do not appear in early oracle bones or the bronze inscriptions, however, there are a few words that might be related to the creation of the characters for yin and yang, particularly the character for yang, given its close connection to the sun.[43] Three of the earliest six Chinese characters that have been found in Dawenkou culture 大汶口文化

[43] H. Xiao 蕭漢明, *Yinyang: Great Transformation and Human Life* 陰陽大化與人生, (Guangdong People's Press, 1998), p. 15.



1.1. The earliest six Chinese characters found in Shangdong Dawenkou culture.

(4300–2500 B.C.E.) are related to the sun[44] (Figure 1.1: 1, 2, 6). Given the fundamental importance of the sun and its connection to yang, the

[44] Da Wenkou culture is based around Shangdong. The six characters were found on pottery. For more discussion see, ibid., p. 14.

722–468 B.C.E., and one of the most important sources for understanding the history of the Spring and Autumn Period, claims that "from the sun one will know there is the way of heaven" (是以日知其有天道也).[49] In early times, the commands or mandate of heaven (*tianming* 天命), were revealed in the movements of the constellations.[50] The movement of the sun, moon, and stars were all expressions of heavenly will. Because the will of heaven is apparent through events in the sky, one can look to the sky to know the will of heaven. The *Guoyu* 國語 (*Discourses of the States*), a supposed record of various states from the Western Zhou to 453 B.C.E., asserts confidently that heavenly affairs must be expressed through heavenly images (天事必象).[51] Heaven also expresses its will through the different seasons, which are produced by the sun.

In particular seasons, heaven manifests specific commands. Human action must be synchronized with the movement of the sun. In fact, the word for seasons, *shi* 時, is also the word for acting in a timely way. The character itself contains an image of the sun: 日. The use of the movement of the sun to structure time and place comes together with reverence for the sun most clearly in the fields of astrology and calendrics.

The development of yinyang thought was largely concomitant with the theorization of Chinese astrology. The sky concerns both the calendar and the seasons as they relate to farming and ritual. It has a central place in people's lives. In China, sun worship was closely associated with the making of the calendar, which was one of the most important duties for any ruler. How does one choose the proper date for various important tasks, ranging from rituals to farming? On which day should one perform what kinds of sacrifice? What time during the day should one carry out a particular ritual? Successfully choosing these dates was thought to secure a desirable outcome. Here we see the interconnection of different levels of phenomena, something typical of yinyang thought.

The *He Guanzi* tells the way in which seasons are determined, based on the position of the Seven Dippers:

> If it points east, in the world it will be spring; if it points north, in the world it will be summer; if it points to west, in the world it will be fall; if it points to north, in the world it will be winter. (*huanliu* chapter)[52]

[49] M. Li, (ed.), *Zuozhuan Yizhu* 左傳譯注, (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 1998), p. 673.

[50] See more discussions in D. Pankenier, "The Cosmo-Political Background of Heaven's Mandate," *Early China*, 20 (1995), 121–176.

[51] Wu Guoyi 鄔國義, (ed.) *Guoyu* 國論譯注 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press,1994), p. 289.

[52] Wang, (ed.), *Collected Interpretations of He Guanzi*, p. 11.

The term translated here as "world" is literally what is "under heaven" (*tianxia* 天下). Thus, heaven/sky and the earth that is under or below heaven are viewed through a lens of relatedness. They are not separate or isolated entities. Similarly, human events depend on these relationships – in spring we plant, and in the fall we harvest. In the *Hanshu* (*The Book of Han*), a classical history text finished in 111 C.E. and covering the history from 206 B.C.E. to 25 C.E., four related elements are distinguished but connected together to form a whole: heavenly images (*tianxiang* 天象), weather and climate (*qihou* 氣候), the developing stages of things (*wuhou* 物候), and human affairs (*renshi*人事). The images of heaven (*tianxiang*) provide the timing for all kinds of actions, including the ruler's policies for scheduling punishments and rewards. The condition of the weather (*qihou*) guides farmers to plant or harvest. The stage of things (*wuhou*) indicates the proper timing for ordinary people. All of these factors are integral parts of human affairs (*renshi*).[53]

This whole structure of time was conceived through the flowing of yinyang, thus making yinyang the basis for human activities. The chapter called "Four Seasons" in the *Baihutong* 白虎通 (*Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*), the official transcript of an imperial conference on the Confucian classics convened in 79 C.E, makes this point explicitly: "Seasons [timing] are periods of time, the periods of the waxing and waning of yinyang."[54] 時者, 期也, 陰陽消息之期也.

Thus, the passage concludes that one needs to follow the decline and growth of yinyang (陰陽消長). The early Chinese calendar is called the "joined yinyang calendar," *yinyang heli* 陰陽合歷, because it was based on the movement of both the sun and the moon. The moon's cyclical movement from full to crescent is called the yin calendar; the movement of the sun, which sets days and seasonal changes, is called the yang calendar. The sun and moon, joined together, provide a guide for farming. The classical Chinese "day" (*ri* 日) is the same word as "sun," just as "month" (*yue* 月) is the same word as "moon." The moon has an indispensable role to play, because individual days (*ri*, representing the sun) are situated within months (*yue*, representing the moon). When you decide what you want to do this particular day, you must also consult with the moon, the background, or the context. This understanding is what allows one to act effectively. The month that a day falls within is much more important in the traditional calendar than is the year. The sun and moon are

[53] Ban Gu, *Hanshu* 漢書 (*The Book of Han*), (Beijing: Chinese Press), p. 1079.

[54] L. Chen, (ed.), *Baihutong* 白虎通, *Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, (Beijing: Chinese Press), p. 2376.

the most vital information for farmers; however, they cannot be viewed as isolated bubbles of elements, but rather related to each other to set the particular context for any decision. Situating oneself in any configuration of forces requires attention to both yin and yang, although the yin commonly is the context and background outside of one's main focus. It is worth noting here that the moon also signifies water, the yin. Water bears live-giving power. Several myths describe women who become pregnant by touching water.[55]

We can see from these examples that yinyang is an early attempt to reconcile human life with the sun. The traditional characters for yin and yang are rooted in this affiliation. The character yin 陰 shows a mound on the left side, with a cloud on the bottom left, below the symbol for "today." The traditional character for yang 陽 shows a mound on the left side, with a sun on the top right. Part of yang in Chinese is *ri* 日, sun. The right side of the yang character can further be grouped as *dan* 旦 (daybreak; i.e., the sun coming over the horizon) and yang 昜 (bright; i.e., light streaming off the sun), which both directly relate to the interpretation of yang as "sunny." The simplified forms of the characters now used in China show this connection even more explicitly – yang is a mound next to the sun 阳, and yin is a mound next to the moon 阴. Similarly, the word for sun even in contemporary Chinese today is *taiyang* 太阳, the absolute or greatest yang.

From the Terms Yin and Yang to Yinyang Thinking as a Paradigm

The terms yin and yang gradually developed from ways of naming relationships with the sun into a complex way of thinking, which we can call "yinyang thinking." Many building blocks contributed to the formation of this thinking pattern. Historically, although the term yinyang was not a dominant concept before the Han Dynasty, proto-yinyang thought already existed and had given rise to a particular thinking model. We can distinguish three main constituents that contributed to this formation of yinyang thought.

The first source is practices of divination. In the *Shijin*g, sun and moon divination is used to predict good or ill fortune: "The sun and moon announce ill fortune, not keeping to their proper paths."[56] As we

[55] E. T. C. Werner, *Myths & Legend of China* (New York: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1922).

[56] Zhou, *Shijing*, p. 300.

know from oracle bones, in the Shang Dynasty, divination was consulted widely for a broad range of activities. Is it a good day for going hunting, getting married, or going to war? All of these questions were divided into "yes" or "no" – two aspects.

This kind of binary structure appears most clearly in the *Yijing* (*The Book of Changes*). The *Yijing* makes known two kinds of divination. One is *pu*, which uses the tortoise shell. The diviner would make marks on the tortoise shell, then burn it and read the cracks. Another method is *wu*, which uses stalks or other sticks that are divided and shuffled according to a certain procedure. The cracked lines or the arrangement of the sticks all point toward one of two possible results: well-fortuned or ill-fortuned, yes or no, going or stopping, failure or success, gaining or losing. The binary structure of these divination methods reveals a value and belief system that became deeply integrated with yinyang thinking. Edmund Ryden asserts, "Binary terminology is a feature of much early Chinese philosophy. Indeed it is perhaps also a feature of the Chinese language."[57] Such a binary system underlies the structure of the *Yijing*; this system was explicitly connected to yinyang through the *Yizhuan*易傳, (*Yi Commentaries*), which were probably written in the late Warring States Period. For example, the "Shuo Gua" ("Explanation of Hexagrams") declares, "The way of establishing heaven is yin and yang; the way of establishing earth is softness and hardness; the way of establishing human being is benevolence and righteousness."[58]

Although associated with divination, yinyang also signified a rationalizing tendency in relation to natural processes. According the contemporary Chinese scholar Chen Lai 陳來, in the Spring and Autumn Period, there was a growing tension between worldly political and moral consciousness and the tradition of spirit worship.[59] The tension concerned whether divination (*wu*) or virtue (*de*) should come first. One key distinction involved in this tension was the separation between yinyang and *jixiong*吉凶 (well-fortuned or ill-fortuned). Here, yinyang stands for human intellectual power to explicate natural events, in which case, human knowledge does not depend on divination or spirits. Natural phenomena result from yinyang movement as opposed to anything mysterious or dependent on the divine.

[57] E. Ryden, *The Yellow Emperor's Four Canons, A Literary Study and Edition of the Text from Mawangdui* (Taipei: Guangqi Press, 1997), p. 11.

[58] H. Gao 高亨, *Commentary on Zhouyi* 周易大傳今注 (Jinan: Qilu Press, 1998), p. 455.

[59] Chen Lai, *The World of Ancient Thought and Culture: Religions, Ethics and Social Thought in the Spring and Autumn Period* (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2009), p. 16.

We can consider an example from the *Zuozhuan*. In the Spring and Autumn Period, the officer in charge of astrology used yin and yang to explain the condition of weather and changes of season. The *Zuozhuan* records two exceptional events in 644 B.C.E. that supposedly happened in the state of Song. One was a shooting star, and the other was six birds flying backwards. The king of Song asked Shi Shuxing whether these were signs of being well- or ill-fortuned. Shi Shuxing responded that these are "the events of yinyang, not issues of being well or ill fortuned."[60] This is a bold claim, because it marks a transitional time when yinyang was used as a conceptual tool to clarify natural phenomena and when it provided a break from treating those events as auspicious signs determining human events. The *Xunzi* 荀子(298–238 B.C.E.) later presents a more explicit and systematic account in the chapter, "Discourse on Heaven":

> When stars fall or trees groan, the whole state is terrified. They ask what caused this to happen. I reply that there was no specific reason. When there is a modification of the relation of Heaven and Earth or a transmutation of the Yin and Yang, such unusual events occur. We may marvel at them, but we should not fear them.[61]

The second aspect of proto-yinyang thought relates to the paradoxical interdependence of opposites. The earliest detailed view of this way of thinking appears in the *Daodejing*, a text expressing thought that probably developed in the fifth century B.C.E. According to Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873–1929), the terms yin and yang in the Shang and early Zhou were primarily descriptions of natural phenomena and did not yet form a philosophical system. He argues that the significant change in the meaning of yinyang began with the *Daodejing*.[62] Although there is only one use of the term yinyang in the *Daodejing*, the text has a persistent orientation toward the paradoxical interdependence of opposites in the world. In chapter two, there are six situations that consist of distinct but interrelated and interacting forces:

> Everybody in the world knows the beautiful as beautiful. Thus, there is already ugliness. Everybody knows what is good. Thus, there is that which is not good. That presence and non-presence generate each other, difficult and easy complement each other, long and short give each other shape,

[60] Li Mengsheng (ed.), *Zuozhuan Yizhu* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 1998), p. 247.

[61] J. Knoblock (trans.), *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, 3 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988–1994), p. 543.

[62] Liang Qichao 梁啓超. 陰陽五行說之來歷, "The Origin of Yinyang and Wuxing" in Gu Jiegang, (ed.) 古史辨 *The Debate on Ancient History* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 1982), vol. V, p. 347.

of "a hundred schools." Among these was an influential group that came to be called the Yinyang School (*yinyangjia* 陰陽家). Unfortunately, its works have been largely lost, and its thought and practices have been ignored in academic studies as a result of the limited sources and its difficulty and obscurity.

In his essay *Lun liujia yaozhi* 論六家要旨 contained in the Shiji 史記, (*Records of the Historians*), Sima Tan 司馬談, the early Han period 前漢 (206 B.C.E–8 C.E), historiographer, listed the Yinyang School as the first of six Chinese intellectual schools.[67]

He describes Yinyang school:

> The secret observations of the method [*shu*] of yinyang greatly emphasizes good fortune [*xiang* 祥] and has a multitude of prohibitions and taboos, it restrains people and multiplies what they fear. So regarding the order of the four seasons, it is greatly following along that cannot be lost.[68] (嘗竊觀陰陽之術，大祥而眾忌諱，使人拘而多所畏；然其序四時之大順，不可失也).

He then provides this more specific explanation:

> Yinyang, the four seasons, the eight positions, the twelve measures and the twenty-four restrictions all have their own teachings and commands. One who follows them will flourish, and one who goes against them, if they do not die, will decline. But it is not necessarily like this, and thus I say "it restrains people and multiplies what they fear." In the spring, things are born, in the summer they grow, in the fall they are gathered, and in the winter they are stored. This is the great order of the way of heaven. If it is not followed then one lacks the warp and woof of the world. Thus I say, "regarding the order of the four seasons, it is greatly following along that cannot be lost."[69]

We can see in these descriptions that yinyang was caught up in various particular practices and that Sima Tan himself is skeptical of at least some of these.

The "Yiwenzhi" chapter of the *Hanshu* supplies further details about the Yinyang School. The *Hanshu* traces the origins of each of the early schools of Chinese thought to different kinds of *shi* 士, the class of intellectuals and specialists who were government officials and advisors. For example, the school of the Confucians (*Rujia*) came from *shi* who

[67] The other five are Confucians, Mohists, Legalists, Logicians, and Daoists.

[68] Sima Qian, 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Historians*) (Beijing: Chinese Press, 2003), chapter 130, p. 3289.

[69] Ibid., chapter 130, p. 3290.

practiced rituals and music. The Yinyang School also came from these specialists (*shi*), however, they were *fangshi* 方士 (specialists in techniques) who engaged in a wide array of practical skills, from reading the oracle bones and observing seasonal transformations, to analyzing political events and cycles of histories, to devising military strategies. Graham calls these *fangshi* "men of secret arts."[70]

More specifically, the *Hanshu* describes the Yinyang School as arising in the following way:

> The course of the Yinyang School probably came from officials for astrology, reverently following great heaven, the calendar, moon, sun, and stars. They reverently gave out the proper timing [*shi*, seasons] for the people, and this is what they were strong in. When it comes to enacting restraints, then they were bound by prohibitions and taboos and sunken in minor numerology, abandoning human affairs to rely on ghosts and spirits.[71] (陰陽家者流，蓋出於羲和之官，敬順昊天，歷象日月星辰，敬授民時，此其所長也。及拘者為之，則牽於禁忌，泥於小數，舍人事而任鬼神).

The same chapter explains further the basis of these practices:

> Yinyang is following the time to issue out; going forward by *xingde*, in accordance with the stars [*douji*] and five elements, relying on the five conquering and using the assistance of the ghosts and spirits.[72]

This passage raises three technical terms associated with particular methods, or *shu*, involved with astrology and numerology. The first is *xingde* 刑德, which is a method associated with the five elements: water, wood, metal, earth, and fire. *Xingde* was closely connected to yinyang, such that the *Records of the Historian* says, "In order to clarify yinyang, one needs to examine *xingde*" (明於陰陽, 审於刑德).[73] *Xing* refers to yin-conquering (*yinke* 陰克), and *de* refers to yang-generating (*yangsheng* 陽生). The second technical term is *wusheng* (五勝), "five conquering," which also concerns the mutual relationships among the five elements. Water will conquer fire, fire conquers metal, metal conquers wood, wood conquers earth, and earth conquers water. The third specific technique mentioned is *douji* (鬥擊), which was a form of divination based on the position of the Big Dipper, which could be used to predict the outcome of battles, depending on which direction it pointed.

[70] Graham, *Yinyang*, p. 13.
[71] Ban Gu, *Hanshu* 漢書, p. 1734.
[72] Ibid., p.1760.
[73] *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Historians*), chapter 128, p. 3231.