

2 Yinyang Cosmology: *Dao*, *Qi*, *Yi*, and *Taiji*

The “what” is in constant flux, the “why” has a thousand variations.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

All civilizations seek to understand what awesome forces, rules, or laws drove the sequence of events from which the physical world materialized. By whom or by what canon is an entire universe created? In what language must the story be told? Can all of the questions ever be answered?

Leon M. Lederman, Nobel Laureate, *Symmetry and the Beautiful Universe*

All of the key concepts we will look at this chapter – *Dao*, *qi*, and *Taiji*, as well as the system of the *Yi* – remained at the core of Chinese metaphysics. They were used in a variety of ways to construct metaphysical systems of varying complexity, particularly through and in response to encounters with Buddhist philosophy.

The Huangdi Neijing (The Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic) offers the most comprehensive definition of yinyang:

The Yellow Emperor claims that yinyang is the *Dao* of heaven and earth, the net (*gangji* 綱紀) of the ten thousand things, the parent (*fumu* 父母) of transformations, the origin (*benshi* 本始) of life and death, and the residence (*fu* 府) of spirit and insight. To heal illness one must seek in this root.¹

In this passage, yinyang is taken as a pattern embedded in the nature of all beings, thus providing the foundation for a coherent view of the

¹ 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. 41.

world. This worldview weaves together human beings, heaven, and the *Dao* 道 (the way) in a way that creates a reality of dynamic wholeness pervaded by and mediated through the interaction of yin and yang. That is why yinyang is called the “net” (*gangji*) of the ten thousand things. The term *gangji* comes from the image of silk fabric. *Gang* 綱 is the main strand to which all other threads are attached, whereas *ji* 紀 represents the mesh of the other threads. Together, they show that the ten thousand things are tied to an interrelated net or web through yinyang. This chapter will explore this *gangji* through four of the most significant concepts in Chinese cosmology: *Dao* (the way), *qi* 氣 (vital energy), *yi* 易 (change/ease/constancy), and *taiji* 太極 (great ultimate). Even though these concepts have developed over centuries and take many diverse forms, we will concentrate on yinyang and the emergence of the world from *Dao* in the *Daodejing* (道德經), yinyang and the transformations of *qi*, yinyang and configurations of change in the *Yijing* (易經) (*Book of Changes*), and yinyang and the great ultimate in the metaphysics of Zhou Dunyi (周敦頤 1017–1073) and Zhang Zai (張載 1020–1077).

Let us begin with a popular Chinese myth about the origins of the universe – known as *Pangu Kaitian* 盤古開天 (*the hero Pangu opens up the sky/heaven*) – which will give us a glimpse of early Chinese views of the cosmos. Although there are different versions of the myth, the core narrative is shared by all early texts. The earliest recorded version is in Xu Zheng’s (徐整) book *Sanwu Liji* (三五曆紀) (*Three and Five Calendars*), written during the time of the Three Kingdoms (220~280 C.E.).² According to the myth, in the beginning, the universe was like an egg in a condition of chaos and indistinctness, called *hundun* 渾沌 (chaos); this cosmic egg did not take any shape or form. The hero Pangu was born and slept in its middle where, after 800,000 years, he woke up and faced utter darkness. He decided to open up this *hundun* to let in light, so he made a break across the *hundun*. When Pangu grew one *zhang* 丈 (around ten feet), heaven also expanded one *zhang* higher, and the earth descended one *zhang* lower, a process that continued for another 800,000 years. Eventually, Pangu could grow no more and died, however, by then heaven had reached its highest stage, and earth had attained its deepest level. Pangu’s body then transformed into the myriad things: his breath became wind and clouds, his voice became thunder, his left eye was the sun, and right eye was the moon. His four limbs and five body parts became the four directions and five mountains. His blood

² The date has been questioned. Some suggest that it was composed in 184, 190, or 208 C.E. The tale itself has been repeated in many classical texts.

became rivers and oceans, his nerves the earthly lines, his muscles the soil, his hair the stars, his skin the grass and plants, his teeth and bones the stones, and his sweat the rain.

We are not sure when this myth arose, however, it reflects a general explanatory pattern for the universe, a pattern that appears in a wide range of early texts. We can note three implicit cosmological assumptions. First, the most primordial state of the universe is described as *hundun*. In this original state, there was no heaven and earth, no light and no forms, only undifferentiated oneness. The wholeness of the universe is rooted in its emergence out of such oneness.

In the *Huainanzi*, this *hundun* is depicted as a chaotic beginning: “Cavernous and undifferentiated Heaven and Earth, chaotic and inchoate [*hundun*] Uncarved Block, not yet created and fashioned into things: this we call the ‘Grand One.’ Together emerging from this unity, so that each acquired its distinctive qualities, there were birds, there were fish, there were animals: this we call the ‘differentiation of things.’”³

The unitary origin, *hundun*, is not an external independent entity beyond or outside the myriad things but is always an integral part of the world. This original state of undifferentiated chaos has a complex two-fold relationship to the myriad things that compose the concrete world. On the one hand, *hundun* comes first and is in some sense distinct from what arises after it. On the other hand, *hundun* continues as the basis of the myriad things. That is, it is not just that the myriad things come from one source, but that they remain with that source.

The second implicit assumption visible in the myth is that the diversification of the universe happens through the interaction of two forces, called variously the light and heavy, clear and turbid, or in more general and abstract terms, yang and yin. When Pangu opened *hundun*, one part became heaven, and the other part became earth, bringing with them light and dark as well as the distinction between the shaped/formed and the shapeless/formless. Yinyang as light is the first sign of this opening of the universe. One difficult question is contained within this narrative: do heaven and earth generate yin and yang, or do yin and yang generate heaven and earth? Clear and bright forces become heaven, whereas turbid or muddy forces become earth: in this sense, yin and yang generate heaven and earth. However, in so far as yin and yang are also cold and warm, winter and summer, dark and light, they are generated by heaven

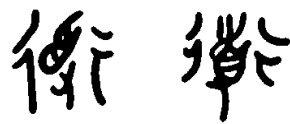
³ Harold Roth (trans.), *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 536.

and earth.⁴ We have already seen that labels of yin and yang depend on context, and thus, they can be applied on multiple levels.

The third aspect of the myth is that the entire universe is considered as analogous to the human body. In the myth, all natural forces or phenomena, such as wind, clouds, thunder, sun, moon, mountains, and oceans, form from the body of Pangu. This analogy between the parts of nature and the parts of the human body suggests that the world is conceived as a living organic whole on the model of a human body. On a fundamental level, the driving forces of the universe are generation and growth, which become the basic structure of the world. In the same way that the nature of motion became a focus for Aristotle and Newton, the way things are generated and transformed from one unitary source captured the attention of early Chinese thinkers. It is not a story of creation *ex nihilo* but a vision of spontaneous growth and transformation.

Yinyang in/with *Dao* and Myriad Things

The term *Dao* (*Tao*) has become one of the most widely known Chinese concepts, and it was central to most Chinese accounts of cosmology. In its original usage, *Dao* had two basic meanings. First, it is the road or path upon which one walks. The first usage of the word *Dao* appears in an imaginative character form found in bronze inscriptions, which shows one's head hidden in cloth or one's head covered by cloth while still walking. With one's eyes covered, one will be slow and probing in walking.



Another form shows one's head walking on a windy, snakelike road.



⁴ For more discussion on this issue, see Q. Wang 王巧慧, *The Naturalistic Philosophy of Huainanzi*, 淮南子的自然哲學思想 (Beijing: Science Press 科學出版社, 2009) p. 132.

This image again suggests a path that must be traversed with caution. In the recently excavated texts at Guodian, buried around 300 B.C.E., the character is written with an image of a person between two sides of a path. Thus, the initial meaning of *Dao* is road or path or way. From this, it extends to a way of acting, a way of living, or even a way of functioning, so that the way of heaven is called *tiandao* (天道).

Second, *Dao* means guidance. To follow a path is, of course, different from being lost, wandering aimlessly, or going nowhere. Furthermore, the character implies that one does not simply walk on the road mindlessly and aimlessly but with a direction and with mindfulness. As a guide, *Dao* is a map for the journey through life, or, as G. E. R. Lloyd puts it, “an internalized mode of being and doing.”⁵

Gradually, *Dao* developed into a complicated and multilayered term. In the Spring and Autumn Period, there are two traditions around the notion of *Dao*, which we might designate as the “way of human beings” (*rendao* 人道) and the “way of heaven” (*tiandao* 天道). The first is explicitly differentiated from “the way of heaven” in the *Ru* 儒 (Confucian) tradition. As the early Confucian *Xunzi* 荀子 says, “The way is not the way of Heaven and is not the way of Earth but is the way of human beings and the way followed by gentlemen.”⁶ The Confucian *Dao* refers primarily to a human way of life centering on ethics, politics, and culture.⁷ For example, we read from *Analects*, chapter 29, “The Master said, human beings can broaden *Dao*; it is not the *Dao* that broadens human beings.”⁸ In this passage, the *Dao* is a part of human action and human life, not an independent cosmic guide. For the *Ru*, the way is the way by which human beings live, and it is the traditional way that developed over centuries.

The other tradition draws on an astrological account in which the *Dao* is the regular movement of the sun and other celestial bodies. The *Dao* reveals an infinite cyclical movement, the “way of heaven” or “heavenly *Dao*” (*tiandao* 天道). The *Dao* of heaven simply means the movement of sky, such as the sun’s daily rising and setting and the moon’s monthly cycle.⁹ The heavenly *Dao* points to the movements and changes of

⁵ G. E. R. Lloyd, *Adversaries and Authorities: Investigations into Greek and Chinese Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 8.

⁶ Modified translation from Knoblock (trans.), *Xunzi*, p. 168. Perhaps the earliest explicit distinction of *rendao* is in the excavated *Ru* text, the “Xing Zi Ming Chu,” strips 41–42.

⁷ L. Chen 陳來, *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. 78.

⁸ B. Liu 劉寶楠 (Qing Dynasty), *Analects 論語正義* (Beijing: Chinese Press, 1990), p. 636.

⁹ Chen, *The World of Ancient Thought and Culture*, p. 80.

constellations and galaxies, linked closely with ancient astrology. Heaven has its own route and path, its own regularity and patterns. This heavenly *Dao* is different from the other humanistic account of *Dao* because it is a construction based on empirical evidence, resulting from the observation of the five planets and twenty-eight constellations. In addition, this heavenly *Dao* was also used to track the changes of the seasons and, thus, to determine the agricultural and political calendar.

The *Daodejing* is a milestone for the richness of the concept of the *Dao*, a term which appears seventy-three times in the text. It is the earliest text to elevate the *Dao* to its apotheosis by forging a metaphysical connection between *rendao* and *tiandao* – the human way and the heavenly way. The *Daodejing* exclaims explicitly that not only human beings but also heaven itself emerges from the *Dao*. Thus, the *Dao* is the unitary source of heaven, earth, and human beings, and it is the model or pattern they all follow (*Daodejing* 25). *Dao* becomes the source of all existence such that there is nothing beyond the *Dao*. Although there are many different interpretations of the meaning of *Dao* in the *Daodejing*, *Dao* is generally taken as the ultimate origin, source, and principle of the universe and the myriad things. Perhaps the most important point is that *Dao* provides a unitary source, analogous in function to *hundun* in the myth with which we began.

We have already discussed the *Daodejing* as a fundamental source for proto-yinyang thought. Although the terms *yin* and *yang* appear only once in the *Daodejing* (chapter 42), many of the basic structures of yinyang underlie the text. At the same time, yinyang thought developed through many concepts that first appear in the *Daodejing*. For both reasons, we can begin with an account of *Dao* and yinyang, focusing on the *Daodejing*.

In chapter 42, the *Daodejing* gives a specific account of *Dao* and the origination of the world: “*Dao* generates oneness, oneness generates twoness, twoness generates threeness, and threeness generates the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things carry yin, embrace yang, and blend *qi* to create harmony.”¹⁰

This origin story has some analogies with the myth of Pangu. The concrete world originates from a unitary but indistinct source, a source that even precedes what could be labeled as “one.” That source is the *Dao*. The movement from that source toward the tangible world is again a process of specification and differentiation, from one to two to three

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Moeller, (trans.), *Daodejing: A Complete Translation and Commentary*, (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2007) p. 103.

and to the myriad things, literally the “ten thousand things” (*wanwu* 萬物). In the *Daodejing*, yinyang is woven into the condition of the myriad things, which are said to “carry yin and embrace yang.” (負陰抱陽) This intrinsic link between yinyang and the myriad things became a common view. For example, the *Liji* (*Record of Rituals*), one of the Five Classics of the Confucian canon edited and reworked by various scholars during the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), says, “When yinyang harmonize, the myriad things come into being.”¹¹

The preceding passage describes *Dao* as the origin and source of the myriad things, which entails that it in some sense exists before those things. This leads into the same question we raised about the relationships between *hundun* and the concrete world – how does *Dao*, as the source of all the myriad things, connect with the myriad things? Is the source of the world the same as the fabric of the world? This ambiguity is built into the concept of *Dao*, which is not just the origin but the structure (*ti*) and the functioning (*yong*) of the world, as well as a guide through it. The question pertains directly to the status of yinyang, which on the one hand is produced by the *Dao* but on the other hand is its function and serves as a guide.

The *Guanzi* 管子 (26 B.C.E.), for example, says, “Accordingly, the Yin and Yang are the primary organizational principle of Heaven and Earth, and the four seasons are the primary pattern of the Yin and Yang”¹² (是故陰陽者, 天地之大理也, 四時者, 陰陽之大經也). The yinyang is patterned after the *Dao*, whereas the *Dao* is in essence the interaction between yin and yang.

From these texts, we can see that yinyang plays a substantial role on two levels: first the *Dao* in/with yinyang; second the myriad things in/with yinyang. We can formulate three specific ways to explicate the *Dao* by showing the primary role of yinyang: *Dao* is oneness; *Dao* is spontaneity (*ziran* 自然); *Dao* is the female body.

The Oneness of Dao

The term *yi* 一 (oneness) is at the core of *Dao* in the *Daodejing*. *Yi* refers both to one and unity or, as a verb, to make one or to unify. When the ultimate *Dao* is identified with the one, this oneness is not simply the

¹¹ Wang, Mengou, 王夢鷗 (ed.) *Liji*, 禮記今註今譯 (*Record of Rituals*), (Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 1981), p.416.

¹² W. A. Rickett (trans.), *Guanzi, Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 111.

first in a numerical sequence, but a unity and wholeness permeating all existence. In the *Daodejing* 22, “the sage holds on to oneness to be the shepherd of the world”¹³ (是以聖人抱一為天下式). *Dao* ties together heaven, earth, and human beings, all of which are generated from the *Dao* and model its spontaneous and generative capabilities. *Dao* animates the whole world and leaves nothing out, giving this world unity and coherence. The world is not constructed from individual pieces, but rather is an indivisible whole taking patterns and processes of interrelatedness as its fundamental structure.

In speaking of the mother or origin of things, the *Daodejing* calls it *Dao* or “great,” but in a similar passage, the *Lüshi Chunqiu* calls it the “great one”:

It is the nature of *Dao* that when we look for it, it is invisible; and when we listen for it, it is inaudible, for it cannot be given material form . . . The *Dao* is the supreme instance of the seminal essence, for it cannot be given shape or name. Forced to give it a name, I would call it “Great One” (*Taiyi* 太一).¹⁴

The text known as the *Taiyi Shengshui* 太一生水 (*Great Oneness Generating Water*) was found with the Guodian *Daodejing* and also names the origins of the world as the great one, with the beginning of the universe coming when “the great one gives birth to water.”¹⁵

Dao permeates space and time, without being identical with any particular place or moment. Thus, the *Huainanzi* states: “The passing of the past and coming of the present is called time [*yu* 宇]; the four directions and up and down are called space [*zhou* 宙]. *Dao* is located between them, and none can know its location.”¹⁶ The “Original *Dao*” chapter works out this relation to space and time specifically in terms of unity and oneness:

Oneness is the unity of up and down, independently going up to the nine skies and go down to the nine lands . . . Looking one cannot see its form; listening one cannot hear its sound; hiding one cannot get its body. The shapeless generates the shaped. Therefore, having comes from lacking and fullness comes from emptiness . . . *Dao* establishes the oneness and then the myriad things are generated.”¹⁷ (道者，一立而萬物生矣).

¹³ Moeller, *Daodejing*, p. 55.

¹⁴ Knoblock and Riegel, (trans.) *The Annals of Lü Buwei: A Complete Translation and Study* (Stanford: Stanford University Press,), p. 138.

¹⁵ Liu Zhao 劉釗 (ed.), *Taiyi Shengshui* (太一生水), strip 1 in *Guodian Chujiàn Jiaoyi* 郭店楚簡校釋 (Fuzhou: Fujian People’s Press, 2003), p. 42.

¹⁶ Modified translation from Roth, *The Huainanzi*, p. 415.

¹⁷ Modified translation from *ibid.*, p. 65.

This oneness or unity is built on the oppositional forces of reality. There would be no point in emphasizing the one if differentiation were not already assumed, and there would be no way for the *Dao* to explain the movement and patterns of singular things. At the same time, the distinction of opposition like yin and yang is not a matter of seeing reality through a dualistic or atomistic lens. Newton's world, in which all physical phenomena can be reduced to the mechanics of their elementary units, long dominated the modern world of philosophy. This deterministic and mechanistic framework goes hand in hand with dualism. In contrast to this conception, the early Chinese view approaches the whole as greater than the sum of its parts, as a result of the multileveled interaction within yinyang.

The Western Han scholar Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53–18 B.C.E.) characterizes yinyang as a threeness (*Yinyang Bisan* 陰陽比參).¹⁸ According to him, there is yin, there is yang, then there is the combination of yinyang, which is *taixuan* 太玄 (a great profoundness). It is the smallest unit that generates all things under heaven.¹⁹

Commitment to oneness leads to a search for the link between ultimate oneness and the ten thousand things. The vision of *Dao* as generation includes an association between the oneness of the source and the multiplicity of the myriad things. However, if *Dao* is eternal, ultimate, and the mother of the myriad things, then how does *Dao* connect to the myriad things themselves? To comprehend how *Dao* and yinyang can unify diverse phenomena, we should be more precise with our understanding of the Chinese term translated as “things” in the phrase “the ten thousand things” (*wanwu* 萬物). *Wu* (物, *things*), in Chinese, does not mean “entities in isolation” (what in European philosophy would be “substances”) but rather phenomena, events, and even histories. It is said that heaven (*tian* 天, the sky) has its seasons; earth (*di* 地, territory) has its advantages; and *wu* (things/events) have their stages (*hou* 候). To attain success, one needs to be attuned to the stage of things. For example, crops need sunlight and rain, however, they also must grow according to their own phases or stages. The timing of things is rooted in how things come into being and transform, as well as how they emerge in a broader context. *Wu* are always becoming. This indicates that position and change are paired. If you are imprecise measuring change, you will be imprecise measuring position and vice versa.

¹⁸ Sima Guang 司馬光, *Collected Commentaries of Tai Xuan* 太玄集注 (Beijing: Chinese Press, 2003), p. 10.

¹⁹ Ibid.

More specifically, the difficulty of linking the oneness of *Dao* to the multiplicity of the myriad things is addressed through yin and yang interaction. Yinyang is the cause of things as becoming and is also embedded in all things as their structure. The *Huangdi Neijing* claims, “From ancient times, the communication with heaven, the root (*ben* 本) of life, has been rooted in yinyang.”²⁰ (夫自古通天者生之本，本於陰陽天地之間). The more the unity of *Dao* is developed, the more the need for the notion of yinyang is increased. Yinyang is the mechanism for this vast network, which is why it is called the net or warp-and-woof (*gangji*) of things. The organism is a constitutive totality of interdependent components rather than a sum of simple parts. Yinyang clarifies these dynamic connections.

Existing as one in many, *Dao* can explain identity in difference and unity in plurality. It entails a sense or vision of *Dao* as the single unifying force within phenomenal reality, while seeing this reality in all its complexity. In particular, along with constant change there is an underlying stability both in things and their patterns. Yinyang relations elucidate this invariance, which applies to phenomena of organized complexity. One passage from a chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* directly on upholding oneness states:

Heaven and earth, yin and yang, do not alter yet they complete the myriad things in their differences. Eyes do not lose the clarity of sight yet they can perceive the black and white; the ear does not lose its keenness of hearing yet it can make distinctions between treble and bass sounds. The true king holds oneness so that the myriad things are correct. One is the order, two is chaos.²¹

Unity is the basis from which to address complexity and plurality, just as the singular function of eyes to see is nevertheless able to perceive multiplicity. Another passage from the *Lüshi Chunqiu* says: “A man capable of employing the One to govern the world, keeping cold and heat balanced, wind and rain seasonal, then becomes a sage. Thus, he who understands the One is enlightened, but he who glorifies the dual is demented.”²² This illuminates why maintaining unity or oneness becomes so central throughout the Chinese tradition, particularly in later Daoist practice.

Returning to the *Daodejing*, chapter 10 asks, “When you nourish the soul and embrace oneness, can you stay undivided?”²³ It also assigns

²⁰ Zhang (ed.), *Huangdi Neijing*, p. 17.

²¹ Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, p. 434.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²³ Moeller, *Daodejing*, p. 25.

different ways to describe oneness, such as “holding fast to the one” (*zhiyi* 致一) or “maintaining/guarding the one” (*shouyi* 守一). The vision and method called *shouyi* is described: “If one knows guarding the one, then the myriad things will be complete.”²⁴ The *Taipingjing* 太平經 (31–7 B.C.E.) illuminates, “Oneness refers to the heart/mind (*xin* 心), intention (*yi* 意) and will (*zhi* 志). It is the spirit (*shen* 神) of one’s body.”²⁵ As this passage suggests, oneness has great significance for governing and cultivating the body. This will be discussed later in the Yinyang body chapter.

Transformation, Spontaneity, and Order

We have discussed the important processes of becoming and transformation. The fundamental connection between *Dao* and generation appears already in the claim that the *Dao* generates the one, which generates the two, then three, leading to the myriad things. This yinyang progression depends on motion or activation. Without this movement, being itself could not come about. We have also seen the centrality of growth in the myth of Pangu. *Dao* is a dynamic process, and its dynamism depends both on multiplicity and unity. The unity is what allows things to function well. Chapter 39 of the *Daodejing* says: “Heaven received oneness – to be clear; earth received oneness – to be at rest; spirit received oneness – to be animated; valley received oneness to be full; lords and kings received oneness – to set the world straight.”²⁶

At the same time, oneness itself cannot generate anything. The *Huainanzi* makes this point explicitly: “*Dao* begins in oneness, yet one cannot generate, so it divides into yin and yang. The harmony (*he* 合) of yin and yang generates the myriad things.”²⁷ *Dao* divides into yin and yang; then yin and yang interact and harmonize to generate the diversity of our lived world.

The tension and relation between the distinct forces generalized as yin and yang naturally and intrinsically lead to changes and transformations. This view of unceasing change is articulated in the *Yijing* as *sheng* 生 (creating and generating). These processes of change can be divided into two types. One kind of change or transformation is growth, which is

²⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

²⁵ Yang Jilin 杨寄林 (ed.). *Taipingjing* 太平經 *Classic of Great Peace*, (Shijiazhuang: Hebei People’s Press, 2002), p. 861.

²⁶ Moeller, *Daodejing*, p. 95.

²⁷ Modified translation from Roth, *The Huainanzi*, p.133.

a movement toward increasing complexity. Things grow up from seeds, and sexual intercourse generates offspring who grow into adults. The *Dao* is thus closely connected with life itself. As the *Zhuangzi* says, “if something receives or possesses *Dao*, it will be alive; but without it, that thing will die.”²⁸

The other kind of change is a cyclical alternation. Summer follows spring, and fall follows from summer in an endless cycle. These two kinds of change are closely related – the progression of the seasons is a pattern of growth (and death) for living things, and the reproduction of things creates recurring cycles that form generations. In the *Taiyi Shengshui*, we find a new dimension to this connection, showing explicitly that creation is not just a single direct line, but is a circle of cooperation in which one element is contained in the next. It tells that the Great One (*Taiyi*) generates water, which then turns back and assists (*fanfu* 反輔) the Great One in generating heaven, which then turns back to assist in creating earth. The end of this process is the sustainable cycle of the seasons, rooted in the alternation of yinyang.²⁹

Dao is most associated with these perpetual cycles. The *Lüshi Chunqiu* devotes a special chapter to discussing the circularity of the *Dao*. First, it explains why the *Dao* of heaven is circular and the *Dao* of earth is square: “The vital essence and *qi* alternately rise and fall, revolving in a complete cycle that is never interrupted or impeded Though the myriad things are distinct in categories and forms, each has its own place and function, and these cannot be interchanged.”³⁰

This cyclical movement derives from immediate observation of nature: the alternation of sun and moon, day and night, cold and hot, life and death. This concentration on cyclical movement and change contrasts conceptions of motion in early modern European physics, as in the Newtonian mechanical laws of nature, in which motion fundamentally existed as a straight line. We might connect this conception to an underlying view of the universe itself as linear, starting from its creation by God and moving toward a certain endpoint. However, the Chinese conception of motion – and of history – was focused on circular movement, perhaps expressing the agrarian roots of Chinese society. This difference has enormous consequences. If motion is constant in a circular fashion, there is no need for external forces to move the heavenly bodies

²⁸ Chen Guying, 陳鼓應, 莊子今注今譯, *Commentaries on Zhuangzi*, (Beijing: Chinese Press, 1983), p. 279.

²⁹ Liu Zhao (ed.), *Taiyi Shengshui*, strip 1, p. 42.

³⁰ Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lübuwei*, p. 110.

because there is no need for a starting point. One need not to seek out a first cause or an unmoved mover. The only necessary explanation is an account of what happens inside that circle and what sustains that movement. This is what the *Zhuangzi* called the axis of the *Dao* (*daoshu* 道枢) in all motions.³¹

The explanation for this eternal generation is the fact that the *Dao* itself contains yin and yang. Yin and yang are internal and inherent elements, not external forces added by grace or will. As the *Lüshi Chunqiu* describes:

The Great One [*Taiyi* 太一] brought forth the dyadic couple; the dyadic couple brought forth yin and yang. Yin and yang metamorphose and transform, the one rising, the other falling, joined together in a perfect pattern, spinning and pulsing. . . . The myriad things that emerged are created by the Great One and transformed by Yin and Yang.³²

The assumption that order and generation are implicit in the fabric of being is most apparent within the concept of *ziran* (自然), which most literally means self (*zi*) so (*ran*). *Ziran* can be translated to “spontaneity” or “naturalness.” It refers to what is so of itself, without any external force or coercion. There are many interpretations of this term and its connection with *Dao*, and many scholars take it as the most central concept of the *Daodejing*.³³ Here, the focus will be on the relation between *ziran* and yinyang. Yinyang is the source and manifestation of *ziran*. The *Daodejing*, in chapter 25, lays out a sequence culminating in the claim that the *Dao* itself is modeled on *ziran*:

There is a form that becomes in indifferentiation, coming alive before heaven and earth.

Soundless, shapeless, standing alone but unaltered, it can be considered the mother of heaven and earth.

Its name is unknown, but it is styled “*Dao*”; if I am forced, I name it “great.”

Great says passing away, passing away says distant, distant says return.

Heaven is great, earth is great, *Dao* is great, the king is great. In the state there are four greats, the king is one.

³¹ B. Ziporyn (trans.), *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2009), p. 12.

³² Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, pp. 136–137.

³³ Liu Xiaogan 刘笑敢, *Laozi Gujin* 老子古今 (*Laozi, Past and Present*) (Beijing: Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2006).

People model earth, earth models heaven, heaven models the way, the way models self-so-ing *ziran*.³⁴

This passage addresses the problem of infinite regress – human beings model the earth, but what does the earth follow? It follows heaven, however, what does heaven follow? It follows the *Dao*, however, what does the *Dao* follow? The *Dao* follows *ziran*, however, *ziran* is not a model. It is simply spontaneity. Ultimately, the *Dao* is so of itself. The regress ends with spontaneity.

Ziran is not only an element of the world but also the most potent mode of action for human beings. Chapter 17 of the *Daodejing* says that when work is completed, people declare that it happens “self-so” by *ziran*. This is the highest stage of human action, where there are no external forces or power compelling things to happen. However, one must ask: why rely on spontaneity? How does *ziran* differ from randomness? Confidence in *ziran* is grounded in confidence in yinyang. *Dao* itself is a self-generating force (as yin and yang), so one should rely on this internal force and allow it to operate as it is. *Ziran* lets things be, in their own natural or raw state, just as heaven and earth have their own state (that is, *ziran*).

To fully grasp this reliance on *ziran* and yinyang, we must consider the place and origins of order. This order is harmony (*he* 和), the configuration and sequence of different elements in space and time. Although yinyang does not work from a rational or intentional plan, it is harmonious, with the endless variety of the world finely organized into a systematic and coordinated complexity. As with transformation, this order is emergent and implicit in the continuity of things rather than an independent principle. *Dao* combines in itself continuity, novelty, and indeterminateness.³⁵

³⁴ Modified translation from Moeller, *Daodejing*, p. 63.

³⁵ R. Ames, (trans.), *Yuan Dao, Tracing Dao to Its Source* (New York: Bellantine Books, 1998), p. 38. This view of order as emerging spontaneously rather than being externally imposed (by a creator or designer) is commonly discussed in a contemporary context by evolutionary biologists. They see the spontaneous emergence of order and the occurrence of self-organization as an answer to the question: “What are the sources of the overwhelming and beautiful order which graces the living world?” S. A. Kauffman, *The Origins of Order: Self-Organization and Selection in Evolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. xiii. Biology, mathematics, chemistry, and physics all reveal the power of self-organization and spontaneous order in complex systems. There are self-ordering properties in complex living systems. As Kauffman says, “The unexpected spontaneous order is this: Vast interlinked networks of elements behave in three broad regimes: ordered, chaotic, and a complex regime on the frontier between order and chaos.” *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

The claim that *Dao* is *ziran* encompasses a view of uncertainty and novelty, that is, a “mysterious efficacy” (*xuande* 玄德).³⁶ We cannot definitively know whether or not it will be sunny tomorrow, however, we are able to prepare what we will do if the sun comes out (go to the beach) or not (stay at the library). Nature is not working from a rational plan that we can discern and use as a cookbook, so there is only a general rhythm for human beings to follow and with which to align themselves. The importance of yinyang lies in this sense of working with uncertainty. Uncertainty as a worldview calls for a mechanism or system to negotiate it, and yinyang fills this conceptual role. Finally, this element of uncertainty and indeterminacy shows that order – or at least an order good for human beings – is not simply taken for granted. Yinyang imparts a strategy for maintaining order, as we will see in later chapters.

Dao as Female Body

The spontaneous potency of the *Dao* is associated with the female body, which is a common metaphor for *Dao* in the *Daodejing*. It reveals not just the importance of yin and its generative force, but also designates a yin origin that is hidden, implicit, or empty. In the *Daodejing*, there are two sets of terms in relation to femininity: *pin* 牝 appearing three times and *ci* 雌 appearing twice. Both sets have been translated as female, whereas in fact *pin* refers to female animals in general. *Ci* refers to hen, as opposed to *xiong*, which refers to rooster.³⁷ In later texts, such as the *Guanzi*, *Huainanzi*, and *Shuoyuan*, *pin* and *ci* are explicitly defined as yin.³⁸

Pin and *ci* are ways to demonstrate two noteworthy aspects of yinyang. One is the importance of yin and its generative force. The terms used in classical Chinese texts for the origin of the myriad things incorporate a sense of “life” and “birth,” both of which are encompassed in the Chinese term *sheng* 生 (generation). For example, the origin is called the ancestor (*zong* 宗), mother (*mu* 母), the gate of the mysterious female (*xuanpin zhimen* 玄牝之門), the female (*ci* 雌), the root of the heaven and earth (*tiandi gen* 天地根), or the beginning (*shi* 始).³⁹

We read from the *Daodejing* 6, “The spirit of the valley does not die – This is called mysterious femininity [*pin*]. The gate of mysterious femininity [*pin*] is the root of heaven and earth.”⁴⁰ Here the *pin* is mysterious,

³⁶ Moeller, *Daodejing*, p. 121.

³⁷ For more discussion on these two pairs, see Ryden, *The Yellow Emperor*, pp. 29–36.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–5.

³⁹ See discussion in Ames, *Yuan Dao*, p. 14.

⁴⁰ Modified translation from Moeller, *Daodejing*, p. 17.

the root of heaven and earth, an unlimited resource. This link between generation and the feminine naturally leads to the priority of yin forces.

The second aspect emphasizes the greater power of the feminine, as in chapter 61: “A large state is lowly waters, the female [*pin*] of the world, the connection of the world. The female [*pin*] overcomes the male by constant stillness. Because she is still, she is therefore fittingly underneath.”⁴¹

Insofar as the feminine is associated with generation (and, thus, with the *Dao* itself), one can notice the yinyang distinction going in two directions. On one hand, there is what we might call the horizontal level in which yin and yang are counterparts embedded in the myriad things. On the other hand, there is a vertical level in which yang refers to the things before us, while yin refers to the origin that is hidden, implicit, or empty. The *Daodejing* 10 asks: “When heaven’s gate open and close, can you be female [*ci*]?”⁴² Chapter 18 suggests: “Knowing *xiong* (male) and guarding *ci* (female), it is valley or mountain stream.”⁴³

In this context, we must also consider the pairing of *you* 有 and *wu* 無. *You* literally means “to have,” whereas *wu* means “to lack.” To say that something exists in classical Chinese is literally to say that it “is had,” whereas to say it does not exist is to say it is not had or possessed. By extension, these terms come to denote something like “being” and “nonbeing” or “presence and absence.” *You* coordinates with yang, and *wu* with yin.

The texts under consideration attribute an unseen force to all existence. This non-presence is always a part of yinyang presence. We have already seen that the *Dao* cannot be perceived or singled out in experience. This characteristic of non-presence or emptiness is what permits the efficacy of the *Dao*. The ultimate *Dao* is the source of everything, however, it is also empty or void. *Wu*, non-presence or nothingness, is the beginning of all existence.

The *Daodejing* uses the word *wu* (lack/nothingness/absence) 101 times. In the oracle bones, *wu* is the symbol for dancing. In fact, there are three closely related characters with the same pronunciation: *wu* 無 meaning nothingness, *wu* 舞 meaning to dance, and *wu* 巫 meaning a female shaman. The earliest comprehensive dictionary of Chinese characters, the *Shuowen Jiezi* (說文解字) by the Han scholar Xu Shen 許慎 (58–147 C.E.), explicates the link: *wu* 巫 (shamans) are women who can perform

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 141.

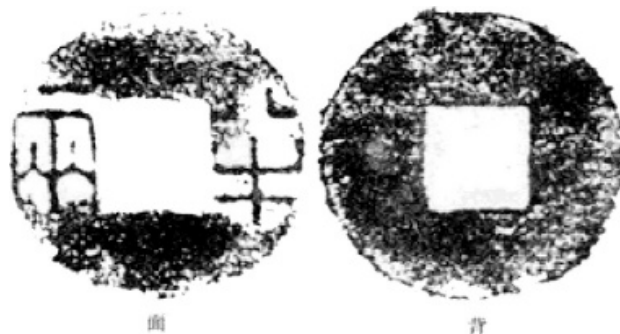
⁴² Ibid., p. 25.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 71.

service to *wu* 無 (the shapeless) and make the spirits come down by *wu* 舞 (dancing). Dancing was the way to communicate with and worship *shen* 神 (spirits).⁴⁴ However, these spirits are unseen and formless; only through dancing activities can one communicate with *shen*. *Wu*'s dancing is something present, yet they are working (*shi* 事) with *wu* (non-presence).

In its origin, *wu* (nothing) is not emptiness, loss, or absence but rather the unseen, hidden, and invisible. It is not a mere nothing but is the undifferentiated source of potency and growth that lets things function, much as the empty spaces between joints and muscles are what allows Cook Ding to cut with such ease in the famous story from the *Zhuangzi*. The aspects of yang might represent the explicated order, whereas the aspects of yin relate to the enfolded hidden implicated order. This aspect will be further discussed in the chapter on yinyang strategy.

Yin and yang are inseparable as *you* and *wu*, or foreground and background. This mutual implication is already suggested in the unity of full potency with emptiness or void (*xu* 虛). An interesting symbolic illustration is ancient Chinese coins or “square-hole currency.” The outside edge of the coin is circular, however, there is a square hole in the center. The circle represents heaven, and the square represents the earth.



面

Front

背

Back

Standard ancient Chinese currency

What is most interesting is that the formless heaven is expressed with a solid metal circle with the concrete earth expressed by the square void. This symbolically shows the inherent connections between having (*you*)/lacking (*wu*) or fullness (*shi*)/void (*xu*). Excavated versions of the

⁴⁴ Shen Xu, 許慎, *Shouwen Jiezi* 說文解字 (ed.), Duan Yucai, 段玉裁 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Press, 1981), p. 201.

Daodejing support this unity. In the received version, chapter 40 says that the myriad things come from being (*you*) and being comes from nonbeing (*wu*). The Guodian version of the text, however, reads slightly different, saying, “the myriad things come from being, come from non-being.”⁴⁵ In other words, the myriad things form simultaneously from *you* and *wu*, the foreground and background, yin and yang. The contemporary Chinese scholar Liu Xuyi (刘绪义) explains the importance of this version of the *Daodejing* chapter 40:

The myriad things are generated in *you* (having or to have) and *wu* (nothing). Here *you* (having) and *wu* (nothing) are not connected in a sequence, one leading to other but rather they are parallel, *Dao* generates *you* and also generates *wu*. *You* and *wu* exist at the same time. *You* refers to a general existence that has a form in formlessness. Yet *wu* is formless, independent and unchanging. *Wu* is a part of *you*.⁴⁶

Liu illustrates this with the example of a young girl and a mother. A young girl has not given birth, so she is *wu*, however, she still has the potential to exercise her reproductive ability to become *you*, or a mother.⁴⁷ So this description of *Dao* follows the biological ability and development of female body. However, how does one seize the *Dao*'s unity of *you* and *wu*? A young girl becoming a mother is the way of the *Dao*; Laozi's *Dao* is the mother of all myriad things. Another important point is that, as the soil to a seed, the mother provides a nourishing condition that allows things to grow and flourish, just as the female body supplies all nutrients for a fetus to survive and develop. This appreciation is different than simply one event of creation.

Dao has a strong tendency for reproduction. This association between metaphysical origins and biological reproduction, of course, appears in other cultures, as well. For example, Diotima, in Plato's *Symposium*, says, “All of us are pregnant... both in body and in soul.”⁴⁸ One of her definitions of love is the desire to give birth in beauty. The *Dao* as the source of generation and reproduction in the world is based on such biological models, with concrete things being born through the interplay of *you* and *wu*, yin and yang.

⁴⁵ X. Liu, *Laozi, Past and Present*.

⁴⁶ X. Liu 刘绪义, *The World of Heaven and Human Being: A Study of the Origin of Pre-qin Schools* (Beijing: Beijing People's Press, 2009), p. 75.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁴⁸ Plato, *The Symposium*, R. E. Allen. (trans.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. xix.

The relationship between *you* and *wu* also implies interplay between background and foreground that is crucial to how yinyang theory functions as a way of skillfully operating in the world. We will turn to this in the strategy chapter.

Qi and Yinyang

Qi 氣 is among the most important, cherished, and widely applied concepts in Chinese intellectual history. As a shared notion underlying all schools, *qi* is believed to be a dynamic all-present, all-penetrating, and all-transforming force animating every existence in the universe. Although *qi* is an abstract idea, it also is a common and integral part of one's perception and experience. It is woven into language: the air one breathes, the force that drives the fusion of blood, the food one eats, the strength of one's mind, the flow of one's thoughts, the deepest urges of one's heart. Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–1978) captures some of this diversity in saying that, in Chinese philosophy, *qi* could mean “either something spiritual, as in ambition (*qizhi* 氣質) or something vital, as animation (*shenqi* 神氣), or something material, as geogaseity.”⁴⁹

The character for *qi* 氣 can be traced back to Shang Dynasty oracle bones, however, in its earliest usage, it was a verb and adjective rather than a noun. We can enter into its meaning by investigating this etymology. In its basic structure, the character for *qi* consists of three parallel lines, just like the Chinese character for the number three. It might be grounded in the observation of morning dew transforming into lines of steam under the sun. As an image, it may also be meant to capture the appearance of flowing clouds or the steam from cooking rice, which are how the *Shuowen Fiezi* describes it.

Regarding its sound, *qi* has the same sound as *qi*, 乞, which means praying or seeking alms. These interpretations indicate that the term *qi*, on one hand, portrays phenomena in nature based on observation, whereas on the other hand, it also involves religious and ritual activity in human life.

Qi refers to the material that constitutes reality, however, it is fundamentally dynamic. Because all of reality is conceived in terms of dynamic processes, the movements of *qi* have gained an explanatory power over all known phenomena, from natural events to political systems, from

⁴⁹ C. Tang, “Chang Tsai’s Theory of Mind and Its Metaphysical Basis,” *Philosophy East and West*, 6 (1956), p. 120.

military battles to medical diagnoses. *Qi* even appears in analyzing literary compositions and poetic imagery. In art, the movement of *qi* is what weaves together the painter, the painting, and the viewer into a single unified experience. The particular fluidity of movement from an idea into the work of art is the momentum of *qi* and should be accomplished in one swoop without interruption or pause.

Qi is the very force of life. As the *Zhuangzi* puts it, “Human life is all about generating *qi*. When *qi* is gathered there will be life; when *qi* is dispersed there will be death.”⁵⁰ When *qi* declines, one will become sick; when *qi* is lost, one will die. On further analysis, *qi* is a complex of different energies, each animating and controlling various aspects of human life and the human body. We read from the *Huainanzi*:

Human beings can see clearly and hear acutely; they are able to protect their own body and bend and stretch their one hundred joints. In their discrimination they are capable of distinguishing white from black, beautiful from ugly. In their intelligence they are capable of distinguishing similarity from difference and clarifying right from wrong. How can human beings do so? This is because the *qi* infuses these activities and the spirit (*shen* 神) regulates them.⁵¹

This primacy of *qi* lies in its self-generating and self-operating power. In this aspect, it can be seen as a more concrete approach to the *Dao*. *Qi* is the *Dao* in its sense of the origin of the myriad things and the basic materials of universe. *Dao* is materialized in *qi* and, thus, in space and time. In fact, in parts of the *Guanzi*, the *Zhuangzi*, and many Neo-Confucian texts, *Dao* and *qi* are practically interchangeable.

Qi is the fundamental stuff of the universe, however, how are the functions of *qi* manifested and organized? How does *qi* generate diversity? Although the diversity of *qi* is discussed in terms of movement and of quantity, it also is said to take on different forms or qualities, so that one can speak of different kinds of *qi*. The classification of kinds (*lei* 類) of *qi* explicates the most basic elements in the universe from which all existence is formed. In a passage mentioned earlier, one of the earliest such uses, the *Zuozhuan* analyzes *qi* as having six forms: yin, yang, wind, rain, dark, and bright. *Qi* is one among many observable natural phenomena, however, as time goes on, *qi* comes to encompass the entire natural world. Similarly, although this passage lists *qi* of yin and *qi* of yang as two

⁵⁰ Chen, *Commentaries on Zhuangzi*, p. 559.

⁵¹ Modified translation from Lau and Ames, *Yuan Dao*, p. 26, and Roth, *The Huainanzi*, p. 75.

of six forms, in texts from the Han Dynasty and later, the concept of *qi* is inseparable from yinyang. To speak of *qi* is to speak of yinyang.⁵²

This *qi* interpretation conceives yin and yang as dynamic and natural forms of flowing energy and manifestation of the primordial potency of the universe. The discussion of *qi* thus offers a context in which yinyang functions. Yin and yang are the two main features of *qi*. They make clear the transformation of *qi* from one form into another, as well as the patterns, regularities, and effects of *qi*. By giving the concept of *qi* actual content, yinyang presents the foundations for the intellectual codification of *qi* and for systematic metaphysics, especially later in Song Neo-Confucianism.

Yinyang as *qi* is not only an explanation for the fabric of the world, but also for the origin of the universe. In cosmogenesis, *yangqi* and *yinqi* have different roles to play, however, they work together to bring out interrelated results: *yinqi* becomes more concentrated whereas the *yangqi* becomes more diffuse. The *Huainanzi* describes this process of cosmogenesis:

When heaven and earth were not yet formed, all was ascending and flying, diving and delving. Thus it was called ultimate manifestation (*taizhao* 天兆). The *Dao* began in the nebulous void. The nebulous void generates time-space (*yuzhou* 宇宙); time-space generates *qi*. *Qi* moves within the border. The light and bright *qi* spreads and ascends to form *tian* (heaven) and the heavy and turbid *qi* congeals and descends to form *di* (earth). It is easier for the light and subtle *qi* to converge and it is harder for heavy and turbid *qi* to congeal. That is why the heaven was completed first and earth was formed later. The merged essence of heaven and earth yields yinyang. The focused essence of yinyang manufactures the four seasons. The scattered essence of the four seasons produces the myriad things. The accumulated hot *yangqi* generates fire; the essence of fiery *qi* is the sun. The accumulated cold *yinqi* generates water; the essence of watery *qi* is the moon. The essence of the overflowing *qi* of the sun and moon forms stars and planets. Heaven contains the sun, moon, stars and planets; earth contains water, floods, dust and soil.⁵³

This passage illustrates what was called the great inception or primal beginning. In the beginning, there is a void, an absence of heaven or

⁵² For example, Wang Yanxiang (1474–1544) states: “Outside yinyang, there will be no *qi*... When heaven, earth, and everything take the forms, there are the images of clear and turbid, male and female, soft and hard, coming and going – this is called yinyang.” Y. Wang, *The Collection of Wang Yanxiang* 王延相集 (Beijing: Zhonghua Press 中華書局, 2009), vol. XXXIII, p. 597.

⁵³ Modified translation from Roth, *The Huainanzi*, p. 143.

earth, no yin and yang, no four seasons or anything. It is vast, infinite, and peaceful. The *Dao* begins in this nebulous void. Time and space (*yuzhou*) are not abstract systems, however, they are a specific moment in a place, like the north or south, or a moment of time, such as a particular day in spring or a night in autumn. *Yangqi* rises up, diffusing from the beginning of spring and culminating during the summer; the cold *yinqi* descends, concentrating itself from the beginning of autumn and culminating in the winter. The alternation of yin and yang are most closely associated with the movement of *qi* in forming the seasons and thus the basic cycles of existence. Another passage from the *Huainanzi* says: “When heaven and earth were formed, they divided yin and yang. Yang is generated (*sheng* 生) from yin and yin is generated from yang. Yin and yang mutually alternate which makes four fields (celestial circles) penetrating. There is life and there is death; that brings the myriad things to completion.”⁵⁴

The connection between *qi* and yinyang indicates that yin and yang are the pulse and rhythm of *qi* that give rise to all things. Through *qi*, yin and yang are theorized as forces embedded in nature – guiding, shaping, or directing natural processes from within. This connection also suggests that the core of *qi* is the proper interplay between different elements. The yin and yang must be harmonized; if not, many problems will arise. We can again use a passage from the *Huainanzi*:

Emitted *qi* endows, retained *qi* is transformed. Thus yang endows and yin is transformed. The unbalanced *qi* of Heaven, becoming perturbed, causes wind; the harmonious *qi* of Earth, becoming calm, causes rain. When yin and yang gather their interaction produces thunder. Aroused, they produce thunderclaps; disordered, they produce mist. When the yang *qi* prevails, it scatters to make dew; when yin *qi* prevails, it freezes to make frost and snow.⁵⁵

The need to bring about harmony and efficacy through the management of yin and yang will be discussed more in later chapters.

Yinyang and Modes of Change (the *Yijing*)

The *Yijing* or *Zhouyi*, known in English as *The Book of Changes*, is one of the oldest Chinese written texts. The word *yi* 易 itself had three meanings

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 115–116.

⁵⁵ J. S. Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 65.

in pre-Qin times: “change,” “simple” or “easy,” and “constancy.” The focus of the text is on change; by following its guidance, however, one can accomplish things simply and easily. This guidance is possible because of constancy; not only the fact that things always change, but also because change follows regular patterns. The character for *yi* has two parts: on top is the sun, *ri* 日, and on the bottom is the moon, *yue* 月. The combination of sun and moon, with the extended meaning of yang (sun) and yin (moon), points to cyclical change, as we saw in the last section, as well as to the completion of a cycle. In the *Shuowen Jiezi*, *yi* is taken as referring to the lizard, gecko, and dragonfly. They share a common property: change. It was said that these animals could change their skin color twelve times within a single day. Association with the lizard also suggests fertility because the lizard, along with birds and the calabash (plant), symbolized the penis in ancient fertility worship.⁵⁶

In the Warring States Period, the word *yi* also referred to divination techniques, called the “three *yi*”: *Lianshan* 連山, *Guichang* 歸藏, and *Zhouyi* 周易. Of these three, the *Zhouyi* is the only one that has survived. The core of the text consists of sixty-four hexagrams (*gua* 卦), each of which is composed of six parallel line segments (*yao* 爻), which can be either solid or broken. Each hexagram has a name, which forms a special vocabulary largely intelligible only within the system of the *Zhouyi*, as well as an image (*xiang* 象). The lines also have their own associated images, and there are explanations of each hexagram (*guaci* 卦辭) and of each individual line (*yaoci* 爻辭).

It was originally a text for divination purposes. Later, commentaries (*zhuan* 傳) were added to these hexagrams and compiled into ten parts, called “ten wings” (*shiyi* 十翼). The commentary is mainly in three areas: an understanding of the *yi* as a whole, explanations of the images and numbers of the *yi* (*xiangshu* 象數), and instructions for divination using the *yi* (*zhan* 占). The commentaries shift focus toward philosophical explanations, and thus, the *Yijing* can be taken as having two sets of vocabularies: one of divination and one of philosophy.⁵⁷ As is customary, we can call the core part of the text the *Yi* or *Zhouyi* (“the *Yi* of the Zhou Dynasty”), the commentaries on it the *Yizhuan* (“*Yi* Commentaries”), and the two together the *Yijing* (the *Classic of Yi* or *The Book of Changes*).

⁵⁶ D. Liu and H. Hu, *The Selection of Sex Antiques Collected by China Sex Museum* (Hong Kong: Wenhui Press, 2000), p. 12.

⁵⁷ B. Zhu 朱伯崑, *The Philosophical History of Yi Studies* 易學哲學史, (Beijing: Huaxia Press 華夏出版社, 1995).

According to legend, the *Yijing* was made over time by four sages: Fu Xi 伏羲 drew eight trigrams, King Wen 文王 authored the explanations of hexagrams (*guaci*), the Duke of Zhou 周公 wrote the clarification of the lines (*yaoci*), and Confucius collected the commentaries (*yizhuan*).⁵⁸ Most contemporary scholars believe that the hexagrams go back at least to the early Western Zhou period, whereas the commentaries appear in the late Warring States Period (well after Confucius). In any case, the making of the *Yijing* took shape gradually over a span of 700 to 800 years.

Although linked with divination, the *Yijing* became a classic text for intellectual guidance as well. There is a long history of so-called *Yi* studies, or in recent Chinese translations, Yiology (*yixue* 易學). From the Han Dynasty on, it became a necessary part of an education for scholarly achievement as well for personal sagehood. Almost every literati had carefully studied the *Yijing*, and many offered their own commentary on it, especially the Neo-Confucians. According to the Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), for example, the *Zhouyi* ranks first among the Five Classics (*Wujing* 五經). Zhu Xi describes the name of the book: *Zhou* refers to the name of the *Zhou* Dynasty, whereas *Yi* refers to a specific way of thinking.⁵⁹

Although there is no explicit usage of the term yinyang in the *Zhouyi*, it contains the most systemic utilization of yinyang thought of any early text. One chapter of the *Zhuangzi* offers a summary of the core ideas of the classics. Along with describing the other five classics (*Poetry, Documents, Ritual, Music, the Spring and Autumn Annals*), it claims that “The *Yi* confers yinyang” (易道陰陽).⁶⁰

A list of classics in an excavated text called the “Collected Sayings I” describes the role of the text: “the *Yi* is that by which one gathers together the way of heaven and the way of human beings” (易所以會天道人道, strip 36).⁶¹ We have already seen how yinyang thought draws cosmological and natural patterns (the way of heaven) together with the way for human beings to act effectively (the way of human beings). The “*Xici Zhuan*” (“Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations”) in the *Yijing* connects them explicitly, saying, “The conjunction and alteration of yin and yang is called *Dao*” (一陰一陽謂之道).⁶² More literally, it says

⁵⁸ Among Mawangdui unearthed materials ten interpretations of *Yijing* are discovered. It shows the links between these interpretations and Daoist and Huanglao thought. It also supports the objection that *Yizhuan* was written by Confucius.

⁵⁹ X. Zhu 朱熹, *The Essential Meanings of the Zhouyi* 周易本義 (Beijing: Chinese Press, 2009), p. 29.

⁶⁰ Modification from Ziporyn (trans.), *Zhuangzi*, p. 118.

⁶¹ Liu Zhao (ed.) *Guodian Chujiàn Jiaoyi*, p. 181.

⁶² Gao, Heng 高亨, *Commentary on Zhouyi* 周易大傳今注 (Jinan: Qilu Press, 1998), p. 387.

simply, “One yin and one yang are called *Dao*,” a phrase Zhu Xi later clarifies as “The constant interaction of yinyang is the *Dao*.”⁶³ According to Granet, here yin and yang are dominated by the idea of rhythm.⁶⁴ In this phrase, *Dao* refers both to the *Dao* as origin of the world as well as to *Dao* as the way of living effectively in the world.

The *Yijing* points to a significant metaphysical development of the concept of yinyang. There are two ways in which to exhibit the role of yinyang in the *Yijing*. One is the yinyang structure of hexagrams and lines; the other is the reconfiguration of these hexagrams as the function and movement of yinyang. In terms of structure, all the hexagrams (*gua*) or symbols are made up of living yinyang configurations. Zhu Xi puts it plainly: “Changes (*yi*) is the way of yinyang; *gua* (hexagrams) are the matters of yinyang; *yao* (lines) are the movement of yinyang.”⁶⁵ The structural lines that compose them have two modalities, with unbroken lines as yang and broken lines as yin. These yin lines and yang lines, when grouped in threes, multiply to form eight possible trigrams, representing eight natural phenomena: heaven (☰), earth (☷), thunder (☳), wind (☴), water (☵), fire (☲), mountains (☶), and marshes (☱). These eight trigrams can then be combined to form sixty-four possible hexagrams. The yin and yang are the smallest units for this massive combinatory system. In addition, each hexagram as a whole can be classed as yin or yang, so that there are thirty-two yang hexagrams, and there are thirty-two yin hexagrams. The function of this categorization is clearest in the first two hexagrams, *qian* 乾, which consists entirely of yang lines, and *kun* 坤, which consists of all yin lines. The “Xici Zhuan” explains that *qian* is identified with heaven and yang, the principle of power and creativity; *kun* is identified with earth and yin, the principle of receptivity and preservation. Together, the two generate all the myriad things through their interaction.

Here, we see that the *Yijing* not only employs yinyang as a conceptual tool to categorize phenomena, but also posits yinyang as an actual element in the structures, forces, and movements of reality. Yang interacts with yin to generate four heavenly images; hardness (*gang* 剛) interacts with softness (*rou* 柔) to generate the four earthly images. Therefore, eight images or forms emerge and establish the trigrams. Through the interaction of these eight trigrams, the myriad things are

⁶³ Zhu Xi, *The Essential Meanings of the Zhouyi*, p. 30.

⁶⁴ M. Granet, *La pensée chinoise (Chinese Thought)* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1968), pp. 72–90.

⁶⁵ Zhu, *The Essential Meanings of the Zhouyi*, p. 1.

generated. This is called one dividing into two, two dividing into four, four dividing into eight, eight dividing into sixteen, sixteen dividing into thirty-two, and thirty-two dividing into sixty-four. This is also called dividing yin and dividing yang, the interaction of hardness and softness. This connection between yinyang and generation, which has already appeared in the *Daodejing*, takes a different form in the *Yijing*. *Yi*, through division, generates two then four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, and sixty-four. This is similar to the composition of a tree: it has a trunk, then branches, then leaves, and so on. It is a linkage between a whole and its parts.⁶⁶

To better comprehend the complex cosmological role of yinyang, we can follow a distinction made in the “Xici,” which says that what is above tangible forms (*xingershang* 形而上) is called *Dao*, and what is below tangible forms (*xingerxia* 形而下) is called utensils, instruments, or vessels (*qi* 器) (not to be confused with the *qi* that means vital force or energy, an entirely different word). Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921), the first generation of Chinese translators of European texts, used the expression *xinger shang* to translate Aristotle’s metaphysics. Since then, the phrase *xingershang* has gained a particular meaning in the academic discipline – the study of *xingershang* is the study of metaphysics. Metaphysics is understood in reference to becoming and cosmology in the sense that it emerges from the cosmic changes that originate beings. In this sense, the invisible *Dao* that is above the forms and the visible material that are below forms are inherently indivisible.⁶⁷

We have seen that the *Dao*, taken as above forms, is still characterized by the alternation and interaction of yinyang. On this level, yinyang participates in the very origination of being. At the same time, yinyang is used to categorize particular things and as the way to transform, develop, and refine the things that have forms. We see this link in the “Xici,” which says, “Opening and closing is called change (*bian* 變), but going back and forth without limit is called penetrating (*tong* 通).”⁶⁸ *Bian* and *tong* are aspects of both concrete things and the *Dao*. Both are experienced and embodied in myriad things as tools or utensils (*qi*) and in the oneness that is above form as their source or the “Great Ultimate,” *Taiji*. This unity is captured in the term for concrete things, *qi*. The term *qi* refers

⁶⁶ Pang Pu 庞朴, *On Oneness Divided into Threeness* 浅说一分为三, (Beijing: Xinhua Press, 2004), pp. 223–224.

⁶⁷ *Dao* and *qi* are often paired with another set: *ti* and *yong*. *Ti* is the basic structure, whereas *yong* is the function. In this case, *dao* is the *ti*, *qi* is the *yong*.

⁶⁸ Gao, *Commentary on Zhouyi*, p. 403.

most specifically to vessels, containers with different shapes for holding water or other daily usages. However, vessels were also a sacrificial tool to be used in worship and divination. *Qi* have forms and shapes but carry the shapeless and formless, representing the *Dao*. We experience *Dao* through *qi*.

The role of yinyang in the generation of concrete things echoes what we have seen from the *Daodejing*, although in a more explicit and developed form. We might say that how concrete things are shaped, connected, and transformed is the focus of the *Yijing*. Nonetheless, the *Yijing*'s yinyang is different than *Daodejing*'s yinyang.⁶⁹ The *Yijing*'s yinyang is like a key used to open a world of symbols. In the West, reality has tended to be analyzed through abstract symbol systems such as algebra, geometry, and calculus, which affect human life as mediated through applications and technology, not as a direct confrontation with lived reality.⁷⁰

The *Yijing*'s symbol system represents unbroken wholeness in the flowing movement of reality. It is the unfolding and enfolding of the perceived world from and to a much vaster and more subtly integrated whole order. All things in the universe are interconnected and directly affect our way of thinking, being, and doing. From another perspective, we might say that European thought has tended toward analysis, the breaking into increasingly smaller parts.⁷¹ While the basis of the *Yijing* in the two elements of yin and yang has some resemblances to this approach, *Yi* thinking strives for an adequate synthetic reflection of functional wholes, examining how patterns appear, move, and transform. It puts events into a framework or grid and then investigates their implications. It serves as a form of inductive reasoning, which pays particular attention to configurational forces, as we will see in the next chapter. It seeks something that can be described using Brook Ziporyn's terms: "internal coherence, or hidden coherence, as opposed to explicitly manifest intelligibility."⁷²

⁶⁹ Liu Xiaogan states that "Yin and yang are generalizations. If one summarizes Laozi's dialectics from the point of view of yinyang, this will not sufficiently reflect the characteristics of Laozi's thought. This is because a yinyang view relates to different ancient Chinese teachings and schools. It more accurately reflects Zhouyi's dialectics of the Zhouyi. Therefore it is not helpful to use yinyang to describe Laozi's dialectics." Liu, *Laozi, Past and Present*, p. 671.

⁷⁰ C. Cheng, "Paradigm of Change (Yi) in Classical Chinese Philosophy," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 36 (2009), 519.

⁷¹ Martin Schonfeld, "Climate Philosophy and Cognitive Evolution," in R. Irwin (ed.) *Climate Change and Philosophy* (London/New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 7.

⁷² B. Ziporyn, *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought – Prolegomena to the Study of Li* (Albany: State University of New York Press, Forthcoming).

All existence, including events, phenomena, and affairs, takes some kind of shape or form. The sixty-four hexagrams of the *Yijing* were designed to cover all structures of being and to apply to all possibilities of change in the natural and human world. They illuminate the intelligibility of the coherence of the world.

Before considering a specific example, two related points about the hexagrams must still be addressed – the role of the individual lines and the importance of change. Each hexagram has six lines, which are read from the bottom up. The positions of the lines have great significance. For example, lines one and two associate with earth; lines three and four, with human beings; and lines five and six, with heaven. Each of the lines contains a specific meaning. Moreover, each hexagram is dynamic, tending toward change, which comes through the configuration, transformation, and alternation of the specific lines. Once a line changes, the hexagram will change accordingly, and different interpretations or meanings will emerge. The line change is from yin to yang or yang to yin. Thus, changes arise from yin and yang mutually pushing, pulling, and generating.

As is evident, the *Yijing* is an extremely complicated text. Here we can use one example to illustrate how yinyang thought operates more specifically. The *jiji* 既濟 hexagram (63) is considered as “perfection complete” or “all things perfectly realized.”⁷³ It takes on great importance in the Chinese tradition, and we will encounter it again, first in Zhou Dunyi’s *Taijitu* discussed later and then in approaches to bodily cultivation, where it plays an important role in the *Zhouyi Cantongqi*. The name of the hexagram, *jiji*, has been translated as “After Completion,”⁷⁴ “Ferrying Completes,”⁷⁵ and “Already Fording.”⁷⁶ In general, the first *ji* 既 means “already,” and the second *ji* 濟 stands for “cross the river” or “completed,” “done,” or “occurred.” Put together, the two terms convey that one has embarked on a course of action and that a perfect result has been reached. We can focus on the images and numbers of the *jiji* hexagram and then on its philosophical meaning.

We read from the “judgment” of the *jiji* hexagram: “‘Ferrying Complete’” is such that even the small enjoy prevalence. It is fitting to practice constancy, for although in the beginning good fortune prevails, things might end in chaos.”⁷⁷

⁷³ R. J. Lynn (trans.), *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 543.

⁷⁴ R. Wilhelm and C. F. Baynes (trans.), *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 245.

⁷⁵ Lynn (trans.), *The Classic of Changes*, p. 338.

⁷⁶ J. Wu, *I Ching* (Washington, DC: The Taoist Center, 1991), p. 213–215.

⁷⁷ Lynn (trans.), *The Classic of Changes*, p. 338.

☲ 離 *li* (fire) ☵ 坎 *kan* (water)

既濟 *Jiji* hexagram



2.1. The *Jiji* hexagram.

The configuration of the yin lines or yang lines in any given hexagram involves position, direction, and movement. Each line has a structural “ought” in the sense of what leads to better fortune – that is, a yin line should be in the yin position (*yinwei* 陰位), which are the lines 1, 3, 5, counting up to down, and a yang line should be in the yang position (*yangwei* 陽位), which are lines 2, 4, 6. In the *Jiji* hexagram, both the hard/strong and firm (*yang/gang* 剛) and the soft/weak and yielding (*yin/rou* 柔) behave correctly and, thus, stay in their proper positions. Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 C.E.) explains that “if both the hard and strong and the soft and weak behave correctly and thus stay in their rightful positions, evil will have no chance to occur. Thus, only when such rectitude prevails, it is fitting to practice constancy.”⁷⁸ The proper positions are expected to bring success and efficacy. Position (*wei* 位) is one of most important ways to appreciate the *Yi*. As with yinyang, position is not just a means by which things in the world are represented or expressed in the images of the hexagrams; position plays a key role in the world itself and in the evaluation of events. Position also supplies an explanatory framework for social structures, as we will see in later chapters. For example, ruler and subject, male and female, parents and children, old and young, all take positions in certain social contexts. These positions define their proper functions and guide their actions. Such positions are structured and constituted by yinyang configurations.

We have seen that each six-line hexagram is made up of two three-line trigrams. The *jiji* hexagram contains water and fire, with water on top and fire on the bottom (see Figure 2.1).

Water’s nature is downward flowing, and fire’s nature is upward burning. Thus, we might expect this configuration to be unfortunate or dangerous, but movement is most central to the hexagrams. When water is above, it can follow its natural tendency to go down, and when fire is below, it can naturally move upward. More importantly, water above and fire below will naturally come into interaction. The

⁷⁸ Ibid.

hexagram gives an image of freedom from blockage and the flow of natural propensities and tendencies. There is no obstacle between fire and water. This is the stage of *tong*, of penetration, communication, or flowing together.

The value of *tong* can be seen in two directions. The focal point is the claim that following a thing's nature is *tong* (*shunxingertong* 順性而通). Everything has its own internal patterns and tendencies, a way in which it flows. As the *Zhongyong* 中庸 claims in its opening statement, "What leads according to its nature is the *Dao*."⁷⁹ When a thing flows according to its nature, it is *tong*. In this hexagram, water and fire follow their inherent natures to *tong*. This expresses the privileged value of change and interaction. Following the nature of things will lead to change and transformation; *tong* is the result of *shun* 順 (following or flowing along with), and *shun* is the condition for *tong*.

From another direction, there is the claim that all things are interpenetrating (*wuwuxiangtong* 物物相通).⁸⁰ Thus, the movement of the two trigrams toward interaction with each other is also *tong*. If *tong* is broken down or blocked by other things, then there will be misfortune. This view of *tong* carries great weight in health and in body cultivation. Body cultivation is about promoting *tong*: sickness comes from its obstruction. *Tong* is the best state of being. If there is *tong*, then there is interaction, growth, and prosperity.

The hexagrams assume a dynamic world with multiple dimensions tightly enfolded into the intricate fabric of reality. Instead of celebrating and relaxing at the successful completion of a journey, the *jiji* hexagram cautions others to be aware and to envision possible disasters in the future. This vision is a logical consequence of *tong*. Because *tong* is constantly rooted in interaction, change is inevitable. The commentary on the judgment states:

If one were to misconstrue Ferrying Complete to mean perfect security, its *Dao* would come to an end, and no progress would occur, so that in the end only chaos would ensue. This is why the text says: "Although in the beginning good fortune prevails, things might end in chaos." That things end in chaos is not due to their becoming so on their own, but happens because of one ceasing to do as one should. Thus the text says: "if

⁷⁹ Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 89.

⁸⁰ Luoshu 洛書 and Han Pengjie 韓鵬杰 (eds.), *The Complete Works of Zhouyi*, 周易全書 (Beijing: Tuanjie Press 團結出版社, 1990), p. 2184.

one ends up ceasing to practice constancy and to follow the mean, chaos will ensue.”⁸¹

In sequence, all yin lines are above the yang lines. That indicates that yin is rising, whereas bringing things to completion also reveals the seeds of disorder. This specifies a condition of climax. Because change is inevitable, any movement of climax may revert from order to disorder. The sense that things reverse when they reach an extreme is quite common in early Chinese thought. Thus, completion necessitates the utmost caution.

The image.
Water over fire the image of the condition
In after completion.
Thus the superior man
Takes thought of misfortune
And arms himself against it in advance⁸²

Yin is the hidden variable that decides which outcome actually occurs. The line text indicates that yin is small and contains possible danger. As a task is completed, the germ of change is already in the making. One must be aware of these things to come. This is called *youhuan yishi* 憂患意識. *Youhuan* can mean anxiety and tribulation, both to encounter troubles and to be troubled by events in the world; *yishi* literally refers to consciousness, awareness, or a mindset. Put together, these terms could be translated as “concerned awareness” or “awareness of concern.”

There are two points at the center of this concern. First, uncertainty is a fundamental principle of the universe, as even contemporary science has come to recognize. Our knowledge necessarily is limited by this uncertainty. This principle is captured in the concept of *shen* 神. We can begin by examining in more detail the multilayered word *shen*. The most concrete meaning of *shen* is a spirit, ghost, or deity. By extension, it comes to refer to what happens in a magical, mysterious, or inscrutable way. Sandor P. Szabo brings out the broader sense of the term: “In the second part of the Warring States Period, the word *shen* often meant the group of those existents which could not be experienced by humans, which did not appear for humans in a way that could be sensed.”⁸³ Graham

⁸¹ Lynn (trans.), *The Classic of Changes*, pp. 338–339.

⁸² Wilhelm and Baynes (trans.), *The I Ching*, p. 245.

⁸³ S. P. Szabo, “The Term Shenming – Its Meaning in the Ancient Chinese Thought and in a Recently Discovered Manuscript,” *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 56 (2003), 263.

translates the word *shen* 神 with wide a range of meanings, such as spirit, daemon/daemonic, numinous, and the locus of more prosaic aspects of awareness.⁸⁴ Willard J. Peterson treats *shen* as an adjective in the “Xici” in *The Book of Changes* and translates it as “numinous,” which derives from the Latin *numen* (divinity).

The yinyang governing the process of production and transformation is inscrutable; therefore it is *shen*. The “Xici” claims that, “Being incommensurate with yin and yang is what is meant by numinous (*shen*)” 陰陽不測謂之神.⁸⁵ The term translated as “incommensurate” is *buce* 不測 – *bu* means “no,” and *ce* originally refers to measuring the depths of water. Thus, *shen* is what our measurements cannot quite reach. *Shen* is a necessary result of the process of changing lines (*bianyao* 變爻). Any given hexagram must go through changes (*bian*), however, these changes are not entirely predictable or determined.

In a much later time, Zhang Zai 張載 in the Song Dynasty uses *shen* in this sense to emphasize the inscrutable, wondrous aspect of the process of generation. Yinyang is the way of *shen* and is the spontaneous principle of the universe. Zhang Zai writes:

The generation of things is transformation (*hua* 化); the transformation reaching its limit is called change (*bian* 變); the unpredictability of yinyang is called *shen*. Those who can apply *shen* without restrictions are called sages. Now, the function of transformation and change in heaven is the profound and dark (*xuan* 玄), among human beings is the *Dao*, and in the earth is transformation. Transforming generates the five tastes, *Dao* generates wisdom, and the profound and dark generates *shen*.⁸⁶

故物生謂之化，物極謂之變，陰陽不測謂之神，神用無方謂之聖。夫變化之為用也，在天為玄，在人為道，在地為化，化生五味，道生智，玄生神。

Shen is intrinsically connected with yinyang and with what cannot be directly grasped through our present cognitive ability.

In part, yinyang is *shen* because the yin and yang lines interact to form unpredictable emergent properties. The *Yijing* reflects a strong acceptance of chance – yinyang will always change and have different configurations.

⁸⁴ A. C. Graham (trans.), *Chuang-tzu, The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, INC. 2001), p. 58.

⁸⁵ W. J. Peterson, “Making Connections: ‘Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations’ of the Book of Change,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 42 (1982), p. 104.

⁸⁶ Zhang Zai, *The Complete Collection of Zhang Zai’s Work* 張載集, (Beijing: Chinese Press, 1976), Z. p. 17.

Shen is not just in the unpredictability of change, but also in the fact that the origin of those changes cannot be fully grasped. Yinyang plays a mediating role in addressing the origination of the myriad things. This yinyang function is *shen*. Yinyang is easier to identify, however, *shen* is difficult to see. Therefore, it can be taken to express an otherness or thirdness. Zhang Zhan, a scholar from the Jin Dynasty, explains this claim in a commentary on the *Liezi*:

The generation of transformation has a form, but the generator of generation (*shengsheng* 生生) has no image (*xiang* 象). The beings with form can be called things; being with no image is called *shen*. The trace of *shen* is its function and it belongs to the class of yinyang. Talking of its true existence, it is unpredictability of yinyang. That's why the *Yi* states that the unpredictability of yinyang is called *shen*.⁸⁷

Shen can also illustrate the actions of a sage or one capable of utilizing yinyang as Zhang Zai states: "The *shen* of a person is the manifestation of sageliness. Harmonizing yinyang with unity, going forward and backward, living and dying at the right time, these are natural heavenly principle. Human beings have to apply movement and rest, hardness and softness, humanity and righteousness to measure it. This is the *shen* of a sage."⁸⁸

Second, this *youhuan yishi* assumes a certain conception of the role of human action in the world. According to the twentieth-century Chinese scholar Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1904–1982), this sense of concern differs from fear or hopelessness, as it comes from a vision that is the result of reflection on fortune and misfortune, success and failure. In this account, one finds the connection between these events and one's action, leading to a sense of responsibility. *Youhuan* is the manifestation of consciousness of one's responsibility toward events and a manifestation of an emerging humanistic spirit.⁸⁹ This concept of *youhuan yishi* originates from the transitional period between the Shang and the Zhou, in which people realized they had control over their own lives and fate. This followed from the emergence of a view of *tian* (heaven) as being responsive to human virtue. Because of this broader context, one must still be cautious when placing trust in one's ability alone. This realization has three interrelated elements: (1) the proper place of human effort, that one's action makes a

⁸⁷ Yang Bojun, 杨伯峻 (ed.) *Liezi Jishi*, 列子集釋, *Commentaries on Master Lie*, (Beijing: Chinese Press, 1979) p. 1.

⁸⁸ Zhang, *The Complete Collection of Zhang Zai's Work*, p. 151.

⁸⁹ F. Xu, *History of Chinese Discussions on Human Nature* (Shanghai: Huadong Normal University Press, 1982), p. 14.

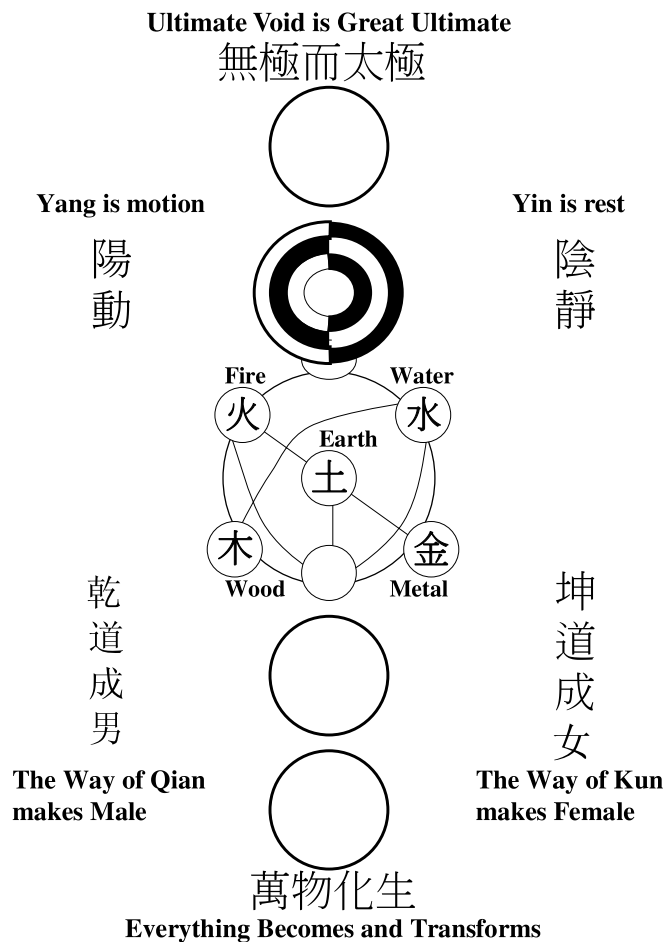
difference in determining success and failure; (2) a future-oriented vision or reflection on future events, how one can sustain success and avoid failure; (3) a sense of one's responsibility to bring about the best outcome in the future, how one will contribute to future success or failure.

The need for caution and diligence rests on an epistemic assumption: any given point of knowledge is only one single and small knot in a giant coherent web. Knowing contains infinite unknowing because the known is only part of what is unknown. There is a holographic nature to reality: every event is part of a continuum. For example, confronting one hexagram, its information or meaning is at hand, however, it also contains the information from the other sixty-three hexagrams hidden within it. The hexagram can be seen as one thing, however, it implicates the myriad things in the world. The difference is that at a particular moment in time and space, the information is known or seen in connection with the unknown and unseen, or we might say, with what does not yet appear. The *jiji* hexagram is followed by *weiji* 未濟 (the sixty-fourth hexagram), whose name means “what is not yet finished.” It is the inverse of the *jiji* hexagram, meaning that every line position is wrong – however, it is an auspicious hexagram, because good fortune follows after disaster.

Yinyang and the Development of Systematic Cosmology

Although the *Daodejing* and the *Yijing* articulate reality from different angles, there are common threads in all of the accounts we have seen, centering on the spontaneous generation of complexity from simplicity and the emergence of patterns and order. In all of these accounts, yinyang is woven into the very fabric of a generative reality, and it is the notion of yinyang that makes these patterns coherent and, ultimately, manageable. Yinyang can simplify, exemplify, and expand various relationships. It underpins all beings by shaping and directing natural processes from within and across boundaries, interfaces permeable to information, energies, and influences.

We have already seen what is probably the most central problem – what is the relationship between the spontaneous, unified, undifferentiated origin and the order and patterns we find among particular things? This is the question of the relationship between presence/being (*you*) and non-presence/nonbeing (*wu*), or between the *Dao* and the myriad things, or between what the “Xici” in the *Book of Changes* designates as “what is above forms” (*xingershang*) and “what is below forms” (*xingerxia*). Under Buddhist influence, the question concerned the status of beings



2.2. Zhou Dunyi's *Taijitu*.

and patterns in relation to the nonbeing at the foundations of the world. We have noted yinyang plays a central role both in understanding the relationships between particular things and events (what is below forms) and in the process that generated those things (what is above forms). Thus, as we would expect, yinyang continues to play a crucial role in Chinese metaphysical thought. An examination of the role of yinyang in later Chinese metaphysics is beyond the scope of this book, however, we can briefly consider two examples, beginning with Zhou Dunyi's conception of the "Great Ultimate" (*Taiji* 太極) and then Zhang Zai's discussion of *qi* and "Great Emptiness" (*Taixu* 太虛).

Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073) is considered the forerunner of Neo-Confucianism and founder of *Daoxue* 道學 in the Song Dynasty. He published a "Diagram of the Great Ultimate" (*Taijitu* 太極圖 see Figure 2.2) and wrote a concise 256-word philosophical account of it (*Taijitu Shuo* 太極圖說). Zhou's influence set the parameters according to

which yinyang theory was assimilated metaphysically and systematically into later Confucian thought and practice.

Zhou Dunyi's *Taijitu* consists of five images, along with six line inscriptions. The first image is a circle placed directly under the inscription "Ultimate Void (*Wuji*) is Great Ultimate (*Taiji*)."⁹⁰ The second image consists of interlocking empty and shaded areas forming six semicircles with a smaller empty circle in the middle. This image is of the *ƒiji* hexagram of the *Yijing*, which we have just discussed. A correct reading of it should start from the middle and divide this image into two parts. The left part is *li* 離 (fire), one of the eight trigrams turned on its side, with two light (yang) lines outside and one dark (yin) line inside. The right part is *kan* 坎 (water), another *gua* turned on its side, with two dark (yin) lines outside and one light (yang) line inside. On either side of these images are inscribed the words *Yangdong* 陽動 "Yang is motion" (on the left) and *Yinjing* 陰靜 "Yin is rest" (on the right). These words acknowledge the crucial role of yinyang and its cosmic significance.

The third image of the *Taijitu* is the flow of five phases or elements (*wuxing* 五行): fire, water, earth, wood, and metal. One of Zhou Dunyi's efforts is to integrate the five elements into the rhythmic pattern of yinyang. The last images, four and five, both contain a circle equal in size to those featured in the first image. On either side of image four is an inscription: on the left, "The Way of *Qian* makes male"; on the right, "The Way of *Kun* makes female." *Qian* and *Kun* refer to the first two hexagrams, with *Qian* composed of all yang lines, and *Kun*, all yin lines. The *Taijitu* is completed with an inscription centered under the last circle: "Everything becomes and transforms."

The overall philosophical interpretation hinges on the first inscription, which links *Taiji* and *Wuji*. The term *ji* 極 here means extremely, utmost, or pole.⁹¹ *Tai* means "great" or "ultimate." We have already discussed *wu*, meaning to lack or be without. The concept of *Wuji* first appears in the *Zhuangzi*. *Ji* refers to the highest boundary of space. It is

⁹⁰ For more discussion on this statement see R. Wang, "Zhou Dunyi's Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained (*Taijitu shuo* 太极圖說): A Construction of the Confucian Metaphysics," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 66, No.3, (July 2005), 307–23.

⁹¹ W. T. de Bary and Bloom translation of *taiji* as "Supreme Polarity" is consistent with their translation of the same term in the *Taijitu shuo*. They argue for the superiority of their translation over other possibilities, including "Great Ultimate," because "*taiji* is the yin-yang principle of bipolarity, which is the most fundamental ordering principle, the cosmic "first principle." Their translation of *wuji* as "Non-Polar" follows from this translation of *taiji*, which they claim is consistent with Daoist usages likely to be familiar to Zhou Dunyi. William Theodore De Bary and Irene Bloom. *Source Book of Chinese Tradition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 677.

used with the term of *liu ji* 六極 (six extremes or directions). “Tang asks Li, ‘There are limits (*ji*) in up, down, and four directions?’ Li responds, ‘There is *wuji* outside of *wuji*.’”⁹² In the “Xici,” *Wuji* suggests the state of beings where there are no numerical distinctions. The origin of the hexagrams comes from this stage of non-distinction. When it comes to Zhou Dunyi, the *Taiji* is the *Dao*. This leads to Zhou Dunyi’s argument that there is no metaphysics of being separated from the cosmology of origination, becoming, and evolution, thus his identification of *Taiji* with transformation and yinyang. The concepts of the numinous or divine (*shen*) and transformation (*hua*) are both the function and manifestation of the changes of yin and yang. *Taiji* is a self-contained notion. Zhou Dunyi’s *Taijitu Shuo* explains how this can be the case.

Zhou Dunyi declares that the movement and rest of the yinyang interaction generate the five phases (water, fire, wood, metal, and soil) as the five constituents of the myriad things and, ultimately, human beings. Zhou Dunyi directly and clearly identifies yinyang with *dongjing* 動靜 (movement and rest) as critical to the generation of the universe. By characterizing yinyang in terms of the polarity of movement (*dong*) and rest (*jing*), or activity and stillness, Zhou Dunyi opens a line of inquiry that remains philosophically promising to this day. As representative of yinyang interactions generally, rest and movement occur in fluctuating or alternating patterns, even though they are encompassed within *Taiji* itself. As Fung Yu-lan remarks, “It is possible for both of these phases to be concurrently present.”⁹³ In other words, neither yin nor yang is absolutely prior to the other, or more powerful, or more dominant; their concurrence is logically and metaphysically necessary. Here is Zhou Dunyi’s more detailed articulation from the *Tongshu* 通書, chapter 16:

Activity as the absence of stillness and stillness as the absence of activity characterize things (*wu*). Activity that is not [empirically] active and stillness that is not [empirically] still characterize spirit (*shen*). Being active and yet not active, still and yet not still, does not mean that [spirit] is neither active nor still. For while things do not [inter] penetrate (*tong*), spirit subtly [pervades] the myriad things.

The yin of water is based in yang; the yang of fire is based in yin. The Five Phases are yin and yang; yin and yang are the Supreme Polarity [*Taiji*]. The Four Seasons revolve: the myriad things end and begin [again]. How undifferentiated! How extensive! And how inexhaustible! [5:33b–34b]⁹⁴

⁹² Chen, *Commentaries on Zhuangzi*, p. 11.

⁹³ Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (trans.) Derek Bodde (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 443.

⁹⁴ Bary and Bloom, *Source Book of Chinese Tradition*, p. 678.

What is unique about yin and yang interactions in the dimension of *shen* (spirit) is that they are not restricted by the law of logical noncontradiction (“something cannot simultaneously be and not be in the same time and place, and in the same aspects”). The formulation of the metaphysical paradox of yinyang as *dongjing* (movement and rest) in the Great Ultimate, however, is carefully distinguished from the realm of the myriad things and the human beings who are generated by yinyang interactions.

Everything begins from one source, in which the Great Ultimate (*Taiji*) as Ultimate Void (*Wuji*) is itself unlimited, undifferentiated, uncaused, and beyond the ontological dynamics of movement (yang) and rest (yin) apparent in the myriad things and human beings. Zhou Dunyi thus uses movement and rest to define the ontological significance of yang and yin. In his account, the metaphysical unity of all things is primary; their differentiation into a multiplicity of things is secondary. Within this assumption of primordial unity, the task of metaphysics is to give a coherent account of the patterned interrelations of all things. The patterned polarities apparent in the myriad things as well as in human relations are neither ultimate, nor in opposition to one another.

Although later Neo-Confucians, following Zhu Xi, would express critical reservations about Zhou Dunyi’s location of the yinyang dynamic within *Taiji* itself, he remains the first to explicate these forces in terms of *dong* and *jing*. This is one of Zhou Dunyi’s major philosophical contributions to yinyang theory. As we have seen, the concept of yinyang had been employed to construct a justification for the structure of the universe at least since the *Yijing*. These classics would argue that yinyang is the main force penetrating all beings in the universe. However, they fall short of disclosing how and in what ways yin and yang perform their functions or undertakings. Zhou Dunyi correlates *dong* and *jing* with yang and yin and, thus, confers a specific framework on yinyang thought. The functions of yang and yin are manifested in the form of movement (*dong*) and rest (*jing*); in other words, *dong* and *jing* are modes of yinyang activity. Following Zhou Dunyi, Zhu Xi identifies yin and yang with his concepts of *ti* 體 (structure) and *yong* 用 (function).

Underlying Zhou Dunyi’s theory of the Great Ultimate is a concern with the relationship between differentiation and the primordial origin of the world. The Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhang Zai can be seen as taking up the same concern from a different angle, concentrating more on nonbeing or emptiness as the ultimate. This concern can be traced most directly to Guo Xiang 郭象 (?–312 C.E.), the famous commentator on the *Zhuangzi* and one of the thinkers most representative of the *Xuan* School

玄學 (Mysterious Learning). Guo Xiang inherited Wang Bi's concern for the problem between nothingness (*wu*) and being (*you*) and developed it into a more coherent and detailed argument. For Guo Xiang, the question is, if something comes from nothingness, then where does nothingness come from? He responds that nothingness and being cannot be related in a linear sequence of generation, such that nothingness is first and then gives birth to something. Rather, they must be bound together in a state of transformation. In other words, nothingness and existence are always intertwined in all beings. Guo Xiang makes use of *qi* to establish this knot of nothingness and being. It is because of *qi* that beings exist in myriad forms, however, this *qi* can lead to change, so that beings can become nothing. He states, "There is one *qi* but myriad forms; there is change and transformation but no dying or birthing."⁹⁵ Nothingness is not absolute nonbeing because it still contains *qi*. He explains, "Even though the changes and transformations constantly replace each other, their *qi* originally is one."⁹⁶ Clearly, *qi* is the reason for the existence of something; nevertheless, *qi* is also the cause for nothingness. In other words, *qi* explains both the coming into and going out of existence of particular beings. *Qi* takes on a clearly ontological function as the ground for all existence, including both being and nothingness. At the core of this view is the belief that *qi* is generation (*sheng*) and transformation (*hua*). We could call this a form of agricultural thinking, modeled on the growth, flourishing, and death of seasonal crops.

When Neo-Confucians contemplated how *qi* could be the ultimate source of the universe and of human minds, they were particularly concerned with the demands of moral cultivation. The understanding of *qi* that resulted was an integration of Qin-Han cosmology and Wei-Jin ontology, developed through the interplay between Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Zhang Zai's *Theory of Qi* (*Qilun* 氣論) lays out the foundation for this new paradigm for the articulation of *qi*. According to Zhang Zai, "Void is *qi*. It is something and nothing, hidden and manifest, numinous and transforming."⁹⁷

The focal point of this speculation is the "Great Void" or "Great Emptiness," *Taixu* 太虛, which was taken as the ultimate source for all particular beings. By interpreting the "Great Void" so that it contained *qi*, Zhang Zai denied the Daoist and Buddhist equation of *Taixu* with

⁹⁵ Guo Xiang, commentary on "Ultimate Happiness" in *Zhuangzi Jishi Collections of Zhuangzi's Commentaries* (Beijing: Zhonghua Press, 1961), p. 629.

⁹⁶ Guo Xiang, commentary on "Yuyan" in *Zhuangzi Jishi*, p. 951.

⁹⁷ Zhang, *The Complete Collection of Zhang Zai's Work*, p. 8.

complete nothingness – an equation that Zhang Zai took as the “hole in the net” of their arguments. The key to understanding Zhang Zai’s conception of *Taixu* is through its relationship with *qi*. The question is whether *Taixu* and *qi* have the same fundamental quality or mode of existence (*tongzhi* 同質) or if they were different (*yizhi* 異質). If *Taixu* has the same quality as *qi*, then *Taixu* is only another manifestation of *qi*. If *Taixu* and *qi* are different, then *Taixu* is bound to transcend the realm of *qi*, and, thus, of all being. The central problem for Zhang Zai, then, is that *qi* and *Taixu* can neither be completely identical nor completely different.

Taixu contains *qi*, however, it is not equal to or identical with *qi*. This is a central assumption of Zhang Zai’s ontology and moral teaching, and it enables him to explain the ontological status of the myriad things. When *qi* condenses, the myriad things begin to exist; when *qi* disperses, the myriad things disappear. This is similar to the way water freezes when it is cold but evaporates into air when heated. These physical changes for Zhang Zai convey a metaphysical necessity: “Ultimate void cannot exist without *qi*; *qi* must condense to form the myriad things; the myriad things must disperse to return to the ultimate void.”⁹⁸

The fundamental claim is that *Taixu* is in both the dispersion and the condensing of *qi*. Zhang Zai verifies the interlocking of *Taixu* and *qi* by again using the comparison with water and ice. Ice is solid or condensed water just as *Taixu* is condensed *qi*.⁹⁹ On a conceptual level, this bond exemplifies one existence in two forms (一物兩體). *Taixu* necessarily permeates *qi*, however, it is not equal or identical to *qi*. From a naturalistic point of view, *Taixu* and *qi* are the same because they both can explain the existence of concrete things. *Qi* is the source for diversity and transformation in the universe. The interdependence of *Taixu* and *qi* is an interface between the ultimate absolute being and the multitude of concrete phenomena. This position enables Zhang Zai to resist the Buddhist view that concrete things are only illusions.

Zhang Zai identifies *Dao* with *qi*, *qi* with void (*xu*), and void with yin-yang. Yinyang makes Zhang Zai’s *qi* theory complete and coherent. Zhang Zai justifies this connection through a detailed and interesting interpretation of the properties of yinyang. *Qi* has two forms of existence: yin and yang. Yin and yang have three properties: motion and rest (*dongjing* 動靜), bending and expanding (*qushen* 屈伸), condensing and dispersing (*jusan* 聚散). We can consider the property of condensing and dispersing

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

as an example: the nature of yin is *ju* (condensing or concentrating), and the nature of yang is *san* (dispersing and expending). These two are in a constant motion of interaction. What forms depends on the proportion and forces of these two. Yang wants to spread and disperse; yin wants to condense and concentrate. When *qi* condenses, things begin to exist; when *qi* diffuses, things disappear.

Although the numinous (*shen*) has several meanings in Zhang Zai's thought, its conception is intrinsically connected with transformation (*hua*). More importantly, *shen* and *hua* both rely on the following presuppositions:

- The myriad things are different (*shu* 殊);
- These differences are bound to generate radiation/resonance (*gan* 感) between things;
- The resonance between things leads to uniting (*he* 合);
- The unity is possible because all things come from a single source, "Ultimate Void" (*Taixu*).

Yinyang relations are crucial in understanding these presuppositions. Zhang Zai says, "Although there are myriad things that are known, in fact, there is only one thing that must be known: there is nothing without yinyang. If one wants to know the changes of heaven and earth, one must know these two aspects."¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, there is the necessity of resonance (*gan*) between different things and the necessity of uniting (*he*) as a result of this *gan*. These come together to exhibit a concurrence between the one and the many, planting the seeds of Zhuxi's later phrase, "there is one principle yet multiple manifestations" (理一分殊).

We have already examined the link between *qi* and yinyang, however, through Zhang Zai's developments, we can conclude with two general points. First, taking *qi* as a foundation resists any dualistic formulation of yin and yang, as if the one could be abstracted from the other, regarded as superior, or be considered metaphysically separate and distinct. Yin and yang represent opposite but complementary qualities of *qi*. They are the rhythm and harmony within *qi*, the condensation and development, or the withdrawing into the depths and the surging to the exterior. The fabric of *qi* reality allows us a glimpse of the extensive underlying unity of the universe. Synchronicities in heaven, earth, and human beings in Chinese texts unveil the absence of division between the physical world and our inner psychological reality.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

Further, the ultimate – as *Dao*, *Taiji*, or *Taixu* – contains *qi* within itself so that it has an intrinsic system of generation and transformation. Yinyang interaction makes obvious the power of self-organization as a source of order. Order emerges from an enormous, contingently assembled network. *Qi*'s quantities and contents (descending and ascending, condensing or dispersing) elucidate the formation of heaven and earth and the patterns of the world, from the changing seasons to family relations to the health of bodily organs. The underlying assumption is that the interaction of yinyang forces spontaneously and naturally generates order and patterns. This kind of emergent order is different from laws that would be absolute, necessary, and externally imposed.