Philosophy Compass 8/5 (2013): 438–446, 10.1111/phc3.12035

Chinese Dialectical Thinking—the Yin Yang Model

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Abstract

The yin yang model of thinking is most essential to the Chinese cosmology, ontology and outlook on life. This paper is a systematic discussion of such a dialectical way of thinking and its significance. It starts with investigating the origin and the meaning of terms ''yin'' and ''yang'', and explains the later developed yin yang doctrine; it then shows how greatly and profoundly the yin yang model of thinking has influenced Chinese philosophy and Chinese character. It concludes that Chinese naturalistic, dialectical, and optimistic attitudes toward the world and life are all based on the yin yang model of thinking and that the yin yang doctrine is the starting point for anyone to understand Chinese people and their philosophies.

One cannot understand Chinese people and Chinese philosophy without understanding the yin yang model of thinking. Such a dialectical attitude toward everything has been an essential part of the Chinese character and Chinese way of living. Endorsed by many Chinese philosophers crossing different schools, it is most essential to the Chinese cosmology, ontology and outlook on life.

1. The Origin and Meaning of ''Yin'' and ''Yang''

To understand the yin yang model of thinking, first it is necessary to know the origin and meaning of ''yin'' and ''yang''. Etymologically, what are yang and yin? It has been said that ''yang'' (阳) originally refers to sunshine or what pertains to sunshine and light; and ''yin'' (阴) refers to the absence of sunshine, i.e., shadow or darkness. In later developments, the yang and yin came to be regarded as two cosmic principles or forces, the yang representing masculinity, activity, heat, brightness, dryness, hardness, etc., and the yin femininity, passivity, cold, darkness, wetness, softness, etc. (Fung 138). They are opposite but interdependent. They work together to produce all things in the universe.[1] The world as a whole consists of yang and yin; there are an infinite number of yang yin pairs in the universe, such as heaven vs. earth, high vs. low, large vs. small, and so on.

Every single thing also involves yin and yang, i.e., consists of these two opposites, too. For example, a car is a positive thing on the one hand, since it can bring us so much convenience in traveling; but also a negative thing on the other hand, since it contributes much to air pollution and even encourages people's laziness. A piece of white paper consists of both while and black components, since it is not purely white (i.e., it is not 100% while). A young man is yang relative to his sister, but yin relative to his father. Misfortune is a bad thing, but it consists of both a bad side and a good side. Because its bad side is much stronger than its good side, in general it is a bad thing. However, a bad thing implies a good side, and we can say that misfortune implies good fortune. For a similar reason, we can say that good fortune implies misfortune. ''Misfortune is what fortune depends on, while fortune is where misfortune is hiding'' (Laozi 160). One of the ancient Chinese stories illustrates this point very well. The story is this: once upon a time, there

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was an old man on the frontier. One day he lost his horse. This was a very bad thing for him. But very soon, the lost horse came back home and brought another horse with it. This was very good. Then his son got injured when he rode on one of these two horses. So, good fortune brought misfortune. But, later on young men were called to go to the army and join a war. Since his son was injured and he was not able to be a soldier, his son was safe. So misfortune again brought the old man good fortune. It was from this story that a famous Chinese saying was derived: ''When the old man on the frontier lost his mare, who could have guessed it was a blessing in disguise (*se weng shi ma, an zhi fei fu* 塞翁失马, 安知非福)?''

Since the yang and yin coexist inside everything and the differences in power between these two opposites are constantly changing, everything is in eternal flux and can change into its opposite. When does a thing change into its opposite? When a thing is fully developed, it begins to decline. ''When the Sun has reached the meridian height, it begins to decline; when the Moon has become full, it begins to wane''[2] (*Yizhuan*, Tuanci 彖辞·丰卦, ''Commentaries on Hexagram No. 55''). All things are in constant change, all changes are caused by yin and yang, and everything involves its negation. These constitute the unchangeable law of the universe. For the Chinese, this is the most fundamental truth of the universe.

The yin and yang concepts occurred in China much earlier than any major Chinese philosophical school. The earliest mention of yin and yang is recorded in the *Guo Yu* (国语 the *Conversations of States*). The *Guo Yu* itself was compiled in the fourth or third century B.C, but it recorded a saying about yin and yang that was uttered in the year 780 B.C when an earthquake occurred: ''When the *Yang* is concealed and cannot come forth, and when the *Yin* is repressed and cannot issue forth, then there are earthquakes'' (*Guo Yu* ''Zhou Yu'', 《国语周语》).[3] However, in the *Guo Yu* yin and yang are merely regarded as two forces in nature, not as the origin of all things. The yin-yang cosmology did not occur until *Yizhuan* (易传), the Commentaries on the *Yijing* (易经 the *Book of Changes*), came to exist (Zhang Dainian 25, 1982).

The *Yijing* has been regarded as the original ancestor of Chinese philosophy (Zhang Dongsun 99). The original text of the *Yijing* is a divination book that consists of eight trigrams, sixty-four hexagrams that are derived from combinations of the eight trigrams, and descriptions of their symbolic meaning. The *Yijing* probably was composed during the Western Zhou period (11 century B.C.–771 B.C). Later on, various appendices were added to make it rational and philosophical. By the later Zhou or early Han period, a series of appendices, known as ''Ten Wings,'' was written (Fung 140).[4] The total of these appendices is titled ''Yizhuan,'' i.e., ''Commentaries on the *Yijing*.'' It is in the *Yizhuan,* that the yin yang cosmology was formed. The reason why the *Yijing* could be rationally interpreted may be that the method of divination in the *Yijing* itself has some philosophical significance. As Cheng Chung-ying has argued, the divination connected with the *Yijing* ''presupposes some rational and empirical outlook on the world'' (Cheng 202).

Furthermore, as Zhang Doungsun suggested, rational interpretation of the *Yijing* might have something to do with the fact that divination of the *Yijing* needs to use symbols.

> Each symbol represents one kind of possible way of change. When all changes in the universe are reduced to several possible kinds of change, many possible changes will be deduced from one kind of change. Then, a cosmology that concerns order and patterns of the universe is formed. ... No matter whether Confucianism or Taoism, their views on the structure of the cosmos do not go beyond those principles provided by the *Yijing*. (Zhang Dongsun 99)

The divination of the *Yijing* uses not only symbols, but also numbers. In the *Yijing*, the numbers of yang are always odd, while those of the yin are always even. In its trigrams,

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the undivided lines symbolize the Yang principle and divided lines the Yin principle. The trigram ''Qian'' 乾, made up entirely of undivided lines, is the symbol of exemplary *yang*, while the trigram ''Kun'' 坤, made up entirely of divided lines, is the symbol of exemplary *yin*. The rest of the six trigrams are supposed to be derived from these two. Therefore, triagrams ''Qian'' and ''Kun'' are regarded as father and mother, while the other six trigrams are considered sons and daughters (Fung 140–41). This is to say that the intercourse of yin and yang produces all things. ''Qian knows the great beginning, and Kun acts to bring things to completion'' (*Yizhuan*, Xici I, 系辞上, ''Appended Remarks,'' PT. 1, ch.1, trans. Chan 265).

All production and change can be explained in terms of yin and yang. ''*Qian* and *Kun* are indeed the gate of Change! Qian is yang and Kun is yin'' (*Yizhuan*, Xici I, 系辞上, ''Appended Remarks,'' PT. 1, ch.6, trans. Chan 268). The way of yin and yang is the Way of the universe. ''The successive movement of yin and yang constitutes the Way (道 Dao)'' [*Yizhuan*, Xici I, 系辞上, ''Appended Remarks'' PT. 1, ch.5, trans. Chan 266). This is the cosmology originated from the *Yizhuan* and then developed by Daoism and Neo-Confucianism later on.

Chinese belief in yin and yang and their interaction is based on empirical observation of nature. It is not hard for anyone who observes nature closely to notice that in nature there are opposites such as night and day or cold and hot that are dependent on each other. It seems that the yin yang doctrine is an outgrowth of Chinese observations of nature and admiration of nature.

Chinese observation and admiration of nature are closely connected with the way of life of farmers in ancient China. To a great degree the Chinese outlook on life and the universe is a reflection of farmers' way of thinking. ''The farmers are always in contact with nature, so they admire and love nature'' (Fung 20). Furthermore, farmers must respect and follow the way of nature. Otherwise they will fail in farming. In order to farm well, farmers must carefully observe regularities in nature and follow them. They would not have failed to notice the existence of opposite forces and their interactions that are clearly present in nature. Moreover, given farmers' admiration of nature and their belief that human beings are part of nature, they would naturally apply the yin yang theory to human affairs as well. Thus, all things both in the natural world and in human society are explained by the same yin yang theory. That might partially explain why the yin and yang theory has become the most fundamental element of Chinese philosophy.

Nevertheless, the emergence of the yin yang cosmology cannot be adequately explained by the Chinese's agricultural way of life. After all, the yin yang doctrine has profound metaphysical and non-religious implications. It articulated and developed the Chinese naturalistic view of the universe and life, and provided the Chinese a systematic explanation of the origin of the universe and the fundamental cause of all changes in the world for the first time. Such a system is directly opposite to conventional religious beliefs in a purposeful Creator. Logically, explaining the origin of the world and its changes in terms of the existence of natural forces like yin and yang and their interactions makes it cosmologically unnecessary to appeal to a supernatural being or Creator. When David Hall and Roger Ames discuss conceptual polarity such as yin and yang in Chinese philosophy, they point out that such polarity is ''a relationship of two events each of which requires the other as a necessary condition for being what it is'' (Hall and Ames 18) ''Each existent is 'so of itself' and does not derive its meaning and order from any transcendent source'' (Ibid). Perhaps, it is due to the dominance of the belief in the yin yang doctrine in Chinese culture that the Chinese in general are not inclined to believe in a supreme personal deity, like God in Christianity, who is responsible for the creation

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of all things in the universe. Although there are Chinese myths about how Pan Gu (盘古) separated sky from the earth (he died after his job was done), and how Nü Wa (女娲) created human beings from mud and mended damaged Heaven,[5] they have always been regarded as beautiful myths, not truths, by the Chinese. Since the occurrence of yin yang doctrine, Chinese cosmology in particular and Chinese philosophy in general have developed in a naturalistic direction without significant departure from the *Yizhuan*. Undoubtedly, the yin yang theory has justified and strengthened a naturalistic tendency in Chinese thought.

The fact that other agricultural societies such as ancient Egypt did not have such a naturalistic theory shows that there are other reasons than agricultural life for the Chinese belief in the yin yang cosmology. Other social and historical factors must have played a role in forming this belief as well. One such factor might be the non-religious atmosphere and the humanistic trend during the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 B.C.) and Warring State period (480–222 B.C.).

In remote ancient times, the Chinese, like other nations, worshiped various gods, goddesses, and spirits. But such worship seems to grow less and less intense with the passage of time. There had been more than 2500 years' development of Chinese civilization when the Chinese entered the Spring-Autumn period. Starting from that point, they no longer so much worshiped a personalized highest deity but something between a personalized god and a natural force—''Heaven.''[6] By this time, humanistic elements became very strong. The humanism lies in the idea that the mandate of the non-personalized Heaven needs to be interpreted in terms of people's will, and that only the virtuous can be favored by Heaven.[7] Such a humanistic view is well expressed in *Shangshu* 《尚书》(*Book of History*) : ''Heaven must follow what people want.'' ''Heaven sees what people see, and Heaven hears what people hear'' (*Tian shi zi wo min shi, tian ting zi wo min ting* 天视自我民视, 天听自我民听'') [*Shangshu*, ''Tai Shi'' 《尚书 泰誓》].

According to the Zuo Zhuan (左传 *Zuo's Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annual*), which records many events that happened during the Spring and Autumn period, there were already ideas such as ''Good fortune or bad fortune is determined by humans,'' (Duke Xi, 16th year) ''People are master of gods,'' (Duke Xi, 19th year) ''Gods are those who are just and intelligent, and they follow what people do,'' (Duke Zhuang, 32nd year).[8] It was during this period that the well-known saying on three kinds of immortality was uttered. The idea of three immortalities excludes the possibility of immortality by life after death or an immaterial soul, but advocates people to do their best in this life and become immortal by their positive and lasting influence on the living. Here is what the *Zuo Zhuan* records about this idea:

> Mu-Shu said, ''… I have heard that the best course is to establish virtue, the next best is to establish achievement, and still the next best is to establish words. When these are not abandoned with time, it may be called immortality.'' (Duke Xiang 24th year, Chan 13)

This idea about immortality, as Chan Wing-tsit has put it, has influenced the Chinese so much that it has remained the conviction of educated Chinese for more than 2500 years (Chan 13). Even today, it still inspires a great number of educated Chinese to do their best in life.

The economic, social, and political situation at that time might have greatly contributed to the growth of humanism. Those were periods of rapid change, war, and chaos, but also periods of creativity during which philosophy flourished and talented people had a stage on which to perform. During these two periods, China was divided into many feudal states. The ruler of each state tended to conquer other states or at least defend his

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own state from invasion by other states. In cruel and severe struggle, rulers of various feudal states had learned that their fates were decided by their own strength, and not by supernatural beings. This pushed them to put an emphasis on humanity, not on deities or spirits. To win, or to survive, they often tried hard to get the most talented people to work for them. Many military, political, and diplomatic strategies proposed during those periods were repeatedly used later on in history. The Spring-Autumn and Warring States were periods when rulers and philosophers had direct conversations about the ways of government and ways of winning. In Chinese history these were periods during which thinkers had the greatest freedom to develop their thoughts. That is why these periods are called the golden age of Chinese philosophy and the ''hundred schools'' periods. The most important schools of philosophy in China, such as Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, Moism, etc., all originated during these periods.

Given the historical background discussed above, it is not surprising that people who lived during the Spring-Autumn and Warring States periods tended to seek the origin of the cosmos in nature itself and explain natural phenomena in terms of natural forces. This might explain, at least partially, why the yin yang cosmology emerged at that time. Therefore, it is plausible to say that the yin yang theory is definitely a product of agricultural China, derived from the Chinese observation and admiration of nature, but it is also a product of China's golden age for philosophy when the naturalistic way of thinking had emerged and humanism had significantly undermined traditional religious beliefs in supernatural beings.

2. The Significance of Dialectical Thinking to Chinese Philosophy and Chinese Character

Since the yin yang doctrine came to exist, it has never been abandoned by any major philosopher in China. As is well known, main steam native Chinese philosophies, Confucianism and Daoism, both endorse the yin yang theory and develop the theory to a fuller degree. At least partially due to the fact that both Confucianism and Daoism embrace the yin yang theory, there has been a difficulty in deciding whether Confucians or Taoists were the authentic authors of the *Yizhuan*. Traditionally, the *Yizhuan* is regarded as works by Confucians. Confucians have regarded the *Yijing* with its appendices as one of the Confucian classics. However, some contemporary scholars have challenged that conclusion and argued that the appendices of the *Yijing* are more likely works of Daoists (Chen 3–114).

What Chinese philosophy has greatly benefited from the yin yang doctrine is not just its naturalistic outlook on the universe and human life, but also its dialectical way of thinking. Actually, the dialectical way of thinking entailed in the yin yang theory not only has greatly shaped Chinese philosophy, but also the character of Chinese people. Its most significant influence is clearly shown in Chinese logic, language, and attitude toward life.

As is argued, the way the Chinese do logic and the way the Chinese explain the meaning of a term are all connected with their yin yang mode of thinking. One of the Chinese philosophers who first noticed the influence of the dialectical thinking of yin yang doctrine on Chinese language and logic was Zhang Dongsun. He said:

> The Chinese do not make definitions (in the Western sense) but only understand the meaning of a word by contrasting it with its opposite. For example, a ''wife'' is a ''woman who has a husband'', and a ''husband'' is a ''man who has a wife.'' (Zhang. 182–83)

This is to say that the meaning of a word is relational and cannot be understood without knowing its opposite. The way of understanding words will definitely affect the way of

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logical thinking. When Zhang explains the kind of logic derived from the yin yang way of understanding language, he says:

> The Chinese use symmetries such as ''big vs. small'', ''above vs. below'', good vs. evil'', ''to have'' (*you* 有) vs. ''to not have'' (*wu* 无) and always believe that opposites are dependent on each other. … It seems to me that such ideas constitute another kind of logic. (Ibid. 181)

> As far as Chinese logic is concerned, let me name it ''correlation logic''(*xiangguan lü mingxue* 相关律名学) or the ''logic of correlative duality''(*liangyuan xiangguan lü mingxue* 两元相关律名学). Such logic emphasizes correlation between opposites, such as '''to have' and 'to not have' produce each other,'' ''high and low compare with each other'', and ''front and back follow each other.'' In the *Yijing* such ideas are fully manifested. Although some modern scholars do not think that it is the oldest book in China, the ideas it expresses have to be regarded as orthodox in China. The clearest expression of its ideas is ''a yin and a yang are what is called 'Dao''' (Ibid. 182).

Such logic is clearly not deductive, but dialectical or correlative, based on relationships between opposites. For deductive logic, a thing x cannot be p and not-p at the same time; but for correlative logic, x must be p and not-p at the same time, since in reality each thing is a unity of opposites p and not-p.

However, these two kinds of logic do not have to contradict each other as they seem to, because they do not deal with things from the same perspective: deductive logic emphasizes that x cannot be p and not-p at the same time in the same aspect, while correlative logic is saying that x is p and not-p when its different aspects are considered or at different times. According to the latter, for example, it is logically true to say that each thing is the same as other things and yet each thing is different from other things. Since each thing is a unity of opposites, on the one hand, each thing has some properties common to other things; on the other hand, each thing has some properties different from other things. Everything is in this sense a unity of generality and individuality. Therefore, it is true that each thing is the same as other things and yet different from other things at the same time. Similarly, according to this logic, we may say that a mountain is high and low. This means that a certain mountain is high by one measure for highness relative to one context, but low by another measure in a different context. For instance, the mountain in a basin is high compared to those marshes nearby, but it may be as low as other marshes in yet higher land. That explains why there is a famous Chinese paradoxical statement ''The heavens are as low as the earth, mountains are on the same level as marshes.'' The same logic will also allow us to say: ''The creature coming into life is the creature ceasing to be alive.'' In China, this saying usually is quoted to highlight that life is very short and it is as if death comes once birth takes place. Each creature is a unity of life and death. If we look at an individual's life in the context of the whole universe, it is too short to be noticed. In that sense an individual comes to life and death almost at the same time. However, no matter how short one's life is, there is a time difference between one's life and one's death. So, logically, it is valid to say that x is alive at time t^1 and dead at time t^2. This is just to say that x is p and not p at different times.[9] Such correlative logic always takes relations and connections between things and between opposite sides into account. It is always dialectic and dynamic. It is clearly based on the yin yang way of thinking. It is not only philosophically but also practically significant to the Chinese.

The dialectical thinking of yin yang doctrine has contributed much to shaping the Chinese character and making the Chinese the Chinese. It has penetrated Chinese attitudes toward the world and ways to deal with life. As Fung put it:

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> The theory has had a great effect upon the Chinese people and has contributed much to their success in overcoming the many difficulties which they have encountered in their long history. Convinced of this theory, they remain cautious even in time of prosperity, and hopeful even in time of extreme danger. (Fung 19)

Given their beliefs that everything is the unity of yin yang opposites, everything implies its opposite, and everything will changes to its opposite, the Chinese in general rarely despair in extremely difficult times. They tend to think that difficult times cannot last very long, just as darkness cannot last very long before the coming of dawn. Furthermore, given this two sided way of thinking, they tend to think that nothing is absolutely bad or good. Therefore, for them, even in the most difficult situation, one should see the bright side, work on the positive aspect, and make an effort to come out with something good.

''Looking for what is positive and hopeful in what is unfortunate'' has become part of the Chinese mentality. When one is in a very difficult or unfortunate situation, a common word of comfort from one's friends is ''when the old man on the frontier lost his mare, who could have guessed it was a blessing in disguise'', the saying derived from the story mentioned earlier on. By saying this one's friend wants to remind her of the idea that a loss may turn out to be a gain, and misfortune may bring good fortune. This way of thinking may have greatly contributed to the optimism of the Chinese toward life.

Similarly, such a way of thinking also reminds the Chinese not to lose caution in the most favored situation and happiest time. As the *Yizhuan* says, ''*Junzi* (君子 a person of virtue) keeps danger in mind when he is in a safe position, keeps ruin in mind when he survives, has disorder in mind when he has peace. Therefore he is safe, and his state is secure'' (*Yizhuan*, Xici II 系辞下, ''Appended Remarks'' PT 2, Ch. 5). Since everything implies its negation and can change to its opposite, one needs to be aware of potential crisis or danger in good times. Since a reversal will take place when a thing has developed to one extreme, in happy situations one should try to slow down the coming of reversal by adding something opposite to what is desirable. For example, in order to remain successful, one must be careful not to be too successful; and in order to keep wealth in the long run, one must give away some portion of one's wealth to enrich the poor. Always keeping two sides of everything in mind, even in the best times, will enable one to maximize what one truly desires.

Obviously, this way of thinking leads to the Chinese belief in the Golden Mean—''Neither have too much or do too much nor too little, but follow the middle way to have or to do the appropriate amount.'' In this sense we may say that the yin yang doctrine has served as the justification and foundation for the Golden Mean. Each extreme is undesirable, especially ''having too much'' or ''doing too much.'' Since the universal law dictates that reversion will happen when a thing develops to its fullest degree, when one has too much or does too much what one wants, one is at risk of bringing the opposite of what one wants (see Fung 20). For example, when one has too much of something such as money or power, one is at risk of bringing himself hatred or a disaster such as a kidnapping. In daily life, if one works too hard for her goal, she might not be able to let her body and mind work well toward the goal due to physical exhaustion and mental stress. If one works so hard that one physically or psychologically collapses, one will no longer be able to work for one's goal. Such an idea is clearly expressed in an old Chinese saying, ''When a string of a musical instrument is set too tight, it will break.''

The doctrine of the mean seems also to have helped the Chinese to be more commonsensical and tolerant in judging others' opinions and even religions. The reluctance to go

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to any extreme inclines the Chinese to find plausible elements in different views and reconcile conflicting beliefs. When Lin Yutang talks about this, he gives the following examples:

> Historian James Anthony Froude said that Henry VIII divorced Catherine due to political reason only, while Bishop Clayton said that the divorce was driven by animal desires, then, common sense will say that both reasons should count. That might be closer to truth. In the West, one scientist might be indulged in genetic theory, while another might be immersed in ideas of environments. Each of them might stubbornly use his/her broad and profound knowledge and great foolishness to prove that he/she is the only one who is correct; but Easterners will assert, without too much deliberation, that both of them are correct to a certain degree. A typical Chinese assertion is this: ''A is correct, but B is not wrong either.'' (Lin 90–91)

Lin might have exaggerated the ''one-sidedness'' of some Westerners, but his description of the Chinese, is basically accurate. This Chinese attitude toward different or even conflicting opinions may help to explain why different philosophies and religions in China often can influence each other and learn from each other, and why some Chinese can believe in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism at the same time. If one thinks that different philosophies and religions are right in different respects, one has no reason to be an extreme supporter of one over others. Clearly, the doctrine of the mean, justified by the yin yang theory, is the key to understanding Chinese tolerance.

The belief in the Golden Mean is definitely not uniquely Chinese, looking back on the history of world philosophy. Greek philosophers such as Aristotle proposed the idea as well and made it the standard for the virtue of character. However, belief in the Golden Mean in the West is not fully justified in the way the Chinese one is by the yin yang doctrine. Moreover, Western belief in the Golden Mean has never been so much followed in the West as the Chinese one has been followed by the Chinese. It seems that Chinese practice of the Golden Mean has a lot to do with the Chinese belief in yin and yang.

To sum up, the yin yang doctrine has profoundly influenced the Chinese way of thinking and living. Chinese naturalistic, dialectical, and optimistic attitudes toward the world and life are all based on this ancient theory. For anyone who truly hopes to understand the Chinese and their philosophy, the yin yang theory is something she needs to start with. The yin yang symbol, widely recognized now in the West, should not be regarded just as one for Daoism, but as a symbol of the Chinese nation—the Chinese people, her philosophy, and her culture.[10]

Short Biography

Xinyan Jiang is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Redlands. Her interests are primarily in Chinese philosophy, comparative philosophy, and ethics. She has published in journals such as the *History of Philosophy and Logic*, *Philosophy East and West*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, *Philosophical Inquiry*, and *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, and in several anthologies. She is the editor of an anthology, *The Examined Life: Chinese Perspectives* (Global Publications, State University of New York at Binghamton, 2002). She has also edited Chinese Philosophy in the English Speaking World (China People's University Press, Beijing, 2009). She was Chair of the Committee on Asian/Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies of the American Philosophical Association (1998–2002), a member of the Advisory Committee to the Program Committee of the Eastern Division of American Philosophical Association (2002–2005), and Deputy Executive Director (2007–2011) and Treasurer (2002–2011) of the International Society for Chinese Philosophy.

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[1] Interestingly, something similar to the yin yang was also found in ancient Greece, but it did not prevail there in the way the yin yang has in China. Among earlier Greek thinkers, Heraclitus (c. 530–470 B.C.) was the one whose view was very close to the Chinese yin yang idea.
[2] James Legge's translation. See Zhouyi, 247. translation.
[3] I adopt Fung's translation. See Fung 138.
[4] There are some controversies over the time when the appendices of the *Yijing* were written. Some scholars argue that they might have existed during the Spring and Autumn period. But the majority of scholars in the *Yijing* seem to assume that the appendices were written later than that.
[5] For the myth about Pan Gu, see Yuan Ke 37–38 and Po Yang 55–56; and for the myth about Nü Wa, see Yuan Ke 54–58.
[6] ''Heaven'' in Chinese culture mainly means (1) Nature or the universe, or (2) the unknown highest power, or (3) the source of political authority (such as ''Heaven'' in ''the mandate of Heaven''). Different philosophers interpret ''Heaven'' differently. For example, Xunzi's conception of Heaven is purely naturalistic, but Confucius' and Mencius' Heaven has will and purpose.
[7] For a more detailed discussion, see Chan 4.
[8] English translation of those quotes from Shangshu and Zuo Zhuan are mine. For a detailed discussion on the humanistic trend of these periods, see Feng Tianyu 182–185.
[9] For detailed discussions of the three paradoxical statements mentioned here and the relationship between the yin yang way of thinking and deductive or Aristotelian logic, see Jiang 1992.
[10] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for his or her valuable comments.

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