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Q: The connection between Yin-yang and Daoism, if I understand correctly, Daoism is the modern way of Taoism, based in the Tao Te Ching. Your explanation of yin-yang and Daoism, in and out, convinced me, but my question came again because in the Tao Te Ching there are thoughts expressed in images that are also in western texts closer to western meaning such as, "All things end in the sea, the Tao, just as the small streams and large flow through valleys to the river" (Tao Te Ching, chapter 32). Tao=God. And in the Ecclesiastes 1:7, "Rivers run into the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea" (1:7), that idea is closer to the flowing circle that you mention. Any explanation?

*A: I like the image of water flowing in the sea...yes it is a flowing circle. Dao (Tao) plays many similar roles as God in the West. However it is not a God because it has no human dimension. It is a natural force, an ultimate force/source...One can find Dao in all things or Dao manifested in all things. This is an unique thing about Daodejing and Chinese language...one can imply it in many ways.*

Q: In this article from the Chronicle this morning, China encourages in and out flow of academy and its students. In your opinion, how should we prepare our students' for this exchange and what are some risks and benefits?

Hancock, Mary. "China Rolls Out the Welcome Mat for Foreign Studens." *The Chronicle for Higher Education*. 12 Aug 2012. Web. 24 Aug 2012. <[http://chronicle.com/article/China-Puts-Out-the-Welcome-Mat/133543/?cid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/article/China-Puts-Out-the-Welcome-Mat/133543/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en)>

*A: The best way to prepare our students for these exchanges is to help them to understand Chinese thought and culture. These can be very vague and conceptual. We need to find a way to help them realize the importance of these exchanges and how these experiences can actually enhance their quality of life, not simply as conceptual learning but a better way of doing and living. Our students will benefit greatly by these exchanges because they will appreciate greatly what they have, cultivate an open-mind and spirit and find out how the media has wrongly shaped and informed us about China and Chinese culture. The only risk I see is that some of them will not want to come back to the US and they will be willing to make China their second home.*

Q: It sounds as if some authors maintain that the earliest Yin-Yang School sages posited yin and yang as natural forces, and the movement was later on "high jacked" by those who used magic, alchemy, and other occult practices (probably popular Taoists?) Do you see this as tenable; I am interested since this would be somewhat analogous to the pre-Socratics in that they were interested in using reason to understand the physical world, not myth. Were there always some within Yin-Yang who studied natural forces without the occult dimension?

*A: I think this is somewhat right. The terms yin and yang were first related to the sun then gradually developed from ways of naming relationships with the sun into a complex way of*

*thinking. Many building blocks contributed to the formation of this thinking pattern. Historically, although the term yin-yang was not a dominant concept before the Han Dynasty, proto-yin-yang thought already existed and had given rise to a particular thinking model. Yin-yang school is using yin-yang as a kind of skill. The Hanshu (The Boo of Han) describes the Yin-yang School as arising in the following way: The course of the Yinyang School probably came from officials for astrology, reverently following great heaven, the calendar, moon, sun, and stars. They reverently gave out the proper timing [shi, seasons] for the people, and this is what they were strong in. When it comes to enacting restraints, then they were bound by prohibitions and taboos and sunken in minor numerology, abandoning human affairs to rely on ghosts and spirits" (Hanshu 1734).*

Q: I was thinking last night about what a flexible and wide-ranging concept yin-yang is, and that led me to wonder how useful it is, or whether that it is so flexible, that it has become attenuated and perhaps even empty. In American political discourse, everybody claims to be pro-family--to be in favor of helping to create strong families. So, for example, in the debate over gay marriage, both sides claim that theirs is the real pro-family position: on the right, because they are limiting families to traditional families, on the left because they are allowing more families to form. Which of these is 'really' pro-family? Well, I think we can't say, because the concept of family is now a diffused concept that it is empty--it gives no guidance to decide whether a particular case is the correct or incorrect application of the concept. It strikes me that maybe yin-yang is a similar concept. If I understood you correctly, you mention the idea of how originally yin-yang was a pro-feminist concept in a lot of ways, but later came to justify anti-women practices like foot binding. What does yin-yang exclude?

*A: Great question: what yin-yang excludes? Everything or nothing...This becomes empty as well as full. In fact, this is the problem of yin-yang, which is universal, and then contains very little substance. Another way to look at it is to put it into Chinese context. Yin-yang is a functional concept; it describes the different functions of thing. A well-known Chin expert in 1920's Alfred Forke puts it,*

*Ultimately, yin and yang do not mean anything in themselves at all, being only employed to express a relation; one notion is the opposite of the other, the one is positive, the other negative. [i]Forke provides a nice illustration: The left hand is Yang, the right hand is Yin, in this no change is possible, but raise both hands, then they are both Yang, and put them down, and they are both Yin, and no matter whether you raise them or put them down, when they are hot they are both Yang, and when they are cold they are both Yin. These are not contradictory labels, and it would be absurd to argue whether the right hand is really yang or really yin. The qualities only make sense when one specifies a certain context. The fact that anything is simultaneously yin and yang mirrors the fact that things are always implicated in multiple relations at once. Moreover, which relation is in view depends on the particular purposes and priorities of the viewer.*

Q: I was wondering if you know whether children/students in Chinese schools are taught about Yin-yang and in what contexts? How familiar is the average person with the yin-yang concepts, or is it just infused in their ways of being (like not drinking cold water)?

*A: I do not think that children or students in China are getting a formal education on yin-yang.*

*But they are experiencing it on a daily life basis...everyone is using yin-yang for something; the language they speak contains yin-yang. For example, the sun is called taiyang (the biggest yang); the sunny day is called yang day; cloudy day is called yin day; male's body part (penis) is called the instrument of yang; the female body part (vagina) is called the way of yin. The fortune-teller is called the Mr. Yin-yang. If they have a headache their parents will tell them that they have too much yang or too little yin. If there is tooth pain it will be seen as too much yang, body is too hot so they will need to get something that has more yin elements, such as a pear or a watermelon...yin-yang is the way of life.*

Q 1. When I read stanza 47 in the Dao De Jing, this spelled out for me the justification for the isolation much practiced by China, particularly in the latter part of the Ming period. I reread it several time, and the "No need to venture past the door" and what follows seemed to spell out China's policy, yet it was written in 300 BC! Is this a proper link to establish? Has China's chronic policy of isolation been stirred by the Dao De Jing?

2. I am fascinated by the notion of conceptualization so prevalent in Chinese Culture, and I think that I understand somewhat how Ying Yang fits into this. Is it your opinion that this predilection for abstractions and connections is somehow linked to education in China? Facilitated knowledge, encouraged the learning process, up to present time?

*A: To Question 1; I'm not sure there is a direct link between Daodejing and China's policy of isolation. However there is a shared concern that a state or thing can be/should be self-sufficient, self-reliance. It is a mentality of peasants. What agriculture really needs are sunlight's and timely rains...no technology is necessarily needed. China's policy of isolation is based on the assumption that "China is at the middle of kingdom (Zhongguo) and has everything it needs. There is no reason to reach out and to learn something new or more. As long as the Chinese can follow the principle of nature or the mandate of heaven. The society or state will just do fine."*

*To question 2: That is an interesting point on Chinese conceptualization. There is no concept of God in Chinese thought and culture so all those human desires or energy for going beyond our current reality goes to cultivate the human nature. For most Chinese thinkers, human beings are not born to be human but rather become human beings through one's life time effort. The education is naturally a part of this lifetime pursuit. To be educated is to become a human being, or a fully and complete human being.*