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Wang, Robin R., *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture*

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No one who has spent much time reading traditional Chinese philosophy, religion, or science can be unaware of the ubiquity of the *yinyang* 陰陽 concept. The longer one engages with this tradition the more *yinyang* seems like the *cogito ergo sum* of Chinese thought—the fundamental building block—although less susceptible of refutation than Descartes' principle. Yet its simplicity and obviousness can obscure both its ubiquity and its usefulness as a key to understanding Chinese thought and culture. Likewise, one would be mistaken to assume that this book has little to offer even to those already familiar with the concept of *yinyang*.

Robin Wang treats *yinyang* as a "philosophical and cultural paradigm" (6) in the Kuhnian sense, going beyond the more well-known characteristics of *yinyang* thinking (complementarity, harmony, correlative cosmology) to dig out and illustrate the wealth of uses to which the concept has been put over the centuries. She draws on a very broad range of early texts, mostly from the Warring States (including the Guodian 郭店 texts) through the Han 漢 periods, but here and there extending into the Song 宋. Some of these texts, such as the *Guiguzi* 鬼谷子 (*Master of Spirit Valley*), are rarely used in English-language scholarship. She also makes excellent use of modern scholarship in both English and Chinese.

Wang's approach is primarily that of an intellectual historian, although she brings a philosopher's eye to the material. It is not as consistently philosophical as A. C. Graham's, in his short book *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), which focuses more thoroughly on the logic of *yinyang* and correlative thinking. Wang says: "I have tried not to impose an interpretation, especially those coming from Western terminologies, but rather let the texts themselves unfold the meanings of yinyang.... Although emphasizing historical developments, the purpose of this work is not primarily historical. Instead, it is meant to articulate conceptual positions.… The book is intended to be

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philosophical.... The goal … is to put many scattered, unexamined conceptual claims into a coherent whole—to build a yinyang thought paradigm" (17–18).

Her decision to avoid imposing Western categories on the Chinese material is the right one, but it should not exclude *contrasting* the two traditions. She does this occasionally, for example in Chapter 2 (on cosmology) where she briefly contrasts the *yinyang* emphasis on cyclical movement with the Newtonian view of linear movement through space and time (52)—although in her longer discussion of space and time in Chapter 5 (on strategy) she does not mention Newton (138–142). I would have liked more of such contrasts, and in a bit more depth. For example, her mention of the assumption that change and transformation are "implicit in the fabric of being" (53) and thus are fundamentally real would have been a good opportunity to discuss Plato's exactly opposite assumption that true being must be permanent and unchanging. This, in turn, could have led to a discussion of David Hall and Roger Ames's theory of rational order versus aesthetic order (e.g., in their *Thinking Through Confucius*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), which I find to be extraordinarily useful in illuminating fundamental differences between traditional Chinese and Western modes of thinking. (She perhaps alludes to this in a footnote [Chapter 2, note 35], but in reference to evolutionary biologists.) I do not mean to criticize Wang for not writing the book the way I would have written it; my point is simply that a great deal of light can be shed on conceptual systems by contrasting them with others.

Since *yinyang* has been so fundamental to Chinese thought for at least two millennia, the potential range of topics that could be covered in a book like this is almost limitless. Wang has wisely been selective, which allows her to go into considerable depth on each topic. The first chapter is an introduction covering the range of philosophical meanings of the concept (various kinds of relationship, generativity, harmony, and efficacy); the origins of the characters for *yin* and *yang*, including possible links to neolithic inscriptions; and the Yinyang school of early Chinese thought. Her list of *yinyang* relationships (8–11) is quite helpful: (1) contradiction and opposition (*maodun* 矛盾), (2) interdependence (*xiangyi* 相依), (3) mutual inclusion (*huhan* 互含), (4) interaction or resonance (*jiaogan* 交感), (5) complementarity or mutual support (*hubu* 互補), and (6) change and transformation (*zhuanhua* 轉化). From the beginning she emphasizes that *yinyang* is more than these types of relationships; it is the engine, so to speak, of the spontaneous "generation (*sheng* 生) and emergence" (12) that is inherent in "the fabric of being."

This argument is continued in Chapter 2 ("Yinyang Cosmology: *Dao*, *Qi*, *Yi*, and *Taiji*"), which could stand alone as a substantial introduction to Chinese cosmology. There are a few minor problems in the chapter. In her otherwise excellent discussion of the *Yijing* 易經 (*Scripture of Change*), Wang refers to the term "Yiology" as a translation of *yixue* 易學, better known as *Yi* studies (64). That hideous term should be banished and prohibited from English usage. Her distinction between metaphysics and cosmology is unclear to me: "Metaphysics is understood in reference to becoming and cosmology in the sense that it emerges from the cosmic changes that originate beings" (66). She implies that for Buddhists, "nonbeing [is] at the foundations of the world" (75); this is a misinterpretation of the Buddhist concept of emptiness (*śunyatā*, *kong* 空), which really means interdependence (emptiness of independent, automous existence). Finally, I think she could have dispensed with the discussion of ZHANG Zai 張載 (78–81), one of the 11th-century "Neo-Confucians," as his emphasis on *qi* 氣 does

not sufficiently engage with its *yinyang* aspects. The discussion of Zhang's contemporary ZHOU Dunyi's 周敦頤 concept of *taiji* 太極 (75–78) is quite good, although his *Taiji Diagram* (*Taijitu* 太極圖) is also discussed and reproduced in Chapter 6.

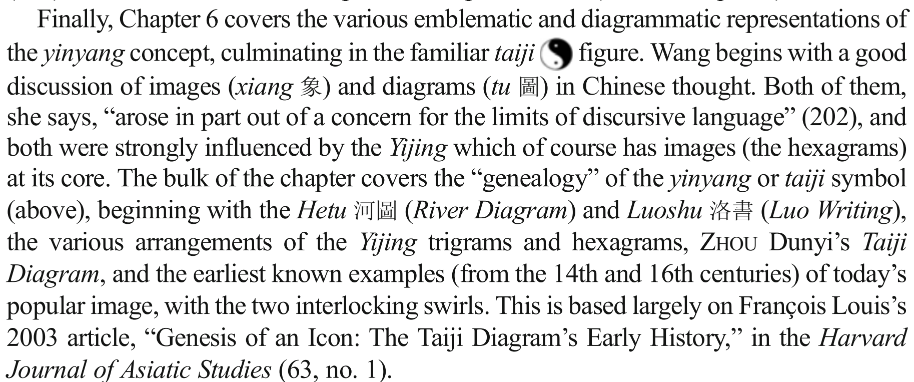
Chapter 3 ("Yinyang Matrix: Organizing the World") addresses politics, gender relationships, *fengshui* 風水, and music and art. It begins with a lengthy discussion of *lei* 類 (categories, kinds), which, Wang claims, "has enjoyed a privileged position in Chinese thought" (85). She also says, "The notion and method of *lei* is the underlying logical structure of the yinyang matrix" (ibid.). It seems to me that categorization is a fundamental operation in all discursive thought, so I fail to see what this argument contributes. The discussion of gender relationships (100–109) is very good, and she correctly identifies DONG Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) as the chief culprit in the use of *yinyang* theory "to justify subordination of yin/women" by positing "a dualistic value division of yinyang" (107). I do question, however, her translation of the title of LIU Xiang's 劉向 (77–6 BCE) *Lienüzhuan* 列女傳 as "stories of women martyrs" (109); many of them could certainly be characterized as martyrs, but a more accurate translation is "biographies of exemplary women." Another minor point: in the section on *fengshui* Wang says, "The temple of earth (*ditan* 地壇) is to the north of the Forbidden City, because the earth is yin and yin is north" (113). This is correct for Qing 清 dynasty Beijing 北京, but the map reproduced on the next page is from the Ming 明 dynasty and shows both the Temple of Heaven and the Temple of Earth as being south of the palace.

Chapter 4, "Yinyang Strategy: Efficacy in the World," drawing on François Jullien's notion of "efficacy" or "propensity" (*shi* 勢), intends to show how "yinyang thinking is applied as a behavioral model" (120). I would guess that the author struggled here with how to classify and group the various topics covered in the chapter. They include various kinds of *shu* 術 (techniques), including techniques of the Way (*daoshu* 道術) and techniques of the heart/mind (*xinshu* 心術); "yinyang strategy: the Way of Ways"; and three examples of yinyang strategy: military strategy, charioteering, and sexual practices. The link between charioteering and *yinyang* seems to be that effective charioteering is a technique that requires effective interaction with the environment (horse, terrain, weather, etc.) and a mind-body integration that Wang calls "yinyang intelligence" (156). But one could argue that, given the pervasiveness of *yinyang* thinking, any skill or "knack" (to use A. C. Graham's term) requires this kind of intuitive responsiveness. Wang also quotes a couple of passages where charioteering is used as a metaphor for how the sage or "great man" acts in the world (*Huainanzi* 淮南子) and how *taiji* 太極, *li* 理, and *qi* are related (ZHU Xi 朱熹), but these passages are not really about charioteering.

Under "the Way of Ways" are sections on (1) "timing and terrain" and (2) "yin as background and non-presence," both of which are incisive theoretical reflections on what might be called the methodology of yinyang strategy. "Timing and terrain," or "the timing (or seasons) of heaven (*tianshi* 天時) and the advantages of earth (*dili* 地利)" (137), covers military strategy and techniques of self-cultivation, including sexual practices. This last section overlaps somewhat with the next chapter (on body cultivation), although the focus here is on the "strategy" of Daoist sexual practices: to enable the man to preserve his *yang qi* 陽氣 (by suppressing ejaculation) and to supplement his *yin qi* 陰氣 (by bringing the woman to orgasm). "In theory, these sexual practices were designed for the benefit of men; however, it is clear that in reality, the woman gets the most enjoyment" (161). Or, quoting from the *Yufang Mijue* 玉房秘訣 (*Secrets from the Jade Room*), "If you observe these principles and

are careful not to violate them, then the woman will be joyful and the man will not decline" (ibid.).

Chapter 5, "Yinyang Body: Cultivation and Transformation," could stand alone as an excellent introduction to traditional Chinese medical theory, including its spiritual aspects. Wang here draws heavily on Paul Unschuld (*Medicine in China: A History of Ideas*, 25th ed., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) and Donald Harper's translation of *The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (London: Kegan Paul, 1998), as well as the *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經 (*The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic*), which is also used as an important source in Chapter 2. She also explicates the inner alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) of the *Zhouyi Cantongqi* 周易參同契 ("The Three Ways Unified and Normalized of Zhouyi") (190). The last section of the chapter is on "spirits/souls" (*hun* 魂 and *po* 魄).

Finally, Chapter 6 covers the various emblematic and diagrammatic representations of the *yinyang* concept, culminating in the familiar *taiji*  figure. Wang begins with a good discussion of images (*xiang* 象) and diagrams (*tu* 圖) in Chinese thought. Both of them, she says, "arose in part out of a concern for the limits of discursive language" (202), and both were strongly influenced by the *Yijing* which of course has images (the hexagrams) at its core. The bulk of the chapter covers the "genealogy" of the *yinyang* or *taiji* symbol (above), beginning with the *Hetu* 河圖 (*River Diagram*) and *Luoshu* 洛書 (*Luo Writing*), the various arrangements of the *Yijing* trigrams and hexagrams, ZHOU Dunyi's *Taiji Diagram*, and the earliest known examples (from the 14th and 16th centuries) of today's popular image, with the two interlocking swirls. This is based largely on François Louis's 2003 article, "Genesis of an Icon: The Taiji Diagram's Early History," in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (63, no. 1).

The most serious problem I have with this book is its sloppy editing, which I attribute largely to the sorry state of academic publishing today. There was a time when books from Cambridge University Press had impeccable copy-editing. In that regard this book, especially in its footnotes, is a mess. For example, the European convention of giving authors' names with full surnames and only initials for first names simply looks weird with Chinese names (e.g., Y. Zhang). If it is used it should be used consistently, but here we have adjacent footnotes listing "Chen, Qiyou" (8, n. 23) and "F. Xu" (9, n. 24), not to mention "Wu Guoyi" (26, n. 51) and "Zongsan Mou" (212, n. 33). None of these examples involve Chinese authors living in the West and using the Western naming convention. Other authors' names are consistently misspelled, such as Fabrizio Pregadio (190–194) and Zhu Zhen (206–207). One Japanese author's name is given in *kanji* only (159, n. 132). "Complementary / complementarity" is misspelled at least four times (171–173), and *Heguanzi* (*Pheasant Cap Master*) is given as "Pheasant Cape Master" every time it appears. There are also some very awkward translations by the author, such as "their having is like empty" from the *Taipingjing* 太平經 (196), "[a]lthough *po* is yin but it is decisive" from a modern Chinese author (197), and "[t]he person of relying on" from the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (144). This last one is cited from the translation by John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel (*The Annals of Lü Buwei*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), where *yin zhe* 因者 is translated as "reliance" (417). Wang of course has the right to modify a translation, but here the modification is neither acceptable English nor acknowledged.

In terms of substance, I would like to have seen a concluding section or chapter reflecting on the significance of *yinyang* thinking in the history of Chinese thought, and especially scientific thought and practice. Yes, this has been covered before,

for example, by Joseph Needham and A. C. Graham. However, like the relative paucity of contrasts with Western thought mentioned above, a broader perspective would have added an important dimension to this book, and would not, in my opinion, have contravened the author's intention to let the Chinese texts speak for themselves.

Aside from these quibbles, this is an extremely substantial book that opens up new dimensions in our understanding of the seemingly simple concept of *yinyang*. Perhaps in a second edition, or in another venue, we can look forward to Robin Wang's reflections on what it all means in broader historical and comparative perspective.