

ICUS XV Committee Six

THE KI AND YIN YANG'S ANALOGIES WITH MESO-AMERICAN
THOUGHT, BEFORE THE CONQUEST AND TODAY

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My very modest intervention is a search of analogies of the thought of Ki with some cosmogonic conceptions of the high cultures of America. You are all Orientalists, but this Conference takes place in this Hemisphere, where transcendental thinking has attained depths known only in the Old World; I hope that this new perspective will interest you.

Prof. Hang Nyong Lee analyzes subtly the Ki-Ch'i thought, identified with the ultimate being and the origin of universe. When the thought of Ri-Ki dualism arises, Ki is considered the basic material of which everything existing is composed. Ki is the human mind, the innate knowledge. Following the theory of Ri-Ki mutual activation, the Seven feelings owe to Ki their essence of good and evil. Other thinkers consider Ki as the temper of God; God is the essence of Ki; as such, Ki is the subject of perception; its passage through Ki corresponds to the sense organs.

Confucianism sees in Ki a material entity under the Ri-Ki dualism; Lao-Chuang identifies Ki monism with the ultimate substance of the universe, including both material and spiritual substance in it. The Tao Tê Ching (Tao of the transformation), the celestial rule of Lao Tzú (contemporaneous of Confucius) is more explicit in the chapter 42, which I have read and reread many times during the years, in its

Italian translation by Alberto Castellani. Without the commentaries of Oriental scholars and occidental orientalists, I would not have penetrated into this synthesis of taoistic cosmology:

Tao(the way) produced the One;
 the One produced the Two;
 the Two produced the Three
 and the Three gave life to all beings.
 All things have on their shoulders the shade
 and in their arms carry the light;
 but the infinite spirit placates them.

Following Tê Ching, the One is the Ki; the Two, the dualism shade-light, that is Yin Yang; the Three, the powers: heaven, earth and man. The unity is divided in the Yin Yang and together with the product of this dualism constitutes a triad, which Lao Tzŭ perceives as the first base of the entire cosmic construction.

As all things carry within themselves the Negative and embrace the Positive, harmony is made from the Ki, origin of everything existing, the beginning of the whole universe. I am aware of the astonishing variety of semantic, philosophical, mystical, religious, and cosmogonic values of Ki or Ch'i in the Chinese, Korean and Japanese tradition. Ki or Ch'i cannot be translated in western languages with the words and concepts of energy, breath, air, steam, vital spirits, essential forces, immanent power, virtuality, because Ki includes both spiritual and material implications. Only Prof. Ravi Ravendra, whose culture is entirely Indian, i.e. fundamentally Arian (thus related with Greek philosophy: remember Plato's conception of the primeval unity of the sexes, which will reunite again at the end of the times), establishes a hypothesis of the very close affinity with Prāna (the total sum of the cosmic energy,

the vital forces of the body), and enumerates the common aspects of both esoteric thoughts. One of them is the striking polarity of Prāna: at night, the negative and during the day, the positive. Due to his discretion, Prof. Ravandra does not mention that the Ki could be a derivation of Prāna, enriched by additions from oriental wisdom. As a matter of fact, the highest Arian philosophy is represented by the most lucid mind India has produced, Gautama Buddha; he deeply influenced and spiritually conquered China, Korea and Japan.

A further bridge among East and West is the Bible. We read in Genesis 1.26: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." "Man" means the human couple, a unity, as the pronoun "him" clearly indicates; and this unity is composed of man and woman, a duality: the "him" corresponds to "them".

Let's return to the chapter 42 of the Tao Té Ching (which sounds cryptic to the uninitiated), containing the ethic springing from Lao Tzū's conception. Have I to emphasize that any introspection of the Christian mystery of unity and trinity, compared with the triad of Lao Tzū, has to be fully rejected? In the third appendix of the famous Book of Changes, I Ching, we find a surprising statement: Tao is just the name of this eternal dualism, which fills all the cosmos with its alternation of light and shade, day and night, life and death. This would allow us to conclude that Tao is equal to T'ai Ch'i or Ki, "principle", "monad", "oneness", "god".

I omit the other meanings of Ki in medicine (especially psychosomatic, as doctor Yujiro Ikemy demonstrates in his essay presented in this conference), art, and new religions (enumerated by the remarkable scholar, Prof. Hang Nyong Lee); and concentrate on the two

Ki's of Yin and Yang, the masculine and feminine principles, light and shade, a duality which can never be disunited, and which explains that the positive phenomena of nature, like health and abundance, and the negative, like earthquakes and sickness, are governed by one and the same cosmic rule.

Now let's look at America and her high cultures. The Aztecs were heirs of the Toltecs, builders of the greatest pyramid on Earth; the Toltecs were heirs of the city of Teotihuacán; in the second and first milenium before the commun era, the Olmec civilization covered the vast territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Mexico's most illustrious anthropologist of this century, Dr. Alfonso Caso, stated that

"A very ancient philosophical school sustained that the origin of all things is one dual principle, masculine and feminine, creator of the gods, the universe and the humankind".

Let us compare the dualistic cosmic principle of ancient Meso-America, male and female at the same time, with the oriental Ki or Yin and Yang. It is basically the same. There is no doubt that the forefathers of the American Indians came from Asia and belong racially to the same ethnic group; but they passed through the Bering Strait more than two hundred centuries ago, when China had not even started to think religiously or philosophically. The arrival of some Chinese ship to Mexican shores, due to oceanic currents or hurricanes, is possible, but the intellectual influence of the crew on a culturally advanced Indian population is not plausible. Likewise the arrival of the Viking Leif Erikson to the east coast of Canada and further down to "Vinland" in 999, had not the slightest repercussion in the customs and creeds of the Indians.

In the Mexican cosmology the supreme deity, creator of everything, dwells in the thirteenth heaven, the highest. His name is Ometecuhctli, which means literally Lord of the Duality (ome is "two" in the Nahuatl language), and he is always accompanied by his female counterpart, Omecihuatl, Lady of Duality. In the Underworld reigns Mictlantecuhtli, Lord of the realm of the dead, with Mictlan-cihuatl, his female companion. The same duality exists for many other deities: like Xochipilli, "prince of flowers", god of flowers, of tender vegetation, of love, companion of the goddess Xochiquetzal, "precious feather"; the counterpart of Tláloc, god of rain, is Chalchihuetlicue, "she who has a skirt of jade", goddess of the moving water. Many other examples could follow: A significant and striking detail: when Quetzalcóatl, the Feathered Serpent, descends to the Underworld and asks the gods of the dead to deliver him the bones destined to create the new mankind, he doesn't treat them with the plural "you", but with the "thou", as if the god and the goddess were not two persons, but one.

What Dr. Caso seems to ignore, is the survival in Meso-America of the dualism in sacred matters, still vital in our days, four and a half centuries after the European Conquest. Let us remember that the Mexican Indians still number seven million; a part of them are monolingual and nominally Christian. In the process of syncretism, the saints of the calendar substitute for the ancient deities. They enjoy the same veneration as the old gods. In the Catholic church of San Juan Chamula, 1200 kilometers southeast of Mexico City (just a few minutes drive from the modern city of San Cristóbal Las Casas), the priest is not allowed to officiate the mass nor to enter into the church. The religious celebrations, except baptism once a year, are the prerogative of the natives. On various

occasions I attended the Sunday service, and during the week days I heard the loud ^{prayers} cried out to the saints -I mean the wooden images of the saints- considered the most powerful. A group of the less efficient ones are lined up against a wall of the temple, punished because of their lack of help to the faithful in determinate emergencies. I noticed that every masculine saint is always accompanied by a feminine image, and vice versa: for instance Saint Peter forms a holy couple with Saint Isabel; the Virgin Mary, strangely enough, was accompanied by Saint Sebastian, and so on. A courteous Chamula explained to me that no saint can stay alone, but had always to be united with his counterpart of the opposite sex; otherwise they wouldn't have any power.

I saw Saint Anne, the grandmother of Jesus, an old wooden statue of good size and artistic value; but her companion was such a little image of Saint Peter, that I asked how, in spite of such a difference of size, they could form a sacred couple. The answer was surprising: "He is small, but he reaches her". My friend Chamula said it so seriously and with such devotion that I was touched.

I had another experience of the mystical dualism among another group of pre-Columbian Indians in the mountains of Puebla. They belong to the Otomí family, older inhabitants of Mexico than the Aztecs, better said, Nahuatl speaking natives. Their chief activity, besides agriculture, is the production of paper, made by the same techniques their forefathers used before the conquest, with the same instruments we find in tombs a thousand years old. The paper, called amate (which also means book), is destined for religious or magical use. They cut it in the traditional patterns for use in any mystical ceremony. The striking point is that the sheets

of paper are always double, because everything sacred must be dual once more, Ki and Yin Yang, or the same cosmogonic conception.

The cultural anthropologist could certainly find other examples among various native groups which have preserved the pre-Columbian customs.

From our point of view these customs are not due to cultural relations, which never existed, but are the result of analogous dualistic ideas, independent from huge distances in space and time.

The existence and persistence of the Ki and Yin Yang in America will be -I hope- a theme of meditation for the Orientalists gathered here.

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