

YIN-YANG AND TAO IN COMPARISON WITH EXPERIENCES IN ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

First of all please allow me to express my thanks for the kind invitation to speak before this distinguished audience. I don't want to give you a wide general lecture about Yin-Yang and Tao and about the origin and function of these principles in Chinese philosophy and cultural history; I am sure you have better specialists on this subject here. My personal intention is more directed to a comparison between seemingly incomparable phenomena of cultural history. I only want to make a little contribution to an intercultural dialogue, to a deeper discussion of common phenomena within the framework of different cultures.

I am personally convinced that some fundamental human ideas and experiences are present everywhere in all cultural strata of the peoples, for instance the correspondence between micro-and macrocosmos. These common ideas are of course, expressed in different languages, symbols and cultural contexts. The hypothesis of the unity of human experience allows us to compare ideas which seem to be incomparable.

I don't want to enter into the scientific discussion if the author of the Hsi-tzu-the appendix of the well known book of oracular sayings I ching—took already Yin-Yang as the fundamental principles for a metaphysical system or if Tsou Yen finally with his subtle doctrine of the 'wu hsing' the five changing phases established a well-formed philosophical system in which Yin and Yang were fixed and stable components. Anyway it is certain that since for long time the principles of Tai-chi and Yin and Yang as expression of the original oneness and bipolarity played a big roll in ancient China. So we can consider Yin-Yang as a modus, the original modus of existence. This bipolarity is not a dualism in a western sense, it is not the dualism of Zarathustra, but it contains the two poles of a whole. The one cannot exist without the other. So the bipolarity must be seen trichotomically: Tai-chi and Yin and Yang in its unity. But we should not forget that the ancient Chinese philosophers had not a monistic or dualistic or even not pluralistic idea of the cosmos, they saw that the whole was hierarchically graduated but at the same time existing totally in different dimensions. Just this many sided aspect of Yin-Yang going from simple nature up to the mysterious Divine confuses often the modern western philosopher who wants to regard metaphysics as a

simple anthropomorph projection. For him it is also very unusual and difficult always to remember in the contemplation of these bipolar structures that the way of contemplation corresponds to the Yin-Yang-principle. This means that any statement about this principle can only be made in and after a double contemplation. Yin-Yang were considered in the Western thought as powers or substances, western philosophers saw according to the development of western philosophy in Yin-Yang the theory of a principal dualism being effective in all world phenomena. The peculiarity of Chinese thought is on the contrary a sort of 'symbolic experience' of the reality as well as of thought and language. This thought is not less critical than the analytical—dialectic European method. It is specially ontologically enlightened, then it realizes that even thinking and philosophizing can only be one side or moment in the bipolar unfolding and manifestation of the fundamental one.

We have already said that Yin-Yang are not only powers or substances or pure logical and cosmogonical principles or symbols—they are perhaps all this together because the Yin-Yang - principle which is inhaerent in all beings to a certain extent is at the same time a transcendental principle that means that this in Yin-Yang expressed bipolarity of all being must be considered as the appearance and manifestation of Unity and oneness. The inexpressible one—beyond all description—reveals itself in the two or with other words divests itself into the two. Yin-Yang are structures connected with each other, they are relative not absolute contrasts, they are real symbols, preestablished, original structures of the appearance of being in everything being or as described by the Chi-Yak-academy (cf. Tsou Yen) preformation of all ontological structures which become manifest in the unfolding into the quintuplicity of the elements of the given. Yin-Yang are therefore transcendental. They are at the same time symbols for the one or the oneness. (cf. light and the illuminated).

Here we are coming the Taiji and Tao. In order to have an idea of Yin-Yang which is closely related to the concept of Tao let us review a number of different texts coming from different schools: We read in the 42nd chapter of Lao-tsu's book: "From the Tao arises (springs) the one, from the one springs the two, from the two arises the three and from the three tenthousand creatures. All creatures bear the Yin and embrace the Yang. The flowing fluidity works the harmony." The one is of course Taiji, the two are Yin and Yang and the three the

fluidity. To give here a definition of 'arise' 'spring' or 'come into existence' in an aristotelian sense is not possible and was for the Chinese philosophers not cogent. The Yin-Yang-theory was applied everywhere since the 12th century B.C. in State and administration, economy and diplomacy, in politics and strategy, astronomy and geography, medicine and sports, art and music, religion, mysticism and philosophy. Taoism and Confucianism came out of this same original source. Konfuzianism which emphasizes the active and virile is in contradistinction to Taoism which represents more the passive and feminine. The feminine aspect overcomes always the male aspect. In the 23rd chapter of Lao-tsus book we read: "The highest good is similar to the water, then the water is useful for the 10,000 creatures and does not fight. It is in those places which men dislike, therefore it is near to the Tao." In these little texts representing taoistic ideas we see clearly how deeply influenced the Chinese concept of being was by the principles of Yin-Yang and the Tao. Here some texts taken out of the Kuan-tsu of the philosopher Sung Hsing (chapter 37/38): "The Tao of the heaven is the emptiness, the emptiness is the beginning of all things.—Tao is between heaven and earth, there does not exist anything that would be larger and there is nothing that would be smaller." (that means it includes all possibilities of existence) "The great Tao is of such nature that one can remain inside it, but it is inexplicable."— The oldest formula and definition of the Tao in the Hsi-tsu—a part of the famous I ching—is the following: "I yin i yang chih wei tao" one yin and one yang that's the Tao. It says not only more than the 'coincidence of the opposits' (coincidencia oppositorum, Nikolaus von Kues) in the one, but the manifestation of the original one in all contradictory phenomena and coincident oppositins, the 'upholding' of all contrats by the unity which can not be realized in time unless in contradictions; these contradictions are only illusory contradictions because the process of becoming manifest means always existing in contradictions.'

Also the sense of the above mentioned formula is in my opinion : In every Yin and in every Yang there is the Tao, so that the Tao is a whole appearing in two completely different but in the same time completely interchangeable aspects. "The Tao is not the sum of Yin and Yang, but the regulator of their cyclical change" said the French Sinologue Marcel Granet. We are certainly not wrong in comparing the Tao with an axis or the center of a circle. Tao is not 'causa prima' (to speak in a scholastical western term) it is the everywhere-existing center of the cosmic context. Tao is the deepest origin and center of all beings.—(I risk to compare it

with recent currents of German philosophy, I think here at Max Müller or Jean Gebser. The new intention of loosing the dialectic, already in Aristotle existing 'either-or' in favour of a 'as well as' or the 'in'.)

From mythology and religion we know that all contrasts are contained in the divine as the mystery which embraces all contradictions. All traditions of mankind show the longing of men for a perfect integration into the original oneness which is plenty and emptiness together. I don't want to pursue the different methods of the Chinese Taoists and Buddhists (meditation, regulation of respiration etc.) to reach the Tao this original unity and oneness and to see the mystery of the beginning of all beings. As you know the Taoistic and Buddhistic meditation is a process of emptying of the self. Non-being, absolute emptiness and Tao are closely related to each other. So writes Wang Pi one of the representatives of the famous Hsüan-hsüeh-doctrine in his commentary to the Tao-te-ching that Tao is only another word for emptiness and non-being.

This attitude of mind we find also in Islamic mysticism specially in its second period. I remind you only names as Ibn Arabi, 'Omar ibn al-Farid, Farid ed-din 'Attār and specially Jelāl ed-din Rumi who uses many symbols for the unification with the divine oneness, the tauhid.

It is, of course, not possible to give now a general survey of Islamic mysticism its origin and historical development. It's also impossible to describe the different mystic systems and methods and to present the innumerable mystic personalities in the Islamic history. As you perhaps know the Orientalists distinguish in the history of Islamic mysticism between two periods: 'waḥdat al-shūḥud'=unity of witness and 'waḥdat al-wuġūd'=unity of existence. In the first period (until the 11th and 12th century) a strict distinction according to the Islamic religion was made between creator and creature, God and man. In the mystic experience of unity the mystic bears witness to this unity which itself is only a seeming one because the immense distance between God and man remains.—In the second period 'waḥdat al-wuġūd' the accent lies more on a monistic understanding of the whole creation, there is principally no difference between creator and creature. The symbol is here the drop of water that loses its boundaries and 'individuality' and falls back into the ocean from where it came. Here is the famous Persian mystic Jelal ed-din Rumi representative of a generation of monistically imbued mystics in Persia and on the Indian sub-continent who sang of the divine abundance of the universe

('hama ost' = all is he) with their experience; these mystics are close to the Chinese and Buddhist mystics who have become united with the Tao or dissolved in the nirvana.

But let us have a short look on Rumi's system and experience. Jelal ed-din Rumi, born 1207 in Balch (nowadays in Afghanistan) settled later on in Konya (Turkey). He became professor of theology there in 1230. He became preoccupied ever more deeply with mysticism in the following years. On November 30, 1244, he encountered the wandering dervish Shams ed-din Tābrizi and this mysterious personage became to him the embodiment of the divine beloved. The close relation with his mystic teacher aroused the jealousy of family and students. Shams ed-din had to leave the city, but returned later upon the request of Rumi and was murdered by jealous student Searching for him, Rumi grew into a poet and mystic who expressed his search in ardent verses and eventually found the beloved in himself and identified himself with the beloved. On December 17, 1273 Jelal ed-din Rumi died and the honorary title of 'Maulana' was bestowed on him. The symbolism used by Rumi is derived from the Arabic-Persian tradition. Mystic wine and the beloved tavern are themes that had been familiar in poetry for a long time. Many allusions to the Qoran and God's archeternal covenant with mankind. The personages of the Qoran are transformed into symbols of general character. Moses is for instance the one to whom the divine light manifested itself and who turned the staff into a snake through heavenly force: he thus becomes the symbol of the mystic beloved who has the power to transform and give life to anything coming close to him. Rumi certainly knew the theories of mystic love that had crystalized in the course of the centuries and culminated in the doctrine of one's own Ego being extinguished unto the beloved. The lover henceforth is only a mirror through which the beloved manifests himself; he has no longer an existence of himself: it is only the beloved who lives and speaks inside of him. This thesis, for which the ground had been prepared from the theoretical angle by the views and works of Ahmed Ghazzali (died 1126) and his disciple 'Ain al-Qudat al-Hamadani (1230), found its realization in Rumi: Even though he might have been influenced by monistic trends as represented in particular by Ibn al-Arabi, he thinks also in terms of personal relationships: return to the prince, home-coming into the custody of the loving friend, complete devotion to the mysterious beloved. So he speaks frequently in dualistic metaphors, but knows as well the un-forming of every individuality and the merging into the divine ocean. Rumi arrives at a tota-

lizing comprehension that leaves the rational philosophical, the Platonic thinking behind—I remind you the influence of the Platonic and Neoplatonic idea of lover-beloved and love on Islamic mysticism—and penetrates to mystic depths where Shams ed-din is really nothing but a crystal within the light of the sun is refracted. Already at this point the difference in the philosophical theological theories about love becomes evident, between the Platonians and Neoplatonians on one side and Rumi on the other :

Plato's concept of love is rational, Rumi's idea of love irrational and cosmic. Love—ishq—is a cosmogonical principle in the theory of Rumi. He says for instance:

در لبودی عشق هست کر بدی

“If there had not been love, how could there have been existence?” It may be interesting to continue the confrontation between Rumi and Plato. Rumi contrasted with Plato is an Irrationalist. In him the position of reason and love are reversed. He does not believe in the simple possibility of knowing the ground of being through theoretical reason. The individual reason cannot comprehend the unity of essence and existence. Reason is a light not an end in itself. Life in its essence is not intellectual, the eternal beauty is the offulgence of truth. The Eros of Plato is theoretically intelligible and the ishq of Rumi defies all descriptions. A characteristic feature of Rumi's world is that his central conception is not truth or knowledge of God but life and love. Love is a miraculous power of transformation which is to be seen in the whole of nature. (cf YY / wu hsing). God is love and love God himself, effective and everpresent in the whole creation:

هر چه جز، عشق است شد ما کول، عشق
دو جهان یک زانه بهش لوال، عشق

“Everything except love is consumed by love: to the beak of love the two worlds are but a single grain.”

God the love is the all-embracing spiritual organism, the reality in all beings, the unity of being (wahdat al-wugud). This is the conclusion to which Rumi's interpretation of assimilation as a process of love leads him. Here then we find the difference between the Eros of Plato and the ishq of Rumi. The former leading to the contemplation of impersonal intellectual beauty and the latter leading us to partake of infinitive life by becoming organs in the life of life which is love. He says :

بس چه باشد عشق دریائی عدم در شکسته عقل را آلبا قدم

“Then what is love : The sea of non-being ; then the foot of the intellect is broken”— The term ‘sea of Non-being’ brings taoistic thoughts to mind. Of course it is difficult to point out specific distinctions, this would mean to think along western lines and hence to split up the overall experience. But I am sure that Rumis concept of love as the ground of all beings and the Tao have something in common. Also the most famous muslim mystic of the early period Al-Hallaj (executed in Bagdad 922) offers for our subject very interesting statements. As you perhaps know was Al-Hallāj later on called ‘monistic’ because of his legendary sentence—spoken in a state of *extasis*—‘Ana ‘l-haq’ (I am the absolute truth). But I could quote a lot of dualistic formulas proving that he has always seen the immense distance between creator and creature in spite of being intimately united with the divine. May I offer you here an example out of his poems which is also significant in another aspect :

هویت بکلی کل هیک یا قدسی مکا شغفی مگر کانک فی نفسی

“With my whole being (existence) have I embraced your whole love of my holiness. You revealed yourself to me that you are inside me.” If we try to explain the first line we must constate that there are there concepts ‘whole being’, ‘whole love’ and ‘holiness’. The author is of course conscious that he—being a creature—cannot embrace in his existence the divine existence or the divine love. Al-Al-Hallāj will say—and this results from the second line—that he became a bearer of the mysterious divine life and this divine life has a bipolar structure. (May we remember the sentence of Lao-tse about Yin and Yang). As another explanation of this sentence may we take the term ‘ishq dhāti’ of Al-Hallāj. ‘Ishaq dhāti’ does not mean ‘essential love’, it means ‘God loves himself’. he is lover and beloved et the same time, and this eternal and timeless action is love. The universe, the creation and in it all beings are part of the divine and manifest the structure of the inner-divine life.

In order to conclude our little essay of comparing mystical experiences may I be allowed to say that even in complete different cultural contexts we find at the ground some where the same fundamental human ideas and experiences. To exchange and discuss these common ideas and experiences could be the beginning of a fruitful intercultural dialogue which becomes more and more necessary in our modern world.

