

On the history of dualism and phases

By Helmut Jäger, January 2022

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We are all familiar with the yin/yang doctrine and the five phases of transformation from the Chinese worldview and usually assume that these originated in China. Helmut Jäger places them in a larger context and shows possible origins of dualistic thinking in human history. He points to connections of the Chinese transformational phases to the teachings of Zarathustra and the Greek elemental teachings, which possibly already became known before the turn of time together with Unani, the "Greek medicine" in Asia. According to this, the source of the present model could actually come from the Caucasus region.

According to Hippolytus of Rome (died around 235) Zarathustra Pythagoras is said to have said that "the causes of all existing things are from the beginning two, namely father and mother. And the father is the light and the mother the darkness: And the parts of the light are the warmth, the dryness, the light and fast, and those of the darkness the cold, damp, heavy and slow. And of these, of man and woman, is composed the whole cosmos." (Hippolytus: Refutatio contra omnes haereses, quoted from Paul Wendland: Refutatio Omnium Haeresium, 1897, Reprint: de Gruyter Verlag

Since the beginning of my first encounter with Chinese movement art more than twenty years ago, I have been trying to "understand". On the one hand, I mean: accepting knowledge and skills that others have acquired and that are imparted to me through writing, words or training. At the same time I associate with the word "understand" a connecting of what I have received with personal realities that result from my experiences, my culture and my socialization. Everything of which I believe to have understood something is based on personal appropriation. (Helmut Jäger: Chinese-European or European-Chinese Movement Art, TQJ 2013, 11:34-40)

The following text presents hypotheses as to how historical connections might have developed. I consider these plausible and present them for discussion. I welcome corrections of my errors or additions.

In the Chinese philosophy the transformation of the great opposites took place within the framework of a formless and nameless whole. Zarathustra saw all existence flooded by an incessantly flowing energy. In Europe, on the other hand, dualism broke down into categorical opposites. The creation of a divisive, partial God rewarded believers and punished unbelievers. Aristotle complementarily invented conceptual truth, certain and provable knowledge (episteme).

Until then, European philosophy was "too clever to be true" (Karl Popper: The World of Parmenides, Piper 1998). Since then, however, the Western worldview has been characterized by strong opposites that are mutually exclusive: true - untrue, right - wrong, good - evil, material - spiritual, Surprisingly, because the technical progress would be unthinkable without a physics that has perceived undivided system interrelations and the subjectivity of observations for 100 years. The eastern dynamic dualism views are clearly closer to the regularities of modern systems natural science than the fixation on single factors, which increasingly determines the world view in the West. (Ian McGilchrist: The Matter with things. Perspectiva Press 2021)

The contrasts between "black and white", "zero and one", "good and evil" are relatively young.

All animals construct differences between "themselves" and others. They have to judge whether something is useful or dangerous for them. Otherwise they could not displace rivals, make prey or defend themselves against enemies. Nevertheless, simple animals remain embedded in an overall context on which they unconditionally depend and which they can hardly influence.

Mammals create a group identity in addition to their individual one, which sometimes becomes more important than their individual "being". With the appearance of the primates, the early humans and especially with the appearance of the genus Homo sapiens the social connections gained importance. The big, undivided whole began to separate very gradually. Flowing: just as ions in the acid bath of a battery migrate to the poles and thus generate voltage.

Typical for the species Homo sapiens is the ability to form close pairs and relationships. In Greek mythology, the coming into being of man begins (after the time of the Titans) with the appearance of three divine brothers: Eros, Pothos and Himeros. (Erich Neumann. History of the Origin of Consciousness, 1949, Patmos 2004).

Eros does not mean "satisfaction through sex" (as with our cousins, the dwarf chimpanzees Bonobos), but symbolizes an energetic, purposeful tension. For early humans, almost insurmountable obstacles stood between the arrow and its target (fulfillment in the arms of the beloved). Hardships and mortal dangers, the overcoming of which required heroic feats that could only be endured through longing (Himeros) and desire (Pothos).

First cult objects 30,000 years ago symbolized the goals of sexual desire. Cave paintings and early rock drawings of the same era, on the other hand, reflected dynamically changing unity with a surrounding animal reality.

Psychologists such as Julian Jaynes, Niclas Humphrey, Jean Clottes, and Ian McGilchrist assumed that "ego disorders" (as an expression of insufficient coordination of the cerebral hemispheres) characterized the psychological "normal state" until four thousand years ago. The everyday life of these people seems to have been determined by obsessions: by hearing inner voices,

which were assigned to spirits, ancestors, goddesses or gods and which interfered (especially in case of strong burdens or stress) commenting or commanding in courses of action.

Sometime 10,000 years ago, abstract lines, circles and patterns first appeared. At the latest from then on, professional mediators worked in the tribes between the worlds of the absolute (which is not accessible to everyday senses) and what is experienced in the present. These shamans could fall into a trance of possession and then report on their journeys.

Gradually, however, people began to make their own decisions. The coordination of the brain hemispheres improved, so that several inner voices could be better merged into a whole. Trance phenomena occurred much less frequently and had to be artificially induced by rituals, drumming or dancing. Spontaneously they often occurred only with prophets, healers or priests.

The philosophy of the undivided circle

One of the first philosophical-religious symbols represents the undivided circle: as an image of the eternal becoming and passing away in a great whole. Later it was often represented as a snake eating itself (so-called ouroboros). The circle symbolism was a sign of uninterrupted-eternal movement in a universe that contains everything (or also nothing) (Chinese: Wuji). According to this view of reality, man was only one of an infinite number of parts of divinely interwoven nature.

In the Caucasus, in addition, another symbol appeared, which is still found today in many textiles and carpets: the buta symbol. It is the symbol of eternal, uninterrupted flowing energy. Its flame shape is reminiscent of the "burning mountains" (Yanar Dag) in Azerbaijan: of the occurrence of inflamed natural gas that escapes from rock crevices there.

The Ouroboros snake was also common in the Caucasus region. But there it stopped eating itself at some point. Instead, it crawled through the full circle from the bottom up, dividing it into two equal halves. Thus the infinitely changing cycle was interrupted. The thus newly created symbol is called "symbol of death" in Azerbaijan: Because from now on there was "beginning and end" and "birth and death".

The circle philosophy ended simultaneously with the collapse of the old concept of rule by the strong young woman and the male hero. And with its replacement by peasant frohn and submission to the power of the great urbanized empires. This change of consciousness was sung about in the Gilgamesh epic (around 2,200 B.C., preserved around 1,700 B.C.) (German among others: Marix 2006, C. H. Beck 2007).

This first coherent history of mankind is based, if necessary, on historically documented events that had taken place in this region a few centuries earlier: 4,300 years ago, the king Anubani of Lulubi (Persia: Zagros, Kermānschāh) had himself depicted as giving captives to the war-hunting-love-goddess Inanna. A little later he was defeated by Naram Sin, the "world ruler of Akkad": Inanna was banished to the underworld, and Naram Sin now paid homage to the male god Enil. In the Gilgamesh epic it is described how after this victory of the neolithic world order (mediated by a snake) death came into the world. And that from now on it was necessary to take care of the well-being in the hereafter.

A few hundred years later in Mesopotamia the revolution of consciousness was completed with the destruction of the female Tiamet dragon by the male god Marduk. Since then, in many of the later Eurasian cultures, magical serpents and mythological dragons have been killed, eliminating the ancient symbols of nomadic principles of rule by strong women and men. Picasso described this war, which is still waged today, in his Bullfight series. It pays homage to the slaying of the ancient Eros macho of hunter-gatherers (symbolized as a massive bull) by the modern horseman, who now rules nature and is celebrated. (Picasso's obsession with bullfighting, Guardian 4/20/2017)

Instead of eroticism and circular worldview, linear, goal-oriented power now reigned.

Dualism - Philosophy - Religion

The first monotheistic dualism was raised to the state religion 2,600 years ago in the Median-Persian multi-ethnic state by Kyros II and Dareius the I.. A few hundred years earlier, the priest-philosopher Zarathustra had invoked the struggle of good (the unity god Ahura Mazda) against evil (the devil Ahriman). The "One God" would be victorious and thus dissolve the dualism once again. But until then man must actively decide for the good. According to this worldview, fire was a symbol of eternally flowing (divine) energy: it permeated the elements that made up the world and transformed them into one another (Sina Vodjan: Zarathustra. Membran International, 2006).

Zarathustrian temples were built quadrangular. They held an eternal flame in their center, and some are preserved as in Ateshgar, Azerbaijan, above a naturally burning natural gas well. In Ateshgar, it is now taught that the edges of the temple symbolized the four "Greek" elements of "fire, water, air, earth" and the flame symbolized the "quintessence" (transformation). However, it is more likely that first the teachings of Zoroaster seeped into Greece with the Persian invasion, and influenced the philosophy there, including Heraclitus, who considered fire the basis of all being. (He lived from 520 to 460 BCE in Ephesus in Asia Minor, which had come under the control of the Medes and Persians before his birth). Zarathustra's teachings are certainly several hundred years older than the "Greek elemental doctrine", from which the first model of medicine was later developed.

The philosophy of Zarathustra remained untouched even after Alexander's invasion in a small part of the country of the new (then Macedonian) empire. In the remaining regions conquered by the Macedonians, the religion of the Mother of God and the Savior (Soter) was propagated. Only the ruler of the South Caucasus, Atropates, a general of the Median-Persian army, was able to achieve religious autonomy for his country through skillful negotiation. Here, the monotheism of Zoroaster remained largely intact, allowing for its renaissance centuries later under the Sassanids.

The Sassanids extended their domain to Jerusalem in the 6th century (in competition with Eastern Rome). Zoroastrian religious philosophy was therefore very present in the eastern Mediterranean and the Arabian Peninsula until shortly before the spread of Islam.

Without Zoroaster dualism, the three religions based on the Old Testament would not exist in the form we know them. The Persian Cyrus II was welcomed by the Jewish elite in Babylonian exile as a God-sent bringer of salvation and enabled their return. His successors protected the growth and maturation of Jewish monotheism, whose roots go back to the teachings of Pharaoh Amenophis IV (Akhenaten).

However, unlike the Jewish religious tradition, Zarathustra's god was not partisan. The divine principle (which was represented in a flame) was more like an energetic flow that permeated everything. Very similar to the idea formulated by Baruch de Spinoza in the 17th century, "There is only one infinite substance, excluding from itself all determination and negation, which is called God, and is the One Being in all existence." (Baruch de Spinoza, 1632 - 1677. *Tractatus theologico-politicus*)

Zoroastrian dualistic ideas (good - evil, heaven - hell, God - devil) characterize all three major Old Testament-oriented world religions to this day.

The first medicine model

For over 100,000 years, shamans have been reconciling the sick and suffering with invisible forces. And until today traditional esotericists and modern "placeologists" effect healings by psychologically memorable rituals, mortifications, applications and sacrificial ceremonies. Probably even longer, midwives had helped women in childbirth, experienced hunters had splinted or cauterized wounds, older women had tended children and nursed the sick, and herbalists had sought out, prepared, and applied medicinal plants.

It was only about 2,500 years ago that people in Europe and Asia first began to wonder how health or illness came about (without any influence from hallucinated gods, demons or spirits). And whether one could influence these connections within the framework of a superordinate explanatory model.

These first medical philosophers wanted to promote and maintain health by pondering (Latin "meditatio") how to find the "middle" (Latin "medias"). And so they created the first medical model that could represent the complex reality in a simple and manageable way. From this it was then possible to derive simple rules of conduct. In this way, diseases were to be prevented from occurring in the first place.

Their colleagues in natural philosophy, who were interested in more general contexts, tried to understand the infinitely large (the "cosmology") and the infinitely small (the "atom") around 500 BCE. Some of them assumed that everything was one and interconnected: either moving in itself (Heraclitus) or static-immobile (Parmenides). If human beings were thus part of a larger network of relationships and if they were flooded by the "breath of the universe", the external forces would have to work equally within and the great superordinate harmonies would also have to be reflected in every being.

The first medical philosophers, who had similar thoughts in the great cultural spheres of Eurasia, were neither interested in the craft of nursing, nor in herbalism, nor in shamanism. Instead, they wanted to construct quasi-religious models from which all connections and contradictions should be explainable. Quite similar to the Chinese Book of Changes (Yijing), which, however, did not deal with health or disease.

One of the first thinkers of a medical model that did without a belief in spirits or gods was Alkmaion of Kroton, who is said to have belonged to the sect of the Pythagoreans. For him, health was considered the result of an inner balance (isonomy). Imbalances of the elements interacting in life led to disorders or disease. Like his contemporary Anaximander, he recognized only apparent opposites in reality, which ultimately arose from a single entity and which then manifested themselves as warm, cold, dry or moist, among other things.

The concept of Alkmaion was subsequently expanded by Empedocles. Possibly he was also a (believing) Pythagorean and furthermore a disciple of Parmenides, who had taught a static-unchangeable unity of all being. He held the view that being consisted of a few very clearly defined elements, which were mixed differently and were in an eternal cycle of change. Through love (connection) these elements nourish each other, health arises. By hate they would be separated and repelled from each other: the condition of the illness. Anaximander saw between such elements the apeiron (the breath of life), Empedocles called it "the soul" and Aristotle "a fifth element": the quintessence.

In practical terms, the new physicians equipped with this model focused on maintaining the state of health: limiting harmful environmental influences, especially climate (drought, heat, cold, wetness), lack of cleanliness or poor nutrition, reducing self-inflicted imbalances within, moderation, health-conscious behavior and exercise (gymnastics). The pneuma or breath should flow.

Independently of these models, of course, medicinal herbs and minor surgery were used, but then they did not ask why it helped if it worked.

The thought building with four elements and a fifth, quasi in another dimension, migrated with the military physicians of Alexander to Bactria and spread from there in the Eurasian-Indian cultural area.

Unani

Unani or Yunani (Indian for "Greek medicine") represents an original form of the first system of medicine that has survived to the present day, which did not involve the construction of spirits, demons or gods and was based on the philosophy of the five-phase doctrine for maintaining health.

In order to effectively diagnose diseases and also treat them according to the doctrine, the model had to be developed into a "four-juices doctrine". Depending on the patient's condition, attempts were made to remove blockages and congestion of the internal fluid and energy flow and thus restore balance.

An original form of the teaching was systematized in the 9th and 10th centuries as "Arabic-Islamic medicine" by Abū ibn Sīnā (Latin Avicenna, born around 980 CE) and, in addition to the basic philosophical principles, then also contained detailed dietary, medicinal and surgical prescriptions, instructions and recipes. In the 12th and 13th centuries, the Arabic works were translated into Latin in Catholic monasteries and then migrated back to Europe in a primitive variant, where cholera was still being fought with bloodletting in the 19th century on the basis of the humoral pathology. Its spirit is still alive today in "purging procedures" (fasting, intestinal cleansing). And it is also present in some methods of European and Chinese medicine.

Variants of Unani teachings (such as Ayurveda and Tibetan medicine) additionally integrated many other traditional healing herbal teachings, massage techniques, shamanistic rituals, and religious Vedic or Buddhist concepts.

Many contemporary Unani physicians in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India are attempting to standardize their methods, are training their courses, are striving for quality assurance (checking preparations for harmful substances such as pesticides or heavy metals), and are sorting out dangerous practices of humoral pathology (for example, phlebotomy).

The five phases in China

In contrast to the Mesopotamian-European divination tradition of "if-then" (from cause to effect), Yijing numerology realistically (i.e., unpredictably) maps unmanageably complex and random situations from a simple binary number system. From (+) and (-) four transformation signs arise, from which eight trigrams are derived. The combination of two trigrams then forms one of 64 words. Or of possibilities, how a transformation phase just "could be". The Confucian refined technique described a (randomly drawn) personal situation as it "could" be right now. Then it was suggested that the statements and recommendations that fit the possible situation be adopted "as if" they actually applied to the current situation. In modern coaching this method is called "reframing".

Around perhaps 300 BCE, the five-phase teaching then seeped into China: either with the traders of the Silk Road and via alternative routes through Tibet and Mongolia, or perhaps missionaries who had integrated the Greek medical religion into their own concepts of faith moved with the caravans: the Mahayana Buddhists of the Graeco-Indian mixed culture of Gandhara.

The Greek numerical image "five" did not fit well with the numerical system of the Yijing. The "elements or phases" were familiar from the Yin/Yang teachings, but according to the Yijing hexagrams the number six played an important role (examples: six arts (liù yì), Six healing sounds (liù zì jué, six stages of disease in relation to Tai Yang, Shao Yang, Yang Ming, Tai Yin, Jue Yin, Shao Yin according to Zhang Zhongjing (150 - 219 CE). The "five-phase teaching" had to be modified in religious Daoism to be useful. (Robert B. Jefferson: The Doctrine of the elixir, Combe Spring Press 1982)

In the Chinese numerology of Yijing, the basis rests on "Wuji", the "undivided One" that integrates everything. It divides into the duality of life: light - dark, day - night, yin and yang in constant alternation. This results in four phases (young and old Yang and young and old Yin) and between them the alternation or the passage through a neutral phase (Earth).

The integration of the Greek model (as a quadrilateral with a central circle) was favored by its similarity to Chinese coins threaded on strings and to the Chinese spoon compass rotating from its center. (Paul Unschuld: Forgotten Traditions of Ancient Chinese Medicine: A Chinese View from the Eighteenth Century, Paradigm Publications 1998)

Anyway, Daoism considered statements only as symbols and not as the reality itself. Therefore, it could easily transform various teachings and characters for the benefit of alchemy, hoping for the discovery of transformation cycles. The resulting image of Wu Xing ("earth, metal, water, wood, fire") was eventually merged with the five virtues of Confucius: being kind, righteous, respectful of authority, wise, and serious.

Dong Zhongshu (179 - 104 BCE) further expanded this concept and united Confucianism with the Yin/Yang doctrine, the five phases (Wu Xing), the five heroes, the five colors, the essence doctrine (Qi) and with the principle of heaven - earth - man. He created a frame of reference with mutually interacting forces of bewildering complexity and with man at the center.

Temporary decline and return to Europe

Unani was ousted because of the obvious unsuccessfulness of humoral pathology (bloodletting, cupping, intestinal cleansing) in the face of epidemics, and from the end of the 19th century was replaced by the (still dominant medical) dogma of germ theory.

The Chinese variant of the five-phase doctrine was known in the West only to insiders until the end of the 19th century. The dynamic renaissance of the "five-phase doctrine" began long after World War II with the spread of the various components of so-called "Traditional Chinese Medicine" (Paul Unschuld (ed.): Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen, Univ California Press 2003 http://biblio.nhatnam.ru/Huang_Di_Nei_Jing_Su_Wen-Paul_Unschuld.pdf, Ancient Classics of Chinese Medicine: Ling Shu/Zhen-Jing, Czygnus Verlag 2015).

Timeless lasting meaning

The "Five Phase Model" emphasizes constant change in relationships, interactions and interconnections. (Paul Unschuld: What is Medicine? Western and Eastern Ways of Healing, Beck 2003) It portrays the world as a living system rather than a pile of individual factors and dead facts. With this view it resembles modern natural science much more than linear, mechanical medical ideas of an enemy who is the cause of all evil and after whose successful fight everything will be good again.

The five-phase model can be applied as a vivid model "how the world - simply-painted-on - could be". Similar as it can be useful for the understanding of quantum physics to imagine an orange floating in the middle of a cathedral (atomic nucleus) and being surrounded by a pinhead in the dome: the electron. It is useful to work with vivid pictures for the beginning of the understanding of system interrelationships. As long as it is not claimed to be "undoubtedly true", for example that "electron and atomic nucleus" really exist. If a model is used, it is irrelevant whether it is true and correct. For example, sailors can orient themselves much better if they believe that the stars "rose or set," which of course they do not.

So using a model like the "Five Phases" can (in the context of relational medicine) open up possibilities for action. It can stimulate reorientations: for example, with regard to diet, exercise, and dealing with stresses and adverse life circumstances. And it can help to reduce the demand for products and services on the medical market.