

Introduction

For millennia Chinese readers have seen the *T'ai hsüan ching* (here entitled *The Elemental Changes* and called the *Mystery* by its devotees) as a true guide for those seeking the Way of the sages. Today, in the West, readers will find the *Mystery* an essential tool for understanding the Tao as it operates in the cosmos, in the psyche, or in sacred texts like the *I ching*. Written in 2 B.C., the *Mystery* represents the first grand synthesis of the dominant strands of Chinese thought. As it weaves together elements of Confucianism, Taoism, Yin/yang Five Phases theory, alchemy, and astrology into a systematic, organic whole, all the fundamental components of early Chinese belief appear within its pages.

As a book of divination, the *Mystery* provides a method for weighing alternative courses of action. As a book of philosophy, it conveys a sense of the elemental changes in life. Intricately structured in eighty-one tetragrams (four-line graphs), the *Mystery* accounts for the movements of the sun, moon, and stars, the shifting rhythms of the seasons, the alternations of night and day, and the ebb and flow of cosmic energy—in short, all the dynamic relations of the realms of Heaven, Earth, and Man. It addresses questions of Fate, assessing the degree of control that individuals have over their destinies. It suggests the fabric that binds families, communities, and states together.

As a book of poetry, the *Mystery* unfolds a literary vision of seeming simplicity but surpassing depth. The long poem divides into short sections of rhyming couplets that focus upon a single mundane event or familiar phenomenon. An ancient Chinese proverb says, “If you don’t know what is far away, look for it near by.” It is through the concrete and the obvious that the *Mystery* approaches the intangible and the abstruse. At the same time, Yang Hsiung drew upon his vast knowledge of archaic texts to construct imagery that is allusive, multilayered, and complex—a fit paradigm for the mysterious Tao threading its way through the ever-changing whole of human and cosmic existence.

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In the title *T'ai hsüan ching*, the word *t'ai* (pronounced "tie") simply means "great" or "supreme." *Ching* (pronounced "jing" as in "jingle") is an honorific title bestowed on a work to indicate its status as a sacred classic in the Chinese canon. The term *hsüan* (which rhymes with "tan") carries an enormous range of meaning from "black" to "darkness" to "hidden" to "mystery." Its overtones are stillness, isolation, nondifferentiation, and inaccessibility by purely rational processes. In early Chinese thought, such ideas bear no unpleasant connotations. They express that aspect of experience which can be known only by quiet and deep contemplation, or by special illumination. Yang Hsiung uses *hsüan* in his title to indicate the profound state of darkness, silence, ambiguity, and indefiniteness out of which creation springs. In the cosmogonic scheme, it is the undifferentiated state out of which first yin and yang, then the Five Phases, and ultimately the myriad phenomena of the experiential world develop. In Nature as humans perceive it, *hsüan* is the latency out of which individual things are born and out of which events shape themselves. In the sage—that is, the ideal human being, the perfect student of the *Mystery*—*hsüan* is the spiritual inwardness that precedes conscious decision and action, insuring that they will be in harmony with the divine process known as "the Way." *Hsüan*, in other words, signifies the creative aspect of the Tao wherever it is manifested. In Yang's *Mystery*, the ineffable Tao, although without visible form, contains unseen all the myriad forms, patterns, and categories that underlie process and interaction.

In divination, a person seeks association, re-creation, and reintegration with the Tao. That is why the divination begins with a seemingly random event, the turn of the coin, by which the inquirer signals his or her acceptance of Time and change. To welcome, rather than resist, these unsettling aspects of human existence becomes the indispensable first step in the kind of creative thinking needed to respond flexibly and appropriately to ever-changing, complex situations.

SOURCES OF THE *MYSTERY*

The *Mystery* was composed in response to three important philosophical texts: the *Tao te ching* of Lao tzu, the *I ching* book of divination, and the *Analects* of Confucius. From the *Tao te ching*, the *Mystery* draws its characterization of the mysterious, even paradoxical, Tao as the basis for all existence in the cosmic order. From the *I ching*, the *Mystery* borrows the notion of the crucial importance of timing with regard to cosmic operations in general, and to individual fate in particular. From the *Analects* of Confucius, the *Mystery* takes the idea that humanity is sacred only insofar as it creates true community.

The philosophical classic, the *Tao te ching* (often called the *Lao tzu* after its author), begins its description of the divine Tao with the following poem:

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The way that can be told is not the common way.
The name that can be named is not the common name.
What has no name is the beginning of Heaven and Earth.
What has a name is the mother of the myriad creatures.
Those without desires contemplate its secrets.
Those who have desires contemplate its periphery.
These two emerge together, but differ in name.
Together, they are called "Mystery."
Mystery of mysteries,
Gateway to the myriad secrets.

Although there is some disagreement about the exact meaning of this poem, most who take it seriously believe that it presents the mystic Tao in two different aspects: the Tao as the ineffable fountainhead outside of and prior to phenomenal experience and as the immanent process that actualizes things and events from their potentiality. Joining these two mysteries is the never-broken connection between the changes we see and the unchanging ground of all process.

The *Lao tzu* passage finds its echo in the *Mystery*:

The Mystery of which we speak in hidden places unfolds the myriad species, without revealing a form of its own. It fashions the stuff of Emptiness and Formlessness, giving birth to the regulations. Tied to the gods in Heaven and the spirits on Earth, it fixes the models. It pervades and assimilates past and present, originating all categories. It evolves and segregates yin and yang, generating the *ch'i*. Now severed, now conjoined, [through the interaction of yin and yang, the various aspects of] Heaven-and-Earth are fully provided indeed!

Like that of Lao tzu, Yang Hsiung's vision of the Mystery bridges the gap between cosmos and consciousness, between the inexpressible and the concrete.

The *Mystery* draws its emphasis on the importance of timely action from the *I ching*, or *Book of Changes*. An emphasis on the choice of an auspicious time for initiating activity is noticeable in most, if not all divination texts. The *I ching* goes beyond vague generalities, however, to explain timeliness as a learned response to the dynamic, but unitary Tao that engenders the multiplicity of changes. Therefore, the *Changes* text makes a critical distinction between "what is within form" (i.e., existing in the phenomenal world of change) and "what is beyond form" (the eternal patterns embedded in a ultimate state that gives rise to and determines form).

The dynamic basis for change lies in the complementary opposition between two different modes of the "stuff" (*ch'i*) of all things: an activating

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mode called yang (associated with light, activity, and heat) and a responsive mode called yin (associated with dark, rest, and cold). In operation, each of these two in turn gains strength until it is dominant, at which point it yields to the advance of the other. Since the waxing of one is in exact proportion to the waning of its partner, a perpetual cycle of birth, death, and rebirth can occur without any permanent imbalance. This alternation of the two modes spawns all change. But since both the quality (i.e., the degree of refinement) and the proportion of yin and yang vary in individual things, each thing in the universe comes to possess a unique combination of properties. This accounts for all the variation that we see in the world around us. Therefore, yin and yang *ch'i* as both universal “life-stuff” and dynamic process integrate things by making them subject to common forces and regular phases, while generating endless changes.

The *I ching* specifically tries to locate the “gate of change”—that phase of transition where things and events first come out of formlessness into an intermediate state of bare perceptibility (often identified with the image or symbol). After passing through this gate, things eventually develop concrete form and fully individuated characteristics. There are two distinct benefits to be gained from locating this gate of change. First, only during an early stage can human beings hope to have some degree of control over natural process; once things have “passed the gate” (i.e., become fully individuated), they are less amenable to outside control. Second, by understanding the process of individuation out of primordial chaos, the seeker can hope to recapture the unitary reality that lies behind the world as we know it. In this way, he or she may align the self with the divine aspects of creation in a process called “centering.” As the *I ching* says, “To know the incipient stirrings of change: Therein lies the divine!” Two early poems in the *Mystery* point to a similar truth:

From small defects he can return.
He can then be taken as model.
That minor defects can be turned
Means: He need not go far to set things right.

Failing in small things,
Attack them yourself
At the source.
Attacking minor failings oneself
Means: As yet, others do not know of them.

The *I ching* suggests that the wise person, perceiving the patterns “beyond form,” is able roughly to predict when trends are about to arise. Then, in a timely fashion, that person may adjust to changing external circumstances. The first hexagram in the *I ching* provides a good example of this in

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successive images. The dragon (symbol of the perfected human being) is at first hidden. Next it "appears in the field." Then it flies high. Only at the end does it have "cause to repent." The essence of the dragon does not change, but the creature adapts its conduct as it travels through the life-cycle of birth, maturity, and decay. Like the marvelous dragon, the would-be sage modifies her own conduct in anticipation of the cyclical changes wrought by time. In that way, at the very least, physical danger can be avoided; and at best, the wise can "ride on" (i.e., take advantage) of coming trends to secure good fortune. Since the divination responses in the *Mystery* are keyed directly to the calendar, the close relationship between Time and individual fate is more clearly identified in Yang Hsiung's text than in the *I ching*.

Just as the *Mystery* draws upon Lao Tzu's *Tao te ching* for its characterization of the single, undifferentiated primordial chaos, and upon the *I ching* (the *Book of Changes*) for its description of the gate between the formless Tao and the multiplicity of things, so Yang Hsiung's masterwork reflects early Confucian tradition in its consideration of human virtue. Yang Hsiung stresses an important truth found in the Confucian *Analects*: the individual can only realize his innate human potential if he learns how to join with other human beings in creative and harmonious union. For Confucius and his early followers, the proper end of life is a scrupulous attention to human relations, whose success requires the mediating "language" of ritual practice. Harmony can prevail, Yang Hsiung assumes, only when "natural" distinctions of age, gender, and experience are upheld so that conflicts are minimized. At the same time, true union (defined by Yang Hsiung as a "meeting of the minds") can exist only when an individual understands others through a process of "likening to oneself" (*shu*, usually translated as "consideration" or "reciprocity"). Perfect human interaction, then, must come from a delicate balance of hierarchy and equality, just as perfect ritual depends equally upon external forms and an inner commitment to Goodness. Not surprisingly, the exact method of maintaining such balance in human relations, like the Tao itself, is inherently a Way "that cannot be told." In other words, no set rules can be given for it. The would-be sage can only be advised as to which course of action lies in the "right direction."

Yang expected people to consult books of divination to learn about fate. He knew that "ordinary folk" (not necessarily the unlettered) tend to consult such books in hopes of being told which course of action will benefit them most. He also knew that the sophisticated thinker would find much more in the divination process: divination may establish a close identification between the inquirer and the ancient author(s) of the divination text. As the questioner "immerses the self" ever more deeply in the sages, an intuition arises that allows the cryptic words on the page to apply to the particular

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situation at hand.¹ The quality of this intuition is the only proof that the questioner has fully “internalized the model.” Then, as Yang writes, “What is divine is not outside any longer.” In discovering the mind of the sages, then, the inquirer reverently engaged in the divination procedure learns to see into the recesses of his or her own heart. The enlightened reader perceives the sacred act of divination as the perfect paradigm for all moral acts, then, for all seek to “reanimate the old” through a complex process of identification and re-creation. In this way, the *Mystery* provides illumination for audiences at all levels of awareness. While the ordinary reader finds in it a series of examples outlining the decided advantages of moral behavior, the truly sympathetic reader engaged in a continuous dialogue with the text gradually uncovers a far more complicated analysis of the influence of personal morality and Time on individual fate.

THE PATH TO GOOD FORTUNE

The *Mystery* posits four major factors affecting the length and quality of a person’s life: Virtue, Tools, Position, and Time.

Virtue refers mainly to a roster of traditional virtues, including filial piety, honesty, loyalty, and modesty. In general, Yang believes that inner Goodness conveyed to other human beings through the language of ritual forms is what allows humans to reach their full creative potential: “the Way of humanity is to make contact.” Virtue is the single mode of behavior capable of fostering necessary social order while satisfying our most basic human needs to communicate. As a committed follower of Confucius, Yang Hsiung believes that perfect Virtue lies within the grasp of each and every human being, even if lamentably few choose to pursue its course.

By *Tools*, Yang Hsiung means not only material artifacts (like jars, stoves, and carts) but also the arts and institutions that civilize society. This single rubric covers such disparate items as compass and carpenter’s square, the Confucian Classics, the ritual system, supportive friendships, and the family, since all are tools for civilization. Thanks to the legacy of the ancient sages, all the proper Tools needed for civilization already exist. However, the individual can take full advantage of these available tools only if he or she has been trained in their proper use. By this training he or she acquires “practical wisdom” (*chih*). Without such training, the individual either ruins good Tools or chooses Tools that are inadequate or inappropriate to the task. Yang Hsiung provides many fine examples to illustrate his point. In one, a benighted soul lugs a boat overland, then rides a cart into water. By analogy, those who employ the teachings of the sages solely to acquire wealth, rank, or long life misapply the Tool designed to further self-cultivation and social harmony.

Position refers to both social rank and the physical location that the individual occupies at the precise moment when action is required. The

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stock example of good position is that of the ruler, who by his position (regardless of his character) has greater access to resources and opportunities (at least while he remains on the throne). By virtue of his Position, then, he has what we might call a “strategic advantage” over others. Being in the right place at the right time, tradition suggests, is at least partly a matter of luck, since even the great sage-master Confucius failed to secure a government position commensurate with his talents. But Confucius lived in troubled times. In well-ordered states Virtue helps to secure Position.

Time refers not only to the interlocking cycles of yin/yang and the Five Phases, it also covers the individual cycle of each phenomenon in the cosmos. Each unit of Time carries its own constraints and benefits. For example, at the age of ninety, women do not bear children, although they may be singularly honored for their accumulated wisdom and experience. For this reason, we can think of Time as synonymous with present (or timely) “opportunity.” Yet Time, insofar as it is produced by Heaven, lies essentially outside human control.

Yang Hsiung’s central arguments about the moral life all follow directly from his single statement that Time lies outside human control. Since individual human fate depends upon the interaction among four variables, one of which is Time, fate itself by definition lies largely beyond human control. Virtue, however, lies within the grasp of each and every dedicated individual. Tools and Position also depend, to a certain extent, upon human endeavor. Therefore, we can help to shape (if not absolutely determine) our destiny if we use the time we have to master Virtue, Tools, and Position, the three aspects of human existence that we *can* control.

Given the manifest advantages associated with the path of Goodness, the perceptive person, even if not yet perfectly good, should realize the inherent wisdom of becoming one with the eternal Tao. Since the Tao refuses to draw attention to its unseen cosmic operations, human beings must likewise learn to shun all self-promotion. Once a person is truly moral, he comes to “delight in the Way,” which is the goal of the sage and the best reward for a moral life. Only those who approach the Mystery through the three paths of Confucius, Lao tzu, and the *I ching* can appreciate both the fundamental unity of the Way and the multiplicity of its manifestations. Only then are they ready to become full partners in the miraculous triad of Heaven-Earth-Man.

STRUCTURAL COMPARISONS: THE *I CHING* AND THE *MYSTERY*

The structure of the *Mystery* is based on that of the *Changes*. By the first century B.C., the *I ching* consisted of a set of sixty-four texts, each associated with a six-line graph (or “hexagram”), in which component lines could be either solid or broken (signifying yang if solid, yin if broken). Under each hexagram, there are six assigned texts, each of which corresponds to one line of the graphic symbol (hence, the “Line Texts”). The core text of

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the *Mystery*, like that of its prototype, the *Changes*, presents a series of linear complexes. For the hexagram of the *Changes*, however, the *Mystery* substitutes a four-line tetragram whose component parts read from top to bottom (i.e., in the opposite order from the *Changes*). Also in contrast to the *Changes*, where lines are categorized as either yin (broken) or yang (unbroken), the divination procedure prescribed in Yang's instructions involves three possibilities for each line of the graph: (1) an unbroken line (correlated with Heaven), (2) a line broken once (representing Earth), or (3) a line broken twice (symbolizing Man as one of the triadic realms, living between Heaven and Earth). Four lines, each with three possibilities, mean that there are eighty-one (3^4) possible tetragrams in *Mystery*, rather than the sixty-four (2^6) hexagrams of the *Changes*. Each tetragram begins with a Head text in three parts: a title (which names one aspect of the comprehensive Mystery, such as "Measure" or "Diminishment"), an image that refers to the cycles of yin/yang, and a second image that chronicles the birth, growth, and decay of the myriad things of the universe. To each tetragram is appended nine separate Appraisal texts, which convey a sense of evolution over time, on the model of the Line Texts of the *Changes*.

In addition to the core text of eighty-one Heads with their 729 Appraisals, Yang Hsiung provides ten autocommentaries—on an analogy with the famous "Ten Wings" appended to the *I ching*. Generally speaking, the "Wings" commentaries relate the Line Texts to the moral, cosmological, and epistemological concerns of their authors, who were shaping a new Confucian orthodoxy in the closing centuries B.C. The *Mystery's* autocommentaries, which reflect the same theoretical interests, can be divided roughly into four kinds of essays: (1) treatises on cosmology; (2) lists of the standard correlations proposed by Yin/yang Five Phases theorists; (3) texts that explain the eighty-one tetragrams by reference to a microcosm, either a single tetragram or a pair of tetragrams; and (4) one text whose sole purpose is to reiterate the Appraisal themes.

There are four theoretical treatises on cosmology: the "Evolution," the "Illumination," the "Representations," and the "Diagram." The long autocommentary entitled "Numbers" lists the various Yin/yang Five Phases associations, so that questioner may deduce more specialized lessons from the generalized message presented by images in the text. Two autocommentaries (the "Polar Oppositions" and the "Interplay of Opposites") treat smaller units of two tetragrams as microcosms of the binary oppositions at work in the larger cosmic Tao. The "Elaboration" commentary discusses Yang's opening tetragram as a microcosm of the whole book. The "Revelation" essay, on the cosmic repercussions of human conduct, acts as summary for the whole *Mystery*.

A final autocommentary, the "Fathomings," is perhaps the most important for the modern reader. The "Fathomings" offers valuable interpretive

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Table 1.

Commentary	Correspondent Ten Wings commentary
Hsüan ts'e Fathomings	Hsiang Images
Hsüan ch'ung Polar Oppositions	Hsü kua Sequence of the Hexagrams
Hsüan ts'o Interplay of Opposites	Tsa kua Interplay of Opposites
Hsüan li Evolutions	Hsi tz'u Appended Judgments (also called "Great Commentary")
Hsüan ying Illumination	Hsi tz'u
Hsüan shu Numbers	Shuo kua Discussion of the Trigrams
Hsüan wen Elaboration	Wen yen Elaborated Teachings
Hsüan yi Representations	Hsi tz'u
Hsüan t'u Diagram	Hsi tz'u
Hsüan kao Revelation	Shuo kua

clues to the questioner, for it restates the significance of each Appraisal text. In this edition, following early Chinese usage, the appropriate "Fathomings" text is printed immediately after each related "Appraisal" text, so that their relationship can be seen at a glance.

(For reference, Table 1 lists the ten autcommentaries to the *Mystery* with their corresponding *Changes* "Wings.")

ON THE AUTHOR

Master Yang Hsiung was born in 53 B.C., in Cheng-tu (modern Chengdu), in the province of Szechwan. By his early thirties, he had come to Ch'ang-an (modern Xi'an), then the capital of the Western Han dynasty (206 B.C.—A.D.

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8). After winning fame as the foremost poet of his age, Yang Hsiung was appointed poet laureate to the court in 10 B.C.

In middle age, shortly after the death of his beloved son, Yang Hsiung experienced a sense of profound revulsion for his earlier poetic efforts. Condemning court poetry as frivolous, he turned to composing works of philosophy. Following a draft of the *Mystery* in 2 B.C. came two lengthy philosophical poems. In A.D. 12, Yang finished the *Fa yen (Model Sayings)*, which employs the same dialogue form found in the Confucian *Analects* to evaluate the conflicting drives for immortality, fame, power, and Goodness. When Yang died in A.D. 18, his genius was still being made the butt of cruel jokes by envious contemporaries.

Though one of Yang's detractors had snidely predicted that the *Mystery* text would soon be relegated to the scrap-heap, its pages used "to cover soy-sauce pots," Yang Hsiung's philosophical contributions were recognized by the very next generation of thinkers to succeed him. That generation, then, hailed Yang Hsiung as a Master of Confucian philosophy, and designated his masterwork, the *Mystery*, a classic (*ching*), securing its place in Chinese tradition.

KEY TERMS

The Five Classics of Confucianism

The Five Classics of Confucianism are the *Book of Odes*, the *Documents*, the *Chronicles* (usually called the *Spring and Autumn Annals*), the *Book of Changes*, and the *Rituals*. (A sixth classic, devoted to music, is thought to have been lost or incorporated into one of the ritual texts.) The Classics are "Confucian" in two senses; Confucius (551–479 B.C.) and his followers used some of them as texts for moral instruction, much as the Greek pedagogues once used Homer. Also, tradition ascribed to Confucius the tasks of compiling, editing, and in some few cases composing the works in this repository of wisdom, although modern scholarship disputes the pious legend that Confucius had a hand in forming the collection. The interpretive problem shared by both early disciples and modern scholars alike is that the Five Classics contain extremely heterogeneous material of different subjects, styles, dates, and points of view. The *Odes* is a collection of songs and hymns that reflect everyday life in court and countryside during the period 800–600 B.C. The *Documents* purports to be a collection of archival materials that preserves important edicts and memorials outlining the responsibilities of the ruling elite. The *Chronicles* reads like a court diary for the rulers of the small state of Lu during the years 722–484 B.C. A divination manual eventually converted for use as a philosophical treatise, the *Changes* attempts to reproduce through graphic symbols and attached texts the multiplicity of changing phenomena produced by the single cosmic Tao. And the three separate

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volumes of ritual texts are said to include some three thousands discrete rules of conduct, as well as a description of ideal government structure.

Confucian orthodoxy presumed that a single message underlay all Five Classics, despite the variety of materials included therein. But it should come as no surprise that scholars have often been frustrated in their attempts to find in this corpus a unified vision of the world. In the Han dynasty (206 B.C.—A.D. 220), an ongoing literary debate focused on inconsistencies in the Five Classics. Nevertheless, during the two millennia from 134 B.C. to A.D. 1905, the Five Classics provided the basic curriculum for training in proper literary styles and served as the core material tested in civil service exams. From China, the influence of this collection eventually expanded into Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, so that it came to occupy for all East Asia a position roughly analogous to that of the Bible in the West.

On Ch'i

The origin of the term is unknown. No Shang or early Chou graphs can be conclusively identified with the concept. The character we now use for *ch'i* shows clouds of steam rising over cooked rice. The graphic form suggests what bubbles or boils over, what fumes, what is agitated; it may also imply some kind of nourishment. In fact, the root meaning of *ch'i* appears to be “vapor” or “breath.” Like early Greek, Indian, Latin, and Hebrew philosophy, early Chinese belief presumes a “life breath” that vitalizes as it circulates through bodies or the air. Undifferentiated *ch'i* is the dynamic universal stuff out of which all the disparate things of the cosmos condense (at birth) and into which they dissolve (at death). Like breath, *ch'i* typically operates in rhythmic, floodlike pulses, as it alternates between inhalation (expansion) and exhalation (contraction) in regular cycles. Only bad *ch'i* is blocked or stagnant.

Perhaps the closest English equivalent to *ch'i* is “vitality.” As latent energy stored in the Tao, *ch'i* is undifferentiated, but as vital energy operating in the universe, *ch'i* is definable in quality and characteristic in its configurations. By some mysterious process the originally undifferentiated *ch'i* makes for distinctive entities. *Ch'i* can be congealed or compacted in liquid and solid forms. *Ch'i* comes in different grades. The lowest grade of *ch'i* (called “muddy”) leads to various malfunctions, including physical deformity, muddled thinking, and excessive desire. The purest refined *ch'i* (the “quintessential” or *ching*) is reserved for two kinds of light-giving entities: the luminous heavenly bodies and the enlightened minds of the sages. Very important, then, is the notion that *ch'i*, as the basic stuff that informs the entire cosmos and binds all humans to the rest of phenomenal existence in Heaven-and-Earth, precludes an absolute dividing line between humans and things. Understandably, the notion of *ch'i* has also worked against the development of the

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transcendent/immanent dichotomy presumed by many Western thinkers. At the same time, *ch'i* functions as the physical medium that allows sympathetic "mutual response" to take place between categorically related entities. Therefore, *ch'i* theory from earliest times has been preoccupied with the nature and significance of macrocosmic influences on microcosmic processes.

In Master Yang Hsiung's time, the single term *ch'i* signified both the "material stuff" in continual process on Heaven-and-Earth and the underlying dynamism predisposing that stuff to assume specific form, though Sung neo-Confucianists a millennium later were to draw a neater conceptual line between *li* ("internal principle") and *ch'i* ("material stuff"). We must remember that for the early Chinese, human *ch'i*, despite its obvious physicality, had a definite moral dimension as well. In the properly functioning heart/mind, for example, *ch'i* is said to gather at "the spirit abode." What's more, the will to do good is said to be "commander over the *ch'i*."

In the case of humans, a finite store of *ch'i* endowed at birth is somehow passed down from parents to the child. The birth of a human being, in effect, represents an accumulation of *ch'i*. Over the course of an individual lifespan, the *ch'i* tends to become less active. Physical overexertion may cause it to "block." Tension and stress equally frustrate it. Immoral acts also are said to "abuse the *ch'i*" to the degree that they engender shame, anxiety, and restlessness, for these emotional states produce certain physical symptoms, such as constricted breathing and palpitations of the heart. Human beings, then, have some measure of control over the rate at which their original *ch'i* stagnates or is depleted. Balance in the mental and emotional spheres can be induced by the process dubbed "self-cultivation." Various techniques designed to retain (and ideally augment) the *ch'i*'s activity include both moral and physical "arts": moderation in daily habits, adjustment of posture, meditation as "inward training," habituation to goodness, and a calm acceptance of fate. The philosopher Mencius (?371–?289), for example, tells his disciples simply that "the way to make *ch'i*" is to "nourish it with integrity."

Master Han Fei (d. 233 B.C.) links the conservation of *chi*'s vitality with the acquisition of political power and material wealth. Extending his imagery, I think of *ch'i* as operating like money in the bank: An individual can deposit or withdraw *ch'i* from his fund. What's more, he can inherit a sum or bequeath it to his descendants. Like great reserves of wealth, a great reserve of vital *ch'i* represents the potential to influence others. *Ch'i* thus provides the basis for the charismatic power of the virtuous man. All Confucians insist that each newborn is credited with sufficient *ch'i* to realize the full human potential for sagehood, even though few are wise enough to exercise their innate capacities.

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In summation, early Chinese thinkers view all cosmic change in terms of the dynamic process inherent in vital *ch'i*. *Ch'i* is substance, activity, and vitality.

Yin/Yang Five Phases Theory: Correlative Thought

The Chinese cosmological system, which assumed its definite shape in China no later than the third century B.C., envisioned the world in terms of two interlocking systems: yin/yang and the Five Phases (often translated, less accurately, as the Five Agents or the Five Elements). This is sometimes known as correlative thought, or categorical thinking.

According to the theory, there evolved out of primordial chaos one cosmic pattern with dual aspects known as yin and yang. All of phenomenal existence reflects this pattern. The myriad things can be categorized as either male or female, light or dark, day or night, hot or cold, superior or inferior, and so on. This duality is one of the constant norms of the universe, as illustrated by the regular alternation of day and night, of summer and winter. Yin and yang, though opposing, are also complementary in that one can never act independently of the other; the waxing of one invariably entails the waning of the other. Taking an example from nature, the summer solstice is the longest day of the year but, in another sense, it also marks the onset of winter; subsequently, the days grow ever shorter and colder until the winter solstice. The familiar figural representation of yin/yang emphasizes this fluid symbiotic relation. The curvilinear areas of dark and light enfold each other within a perfect circle that knows no beginning or end; the tiny seeds of each are discovered in the swelling contours of its opposite. At the culmination of one, its opposite is born, and on and on, in a constant process of advance and retreat, making and unmaking. In this way, "movement back" becomes "the Way of the Tao." Men of virtue in studying the cosmic patterns infer from this that in victory lies defeat, and in humility, greatness.

Yin/yang may not seem so alien to us, since our language predisposes us to think in terms of positive/negative. But it is far more difficult for us to conceptualize cosmic process in terms of the Five Phases. The list of the Five Phases invariably includes Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Earth, though different orders of enumeration are preferred by various classical authorities. The Phases are essentially five different types of process. According to one early authority, "water goes down, fire goes up, wood is pliable," and so on. Each Phase is said to "rule" (i.e. to predominate) a certain period of time (a dynasty, a season, a set of hours), before it gives way to the next phase. This connection with time resulted in conceptual overlays between systems of yin/yang and the Five Phases, as in the following chart (Table 2).

Table 2.

Rising Yang		yields to	Rising Yin	
Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Spring	Summer	transition	Autumn	Winter
East	South	Center	West	North
Green	Red	Yellow	White	Black

The Chinese soon set about classifying all known entities into groups of fives, constructing exhaustive lists which they hoped would elicit order from the seeming chaos of the world. Yang Hsiung lists all the major correlations in his autocommentary chapter entitled "Numbers of the *Mystery*." By laws of sympathy and repulsion, things accounted as categorically alike (i.e., correlated with the same Phase) were said to be drawn to one another while things which were categorically different purportedly repelled each other. Again, according to the same theory, careful "inference by analogy from objects of the same kind" (*t'ui lei*) could facilitate the intuitive apprehension of all parts of the ineffable Tao by some form of indirect communication that is simply not possible through logical argument.

The initial difficulty, of course, lay in determining the exact boundaries of each logical category, so that inferences were not mistakenly drawn. Generations of Chinese scholars, first the early Logicians and later the Han scholastics, devoted a great deal of time and energy to this problem. Due to the occasional rift between logic and language, their first task was to establish formal rules of logic by which to discover the defining characteristics of each entity in the universe, so that essential attributes could be clearly distinguished from accidental attributes. For example, the Logicians determined that a horse must have one head, four legs, and the propensity to run, though it need not be red or black. The color of a horse, then, is a nonessential attribute, something that only accidentally subsists in a particular horse, but does not define the species. While it was relatively simple to agree upon fundamental definitions for animals, shapes, and inanimate objects, the true definition of human nature was a thornier problem, as it touched upon a host of problems which stubbornly resisted solution by the logical method:

What is the proper definition of human nature?

What is the proper sphere and existential significance of human activity?

What can humans reasonably hope to accomplish in this life?

In the Han Confucian synthesis, then, the protoscientist's impulse towards categorization and the logician's search for orderly expression joined forces with the ethical concerns of the traditional scholar. Categorical thinking, inherently preoccupied with the relation of macrocosm to microcosm,

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came to be applied to many areas of inquiry, most significantly (1) portent theory; (2) the rectification of names; and (3) point-by-point analogies between the human body, the body politic, and the universe. We are familiar enough with body analogies; we often talk of “heads of state,” for example. Portent theory and the rectification of names, however, may need some explanation for the modern reader.

Early Chinese portent theory assumed that the king as focus for his state exerts an influence for good or for ill upon those entities that are accounted his categorical analogues: Heaven, because it is high; the Big Dipper, as pivot for the sky; the father, as head of the household; and so on. More specifically, evildoing on the part of man—especially the “One Man,” the ruler—provokes dislocations in his counterparts in the natural world. The good ruler, far from decrying these omens, welcomes them as reproofs of his erroneous ways sent by a caring Heaven, compelling him to reform.

To successfully apply categorical thought to happenings in the external world, it was incumbent upon the individual not only to locate himself in a parallel scheme of ethical categories (such as “ruler,” “mother,” “son,” or “court advisor”) but also to understand the ethical requirements of the assigned role he currently plays. This led many early Chinese thinkers, including Yang Hsiung, to conflate the earlier Confucian call for a “rectification of names” with the naturalists’ talk of Five Phases theory. According to Confucius, greater linguistic precision was required for logical thought and effective action:

If words are not correct, then speech does not conform [with what was intended]. And if speech does not conform with what was intended, then affairs cannot be completed [properly]. . . . Therefore, let a ruler be a ruler and a father be a father.

For early Confucians, a person failing to fulfill his or her proper societal roles was accounted a “human portent” no less significant than a baleful prodigy in the skies above or earthquakes, floods, and droughts on earth.

The early Chinese assumed that the transition from primordial chaos to civilized order represented successive stages of increasing differentiation. In effect, the Chinese argued that the world as they knew it had evolved by a process analogous to human attempts to identify, demarcate, and name significant geographical, political, social, and religious boundaries. From this they concluded that there existed in the primordial Tao a divine basis for the development of the various human orders. Some Han thinkers even argued that humans engaged in the search for intrinsic categories can further or complete the cosmic processes through their continual ordering and reordering of categories. This helps to explain why categorical thinking and correlative thought figure so largely in Chinese philosophical writings.

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Self-Cultivation

“Self-cultivation” refers to the arduous process by which the individual intent on virtue fulfills his own innate potential. This process consists in making second nature the traditional virtues (filial piety, good faith, consideration for others, and so on). For early Confucians, including Yang Hsiung, humans at birth have in their original endowment a host of contradictory impulses and desires, including those for food, sex, and community. Just as the artisan works jade to release its true beauty from rough-hewn pieces, any moral deficiency in the person is polished and carved away until an “elegant and accomplished gentleman” emerges. Time and precision are needed for the process, but complete dedication to the Good is the chief requirement if human nature is to be refined. There are many paths leading to self-cultivation, but the most important is emulation of worthy models past and present, followed by the study of the Five Confucian Classics. Once the noble lessons of various masters, living and dead, have been internalized, the perfectly civilized man emerges.

We can think of moral development as taking place in three successive stages, with self-cultivation the culmination. Stage 1 corresponds to the individual’s first awareness of the mix of good and evil impulses, moral and physical desires, inherent in human nature at birth. In Stage 2, the good impulses begin to predominate as a result of moral messages received from a variety of sources: the models presented by family members, oral teachings, and so on. Confucius implied that those who reached this stage of development might be accounted “educated”:

A young man’s duty is to behave well to his parents at home and to his elders abroad, to be cautious in giving promises and punctual in keeping them, to have kindly feelings toward everyone, but seek the intimacy of the Good. . . . [As to one who acts thus,] others may say of him that he still lacks education, but I for my part should certainly call him an educated man.

But Confucius also advised his disciples to go on to study the “polite arts” (poetry, archery, and music, for example) when they had energy to spare. In stage 3, then, the polite arts become tools by which members of the moral elite can hope to gain an exquisite sensitivity to the moral patterns embodied in ritual conduct. In effect, the acquisition of new skills reconfigures each individual’s perception of structures, values, and imperatives. As the philosopher Hsün tzu remarked, “Once the proper arts are mastered, the mind will follow them.”

This notion may sound somewhat familiar to us, for it corresponds to our own complex definitions of nobility. Still, the Chinese idea of nobility is not entirely equivalent to our own. The European tradition, embracing a more individualistic vision, tends to emphasize noble conduct as a laudable

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end in itself, while the early Chinese never tired of reminding us that personal self-cultivation is merely the first step in a process of forming harmonious communities in family, town, state, and empire. As Yang Hsiung writes, "Cultivate oneself so that one can later contact others."³⁴

"Center Heart" (Chung Hsin)

The phrase *chung hsin* dates back at least as early as the *Odes* (compiled sixth century B.C. from earlier materials). In the *Odes*, the verb-object unit signifies "what centers the heart"; it compares in meaning with the adjective-noun syntactical unit *hsin chung* ("the center of the heart"), though it is strikingly more emphatic.

Since the truest emotions presumably reside at the deepest core of one's being, by a slight extension *chung hsin* came to be equated with the feelings that "are not put on for others to see," feelings that are completely genuine. After the heart was identified as the seat of the inborn conscience by Mencius, the same expression came to be loosely identified with the evaluating mind. The *Mystery*, for this reason, insists that "inside there is a ruler." At the same time, the characteristic activity of the evaluating mind is to center the self, in the sense of reestablishing an equilibrium free from emotional bias. Only then can the mind's perceptions hope to "hit the mark," and so prompt the moral self unerringly. For Yang Hsiung, the way of the sage lies in paying attention to the center heart, in centering the self, and in "hitting the mark" by the correct identification with Confucian tradition. Thus the *Mystery* employs all these associations for the phrase *chung hsin*.

Ritual

A daughter bows low and eschews the use of her father's personal name. In solemn state ceremonies the emperor periodically offers sacrifices to various protective deities. Imperial ministers wear caps with seven silk pendants but junior officers are allowed only three. The aged and the pious are honored at annual feasts sponsored by the local magistrate. A professional spirit medium on the ridge of the roof calls out "Ho! come back!" to a departing soul, urging it to return to the world of light and life. At the marriage feast, fish are presented to the newly married couple as tokens of fertility. And the rich harmonies of bell and drum exert a powerful effect upon the worlds of Man and nature so that "the common people, the gods, beasts, and birds" happily join in the refrain.

The Han Chinese would consider all these examples of the Confucian ritual system. Though Confucius seems to signify by the term ritual a narrow code of conduct expected of the gentleman, by Han times, the concept embraces many popular religious practices as well. In the Han, ritual meant exhaustive lists of detailed prescriptions governing all aspects of behavior (including physical gestures), as well as an unwritten code of good manners. Sumptuary regulations and taboos, and all manner of ceremonies, formal

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and informal, at every level of society, were included. At the heart of Han Confucianism lay this body of ritual practice, rather than a logical system. For ritual, as significant pattern, could work to clarify and cohere reality in at least four related ways: First, ritual patterns imitate the character of the unseen sacred Tao, upon which they are modeled. Second, ritual tradition represents the distilled—and therefore, supremely potent—wisdom of the sages throughout history. Third, ritual performance leads the individual to a new understanding about the place of the authentic self in society. Fourth, as if by magic, the correct performance of ritual so pleases observers and co-participants that they devote their best efforts to forging communities, the quintessential human activity. At the heart of effective ritual lies the will to understand others by a process of “likening [others] to oneself,” then allowing each his due.

For ritual to prove effective, it was believed, its conventions have to become second nature so that inner disposition combines with outer form in a fitting manner that is understandable to all. This characterization of ritual contrasts sharply with the modern tendency to equate the term with mechanical or repetitive conventions as opposed to the authentic. We can learn much from Han society, where ritual performed a variety of functions: The ritual act could teach even the unlettered the prevailing notions of social hierarchy and intimacy. By “securing men in their position,” ritual also habituated men to the social virtues associated with their station. In effect, it became the glue binding the human community together, mitigating base desires and transmuting them into mutual consideration. At the same time, ritual presupposed the possibility for most, if not all, social acts to become emblematic of the divine cosmic order, thereby closing the gap between the sacred and the mundane.

TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

Citations in the text refer to four standard translations currently available in print:

The Analects of Confucius, trans. by Arthur Waley (London, Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1938; rpt. New York, Vintage House, n.d.).

Lao tzu: Tao te ching, trans. by D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985).

Mencius, trans. by D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984).

The I ching, or Book of Changes, trans. by Richard Wilhelm (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1967).

Citations to the Wilhelm translation list the relevant page number(s); citations to the other standard translations refer to chapter and verse. The present translation has modified these translations in some cases where it is appropriate.

Method of Divination

The early Chinese used yarrow stalks (*Achillea millefolium*) for divination, probably because the Chinese word for “yarrow” is written with the graph for “old” under the graph meaning “plant.” Apparently this visual pun led the Chinese to the idea that the yarrow stalk could serve as an excellent medium to facilitate communication between the living and the ancestors, who collectively represent the sum of wisdom and experience available to all who learn the means to draw on it.

Coins have come to be used as a convenient substitute for yarrow stalks. With coins, two different methods will simulate the original method of divination using yarrow stalks. If the questioner comes to the divination with a clear and untroubled mind, the first method of divination will prove adequate. However, most of us approach the oracle in a troubled state of mind. In that case, the second method of divination is recommended, since the very length of the divination process will help the questioner focus attention on the problem to be solved. That should insure that the proper answer comes from the *Mystery*.

FIRST METHOD

You will need four coins altogether. Put two of them aside, holding them in reserve. Toss the remaining two coins at the same time. If both come up tails, toss them again. Continue tossing both until at least one coin comes up heads. (The probability of two heads will be $\frac{1}{3}$; the probability of one, $\frac{2}{3}$.) If, of the two coins, only one comes up heads, it is designated as yin. If both coins come up heads, the result is yang. The first trial, then, will result in either yin or yang.

Next, take up the two coins you have held in reserve. Follow the same procedure, tossing both coins until either one or two heads comes up. Having completed the tosses of all four coins, you will have one of three configurations: yang-yang (4 heads), yin-yin (2 heads total), or the mixture yin/yang (3 heads total). Yang-yang will correspond to 9; yin-yin to 7; and yin-yang to 8. The number 9 is equivalent to the twice-broken line of Man; 8, to

Method of Divination

the divided line of Earth; and 7, to the solid line of Heaven. Now the first line of the tetragram can be drawn.

To arrive at a complete tetragram of four lines, three more applications of the entire procedure are needed. Remember: the tetragram in the *Mystery*, unlike the hexagram in the *Changes*, is constructed *from the top down*. When the questioner has a four-line graph, the graph will direct the user to the appropriate Head text.

SECOND METHOD

Sit facing south. Take thirty-six coins. Set one reverently aside to the left (east) as a way of honoring the cosmic unity we call the Tao. Set three more coins aside to the right (west) as a way of honoring the sacred triad of Heaven-Earth-Man. Toss the remaining thirty-two coins one at a time. Place all those coins that come up heads in one pile in the southwest. Place those coins that come up tails in a second pile to the southeast. From the southwest pile of heads remove the coins by threes until a remainder of one, two, or three is left. Keep the removed coins separate. Next, turn to the southeast pile of tails. Now, from that pile, remove coins by threes until a remainder of one, two, or three is left. Again, keep the removed coins separate.

Next, gather together the remainders from both piles on the table (they will add up to either 2 or 5) directly in front of you. It is now time to reaffirm your desire to reintegrate the Tao in your own individual destiny. Therefore, take the one coin that you have segregated to the left and the three coins initially set aside to the right and add them to the pile directly in front of you. Now move this pile directly away from you to the extreme south.

Merge the southwest and the southeast piles (which will sum to 27 or 30), set aside one coin to the south, then once more randomly toss the remaining 26 or 29 coins, separating them again into two piles: heads (in the southwest) and tails (in the southeast).

Next, turn your attention to the coins in the southwest pile of heads. Once more remove the coins by threes until a remainder of one, two, or three is left. Add these remaining coins to the pile in the extreme south. Then turn your attention to the coins in the southeast pile of tails. Remove the coins in sets of threes until a remainder of one, two, or three is left. Add these remaining coins to the pile in the extreme south.

At this point, the total number of coins left in the combined southwest and southeast piles will add up to 27, 24, or 21. Divide the 27, 24, or 21 by three to honor the sacred triad of Heaven-Earth-Man. The results will be 9 (equivalent to the twice-broken line of Man), 8 (the divided line of Earth), or 7 (the solid line of Heaven). When you have 9, 8, or 7, you have derived the first line (i.e., the top line) of the four-line tetragram.