**dialectics/阴阳(Yīn Yáng)**

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| Final Remarks | Jana S. Rošker, YAO Xinzhong | 23 May 2022 |

First, we might ask whether the paradigm of yin and yang can also be called a dialectics. We believe that this is a matter of definition. If we assume that the dialectical model developed in the European tradition is the only possible or "correct" model of dialectics, then the categories (or forces) of yin and yang do not fit this definition. However, if we start from the original meaning of the word ‘dialectics’, which implies an interaction between two sides or two opposite concepts, then they are certainly a kind of dialectics, even if this ‘Chinese’ dialectics is a different pattern and works according to a different methodology.

In our view, such an understanding is important because too often Chinese philosophy has been seen as based on a ‘primitive’ holism in which everything is connected to everything else and nothing can be separated from anything else. While it is certainly true that Chinese philosophy is primarily holistic, this holism is by no means a fused unity containing mutually alienated elements, nor is it a form of monism. On the contrary, it is a relational network of correlative relationships between different entities or propositions, a network that is strictly and very carefully ordered according to binary structures such as yin and yang. Thus, as was made clear in the presentation of yin and yang as a Chinese dialectical model, yin and yang (and their mutual relations and interactions) have not only an epistemological, but also an ontological and even a metaphysical dimension.

According to our understanding, the main differences between these two methods can be summarized as follows: First of all, the European (at least modern European) dialectics is based on dualisms, while the Chinese model is based on binary or so-called ‘polarist’ categories. What they have in common, however, is the fact that both models work with two opposing concepts, ideas, or forces. Nevertheless, while the opposition of the European model is at the same time a contradiction (because the two opposing ideas are mutually exclusive), the Yinyang dialectic, which has prevailed in Chinese intellectual history, is based on the correlative mutual completion and intertwining of the two opposing sides. In what follows, we will attempt to explain these differences through a brief historical examination.

As already mentioned, the European model can be historically followed back to Ancient Greek philosophy and is in its modern forms rooted in dual representation models like Cartesian dualisms, in which oppositional notions (body and mind, matter and idea, substance and phenomena, subject and object, etc.) negate and exclude each other and are thus strictly and radically separated both formally and logically. Although in Hegel’s theory the two oppositional concepts still form a correlative unity, they are seen as static momenta within this entirety; in the ultimate instance, this unity is nothing more than the sum of its parts, which, as momenta, condition but also contradict and hence exclude each other. In such models the two oppositions are often denoted thesis and antithesis. The tension that results from the mutual negation and contradiction of both poles leads to the synthesis (which can be reached through *Aufhebung* or sublation in Hegel). This third stage is a qualitatively different and “higher” stage of development, in which parts of the previous opposition are preserved and other eliminated. In essence the dialectical thought in this framework is conceptual (i.e. containing fixedly defined contents), while in the Chinese *yinyang* model it is processional, based on categories or powers (the concrete content of which is exchangeable and replaceable, not only in the semantic but also in the axiological sense). In its earliest form this latter model goes back to the building blocks of the oldest Chinese proto-philosophical classic, the *Book of Changes* (*Yi jing* 易經), where it appears as a model of “continuous change” or “continuity through change” (*tongbian* 通變). It functions by applying binary categories and the principle of correlative complementarity. The oppositions it contains are interdependent and do not negate but rather complete each other. They are oppositional dualities, but not dualistic contradictions. Hence, the model of their mutual relationship and interaction cannot be denoted as an abstract form of dualism, but rather as a process of a dynamic duality. Furthermore, each of them represents the very essence of the other and none of the two can exist without the other. In contrast to the synthesis belonging to the European model, the totality or unity of both oppositions in the Chinese *yinyang* paradigm is to be found in the very process of their interaction as such; hence, it does not lead to a qualitatively new and “higher” stage or form of reality, idea, or even its understanding (which is the tendency of the Hegelian model). The two opposites, either in the form of the male and female forces, or through the categories of the negative and the positive, are mutually included and intergenerated, are ultimately unified. In the process of the intensive Sinification of Marxism, this feature of the dialectical model (*duili tongyi*對立統一), belonging to the *yinyang* duality, (which was typical for traditional China), was highly problematized by Maoist theoreticians. Hence, they used to call this form of dialectics ‘simple’ or ‘primitive’ dialectics (*pusu bianzheng* *fa* 樸素辯證法, *yuanshi bianzheng* *fa* 原始辯證法) and criticized it for its conservative nature, i.e. for its lacking of the component of progress.

Such a view, however, is one-sided and incomplete, because it overlooks the processual nature of the mutual interaction between yin and yang. This interaction as such is precisely the ever-changing and forever new synthesis of the two powers or categories. While the European model of static oppositions is based upon the principles of the European formal logic, implying its three basic laws of identity, contradiction and the excluded third, such a logic is impossible in the framework of dynamic correlativity, which is typical of the Chinese dialectical model. In a flux, A can never be identical to A, and neither it can be in contradiction to no-A, because yin and yang can never exclude each other, and their mutual interaction unceasingly produces and opens new spaces for new ideas.

In this sense, the Chinese *yinyang* dialectic is more comprehensive and can hence provide us with new insights, new ideas, and new perspectives of thinking. Although the model of modern European dialectics is important, for without formal logic there could hardly be Western-style development of rationality, science, and technology, the potential of *yinyang* for cross-cultural dialogues is stronger and much more radiant. And since we live in a globalised world where we are constantly confronted with global crises that can only be overcome through transcultural solidarity, intercultural dialogues and the exchange of knowledge and ideas, such potential is much more needed than ever before.

On the other hand, we are also fully aware of the problems and limitations that are facing *yinyang* philosophy when its being applied to contemporary times. Within a traditional framework, mutuality and inter-transformation that are central to *yinyang* cosmology and dialectics were significantly reduced through being moralized and politicized in the later part of Chinese history. Once two-way dependence was moderated or even replaced by the one-way hierarchy, symbolized in the process from ‘yin-yang’ to ‘ruler-subject’, ‘father-son’ and ‘husband-wife’, it would be too natural for *yinyang* philosophy to become culturally fossilised and to be politically mutated into a tool to justify authoritarian and patriarchal regimes. Therefore, to enable it to be meaningful for an increasingly globalized and multicultural world where liberty, democracy and equality are recognized as common values, it would be of necessity for us to make use of European dialectics to supplement *yinyang* philosophy by which the original dynamics of the latter can be fully restored or regenerated, and to magnify the universalism that was inherent in *yinyang* and dialectics not only as an epistemological model applicable both to the East and the West, but also as an axiological aspiration leading to multicultural coexistence and harmonious symbiosis for all human beings.