SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

Number 252 December, 2014

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SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

FOUNDED 1986

ISSN
2157-9679 (print) 2157-9687 (online)

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Dao and Brahman: The Phenomenon of Primordial Supreme Unity[1]

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The transition from a concrete, figurative, mythological way of thinking, with its gods and deified heroes, to a philosophical understanding of the world and the creation of the first abstract ontological and metaphysical constructions, usually takes a long time and is a testimony to the high development of a civilization. In many cases this transition is related to the gradual elevation of cults of gods or the worship of a single supreme god, with whose sacred and creative potential people associate the origin of the universe and objective reality. Judaism presents the most conspicuous and universal example of this avenue of development. As is widely known, the Hebrew thought reflected in the Old Testament was so significant in this respect that the Hebrew model of a theological system laid the foundation of the concept of ontogenesis, namely the idea that the origin of the universe and all objective reality are the creation of God, a belief now also shared by hundreds of millions of Christians and Muslims.

The thought of classical antiquity can be considered to be a representation of another way of thinking. In that system, the cults of the great gods to whom the demiurge role in mythology was ascribed did not contradict the concept of primordial abstract creative power. Some philosophers of antiquity elaborated on this concept of the creation process in their systems.

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[1] Originally published in L. S. Vasil'ev and E. B. Porshneva, eds., *Dao i Daosism v Kitae* (Dao and Daoism in China) (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), 134–58. L.S. Vasil'ev (b. 1930) is a research fellow at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, and Professor at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow. He specialized in ancient Chinese history, economy, and religion, worked out his own concepts of world history, and published several monographs in Russian (translator's note).

However, this way of thinking did not spread very broadly — presumably because alongside it other philosophers developed completely different ideas in their systems that stimulated the growth of freethinking and led to the development of philosophy almost free of the religious tincture. In any case, the way of classical antiquity was unique.

Ancient Chinese and Ancient Indian thought represent the third way of thinking about and seeking the solution of the most difficult problems of universe. Just as were the Greeks, the people of ancient India, and to a lesser degree the people of ancient China, were familiar with the cults of great gods, including some gods to whom the role of demiurge was ascribed. But in these systems the philosophical interpretation of the world was not connected with the cults devoted to the gods' sacred powers and creative potential. The concept of absolute unity and the idea that an impersonal and abstract power gave birth to everything and controls everything, including the gods themselves, became prominent in India and China and essentially predominated in those regions. The fundamental difference from the first mode of thinking is obvious: it is not gods or a single God who created the universe, but rather the supreme force beyond the phenomenal world that created everything, including the gods.[2] The name of this power was Dao in China and Brahman in India.

As a philosophical category, Dao (literally "the Way") appears in ancient Chinese texts not earlier than the middle of the first millennium BCE. For around a millennium before that, the religious beliefs of the ancient Chinese (Shang dynasty) and their ideas regarding their ancestors included deification of natural phenomena and the ancestors' souls. Among the latter the great progenitor Shangdi dominated. The therio-anthropomorphous image of Shangdi is probably the face represented in the famous *taotie* mask on many ancient Chinese art objects, beginning with bronze vessels. At the beginning of the Zhou dynasty (at the turn of the second and first

[2] One should note a certain similarity in the modes of thinking in antiquity on the one hand, and ancient India and China on the other. In part, one can explain it by the genetic affinity of Indo-European peoples (at least as concerns Greeks and Indo-Arians). However, there was a significant difference: what was only one of the possible ways of ontogenetic thought in antiquity, in India and then in China laid down the foundation of the representation of creative process. In this aspect — and only in this one — the way or variant of antiquity lay in between the Judeo-Christian-Islamic and Indo-Chinese views.

millenniums BCE), the cult of Heaven brought by the Zhou people started to supplant the Shangdi cult. The cult of Heaven gradually evolved into the highest abstract divine force.[3] The cult of Heaven, as the deified abstract Unity that operates the entire world,[4] dominated in the context of the almost complete lack of other equal or even prominent deities in the entire country, or even of regional significance,[5] probably played a role in providing a receptive background for developing the idea of the universal principle of objective reality embedded in Dao. It is important to note that it was not Heaven that created the world, but another entity that created everything, including Heaven.

This article will not try to follow in detail the whole process of the genesis and evolution of ancient Chinese beliefs concerning the origin of universe. It is enough to remind the reader that at the beginning of the first millennium BCE, on the basis of a mantic practice that uses trigrams and hexagrams representing various natural phenomena, as recorded in the *Yijing* (The Book of Changes), a stable notion was formed of the world that regarded it as an interaction of different forces and phenomena in their alternation and evolution. Around the middle of the first millennium BCE, the idea arose that the macrocosm (the Universe) and the microcosm (humans, organisms) operate on the same primary scheme. The base of this scheme is the "five phases" —

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[3] This cult of Heaven was not of the same type as, say, the ancient Egyptian cult of Amon-Ra, the god of the Sun.

[4] The Zhou concepts of *tianming*, "the divine mandate" of Heaven, the right of power over all under heaven, held by the *tianzi*, "the son of Heaven," the Chinese ruler of all under heaven, are widely known.

[5] During the Shang as well as the Zhou periods, the ancient Chinese worshipped other deities, but these, in terms of their significance and social role, could not rank alongside Heaven. One can observe this phenomenon in the cult of the Earth deity. The worship of the Earth took place at three levels: the local, the regional, and at the level of the entire Chinese She. Its role increased at the beginning of the Zhou dynasty. However, while Heaven was an abstract deified Absolute, corresponding to the cult of a supreme deity, the She cult served the role of ethnic and territorial integration and had more of a political rather than genuinely sacred significance. In other words, one cannot compare the sacred status of She with the corresponding status of Heaven. Only later, starting around the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), and related to the thought of the Daoists, was Earth considered to be the power opposite to Heaven and ranked equally with it. At the same time, other deities appeared along with the abstract Heaven and Earth that personified male and female principles, including those such as Pangu, to whom was attributed the role of the creator of the Universe.

earth, water, fire, metal, and wood — without which existence is impossible. The active operation of the macro- and microcosm follows the interaction of two great principles — the male (*yang*) and the female (*yin*), the unity of which leads to the gigantic creative impulse and, in the last analysis, lays the foundation of the universe and existence. In this system Heaven was the symbol of the life-giving force, while Earth represented the impregnated and bearing entity. It is quite natural that this dualism of structure led to the question of how, when, and under what circumstances these two great forces appeared. Such notions and categories as *taiji* (the Great Apex) and *taiyi* (the Great Unity) appeared. However, of these, the idea of the great Dao became the most developed.

Texts dating back to the fifth–third centuries BCE say quite a lot about Dao. Confucius's aphorisms, collected in the *Lunyu* (Analects), mention it especially often.[6] In the Confucian texts, this notion had socio-ethical shades of meaning, and one should interpret it as "the Great Way of Truth and Justice." The Daoist texts and the texts similar to them, recorded at approximately the turn of the third century BCE — *Daodejing*, Zhuangzi, Guanzi — usually use this notion with another meaning. Dao in these texts, especially in the expressions "earthly Dao" or "the ruler's Dao," sometimes has a socio-ethical shade of meaning.[7] However, in most cases Dao in these texts acts as the supreme primary substance. We cannot provide here a detailed description of all its features and functions based on the corresponding quotations from the texts, so we limit ourselves to describing its characteristics in brief and give attention to its best known and unquestioned qualities.

Dao is the essence of existence, the beginning of all beginnings. It gives birth to all things, but cannot reveal itself. It does not have a form or a name, it is empty and inexhaustible, it is endless and permanent. Though it does not have form and substance, it includes everything in itself. Though it does not act by itself, everything happens because of it. Those who have

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[6] See, for example, Yang Boqun, ed., *Lunyu yi zhu* (Analects with Translation and Commentaries) (Beijing, 1958), ch. 16, par. 2.

[7] Guanzi, in the series *Zhu zi jicheng* (Collected Philosophical Writings) (Beijing, 1956), vol. 5, *juan* 31; *Daodejing* (The Canon of Dao and De), in the series *Zhu zi jicheng* (Beijing, 1956), vol. 3, par. 53, 60, 65; *Drevnekitaiskaia Filosofiia* (Ancient Chinese Philosophy) (Moscow, 1972–73), vol. 1, 130–33; vol. 2, 18–19.

perceived Dao also have learned the principles of existence. However, one cannot grasp Dao with the use of words or with the help of accumulated knowledge. One can perceive Dao only after getting rid of desires, liberating oneself from passions, and concentrating on "oneness." Then one can grasp Dao with one's heart and vanish into it. The one who has perceived it does not speculate, the one who follows it does not teach others. In other words, the one who serves Dao is equal to it, and the confluence with Dao provides one with longevity or even immortality.

Given that Dao cannot reveal itself, De is its manifestation and emanation in the world of phenomena. De is virtually the same as Dao, but it is manifested in things and people. It is the realization of Dao's potential in the world and society. One who has perceived De has at the same time perceived Dao. One who has perceived De and Dao seeks for naturalness, which is revealed in Non-activism: one refrains from action, allowing everything to follow its natural way — that is the principle of Dao. If Dao gives birth to all things and living beings, and De manifests them, the substance Qi is the concrete manifestation of De in each of those. The subtle Qi is the origin of life and the foundation of its florescence, its spiritual source. With the use of the right life regimen and renunciation of passions, one can accumulate and preserve Qi and then attain longevity and Dao.[8]

One is impressed by the depth of philosophical speculation of the early Daoists, especially if we take into consideration those few facts that we know about the development of natural philosophy in China for a millennium before that.[9] However, before we define our attitude towards the Chinese pursuit of the answer to the problems of ontogenesis, we should pay attention to the analogous development of thought in the neighboring Indian region at

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[8] For details see Guanzi, *juan* 36–40,49; *Daodejing*; *Zhuangzi jijie* (Zhuangzi with the Collected Commentaries) in the series *Zhu zi jicheng* (Shanghai, 1954), *juan* 2, 6, 17, 22; *Ancient Chinese Philosophy* 1: 115–38, 254–63, 268–83; 2: 25–48, 51–57.

[9] Modern scholars quite persuasively argue that this florescence of thought was connected to the activities of the famous Jixia Academy in the Qi kingdom of the Eastern Zhou period in the fourth–third centuries BCE. Many of the greatest thinkers of the late Zhou period worked there in collaboration with their peers. Some of them were permanent residents of Qi: the rulers of Qi treated dozens or even hundreds of them with attention and care. Others only visited Qi for a short time, as Zhuangzi did.

approximately the same time. Here, I will deal only with the Vedic tradition, while setting aside the ancient enclaves of urban culture such as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. The Indian thinkers, as already mentioned, worked out their own way of solving the cardinal problems of ontogenesis in a fashion similar to the way developed in China.

In the Vedic culture of the Aryans, who settled in Northern India in the second half of the second millennium BCE, there were many personified and concretely depicted deities — Dyaus, Indra, Varuna, Agni, and others. This is one of its principle differences from ancient Chinese culture. The characteristics of these deities' cults, the mythological descriptions of their deeds, and even their names, were close to those of other peoples, for example the Greeks of antiquity, Germans, and Slavs. The common Indo-European origin of these peoples was an obvious reason for these similar religious features. However, the further development of the interpretation of the problems of the universe took a different path in ancient Indian philosophy than it did in Europe or the Middle East.

As early as in the first texts of the ancient Indian *samhits*, namely in the hymns of the Rigveda, mention is made that the gods are not the creators of the universe. On the contrary, the gods were themselves created. For example, one of the hymns says that there was a time when there still was "no existence nor non-existence," and only the great Unity surrounded by darkness and emptiness existed. This Unity emerged by means of *tapas*, the great vital energy, the accumulation and realization of which help to reveal the miraculous potential; similar notions helped to create the cult of ascetics in ancient India. The hymn is not very clear in regard to details, but one can deduce from it that this Unity, when it took its ultimate form, was that very "non-existence" that later gave birth to "existence." The hymn also says that thought and desire formed the liaison of "non-existence and existence," and, in the complex process of the transformation of the first into the second, the world emerged and the gods were created.[10] Another hymn of the Rigveda tells how "existence emerged out of non-existence," and the gods

[10] Rigveda, X, 129; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia* (Ancient Indian Philosophy) (Moscow, 1972), 34.

appeared.[11] Finally, another hymn of the Rigveda tells about the primary being Purusha, who gave birth to everything: heaven, earth, sun, moon, people, and animals.[12]

The hymns of the Rigveda tell about the universe in a quite disorderly and contradictory fashion. At the same time, in the last and the latest of four ancient Vedic collections (*samhits*), *Atharvaveda*, there is a hymn that develops the idea of Purusha found in the Rigveda and poses these questions: who created this giant with his multifunctionality, and what is his primary substance?[13] In the *Brahmans*, later commentaries to the *Vedas* (dating to around the beginning of the first millennium BCE), there is an attempt to clarify these obscure notions. For example, Aitareya-Brahmana tells about the great Brahman and his way "upwards towards the gods," about the death and birth of the natural forces such as lightning, rain, moon, sun, and wind around him.[14] Probably the most famous and revered of the *Brahmans*, Shatapatha-Brahmana contains the commentary on the Vedic ideas of the birth of everything out of non-existence. Purusha emerged out of non-existence with the assistance of breath (*prana*); Purusha created Brahman with the use of *tapas*, and Brahman became "the foundation of the universe."[15] Another commentary in this source makes more precise the assertion that thought is the primary entity ("no existence nor non-existence"); it reveals itself with the use of *tapas* and created words.[16] Finally, another passage from that source explains that originally the universe was Brahman, and then Brahman created all the gods who became immortal because of Brahman.[17] In the Aranyakas, the texts of the forest-dwelling ascetics, probably created around the same time as the Brahmans, there is yet other theory of the genesis of the universe: at first there was Atman, who

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[11] Rigveda, X, 72; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 29–30.

[12] Rigveda, X, 90; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 30–32.

[13] Atharvaveda, X, 2; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 35–39.

[14] Aitareya-brahmana, VIII, 24, 28; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 41–44.

[15] Shatapatha-Brahmana, VI, 1, 1; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 52–53.

[16] Shatapatha-Brahmana, X, 5, 3; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 59–60.

[17] Shatapatha-Brahmana, XI, 2, 3; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 71.

"created these worlds," including the gods and Purusha, and Purusha was himself "a giant Brahman."[18]

We have noted the numerous discrepancies and very confusing links between existence and non-existence, Unity and thought, Brahman, Atman, and Purusha; for the sake of clarity, we have simplified the situation and omitted discussion of Prajapati and other beings and symbols that appear in ancient Indian texts as creators or synonyms for these. All these facts attest the difficulty with which the process of the ontological interpretation of the world and the creation of a fairly coherent theory of the universe took place. An important period in this process was the period of the Upanishads (eighth–third centuries BCE), when the first philosophical texts in the proper sense formed. The early Upanishads, especially the largest and the most ancient among them, Chhandogya and Brihadaranyaka (eighth–seventh centuries BCE) took form on the basis of the detailed speculations over those passages and notions in the commentaries (Brahmans and Aranyakas) that talked about the deep inner meaning of the basic processes and subjects of the creation of the universe and defined the most important notions and categories: they paid enormous attention to the problems of clarifying the substance of Brahman, Atman, and Purusha and the relations between them. The authors of different Upanishads clarified those problems in different ways, following different traditions; they variously presented either Brahman, or Atman, or Purusha as the primary cause and the primary entity. However, all of them tried to coordinate the relations between the three and to identify each of them in a more or less coherent and persuasive way.

A brief explication of the essence of the speculations on this topic appearing in thirteen early Upanishads follows. The primary entity of all existence is great Brahman. He appeared by the power of *tapas* and created everything, he was the primary cause of existence. Brahman is the world, space, breath, sun, thought, and joy. He is clear and bright, one and indivisible (in the sense that he does not have parts); he is the truth. Brahman is different from knowledge and stands even higher than the incomprehensible. Revealed Brahman is not true, non-revealed Brahman is true. Everybody is looking for Brahman and strives for it. One who has reached

[18] Aitareya-aranyaka, II, 4; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 79–81.

Brahman gets rid of desires and passions, achieves truth and immortality. One who goes to Brahman does not return back to the human life; he loses name and form, but achieves bliss and eternity instead. Brahman created everything and everybody, including the phenomenal world and gods. However, he did not do this himself directly (that is, by his hands or efforts), but by the means of Atman and Purusha.

Atman is a minute particle of Brahman, his concrete, but not material, emanation in all the being and matters of the phenomenal world. Brahman is a sort of vital energy in relation to living beings or the main quality in relation to matter. Atman is the most subtle basis of everything, the first and the main manifestation of existence, but at the same time he is unrevealed and incomprehensible. Atman seems to be always active and inconstant, but in reality he is inactive and constant. Atman is an embryo and a seed, he dwells in the heart, and the breath comes from him. Atman is an arrow with which one can achieve the target — Brahman; he is a light that makes it possible to see and realize Brahman. He changes his form according to the forms of concrete existence, but stays outside of them, because he is beyond existence. He is a sort of intermediary that should be the first object of comprehension for one who strives to achieve Brahman. That is why many people strive to comprehend Atman; however, it is not possible to do this without learning and speculation, but only with the effort of thought (tapas). Besides, it is important that not everybody possesses the ability of such comprehension: Atman himself selects those who can comprehend him. At the same time, one who has comprehended him does not know sorrow: he grasps light and truth and achieves immortality, because Atman is Brahman.

Purusha is the divine and immaterial basis that gives birth to everything; he is the bosom of Brahman. Purusha is one and indivisible, immortal and “the master of immortality”; he is the great ruler and the motive force of the whole of existence, and in this aspect he is both Atman and Brahman. Purusha is everything that exists, has existed, and will exist. In a certain sense he is even higher than non-revealed, so that by comprehending him, one can attain liberation and immortality. It is Purusha who directly gives birth to all matters and beings, gods and even natural phenomena. His head represents fire, his legs earth, his eyes the sun and moon. Gods and people, animals and birds, seas and mountains, plants and juices, breath and mind all came out of

him.[19] Sages who strive for liberation from name and form also look for Purusha: they obtain truth in return. Brahman is the creator of Purusha, so they are often identified with one another.

In spite of the seeming and often even real contradictions of the concepts of ontogenesis expressed in the Upanishads, on the whole one can draw quite a logical and clear picture of ontogenesis and the specific succession of events based on them. A certain formless and unnamed Unity, an abyss, standing somewhere on the verge of non-existence (beyond it or actually in it), creates a great absolute entity of Brahman that at the same time is a transformation, modification, alter ego of the Unity itself. Brahman stands outside of the phenomenal world, but he creates existence. His manifestation, emanation, in this world is Atman, whose subtle monads are revealed, though they are not perceptible materially in all matter and especially every being. Purusha is his direct tool in the act of the creation of the phenomenal world; the particles of his substance, being at the same time the particles of substance of the unrevealed Brahman and the subtle monads of Atman, directly created the whole phenomenal world in his material as well as immaterial (mind and emotion) aspects.

I recount here this scheme of ontogenesis very briefly, because of space limitations. However, it was the result of more than a thousand years' thought against the background of the social reality and the system of spiritual values that inspired this kind of search at a time when the whole spiritual and, for the most part, material culture was oriented around the apprehension of great metaphysical verities and attempts to approach the Absolute with the help of esoteric *tapas*, ascesis, and yoga. This search was reflected not only in the Upanishads, but in many other works of ancient Indian civilization, starting with the multi-volume epic poems the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the role of which in the formation of cultural traditions of India and the religious foundations of Hinduism cannot be overestimated. Therefore, the search for the answers for the cardinal problems of the origin of universe and existence was probably the most important concern of thought in ancient India. In this perspective, the obvious similarity of a number of the most important points in metaphysical constructions in the ancient Indian and

[19] Mundaka-Upanishad, II, 1; *Upanishady* (Moscow: Upanishads, 1967), 180–81.

ancient Chinese theories of ontogenesis is especially interesting. These common points are as follows.

First, both ancient Indian and early Daoist philosophies created the notion of the supreme absolute substance — the primary basis of the universe and existence. Brahman as well as Dao are outside of time and space,[20] but at the same time fill each of those without remainder. Both substances are impossible to apprehend, though it is possible to grasp their essence, even if only selected ones can do so. Both of them are indivisible, but at the same time reveal themselves in all the subtle events of the phenomenal world that one can only recall and mention. I think that I do not need to reiterate all the characteristics of these substances (I have partially listed them above) in order to demonstrate that their common features and functions by far outnumber the few differences; besides, these differences concern minor details.

Second, both great substances do not reveal themselves directly, as the revealed Dao is not the true Dao,[21] and the manifested Brahman is not true either.[22] However, they reveal themselves through their emanations or intermediaries: for Brahman those are Atman and Purusha, for Dao they are De and Qi. Atman is closer to Brahman than Purusha; he can stand for his part and is often identified with Brahman. The situation with Dao and De is quite similar. In a certain sense the parallel between Atman and De is quite possible. Comparison of Purusha to Qi is more difficult. The primordial substance of Qi is quite close to the monads of Atman: its characteristics are comparable to some characteristics of Atman. In this respect one can recall for example the refrain of the Uddalaka's injunctions for his son Svetaketu: "This subtle part is this whole world, this is the truth, this is Atman, this is you, Shvetaketu."[23] As for Purusha, there are no parallels for him in the early Daoist texts. However, a little later, as we will see below, the primordial human Pangu became his parallel.

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[20] Following the ancient Indian texts, we conventionally identify the Unity as Brahman, Atman, and Purusha, and use the term Brahman for the composite substance of the creator.

[21] Zhuangzi jijie, *juan* 2; *Drevnekitaiskaia Filosofiia*, vol. 1, 258.

[22] *Upanishady* (Moscow: Upanishads, 1967), 142.

[23] Chhandogya-Upanishad, VI, 8–16; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 116–19.

Third, both substances, Brahman and Dao, have the functions of a creator; they stipulate the laws of this world and create the phenomenal world. Brahman and Dao partly directly and partly indirectly participate in the process of creative activity. Atman and Purusha act as the Brahman's intermediaries, and their functions are different. Atman is a kind of particle of Brahman's divine soul, and the entirety of life and existence are impossible without him. Purusha creates the concrete forms of the phenomenal world. The Dao's intermediaries are De and Qi, and their functions are quite close. Here one should pay attention to one important detail.

Absolutely all things, including the gods, are objects of creation. However, if this idea that the gods are created was very natural and logical in the situation of ancient India, with its rich and complex mythology and the pantheon of the Vedas, in the Daoist texts the use of the term "gods" in this perspective seems less appropriate. Nevertheless, the gods are mentioned in in these texts, and they take quite a strange form. As was already noted, there were no great gods in ancient China except for the Heaven of the Zhou people and the Shangdi of the Shang dynasty. In fact, the first seems to have driven back the latter. The early Daoist texts do not mention Shangdi: it seems that by the fourth–third centuries BCE he was completely forgotten and at any rate nobody thought of him as the great deity of the entire country. These texts interpret Heaven in its ontological and cosmogonic aspects. The Upanishads mention it approximately in the same way, when they talk about the creation of heaven, earth, sun, and so on. Oppositely to the Confucian philosophers, the Daoists did not treat Heaven with any great piety; at least they did not regard it as the supreme deity. For them Heaven was the primary material substance and not more than that. However, paragraph 4 of the treatise *Daodejing* says that Dao appeared earlier than the deities. The text uses a neologism, *xiandi*, where *xian* is "an appearance, image," and *di* "a divine ancestor," "sacred emperor," a usage not to be encountered in other texts. At the same time it is clear from the context that this term means "gods," or "celestial emperors," which is clarified in the commentaries as well. It creates an impression that this term is a calque used for a notion borrowed from another culture. In all other cases one would expect the use of another term, for example, Shangdi.[24]

[24] In the commentary to the *Daodejing* by Wang Bi (226–249), the neologism *xiandi* is explained by the term *tiandi*,

Fourth, although both substances are incomprehensible, there are many people, at least many wise ones, who try to apprehend them; and sometimes they are successful. In both cases the way to apprehend these substances is not by trying to gain supreme knowledge, through study or speculation, but by using the appropriate behavior, namely the reduction of desires and passions, the utmost commitment, concentration, abstinence, *tapas*, physical exercises, and breath gymnastics. The figure of the ascetic — a *tapasya* or yogi — was very common in ancient India. In China, such a figure was unknown at least until the middle of the first millennium BCE. There were indeed hermits at the time of Confucius, but we do not know anything about the nature of their ascetic practices. At the same time, the early Daoist texts discuss at some length such asceticism, including discussions of suitable physical exercises and breath control.

Arthur Waley noted the obvious commonality between the Daoist descriptions and yogic practices in ancient India. He called the Chinese practices "the Daoist yoga."[25] Other modern scholars also use the term suggested by Waley.[26] In India and for Daoists as well, similar practices were believed to lead to immortality, dissolution in the supreme absolute.

And fifth, both supreme substances have a direct connection with the sphere of social ethics. Though in the Indian texts there are no discussions of the problems related to improving government administration in which the ancient Chinese, including the Daoists, took such an interest; but both ancient Indians and Chinese were interested in ethical questions. Brahman as well as Dao was considered to be the embodiment of truth. However, as soon as the phenomenal world with all its forms was created, the lie emerged. In India, the truth and the lie were divided

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i.e. "celestial rulers": *Daodejing*, 3. This fact can lead to identifying *xiandi* with Shangdi. One can find this interpretation in some works of modern authors. However, this treatise does not mention Shangdi, which makes this identification questionable. Apparently those authors who interpret the neologism *xiandi* as a symbol emphasizing the primary quality of Dao are right: see Ch'en Ku-ying, *Lao-Tzu: Text, Notice and Comments* (San Francisco, 1977), 68. In this case we cannot exclude the possibility that this newly coined term in the text of the treatise was some sort of a calque that reflected the influence of another culture with its multitude of gods created by the Absolute-Brahman.

[25] Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (London, 1934), 116–20.

[26] See, for example, Chang Chung-yuan, *Tao: A New Way of Thinking: The Translation of Tao Te Ching with an Introduction and Commentaries* (New York, 1975), 33–34.

between gods and demons (*asuras*).[27] Daoists argued that "when the truth and the lie appeared, it caused damage to Dao."[28] One should note that while ethical perfection was a condition for the attainment of truth and salvation in both India and China, the Chinese tradition was more developed in this aspect. This fact probably explains the use of such categories and definitions as "the earthly Dao" and "the human Dao" alongside "the celestial Dao" that stood close to the Confucian interpretation of Dao.

We still stop at this point, but one could continue the list of similarities and analogies. The facts noted above are sufficient to demonstrate the obvious similarity of a number of fundamental principles in the solution of many cardinal problems of the origin of universe and existence in Ancient India and among the Daoist thinkers in China in the fourth–third centuries BCE.

Taking into account the fact that the starting points are very different, as in India the system of thought we are concerned with was developed over many centuries and was always the main focus of attention, while in ancient China it does not seem to have been so, one can nevertheless pose the question whether the authors of early Daoist works were acquainted with the ideas, notions, and categories that were widespread in Northern India in the middle of the first millennium BCE, whether such influence was even possible, and how significant were external factors for the development of Daoist concepts.

This is not the first time that scholars have asked questions of this kind. These inquiries have quite a long history, in fact, especially if we consider them in a broader sense, beyond the natural philosophical concerns of Daoists. One should note that modern scientific sinology from its very beginning has attempted to solve the problem of the origin of Chinese civilization by researching possible Western influence. Though many suggested parallels and arguments are beneath criticism, and often seem merely comic now,[29] research in this direction is not

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[27] See, for example, Shatapatha-Brahmana, XI, 5, 1; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 71–72.

[28] *Zhuangzi jijie*, *juan* 2, 30; *Ancient Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 2, 258.

[29] For details, see L. S. Vasil'ev, *Problemy genezisa kitaiskoi tsivilizatsii* (Problems of the Genesis of Chinese Civilization) (Moscow, 1976), 39–47.

completely groundless. First, one should consider the possibility that certain elements of material culture and ideas, including those in the spheres of astronomy and calendar, script and symbolism, were borrowed by the Chinese from neighboring peoples. Some possible sources of such influence are contacts with Indo-Europeans.

The special studies of paleolinguists have documented a certain similarity, and possibly even affinity, though a very distant one, between ancient Chinese and Indo-European languages. This fact is particularly important because other parallels exist: for example, Indo-European and Shang and Zhou battle carts are very similar.[30] However, analogies of this kind cannot prove that there is a relationship in aspects of belief and thought: the close and unquestionable affinity between Indians, Iranians, and ancient Greeks did not impede them from creating their own models of ontogenesis. Here it would be more correct to speak of the possibility of some common world outlook in the principles of the ancient Chinese and Indians in the remote past. Especially noteworthy is the fact that, in the case of Greeks, Iranians, and Indo-Arians, their obvious affinity did not influence their ideological systems, yet comparison of the ancient Chinese and ancient Indian systems shows just the reverse situation. The affinity between them is not very obvious, and the similarities are very fragmentary, but the resemblance of the ways of thinking is so striking that it is hard to reject the hypothesis of direct influence.

It appears that one can speak only about quite late borrowing with assurance. The earlier parallels mentioned above can only have the significance of precedent. Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to identify individual borrowings of this kind, which one can explain by the scarcity and specific nature of the pre-Han mythology.[31] These features are related to the tendency to euhemerize myths, a characteristic of the culture of Zhou dynasty China. Yet many sinologists, including very serious and authoritative scholars, have given attention to the question of Indian borrowings.

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[30] L. S. Vasil’ev, *Problemy genezisa kitaiskoi tsivilizatsii* (Problems of the Genesis of Chinese Civilization) (Moscow, 1976), 300–2, 275–79.

[31] L. S. Vasil’ev, *Kul’ty, religii, traditsii v Kitae* (Cults, Religions, and Traditions in China) (Moscow: 1970), 232–35.

One of the first scholars to hypothesize Indian borrowings was a famous sinologist of the nineteenth century, Wieger. The essays on Daoism by Wieger were collected, arranged, and reprinted not long ago.[32] Wieger analyzed mostly texts, and in his essays that served as introductions to these texts, he gave attention to the fact that Lao-tzu probably did not invent Daoism. Lao-tzu only made known Daoist works that were kept in the archives of the Zhou dynasty court: according to legend, he served in these archives. Although the tradition that Wieger used for his description of the life and work of Lao-tzu is not very reliable, the question he asked seems to be well-posed: how did the Daoist texts find their way into the archives of the Zhou dynasty court? This question is quite reasonable if we take into account that China during the Zhou dynasty lacked almost any metaphysical cosmological speculation, as we have already mentioned. Basing his speculations on this fact, Wieger proposed a hypothesis according to which the Zhou archives contained some information introduced to China from abroad; therefore "Daoism in its general characteristics seems to be an adaptation of the contemporary Indian doctrine of the Upanishads." Although now it is impossible to prove such borrowing, it is obvious that "the non-Chinese doctrine that flourished at that time in India, suddenly and rapidly flourished in China."[33]

One might say that this argument is not very persuasive, but one should give attention to the fact that Wieger, a well-known connoisseur of ancient Chinese texts, was quite resolute in tracing the origin of Daoism to Indian philosophy. Although it was very typical of the sinologists of the nineteenth century to search for the origins of Chinese culture in the West, in the case of Indian philosophy and Daoist texts there was a solid basis for this hypothesis. One of the younger contemporaries of Wieger, Medhurst, wrote in the introduction to his translation of the *Daodejing* that the manner of interpretation of Dao in Lao-tzu's book reminds him of some well-known statements of Indian philosophy. According to Lao-tzu, Dao takes two major forms — undifferentiated nameless entity and differentiated Unity of existence; and this quite conforms with the text of Bhabavat-gita that says: "There are two Purushas in this world: destructible and

[32] L. Wieger, *Taoism: The Philosophy of China* (Burbank, Calif., 1976).

[33] L. Wieger, *Taoism: The Philosophy of China* (Burbank, Calif., 1976), 39.

indestructible. The destructible one is represented by all the living beings, while the indestructible is that which is unchanging."[34]

The German sinologist Konradi in his special article continued to work on the program of Indian influence on the ancient Chinese culture.[35] The author concentrated his analysis on the fourth century BCE, a period crucial for the examinations of the current paper. He recalled that Zou Yan worked out a fundamentally new geographical system, in which, for example, China occupied only 1/84th of the area of the world; in the poetry of Qu Yuan that dates approximately to the same period, new mythological motifs appear. Qu Yuan came from the southern state of Chu, where contacts with India were more probable than in the North.[36] However, in his opinion one can find the most obvious Indian influence in the works of early Daoists, especially in the tales of Zhuangzi. There one can discover the ideas of reincarnation and the constant cycle of life: an example is the famous tale of Zhuangzi's dream in which he turned into a butterfly and then contemplated the question whether he was a butterfly dreaming that it was he, Zhuangzi, or if he was Zhuangzi who dreamed that he turned into a butterfly. Konradi also noted that some ideas of Zhuangzi were close to yoga.[37]

In the 1920s H. Maspero was a proponent of the idea that there had been close contacts between India and China, and that Indian culture had influenced Chinese culture since the fifth century BCE. In his collected research on ancient China he wrote about the possible contacts of ancient Chinese with Indian merchants and the spread of Indian knowledge in the spheres of astronomy, geography, cosmogony, and mythology as the result of these contacts.[38] Although later scholars criticized Maspero's arguments, especially those concerning astronomy, on the whole his search for Indian influence was not at all groundless. Maspero had a number of

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[34] C. S. Medhurst, *The Tao Teh King: A Short Study in Comparative Religion* (Chicago, 1905), X.

[35] V. M. Shtein, *Ekonomicheskie i kulturnye sviazi mezhdu Kitaem i Indiei v drevnosti* (Economical and Cultural Contacts of China and India in Antiquity) (Moscow: 1960).

[36] V. M. Shtein, *Ekonomicheskie i kulturnye sviazi mezhdu Kitaem i Indiei v drevnosti*, 34–35.

[37] V. M. Shtein, *Ekonomicheskie i kulturnye sviazi mezhdu Kitaem i Indiei v drevnosti*, 36–39.

[38] H. Maspero, *La Chine antique* (Paris, 1927), 607–21.

followers, who were prominent sinologists as well, and they supported some of his arguments, especially those concerning the origins of Daoism. Among Maspero's followers the first to be mentioned is Arthur Waley.

Arthur Waley was one of the most famous scholars of Daoism, and in his classic work *The Way and Its Power*, first published in 1934 and many times reprinted, he argued that by the third century BCE Chinese literature was already "full of geographic and mythological elements borrowed from India.[39] Significantly, Waley dated the *Daodejing* to that time.[40] In discussing Daoism, Waley wrote that the descriptions of movements and breath techniques that one can find in Zhuangzi testify for the acquaintance of the ancient Chinese with Indian culture, namely the yoga asanas, and that most probably merchants transmitted this knowledge to China. As for the last point, it coincided with the Maspero's supposition.

One should note that in the last several decades the situation in sinology with regard to this aspect has significantly changed. After intensive archaeological research began in China, with many new archeological discoveries, some of them sensational and changing commonly held concepts, the hypothesis of the autochthonal development of Chinese civilization became widespread.[41] These circumstances probably made specialists adopt a more cautious approach to all problems related to the possible external influences on ancient China. In particular, this is directly reflected in the approach of V. M. Shtein, who wrote a book about contacts between India and China in antiquity: *Economical and Cultural Contacts of China and India in Antiquity*. He invoked many undeniable facts testifying for the existence of Indian influence on the ancient Chinese culture; however, he was very cautious when it came to conclusions. Scholars of Daoism who especially studied the genesis of Daoism and paid attention to the problem of the influence of Indian thought on Daoist philosophy adopted a similar approach. Some modern scholars, such as H. Creel, were more prone to treat the hypothesis of Indian influence as an

[39] A. Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (London, 1934), 114.

[40] A. Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (London, 1934), 127–28.

[41] L. S. Vasil'ev, *Problemy genezisa kitaiskoi tsivilizatsii* (Problems of the Genesis of Chinese Civilization) (Moscow, 1976), 47–70.

alternative theory, as they argued the related evidence was not sufficient.[42] Although this approach is quite reasonable and in some cases even preferable to any other, it does not solve the problem discussed here.

One can agree with modern authors that the bold hypotheses of past sinologists do not seem very persuasive in light of the new evidence. We can add that there are no direct and certain facts that testify for Indian influence on early Daoist thought, and that Daoist treatises represent the essence of indigenous Chinese thought, the depth, originality, and independence of which are undeniable. Besides, many of the details of these treatises do not have parallels with the ways of thinking of Indian sages. On the contrary, many parts of the Chinese works are very different from the philosophical speculations in ancient India in regard to the subject and method. Nevertheless, the problem of the possibility of Indian influence remains.

First, following Creel, one should pay attention to the heterogeneity of the *Daodejing* treatise and the existence of two clearly differentiated layers in this work. Creel calls them "contemplative" and "purposeful": in the first, there is a search in the higher sphere of abstract philosophical categories, while the second is dedicated to profitable practical instructions. Creel regards the second layer as a later and secondary one.[43] The emphasis on the principles of right behavior, skillful administration, and other concepts very typical of ancient Chinese thought leaves no doubt that the second layer of this treatise is genuinely Chinese. Not only does this layer, according to Creel's persuasive argument, differ considerably from the first, but the two are almost incompatible.[44] At the same time, the passages that represent both layers are intermingled in the text of the *Daodejing*. If we take into account that all of the analogies with Indian thought that were discussed above concern only speculations included in the first layer of the text, the division of the text into these two layers is itself an additional proof for the hypothesis that the process of creation of the *Daodejing* was connected to the serious and difficult effort to assimilate foreign ideas and to bring them into conformity with concepts

[42] H. Creel, *What Is Taoism?* (Chicago and London, 1977), 44, fn. 28.

[43] H. Creel, *What Is Taoism?*, 4–5.

[44] H. Creel, *What Is Taoism?*, 45–46.

characteristic of existing Chinese thought. In other words, one can suppose that originally the authors of this treatise possessed the "contemplative" layer of the text that they needed to adapt and to rewrite in a clear way. Afterwards, they added everything that corresponded to the indigenous way of thinking to the assimilated contents. It is hard to prove that this really took place; however, there are some grounds for this hypothesis. One must confess that the evidence to be presented and discussed here is very scarce, and some arguments do not seem persuasive. However, it is important to note that this evidence concerns exactly those passages in the early Daoist treatises that describe the process of creation, i.e. the genesis of the universe, and while it was the key topic of philosophical speculations in ancient India, in China it was almost completely unknown in philosophical works dating to the period before the fourth–third centuries BCE.[45] I have already discussed one of these passages — one that mentions *xiandi*. Below I will discuss the others.

Unlike the Indian texts, the early Daoist texts do not provide a detailed description of the creative process with several variants. In this perspective, everything that relates to this topic is very important. One can find one of these passages in chapter 12 of Zhuangzi, where it is

[45] Some ideas of the creative potential and functions of Heaven found their expression in the *Yijing* treatise: Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth and Man in the Book of Changes* (Seattle, 1977), 49–51. One can agree that Daoism in a certain sense can serve as the key for "the mystical world" of this treatise: P. Rawson and L. Legeza, *Tao: The Chinese Philosophy of Time and Change* (London, 1973), 7. However, based solely on these facts, one cannot conclude that Daoism emerged under the influence of philosophy and practices recorded in the *Yijing*. First, the special analysis has demonstrated that *Yijing* in its philosophical aspect did not significantly influence the process of genesis of Daoism. Second, one cannot exclude the possibility that the propositions that constitute the *Yijing* were written down in the form of a treatise only around the fifth–fourth centuries BCE; see A. B. Watts, *Tao: The Watercourse of Way* (New York, 1975), 27. On the other hand, one can admit that before the formation of Daoism as a school of thought in mantic practice, later recorded as the *Yijing* text with its numerous addenda, explanations, and commentaries, there existed those cardinal ideas, including the polar opposition of yin and yang, the not-yet precisely formulated thesis of the unconscious as the source of supreme knowledge, that later were developed by the Daoists: Watts, *Tao: The Watercourse of Way*, 27–28. However, it is not possible to regard the oral mantic practice and the related records of the *Yijing* as the only sources of Daoism. One can consider the *Yijing* to be the best of the sources of early Daoist thought, and one cannot overlook the principal difference in the world outlook of these two systems of thought: U. K. Shutskiy, *Kitaiskaia klassicheskaia "Kniga Peremen"* (Moscow, 1960), 143.

surrounded by many tales completely devoid of deep philosophical content.[46] Here is such a passage: "Originally, there was non-existence without content or name. Then it evolved into the Unity. The Unity existed, but it did not have a name. It gave birth to all things that are called its De. Because of this formlessness, an endless division took place, and this was called the behest. The movement slowed down and the things [and living beings] appeared. When they took their forms, the principles of existence appeared too, and this was called formation. The formed bodies received their spiritual basis, and this was called their nature. If one perfects oneself in accord with the nature, he (or she) can return to De. [The approach] to De brings one back to the primary substance, the all-embracing emptiness [of non-existence]."[47]

This passage is difficult to interpret and translate.[48] Ignoring the chain of events of creation turns this passage into "abracadabra."[49] A close study of this chain of events leads one to the conclusion that this passage briefly narrates the process of the creation of the world as well as the reverse process of returning to the Absolute and merging with it. It is very significant that, without the key that one can easily find in the texts of Upanishads, it is very difficult to decipher this passage. Some unclear concepts and categories are intermingled and can create an impression of useless and fruitless philosophizing. However, if we turn to Upanishads, we can solve the problem of its interpretation.

First, there was non-existence, the abyss that gave birth to the Unity. The formless and nameless Unity was the fundamental reason underlying everything: it created the world, and its subtle monads or emanations, Atman or De, exist in all beings, things, and phenomena of the world. The Unity or the great Brahman, being formless itself, created all forms, i.e. the diversity

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[46] This can explain why this important passage was not included in the collection of Russian translations called *Drevnekitaiskaia Filosofiia* (Ancient Chinese Philosophy).

[47] *Zhuangzi jijie*, 73.

[48] See variants in H. A. Giles, *Chuang Tzu: Mystic, Moralist and Social Reformer* (Shanghai, 1926), 143; Chang Chung-yuan, *Tao: A New Way of Thinking. A Translation of the Tao Te Ching with an Introduction and Commentaries* (New York, 1975), 119.

[49] See, for example, L. D. Pozdneeva, *Ateisty, materialisty, dialektiki Drevnego Kitaia* (Atheists, Materialists, Dialectics of Ancient China) (Moscow, 1967), 191.

of the world, by way of endless division. However, what was divided? The Unity itself could not be. This passage is not clear as concerns the details of this process. The Upanishads provide some explanation: the great Purusha, who also represents Brahman, was divided into the myriads of things, beings, and phenomena and in this way created the diversity of the world — certainly at the behest of the Unity (Brahman, Dao). When Purusha completed his task, the division stopped, i.e. the process of the quick movement slowed down, and all things, beings, and phenomena received their own image or form and also the particle of immortal spiritual entity, i.e. Ataman (De or Qi). After this, the creative process stopped. This is not important in itself, however. What is important is to understand these principles and mechanisms, in order to escape from this phenomenal world. I would like to remind the reader that in China, before the appearance of the Daoists and the Daoist doctrine, people usually did not strive for such escape, while in India it was the ultimate goal of all of the diverse religious-philosophical doctrines. For the attainment of this goal, one who has apprehended the principle of things perfects himself in accord with his own nature and in this way attains Atman, the particle of the great Brahman (or De, the representation of Dao). After one has apprehended Atman or De, he or she receives the possibility to merge with Brahman or Dao, to reach the great Unity and through the loss of name and form to return to the all-encompassing emptiness of the absolute reality that exists beyond the phenomenal world.

I would like to repeat that, for Indian philosophy this chain of events was quite a commonplace. In China, on the contrary, before the appearance of early Daoist works these ideas had not developed. Even the Daoist works do not explain the details of the creative process and the reverse process of the step-by-step approach to the absolute Unity. In the early Daoist works the topic of the merging of an individual with the boundless Absolute was almost undeveloped except for the brief and non-informative formulas such as “Dao gives birth to the things,” “Dao is the progenitor of everything,” “One who follows Dao is eternal,” “One who apprehended Dao does not speculate,” and so on. Only Daoists of the Han dynasty and later periods developed this topic. In this regard the passage quoted above is almost unique. One can compare it only with paragraph 42 of the *Daodejing*, which deals with approximately the same topic: “Dao gives birth to one (or Unity); one gives birth to two (or one turns into two); two give birth to three (or two

turn into three), three give birth to all things (or myriads of things, beings, and phenomena). All of existence is permeated with yang and yin, filled with Qi, and arrives to the state of harmony."

Unlike the previous passage, this passage is easy to translate; however, one can hardly interpret and explain it without an extended commentary. One should note that the commentary by Wang Bi usually appended to the well-known modern edition of the treatise cannot satisfactorily decipher the number symbols, though it was designed to explicate them.[50] It is not surprising then that translators usually do not take the commentary by Wang Bi into consideration or leave this passage without interpretation at all, which makes this text hard to comprehend.[51] Some translators offer their own interpretations. For example, one of the first and for a long period one of the most authoritative translators and interpreters of ancient Chinese texts, James Legge, suggested more than one hundred years ago that one should identify the Unity (one) in the text of the paragraph 42 as Dao that gave birth to itself by turning from non-existence into existence. Although one can understand the first steps of this process in another way, taking as the first step the movement from "the not non-existence and non-existence" to "non-existence," in general one can accept this identification as reasonable. As for "two born by one," Legge suggested interpreting these two as the forces of yin and yang. In regard to three, he noted that he did not even dare to suppose what this can mean.[52]

Legge's research deserves our attention, but it is noteworthy that he did not find the solution to this problem. He left the key moment in the chain of events — "two give birth to three" — unexplained. In the commentary to the Russian translation of this passage by Yan Hin-shun, one is identified with the abyss, two with the light and heavy particles of Qi, three with Heaven, Earth, and Man.[53] However, this interpretation is not satisfactory either. Even if one can

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[50] Daodejing, 27.

[51] Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, 195; Chang Chung-yuan, *Tao: A New Way of Thinking. A Translation of the Tao Te Ching with an Introduction and Commentaries* (New York, 1975), 119.

[52] James Legge, *The Sacred Books of Daoism* (in *The Sacred Books of China*, vol. 39 of *The Sacred Books of the East*, ed. Max Muller; Oxford, 1891), 86.

[53] *Drevnekitaiskaia Filosofiia*, vol. 1, 312.

identify the light Qi with the Qi of yang and heaven and heavy Qi with the Qi of yin and Earth, as was suggested in the more comprehensive independent edition of this Russian translation,[54] the question arises: how did a man get into the creative triad and who is that man?

Here one should note that Man, especially in his hypostasis of a sage ruler, had an honored position in ancient Chinese thought. He always attracted the attention of philosophers interested in problems of social ethics, including Confucians and Daoists. The legendary ancient sages enjoyed particular reverence. Many great deeds were ascribed to them, including the invention of fire, agriculture, marriage, fair administration, and so on. In the treatise *Daodejing*, namely in its twenty-fifth paragraph, the Man (ruler?) appears in one row with Heaven, Earth, and Dao. Together they make the "great four." At the same time, the ruler or sage mentioned in paragraph 25 of the *Daodejing*[55] is a person, but not a deity.[56] Chinese philosophy was very clear on this point, especially in the period preceding the Han dynasty. There was no man-demiurge in ancient China.

Later such a figure did appear in Chinese philosophy. Beginning in the Han dynasty the philosophers started to interpret the triad "Heaven, Earth, and Man" as the sacred triad of great demiurges. According to H. Wilhelm, the first philosopher to develop this interpretation in application to the materials of the *Yijing* treatise was Yang Xiong, who lived around the

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[54] Yan Hin-shun, *Drevnekitaiskii uchenyi Lao-tsy i ego uchenie* (The Ancient Chinese Scholar Lao-tzu and His Teaching (Moscow and Leningrad, 1950), 50–51.

[55] This passage certainly belongs to the purposeful layer of the *Daodejing* treatise, according to the Creel's classification.

[56] Many commentators and interpreters of the *Daodejing* text decisively identify the Man in the passage that talks about "the great four" in paragraph 25 as a ruler: Ch'en Ku-ying, *Lao-Tzu: Text, Notice and Comments* (San-Francisco, 1977), 144–45. There is a solid foundation for this identification, because in the passage talking about the Man who should follow the laws of the Earth, i.e. principles of life, it is reasonable to regard him as one who guides others in accordance with those laws and who stipulates laws for others himself. Although there is sacred symbolism in this text, it is at the same time undeniable that the passage talks, not about the divine symbol, but about a concrete person, a sage ruler, who acts in accordance with the principles of Earth, Heaven, and Dao.

beginning of the Christian era.[57] The interpretation of the triad "Heaven, Earth, and Man" in the Daoist treatise *Taipingjing* that became the theoretical basis of the ideology of the Yellow Turbans uprising that led to the collapse of the Han dynasty also dates back to approximately the same time. It is very important that, in the Han dynasty triad, the Man did not appear in the common ancient Chinese meaning of sage, ruler, and agent, but was turned into the sacred figure, the great symbol that aligned with heaven and earth. It was logical and natural that the further development of this notion led to the appearance of the myth of the primordial man Pangu who gave birth to the whole of existence.

This myth is first recorded in texts that date back to the period following the Han dynasty — the third–fourth centuries CE. Many details of the myth, such as the birth of Pangu from the cosmic egg, two parts of the shell of which subsequently turned into heaven and earth, and the transformation of Pangu into myriads of matter, beings, and phenomena,[58] are very similar to the ancient Indian myths. For example, a detailed description of the cosmic egg had appeared earlier in the early Chhandogya-Upanishad.[59] There is no doubt that Pangu is the Sino-Daoist equivalent of Purusha. H. Wilhelm argues that this myth has a non-Chinese origin.[60] However, the most important fact is that the details of the Pangu myth remind us of the interpretation of the mysterious formulas of the creative process in paragraph 42 of the *Daodejing*, which I have already demonstrated in another work.[61]

Therefore, in post-Han Daoist texts, when the Pangu myth became a part of Chinese indigenous tradition, the well-known triad "Heaven, Earth, and Man" was interpreted as the agent of creation. The Indian influence is undeniable here, by which I mean the introduction into the creative process of a primordial man-demiurge of the Purusha variety, i.e. Pangu. We can ask,

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[57] H. Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth and Man in the Book of Changes* (Seattle, 1977), 131.

[58] Yuan' Ke [Yuan Ke], *Mify Drevenego Kitaia* (Myths of Ancient China) (Russian translation; Moscow, 1967), 41–42.

[59] Chhandogiya-Upanishad, III, 19; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 92.

[60] Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth and Man in the Book of Changes*, 95.

[61] Vasil'ev, *Kul'ty, religii, traditsii v Kitae*, 238.

however, how this can be connected to the formulas of the creative process in paragraph 42, which, as we have mentioned, some interpreters post factum explain with the use of the triad discussed above? In other words, is there any evidence that the authors of the *Daodejing* had in mind the notion of the primordial man of the Purusha/Pangu type as one of the primary substances? We can hardly answer this question with the use of available evidence. However, we can pose this question in another way: if those three on whom the creation of all existence depended were not Heaven (or yang force), Earth (or yin force), and Man (Purusha/Pangu), who could the three be?

One should note in this connection that the early Daoist treatises often manipulate numbers. In chapter 2 of Zhuangzi there is a passage that also concerns some problems of ontogenesis: "Heaven, Earth, and I all exist together, all existence makes one unity together with myself. If [all existence] makes one unity, what is then left for a word? If all this can be named, how can the word not exist? The one (the Unity, all existence) and the word are two, two plus one make three. From non-existence to existence we achieve three."[62] In the numerical symbolism used in this case the last stage related to the triad also remains unclear. The preceding stage is clearer than the last one: it is the sum of all existence and the word which make two. The meaning of this sum, however, is not very clear either. We can make more sense of it if we turn for the explanation to the Upanishads and Brahmans. They spend quite a long time clarifying the nature of speech and word and their relation to thought, breath, and in the final analysis Brahman.[63] However, there is an obvious difference between the ancient Indian and ancient Chinese thought: in the first case the topic that we are interested in is developed thoroughly and in detail, and it is represented by the logically arranged row of categories and notions, while the explanations of the Daoist treatises are very vague. They often create the impression that they miss something, hold something back, omit or simplify some links. This can be the result of something insufficiently adapted, as when the author attempts to interpret some unclear passages.

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[62] *Zhuangzi jijie*, 13; Pozdneeva, *Ateisty, materialisty, dialektiki Drevnego Kitaia*, 143; *Drevnekitaiskaia Filosofiia*, vol. 1, p. 257; Giles, *Chuang Tzu: Mystic, Moralist and Social Reformer*, 23–24.

[63] Shatapatha-Brahmana, X, 5, 3; *Drevneindiiskaia filosofiia*, 59–60 and following.

But let us return to the creative triad in paragraph 42 of the *Daodejing*. Can the reference to the ancient Indian texts help to clarify its meaning?

First, in ancient China the first formulations of the creative process appear only in the early Daoist texts. They do not exist in the texts of the earlier period, although the problem of creative force was important in early mantic practice.[64] There was a stable notion of the great creative potential of Heaven and its De emanation.[65] At the turn of the fourth to third centuries BCE, the philosophers quickly and decisively revised and reconsidered all these notions while they also added new ones. They introduced the new notion of the Great Emptiness or the Great Nothing. This may also be related to Indian influence, as it was the Indians who introduced the notion of "zero" into mathematics, and originally that idea was related to the cosmogonic notions of the Great Nothing or absolute emptiness. Dao substituted Heaven, with its supreme creative functions, and De became its emanation, while Heaven in the new scheme changed its place and was reduced to a symbol of one of two life forces, yang. Earth represented another force, yin. Finally, the primary substance Qi appeared among these new ancient Chinese notions. It permeated everything, and if we take into account its Indian equivalent, it can be compared with Purusha, which was disseminated into the myriads of things, Atman with his monads, and the great life force — the breath-*prana* that makes all existence possible (discussed in the Upanishads) — and even the dharmas that can be organized in every body of existence – the system developed its details in early Buddhist thought.

In other words, the single, united Heaven was substituted by the hierarchical system of substances . These substances are also so closely related to one another that they were inter-identified: De was identified with Dao, yin and yang with De and probably with Dao as well, and Qi also with De. In ancient Indian thought this sort of identification was natural and organic. In ancient China, on the contrary, the texts, at least at their earliest stage, emphasized the strict distinction of notions and categories. One can trace this tradition of distinction back to the mantic practices and the formulas of the *Yijing* treatise. One can suppose that, in order to combine these

[64] See, for example, U. K. Shutskiy, *Kitaiskaia klassicheskaia "Kniga Peremen"* (Moscow, 1960), 19.

[65] See, for example, D. U. Munro, *The Concept of Man in Early China* (Stanford, 1969), 185–93.

two different tendencies, the authors of the early Daoist treatises started to employ vague numerical formulas in which the clear distinction between numbers veils the inner non-segmented mysterious and inter-related notions and categories. Their roles in the creative process were not very clearly defined at the beginning. If we can accept such a supposition, and it is quite reasonable in the situation that we are looking at here, we can again turn to the parallels of the ancient Indian and early Daoist constructions.

Let us analyze all the stages of the creative process expressed in the formulas of paragraph 42.

The first stage: Dao gives birth to one. If we schematize this stage to its extreme extent, it will become the scheme in which something primordial, absolute, and formless, "not non-existence" or non-existence, that is situated on the border of existence, gives birth to existence, the Unity. In the Indian original this stage corresponds to the primary substance of movement already mentioned: non-existence transforms into existence, taking the form of the Unity that is Brahman. The Daoist scheme seems to be an inversion of this stage, as it is the transformation of Dao into the Unity, but not the transformation of non-existence into Unity and then Brahman. However, this inversion is more imaginary than real. The same act lies at the basis of this scheme: something formless gives birth to some form, one gives birth to one. To put it more clearly, one can explain that Dao in its hypostasis of the Great Nothing gives birth to the same Dao, but in its hypostasis of the Absolute Reality, which one can equate with the Unity and identify with Brahman.

The second stage: One (Unity) gives birth to two, or one turns into two. In the Indian original this stage is represented by the creation of Brahman's emanation — Atman. The Daoist scheme envisages that Dao or Supreme Reality gives birth to De (its emanation).

The third stage: Two give birth to three, or two turn into three. In the Indian original Brahman and Atman created the third substance, Purusha, and it was Purusha who played the key role in the further process of the creation of all existence. The world was created from the substance of Purusha, though all three substances were identified with each other. In the Daoist

scheme Dao and De more probably gave birth to the primary substance of Qi[66] that can be equated to Purusha, as was already mentioned.

The fourth stage: Three give birth to all existence. The Indian original precisely follows this pattern. The Daoist scheme is not very clear on that point. How did these three, if they were Dao, De, and Qi, exactly give birth to all existence?

The reasonable question arises: why should we consider Dao, De, and Qi the creative triad? Is it only by analogy with the India scheme? It is widely known that, according to the traditional Chinese concepts that formed long before the appearance of the early Daoist treatises, yin and yang were the major creative forces and the interaction of yin and yang gave birth to all existence. It is not surprising then that commentators and interpreters of the *Daodejing* have identified two from the passage analyzed here with yin and yang and not Dao and De. However, in this interpretation it is unclear what were those three in this passage, namely what was the third substance. Besides, why did the process need this third one? The rationalism of the ancient Chinese nature-philosophical thought was based on the necessity of two creative forces yin and yang for the creation of whole universe.

Daoists, however, insisted that the third entity is necessary. It seems that those were Daoists who quite consciously introduced the mystical and metaphysical element that was characteristic for ancient Indian constructions into the rationalist scheme of early Chinese ontogenetical concepts. This element was represented by the primary substance of Qi. Only when

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[66] As is well known in the study of mantic practices, the ancient Chinese managed without the notion of Qi, although this was the most mystical aspect of their lives. The notion of Qi became a distinct fact of ancient Chinese thought in the fourth–third centuries BCE, and the special dictionary proves it: Bernhardt Karlgren, *Grammata Serica* (Stockholm, 1940), 257, no. 517c. Daoists were not the only ones to use this new term. One can find it in Confucian writings, namely in Mengzi. However, Mengzi uses it in its aspect of ethical meaning; see *Drevnekitaiskaia Filosofiia*, vol. 1, pp. 232, 330. One can suppose that the Daoists gave this term the nuance of meaning that is important for our analysis. They used it often and eagerly in their writings with its clear definition. Modern specialists think that it is possible to emphasize the Daoist (especially the late Daoist) interpretations of Qi as "the cosmic energy," "the breath of Earth," and even "sexual energy": I. Legeza, *Tao Magic: The Chinese Cult of the Occult* (New York, 1975), 14. These also have clear parallels in the traditional Indian culture from Brahmanism to Tantrism.

Qi permeated the yin and yang forces did they become able to realize their creative potential and fill in all existence, as is clear from the second phrase of paragraph 42. The state of harmony is formed because yin and yang permeated with Qi reveal themselves in all existence.

Therefore, from this point of view, the second phrase of the passage seems to clarify the meaning of the first phrase, and then one can interpret everything according to the logic: the commentators are right when they identify two from this passage as yin and yang, while one can identify three as yin, yang, and Qi. According to Daoist ideas, these three indeed had the potential to create all existence. However, this seemingly probable solution meets difficulties in the further analysis.

The basic meaning of the third stage of creative process is "two gave birth to three." However, one can wonder how exactly yin and yang could give birth to Qi? It does not seem possible, if we take into account that, according to the context of this formula, the two forces lacked creative potential without Qi, so they could not give birth to anything. If we look for the forces that could give birth to three, namely the third entity, i.e. Qi, in the Daoist philosophy, those will be only Dao and De, and nothing else. This brings us back to my previous hypothesis: the creative triad in paragraph 42 of the *Daodejing* is composed of Dao, De, and Qi. However, one can further ask: how could they give birth to all existence? We know that existence is given birth to by the yin and yang forces, and only by them, even though the primary substance of Qi can take part in this process. The final part of the formula speaks about the concrete creation of all of the diversity of the Universe, similar to the creation of world by Purusha, and not about the priority of Dao, De, or Qi.

In this way the logical analysis leads us to a deadlock, so we need to look for an exit in the direction that the posing of the question in this work suggests. We can likely differentiate between two layers in the construction of the formula under question. The first layer that can be provisionally labeled as Indian represents the narration of ideas about the creative process that formed under foreign influences, close to those that were developed for centuries in the philosophy of ancient India and that were widespread. The current state of research in this field and the available quantity of materials do not allow one even to pose the question how, when and in what form these ideas were transmitted to China, how many intermediate traditions they

passed through before they became known in a certain form to the early Daoist philosophers. However, it is undeniable that the numerical symbolism of this formula has an Indian origin. One cannot satisfactorily decipher this symbolism if one does not take into account the Indian sources. The meaning of this formula remains unclear without consulting them, as all previous commentators and interpreters of the Daoist treatises have proved.

The second layer is the indigenous, Chinese one. Its characteristics are the most obvious in the second phrase of the formula in paragraph 42 that mentions yin and yang forces, the state of harmony, and the role of the primary substance Qi. The authors of the formula tried to hide the creative forces that definitely were Dao, De, and Qi, corresponding to the Indian Brahman, Atman, and Purusha, under numeric symbols. Apparently they were trying to translate them into the language of Chinese thought and to label them with familiar terms. The indirect proof for this hypothesis is the further transformation of the primary substance Qi into the third member of the creative triad.

The first two members of the triad, either as the abstract and mystical categories of Dao and De or even as their Indian prototypes, Brahman and Atman, were vaguely portrayed in the early texts and with the passage of time they lost their recognizable features. In the Han dynasty they were substituted for by analogues from the Chinese layer, i.e. the traditional forces of yin and yang. At the same time, colorful mythological constructions were introduced into the philosophical scheme. Yin and yang also took on their metaphorical meanings, which had existed previously, but which became especially prominent in the Han period: the male yang force was associated with Heaven and the female yin with Earth. The Daoists transplanted the vague philosophical reminiscence of the formulas of creative process into the colorful mythological picture of relations between Heaven and Earth, including the construction of relations between yin and yang. The third member of the creative triad, the primary substance of Qi, took on the image of the primal being (man) Pangu in the Han and post-Han period. One should pay attention to the natural and reasonable characteristics of this transformation: three creative forces were not named in the mysterious numerical formula, so the change of accents was unnoticeable. At the same time one should pay attention to the fact that Pangu, who apparently was a Chinese

variant of Indian Purusha, became the third member of the triad, and he was also the natural embodiment of the primary substance of Qi.

The transformation of Qi into the metaphorical mythological figure of Pangu (Purusha) was the logical end of the traditional Chinese construction concerning the origin of the universe. This transformation also indirectly proves the parallels between Chinese and Indian thought that led to the discussion of the possibility of Indian influence on Chinese Daoist thought that was undertaken in this paper.

In conclusion, I would like to define more precisely some aspects of this discussion. Even if one accepts the idea of Indian influence on Chinese conceptions of ontogenesis as quite persuasive, and given that there are some facts proving it, this cannot lead to the conclusion that ancient Chinese philosophy, namely the speculations of early Daoists, is not an original construction based on an independent indigenous interpretation of the world. On the contrary, the complex links and combinations of layers that I tried to trace in this paper persuasively testify for the difficult and indeed creative characteristics of the process of adaptation of the borrowed foreign ideas. These ideas underwent huge transformations after they were transplanted to Chinese soil, well prepared for their acceptance, and they found their expression in the works of Chinese philosophers, including Daoists, in an adapted, often enriched, way, in a form, in any case, in which they were differently, and often unusually, interpreted.

Specialists and even general readers are very familiar with the creative potential and the power of thought characteristic of the early Daoist works, giving first place to the treatise *Daodejing*. The legendary author of the *Daodejing,* Laozi, is a vague and symbolic figure, and many passages of the treatise correspondingly are hard to interpret. However, he is considered to be one of the greatest thinkers of humankind. Even if it turns out that important foreign influences contributed to the creation of this profound work, at a time when the preceding ideas of Chinese cosmogony and natural philosophy were not well developed, this cannot diminish the originality of Chinese culture and its great developments. In any case the early Daoist works, including works other than the *Daodejing,* and the conception of Dao in particular, will not only stand on a level with the analogous search and achievements of other cultures, including the philosophical systems of ancient India and ancient Greece, but can serve as proof of the

originality and persistence of the indigenous classical Chinese tradition. Even when it borrows important foreign ideas that stimulate its further development, these are refined and assimilated into the indigenous tradition to such a degree that one often can hardly detect the traces of foreign influence.

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