Yinyang

The concept of yinyang lies at the heart of Chinese thought and culture. The relationship between these two opposing, yet mutually dependent, forces is symbolized in the familiar black and white symbol that has become an icon in popular culture across the world. The real significance of yinyang is, however, more complex and subtle. This brilliant and comprehensive analysis by one of the leading authorities in the field captures the richness and multiplicity of the meanings and applications of yinyang, including its visual presentations. Through a vast range of historical and textual sources, the book examines the scope and role of yinyang, the philosophical significance of its various layers of meanings, and its relation to numerous schools and traditions within Chinese (and Western) philosophy. By putting yinyang on a secure and clear philosophical footing, the book roots the concept in the original Chinese idiom, distancing it from Western assumptions, frameworks, and terms, yet also seeking to connect its analysis to shared cross-cultural philosophical concerns. In this way, the book not only illuminates a particular way of thinking, but also shows how yinyang thought has manifested itself concretely in a wide range of cultural practices, ranging from divination to medicine, and from the art of war to the art of sex.

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Yinyang

The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture

Robin R. Wang

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To Kelly & Mindy

A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.

千里之行，始于足下.------道德經
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Acknowledgments

My research on the work of Dong Zhongshu (179–104 B.C.E.) in 2004 first awakened my interest in yinyang. I was investigating what appears to be a puzzling contradiction: on the one hand, yinyang seems to be an intriguing and valuable conceptual resource in ancient Chinese thought for a balanced account of gender equality; on the other hand, no one can deny the fact that the inhumane treatment of women throughout Chinese history has often been rationalized in the name of yinyang. These two conflicting observations are reflected in divisions within scholarly circles. Some scholars claim that the concept of yinyang can be a primary source for understanding Chinese gender identity and that it has much to offer to contemporary feminist thought. On the other hand, arguments have been given that the denigration and abuse of women in ancient China is a direct result of the idea of yinyang. This puzzle and the theoretical discussions around it led me to wonder what yinyang thought really meant in early Chinese texts, and why Chinese have for thousands of years continued to approach the world through the lens of yinyang. How can we understand the power of a way of thought that is both very simple and almost infinite in its applicability?

This project has been a transformative journey for me, and many minds, hearts, and hands have contributed to its development from those initial questions. I particularly wish to thank the following individuals for their intellectual insights and generosity in assisting me in this journey. At an early stage in its development I benefited much from discussions with Roger Ames, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Livia Kohn, Ronnie Littlejohn, Lisa Raphael, Weimin Sun, Bryan Van Norden, Zhiihe Wang, Verner Worm, Wenyu Xie, Brook Ziporyn, and my dear colleagues in China: Su Yongli, Wu Genyou, Ding Weixiang, Zhang Xianglong, Gan Jianmin, Wan Junren, Zhang Zailin, Li Zhonggui, Lu Xichen, and Chen Xia. I owe a particular debt to Martin Schönfeld and Tao Jiang, who have always provided me with inspirational support. Li Ming has been a troubleshooter for me in resolving some obscure difficulties in my research. Special heartfelt
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