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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE COSMOLOGY-CUM-HUMOROLOGY WITH EIGHT ELEMENTS

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A word may be said as to how cosmology has arisen. This is easily understood when we study the early history of the Aryans. We begin with the times when they were hunters and later pastoral tribesmen who regularly found opportunities to grow millet. It is a hardy plant requiring no ploughing, nor even proper soil. Later, they became regular farmers when they had to realize the conditions of plant growth necessary for a good crop. We presume they grew barley which became their stable source of food. Now barley cannot be grown in a farm in the midst of a forest just cleaned for the purpose. It required an open ground with light and heat to promote plant growth. Next, they found arable soil was preferable. Finally came water in the form of periodical rains which supplied moisture to the soil. Thus plant life required three factors, Earth as soil, Heat as light, and Water as moisture. When these were projected there arose a cosmology with three cosmic elements, water, heat and earth. The earliest reference to Indian cosmology occurs in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* which may be dated 8th century B.C. but it really records the cosmology which had already existed and was much older in origin.

The farmer's contemporary was the medicine-man. As practical physician he was concerned with health and longevity and not with the origin of human life. He was aware of the cosmology, the farmer as thinker had creatred. What was conspicuous by its absence was air, which the farmer could never think of supplying to the plants he grew. The physician on the contrary found air, as breath, most essential to human life. In fact he realized that to breathe is to live. Then he modified what may be called the farmer's cosmology, and created the doctrine called *Tridoṣa* in Sanskrit.

The *Tridoṣa* comprises of *vāyu* (air), *kapha* (water) and *pitta* (heat). It has been shown earlier[1] that human physiology recognizes four kinds of enzymic or biochemical actions—oxidation, reduction, hydration, and dehydration. In this light the *Tridoṣa* doctrine can be scientifically interpreted, as has been shown,

vāyu (air) = oxidation/reduction ; *kapha* (water) = hydration/dehydration ; and *pitta* (heat) = (exothermic/endothermic) = heat/cold. These would amount to six items. After all any system of life-form reveals growth, which essentially is energy, and this can be supplied by air and water, broadly understood as above. When these two powers function as they should they maintain a balance which results in health.

All that have been stated so far can explain the maintenance of life. Now came a thinker who wanted to know life's origin. What was observed or otherwise experienced had given four elements, air, heat, water, and earth. To conceive their origin meant assuming the existence of Creative Energy for which the proper Sanskrit word would be *Ākāśa.* Divanji[2] equates Ākāśa to Brahma, that is Creator. Ākāśa then would be creative energy. As opposed to existence we have to consider creation. Existence represents the present while creation considers the past. This means what has been observed is to be supplemented by what can be legitimately conceived as an earlier reality. A simple case of this kind would be creation which has to be traced to a creator; to admit of the creator alone would place him in a vacuum.

Here we have to consider the limitation of human understanding. When there are two entities one can be understood in terms of the other but left with only one it becomes unknowable. It has then to be legitimately conceived as real in the light of other considerations. So, to consider creation man started with the phenomenon of reproduction which he projected as creation. Reproduction is a phenomenon where an issue emerges out of a system itself. However, it also means union of two opposites as male and female. Correspondingly, creation must have its universal pair of opposites. This further means that Creative Energy must be dual natured as a matter-cum-energy to be able to give rise to all forms of energy and to all forms of matter, which together go to make all creation. Creation then, like reproduction, must have a pair of opposites. To the Chinese goes the credit of selecting the most impressive pair of opposites we can imagine. They are night and day which, in abstract form, mean darkness and light, for which the Chinese terms are *Yin* and *Yang.* They are general or universal terms applicable to all categories of opposites.

By now we are in a position to consider Chinese cosmology-cum-humonology. Its Chinese designation as Cheng[3] properly gives would be *Yin-Yang Wu-Hshing. Yin-Yang,* we have considered, signifies opposites in general while *Wu-Hshing* signifies five cosmic elements. The Chinese recognise as five cosmic elements, wood, fire, water, earth and metal. These, however, need proper elucidation.

We have considered that to explain creation the Indian thinker created the idea of Ākāśa, best paraphrased as Heaven as power. The Chinese interpreted creation in two stages. There was creative energy in its latent form, called *Thai-Chi,* meaning absolute-existence. It was depicted as an empty circle. There was, however, a circle which then could represent existence. There was nothing as content enabling us to know anything more about it. Here we have in

Indian mysticism *Brahmāṇḍa*, creator's egg, which would tell us that there is something as reality. But its content remains unknowable. I can accordingly equate *Thai-Chi* to *Brahmāṇḍa*, creator's egg. Later, the latency of *Thai-Chi* gave in to its dynamic form as *Chhi*, creative energy manifest, and it was dual in nature, being matter-cum-energy. Since it was both, matter as also energy, it could give rise to all forms of matter and to all forms of energy, briefly to all creation. It then means that *Chhi* is the same as *Ākāśa*, the Creative Energy. Moreover, in its make up *Chhi* is *Yin* plus *Yang*, the opposites which impart *Chhi* the energy it harbours.

The above discussion would tell us that the Chinese are the best among the thinkers who projected reproduction as creation and thereby conceived creative energy as *Chhi*, a dual natured entity. It implies that the Chinese must have had a long history of life as pastroal people to be able to project reproduction as creation. Let us contrast them with people who have all along been mere hunters. How do they imagine the origin of life to be. Malinowski informs that in Australia and Melanesia there is a tribal lore, the child's body is built exclusively by the mother, the father contributing nothing. There is in every man or woman a spirit. After death it reappears in a woman's body causing pregnancy." We see here clear enough that as hunters they were unable to observe reproduction properly and as such could not conceive birth as resulting from union of opposites. The early Chinese as pastoral people had the opportunities of observing reproduction from its first stage onwards, and projecting the same conceived of *Yin-Yang* as constituting *Chhi*, the primordial source of creation. It seems creditable that the Chinese conceived of *Yin-Yang* from prehistoric times. When later on they came to know of cosmologies of Indian origin they could easily ignore Ākāśa, for *Chhi* with its *Yin-Yang* easily explained the origin of the universe. Thus by now we have thus fully discussed the *Yin-Yang* and are now left to deal with *Wu-Hshing*, the five cosmic elements.

There does seem to have been some impact of Indian thought upon Chinese cosmology. The Chinese do recognize five cosmic elements but when we focus attention on their contents we find that three elements carry two meanings each and there are only two elements, fire and water possessing only one sense. Wood contains air and air as such is not included in the five cosmic elements. While we have seen the importance attached to air by the Indian humorology, *Chhi*, of which so much has been said before, lierally means breath, which is air by nature. But *Chhi* is not one of the Chinese cosmic elements. Like wood, earth as content has moisture which is not identical with water as element. Finally, metal as content carries dryness, which again is independent of fire. It was explained that besides the five cosmic elements, there could have also been air, moisture and dryness as regular cosmic elements. When air does appear as such in Indian and Greek cosmologies it could have easily been the case also with Chinese cosmology. The absence of air in Chinese cosmology is a problem which has never been mentioned, much less discussed, before. However, the information already given enables us to state that there are the following entities

as regular cosmic elements, and they are eight. 1. Water, 2. Fire, 3. Wood, 4. Air (as content of Wood), 5. Earth, 6. Moisture (as content of Earth), 7. Metal, and 8. Dryness (as content of metal). If it be objected that the contents of elements need not be assigned separate forms I can easily point to air which is far more universal than wood and air is treated merely as the content of wood.

The Chinese are perhaps the only people who have deified the cosmic elements and depicted them graphically. I mention this, for now air is recognized as an element, given the form of a bird, called the Red-bird. Water is given the form of a dragon and both dragon and Red-bird are celestial beings. To complete the picture fire is represented as tiger and earth as tortoise, both of which are terrestrial beings. Tortoise has a snake around it, perhaps the snake here represents the cosmic soul, which can substitute *Chhi.* It is obvious that the Chinese *Wu-Hshing* contains the elements, wood and metal, which however have not been depicted graphically in any example of Chinese art.

Here wood is replaced by air and this is depicted as Red-bird, and metal as dryness is further interpreted as fire and then depicted as tiger. This discrepencies have resulted perhaps from the impact of Indian cosmology upon that of Chinese. At any rate there are *eight cosmic elements in Chinese cosmology* which also incorporates humorology. The recent article[5] on "Venus and the 8 designs called *Pa-kua*" shows how "wood" appears in three of the 8 designs while a fourth is credited as representing the two elements, metal and water. It appears that more importance has been assigned to *Pa-Kua* and to *Chhi* than to cosmology. This fact becomes obvious on considering the decoration of the gown of the Chinese priest, as immortal, illustrated in the above article. Indirectly it means *Pa-Kua* leads to immortality.

SUMMARY

As farmer, man recognized earth, heat and water as essential to plant life, projecting them as cosmic elements. The pastoral man seeing animals multiply due to reproduction realized that it resulted from union of opposites as male and female. Projecting reproduction, he conceived creation which then resulted as union of cosmic pair of opposites as Heaven and Earth. The Chinese conceived creation starting with creative energy, in its latent form, as *Thai Chi,* meaning the absolute existence. Later it assumed its dynamic form called *Chhi.* It was dual natured, with the opposites called *Yang* (light) and *Yin* (darkness). The reproductive power was projected as creative energy, called *Chii,* and male and female opposites were projected as the universal pair of opposites, as *Yang* and *Yin.* Creative energy produced the cosmic elements which in turn produced all creation. The cosmic elements of Chinese cosmology were wood, fire, water, earth and metal. They also included the factors of humorology when the following three elements had, as contents, items belonging to humorology: Wood—contained air, Earth—contained moisture, Metal—contained dryness.

By asigning dual sense to three cosmic elements, Chinese humorology came into existence but remained incorporated in its cosmology. It is easy to equate Air to *Vāyu* of *Tridoṣa* doctrine of India, Moisture to *Kapha,* and Dryness to *Pitta.* Then with five elements of cosmology including three with dual sense, as belonging to humorology, we have eight elements in all as cosmology-cum-humorology. It is obvious that air, so important in cosmologies of India and Greece is nowhere explicit in Chinese cosmology. This fact requires emphasizing the content of wood which is air. Probably these eight elements have finally been expressed as *Pa-Kua,* 8-designs, already reproduced in the article on Venus and the origin of 8-designs.

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