

Basic Concepts of the Yin-Yang Story and Five-Element Doctrine and Their Implications in Business

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Abstract

This paper explores the fundamental principles of the Yin-Yang story and the five-element doctrine, both of which have their roots in ancient Chinese culture—one of the oldest continuous civilizations in the world. These philosophical concepts have profoundly influenced the Chinese people throughout their history, shaping their mentality, business practices, and social pursuits. The aim of this paper is to examine how the dualistic nature of Yin and Yang, representing opposing yet interconnected forces, and the five-element doctrine, categorizing the physical world into the elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, continue to impact modern business strategies and decision-making processes in China. Through a detailed analysis, this paper reveals the complex relationships of unification, opposition, interdependence, mutual consumption, and transformation inherent in these philosophies. The findings demonstrate how these ancient doctrines still play a vital role in contemporary Chinese thought, offering valuable insights for global business interactions and contributing to the enrichment of the world's cultural heritage.

Keywords: Yin Yang, philosophy, five elements, story, doctrine, Chinese

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of Chinese Culture and Yin-Yang Philosophy

The Chinese culture, with its history spanning over 5,000 years, is one of the oldest and most enduring civilizations in the world. The cultural characteristics that define modern China are deeply rooted in ancient traditions, where foundational concepts developed millennia ago continue to shape the philosophical approaches and thinking patterns of the Chinese people today. Among these, the Yin-Yang philosophy stands out as a core system of thought. Despite its apparent simplicity, the Yin-Yang concept embodies profound complexity and has had a significant and far-reaching impact on the mindset and behaviour of the Chinese people, influencing various aspects of life, including business practices.

1.2 Literature Review

The Yin-Yang concept has been extensively studied across various disciplines, including philosophy, medicine, and cultural studies. Scholars like Wang (2002) and Gan (2014) have traced the origins of Yin-Yang back to the early Xia Dynasty, highlighting its foundational role in Chinese cosmology and its subsequent influence on major philosophical works such as the I Ching and the development of Taoism. Adler (2002) and Lynn (2009) have examined how the dualistic nature of Yin and Yang was systematically documented and symbolized during the Zhou Dynasty, with further elaboration by notable philosophers like Zou Yan and Lao Zi. In the realm of business, researchers such as Chew (1991), Fang (2011) and Bogushevskaya (2016) have explored the application of Yin-Yang and the five-element doctrine in strategic decision-making and planning, particularly in cross-cultural interactions between Eastern and Western business practices.

1.3 Research Methodology

This paper utilizes a qualitative research approach, combining historical analysis with contemporary resources to

explore the enduring relevance of Yin-Yang and the five-element doctrine in modern business practices. The study draws on primary sources, including ancient Chinese texts such as the I Ching and the Huangdi Neijing, as well as modern interpretations and applications of these philosophies in business contexts. Secondary sources include scholarly articles and books that offer critical analyses and various perspectives on these concepts. Additionally, the authors, having lived and worked in both the West and China over the past 30 years, incorporate their personal experiences into the research. These first-hand experiences have provided insights into the challenges and misunderstandings that frequently arise in cross-cultural business interactions. This paper aims to address these challenges by offering a deeper understanding of the underlying philosophies that guide Chinese business practices.

1.4 Purpose and Scope of the Study

The principal authors of this paper, being seasoned businessmen and scholars with extensive experience in both Western and Chinese contexts, have observed the difficulties and confusion that Western professionals often face when interacting with their Chinese counterparts. Motivated by a sense of responsibility to clarify these complex ideas, they aim to narrow the understanding gap between the two sides. This article is the culmination of that effort, providing insights that are intended to facilitate more effective cross-cultural communication and cooperation in the business world.

2. Fundamentals of Yin-Yang Theory

2.1 History

Many scholars believe that the Yin-Yang concept was originated from the primitive understanding of nature over 4,800 years ago during the Xia dynasty which was the beginning of the recorded history of China (Wang, 2002; Gan, 2014). When the Xia people observed such basic phenomena that day was followed by night and the bright side of a mountain was always coupled with a dark side (Figure 1), they generalized that the world was composed of two elements which were referred as Yin (阴) and Yang (阳) or Yin qi and Yang qi (气 qi means “gas” literally in Chinese. However, it actually represents the very basic substance or energy that constitutes all materials in the universe, according to the ancient Chinese view of nature).

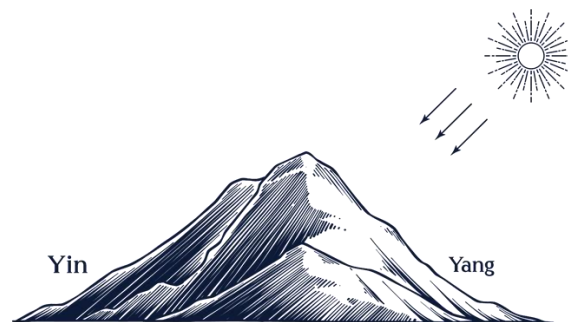


Figure 1. Illustration of the yin and yang sides of a mountain

According to the ancient Chinese legend, the cosmos started in a state of chaos. Then, when the Great Creator brought the universe into being, the chaos was separated into two, the heaven and the earth. The heaven was regarded as Yang and the Earth Yin. This was probably the very first conception of Yin and Yang. Afterward, the Chinese people, on the basis of their observations of natural phenomena and practice of agricultural activities, categorized the sun, men, light, heat and strength, which represent ascent, positivity, kindness and passion, as Yan while the moon, women, darkness, cold and weakness, which represent descent, stillness, negativity and malice, as Yin.

Archeologist could even produce evidence to demonstrate that people during the Xia Dynasty began to use the male symbol \blacksquare to represent Yang and the female symbol \bullet to represent Yin.

During the Zhou Dynasty (~1100 B.C. – 221 B.C.), the Yin-Yang concept was systematically recorded and interpreted in the book I Ching which gave the symbol \blacksquare to represent Yang and the symbol \blacksquare to represent Yin (Adler, 2002; Lynn, 2009), which has been in use until present days.

Then, during the Warring States Period (475 B.C. – 221 B.C.), Zou Yan (also referred to as Tsou Yen), a prominent philosopher and noted representative of the naturalist school, further developed the Yin-Yang philosophy alongside the formulation of the five-element theory (Bogushevskaya, 2016). He promoted the idea

of living in harmony with natural laws. Followers of this school applied the Yin-Yang principle to interpret natural phenomena and observed how these five elements were reflected in the human body in health and disease. Since then, Yin-Yang and the five elements have become an integral part of the Chinese philosophy.

Lao Zi (or Lao Tzu) (571 B.C.? – 471 B.C.), who was equally influential on Chinese culture as Confucius, further articulated the Yin-Yang philosophy to interpret the evolution of the universe, thereby laying the foundations of Taoism (Stenudd, 2011; Chew, 1991).

The principle of Yin-Yang is represented in Taoism by the Taijitu (*literally “diagram of the supreme ultimate”*) diagram which consists of two inter-wined black and white fishes. The white fish with a black dot represents Yang and the black fish with a white dot represents Yin (Figure 2).

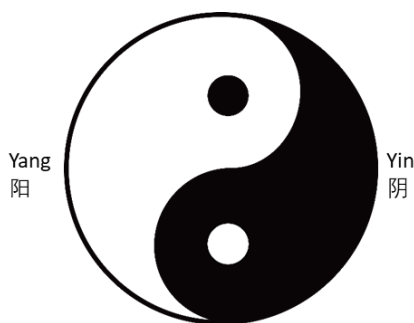


Figure 2. The Taijitu diagram

2.2 Basic Concept

In Chinese, the literal meanings of Yin and Yang are the bright and dark sides of an object. Later, the concept was expanded to represent a wider range of opposite properties in the universe: cold and hot, slow and fast, still and moving, masculine and feminine, lower and upper, and more.

In general, anything that is moving, ascending, bright, progressing and hyperactive pertains to Yang. The characteristics of stillness, descending, darkness, degeneration and hypo-activity pertain to Yin (Table 1).

Table 1. Yin and Yang elements

Yin	Yang
Negative	Positive
Moon	Sun
Woman	Man
Water	Fire
Cry	Smile
Contraction	Expansion
Descending	Ascending
Slow	Fast
Cold	Hot
Liquid water	Vapor water

The Yin-Yang theory holds that all phenomena consist of two opposite aspects, Yin and Yang, which are variously defined as: up and down, left and right, light and dark, hot and cold, stillness and movement, substance and function, etc. The movement and changes of Yin and Yang give impetus to the development of everything. In *Hungdi Neijing* (Canon of Yellow Emperor) which is the first book on the Chinese medical practice compiled during the Warring States Period, it was stated that “Yin and Yang are the way of heaven and earth, the primary discipline of the universe, the mother and father of change, the root of birth and death, ... When the qi subdue one another, this is harmony. If there is no mutual subduing, this is disease” (ItsHaky, 2017; Ramirez, 2010).

The concept of Yin and Yang is inherently relative. According to Yin-Yang theory, everything in the universe can be divided into two opposite but complementary aspects of Yin and Yang. For example, day is considered Yang and night is Yin. However, within these periods, morning is Yang within Yang, afternoon is Yin within Yang, evening before midnight is Yin within Yin, and the time after midnight is Yang within Yin (Figure 3).

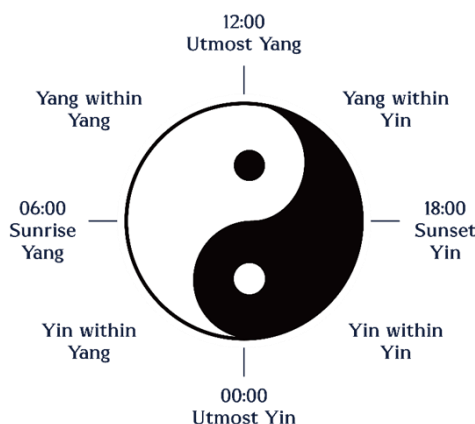


Figure 3. Evolution of Yin and Yang during a day

Yin and Yang are also subject to change. For example, cold water is regarded as Yin. When enough heat is applied, the water turns into vapor, which is considered Yang. When the vapor cools down, it becomes water again, returning to Yin (Figure 4). This demonstrates that Yin and Yang can change continuously, influenced by both internal and external circumstances.

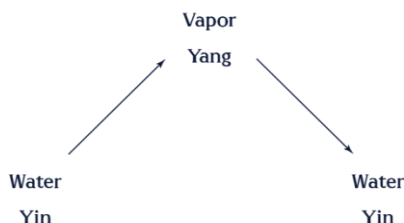


Figure 4. Illustration of change of Yin and Yang in water

The function of Yin and Yang is guided by the law of unity of the opposites. In other words, Yin and Yang are in conflict but at the same time mutually dependent. The nature of Yin and Yang is relative, with neither being able to exist in isolation. Without “cold” there would be no “hot”; without “moving” there would be no “still”; without “dark”, there would be no “light”. The most illustrative example of Yin-Yang interdependence is the interrelationship between substance and function of our human body. Only with ample substance can the body function in a healthy way; and only when the functional processes are in good condition, can the essential substances be appropriately refreshed.

The opposites in all objects and phenomena are in constant motion and change: the gain, growth and advance of the one mean the loss, decline and retreat of the other. Seed (Yin) grows into plant (Yang), which itself dies back to the earth (Yin). This takes place within the changes of the seasons. Winter (Yin) transforms through the spring into summer (Yang), which in turn transforms through autumn into winter (Yin) again. Because natural phenomena are balanced in the constant flux of alternating Yin and Yang, the change and transformation of Yin-Yang has been taken as a universal law.

2.3 Basic Relations of Yin and Yang

It sounds very simple that the Yin-Yang story uses only two very basic elements to explain the function and evolution of the nature. The interactions and changes of Yin and Yang could give rise to various complicated situations which might be very difficult for us to grasp.

Among many possible variations and developments, there are five main relations in Yin and Yang.

(1) Unification of Yin and Yang

Yin and Yang are always united within any object and the two elements are mixed together all the time. Yin contains Yang and Yang also contains Yin at the same time. The relative position of Yin and Yang changes continuously in cycles which give rise to evolution of the universe as well as humankind. In other words, one is two and two are one. Unification and separation are in co-existence at the same time in the same object.

(2) Opposition of Yin and Yang

The opposition relation between Yin and Yang means that there are always two opposite aspects in all things and phenomena in nature. They are either on the opposite ends of a cycle, like the seasons of a year which evolves from Yin (winter) to Yang (summer) in every cycle, or opposites on a continuum of energy or matter such as “cold” and “hot” or “solid” and “gas”. Anything that exists in the universe or any event that has occurred to us contains both Yin and Yang or two opposite elements at the same time. A failure is not necessarily a real failure (Yin) as is usually perceived but contains elements for success (Yang). “There is a wheel on which the affairs of men revolve, and its mechanism is such that it prevents any man from being always fortunate.” (quotation of Croesus)

As for money, there are also two opposite functions. The beneficial part is to utilize money for good purpose so that positive energy could be generated for the well-being of mankind in general. The evil side is to use money for destruction and vengeance which lead to sufferings for all the people involved.

Understanding the opposing relationship between Yin and Yang provides us with a powerful tool to continuously observe the natural and human worlds from multiple perspectives. This holistic approach helps avoid the one-sided views that are all too common, even among so-called intelligent individuals, such as politicians who often assess the world through the lens of political bias.

(3) Interdependence of Yin and Yang

Yin and Yang are both opposite and interdependent. Neither of them can exist by its own without the other. Nothing is purely Yin or purely Yang. Just as a state of total Yin is reached, Yang begins to emerge, and vice versa. Yin contains the seed of Yang and vice versa. The two constantly transform into one another and depend on each other for their existence. While this relation appears to be confusing and hard to understand, it reflects the reality of the world composed of contradictions. As highlighted in philosophy, our world is made up of continuous conflicts and dualities, which are essential for existence.

If one observes the surroundings, it is not difficult to notice this nature of contradiction and interdependence of Yin and Yang. Matter and energy are in opposite status of existence but rely on each other to keep the universe alive. There would be no matter without energy and no energy without matter. The same is true for day and night. If there is no night, where could one find day?

The wife-husband relationship is another good example. There are numerous reports that wives do not like husbands and husbands do not appreciate their partners in marriages. If one asks such a question, “Where is marriage or family if there is no wife and husband?” The answer is obvious. To expand the concept, our humankind is solely made up by the two opposite components, men and women. Without women, how can men survive? Without men, how can women be women?

The correct understanding of this interdependence of Yin and Yang could bring end to many of the problems and miseries that we are suffering from in our daily lives. There would be no more arguments, quarrels and fights between husbands and wives. There would be no discriminations among different human races. There would be no more dislikes or hatreds between the rich and the poor and between the good and the bad.

(4) Mutual consumption of Yin and Yang

The two opposite and interdependent sides of Yin and Yang are not in a state of stillness or fixation, but in a dynamic and continuous state of changes. Yin consumes Yang for its survival and Yang attempts to grow at the expense of Yin. At any given point of time, the Yin and Yang of any object are in fight for consumption of the other. This is a dynamic and live process which is the driving force for the evolution of the universe. When bright day is in dominance, dark night is preparing for its arrival by pushing day away. An infant is consuming the Mom’s body for his or her own future. Parents are consumed by children for the development of human beings. This cycle continues as far as humankind is in existence.

Relative positions of Yin and Yang are continuously changing. This is a harmonious process which is in a dynamic balance for most of the time. However, when the two are out of balance and there is too much sacrifice of Yin for the sake of Yang or too much Yin with too little Yang, things will develop in an unbeneficial manner which leads to damages and destructions.

(5) Transformation of Yin and Yang

Yin and Yang can be transformed into each other under certain conditions. Yin could be transformed into Yang and Yang can be turned into Yin so long as there are suitable internal and external factors which provide the favorable forces to enforce such transformation.

It is worthwhile to notice that the transformation between Yin and Yang can take place only when the appropriate environments, i.e., both the internal and external circumstances, are ready for the transformation to take place. For such a purpose, time is a critical factor which affects the whole process as well as the end result.

Again, if one keeps this principle in mind, one would take different approaches to many things that have occurred in our lives, regardless how good or how bad these things could be. Good things could turn into bad just as bad things could be transformed into good. For a misfortunate person, he would stop the habit of moaning or complaining all day long if he understands that his misery in life could be changed into prosperity and success under certain conditions which are left to be figured out by the person who has the desire and determination to change his destination.

In the business world, failure and mistakes, which belong to the Yin category, are commonplace and often serve as crucial learning opportunities. Any successful businessman would agree that his or her success, which is the Yang side, arrives as the result of overcoming numerous failures because of his or her continuous and persistent endeavors.

2.4 Yin-Yang Balance

The fundamental principle is to keep Yin and Yang in balance (Stuart-Fox, 2003). When the universe was initially created by the Highest, everything was in balance and all the beings within the cosmic system were in harmonious relations towards each other and among themselves.

It is, in fact, a subtle art of nature to preserve the beauty and harmony of the cosmic system. Yin-Yang balance is one of the basic natural laws that we humankind need to respect and follow in order to understand the real intention of the Great Creator and to enjoy peace and harmony which are the essential elements of happiness that everyone in all walks of life, regardless of their differences in races and religious beliefs, is trying to obtain.

There are four possible states of imbalance:

- (1) Preponderance or excess of Yin
- (2) Preponderance or excess of Yang
- (3) Weakness or deficiency of Yin
- (4) Weakness or deficiency of Yang

Any state of imbalance could result in unsatisfactory situation. Essentially and ultimately, all the problems in our society, either in material world or spiritual dimension, are caused by the imbalance of Yin and Yang. As human beings, we all desire for money which is actually a wonderful invention that has been responsible for most if not all the development of the modern world, in particular the economic advancement. Without money, one goes nowhere and falls in the trap of poverty which could be a very damaging disease to deprive one's basic indignity, self-confidence and respect. However, too much money sometime becomes the curse which brings some celebrities down to hell when these people cannot or do not use the power of money for good purposes.

We all know that laughing is good for our health. However, if one laughs all the day and in all circumstances, he or she would really laugh to death. Again, if one stays in a status of sadness for too long time, his or her body would not be able to maintain its normal functions properly and this person is doomed to suffer from such out-of-portion negative emotion. As taught by Confucianism in the Analects, "Pleasure not carried to the point of debauch, grief not carried to the point of self-injury" (or "Enjoyment without being licentious and grief without being hurtfully excessive." (Legge, 2002; Waley, 2021).

This balance principle is so widely accepted by the Chinese people that one can easily spot its influence on every aspect of the social life in China. As one may have observed, the Chinese people always maintain a good balance of vegetable and meat for their meals. It would be very seldom to notice a big chunk of meat on their dining tables in comparison with the half-kilogram beef or pork steak which is quite popular in the western menu. Tai Chi (or Taiji), which is the most popular exercise practiced by the Chinese people, particularly the elders, all over the country, is characterized by its smooth movement, not too fast and not too slow, with perfect effect for improving one's health condition.

Generally, Chinese people are less inclined toward sports that involve extreme or aggressive activities, such as skydiving, high-mountain snow skiing, rugby, and boxing. This preference is often attributed to the belief that such sports may conflict with the principle of Yin-Yang balance.

2.5 Comprehension of the Yin-Yang Relationships

The relationship between Yin and Yang is not static but is always in a dynamic process of motion and change.

The two are continually opposite yet complementary qualities, evolving constantly. For example, dropping a stone into a calm pool of water will create waves and troughs, with the alternation between high and low points radiating outward until the pool returns to calm. Observing the ocean's undertow, one can see that every advance is complemented by a retreat and every rise transforms into a fall. When one quality reaches its peak, it naturally begins to transform into its opposite. For instance, grain that reaches full height in summer (fully Yang) will produce seeds and die back in winter (fully Yin), illustrating an endless cycle.

Everything that is born must die, and everything that grows will one day decay, and we can assume that what is Yin today is destined to become Yang in the future, and vice versa.

The Yin-Yang story sounds simple and easy to learn. But it requires extensive observations and in-depth thinking to comprehend the true meaning of the philosophy. Once you come to comprehend the full messages, the particular and unique Chinese views expressed in literature, art, and history, which appear to be very obscure and abstruse to the west, will become immediately evident. Such knowledge would be very helpful for a foreign businessman to properly understand the Chinese business ethics that is profoundly impacted by the ancient Yin-Yang thought (Gan, 2014).

3. The Five-Element Doctrine

3.1 Basic Concepts

The five-element (五行) doctrine was formulated after but not very long after the Yin-Yang story.

Yin-Yang philosophy is the foundation of the five-element. Without Yin-Yang, without the five-element. Therefore, many scholars argue that the five-element doctrine could not survive without the Yin-Yang principles but the Yin-Yang teaching is independent from the five-element.

In ancient times, the Chinese recognized that wood, fire, earth, metal, and water were five essential elements in human life. They believed that these elements not only interact and constrain each other but are also in a constant state of motion and change.

Later, the abstract properties of these five types of substances and their relationships were used to explain the whole physical world.

This simple and early understanding of nature's evolution evolved into what is known as the "Five-Element Doctrine," a theory that assigns each of the five elements a series of abstract generalizations and applies them to classify all phenomena (Sun & Zheng, 2012).

Wood encompasses aspects such as germination, growth, flexibility, and harmony. Therefore, anything exhibiting these characteristics is classified under the wood element.

Fire involves the aspects of heat, flaring and moving upward. Any things and phenomena that display such characters should be classified as fire element.

Earth involves the aspects of growing, nourishing, and changing and represents all things that demonstrate these traits.

Metal is associated with cleaning up, killing, strength, and firmness. It includes a wide range of materials and phenomena which have these features.

Water is associated with cold, moisture, and downward flow. Therefore, things that exhibit these dominant characteristics are classified under the water element.

Therefore, the so-called five elements in the doctrine do not represent only five natural materials. They actually symbolize five categories of natural things and phenomena (Table 2).

Table 2. Expression of five elements

Five elements	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Directions	east	south	center	west	north
Changes	germinate	grow	transform	reap	store
Color	green	red	yellow	white	black
Yin-Yang	Yang	Yang	neutral	Yin	Yin
Climate	wind	summer heat	dampness	dryness	cold
Flavor	sour	bitter	sweat	pungent	salty

3.2 Relationships of the Five Elements

Relationships among the five elements are summarized as mutual generation, mutual subjugation, extreme subjugation and counter subjugation.

(1) Mutual generation

Mutual generation means multiplication and promotion. The order of mutual generation among the five elements is that wood generates fire, fire generates earth, earth generates metal, metal generates water, and water generates wood (Figure 5). In this way, generation is circular and endless. In the mutual generating relation of the five elements, each of the elements has the property of “being generated” and “generating.” The one which generates is the “mother,” the one that is generated is the “son.” This is known as the “mother-child relationship.” Each of the five elements has this type of mutual generating relationship with the other (Figure 5).

This sequence of mutual generation reflects the correct evolutionary order among the five elements. When this order is followed, things will naturally maintain a state of growth and development. However, when the order is disrupted, chaos or destruction may ensue.

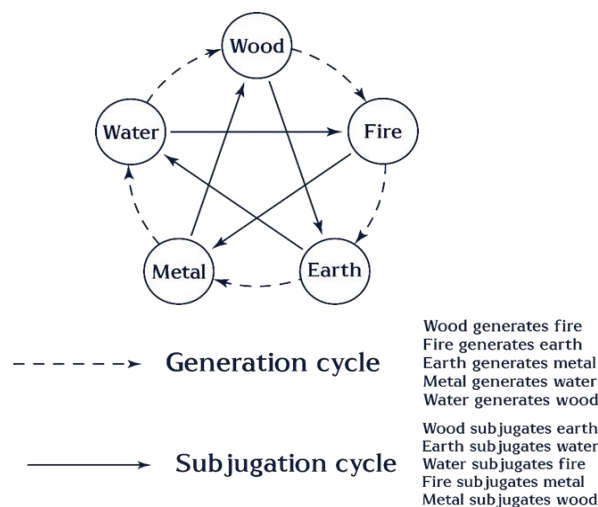


Figure 5. Interaction of the five elements

(2) Mutual subjugation

Mutual subjugation means mutual restriction and restraint. Among the five elements, wood subjugates earth, earth subjugates water, water subjugates fire, fire subjugates metals and metal subjugates wood (Figure 5). Each of the five elements also shares this subjugation relationship with the other. This relationship has the properties of “being subjugated” and of “subjugating.” The former means that “my ability is inferior to the object”, while the later denotes my superiority to the object. Therefore, the mutual subjugating relationship among the five elements is also known as the relationship of “being superior to” and “being inferior to” another element.

Mutual generation and mutual subjugation are two aspects which cannot be separated. If there is no generation, then there is no birth and growth. If there is no subjugation, then there is no change and development for maintaining normal harmonious relations. As said in Huangdi Neijing, “If there is no generation, then there is no growth and development. If there is no restriction, then endless growth and development will become harmful.” Thus the movement and change of all things exist through their mutual generating and subjugating relationships. These relationships are the basis of the never-ending circulation of natural elements.

(3) Extreme subjugation

Extreme subjugation denotes that the subjugation of one of the five elements to another surpasses the normal level. For example, if there is hyperactivity of the wood element, it will subjugate the earth element to the extreme so that earth becomes very weak and insufficient. This could be compared to the situation where the illness of a mother affects the health of her son.

(4) Counter subjugation

Counter subjugation means that one of the five elements subjugates the other opposite to the normal mutual subjugation order and itself becomes the object of subjugation. For example, in the normal order of subjugation,

wood should subjugate earth. However, when wood is not strong enough, it will be subjugated by earth. The same is true for metal and wood. When metal is weak and insufficient, it leads to the hyperactivity of wood. The latter will then counter subjugate the former. This is compared to the situation where a son's illness will have impact on the mother's health.

3.3 Complexity of Relationships among the Five Elements

The generation and subjugation relations among the five elements are meant to maintain good balance and harmony in the world while extreme subjugation and counter subjugation are abnormal phenomena. Our mother nature has equipped every creation the capability to make self-correction when things go astray.

If fire is too strong, it will over restrict or subjugate metal which will then be made weak. Consequently, metal could not effectively subjugate wood which will become very strong and impose excessive restriction to earth. As the result, earth cannot apply its subjugation over water effectively. Then, water will become very strong. A strong water element will in turn impose strong restriction over fire so that the excessive strength of fire will be stripped away. Eventually, a balance will be restored among the five elements.

On the other hand, if fire becomes weak, it will be subject to the extreme subjugation of water. At the same time, a weak fire is not able to put metal under its restriction, resulting in a strong metal which will apply excessive subjugation over wood. Under such condition, wood will become weak and is not in the position to subjugate earth. As such, earth will gain strength and will influence water with strong restriction. When water becomes weak, its subjugation over fire will be reduced, which will help fire to gain power. After such interactions and movements among the five elements, a new balance will be restored so that a healthy circumstance could be maintained.

Under normal situation, all the five elements impose influence over others and, at the same time, are under influence from others.

Wood subjugates earth. Earth generates metal. Metal subjugates wood (Figure 5). In such a way, wood stays in a state of balance, not too strong and also not too weak, so that it can nurture fire which will be on a normal course of growth and generation.

Fire subjugates metal. Metal generates water. Water subjugates fire (Figure 5). As the result, fire is maintained in a neutral and healthy position, so that it can nurture earth which will then stay on a normal course of growth and generation.

Earth subjugates water. Water generates wood. Wood subjugates earth. Under such mutual influence, earth is put in a well-balanced position so that it can nurture metal which will enjoy a normal course of growth and generation.

Metal subjugates wood. Wood generates fire. Fire subjugates metal. Then, metal is ensured to be in balance, not too strong and not too weak, so that it can nurture water and keep water on the normal course of growth and generation.

Water subjugates fire. Fire generates earth. Earth subjugates water. In the end, water will be in a well-balanced position to generate wood which will be able to stay on the normal course of growth and generation.

Therefore, according to the Chinese wisdom, the generation and subjugation among the five elements work as the fundamental mechanism to keep the world in harmony and balance. The process of interactions among the five elements is the vital force driving every development and evolution of the nature.

4. Influences of the Yin-Yang Philosophy

4.1 Taoism and the Yin-Yang philosophy

The relativity of Yin and Yang and the dynamic tension of their interactions helped to formulate the thoughts and expressions of Taoism which was founded on the basis of the teachings of Lao Zi (Li., 2015).

In the classic book *Tao Te Ching* (Daodejing), Lao Zi articulated repeatedly the Yin-Yang philosophy and the relationships between the two principles as well as their changes in the world (Boisen, 1996; Smarandache & Fu, 2011).

For instance, in Chapter 2 of *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Zi said that:

“Indeed, the hidden and the manifest give birth to each other.

Difficult and easy complement each other.

Long and short exhibit each other.

High and low set measure to each other.
Voice and sound harmonise each other.
Back and front follow each other.”

In Chapter 42, Lao Zi made such a remarkable observation:

“Tao produced the One.
The One produced the Two.
The Two produced the Three.
And the Three produced the ten thousand things.
The ten thousand things carry the Yin and embrace the Yang,
and through the blending of the material force (qi) they achieve harmony.”

Here, Lao Zi concluded that the creation of the universe is the result of evolution of Yin and Yang and that everything in the world has to rely on Yin and Yang for its own existence. In addition, the unification of Yin and Yang is the requisite condition for harmony.

Taoist philosophy generally discounts good and bad distinction and other dichotomous moral judgments but promotes the idea of balance.

In the development of Taoism, the 64 hexagrams derived from the Yin-Yang story is widely used in the practice of religion in China, particularly in the countryside where Folk Taoism has been deeply imbedded into the traditional culture and social custom.

4.2 Chinese Medication and Yin-Yang Philosophy

The entire system of traditional Chinese medical treatment is based on the Yin-Yang theory and the five-element doctrine (Sun & Zheng, 2012). Human health depends on the balance between Yin and Yang. All cells, organs, and systems in the body are paired with Yin and Yang and function normally when Yin and Yang are in harmony (Cheng, 2001). According to Wang (2002), all diseases result from an imbalance of Yin and Yang. The primary goal of treatment in traditional Chinese medicine is to restore this balance through herbal medicine and other methods, such as acupuncture, cupping, and massage.

4.3 Computer Language and the Yin-Yang Philosophy

According to the Yin-Yang philosophy, the world consists of two basic elements, Yin and Yang. All the variations and changes, which bring to existence of millions of creatures and phenomena, are based on the complicated combinations of Yin and Yang.

Some modern scientists relate the Yin-Yang concept with the language used in computer whose programs, regardless how big and how complicated they could be, are written just with two digits “0” and “1”. It is argued that, if Yin is represented by “0” and Yang by “1”, the computer language could be written in “Yin” and “Yang”. The way of thinking arisen from the Yin-Yang philosophy has become part of the inspiring sources in the development of the binary number system and the improvement of software and hardware for computers (Lande, 2014; Cao et al., 2012).

4.4 Chinese Mentality and Ying-Yan Philosophy

It is not an exaggeration to say that the mentality of the Chinese people is most profoundly impacted by the Yin-Yang philosophy in almost all fields of actions, including leadership, business, sport, art and socialization (Wang, 2013, Fang, 2011; Lee et al., 2008).

As from the ancient time, since the formulation of the Yin-Yang concept and the spread of Taoism, the Chinese have been holding the view that it is Yin and Yang that constitute Tao (or Dao) which is the essential force governing the evolution of the cosmos and humankind. No changes and developments can escape from the influence of the two basic principles.

In the field of cosmology, the Yin-Yang philosophy has helped the Chinese people to formulate the correlative thinking which holds the view that both the cosmic body, or the universe, and the micro body, or the human flesh, follow the principle of Yin-Yang interdependence and interconnection. Events occurred in one domain will have influence on the corresponding events in another domain (Graham, 1986).

According to Yin-Yang teachings, all objects possess both Yin and Yang simultaneously within the same domain. Therefore, it is common for Chinese people to place two opposing statements or proverbs together and believe in

both. Here are some examples (Gan, 2014).

“Heroes are not judged by success or failure”.

This is a very popular expression in China, meaning that one should not judge others solely based on the end results of their actions.

At the same time, many people also believe that

“One who makes success becomes the king; one who fails becomes the low-class.”

In this statement, the end result does become the final evidence for the judgment.

It is not difficult to find the contradiction between the two different views.

Again, people will advise you that “all our hearts are the same and understand the same rationalities”, meaning that our human beings share the same basis of reasoning. If you understand the issue, the others would hold the same view with you.

However, one will receive another warning: “all our hearts are different and have different appearances”, implying that one needs to apply caution all the time in the process of interactions with other people, because different people have different hearts with different motives.

In business pursuit, it is not uncommon to notice such contradictory views or statements. For instance, when a western executive goes to China with the mission to conclude a deal, he will receive warm welcome, get entertained with grand banquets and receive insurance from the Chinese counterpart that friendship is more important than business and that the contract will be signed easily. However, after three days of extensive meetings and arguments, the two sides could not reach agreement and no deal is made. The western executive gets so disappointed and frustrated that he intends to make the decision to withdraw from the project. However, it is not the fault of the Chinese if no deal is made, because they are so familiar with the opposite nature of Yin and Yang and are well prepared for all possibilities while the western businessman is in the disadvantageous position as the result of his lack of knowledge of the Chinese culture.

The principle of Yin-Yang balance is so evident in every aspect of the Chinese society that one could pick up numerous examples at hand. When you sit together with your Chinese partners on the dining table, you will notice that there are always a good mixture of vegetables (which is Yin) and meat (which is Yang) for the meal. When you tell a joke to them, they will smile, but not laugh loudly. It is not because they do not understand your joke (though sometime it might be the case). It is rather because they do not want to laugh too much out of the Yin-Yang balance.

The Yin-Yang philosophy is responsible for the formulation of the typical character of moderation of the Chinese people. So, when you work together with your Chinese partners and observe that they are not so out-spoken as the westerners and do not show how much they know, you should not make mistake to assume that your partners do not possess much knowledge and business know-how and could not add much value to your venture. On the contrary, they could have good knowledge and rich experience but not intend to reveal to you everything that they know, because they want to keep balance between giving and receiving and between talking and listening. It would be advisable to apply the Yin-Yang principle in your approach by showing them your respect and appreciation before expecting their support and initiatives, which could be vital for the success of the cooperation.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

5.1 Yin-Yang and the Law of Polarity

In the west, people are familiar with the law of polarity which states basically that everything in the world in the present states of human consciousness appears to have two poles, the positive and the negative poles – good and evil, heaven and hell, life and death, light and darkness (Ferson, 1923) or that everything in the universe has an opposite or two sides. The great scientist Isaac Newton put it in his third law of motion in such a way as “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.”

The law of polarity has been helpful for people to formulate the right mentality in dealing with many complicated issues and challenges in our social lives such as personal relationships and religious believes. It is recognized in the west as one of the essential laws of the universe.

On surface, the law of polarity and the Yin-Yang story are stating the same principle that everything in the universe has its opposite. However, the Yin-Yang story goes much further to elaborate that every element contains two opposite natures in itself, i.e., two are in one and one contains two and that the two opposite sides

evolve and develop into complicated relationships as discussed in the proceeding sections. In this regard, the Yin-Yang story has more far-reaching influence in the Chinese culture than the law of polarity in the western culture.

5.2 Yin-Yang Story and the Dual Nature of Human Beings

Although the Yin-Yang story was derived by the ancient Chinese from the observation of natural phenomena, it also applies perfectly to the explanation of human behaviour. As we learn and understand, our human beings demonstrate the nature of duality, or Yin and Yang, in many aspects and in many ways, individually and collectively. As a singular entity, each of us is embedded with both the enlightened side and the darker side and is equipped with the ability to do great goodness and terrible depravity. Every human being has both criminal and altruistic thoughts and actions (Kneller, 2018, 2021; Har-Lev, 2017). As a whole, our human community on earth has done so much to bring prosperity and happiness to this world by creating wonderful cultures and technologies. At the same time, we are also responsible for the many killings and destructions through meaningless wars and manmade disasters.

On the very existence of human beings, we are gifted by the Great Creator with dual realms of both Yin and Yang or spiritual self and natural self (Shah, 2021, 2022). Our spiritual- or Yin- self is not composed of any kind of material or energy and exists beyond the space-time dimension. It has nonmaterial quality but resides deep in ourselves. On the other hand, the natural- or Yang-self, including our body and mind, exists in the space-time universe and functions through matter and energy which provide the foundation for our physical existence.

5.3 The Five-Element Doctrine and Ancient Greek Belief

It is understood that the Greek people in the ancient time, around 450 BC, developed the theory that the world was composed of four elements, i.e., earth, water, air, and fire. This theory was later improved by the great philosopher Aristotle who also suggested the fifth element of aether (Benson, 2000; Carr, 2022; Hauck, 2017). Every visible thing was believed to be made of the four elements which were even used to describe the four temperaments a person could have. Hippocrates, the ancient Greek physician and the father of medicine in the west, used the four elements to describe the four “humors” found in the body (Nuland, 2005). It was concluded at the time that the temperaments and humors needed to be in balance with each other in order for a person to be well both mentally and physically, which shares the similar propositions of the Yin-Yang philosophy, as well as the five-element doctrine which though went much further to explore the interrelations among wood, fire, earth, metal and water.

5.4 Conclusions

In conclusion, the Yin-Yang philosophy, which may seem simple by assigning the two basic components of Yin and Yang to everything and every phenomenon in the universe, reflects the wisdom of the ancient Chinese people who revealed a fundamental principle governing the change and evolution of the world through the complex relationships and interactions of Yin and Yang. This ancient philosophy, along with the five-element doctrine, has had—and continues to have—a profound influence on the Chinese mentality in various fields, including business management, traditional Chinese medicine, and socialization. It has also become part of the global cultural heritage, enhancing our understanding of the basic principles underlying the motion and evolution of the universe.

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