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Abstract

Extract:

The Yin Yang doctrine is very simple but its influence has been extensive. No aspect of Chinese civilization - whether metaphysics, medicine, government, or art - has escaped its imprint. In simple terms, the doctrine teaches that all things and events are products of two elements, forces or principles: yin, which is negative, passive, weak, and destructive, and yang, which is positive, active, strong, and constructive.

Keywords

Yin Yang, Daoism, Chinese development, environmental management

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Daoist Perspectives on Chinese and Global Environmental Management(1)

by Rosita Dellios

The Yin Yang doctrine is very simple but its influence has been extensive. No aspect of Chinese civilization - whether metaphysics, medicine, government, or art - has escaped its imprint. In simple terms, the doctrine teaches that all things and events are products of two elements, forces or principles: yin, which is negative, passive, weak, and destructive, and yang, which is positive, active, strong, and constructive.

- Wing-Tsit Chan(2)

The Yin and Yang of Hardship and Hope

Asked about the conditions of life for farming women in China, a rural magazine editor, Xie Lihua, said: "It's a life of hardship but they have hope. Real hardship would be having no hope."(3) She could easily have been speaking of China and its prospects in the new century. In view of China's size and scale of operations, simply assuring 1.3 billion people of the availability of food is an exercise of global consequence.(4) If the Chinese people cannot feed themselves, who can and at what cost - be it to China or other parts of the world? If China's environment ceases to be habitable let alone cultivable, political upheaval is sure to follow. And while the 'Mandate of Heaven' (5) shifts from one ruler to another, an inevitable refugee exodus risks destabilising surrounding societies and *their* resources. The effects an environmentally disabled China would have on climate change and cross-border pollution is as unthinkable to the current era of ecological awakening as nuclear war was in the age of the superpowers.

But there is hope in China's predicament. Despite the inevitable turbulence in socio-economic transition from Maoism to market economics, the nation is the world's most dynamic in terms of economic development, even in the current period of Asian recessions. Never in human history have so many people risen out of conditions of absolute poverty in so little time as in the past two decades of economic reforms. And, indeed, never in Chinese history has Chinese philosophy been so relevant to 'all under Heaven' (*tianxia*) - that is, the world (6) - in providing the 'spiritual technologies' for living in the 21st century. The culture derived from Chinese philosophy, with its roots in Daoism (Taoism), Confucianism and Buddhism, encourages the aesthetic of strategic thinking. In the 21st century when the planet's congestive problems come to a head, each has a distinctive quality to offer and all three combine in the common search for harmony. Indeed, the basic idea of Chinese civilisation is the quest for harmony on Earth. The *yin-yang* symbol represents this.

Fig. 1: Yin-Yang Symbol



Figure 1: When yin and yang embrace each other, they reveal that they are not a world that can be divided into black and white, but black-in-white and white-in-black, forming a unity.

Strategies for Survival

Specifically, Daoism realigns the politics of power over nature to a relationship of cooperation, Confucianism concerns itself with the cultivation of harmonious human relations, and Buddhism instructs on behaviours conducive to survival of the biosphere.⁽⁷⁾ How to survive and prosper among the 'myriad things' of Earth in accordance with the moral law of Heaven forms the crux of Chinese strategic philosophy.⁽⁸⁾ 'Seek truth from the facts,' exhorted Deng Xiaoping in a return to traditional Chinese pragmatism. If China was to revive from its ailing fortunes - to 'rejuvenate' itself, as past and present Chinese leaders (Sun Yat-sen and Jiang Zemin) have expressed it - the Chinese leadership would need to deal with the *ming* or potentialities of prevailing circumstances. Planning and opportunity meet on the common ground of recognition of an emergent reality. The People's Republic would never have survived if it failed to recognise the disutility of unreconstructed Communist ideology. Similarly, the strategies for survival upon embarking on a new millennium could well emerge from Chinese philosophical standpoints, one of which - Daoism - this article will examine in more detail.

In accordance with Xie Lihua's edifying observation about hardship in the countryside, and China's demonstrable capacity to survive, it is possible to identify restorative measures through Daoist thinking and modes of analysis. In so doing, the observations are also applicable more generally to global environmental policy and planning.

The Sino-Global Nexus in 21st Century Life

To live in the new century of rising expectations and shrinking environmental capital is no easy task for any country, let alone for one as large and as poor as China. As the world's largest sociopolitical unit, China has considerable needs. They are the needs of every society; but for China they are of magnified importance. Not only are more lives directly affected - some 1.6 billion by 2030 - but the rest of the world is also affected by China's chances of establishing the right balance. This calls for self-awareness with regard to relationships across a wide spectrum in 21st century life: not only with other people and societies but relationships with the environmental resource base, the cultural resource base (which spans generational time), an associated aesthetic order, and technology, to name a few. Ranking high among China's more substantial requirements, therefore, is a comprehensive engagement with physical (*yang*) and psychological (*yin*) resources, which together describe the unity of the above relationships. It will not do to prioritise one over the other, for they function in

partnership. For example, choice of technology is associated with choice of philosophy; mega projects like dams are 'statist', small scale technologies which work with the environment (*wu-wei*, described below) are Daoist. It is to the latter, *yin*, resources that we now turn.

Dao, The Way

Daoism has been described as a philosophy (*Daojia*), a religion (*Daojiao*),(9) and indeed a psychological outlook or disposition (evidenced in the plethora of writings by the Western-trained Daoist Alan Watts).(10) It is to all of these that this paper will appeal, as environmental commentaries are found across the entire spectrum of Daoist formulations.

Dao refers to The Way - the way of an individual's cooperation with the course of the natural world. (11) It cannot be captured in definitions, as such an attempt would be antithetical to its nature, but its properties or characteristics can be described. Accordingly, the *dao* may be said to be:

- **nameless:**

The way that can be spoken of

Is not the constant way;

The name that can be named

Is not the constant name.(12)

- **generative:**

The way [*dao*] begets one; one begets two [*yin-yang*];

two begets three [*yin, yang* and their unity];

three begets the myriad creatures.(13)

- **nourishing but not possessive:**

The way is broad, reaching left as well as right.

The myriad creatures depend on it for life yet it claims

no authority.

It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit.

It clothes and feeds the myriad creatures yet lays no

claim to being their master.(14)

- **integrative and contextualising:**

Those who comprehend the Tao [*Dao*] are not focused only on themselves;

they are also connected to the world.(15)

The Taoist goal is to become one with all things and to coexist with
Heaven and Earth.(16)

The *dao's* most famous teacher was Laozi (Lao Tzu or Old Master) who lived in China at some time between the sixth and the fourth centuries BC. The major tenets of Daoism are in a book called *Daodejing* (*Tao Te Ching*), the *Book of the Way and Its Power*, derived from Laozi's teachings. Hence the *Daodejing* is also called the *Laozi Dao*. *Dao* is not exclusive to Daoism. Different schools of Chinese philosophy expound on different *daos*, as with the Confucian *dao* of the Doctrine of the Mean and the Buddhist *dao* of *dharma*. Daoism treats the *dao* as a metaphysical principle, spontaneous, without divine pretensions, but of aesthetic spiritual resonance. *Dao* is universal, and when it is particularistic it is called *de* (virtue/power). This is the *de* which appears in the *Daodejing*. As will be reiterated, the *dao* operates in accordance with the interactions of *yin-yang*, and its symbols are water, woman, and infant. "In the world there is nothing more submissive and weak than water. Yet for attacking that which is hard and strong nothing can surpass it. This is because there is nothing that can take its place."(17) Woman also has the subtle *yin* qualities so admired in Daoism: "Know the male/But keep to the role of the female";(18) while the infant represents harmonious integration with its environment.(19) It is noteworthy that Laozi's teacher was said to be a woman, as was the teacher of the first legendary emperor, Huang Di.(20) Indeed, one of Daoism's alternative names is the Huang-Lao Teaching.

Daoism may be regarded as the *yin* to Confucianism's anthropocentric *yang*. In comparison with the West's scientific-rational *yang*, however, China presents a decidedly *yin* (relational rather than rational) civilisation. There is much in the Chinese national experience that can be interpreted in *yin-yang* terms. Below are some instances.

- *Grand Schemes and Daoist Dreams*

Despite a Daoist *yin* strategic culture, which by definition is understated,(21) China's history of mega projects displays an equally notable propensity for *yang*-style solutions to its needs.

Nowhere is this more noticeable in contemporary Chinese construction sites than at the scenic Three Gorges of the Yangtze River. The dam being built there will be the world's largest. Begun in 1993 and scheduled for completion in 2009, the dam is expected to account for one-ninth of China's 1993 levels of electricity usage.(22) Given that China is in the process of modernising and hence consuming higher levels of energy, this figure is not particularly representative. The Three Gorges Dam will, in fact, satisfy less than a ninth of China's power demands. Moreover, it will not reduce the heavily polluting coal-burning method of generating power in many areas, as these regions are well beyond the area which the Three Gorges Dam is to serve.

The Three Gorges Dam and the administration's enthusiasm for such hydro-engineering feats, need to be considered in the historical context in which such activity is highly regarded. A concern for mastering the waterways is akin to the primordial in Chinese experience. Hence the founder of the first dynasty was called Yü, the Great Engineer. Not surprisingly, the champion of the Three Gorges Dam project is also a leader skilled in hydraulic engineering - the Soviet-educated Li Peng. The neglect of public works like irrigation and flood control was considered one of the signs of a degenerating dynasty. Unable to maintain society, the emperors of the past risked losing their Mandate of Heaven. In this light, the Three Gorges Dam could also be viewed as an attempt not only to shore up water for hydro-electric power but also political legitimacy.

In essence, the Three Gorges Dam project represents a battle between the tradition for grand solutions and its critics, the Daoists. Grand solutions were epitomised in the Great Wall, the Grand Canal, the Long March, the Communist Revolution, the Great Leap Forward, the Tiananmen Square Crackdown, and even the unification of China in 221 BC (whereas Daoists prefer states which are small in size and population). None of these was famous for their ostensible reason; they all cost

dearly in terms of human lives.(23) It remains to be seen whether the Three Gorges Dam is of the same category in terms of future casualties, or whether it will simply remain a matter of dislocation. As recently as 1975, it should be remembered, disaster from other dams, the Banqiao and the Shimantan, resulted in tens of thousands of people dying. The dam's proponents point out that the number of lives saved from periodic flooding would outweigh the current costs to residents. Add to this the gains made in helping supply a modernising nation with its energy needs, and anti-dam protests become little more than sentiment. Daoist 'dreams' may not seem to equate with a land of harsh realities. The 1998 floods, however, have turned attention back to the whole question of China's flood control methods. The Three Gorges Dam cannot prevent the type of extensive flooding experienced in 1998. More localised smaller-scale dams are thought to be a better solution than the mega-dam mentality.

- *Farming-Trading; Tradition-Innovation*

Another *yin-yang* feature in China's development is the tension between a stable agrarian tradition and an innovative trading one. One way in which this has been expressed was in the popular Chinese TV series of 1988, called *River Elegy*. The Yellow River of tradition and the Blue Ocean of innovation were contrasted. Confucianism and its conservatism are - on the surface - blamed for China's rigidity and thus ineptitude in the face of European advances, which came from across the blue Pacific. Science, democracy and capitalism were deemed 'blue ocean' culture. Yellow River culture was shown to be feudal and backward. One interpretation was that *River Elegy* was in fact a way of criticising the Chinese Communist Party government for its inability to be more flexible in political reforms. Interestingly, the following year (1989), the Chinese government demonstrated its inflexibility by militarily crushing the pro-democracy demonstration in Beijing. The balance between the Yellow River and Blue Ocean cultures might well reside in an attitude that 'gradualism' is the most suitable (*wu-wei*) method of progress, rather than becoming seduced by the fashions and fallibilities of global money and management. That China has weathered the Asian economic crisis more successfully than any of its neighbours shows some accomplishments in balancing this particular *yin-yang* challenge, that of not being too outward looking but not too insular either.

- *Past-Future*

The Yellow River agrarian China in contrast to the Blue Ocean trading China, highlights the region's possession of two distinct temporal features: the power of the past and of the future. Thus not only is China home of the world's oldest continuous civilisation (some 5,000 years), but it is also pointing the way of the future, with predictions of China achieving the status of global power within a generation.

- *Paternalism-Pragmatism*

There is yet another *yin-yang* complementarity worth mentioning, that of a disciplined (or strict) nature yet a middle-road (or flexible) mentality. Politically, China has been a predominantly authoritarian or paternalistically ruled country predisposed to 'centrist' thinking and maintaining 'order', but not towards rigidity of the system. Culturally, this authoritarian paternalism is reinforced through the underpinnings of Confucianism, though Confucianism has a humanistic streak and that humanism can be used against rulers. The intellectual subtlety of Buddhism and Daoism promote flexibility within the political culture. Hence Deng Xiaoping's 'one country, two systems' formula for Hong Kong SAR, Macao (in 1999), and as a standing offer to Taiwan, has its roots in the Daoism - "taking two courses at once" because "there is no mutual opposition in all things".(24) The *yin-yang* symbol of the circle, one China, comprises two systems. If the formula has not been applied formally to Taiwan, it does not mean that it has not been applied at all. Like Taiwan's *de facto* independence of control from Beijing; there is also Taiwan's *de facto* dependence on Beijing. One is shaped by the other, and in the process of being transformed by the other. As with human affairs, so too with the environment. In judging our civilisational status in 21st century culture, it is important to know whether we support 'management' policies premised on *person-versus-environment* or those less 'managerial' but more nurturing policies of *person-in-environment* ?

For example, the *person-versus-nature* paradigm has long existed in anthropocentric Western civilisation. Not only was 'man' celebrated as the centre of the universe in the Western system, God having been dislodged during the Renaissance, but 'man' had been granted dominion over nature by the very God whose throne he usurped. Moreover, aided by science, he has tamed (demystified) nature and caused her to yield her secrets. In doing so, 'man' not only became a more efficient producer of goods and services, but an efficient destroyer of his environmental capital. Contamination of air, soil and water, as well as loss of biodiversity, have forced him to re-evaluate his exploitative relations with the very source of his sustenance - mother nature.

Notice in the above paragraph the gendered representation of the Western relationship between culture and the environment. Typically, in the West, *culture* has been depicted as the product of man's civilising achievements, bringing forth light and rationality to a bewitched world of ignorance and superstition. The *environment*, by contrast, has been thought of as female, irrational and subject to conquest or exploitation. The environment as 'nature' could be seen as mother, mistress, wife (for whom one 'husbands' resources) and, of course, witch. Witches, as we know, have no place in 'rational' society.

It has been shown above that Chinese thinking, too, has its *yin* and *yang*, the complementary polarities of female and male, negative and positive, dark and light, soft and hard, and so forth. But these are treated as impersonal 'forces' of nature itself - the unchanging 'laws' underlying change (25) - rather than being used in gendering anthropocentric relations with nature. Moreover anything can be *yin* or *yang* according to context. For example, a traditional painting which depicts the human spirit 'yielding' to the power of nature is *yin*-like, compared to the *yang* quality of Western Renaissance painting with its strong assertion of human centrality.(26) By the same token, the *yin* quality of a Chinese nature painting appears quite *yang* from the perspective of nature's strength and the human figure's frailty. It is to art, the embodiment of Daoist mysticism, that I now turn.

Mountain and Water

When 'deep ecologists' turn their backs on industrialism and ask us to think like a mountain,(27) I am reminded of a poem by a celebrated poet of China's Tang dynasty (AD 618-906), Li Bai (Li Po):

All birds have flown away high in the sky;

One lazy cloud drifts alone.

Without tiring, I look at Mount Jingting, Mount Jingting looks at me;

Finally there is only Mount Jingting.(28)

These words illustrate a cosmic intimacy sought in relations with nature, one in which landscape - literally 'mountain and water' (*shan shui*) - are expressions of Heaven and Earth.(29) To become a true person, *zhenren*,(30) is to realise these forces within ourselves. Integrity is thereby pursued through integration.(31) This path, or *dao*, takes us through a Chinese landscape, one in which we are but a small detail within the enormity of mountain-and-river scenes. Small as we are, we become part of the larger picture; in becoming that larger picture, we gain self-understanding.(32) *The self is sought outside the ego*. This is the time-honoured way of sagehood. Person and environment operate as one field of inter-creativity. The first lesson of Daoism is that the environment is not only necessary for our physical survival but also our psychological maturity.

In this we cannot complain of alienation, that side-effect of modernity. But most of us do not live in a classical Chinese thoughtscape; not even most Chinese. Traversing busy Shanghai or Hong Kong does not lend itself to daoist living.

Wind and Water

There are some, however, who still apply stylised remnants of this idea through the practice of *feng-shui*. Also dating from the celebrated Tang dynasty, *feng-shui* concerns itself with the harmonisation of spacial energy. Literally meaning 'wind and water', it has been said that *feng-shui* is "the wind which you cannot comprehend, and it is the water which you cannot grasp".(33)

Feng-shui's 'laws' govern not only the siting of graves or the logic of a Chinese garden, but the interior decoration of a modern manager's office and the erection of high-rise buildings in Hong Kong's central business district. Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa, is on record as having based his decision not to reside in Government House because of its allegedly poor *feng-shui*. (34)

That even the most modern of Chinese still express a belief in their fortune being environmentally affected is testament to the pervasiveness of traditional attitudes to nature. The passage below, which elaborates on the meaning of *feng-shui*, reveals the philosophical basis behind its cultural and commercial significance (35) for many contemporary Chinese.

Wind and water together express the power of Nature's flowing elements, and its effects on surface landscapes. Feng Shui recognises that the Earth's surface is sculpted by wind and water. Feng Shui insists that one needs to live in harmony with the winds the waters of the Earth, if we want these elements to create positive Energy flows that work in our favour.(36)

Clearly, environmental awareness is not a Western import to which a developing country like China must accommodate itself. Rather, the need for a healthy environment is firmly rooted in Chinese cosmology. There is the speech, for example, by Prince Qin (Chin) in 549 BC during the Zhou (Chou) dynasty.(37) This speech, which is part of the *Zhou yü* (*Speeches of Chou*), forming the initial chapters of the *Guo yü* (*Speeches of the States*), presents by today's standards a particularly favoured viewpoint. Not only must the natural environments be uncorrupted, but they need to be 'facilitated'. Said the Prince: "I have heard that those who ruled the people in ancient times did not tear down the mountains, nor did they raise the marshes, nor did they obstruct the rivers, nor did they drain the swamps."(38) Instead they facilitated these areas by dredging rivers, for example, or banking swamps. (39) Prince Qin had Daoist reasons for his views about environmental protection. Rivers assist in conveying the earth's *qi* (*chi*), whose circulation must not be impeded. If it is, as in humans, environmental health problems will arise. Mountains, too, must not be tampered with, or the lowlands will suffer - as often occurs when there is deforestation in the mountain regions, and as demonstrated in the 1998 floods. The Prince's thought reflects a Daoist emphasis on humans 'conforming' to the 'pattern of nature',(40) and not the other way around. In typically Daoist fashion, situations transfer readily between the natural and the human world. This is evident from the above-mentioned application of *qi* to humans as well as to the land. The lesson to emerge is that: "The flow of energy must not be obstructed at any level. Within the body obstruction will cause physical or mental disorder. On the social level it will lead to resentment and rebellion. In nature it will cause floods."(41)

Floods

So what went wrong for China in 1998 the year of its worst floods in living memory? In a single season, flood waters wrecked havoc in river basins in 20 provinces. Especially notable were the north-eastern province of Heilongjiang, where flooding curtailed crucial oil production,(42) and in the south where the world's third largest river, the Yangtze, had driven tens of millions of people to live on top of dykes. The floods claimed the lives of at least 3,000 people, affected - at a conservative estimate - 200 million others, and delivered flood damage estimated at more than US\$20 billion. The disaster has also been expressed, in the global language of the day, as a percentage of annual growth in GDP: flooding is widely claimed to have cut between half and one percentage points from China's economic growth rate for 1998. This is a serious matter in view of China's struggle to maintain a high growth rate in a region undergoing recession and against the potential for social unrest if unemployment becomes unmanageable.(43)

Fire

The human world is indeed coming to reflect the natural world, and vice-versa - much as the 1997-98 'haze' of Southeast Asia was partly caused by a political haze (or 'lack of transparency') in the Indonesian system. The 'haze'-producing fires were in no small way linked to forest clearance permits given to big business. As I have observed elsewhere:

This was not the first time Indonesia drew polite criticism of its crop clearance methods, whereby modern cash-crop cultivators would use fire to clear the land. Illegal as it was, the regulations against burning were ignored and unenforced; neighbouring countries would ingest the smoke, along with their own industrial pollution. Nothing changed until the 1997 *El Nino* magnified the effects to such proportions that the lucrative tourist industry was damaged and normally docile citizens of Singapore and urban Malaysia joined protest marches.⁽⁴⁴⁾

The government of that time fell, disgraced as it was by an inability to revive the economy, or deliver social justice, or even put out the fires. It presided over a conjunction of events which together gave the appearance of Indonesia burning - in every sense. Looking at the culpability of government in the Indonesian case, the Beijing authorities need to take stock of what it means to govern and what it is to manage or mismanage. They cannot afford to be washed away by the tides of history. "The eyes and ears of enlightened leaders are not strained; their vitality and spirit are not exhausted. When things come up, they observe their changes, and when events happen, they respond to their developments."⁽⁴⁵⁾

In doing so, it is pertinent to recognise what is 'natural' and what is not. The Indonesian government had called the forest fires a *natural* disaster. While it was true that the *El Nino* weather phenomenon brought drought and delayed the monsoon rains, humans were responsible for lighting the fires to clear the forest. By comparison, the Chinese authorities were quite open in their assessment of the human contribution to the 1998 floods. They did not blame Heaven ('an act of God'), as easy as that would have been in view of China's long history of natural calamities through floods. Fear of flooding has been with Chinese people since the mists of time - when Yü, the mythical founder of the first dynasty, Xia, reputedly spent 13 years 'mastering the waters'. But the 1998 flood was not entirely 'natural'. The Chinese government blamed the severity of this flood on human excesses, particularly logging which has caused soil erosion, leading to abnormally high levels of silting, thereby raising river beds, and aggravating flood damage. Understandably, the authorities have reacted by imposing a ban on logging in the Yangtze River basin; while the Chinese parliament has been told that more funds will be allocated to reforestation and returning lakes and rivers to their original sizes (after these had been filled in or otherwise constrained). This pertains to the above-noted observation: "The flow of energy must not be obstructed at any level."

Wu-Wei (Non-Action)

Directly related is another lesson, of not overly managing things: the concept of *wu-wei*. According to the *Laozi*: "Tao invariably does nothing (*wu-wei*) and yet there is nothing that is not done."⁽⁴⁶⁾ *Wu-wei* does not mean being totally passive, but not acting unnaturally. According to the Daoist Masters of Huainan (*Huainanzi*):

. . . *wu-wei* (doing nothing) means that one should take no action before natural development; . . . *wu-pu-wei* (nothing left undone) means that one should take action according to the development of things themselves.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Prince Qin's advice, noted earlier, of facilitating the environment - with its obvious relevance to contemporary flood control measures - is illustrative of the *wu-wei* approach. Essentially, the principle of *wu-wei* is one of seeking to align oneself with the *dao*; such is the strategic style of Chinese culture. To 'go with the flow' is regarded as more beneficial than to try to overly manage things, or even to oppose.

Of pertinence is the teaching that change is caused by the interaction of *yin* and *yang* forces. It will be recalled that the *yin-yang* polarities of negative and positive, feminine and masculine, defensive and expansive are not in dualistic opposition but act as complementary polarities. The *wu-wei* principle makes sense in conjunction with the workings of *yin-yang*, which teaches us to "flow" in the direction of restoring balance. This represents a different approach from the belief in "struggle", so beloved of Mao Zedong, to reach an improved dialectical resolution. Meanwhile, the above-mentioned *qi* or 'life force' is part of *yin-yang* dynamics and is pregnant with transformative power. This power may be tapped into by individuals and whole societies. The survival (transformative) capacities of *yin-yang* mean that it is possible to emerge secure even in the most trying of conditions. This is a far cry from the torrential swells of the 1998 floods.

The Cycle of Consumption

Clearly, what has befallen China in suffering and solution-seeking has little to do with mystical landscapes, *feng-shui* harmony, or *wu-wei* 'management theory'. The problem with China is that it has been weighed down with population pressure in relation to available resources. Consequently, with all its problems, it could appear to be overly managed, not only in bureaucratic terms but also in the pragmatic sense of turning wilderness into farmland, and farmland into more lucrative factories. As acclaimed travel writer Paul Theroux observed of his travels in China in 1986:

. . . I rarely saw examples of man's insignificance beside the greater forces of nature. They [the Chinese] had moved mountains, diverted rivers, wiped out the animals, eliminated the wilderness; they had subdued nature and had it screaming for mercy [contrary to Prince Qin's advice!]. If there were enough of you it was really very easy to dig up a whole continent and plant cabbages. They had built a wall that was said to be the only man-made object on earth that could be seen from the moon. Whole provinces had been turned into vegetable gardens, and a hill wasn't a hill - it was a way of growing rice vertically.(48)

Theroux, of course, was speaking as a post-industrial consumer of the environment. From this perspective, the starting point of our capitalist 'food-chain', wilderness, becomes the endpoint. Thus agrarian societies 'tame' nature for agricultural purposes, industrialising societies build factories on farmland, and post-industrial societies replace factories with office towers. But even office towers pale into insignificance when it comes to the rising eco-tourist value of 'wilderness'. This cycle in the *consumption of nature* has transformed from its physical consumption by bulldozers to its aesthetic and experiential consumption by tourists. Interestingly, classical Daoism was also concerned with an aesthetic and experiential approach to nature. As it will be recalled: The first lesson of Daoism is that the environment is not only necessary for our physical survival but also our psychological maturity.

However disconcerting it may seem to place American tourists alongside Daoist mystics, it is worth remembering that the Eastern traditions (particularly Daoism, Buddhism and aspects of Hinduism) experienced a renaissance in the post-industrial West.(49) The environmental movement, too, is essentially a post-industrial Western phenomenon. Paul Theroux sounds more like a Daoist than Li Peng - author of the Three Gorges mega-dam project.

Lest Western post-industrialists succumb to a self-congratulatory impulse, it is worth recalling that not so long ago in the *consumption of nature* cycle, Western civilization was equally adept at clearing the wilderness. Such an instrumentalist relationship to the environment favouring development has 'progressed' to one which seeks to 'manage' exploitation at more 'sustainable' levels. The relationship is still one premised on the superiority of humans over nature, their extractive needs over the rest of existence, and an enabling methodology of capitalist-consumer economics. There are no classical Chinese landscapes with ant-like individuals traipsing the terrain; no endeavour so alien as a mountain's consumption of the self in the meditative act.

Without tiring, I look at Mount Jingting, Mount Jingting looks at me;

Finally there is only Mount Jingting.

Bureaucratic Environmentalism

But there are rules and regulations, insignificant as they may appear beside the seemingly greater forces of consumption and, indeed, corruption. In environmental management terms, the Chinese government subscribes to an *administrative rationalism* model, one which "seeks to organize scientific and technical expertise into bureaucratic hierarchy in the service of the state".(50) Much like the state Confucianism which dominated Chinese politics for two millennia, it is a paternalistic expression of authority backed by what one analyst describes as "the Communist system of administration by law".(51) By this he means, in environmental terms, a *command theory* of management:

The communist state-centred conception of administrative law determines that environmental law is predominantly an instrument for effective and efficient environmental management. Environmental law is a means to legitimize the state's environmental policy and to facilitate its management rather than to limit its power...environmental law represents the interest of the state which is a closed system insulated from public supervision.(52)

The criteria for state success in this domain are identified as:

- first, there must be a law for people to follow in every aspect of environmental control,
- second, the observance and the enforcement of environmental rules must be strict,
- and third, all the law-breakers must be dealt with.(53)

It should be noted that a comprehensive body of environmental law along socialist centrist lines was introduced at the start of the reform period in China, in 1979, when the country's first environmental law was promulgated.(54) Hence this *administrative rationalist* model found a favourable political climate under Deng Xiaoping's program of reforms designed to strengthen China via the introduction of a market-oriented economy. To do so, it was necessary to engage in institution-building, and 'modernisation' of China's legal, business and administrative culture, but not to erode the power of the party-state.

There are, of course, sound reasons for managing the environment through a legal system of regulation, enforcement and punishment of offenders. Without such a system, the environment's already advanced economic exploitation would spell ecological disaster. The question arises, if the system is so rule-bound and compelling, why was human culpability deemed to lie behind the severity of 1998 floods? And why did the authorities wait until the floods demonstrated the effects of soil erosion (a scenario which can be readily and plausibly hypothesised), before placing a ban on logging in the Yangtze River basin, particularly the forested upper reaches? One answer is that China, by the government's own admission, suffers from widespread corruption and flouting of central directives. Like the floods, corruption in socialist China is unprecedented.(55)

When water accumulates, it breeds predatory fish. When earth accumulates, it breeds cannibalistic beasts. When rites and duties become decorations, they breed artificial and hypocritical people.(56)

As already noted above, in relation to the year of 'Indonesia burning' (see subsection 'Fire'), there is a Daoist view that the natural world parallels the human world - or, more precisely in this case, the human world's excesses. Administrative rationalists are also well aware of this. Hence their justification that harsh measures are called for in severe circumstances. But a Daoist policy-maker would approach the situation somewhat differently, arguing that nature - whether it be human or environmental - blossoms not through 'management', let alone coercion, but through being allowed to fulfil its own promise - or *de* (virtue/power) which, as noted above, is the *dao* expressed in the individual and the particular. Essentially, it is an educative function that is required of the state. This function was always implicit in Chinese philosophies of government, even if only to criticise the

more draconian and insensitive regimes that have emerged from time to time in China's long history. Without an attitude which takes the environmental value seriously, laws are not taken seriously.

Part of the change in attitude to the environment comes from a "holistic rather than a sectoral approach to environmental management".(57) This was recommended to Beijing by a Sino-Japanese scientific endeavour called the Working Group on Scientific Research, Development and Training (SRDT). This SRDT recommendation, among others, was presented in a paper - 'Achieving Cleaner Production in China' - at the September 1995 conference of the China Council for International Cooperation and Development (CCICED), an organisation established by China's State Council to serve as, in Chris Ashton's impressive description, "its think-tank, policy adviser and catalyst to implement Agenda 21, the manifesto itemising the Rio Earth Summit's objectives for sustainable development, which the State Council has endorsed".(58)

Why do Chinese people and their leaders need to think more seriously about their country's environmental health? Some basic statistics are in order.(59) A quarter of all deaths in China are linked to respiratory diseases. This is not surprising given the high levels of atmospheric pollution issuing from coal combustion used to deliver three-quarters of China's energy needs. Of 500 Chinese cities tested for air pollution, less than one per cent have levels acceptable to World Health Organisation standards. Acid rain affects 30 per cent of China's land surface and is especially prevalent in the agricultural lands of the densely populated southeast; while silting and erosion affects 15 per cent (but as much as a third of arable land). The yield of arable land has deteriorated. In the brief period 1989-1991, land classified as medium-to-low yield expanded from 66 per cent to 80 per cent. Crops are grown on only 10% of China's land. China holds the dubious distinction of containing what is believed to be the world's largest area of seriously eroded land - the Loess Plateau, accounting for some half a million square kilometres in the middle and upper reaches of the Yellow River. More than half of China's rivers are heavily polluted. Forest cover in China amounts to only 12 per cent of land area (compared with 26 per cent in India, a comparable country in terms of population pressure). China generates 40 per cent of Asia's carbon compound pollution (more than Japan) and is the second largest emitter of global greenhouse gasses (behind the United States) even though it emits less per capita than the US and Canada. According to the Stockholm Environment Institute, if China sustains an annual growth rate of 8.5 percent until the year 2025, its carbon dioxide emissions will be three times as great as that of the US. Its acid rain output would be the world's highest by 2010. The SRDT predicts that by early in the 21st century, regional and global consequences of China's environmental problems will be felt. For China itself, the problem according to an Australian academic, would lead to the country's "almost certain demise".(60) This would not only be bad for China but also for the rest of the world which would suffer the twin disasters of the effects of China's environmental mismanagement and the collapse of China from this mismanagement. The effects would include rising sea levels, a higher incidence of skin cancer, and transnational acid rain. China's collapse would mean massive problems of dealing with environmental refugees, the possibility of civil war, and raise questions over the status of the Chinese nuclear armoury.

In this unsettling situation lies a *yin-yang* relationship. In a word, the *yin* of despair must surely correlate with the *yang* of overcoming. Otherwise, "Real hardship would be having no hope," as quoted at the start of this paper. China's hope is that a 5,000-year record of civilisational survival will demonstrate its capacity once more in the face of modernisation's depredations.

Conclusion

In Daoism, as an emergent 21st century environmental philosophy, lies China's global power of attraction, *lai-hua* - come and be transformed. The performative function of domestic as well as international politics is that of attraction. Not only one's own citizens, but the world, is attracted by enlightened governance. It is no coincidence that the environment is (along with human rights) the bane of contemporary China's identity. China already has a well developed sense of economic life,

though Chinese planners know that there remains much to be done. For example, valuable resources like wood and water need to be realistically priced. The 1980s strategy of 'harmonious development' (*xietiao fazhan*) cries out for serious attention. This strategy, which was adopted as government policy in 1982, entails the pursuit of greater efficiency and effectiveness in the economic sphere through sound ecological practices, rather than at the expense of the environment. In Daoism China has an indigenous source of advice, including the following, which have been highlighted in this paper:

1. Psychological Daoism: The environment is not only necessary for our physical survival but also our psychological maturity.
1. Religious Daoism (*qi*): "The flow of energy must not be obstructed at any level. Within the body obstruction will cause physical or mental disorder. On the social level it will lead to resentment and rebellion. In nature it will cause floods."
2. Philosophical Daoism (*wu-wei*): Not overly managing things - "Tao invariably does nothing and yet there is nothing that is not done."

If the PRC is to be the global power it promises to be, then the environment will have to be the vital issue over which China proves its credentials.

References

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3. Quoted in Associated Press, 'Down on the Farm, Women Wear the Pants', *The Australian*, 21 February 1996, p. 35.
4. As vigorously argued in Lester Brown, *Who Will Feed China? Wake-Up Call for a Small Planet*, Worldwatch Institute, W. W. Norton & Co., New York, 1995. See also Vaclav Smil, 'Who Will Feed China?', *The China Quarterly*, No. 143, 1995, pp. 801-813; Richard McGregor, 'Beijing Propaganda Blast Defends Its Growing Appetite', *The Australian*, 8 May 1996, p. 11; and Michael Richardson, 'Timely Grain', *The Australian*, 12 July 1996, p. 25.
5. This is the classical concept of *tien-ming*: whoever rules must do so virtuously or Heaven (*tien*), the cosmic moral order, will withdraw its mandate and pass it on to someone more worthy - irrespective of whether that person is of royal lineage or a simple peasant.
6. The 17th century Chinese thinker, Ku Yen-wu, distinguished *tianxia* as a cultural notion rather than a geopolitical one.
7. See J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (eds), *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1989.
8. Chinese strategic culture has recently become popularised in the West through business adaptations of Sunzi's *The Art of War* (circa 350 BC). (One translation is Samuel B. Griffith's Sun Tzu [Sunzi], *The Art of War*, Oxford University Press, London, 1963.) The *Art of War* is a Daoist-derived manual on gaining advantage in competitive situations through an understanding on the workings of the *dao*. I have explored this in two papers: Rosita Dellios, *Chinese Strategic Culture - Part 1: The Heritage from the Past*, Research Paper No. 1, Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies, Bond University, April 1994; and Rosita Dellios, *Chinese Strategic Culture - Part 2: Virtue and Power*, Research Paper No. 2, Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies, Bond University, November 1994.
9. On the similarities and differences between the philosophical and religious forms of Daoism, see Liu Xiaogan, 'Taoism', in Arvind Sharma (ed.), *Our Religions*, Harper Collins, New York, 1993, pp. 229-289.

10. For example, Alan Watts, *Tao: The Watercourse Way*, Arkana, London, 1992.
11. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
12. *Laozi*, I, 1. The translation used here is: *Laozi (Lao Tzu), Tao Te Ching*, (D. C. Lau, trans.), Penguin, London, 1963.
13. *Ibid.*, xlii, 93.
14. *Ibid.*, xxxiv, 76
15. Huainanzi, *The Tao of Politics: Lessons of the Masters of Huainan*, (Thomas Cleary trans. & ed.), Shambhala, Boston, 1990, p. 26. The Huainanzi or Masters of Huainan refer to eight Daoist sages who were called to advise the King of Huainan during the early Han dynasty (207 BC - 220 AD). Their advice in the form of the text which bears their name, the *Huainanzi*, is a classic from the Huang Lao school, representing social and political Daoism. See Liu Xiaogan, 'Taoism', pp. 252-254.
16. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 186.
17. *Laozi*, lxxviii, 186.
18. *Laozi*, xxv11I, 63.
19. See Roger T. Ames, 'Putting the Te Back into Taoism', in J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (eds), *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1989, p. 134.
20. Thomas Cleary (trans. and ed.), *Immortal Sisters: Secrets of Taoist Women*, Shambhala, Boston, 1989, p. 2.
21. This is because, as Sunzi's *The Art of War* shows, it relies on the hidden and psychological for its efficacy, rather than the obvious and physical.
22. 'China Will Rely on Reserves to Finance Giant Dam Project', *The Australian*, 29 March 1996, p. 7.
23. In functional terms, the Great Wall malfunctioned. It was China's Maginot Line. Built 5,000 kilometres across northern China at great cost in labourers' lives, it failed to prevent the entry of warlike nomads. It has also been condemned for its disruptive *feng-shui*. (*Feng-shui* is discussed below.) But the Great Wall has succeeded as a symbol. It became one of the most powerful symbols of China unto this day, and certainly the premier tourist attraction. The Grand Canal (2,500 kilometres from north to south) was designed to advance China economically and enhance its unity. Instead, it contributed to civil war because of the emperor's disregard for the welfare of his subjects. The Long March (8,000 kilometres from south to north) was a retreat from military defeat at the hands of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists. The hardships endured became a propaganda victory for Mao's Communists. Of the 90,000 soldiers who began the journey, only 20,000 survived. The Long March's symbolism overtook its military reality. The Communist Revolution sought to rid China of exploitative class relations. It is remembered less for social justice than for advancing the cause of Chinese nationalism. "The Chinese people have stood up!" said Mao in proclaiming the People's Republic of China in 1949. Mao's Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s was meant to accelerate the industrialisation process but in fact it became a Great Leap Backward in terms of economic progress. Worse still, it triggered a famine which claimed the lives of an estimated 20 million people. By comparison, the lives lost during the 1989 crackdown of pro-democracy students in Tiananmen Square was a small fraction of this, a widely accepted estimate being 1,000. However, the manner in which the killings were reported and their cause analysed assured the event was remembered for more than its intended function of restoring 'law and order' in the Chinese capital. The Party's willingness to act ruthlessly if circumstances so demanded became the lasting message of this grand coercive gesture by the ruling hub. Finally, the unification of China did what it set out to do, and is remembered for precisely that. Even the unifier's cruelty, which was renowned in that he buried scholars alive, burned books, and administered cruel punishments, did not overshadow his spectacular feat of unifying the Chinese nation. Still, China's golden age is felt to be of a much earlier time, a time when model sovereigns reined.
24. *Zhuangzi*, Ch. 2. The translation used here is *Chuang-Tzu (Zhuangzi)*, (Fung-Yu-lan, trans.), Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1989, with these quotations appearing on p. 94. The *Zhuangzi* is one of the three key texts in Daoist literature, forming a connecting link between the other two, the *Laozi* or *Daodejing* and the *Huainanzi (Huai Nan Tzu)*.
25. That *yin* at its extremity becomes *yang*, and *yang* at its extremity becomes *yin*. Therefore, to maintain harmony, it is best to try to balance *yin* and *yang*.

26. In the Western context, St. Francis of Assisi might be the Daoist equivalent of *yin* counter-culture, in relation to the dominant *yang* posture of European dominance attitudes to nature. On St. Francis of Assisi being proposed as the patron saint of ecology, see Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, No. 155, pp. 1203-7; and discussion in John S. Dryzek, *The Politics of Earth: Environmental Discourses*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 161.

27. As identified in Dryzek, *ibid.*, p. 166.

28. Li Bai, 'On Contemplating Mount Jingting', quoted in Simon Leys, *The Burning Forest: Essays on Chinese Culture and Politics*, Paladin, London, 1988, p. 26.

29. See Yi-Fu Tuan, *Passing, Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture*, Island Press, Washington DC, 1993, pp. 127-129.

30. *Zhuangzi*, Ch. 6, deals with the 'true person'. "When the perfect man is active, he is like heaven; when tranquil, he is like earth."

Moreover:

The true man unifies nature with man, and equalises all things. To him there is no mutual opposition in all things. There is no mutual conquest of nature and man. Therefore, he is empty and is everything. He is unconscious and is everywhere. He thus mysteriously unifies his own self with its other. (*Ibid.* p. 94.)

31. See Ames, 'Putting the Te Back into Taoism', especially pp. 124-131.

32. Expressed another way, the individual attains 'self-disclosure' through an 'envirning context'. Ames, 'Putting the Te Back into Taoism', p. 138.

33. Lillian Too, *Feng Shui*, 2nd edn, Konsep Lagenda Sdn Bhd, Kuala Lumpur, 1996, p. 1; Ernest J. Eitel, *Feng-Shui*, Graham Brash, Singapore, 1985, p. 2.

34. Andrew Bolt, 'Luck Finds a Way', *The Sunday Mail* (Brisbane, Australia), 6 July 1997, p. 75.

35. Chinese business premises cannot afford to exhibit bad *feng-shui* lest they repel customers who believe in the efficacy of the art. *Feng-shui* consultancy fees, by masters versed in the art, reflect market demand. Not only can it be expensive to consult such a master, but the remedies - such as new construction or demolition - can also prove expensive.

36. Too, *Feng Shui*, p. 1.

37. Prince Qin is a model Daoist character. After his princely life, he is said to have disappeared into the mountains, becoming a Daoist immortal with the new the name of Wangzi Qiao (Wang-tzu Ch'iao).

38. Quoted in James A. Hart, 'The Speech of Prince Chin: A Study of Early Chinese Cosmology', in Henry Rosemont, Jr. (ed.), *Explorations in Early Chinese Cosmology*, JAAR Thematic Studies, Vol. 50, No. 2, Scholars Press, Chico, California, 1976, p. 43.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

42. At an annual consumption rate of 150 million tonnes, China is Asia's second largest oil consumer in Asia, next to Japan. In 1994, China became a net importer of oil, after two decades as a net exporter.

43. It is estimated that the economy must grow at a rate of 7%-8% in 1998 to accommodate the millions of workers who have been retrenched as a result of reforms to state owned enterprises.

44. 'Living in a Haze', Centre Report, *The Culture Mandala* (The Bulletin of the Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies, Bond University), Vol. 2, No. 2, December 1997, pp. 34-37.

45. *Huainanzi*, p. 24.
46. *Wu-wei erh wu-pu-wei*, *Laozi*, Ch. 37.
47. *Huainanzi*, Ch. 14, quoted in Liu Xiaogan, *Taoism*, p. 253.
48. Paul Theroux, *Riding the Iron Rooster: By Train Through China*, Penguin Books, London, 1998, pp. 251-252.
49. That these spiritual philosophies have been adapted to Western conditions does not detract from the exercise. As Ames, *Putting the Te Back into Taoism*, explains (p. 141):
- In these days of mass communication and cultural flux, we do have access to the insights of other traditions. Certainly, we cannot escape the problems of having to understand these insights through the medium of our own culture, but if they are to transform us in any way at all, they must be meaningful to us. . . . in the attempt to interpret the central vocabularies of Taoist philosophy, the need to transform these ideas to make them appropriate to our own circumstances is entirely consistent with this Taoist tradition.
50. Dryzek, *The Politics of Earth*, p. 73.
51. Carlos Wing-Hung Lo, 'Environmental Management by Law in China: The Guangzhou Experience', *The Journal of Contemporary China*, No. 6, Summer 1994, p. 44.
52. *Ibid*, p. 43
53. *Ibid.*, p. 44
54. See *ibid*, p. 39.
55. In 1993, it was announced by the Supreme People's Procuratorate (an arm of the highest court) that corruption had become worse than at any other period since the People's Republic was founded in 1949 (Marguerite Johnson, 'Hunt for Highflyers', *Time*, 13 September 1993, p. 45). Periodic crackdowns on corruption are a regular feature of Chinese post-Mao politics. Deng Xiaoping's reformist slogan, 'To be rich is glorious', has often been treated as an end which is justified by any means. It has been reported that between 1992 and 1997, 731,000 corruption cases within the Chinese Communist Party were investigated, resulting in 121,500 expulsions from the party, 669,300 being 'sanctioned', and 37,492 being criminally prosecuted ('Discipline Inspection Commission Circular on anti-Corruption', BBC *Summary of World Broadcasts: Far East*, 27 September 1997, S2/2, cited in David Shambaugh, 'The CCP's Fifteenth Congress: Technocrats in Command', *Issues & Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1, January 1998, p. 9). In 1997, 40% of delegates to the National People's Congress (China's parliament) expressed their disapproval of corruption and rising crime by voting against the work report of the chief procurator (James Pringle, 'Congress Looms as Turning point for China', *The Australian*, 6 March 1998, p.8). For a parliament which is normally labelled a 'rubber stamp', this represents a strong censure.
56. *Huainanzi* (Cleary trans.), p. 41.
57. Reported in Chris Ashton, 'The High Environmental Price of China's Progress', *Asian Business Review*, December/January 1996, p. 49.
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59. Derived from the SRDT paper cited in Ashton, *ibid.*, pp. 47-49; Fiona Carruthers, 'China "on the Brink of Environmental Chaos"', *The Australian*, 17 February 1995, p 26; Sandra Burton, 'The East is Black', *Time Australia*, 29 April 1991, and 'Taming The River Wild', *Time Australia*, 19 December 1994; Colin Mackerras, Pradeep Taneja, and Graham Young, *China Since 1978: Reform, Modernisation and 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics'*, Longman Cheshire, Sydney, 1994, pp. 150-165; June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition*, Macmillan, London, 1993, pp. 315-323; and Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *China Wakes: The Struggle for the Soul of a Rising China*, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London, 1994, pp. 389-390.
60. Paul Monk, speaking at the inaugural *AsiaLink* seminar in Canberra and reported in Carruthers, *ibid*.

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