Yin-Yang Theory, the Human Organism, and the Bai hu tong: A Need for Pairing and Explaining

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Abstract

This paper discusses some terminological consequences of the acceptance of a seemingly all-pervasive *yin yang* dualism by ancient Chinese naturalists, with a focus on the origin of certain technical terms introduced to designate morphological and functional items in the emerging Chinese medicine. These terms were selected from words not originally linked to morphological and physiological notions. They served as metaphors to illustrate both function and the *yin yang* nature of the items they were chosen to designate. How to translate these terms into Western languages is a complex issue not sufficiently discussed among philologists.

In 79 CE, the historian Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) published the *Bai hu tong* 白虎通, based on contributions by an unknown number of participants in one of the first documented meetings of intellectuals in antiquity. Chapter 8 offers a discourse on the meaning of *qing* 情, ‘emotion’, and *xing* 性, ‘moral disposition’. Two terms were available that had been in long use in this arena of meanings, albeit without a clear-cut distinction along the lines of a *yin-yang* categorisation. No metaphors were required here. Rather, a redefinition of *qing* 清 and *xing* 性 was required to assign a *yang* nature to the former and a *yin* nature to the latter.

The *Bai hu tong* is a telling example of a continuing heterogeneity of explanatory models in early Chinese life sciences. The following discussion offers an impression of the merger of what may originally have been a neutral attempt at a dualistic categorisation of all phenomena in terms of two natural categories of *yin* and *yang* with another doctrine. The second clearly valued *yang* phenomena more highly than *yin* phenomena and applied this distinction to more and less desirable moral categories. Also, the *Bai hu tong* offers evidence of different metaphorical usages of the term *fu* 府 in physiological theory from as early as Han times. To the older meaning: ‘short-term storage facility’ a second meaning of ‘palace’ was added. The question of an adequate translation of such terms in modern languages is worth further thought.¹

Keywords

Bai hu tong, *Yin-yang theory*, Chinese medical terminology, translation

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***Yin-yang* categorisation and the choice of metaphors**

At some time in the late Zhou era, i.e. around the third century BCE, an established understanding involving a pairing of selected phenomena in the natural world appears to have been extended to an interpretation of the entire universe. This was based on the idea that such a pairing constitutes a basic structural principle linking all phenomena. Knowledge of this structural principle, philosophers seem to have assumed, enabled them to explain, if not predict, eternal change involved in the coming into being, maturation, decline, and passing away of all possible types of things, as well as to interpret the nature of the interactions among them.

Possibly preceded by terminological juxtapositions such as *xiong* 雄, ‘male’, and *ci* 雌, ‘female’, or *pin* 牝, ‘female’, and *mu* 牡, ‘male’, eventually the categories of *yin* 陰, ‘dark side of a mountain’, and *yang* 陽, ‘sunny side of a mountain’, appeared best suited to express this notion to late Zhou and early Han dynasty Chinese naturalists. Henceforth, a presumed all-pervasive dualism was defined with these two terms, and an ever more complicated *yin-yang* doctrine emerged.

In the history of natural scientific theory, no matter what observations may have stimulated the creation of a theory, facts and phenomena offering supporting evidence may prove very limited. By definition, though, theories are meant to explain not only visible phenomena but also those processes that remain unseen by the human eye. A theory is a tool of the human intellect to open a window on a segment of an assumed reality concealed in a black box called existence. As a consequence, a descriptive argumentation, such as: ‘day, light, movement are *yang*; night, darkness, standstill are *yin*’, is amended by an associative argumentation, to the effect that: ‘if there is *qi* in the human organism, there must be *yang qi* and *yin qi*’. This is where the autodynamism of a theory takes flight. It is assumed that phenomena of whose existence one is convinced, but which may not be provable as a part of everyday experience, can be subsumed under the same tenets as those facts and phenomena observed with the human eye. In modern science experiments are conducted to prove or disprove such assumptions. In ancient science such a corrective was not yet available. Plausibility was sufficient proof of truth.

Yin-yang categorisation is a case in point. Night, darkness, stillness, females, and many other phenomena appeared to ancient Chinese naturalists to be associated with the contrasting day, light, movement, males, etc., in a *yin* and *yang* dualism. Soon enough these early scholars must have found themselves confronted with the problem of how to extend their theory of an all-pervasive *yin-yang* dualism to regions where opposites were not as easily distinguishable

as day is from night. Human internal morphology and physiology are such regions. When the *yin-yang* categorisation was applied to the human organism, its outer and inner morphology and its presumed functions required firstly a division into *yin* and *yang* units, and secondly an appropriate nomenclature to make this division visible and, perhaps even more importantly, appear natural. No evidence is available today to suggest a pre-Han categorisation of the internal organs into two distinct groups. Hence, Chinese naturalists who were convinced of the existence of two distinct groups of organs in the human body, i.e., one *yin* group and one *yang* group, were unable to resort to long-established precedents in designating these two groups. Rather, they were forced to choose for themselves two terms that responded to two separate requirements. First, terms chosen must fit the designated unit, in this case organs like the heart, lungs, stomach, large intestine, etc. That is, to categorise the organs, two terms had to be selected, both of which reflected, at least to a certain degree, the physiological functions assigned to these organs as a whole. In addition, terms were to be pairs that offered, in their juxtaposition, some hint at a *yin* and *yang* nature of the two sub-groups among the organs. Both of these demands required the use of metaphors, that is, of terms lending themselves to convey a meaning to the newly conceptualised categories from an area of meanings well-known to at least a broader educated elite.² The choice of terms may have been further complicated by the fact that at some point in time the *yang* category of all existence was valued higher than the *yin* category, at least in the world view of some early Chinese philosophers. Several pairings found in ancient Chinese morphology and physiology appear to owe their existence and designation to such requirements. Dualistic terms distinguishing between day and night, light and darkness, and male and female were well established in ancient Chinese long before the advent of *yin-yang* categorisation. In contrast, terms widely used in later medicine like *zang* 藏 and *fu* 府, *shu* 俞 and *mu* 募, *ying* 营 and *wei* 衛, and *ren* 任 and *du* 督, are designations transferred from their conventional subjects of reference to a new reference that makes sense only in the context of a *yin-yang* doctrine.

The translation of such terms into Western languages poses difficulties. In ancient Greece as in ancient China, naturalists resorted to metaphorical usages of words known to all members of their language community to indicate their understanding of the shape or function of a certain morphological unit, or of intangible phenomena.³ For example, the Greek word for woven tissue, *histos*,

² Haverkamp, 1990.

³ For the most recent survey of existing theories of metaphors in the formation of ancient Greek medical terminology to date, and the introduction of a new category of 'empirical metaphors', see Richter, 2009.

was adapted to signify certain cell structures that we still call body ‘tissue’ today. However, it is not as simple as that. Originally, *histos* had signified the mast of a ship. Because a mast carried a sail made of tissue, the meaning of *histos* was extended to include ‘tissue’. There was no question when Chinese linguists discussed the proper translation of the European term ‘histology’, that they referred to the secondary meaning of *histos*, not to the primary meaning. Hence Chinese equivalents of the Western medical terminology of the *histo*-family use the binomial *zu zhi* 組織 to convey literally the image of a ‘woven tissue’. Presumably in choosing a Chinese term for *histo*-, no one would have even thought of returning to its original meaning: ‘ship mast’.

To translate ancient Chinese metaphorical medical terms into a modern Western language requires a similar decision-making process. The meanings assigned to a word over time should be reflected in the target language. The Chinese term *jing* 經 is as good an example as *histo*-. The metaphorical significance that has helped this technical term to move from the realm of weaving into numerous and diverse areas of reference is that of a ‘warp thread’. What, one may ask, may have prompted ancient Chinese intellectuals, contributing to the expansion of their vocabulary, to choose ‘warp thread’ to refer to major rivers, major texts, and also to the major passage-ways of blood and *qi* in the human organism?

No explicit reflection on this question was recorded in Chinese antiquity. One may assume, though, that the basic metaphorical value of a warp thread is its function of holding the weft, that is, of supporting all the many threads that together form the main weave of a tissue over the warp. Without the warp a tissue breaks down, whereas a single weft thread, or even several weft threads, may loosen or be lost and the tissue will hold nevertheless. But the warp is basic: if it is destroyed, the tissue loses its essential support, and thereby its structure. A warp is thus an element that holds together what is supposed to exist for a long time. One may regard Chinese literature, that is, Chinese written culture, as a tissue. This tissue is woven around certain essential texts that should be in place forever to keep all the fine wefts in place that provide the culture tissue with its many facets and colours. Perhaps it was this reference that led ancient Chinese intellectuals to select the character *jing* 經 as signifier of those ‘classical’ texts that they intended would provide Chinese literature, and through it Chinese culture, with its ever unchanging identity. To translate *jing* 經 as ‘manual’ is to miss the point of this metaphorical transfer. ‘Canon’ is not suitable either as it evokes notions of a doctrine that has been defined as orthodox by a religious body and these connotations are not necessarily included in the metaphorical use of *jing* 經. The European ‘classic’ is a secular term. Classic texts, like classical music, are culture products that are termed

‘classic’ because it is believed that they will survive short-term changes in fashion and preference. They are assumed to be capable of lasting forever. They guarantee the continuation of certain basic values. This may be the idea behind the term *jing* 經 in titles such as *Yi jing* 易經, ‘Classic of Change’, *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (The Yellow Thearch’s Inner Classic), and the *Shen nong bencao jing* 神農本草經 (Shennong’s Classic of *Materia Medica*).

Similarly, much ancient Chinese agriculture would have been inconceivable without the irrigation systems fed by rain or, even more reliably, water diverted from rivers. The large rivers of China take their course through the land like warp threads supporting a tissue. Without these large rivers, agriculture, and therefore life, would hardly exist. Also, rivers connect different regions as means of transportation for men and goods. The metaphorical use of *jing* 經 appears quite suitable to express this basic notion of dependence.

Finally, there is the use of *jing* 經 in human physiology. The origin of the ancient Chinese concept of two opposite systems of *jing* 經 in the right and in the left half of the human body is unknown. As they have no verifiable morphological substratum, the concept must be the result of a projection, but the source of this projection has not been identified. In general, notions of assumed morphological structures or physiological/pathological functions in the human organism that have no morphological correlate, or at least remain invisible to the human eye, are projections of phenomena experienced in the environment of human existence. Because such facts exist externally, it is plausible that they are presumed to also exist internally. The external facts that may have stimulated the concept of two opposite and separate irrigation systems in the human body are unknown, but the major interconnecting passageways of these two systems were named: ‘*jing mai* 經脈’. In an abbreviated version of this compound, they are simply called ‘*jing* 經’. They run through the body vertically and they are the ‘mains’ for the constant flow of *qi* and blood. The reason for choosing the term *jing* 經, to name them may lie either in their resemblance to the large rivers of China, or because they can be compared, once again, with a warp. That is, the *jing* 經 keep the organism alive much as the warp threads hold a tissue together.⁴

Here we need to ask ourselves how far we wish to go in recreating the world of images guiding ancient Chinese naturalists in describing the world. The Mawangdui silk manuscripts of 167 BCE speak of eleven *mai* 脉 without a notion of an interconnection among these structural elements. The idea of a permanent flow had not yet originated. A translation as ‘vessel’ appears

⁴ On medical notions of human physiology and pathology as projections, see Unschuld 2009.

appropriate because a vessel is a container. Although in a non-physiological context a Western reader may not, upon hearing the word ‘vessel’, primarily imagine a tube, because we have been influenced by the idea of ‘blood vessels’ to such an extent that ‘vessel’ is acceptable here. The point is that ‘vessel’ does not immediately invoke an image of flow.

The concept of *jing* 經 is different since the *jing* 經 were considered not only to hold blood and *qi*, but to pass these two vital substances through the human body. To translate a Chinese sentence like: ‘The body has twelve *jing*’ as: ‘The body has twelve warp threads’ makes no sense. Presumably, the term *jing* 經 in ancient Chinese physiology was not chosen to recreate the image of warp threads holding the body like a tissue, but to signify a system of passage ways of blood and *qi*. In the seventeenth century, Andreas Cleyer (1634–1697/8) resorted to Latin *via*, ‘way’, when he spoke of what Joseph Needham, in the mid-twentieth century, called ‘tracts’.⁵ These are translations based on the assumed function of the *jing* 經; ‘*via*’ and ‘tract’, are not meant to reflect the original metaphorical sense of warp. In fact, the *Lun heng*, a text not much later than the earliest appearances of *jing* 經 in Chinese physiology, uses it in the sense of ‘small path’, and ‘vertical’. In my translations of ancient Chinese medical texts, I have chosen ‘conduit’ as a suitable English equivalent; perhaps to speak of ‘vertical conduits’ or ‘main conduits’ would come even closer to the meaning intended by the ancient authors.

It seems entirely understandable then that no one ever has repeated the primary metaphorical significance of the word *jing* 經 in an English translation. Classic texts, major rivers, and physiological conduits can be etymologically traced to the notion of ‘warp threads’, but the uninitiated reader of English translations of Chinese texts that speak of ‘classics’, ‘rivers’, and ‘conduits’ does not necessarily need to be aware of this historical background to fully understand the meaning of the original Chinese text.

Does this apply to all ancient metaphors? Should we forget about etymology and always resort to translations reflecting secondary levels of meaning? Here we return to the *yin-yang* pairings in ancient Chinese physiology: *zang* 藏 and *fu* 府, *shu* 俞 and *mu* 募, *ying* 营 and *wei* 衛, *ren* 任 and *du* 督. Like the *jing* 經 in the sense of ‘conduits’ these eight terms refer to ideas not known in physiology outside of *yin-yang* categorisation. Day and night are constructs found in virtually every language, like male and female. In contrast, *zang* 藏 and *fu* 府 are culture-bound divisions of human organs. It is only in the context of ancient Chinese physiology that a conceptual division of lung, heart, spleen, liver, and kidneys as *zang* 藏 and small intestine, large intestine, stomach, gall, urinary bladder and triple burner as *fu* 府 is meaningful. The

⁵ Cleyer 1682, *passim*. Lu and Needham 2002, *passim*.

same applies to the conceptual division of needle insertion holes on the back as *shu* 俞 and those on the chest as *mu* 募, of one type of protective *qi* as *ying* 营 and another as *wei* 衛, and of a conduit passing on the back as *du* 督 and another on the front as *ren* 任. Without the claim, characteristic of the *yin-yang* doctrine, of a pervasive dualistic nature of the entire universe these four pairings would not have been recognised. Their translation into English has seen different approaches.

The pairing of *zang* and *fu* is rendered by various Chinese and Western authors as ‘zang and fu organs’, ‘viscera and bowels’, ‘solid and hollow organs’, ‘treasury and storehouse’, among other translations. The *shu* and *mu* needle insertion holes on the back and front of the human body have been rendered as ‘transport points vs. alarm points’, ‘stream points vs. front-*Mu* points’ and ‘Shu-points vs. collecting points’. The *ying* and *wei qi* have been introduced to readers of English translations as: ‘yin-energy and wei-energy’, ‘construction *qi* and defence *qi*’, ‘essential substance circulating in the channels and blood vessels vs. defensive energy’. Finally, the dorsal and frontal conduits *du* and *ren* have been rendered as: ‘*Du* channel vs. *Ren* channel’, ‘governing vessel vs. conception vessel’, ‘governing channel vs. ren-channel’, ‘governing vessel vs. controller vessel’. For the most part, the English equivalents chosen are not meant to reflect a metaphorical message included in the original Chinese terms, and one may ask indeed whether that is desirable at all.

Naturally, if an acupuncture treatment was able to produce physiological effects, these effects should be independent of the technical nomenclature guiding practitioners in their attempts at finding the appropriate insertion holes, mobilizing internal *qi*, etc. However, translations of ancient texts speak to at least two audiences. One is the audience of healers. Their interest, especially if they are influenced by advocates of the PR China policy of a modernisation of TCM, focuses on creating a scientific image of their healing art, and this includes a resort in English translation of traditional terminology to ancient metaphors as little as possible. On the other hand, philologists and anthropologists may prefer a social science approach in their reading of ancient texts. This entails efforts to recreate in a translation the images underlying the ancient Chinese understanding of human physiology and pathology, as it is only through an understanding of these images that the peculiarities of Chinese medicine can be perceived. The resulting antagonism between ‘modernists’ and social scientists is difficult to overcome.

When the Chinese premier Wen Jiabao visited Charité Medical University in Berlin in February 2009, members of his entourage interested in trade relations with German medical institutions were introduced to our attempts at generating philologically serious English translations of some seminal Chinese medical classics, such as the *Huangdi neijing suwen*, *Nan jing*, etc. Eventually,

some of the delegation members vehemently protested against what they called an illegitimate identification of modern China with the superstition of past millennia, and requested that we focus on what they called ‘modernised Chinese medicine’. What is to be learned from such an outbreak of anger, reflecting the Chinese administration’s attitude towards Chinese medicine, is that one should perhaps be surprised to find among English translations of ancient Chinese texts prepared by contemporary Chinese authors anything that is worth closer philological scrutiny. The official Chinese policy towards generating a list of standardised English translations of Chinese TCM terminology may be of value to practitioners of TCM and acupuncture, but it is certainly generally worthless for all those who wish to take the historical background of Chinese medicine into account in their attempts at penetrating the culture-bound characteristics of the Chinese approach to health care.

The translation of term pairings like *zang-fu*, *shu-mu*, *ying-wei*, and *du-ren* is a case in point. It is only through a literal translation, starting from their primary metaphorical message, that the culture-bound nature of ancient Chinese medical concepts is to be revealed. Hence it is understandable that those forces who wish to emphasize a timeless and cross-cultural validity of Chinese medical theory find little reward in analysing the metaphorical meaning of these pairings. Most of the English renderings quoted above obfuscate rather than clarify the origins of Chinese medical terminology.

A discussion of an appropriate English translation may begin with the pairing *shu*—*mu*. These are terms signifying functions associated with needle insertion holes on the back and on the front of a patient. Earlier English renderings have identified the meaning of *shu* as ‘to transport’ and of *mu* as ‘to collect’, but no author has brought these two meanings together to generate an English pairing of ‘transportation holes’ and ‘collecting holes’, or, as I prefer, ‘transporter’ and ‘levy’ holes or openings. In a translation aimed at recalling the conceptual foundations and environment of ancient Chinese medical interventions, a holistic approach intends to put every theoretical and clinical facet into place. This includes taking seriously the choice of terms by ancient authors. *Shu* openings are *yang* needle insertion holes. They are located on a person’s back, and their choice reflects an attempt at including yang qualities, such as movement. Transport is movement. In contrast, *mu* holes are located on a patient’s front side. This is the *yin* side of the body, and the term chosen, *mu*, signifies the opposite of movement, that is, to collect and store things. This is the meaning of ‘to levy’.

Similar considerations may be applied to elucidate the choice by ancient Chinese authors of the pairing *du mai* and *ren mai* for the two central conduits on the back and front. *Du* and *ren* are terms borrowed by Han-dynasty medi-

cal authors from the arena of state administration. *Du* vs. *ren* is the only pairing that has been rendered in English with a complete metaphorical equivalent for some time already; as is to be expected not by Chinese but by Western authors. Birch and Felt, in *Understanding Acupuncture*, have chosen to use the terms ‘governing vessel’ vs. ‘controller vessel’. My own preference is ‘supervisor vessel’ vs. ‘controlling vessel’. In contrast to the easily identifiable *yang* and *yin* qualities of *shu*, ‘to transport’, and *mu*, ‘to levy’ respectively, one may assume that well-established hierarchical differences between administrative positions of *du* and *ren* stimulated Han dynasty authors to select this pairing in naming two important conduit vessels.

Du and *ren* signify tasks in an administration. Charles O. Hucker identifies *du* as ‘most commonly signifying that without giving up his regular post, an official had been delegated to take temporary charge of another post.’⁶ One may detect mobility, and hence a *yang* quality, in ‘taking temporary charge of another post’, but *ren* as the opposite can hardly be identified as a more stable position. This implies that the choice of these terms may have been led by other considerations. Rather than choosing a pairing that suggested ‘movement’ vs. ‘non-movement’ to Han dynasty readers, two administrative terms were selected that reflect different echelons in a bureaucratic hierarchy. *Du* was definitely a higher ranking official than *ren*. A *du* could be in charge of, for example, an army division. A *du* was a leading position, such as a supervisor, or a general. In contrast, *ren* has the meaning ‘to shoulder’, ‘to shoulder a task’, ‘to assume an official position’. A *ren* could be any lower official who was simply in charge of controlling the execution of some ordinary task.

A rendering of *ren mai* as ‘conception vessel’, a term frequently used in TCM practitioner texts, is rather difficult to accept. The general principle in choosing terms for these pairings appears to have been to select two terms from one arena of public life known to all potential future users of the terms. The two terms chosen had to be rather close in their meanings, with a difference that enabled one to associate one of the two with a *yang* and the other with a *yin* meaning. The metaphorical rationale of juxtaposing *du* and *ren* in the context of human physiology seems to have been one of acknowledging a higher rank of *yang* phenomena in comparison with *yin* phenomena.

Ying qi 營氣 and *wei qi* 衛氣 are further candidates for examination in view of this general principle. It was apparently assumed by ancient Chinese observers of the human body’s health and illness that, as in social life, attacks by hostile agents on the organism could be successful or not, depending on the ability of a potential victim to defend himself. Hence military metaphors

⁶ Hucker 1985, p. 535.

served to provide a terminology for this projection of a social fact into the human organism. As the *yin-yang* doctrine claims a pervasive duality of phenomena, the organism was supposed to have at its disposal two types of protective forces, the *wei qi* and the *ying qi*. In the same way as *du* and *ren* were chosen from an identical arena of social facts, i.e., that of the administration, *wei* and *ying* were chosen from the arena of the military. Here once again the categorisation as mobile vs. immobile appears to have been the guiding principle underlying the choice of terms.

Wei and *ying* are both associated with military defence. *Ying* 營 signifies a military camp. This is a sedentary unit, staying firmly in place for an extended period of time, but to protect a city or country a successful military force also needs mobile units, which are flexible in their movements. They patrol day and night, and they can be sent here and there. They constitute the *yang* counterpart of the *yin* camps. In ancient Chinese physiology they appear to have been signified by the term *wei* 衛, literally meaning, ‘guards’. Hence I have chosen to translate *ying qi* as ‘camp *qi*’ and *wei qi* as ‘guard *qi*’. A translation of *ying qi* as ‘constructive *qi*’, as is frequently the case in TCM practitioner literature, appears questionable for at least two reasons. Firstly, because it does not offer a *yin* quality in comparison with the *yang* quality of *wei*, and secondly, ancient Chinese medicine at no point offers a hint that a sub-section of *qi* is identified as carrying a specifically ‘constructive’ potential.

The fourth of the pairings listed above is the juxtaposition of *zang* 藏 and *fu* 府. In late Zhou and early Chinese vernacular language, both terms were used to refer to what one might call places of storage, such as a granary, storehouse, or reservoir. *Fu* appear to have been places where all of the items, funds, and documents required by a bureaucracy were stored. *Zang* were places to hide away particularly valuable or precious items. Such a reading of non-medical usage of the word seems to parallel the distinction provided in *Su wen* 11, where the six *fu* are said to receive the more solid *qi* which, however, they do not store for long but soon release again. In contrast, the five *zang* store the finest *qi*, which they not do not readily release again.

No English terms conveniently express by means of two single words the *fu-zang* antagonism of short-term and long-term places of storage, that is, of transitory storage and definite storage. *Zang* could be translated as ‘treasury’ or ‘depository’ or, as I have chosen, ‘depot’ to convey the sense of long-term storage. For *fu*, though, it is impossible to find a matching term to signify what might be considered temporary storage as a *yang* quality in contrast to permanent storage as a *yin* quality. Also, during the late Zhou and early Han dynasties, the meaning of *fu* underwent an expansion from ‘short-term storage facility’ to signify also venues of administration and, subsequently, a palace

where an administrator resides. This is clearly the meaning of *fu* in the physiology outlined in *juan* 8 of Ban Gu's 班固 *Bai hu tong* [yi] 白虎通[義] of 79 CE.⁷ The text identifies the five *fu* as *gong fu* 宮府, 'palaces' of the *zang*, evoking the notion of officials residing in the palaces. These *zang* officials 'rule', *zhu* 主, or are responsible, for example, for supplying the body with *qi*. It is this expansion of the meaning of *fu* that makes it so difficult to find an English translation for the *zang-fu* pairing. No pair of terms is readily available in English that might satisfy the historian of ideas in that it first reflects the primary theoretical message of *zang* 藏 and *fu* 府 as a distinction of long-term and short-term storage facilities, clearly reflecting a *yin-yang* dualism, and also includes a hint at what appears to be a shift in the understanding of the organs when a metaphor was chosen that uses *fu* 府 in the sense of 'palaces' housing officials acting as 'rulers'. One may speculate about a different ranking of *zang* and *fu* in the juxtaposition of long-term storage vs. short-term storage. The *yin-yang* pairing in this metaphor appears to have been based on the contrast between long-term stability associated with *zang* storage vs. frequent movement and activity associated with *fu* storage. The second metaphorical pairing of *zang* and *fu* seems to be built on a higher ranking of the former in comparison with the latter. We shall recognise this with more clarity when we take a closer look at the text of the *Bai hu tong* further below.

My thesis that the four pairings: *shu-mu*, *du-ren*, *ying-wei*, and *fu-zang* are the result of ancient Chinese attempts at projecting an all-inclusive *yin-yang* categorisation on the human body and its functions, prompts the question of whether there are more pairings than these four. Could it be that *jin* 津 and *ye* 液 were understood in antiquity as a *yin* and a *yang* liquid respectively, with one of them being associated with a calmer and the other a more mobile nature? This may be worth further study.

Yin-yang doctrine and redefinition of terms

Another pairing that may owe its juxtaposition to the requirements of *yin-yang* theory links the two characters *xing* 性 and *qing* 情. The former is commonly translated as 'nature' or 'disposition', and the latter as 'emotion' or 'affect'. The English terms, deliberately or not, seem to suggest a *yin* and *yang* quality. A 'disposition' may be categorised as a *yin* quality; based on the Latin root of 'ponere', to set down, it is associated with notions of stability, and long-lasting qualities. Trustworthiness, for example, is not a quality a person

⁷ Cf. Tjen Tjoe Som 1952, p. 566 ff.

acquires overnight and loses again after showing it for only a brief time. In contrast, emotions, as the Latin root ‘movere’, to move, in the English word indicates, signify more flexible states such as joy and anger, which do not usually last long. Joy may even turn into anger, and vice versa. That is, disposition and emotion seem to suggest a rather straightforward *yin* and *yang* categorisation. We should consider therefore whether *xing* 性 and *qing* 情 in Chinese may also be associated with such *yin* and *yang* qualities. The *Bai hu tong* of 79 CE is the place to expect an answer, and an answer is indeed given, but it contradicts what the etymology and meaning of the English terms might suggest. The relevant passage begins with the statement:

性情者，	Moral dispositions and emotions,
何謂也？	What do they refer to?
性者，陽之施；	Moral dispositions are manifestations of <i>yang</i> .
情者，陰之化也。	Emotions are transformations of <i>yin</i> .

A few lines further on, the author adds:

情者，靜也，	<i>Qing</i> [emotions] is <i>jing</i> [calmness].
性者，生也，	<i>Xing</i> [moral dispositions] is <i>sheng</i> [life].

In the same way as we have carved out of the English word *disposition* the Latin root *ponere*, and out of *emotion* the Latin root *movere*, the ancient Chinese author cut his terms *xing* 性 and *qing* 情 to isolate 生 and 靜 to validate a *yang* and a *yin* quality respectively. After all, *sheng* 生 in the sense of to give birth or bring forth, is a *yang* quality, and *jing* 靜 in the sense of quietude is a *yin* quality. *Yin* and *yang* are no longer (if ever they were considered as such) neutral categories that divide natural phenomena into two equal groups alternately dominating one another, like night and day or winter and summer. Instead, *Yin* and *yang* are used here to express discrimination in morality as in nature: light is better than darkness, action is better than inactivity, males are more valuable than females, moral dispositions are more fundamental than emotions.

A quotation in the *Bai hu tong* from an earlier text of unknown authorship, the *Gou ming jue* 鉤命決, discloses the rationale presumed to legitimate such a categorisation:

情生於陰，	The emotions originate from the <i>yin</i> .
欲以時念也；	One's desires, one thinks of them all the time.
性生於陽，	The dispositions originate from the <i>yang</i> .
以就理也。	They serve to achieve structure.

Li 理 signifies ‘order’ and ‘structure’, and order is what is valued most. Hence *li* may also be read as ‘principle’. Structure and principles are basic; they are required to stay, lest chaos evolves. *Yü* 欲, one's desires, are temporary and

frequently change. If *li* is associated with *xing* and *yang* here nevertheless, this is because the author of these lines did not consider associations with stability (*yin*) vs. movement (*yang*) as his rationale. He based his identification of dispositions as *yang* and emotions as *yin* on a ranking of the former over the latter, associating a *yang* nature with the more valuable aspects of existence, and a *yin* nature with those less valuable. The following statement expresses this difference even more clearly:

陽氣者仁	As for <i>yang qi</i> , this is humaneness
陰氣者貪	As for <i>yin qi</i> , this is greed
故	Hence,
情有利欲	emotions include profit and desires
性有仁	moral disposition includes humaneness

The *Bai hu tong* goes on to explain the dispositions in detail:

五性者何謂?	What are the five dispositions? ⁸
仁、義、	They include humaneness, righteousness,
禮、智、信也。	propriety, wisdom, trustworthiness.
仁者, 不忍也,	Humaneness is compassion ⁹
施生愛人也;	It tends to generate love of mankind.
義者, 宜也,	Righteousness is to act appropriately.
斷決得中也;	In one's decisions one always hits the point.
禮者, 履也,	Propriety is conduct.
履道成文也;	If one's conduct is in accordance with the Way, one's culture is perfected.
智者, 知也,	Wisdom is knowledge.
獨見前聞,	One needs to take into regard only what one has heard,
不惑於事,	and there will be nothing one is uncertain about.
見微者也;	This way one recognises the details. ¹⁰
信者, 誠也,	Trustworthiness is sincerity.
專一不移也。	It means to be focussed, without shifting.
故人生而應	Hence if humans live to correspond to
八卦之體,	the structure of the eight trigrams,
得五氣以為常,	they will be endowed with the five <i>qi</i> to be transformed into the eternal virtues
仁、義、	These are humaneness, righteousness,
禮、智、信是也。	propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness.

⁸ Some editions of this text have 五常, 'five eternal [virtues]', instead of 五性. This identification of the five moral dispositions as five eternal virtues is justified by a statement further down where humans living in accordance with the eight trigrams are said to receive *qi* to be transformed into the 五常.

⁹ 不忍, lit.: 'one cannot bear [to see the suffering of others without helping them]'. See Legge 1991, p. 202.

¹⁰ Wü Zeyu (ed.), Chen Li (ed.), 1994. 吳則虞 點校, 陳立撰, 白虎通疏證, 中華書局, 北京, read 見微者也 as 見微知著也, 'one sees a detail and knows everything.'

The five *yang* dispositions of humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness, are to be compared with the six *yin* emotions, as identified by the *Bai hu tong*:

六情者， 何謂也？	The six emotions, which are they?
喜、怒、哀、 樂、愛、惡	Happiness, anger, sadness, joy, love, aversion,
謂六情， 所以扶成五性	these are the six emotions. They are to support and perfect the five dispositions.

The final sentence should not come as a surprise. The author of the *Bai hu tong* considers the five dispositions as basic, and he acknowledges the six emotions as necessary to support and perfect one's dispositions. That is to say, the five dispositions of humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness require the six emotions to show and be applied in one's daily activities.

The *Bai hu tong* then goes a step further and offers a physiological model of the interdependence of dispositions (*yang*) and emotions (*yin*), locating the former in the body's *zang* 藏, i.e. 'depots', and the latter in the body's *fu* 府, i.e., 'palaces'. Here now we encounter the different valuation of *zang* and *fu* indicated above. It flatly contradicts the *yin-yang* categorisation of *zang* and *fu* in medical literature. The author of the *Bai hu tong* had no intention of contributing to a medical discourse. Rather, he used physiology to validate the Confucian system of moral values, and to achieve this reversed *yin* and *yang* categorisation of the *zang* and *fu*.

五藏者何也？	Five <i>zang</i> , what are they?
謂肝、心、肺、 腎、脾也。	They include liver, heart, lung, kidneys, and spleen.
肝之為言干也；	<i>Gan</i> , liver, that is to say <i>gan</i> , shield.
肺之為言費也，	<i>Fei</i> , lung, that is to say <i>fei</i> , to expend.
情動得序；	Emotional excitement is brought to order here.
心之為言任也，	<i>Xin</i> , heart, that is to say <i>ren</i> , to be engaged.
任於恩也；	That is, one is engaged by kindness.
腎之為言寫也，	<i>Shen</i> , kidneys, that is to say <i>xie</i> , drainage.
以竅寫也；	They make use of openings to drain.
脾之為言辨也，	<i>Pi</i> , spleen, that is to say <i>bian</i> , to distinguish.
所以積精稟氣也。	It is that by which essence is accumulated, and <i>qi</i> is endowed.
五藏，	The five depots,
肝仁，	The liver [is the depot of] humaneness,
肺義，	the lung [is the depot of] righteousness,
心禮，	the heart [is the depot of] propriety,
腎智，	the kidneys [are the depot of] wisdom,
脾信也。	the spleen [is the depot of] trustworthiness.

肝所以仁者何？ 肝，木之精也； 仁者，好生。 東方者陽也， 萬物始生， 故肝象木， 色青而有枝葉。 目為之候何？ 目能出淚， 而不能內物， 木亦能出枝葉， 不能有所內也。	Why is it that the liver has the humaneness? The liver is the essence of wood. Humaneness is the love of life. The East is <i>yang</i> . This is where the myriad beings come to life. Hence the wood is the image of the liver. Its colour is green, and it has branches and leaves. Why is it that the eyes are its sense organ? The eyes can shed tears, but they are unable to ingest anything. Wood likewise is able to produce branches and leaves, it is unable to ingest anything.
肺所以義者何？ 肺者，金之精； 義者，斷決。 西方亦金， 成萬物也， 故肺象金， 色白也。	Why is it that the lung has the righteousness? The lung is the essence of metal. Righteousness is decision making. The West is metal too. It brings the myriad things to maturity. ¹¹ Hence the metal is the image of the lung. Its colour is white.
鼻為之候何？ 鼻出入氣， 高而有竅， 山亦有金石累積， 亦有孔穴， 出雲布雨 以潤天下， 雨則雲消， 鼻能出納氣也	Why is it that the nose is its sense organ? The nose lets out and takes in <i>qi</i> . It is elevated and has openings. Mountains too have metals and stones accumulated. And they too have holes. Clouds leave from here and spread rain to moisten the land under heaven. When it rains the clouds dissolve. The nose is able to let out and take in <i>qi</i> .
心所以為禮何？ 心，火之精也。 南方 尊陽在上， 卑陰在下， 禮有尊卑， 故心象火， 色赤而銳也， 人有道尊， 天本在上， 故心下銳也。 耳為之候何？	Why is it that the heart brings forth propriety? The heart is the essence of fire. [As with] the South, the <i>yang</i> is revered [by placing it] above, the <i>yin</i> is regarded lowly [by placing it] below. The rites distinguish between elevated and inferior status. Hence fire is the image of the heart. Its colour is red, and it is pointed. Man has the Way to revere. His base is heaven above him. Hence the lower part of the heart is pointed. Why is it that the ears are its sense organ?

¹¹ Wu Zeyu, 1994, followed the corresponding passage in the *Tai ping yu lan* and changed to: 西方亦金，殺成萬物也，‘the West is metal too. It kills and brings to maturity the myriad things.’

耳能遍內外、 別音語， 火照有似於禮， 上下分明。	The ears are able [to perceive] comprehensively, inside and outside, and to identify sounds and language. The light of fire resembles the rites in that it makes clear what is above and what is below.
腎所以智何？ 腎者，水之精。 智者，進而止 無所疑惑。 水亦進而不可惑， 北方水， 故腎色黑； 水陰，故腎雙。	Why is it that the kidneys have the wisdom? The kidneys are the essence of water. Wisdom, proceeds and comes to an end only ¹² when there is nothing left to doubt or be uncertain about. Water, too, proceeds and is never uncertain. The North is water. Hence the colour of the kidneys is black. Water is <i>yin</i> . Hence there are two kidneys.
竅為之候何？ 竅能瀉水， 亦能流濡。	Why is it that the [private] orifices are their sense organ? The [private] orifices are able to drain water, and they are also able to make flow what is moist.
脾所以信何？ 脾者，土之精也。 土尚任養 萬物為之象 生物無所私， 信之至也。 故脾象土， 色黃也。	Why is it that the spleen has the trustworthiness? The spleen is the essence of the soil. The soil is charged with nourishing, it is reflected in the myriad things. It brings things to life, without selfishness. This is extreme trustworthiness. Hence soil is the image of the spleen. The colour is yellow.
口為之候何？ 口能啖嘗， 舌能知味， 亦能出音聲， 吐滋液。	Why is it that the mouth is its sense organ? The mouth is able to ingest and to taste. The tongue is able to recognise flavours. Also, it is able to emit sounds and voice, and to spit liquids.

The metaphorical language chosen by the author of the *Bai hu tong* places moral dispositions and emotions into the theoretical framework of *yang* and *yin* dualism. It assigns a priority to *yang* and to the dispositions, while at the same time acknowledging the depots, storing the moral dispositions, as residents of ‘palaces’ where they ‘rule’, *zhu* 主. That is, where they accomplish certain tasks, such as drainage, or, on the basis of ‘humaneness’, judgment. The metaphorical meaning of *zang* as a *yang* facility storing *yang* moral dispositions is somewhat modified in that the *zang* themselves are housed in the *fu*, identified here as *gong fu* 宮府, ‘palaces.’

¹² 智者，進而止：Wu Zeyu 1994 has: 智者進止, ‘wisdom whether advancing or stopping, has nothing to doubt or be confused about.’

六府者，何謂也？
謂大腸、小腸、
胃、膀胱、
三焦、膽也。
府者，謂五藏宮府也。
故禮運記曰：
‘六情所以扶成五性也。’

Six *fu*, what does that mean?
They include large intestine, small intestine,
stomach, bladder,
triple burner, and gall bladder
Fu is to say: the palaces of the five *zang*.
Hence the *Li yun ji* states:¹³
‘the six emotions, they are to support and perfect
the five dispositions.’

胃者，脾之府也，
脾主稟氣；
胃者，穀之委也，
故脾稟氣也

The stomach is the palace of the spleen.
The spleen governs the endowment with *qi*
The stomach is in charge of the grain.
Hence the spleen endows with *qi*.

膀胱者，腎之府也。
腎者，主瀉，
膀胱常能有熱，
故先決難也

The bladder is the palace of the kidneys.
The kidneys govern drainage.
The bladder is able to always have heat.
Hence it is the first to dissolve [items] difficult [to digest].

三焦者，包絡府也。

The triple burner is the palace of the enclosing network.

水穀之道路，
氣之所終始也。
故上焦若竅，
中焦若編，
下焦若瀆。

It is the passage way of liquid and solid food.
It is the end and beginning of *qi*.
Hence, the upper burner resembles an orifice.
The central burner resembles a plait.
The lower burner resembles a ditch.

膽者，肝之府也。
肝者，木之精也，
主仁。
仁者不忍，
故以膽斷也，
是以肝膽二者¹⁴
必有勇也。
肝膽異趣，
何以知相為府也？

The gall bladder is the palace of the liver.
The liver is the essence of wood.
It governs humaneness
Humaneness is compassion.
Hence it relies on the gall for decision-making.
This is why both liver and gall
must possess courage.
Liver and gall differ in their inclinations,
How can one know that the latter is the palace of
the former?

肝者，木之精也，
木之為言牧也，
人怒無不色青

The liver is the essence of wood.
Mu [wood] is to say *mu* [shepherd].
When a person is angry, he will be green all over,

¹³ This may be the chapter *Li yun* of the *Li ji*. However, I have been unable to locate this passage in the received text of the *Li ji* 禮記.

¹⁴ 是以肝膽二者: Wu Zeyu changed to: 是以仁者, ‘this is why humaneness must go along with courage.’

目腋張者， 是其效也。	and his eyes and armpits will be extended. That is the result of this.
小腸、大腸， 心肺之府也， 主禮義， 禮義者有分理，	Small intestine and large intestine are the palaces of heart and lung. They govern propriety and righteousness. Propriety and righteousness have principles of discrimination.
腸之大小相承受也。	The large and the small intestines receive from each other.
腸為心肺主， 心為支體主， 故為兩府也。	The intestines are in charge for heart and lung. The heart is in charge for the entire body. ¹⁵ Hence [the intestines] constitute two palaces.
目為心視，	The eyes see for the heart.
口為心談，	The mouth speaks for the heart.
耳為心聽，	The ears hear for the heart.
鼻為心嗅，	The nose smells for the heart.
是其支體主也。	This is how it governs for the entire body.

Returning to the initial issue addressed in this paper, *xing* 性 and *qing* 情 appear to be a further example of pairings resulting from the *yin-yang* doctrine's claim of universal dualism. However, the choice of terms, and the selection of metaphors, may not have been as simple as in the cases of *shu* and *mu* points, and of *ying* and *wei qi*. Dispositions and emotions have meanings that reach deep into Confucian conceptions of social structure and stability. Notions of a *yin-yang* equilibrium in nature required to be adapted to the moralists' notion of *yang* priorities. What may appear as an early example of an intellectual squaring of a circle was achieved by means of a complicated language structure and by bringing together different metaphorical and theoretical discourses available at the time.

Xunzi 荀子 (born ca. 312 BCE), in his section *Zheng ming* 正名, 'Rectification of Names', stated 性之好惡喜怒哀樂謂之情, 'The likes and dislikes, delights and angers, griefs and joys of one's disposition are called emotions.' Yü Yue 俞樾 (1821–1907), commenting on a statement by Mengzi 孟子 (372–289), pointed out

蓋性情二字 在後人言之 則區以別矣， 而在古人言之 則情即性也，	Now, as for the two characters <i>xing</i> and <i>qing</i> , if we speak of people in later times, they distinguished between them. However, if we speak of people in ancient times, for them <i>qing</i> was identical with <i>xing</i> . ¹⁶

¹⁵ 心為支體主: I follow Wu Zeyu, 1994, who has replaced 皮體 here with 支體. This is in accordance with the phrase six lines further on.

¹⁶ Yu Yue 2002.

Here one of the most famous commentators of the ancient philosophers gives an example of the pairing we have hypothesised above. If we follow his argument, *xing* 性 and *qing* 情 were used interchangeably at one time before they were assigned different meanings later on. It may well be that these assignments followed the claim of the *yin-yang* doctrine to see dualism in all phenomena. As the *Bai hu tong* shows, the distinction between and subsequent pairing of *xing* 性 and *qing* 情 may have permitted *yin-yang* theorists to extend their claim to the relationship between dispositions and emotions.

Conclusion

The pairing of characters with originally closely related, if not identical, meanings is a consequence of the acceptance of the *yin-yang* categorisation as universally valid. Such pairing constituted a deliberate act. Ancient naturalists were convinced of the existence of an all-pervasive dualism and therefore required symbols to signify the *yin* and *yang* nature of phenomena. In many cases the terms *yin* and *yang* sufficed as markers, for instance when texts spoke of *yin qi* and *yang qi*. However, in some cases specific terms were chosen to signify *yin* and *yang* opposites. These terms may have been selected for their inherent metaphorical value, as appears to be the case for *zang* 藏 and *fu* 府, *shu* 俞 and *mu* 募, *ying* 营 and *wei* 卫, and *ren* 任 and *du* 督. Others, including *xing* 性 and *qing* 情, were not imposed as metaphors from outside to lend their original meaning to phenomena not known under these names before. Rather, they seem to have signified the phenomena in question without *yin-yang* categorisation initially, and were assigned *yin* and *yang* values later, during the course of the construction of an encompassing theorisation of the universe.

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