

Reorienting the *Yin-Yang* Metaphor using Blending Theory

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This presentation calls into question the traditional definition and use of the *yin-yang* metaphor in reading and interpreting the *Laozi* (also known as the *Dao De Jing* or *Tao Te Ching*), one of the two foundational texts of Daoism (Taoism), and proposes a rebuilding of the *yin-yang* metaphor in a way that better emphasizes and integrates the philosophical contents of the oldest known edition of the text, the Guodian *Laozi*.

The *Laozi* has traditionally been read through the lens of dichotomy and reversal, dictated by the Daoist cosmological primacy of *yin* and *yang*, which have been traditionally seen as an infinite set of complimentary opposites, always in flux, and whose dynamic interplay results in all of creation. A popular representation of the forces of *yin* and *yang* is the well-known Taiji symbol, where black (*yin*) and white (*yang*) teardrops revolve in a circle. The use of the *yin-yang* dichotomy metaphor as a framework through which to read the *Laozi* is well-supported by the positioning of *yin* and *yang* in the traditional cosmology of the *Laozi*: “The One (the Dao) births The Two (*yin* and *yang*); The Two birth The Three (the identity of which are often debated); The Three birth The Ten Thousand Things (all living beings).” In this cosmology, *yin* and *yang* are born directly of The One, and are formative powers behind the rest of creation. However, the oldest edition of the *Laozi* (recently discovered at Guodian) does not include the traditional cosmology, and instead includes a previously unseen—and more complex—cosmology which decentralizes and demotes *yin* and *yang* from second in order of creation to sixth and seventh, bringing them into existence only *after* Water, Heaven, Earth, Spirits, and Luminaries, and furthermore only *as a result* of the interactions of these other elements with each other. This drastic change in hierarchy, nature, and function calls into question the suitability of using the *yin-yang* dichotomy metaphor as a framework for reading and understanding the *Laozi*.

Rather than dismissing it entirely, I propose that there is another possible way to derive the set of entailments for the *yin-yang* metaphor which additionally highlights and integrates the various rulership tropes prominent in this particular edition of the text. In my investigation, I follow George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Mark Turner, Giles Falconnier, and Masako Hiraga in employing conceptual metaphor theory, blending theory, and imagic and diagrammatic mapping to show how the entailments traditionally attributed to the *yin-yang* metaphor can be reduced to a combination of primary metaphors about light and the vertical orientation image schema. As a result, two image schemas emerge: one of a person standing on a hill in sunlight (*yang*), and one of a person lying down at the bottom of the hill in shade (*yin*). All the familiar entailments of *yin* and *yang* can be derived from manipulating the embodied experience of light and verticality in these two image schemas. By reading the Guodian *Laozi* in the light of vertical orientation, and treating the *yin-yang* pairs as *by-products of verticality* rather than an infinite set of complementary opposites, not only are *yin-yang* images preserved, but new images suddenly emerge as relevant, and all can be unified under a single metaphor which is appropriate to rulership, the key topic of the Guodian *Laozi*.