

YIN-YANG FIVE-FORCES THEORY DURING THE HAN

During the early Han, the conception of the universe as governed by yin and yang and the five forces became characteristic of almost every school of thought. We will find it a pervasive undercurrent in the Huang-Lao texts that appear in a later reading, and it is also probably the greatest influence in the reformulation of Confucianism undertaken by Dong Zhong-shu, also discussed in further readings. These theories were a part of Warring States naturalism (as discussed in the earlier reading on that subject), and are often traced to the philosopher Zou Yan. However, it was during the Han that they came to have their greatest influence.

An idea of the plastic nature of these concepts can be conveyed by illustrating how they were applied to a very broad range of phenomena. For example, the five forces were each assigned to a direction and a season (with the sixth month, midsummer, being considered a separate season). This seasonal concept allowed the forces to be correlated with phases of the yin-yang cycle of polar influence as follows:

WOOD	East	Spring	Rising Yang
FIRE	South	Summer	Greater Yang
EARTH	Center	Midsummer	Balanced Yin and Yang
METAL	West	Autumn	Rising Yin
WATER	North	Winter	Greater Yin

With these as starting points, the system that emerged became a grand correlative scheme:

<i>Category</i>	WOOD	FIRE	EARTH	METAL	WATER
numbers	8	7	5	9	6
colors	green	red	yellow	white	black
astral bodies	stars	sun	earth	constellations	moon
planets	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
weather	wind	heat	thunder	cold	rain
sense organs	eye	tongue	mouth	nose	ear
emotions	anger	joy	desire	sorrow	fear
organs	spleen	lungs	heart	kidney	liver
tissue	muscles	blood	flesh	skin & hair	bones
tastes	sour	bitter	sweet	acid	salty
smells	goat-like	burning	fragrant	rank	rotting
animals	sheep	fowl	oxen	dogs	pigs
sage rulers	Emperor Yu	King Wen	Yellow Emp.	Tang	First Emperor
tools	compass	measures	plumb lines	T-square	balance

The list could be extended indefinitely. Musical notes, constellations, government ministries, geographical regions of China, sacrifice locations--all were incorporated into this system.

While theories concerning yin and yang and the five forces dominated the Han view of the world, the intellectual excitement of these theories seems somewhat elusive now. There are

cases where Han writers attempt to fashion a grand system by showing how the two powers of yin and yang and the five forces fit together well with cosmic systems that correlate them with the ten heavenly stems, and twelve earthly branches, and the sixty-four hexagrams of the *Yi jing* (we also see the twelve-year cycle of Jupiter and the twenty-eight lunar-lodge constellations figure in such designs). It is hard not to hold one's breath while reading through some of these numerical acrobatics, but there is a certain undeniable level of tedium. The impulse to control the cosmos through dense classification and mechanistic dynamics that these theories express contrasts rather unfavorably with the earlier interest in the protean concept of *qi*, which underlies many of these later theories, and which was absorbed into their frameworks.

However, five forces theory held a very important place in politics for a time. One of the aspects of the theory concerned the succession of dynasties, a matter into which Zou Yan had inquired early on. It was believed that each dynasty was governed by one of the five forces, and that the governing force was meant to determine many of the ritual features of the government, such as the color of the imperial robes and insignia, the geographical location of its sacrifices, and so forth. It was believed, for example, that the Yellow Emperor had ruled through the force of earth, the Zhou through the force of fire, and so forth.

The First Emperor, in his devotion to all forms of superstition, was very concerned to adjust his governance to the force according to which his dynasty was believed to rule. His court scholars reasoned that since he had conquered the Zhou, a dynasty of fire, the Qin must be a dynasty of water, because water conquers fire. Accordingly, the Qin rulers worshipped the Yellow River, wore black robes, and so forth.

When Liu Bang succeeded to the throne, he paid no attention to these issues. Just as he retained the forms of Qin administration and law, he also continued to wear black robes, sacrifice black oxen to Heaven, and generally continue the rituals of the Qin. His failure to attend to issues of such importance seemed a clear reflection of his limited education. After his death, this became a matter of concern to the erudites at court.

By the reign on Wen-di, the need to fix an appropriate system for the Han had become a major concern. The problem was that there was complete disagreement concerning what the "force" of the Han was. Some argued that since the Han had defeated the Qin (water), the force of the Han was earth (earth "conquers" water). Others, however, said that conquest was not the manner in which the forces succeeded one another. As with the seasonal arrangement, so dynastic forces "gave birth" to one another. Water gives birth to wood, so that was the Han force. Still others argued that the Qin had never actually received the Mandate, and hence had not been a real dynasty. Therefore the Han sign should be earth, which fire gives birth to. And others yet agreed about the Qin not being a legitimate dynasty, but, holding to the "conquest" order of the forces, designated the Han sign as water. Such was the vigor of the Han metaphysical imagination!

It was not until 104 B.C. when, in the course of a massive calendrical reform that fit emperor Wu-ti's reign into immense cycles stretching back to the beginnings of time, the Han finally settled on earth as its force and changed its ritual appurtenances accordingly.

The ideas of yin and yang and of the five forces exerted their greatest influence during the Han, but they persisted as key concepts in Chinese cosmology throughout the traditional period. Even today, Chinese culture continues to exhibit strong interest in these concepts, which play major roles in some forms of the martial arts, in the much used art of geomancy (recently becoming popular in the U.S.), and in various types of popular religion and religious Daoism.

While the twin powers of yin and yang, taken in isolation, may have enhanced the creativity of some aspects of Chinese thinking by their broad and flexible natures, the five forces and the dense gridwork that those concepts generated seem stifling by comparison. The mechanistic nature of the five force "organic" cosmos led to the creation of a wealth of true pseudo-sciences, most of which emerged from *fang-shi* cults. These appear to have strongly inhibited the development of true science in China (though there were surely more powerful social factors bearing on this issue). The five force models were systematic enough to support elaborate explanatory and predictive uses, and also complex and incoherent enough to provide secondary explanations and margins of error that could be used to mask the true nature of frequent failures.

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The role of yin-yang and five force theory in the life of imperial China was probably felt most intensely at the center, in the life of the emperor and his ritual attendants. This was particularly true after 135, when Dong Zhong-shu's adaptation of these theories to Confucianism became the foundation of an emperor-centered ideology. However, even before that time, a detailed manual for the administration of a state according to these concepts had been elaborated as a set of twelve dispersed chapters in the late Warring States text, *The Almanac of Lord Lü*. These chapters, corresponding to the months of the year, portrayed the progression of annual cycles through the five force fields and some of the host of correlated phenomena listed in the tables above.

The chapters, known as the "Monthly Ordinances," were collected together during the Han and included as a long section of the Confucian classic, *Records of Ritual*. The description of the first month is translated below, in a version based on that of Burton Watson and others.

The First Month of Spring

In the first month of spring, the sun is in the constellation Ying-shi. The constellation Shen [Orion] reaches the zenith at dusk, the constellation Wei [Scorpio], at dawn. Its cyclical signs are *jia* and *yi*, its divine ruler is Tai Hao, its attendant spirit, Gou Mang. Its creatures are scaly, its musical note *jue*, its pitch-pipe *tai-zu*, its number 8. Its taste is sour, its smell goatish; its sacrifice is at the inner door for which the spleen of the victim is essential.

The east wind dispels the cold, the hibernating insects and reptiles begin to stir, the fish rise up under the ice where the otter catches them to eat, and the wild geese fly north in season.

The Son of Heaven shall live in the apartment on the left side of the Green Bright Hall. He shall ride in a great belled chariot drawn by dark green dragon horses and bearing green flags. He shall wear green robes with pendants of green jade. His food shall be wheat and mutton, his vessels coarse and open to represent a coming forth.

During this month, spring begins. Three days before spring begins, the Grand Astrologer shall report to the Son of Heaven, saying: "On such and such a day spring will begin. The agent of wood is in ascendance." The Son of Heaven shall then fast and purify himself and on the first day in person lead the chief ministers and feudal princes and officials to the eastern suburbs to greet the spring. On his return he shall hold court and bestow rewards upon them. He shall order the three chief ministers to publish abroad his good teachings and to relax the prohibitions of winter, to present awards and bestow alms to all, down to the common people, so that everyone who is deserving shall receive awards and gifts.

He shall order the Grand Astrologer to cherish the laws and publish the ordinances, to observe the sun and moon, the stars and zodiacal signs so that there will be no error in the calculations of their movements and no mistake in their courses, taking as a model the astronomical laws of ancient times.

In this month, on a favorable day, the Son of Heaven shall pray to the Lord on High for abundant harvests. Then, selecting a lucky day, he shall himself bear a plowshare and handle in his carriage, attended by the charioteer and the man-at-arms and, leading the chief ministers, feudal princes, and officials, shall personally plow the Field of the Lord. The Son of Heaven shall plough three furrows, the three chief ministers five, the feudal princes and officials nine. On their return, they shall assemble in the Great Hall where the emperor shall take a chalice and offer it to each of them, saying: "This is wine in recompense for your labors."

In this month the vital force of Heaven descends, the vital force of earth arises; Heaven and earth are in harmony and the grass and trees begin to burgeon.

The ruler shall order the work of fields to begin. He shall order the inspectors of the fields to reside in the lands having an eastern exposure, to repair the borders and boundaries of the fields, to inspect the paths and irrigation ditches, to examine closely the mounts and hills, the slopes and heights and the plains and valleys to determine what lands are good and where the five grains should be sown, and they shall instruct and direct the people. This they must do in person. When the work of the fields has been will begun, with the irrigation ditches traced out correctly beforehand, there will be no confusion later.

In this month, the Chief Director of Music shall be ordered to open school and train the students in dancing.

The rules for sacrifices shall be reviewed and orders given for offerings to the spirits of the mountains, forests, rivers, and lakes, but for these sacrifices no female creature may be spared. It shall be forbidden to cut down trees, to destroy nests, to kill young insects, the younger yet in the womb or new born, or fledgling birds. All young of animals and eggs shall be spared.

Multitudes of people shall not be summoned for any service, nor shall any construction be done on walls or fortifications. All bones and corpses of those who have died by the wayside shall be buried.

In this month it is forbidden to take up arms. He who takes up arms will surely call down Heaven's wrath. Taking up arms means that one may not initiate hostilities, though if attacked he may defend himself.

In all things one must not violate the way of Heaven, nor destroy the principles of earth, nor bring confusion to the laws of man.

If in the first month of spring the ruler carries out proceedings proper to summer, then the wind and rain will not come in season, the grass and trees will soon wither and dry up, and the nations will be in great fear. If he carries out the proceedings proper to autumn, then a great pestilence will strike the people, violent winds and torrential rains will come in abundance, and the weeds of orach and fescue, darnel and southernwood will spring up together. If he carries out the proceedings of winter, the rains and floods will cause great damage, frost and snow will wreak havoc, and the first seeds sown will not sprout.