

## JIXIA NATURALISTIC THOUGHT

Towards the close of the fourth century B.C. the new ruling house of the state of Qi decided to strengthen its prestige by establishing an academy at its capital city of Linzi. This academy, which was located near a gate in the city wall known as the Jixia Gate, was intended to serve as a magnet for intellectual talent that would both redound to the credit of the Qi rulers and also provide them with a promising group of young men from which to recruit government talent. This institution became known as the Jixia Academy, and it became the intellectual center of early third century China.

Jixia was attractive to learned men of every variety. We do not know precisely how men came to receive appointments there, but it seems likely that all that was needed was that a master and his disciples to find a patron among the patricians of Qi to recommend an appointment to the ruler. If the Qi court deemed such a master worthy of installment among the wise men of Jixia, then he would receive from the ruling house a stipend sufficient for his needs—including his need to house and feed his disciples—and in return he would simply be expected to remain at Jixia, accepting disciples and participating in the ceremonial events of the Academy.

Once the most famous masters of China were assembled at Jixia, young men came there in numbers to select a master and be trained in some tradition that would provide them with a path to employment, fame, or simply intellectual fulfillment.

Among the schools of thought that flourished at Jixia, the academy founded in Qi during the late fourth century, one group in particular seems to have enjoyed the greatest growth during the third century. This was the group of schools that may be called “naturalisms.” The term “Naturalistic Schools” covers a broad range of intellectual trends which became prominent at this time, and which continued to flourish after the close of the Classical age.

Some of the ideas associated with naturalism were so powerful that they came to dominate Chinese thought during the centuries immediately following the close of the Classical era; all surviving schools of early thought were reshaped by incorporating elements of these systems. In order to portray naturalism more fully, we will stray beyond the scope of the Classical period in this section, moving from of the first naturalists of the third century B.C. to works associated with the early decades of the Han Dynasty (202 B.C. - A.D. 220).

In the following pages, we will examine several short texts, each one illustrative of the progressive development of naturalistic ideas in early China. We will begin with the biography of the man most commonly pictured as the founder of naturalism as a philosophical school, Zou Yan. Our survey will end with a discussion of the system devised by Han period Confucians, most notably the foremost thinker

of the early Han, Dong Zhongshu. We will then close with some general observations.

## Zou Yan

Zou Yan 鄒衍, who lived early in the third century B.C., seems to have been the first to combine together two different conceptual sets, which had earlier played important roles in the mantic, or soothsaying, traditions of China. These sets are known as “*yin-yang*” and “the five forces.”

**Yin-yang.** “Yin” and “yang” are fundamental notions of a view of the cosmos which first appears in texts about the fourth century B.C. and comes to have enormous influence in China and elsewhere from then on. Yin and yang were believed in this scheme to be two complementary forces or force-qualities which governed the flux of the universe. The yin force was most clearly manifest in all things that ancient Chinese thinkers associated with the female: softness, darkness, submissiveness, cold, and so forth. Yang was the complementary set of qualities: hardness, light, forcefulness, heat, etc. Yin-yang thinkers tended to hold that while the universe expressed an essential unity which was its original and enduring quality, that unity was never static, it was always manifest as a dynamic interaction of the polarities of yin and yang. These forces alternated in their ascendance: for instance, yin was ascendant in winter and yang in summer. But there existed always in even the most predominant state of yin the seed of yang’s re-ascendance, and vice versa, thus ensuring an eternal dynamic.

**The five forces.** The notions of yin and yang came in the third century to be associated with another set of cosmological ideas. This set is variously known as the five powers or the five forces (the Chinese terms vary; we will use only “five forces”). The concept of the five forces seems to have arisen independently of the notions of yin and yang, but during the late Warring States era the became combined into a single system. Five forces thought had various applications. On the broad cosmological level, it was believed that, like yin and yang, these five forces interacted in a constant dynamic that determined the overall rhythms of existence. For example, during the early spring, the force of wood was in the ascendant; the sprouting of woody plants and a wide range of other natural and astronomical phenomena were explained by the dominance of the force of wood. As the season progressed, however, the power of fire would grow until it dominated. Then in midsummer, earth would become dominant; in autumn metal; in winter water; in spring wood once again. All of the regular phenomena of the natural world and many of those pertaining to the human world could be explained by the resonant power of the alternating forces.

A different use for this model, and one associated with the thinker Zou Yan, pertained to the succession of dynasties. Zou Yan seems to have applied the five

power theory to the process of history, which he conceived in terms of dynastic eras. He attempted to explain the process of dynastic change as a transition stage in the revolutions of the five forces. Thus he associated the rise of the Yellow Emperor with the element earth (which, in the five forces system, is correlated with the color yellow); Yu, founder of the Xia, reflected the dominance of wood in his age; the Shang conquest signaled the dominance of metal; the Zhou conquest the ascendance of fire (hence the legend of the fire-crow omen which we encountered in the tale of the Zhou conquest).

It appears from the biography of Zou Yan that appears in the historical text *Shih-chi* (written about 100 B.C.) that Zou may have begun his career as a Confucian adherent, and made his mark by trying to search for a suitable cosmological model to supplement the anti-metaphysical school to which he belonged. If so, his original training was overwhelmed by the novelty of his ideas, and his role in early Chinese thought is noted solely for his naturalistic contributions.

### ***The Biography of Zou Yan***

There were actually three Masters Zou in the state of Qi. The first was Zou Ji, who rose to high administrative rank through having played the zither for King Wei. He received an estate as Marquis Cheng and the seals of the Prime Minister. Zou Ji preceded Mencius's stay in Qi. Zou Yan came later, after Mencius's time.

Zou Yan recognized that the rulers of his time were becoming increasingly dissolute. They were unable to honor virtue or to follow the lesson of the "Greater Court Odes" to "reform your own person first and then extend it to the black-haired masses."

Zou Yan carefully observed the waxing and waning of the forces of Yin and Yang, and he wrote the texts, "Bizarre Transformations," "End and Renewal," and "The Great Sage," altogether totaling over 100,000 characters. His discussions were vast and unorthodox. He always began from the observation of some small phenomenon and then extrapolated from it to great lengths, until it receded into the boundless.

Zou Yan composed a careful ordering of recent events, and then inferred back to the Yellow Emperor. Basing himself on the records transmitted by scholars, he traced the patterns of flourishing and decay down the ages and correlated them with recorded signs and omens and the various systems of administration. Then extrapolating back into the distant past he described the time before the birth of heaven and earth, into the misty darkness where origins can be traced no further.

He composed a list of the major mountains and rivers of China, noting the great ravines and the species of birds and beasts. He recorded the plants that

flourished in the various soils and waterways, and the types of rare objects and species. Extrapolating from these he spoke of things beyond the seas, where no man can travel to see.

Zou Yan said that ever since the time when heaven and earth were first rent apart, five powers had circulated therein. There existed principles of government for responding to each of the five, and portentous signs that signaled when the appropriate accord was reached.

He believed that the lands which Confucians term the “Central States” [China] in fact occupied only one part of eighty-one in the entire world. He called China the Spirit District of Vermillion Parish. Within the Spirit District of Vermillion Parish there were nine sub-districts, the very same that were first designated by the Emperor Yu, but these were not counted separately in the total of eighty-one. The Spirit District of Vermillion Parish comprised one of nine similar lands, each encircled by a small sea which prevented people, birds, and beasts from crossing from one the other. The set of nine comprised a single continent, and there were altogether nine of these. The whole was circled by a great ocean, beyond which was the horizon where heaven and earth meet.

All of Zou Yan’s teachings were like this. However, if one traced them back to their base, one always found there the values of ren and righteousness, constraint and thrift, the proper conduct of ruler and minister, superior and inferior, and the six types of family relationships. It was only that his ideas spilled over too far from these beginnings.

When kings and lords and grandees of state first learned of Zou’s arts they were struck with awe, and totally won over. But later on, they would find themselves unable to put them into practice.

Master Zou was greatly revered in Qi. He traveled to Wei, where King Hui came out to the suburbs to greet him and personally performed the rites of host and guest. When he traveled to Zhao, Lord Pingyuan walked sideways before him, and bent to brush off Zou’s mat for him.

When he traveled to Yan, King Zhao came out with a broom to sweep his path clean, and requested permission to sit as a disciple among Zou’s followers. The King ordered a residence called the Standing Stone Mansion to be built for Zou and visited there, treating Zou as his teacher.