



Taoism and Jung: Synchronicity and the Self

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In my book *Jung and Eastern Thought*,¹ I explored the influence of Indian concepts such as *karma*, *citta*, *buddhitattva*, *tapas*, and *maṇḍala* on the development of Carl Jung's notions of "archetype," "psyche," the "collective unconscious," "active imagination," and "circumambulation." But the question of Eastern influence on Jung's most complex concept, "the Self," was given only very sketchy treatment. Following the lead of one of Jung's senior North American students, Joseph Henderson of Stanford University, I suggested that the notion of *Ātman*, as found in the Hindu Upaniṣads, was the major Eastern formative influence in Jung's concept of "the Self."² Additional research, however, has led me to conclude that Chinese Taoism, rather than Hinduism, provided the fundamental formative influence in Jung's developing notion of "the Self." This Taoist influence, I will argue, came to Jung's "Self" concept not directly, but by way of another of Jung's ideas, namely synchronicity. "Synchronicity," it will be shown, depends directly on the Taoist Chinese text the *I Ching*, with which Jung experimented for a whole summer in 1920.³ His experiments demonstrated to Jung that there are meaningful connections between the inner psychic realm and the external physical world. In his autobiography Jung says, "Time and time again I encountered amazing coincidences which seemed to suggest the idea of an acausal parallelism (a synchronicity, as I later called it)."⁴

It is this notion of correlative parallels between the inner and the outer realms of experience that is fundamental for understanding Jung's complex notion of the "Self." Failure to recognize the Taoist background to Jung's thinking has, I will argue, resulted in the mistaken charge that Jung is simply a gnostic in modern psychological dress. This mistake is made when the external half of the correlation of the outer world with the inner psyche in Jung's individuated Self is ignored. By highlighting the Taoist context of Jung's thinking, this error, common among Jungians, is avoided.

In addition, the analysis offered will show that in the case of Eastern influence on his notion of the Self, Jung rejects some aspects of the Hindu *ātman*, but fully accepts Taoist thinking. This article is divided into three sections: (1) The Taoist Background of Jung's Thinking, (2) Synchronicity and Individuation of Archetypes, and (3) Tao and the Self. In this essay I am explicitly concerned with Jung's own reading, not the Chinese texts themselves.

The Taoist Background of Jung's Thinking

Jung was led to Taoist and Indian thought in the period 1915–1920, while he was doing the research for his book *Psychological Types*.⁵ Of this book Jung says:

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This work sprang originally from my need to define the ways in which my outlook differed from Freud's and Adler's. In attempting to answer this question, I came across the problem of types; for it is one's psychological type which from the outset determines and limits a person's judgement. My book, therefore, was an effort to deal with the relationship of the individual to the world, to people and things.⁶

Already we see here Jung's interest in correlating the inner psyche with the external world. The identification of opposite personality types (e.g., introversion versus extroversion) gave Jung the insight that every judgment made by an individual is conditioned by how his or her personality type relates to the surrounding world. Extreme introverts or extroverts suffered from a very limited experience of their world or themselves. This insight raised for Jung the question of how one could find a unity in which these opposite personality types would be balanced and their narrowness transcended. The search for an answer, said Jung, led him directly to the Chinese concept of *Tao*,⁷ the idea of a middle way between the opposites.⁸

John Henderson has recently demonstrated that Taoism, along with most other traditional forms of Chinese thinking, is rooted in "correlative thinking," a sort of perennial philosophy of Chinese civilization.⁹ Correlative thinking draws systematic correspondences between various orders of reality such as the human, the world of nature, and the divine. "It assumes that these related orders as a whole are homologous, that they correspond with one another in some basic respect, even in some cases that their identities are contained one within the other."¹⁰ Underlying "correlative thinking" is the notion of cosmological resonance (*kan-ying*). Correlations, it is held, can interact at a distance by virtue of a mutual sympathy, an idea based on music theory or harmonics.¹¹ In Chinese thought, this notion of resonance is applied even in social relations, as, for example, in the Confucian concept of filial piety. In its most general form the theory of resonance is stated as "the principles of the cosmos are the same as the principles of my mind."¹²

Much of the groundwork for this theory of resonance or correlative thinking was established by the classical Taoists, especially Lao Tzu in his proposal that humans pattern themselves after heaven and earth.¹³ While Lao Tzu's idea did not lead directly to the pairing of the human with the cosmic, it did much to create a context in which correlative thought could develop. What caught Jung's attention in his *Psychological Types* was Lao Tzu's discussion of *Tao* as the middle way between opposites such as man-and-nature and heaven-and-earth, as well as being the source of all arisings and the receiver of all subsiding. Jung quotes from the *Tao Te Ching*:

One may think of it as the mother of all things under heaven.
Its true name we do not know;
"Way" is the name that we give it.¹⁴

There was also the central Taoist teaching that the *Tao* manifests in creation as a fundamental pair of opposites, *yang* and *yin*. Jung summarizes as follows:

Yang signifies warmth, light, maleness; *yin* is cold, darkness, femaleness. *Yang* is also heaven, *yin* earth. From the *yang* force arises *shen*, the celestial portion of the human soul, and from *yin* force comes *kuei*, the earthly part. As a microcosm, man is a reconciler of the opposites.¹⁵



The aim of the Taoist sage is to live in harmony with the *Tao* and thereby avoid falling into one extreme or the other, neither introvert nor extrovert, to use Jung's terms, but striking a balance between the two. Specific guidance toward that end is provided by the *I Ching*, which Jung tried out on himself with convincing results.¹⁶ A few years later, Jung read Richard Wilhelm's translation of the *I Ching* and invited Wilhelm to Zurich. From Wilhelm Jung learned a great deal about Chinese thought. This friendship led Jung to write commentaries on two of Wilhelm's translations: first *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, and later the *I Ching* itself.

In his Foreword to the *I Ching*, Jung notes that the coincidence or correlation between the opposites is the chief concern of the work.¹⁷ To enter into the "Chinese mind" of the text requires that modern Westerners drop for the moment their fixation on rational and causal thought as the only valid thinking. This is why Jung refers to the meaningful correlations of the *I Ching* not as chance but "acausal"¹⁸ and why W. A. Callahan, in a recent article, refers to Taoist thought not as irrational but "arational."¹⁹ Both agree that the acausal, arational, relational experience described in Taoist texts like the *I Ching* is a direct reflection of natural reality. All of this confirmed Jung's intuition of a connection that is potentially present in each of us between our inner psychic realm and the external cosmos. Jung coined the term "synchronicity" to describe this correlation between inside and outside events.²⁰ The *I Ching* offered a traditional Chinese technique for reflecting on these correlations. Jung felt that his method of active imagination would achieve the same goal and was more appropriate for the modern Westerner. But Jung was convinced that the goal of the *I Ching*, namely a reestablishing of balance between the *yang* and *yin* in the *Tao*, and the goal of his psychotherapy, namely a balancing of the psychic opposites in the experience of the Self, were parallel processes. Let us now examine in depth the way in which Taoism and the *I Ching* influenced Jung's notions of "synchronicity" and its crucial role in the realization of the "Self."

Synchronicity

Although one of his earliest notions, "synchronicity" was a concept that Jung struggled to express adequately throughout his life. When in

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1960 he finally produced a little monograph on the subject, containing an extended discussion of astrology, it was generally assumed that this was simply Jung's attempt to explain odd psychic events such as a table splitting in half, a steel knife shattering, or seances for communicating with the dead. Indeed, in his "Editorial Preface" to the volume, Michael Fordham largely consigns synchronicity to Jung's attempts to deal with the occult.²¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that synchronicity has not been seen as a key concept in Jung's psychology. Jolande Jacobi, for example, in her authoritative presentation of Jung's psychology, does not even treat it as a separate concept and offers only one rather weak paragraph under the heading "archetype."²² This consigning of "synchronicity" to Jung's offbeat interest in things occult has helped to create a serious misperception of Jung's theory as being almost totally inward; focused on the collective unconscious and the archetypes. It has led to a misunderstanding of the process of individuation, with external factors being given short shrift. And it has paved the way for the charge to be leveled that Jung is nothing more than a modern-day gnostic who does not take the external world seriously. In what follows we will show that all of these errors are corrected if "synchronicity" is approached from Chinese Taoism rather than from modern parapsychology. The difference this makes for one's estimate of Jung's thought and the understanding of his concept of "the Self" is enormous.

Jung's earliest thinking on synchronicity was prompted by a conversation over dinner with Albert Einstein sometime between 1909 and 1913. Einstein was developing his first theory of relativity and this started Jung thinking about the relativity of time and space "and their psychic conditionality."²³ But it is in the "Chinese orientation" of a 1930 memorial address for sinologist Richard Wilhelm that Jung first clearly speaks about synchronicity:

The science of the *I Ching* is not based on the causality principle, but on a principle (hitherto unnamed because not met with among us) which I have tentatively called the *synchronistic* principle. My occupation with the psychology of unconscious processes long ago necessitated my looking for another principle of explanation.... Thus I found that there are psychic parallelisms which cannot be related to each other causally...²⁴

Jung's sense of the existence of psychic parallelism or correlations between inner and outer events was strongly nourished as a result of reading Wilhelm's translations of the *I Ching* and a book on Taoist Yoga, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, for which he wrote a psychological commentary.

To understand the importance of this notion of synchronicity for Jung's psychology, it is useful to remind ourselves of the main constructs of his theory. It is Jung's view that each of us shares in three different levels

of consciousness: the conscious level of the ego; the dreams, memories, and repressions that comprise the personal unconscious; and the predispositions to universal human reactions, the archetypes, that compose the collective unconscious. It is, of course, the notion of the archetypes and the collective unconscious that is the trademark of Jung's thought. It is in the raising of the archetypes to the conscious level and in the shifting of the center of gravity of the personality from the ego to the Self that synchronicity plays a vital role. Without synchronicity both of these processes could not take place, for Jung's psychology would be encapsulated within the inner psyche and out of touch with the external world. Then the charge against Jung of gnosticism or mere idealism could be made to stick.

Although Jung's synchronicity concept saved him from falling into the gnostic trap, Jung never developed a theoretical framework that would enable him to discuss this concept systematically. About this failing of Jung, Ira Progoff says: "His vision was so rich and essentially valid, yet he could not reduce it to a form that he could communicate. . . ." ²⁵ It remains for us, then, to reread Jung's notion of "synchronicity" through his references to the Chinese texts so that the meaning intended by Jung will be understood.

To be clear about the archetype and its creative individuation through the use of materials of the external world, one needs to know the Chinese doctrine *T'ien-jen chih chi* ("the interrelation of heaven and man"). In English we might use the term "correlative anthropocosmology." ²⁶ This is what underlies Jung's notion that an archetype includes not only psychic equivalences but psychophysical equivalences too. ²⁷ Like the Chinese doctrine of the interrelation of the individual with the cosmos, Jung conceived of the archetype as interrelating the meaning content of the inner psyche with the meaning content of the external cosmos. When the two connected, an experience of synchronicity took place. The deeper meaning within one's psyche was experienced in relation to a corresponding meaning in the external reality. Jung said, the "archetype has a tendency to behave as though it were not localized in one person but were active in the whole environment." ²⁸ Or, as he put it in a letter dated August 1951, the archetype is an "arranger" of psychic forms inside and outside the psyche into meaningful patterns. ²⁹ When this occurs one is taken out of one's small ego consciousness by experiencing contact with the larger meaning-whole of oneself within the cosmos. As is the case in Chinese thought, this notion of Jung's is not allegorical or prelogical, but is based on the idea of an ordered universe into which everything fits harmoniously.

In a letter to Pastor Bernet, Jung indicates that the archetype mediating the phenomena of synchronicity is embedded in the brain structure and is physiologically verifiable through electrical stimulation of certain

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areas of the brain stem that produce *mandala* visions.³⁰ But in a letter to Walter Schmid, Jung warns that even though the archetype and synchronicity are rooted in the psychic realm, we should not take them to be only psychic. "In so far . . . as synchronistic events include not only psychic but also physical forms of manifestation, the conclusion is justified that both modalities transcend the realm of the psychic and somehow belong to the physical realm."³¹ The inherent patterning activity by the archetype is not only present at the level of the collective unconscious but, under Chinese influence, came to be regarded by Jung as a psychophysical continuum present throughout the cosmos. Thus the deepest levels of the collective unconscious were seen to participate in the underlying patterns of the external world of nature. When the two are brought together a significant moment of synchronicity is experienced, and the archetypal meaning is revealed. In Eastern religion this is the revelation of the divine.

In summary, then, Jung's "synchronicity" is the idea that a person is a participant in and meaningfully related to the acausal patterning of events in nature.³² The weakness in Jung's theory is that he does not consistently demonstrate how the synchronistic event and its meaning are clearly related to the depth psychology of the individual.³³ What is clear is that Jung became quite sure that the multiplicity of the empirical world rests on an underlying unity. It is this underlying unity that gives opposites such as inner versus outer, psychic versus physical, and spiritual versus worldly the potential to become linked in meaningful acausal synchronistic experiences. It is the Chinese worldview that started Jung in this direction, and it is Jung's reading of Chinese thought that can render his thought more systematic in relation to synchronicity.

In his discussion of the forerunners of the idea of synchronicity Jung points strongly to Chinese thought.³⁴ There nature constitutes a dynamic, organic whole. The individual participates in the whole in accordance with its comprehensive pattern (the *Tao*). When we think of the unfolding of events in this interaction between humans and nature, Western ideas of cause and effect are replaced in Chinese thought by notions of interdependence. This interdependence is based on the idea of a simultaneous resonance between otherwise independent entities.³⁵ As mentioned earlier it is more like a music theory of resonance than Newtonian physics. According to Joseph Needham, the key word in the Chinese worldview is "pattern": "The symbolic correlations or correspondences all formed part of one colossal pattern."³⁶ Things behave as they do not because of cause-effect relationships with other things but because of their intrinsic interdependent relationship with the existential pattern of all life. Jung quotes Chuang Tzu saying the *Tao* (the whole) is obscured when one fixes one's eye on little segments of existence only.³⁷ Limitations are not grounded in the pattern of the whole of life. Thus the vision

of the successful artist is of one who "can follow Nature's spontaneity and be aware of the subtlety of things, and his mind will be absorbed by them. His brush will secretly be in harmony with movement and quiescence and all forms will issue forth."³⁸ One who is not in tune with the harmonics of reality "becomes a slave of passion and his nature will be distorted by externalities."

From the viewer's perspective, when a Chinese artist is successful, the painting is said to reveal the potentialities of the "spiritual court," a term first used by Chuang Tzu to mean what Jung calls the depth of the unconscious. So, when Fu Tsai saw Chang Tsao's paintings of pines and rocks, he said: "When I sense the vigor of Chang Tsao's painting, I no longer see a painting, I see *Tao*. . . [T]hings brought out are not from consciousness of the eye and ear, but from the Spiritual Court."³⁹ In Jung's view this is also what happens in the making of the best *mandalas*.⁴⁰ The potentialities within and without come together according to the divine pattern, and synchronicity is complete. The *Tao* is revealed.⁴¹ In other places Jung describes this as the mystery of the *coniunctio*, in which the extreme opposites unite, night is wedded with day, outside with inside, and male with female. There is a universal validity, he observes, from the *Tao* of Lao-Tzu to the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Cusanus.⁴²

The Taoist approach is the synchronistic way. As in the *I Ching*, it involves the study and classification of events wherein meaningful interdependence transcends space, time, and causality as the determining factor. The archetype contains the meaningful pattern that waits to resonate sympathetically with events sharing the same pattern in the external world. News of the external world is first taken into the psyche by the sensing function and then taken deep within the psyche by the intuiting function. There, under the influence of the archetype, contact is made between the inner and outer forms of the pattern. The work of individuation or symbol formation involves the creative working together of the archetypal forms with the interiorized contents of the psychical world until a "synchronous fit" is achieved and the interdependent meaning revealed (usually in a series of dreams ending finally in a conscious experience). While in Chinese culture the throwing of the yarrow stalks in accordance with the *I Ching* helps the process of seeing the *Tao* along, in the West Jung felt that his practice of "Active Imagination" played a parallel role in a way more suited to the modern Western mind. In both cases the end result was an experience of the inner psyche and the external world coming together synchronistically in a meaningful whole.



Self

Jung typically describes spiritual maturity and psychological integration as the shifting of the center of gravity of the personality from the

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ego to the self.⁴³ Jung's discovery of the self as the goal of psychic development occurred as a result of his study of Taoism in 1918 while writing *Psychological Types* and in 1927 while writing a commentary for Wilhelm's translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. These Chinese texts taught Jung that in the development of the self there is no linear evolution; there is only a circumambulation in which everything is related to the center.⁴⁴ And this circumambulation process of the self includes materials from both the inner psyche and the external world in ever widening circles. The equal inclusion of the external world is of crucial importance, in Jung's view, for it saves one from falling into the theosophical trap of much Hindu thought, namely that the external world is mere *māyā* and ultimately disappears, leaving a pure, universal consciousness.⁴⁵ Jung makes it clear that his concept of the self is not that kind of "universal consciousness," which he says is simply another name for the unconscious. The Taoist insistence on a balance between inner and outer, between *yin* and *yang*, confirmed in Jung's mind that both sides were essential for the development of the self. As Frieda Fordham puts it: "[The self] consists . . . in the awareness on the one hand of our unique natures, and on the other of our intimate relationship with all of life, not only human, but animal and plant, and even that of inorganic matter and the cosmos itself. It brings a feeling of "oneness" and of reconciliation with life. . . ."⁴⁶ The two Chinese notions of correlation between the inner and outer (synchronicity) and a balanced center that expands or circumambulates so as to include both the inner and the outer are fundamental to Jung's notion of the self.

In explaining his concept of self, Jung points to the Hindu Upaniṣadic teaching that it is not the individual ego that speaks, thinks, and acts. Rather it is the universal *Brahman*, which speaks through the individual and so uses the individual as a means of expression.⁴⁷ But the danger in Hindu thought is that *Brahman* becomes one-sidedly identified as pure consciousness and, as such, is no longer in dynamic interrelation with the physical world. This is exactly Śaṅkara's notion of *nirguṇa Brahman*, Brahman without qualities.⁴⁸ From Jung's perspective, as soon as one gets out of dynamic interrelation with the empirical world, one is either unconscious or out of life altogether. On the other extreme is the modern Western mind, which is overbalanced on the external empirical consciousness and virtually cut off from the internal unconscious. Because it balanced both extremes, Jung found his reading of Chinese thought, and Taoism in particular, to offer a better clue to the self. Taoism is structured such that an overbalance on one side is necessarily compensated by a stress on the other so that within the personality the two sides are always seeking to be in balance. In the Taoist book, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Jung found for the first time an outline for the development of a balanced self.

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In his Introduction to the Causeway Edition of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Charles San states that the aim is "an enrichment of consciousness which will unite the inner and outer worlds of reality."⁴⁹ The translator, Richard Wilhelm, adds that the book teaches a correlation of the inner spiritual principle with the psychogenic forces of the cosmos so as to prepare for the possibility of life after death in a transfigured bodily form.⁵⁰ In the text, Master Lu teaches that the one primordial whole is the *Tao*. The *Tao* phenomenalizes into a multiplicity of individuals in the form of *hun* and *p'ò*. *Hun* dwells in the eyes and is bright and active. It is identified with *yang* and associated with the lighter, higher spirit, which after death rises in the air and flows back into the reservoir of life. *P'ò* dwells in the abdomen and is dark and earthbound. It is identified with *yin* and associated with the body and its sexual energy. At death it decays and returns to the earth whence it continually begets.⁵¹ The goal of the yoga as taught in the text is to arouse the sexual energy of the *yin* or *p'ò* and convert it into the lighter spiritual energy of *yang* or *hun* until a balance is achieved.⁵²

What struck Jung about this Taoist model for the development of the self was that it never attempted to force the pairs of opposites so far apart that all connection between them is lost. Yet the Taoist Yoga of the text sought out a point of balance or freedom that would take one beyond the clash of opposites without becoming one-sided or overbalanced.⁵³ The self, said Jung, is the midpoint of the opposites. It is equivalent to the *Tao*.⁵⁴ Problems caused by being overbalanced on one side or the other can never be solved but only outgrown. To remain overbalanced and caught up in a conflict between the opposites is pathological. Growth into the self, however, is normal. Jung comments:

When I examined the way of development of those persons who, quietly, and as if unconsciously, grew beyond themselves, I saw that their fates had something in common. Whether arising from without or within, the new thing came to all those persons from a dark field of possibilities; they accepted it and developed further by means of it. It seemed to me typical that, in some cases, the new thing was found outside themselves, and in others within; or rather, that it grew into some persons from without, and into others from within. But it was never something that came exclusively either from within or from without. . . . [I]n no case was it conjured into existence through purpose and conscious willing, but rather seemed to flow out of the stream of time.⁵⁵

This new thing, the developing self, Jung goes on to say, seldom corresponds to conscious expectation, does not permit mechanical duplication, contradicts deeply rooted instincts, and yet is "a singularly appropriate expression of the total personality, an expression that one could not imagine in a more complete form."⁵⁶ All this was accomplished by doing nothing, or, as Master Lu Tzu said, by *wu wei* (actionless

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action). This art of letting things happen—action in nonaction, letting go of oneself—became for Jung the key to opening the door to the development of the self. Later he was technically to designate the process as “active imagination.” In fact, at this point in his Commentary, Jung provides one of his clearest descriptions of “active imagination” as inspired by his reading of the Taoist notion of *wu wei*.⁵⁷

As the Taoist text makes clear, said Jung, some have to enlarge their personality into a self by taking from without, others by expanding within. It depends on their starting personality type—introvert or extrovert. Either way, an enlargement into a self occurs by making present parts of one’s inner or outer world that one had previously blocked out. The process involves an enlargement of consciousness through a uniting or correlating of what was separated. In Chinese terms, says Jung, this is the bringing about of *Tao*. In Western terms this making the opposites consciously in harmony with the larger pattern of life is “conversion”—conversion from the ego as the center of the personality to the self as center.⁵⁸

This expansion of the personality and the union of the opposites through the process of letting go of the ego expresses itself in symbols. Such symbols are *mandalas*. The term implies a circular nature. *Mandalas* pictorially represent the harmonious inclusion of both the inner and outer realms within the self. In Jung’s view, finding one’s own *mandala* symbol is crucial for the development of the self. Earlier (1918–1920), says Jung, “I had a dream about the center and the self which I represented in a *mandala* painting called ‘Window on Eternity’.” A year later Jung painted a second picture, likewise a *mandala*, that was very Chinese in character, with a golden castle at the center. Some years later, in 1927, when Jung read *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, he found confirmation of his ideas about the self, the *mandala*, and the circumambulation (the circling around) of the center.⁵⁹ In the Taoist text, the Golden Flower of Heavenly Light is the *mandala*. As was the case with Jung, the *mandala* of the text, the Golden Flower, symbolizes the self in which the unconscious has become conscious in a harmonious union with all of life. The union of these two, life and consciousness, is the *Tao*.⁶⁰ In a later article, Jung comments that *Ātman*, *Tao*, and Christ are different cultural symbols for wholeness that correlate the inner self with the animating principle of the cosmos.⁶¹

Behind the opposites and in the opposites is true reality, which sees and comprehends the whole. . . . We use the word “self” for this contrasting it with the little ego. . . . [T]his self is not just a rather more conscious or intensified ego, as the words “self-conscious,” “self-satisfied,” etc. might lead one to suppose. What is meant by the self is not only in me but in all beings, like the *Ātman*, like *Tao*. It is psychic totality.⁶²

In *The Secret of the Golden Flower* Jung was particularly struck by a drawing of a yogi with five human figures growing out of the top of his head and five more figures growing out of the top of each of their heads. The picture, thought Jung, portrays the spiritual state of the yogi who is about to rid himself of his many small egos and pass over into the more complete objective state of the self.⁶³

Jung found the process of circumambulation, by which the self is built up, fully represented in the *maṇḍala* and text of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. A *circumambulatio* or circular course of development is prescribed. Through meditation, claims Jung, the *Tao* begins to take leadership. Action is submerged into nonaction, and everything peripheral is subjected to the command of the center. Psychologically, says Jung, the turning in ever widening circles about oneself engages all sides of the personality.

Thus the circular movement has also the moral significance of activating all the light and dark forces of human nature, and with them, all the psychological opposites of whatever kind they may be. That means nothing else than self-knowledge by means of self-incubation (Hindi, *tapas*).⁶⁴

For this circular movement to take place, a symbol such as the sun, a castle, or, as in this text, a golden flower is necessary. The symbol is a visual image of the divine pattern, which gathers up and integrates materials from the unconscious with those of the external world received through the senses. As such the symbol is a manifestation of the God or self archetype. As it refocuses one's psychic energy from the ego to the self, there is felt a heightening and clearness of consciousness, a freeing of oneself from emotional or sensory entanglements, and a deepening sense of unity of being.⁶⁵

Jung observes that the Taoist text is aware of certain dangers that arise when such an expansion of consciousness is taking place. Newly activated unconscious contents are frequently projected upon the outside world. The text offers visual representations of such projections and describes them as "thought-fragments" that are empty colors and shapes possessing no being in and of themselves. Jung comments that such psychic partial systems are common in mental illnesses (like schizophrenia), mediumistic phenomena, and religious phenomena (in which the thought-fragments may be personified as spirits or gods). The beginning formation of a self gives one a center from which to recognize these partial psychic systems for what they are and, in turn, makes possible their depotentialization and assimilation by the center.⁶⁶ Again the circular movement dominates the process.

This is not an easy or quick process but, as the Tibetan Book of the Dead (the *Bardo Thödol*) makes clear, one that may engage one even beyond one's death.⁶⁷ The assimilation of such psychic projections through

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the process of circumambulation is an essential part of the individuation of the self from its entrapment in either the inner unconscious or the external world. The instructions in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, thought Jung, teach the pupil how to free himself or herself from inner or outer bondage. The unconscious is not projected any more; therefore, the *participation mystique*, the primordial interweaving of consciousness with the world, has been disentangled. Levy Bruhl defines *participation mystique* as "the indefinitely large remnant of non-differentiation between subject and object."⁶⁸ In primitive peoples this nondifferentiation takes the form of plants and animals behaving like humans and vice versa. In modern people this nondifferentiation takes another form. As Jung puts it, one is identified with one's parents or with one's affects, or one accuses others of things one does not see in oneself. In both kinds of non-differentiation, people feel themselves to be magically influenced by things, circumstances, and other people. But when these unconscious projections are made conscious, the *participation mystique* is transcended and the center of gravity of the personality shifts its position. "It ceases to be the ego, which is merely the center of consciousness, and is located instead in what might be called a virtual point between the conscious and the unconscious. This new center might be called the self."⁶⁹ This is what is meant by the text, says Jung, when it speaks of "the diamond body." Such an expression symbolizes a psychological attitude that is invulnerable to entanglements in the outer or inner world. Jung agrees with the text that the time for this process to take place is in the second half of life as a preparation for death. This naturally follows the focus of the first half of life on "begetting and reproduction."⁷⁰ In the second half of life, one's sexual energy is transmuted, through yoga practice, into the universal spiritual energy of the self.

Jung's reading of the Taoist text highlighted another important aspect, namely the text's emphasis on direct experience and the refusal to attempt a metaphysical description. Whereas in Taoism any metaphysical description is negated (e.g., Lao Tzu: "The Tao that can be told of is not the eternal Tao."⁷¹), in Western religion metaphysics has become the norm and, Jung thinks, an obstacle to direct experience of the divine. Jung's following of Taoism on this point has led to charges of "psychologism." If by "psychologism" is meant the bringing of "metaphysics" within the range of experience, then Jung says he pleads guilty and is flattered, for that indeed is the aim: "To understand metaphysically is impossible; it can only be done psychologically."⁷² The Taoists, says Jung, understand this well. They are really symbolical psychologists. When the text speaks of the "diamond body," the indestructible spirit body that develops in the Golden Flower, it is describing not a dogma but a real experience, which Master Lu Tzu has had and expects his pupil to have. Nor do the Taoists make the mistake of taking this breath

or spirit "diamond body" to be separated from the physical. There is no dualism here. What is experienced is a purifying and correlating of the physical and the mental into a balanced self symbolized by the "diamond body."⁷³ This ultimate experience can only be hinted at in words such as "It is not I who live, it lives me," or, to use the Christian context, "No longer do I live, but Christ lives in me."⁷⁴ Jung adds: "In a certain sense, the thing we are trying to express is the feeling of having been 'replaced,' but without the connotation of having been 'deposed.' It is as if the leadership of the affairs of life had gone over to an invisible center."⁷⁵

The experience of this new center is the *Tao* or, in Jung's terms, the self. It is not skepticism or agnosticism but, says Jung, an experience of Kant's *Ding-an-sich*, the thing in itself. This is why, when asked, in an interview with the BBC, "Do you believe in God?" Jung paused and responded, "I do not believe, I know!"⁷⁶ This direct knowledge, says Jung, brings with it a release from the compulsion and impossible responsibility that are the inevitable results of dogmatism and the *participation mystique*. Instead, there is a feeling of reconciliation with oneself and with what is happening in the world. One is released to live in *wu-wei*, spontaneous action centered not in the ego but in the self, the *Tao*.⁷⁷ Jung concludes his Commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower* with the following words: "It is . . . the atmosphere of suffering, seeking, and striving common to all civilized peoples; it is the tremendous experiment of becoming conscious, which nature has imposed on mankind, uniting the most diverse cultures in a common task."⁷⁸ In his reading of Taoism, Jung found not only an adequate expression of synchronicity but also a trustworthy guide to the experience of the self as the spiritual center.

Conclusion

This study has shown that two of Jung's central and often misunderstood concepts, "synchronicity" and "the self," were strongly influenced in their initial formulation by his reading of Taoist thought. When placed against the background of Chinese correlational cosmology, synchronicity is seen as primarily concerned with the inherent interrelation of the inner psyche with the external world, and only secondarily as an explanation of occult events. When examined in relation to the *I Ching*, synchronicity is understood to be a fundamental principle underlying the archetypes and the way in which the opposites within and without the psyche interact. As such it becomes a basic building block for Jung's concept of self. First encountered in his dreams and later confirmed and explained in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Jung developed his notion of the self in a detailed reflection on the *Tao*. Of central importance here is the idea that the contents of the inner psyche and those of the external

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world must be assimilated and balanced to approximate the *Tao*. Following the lead of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Jung finds that the self evolves by a process of circumambulation around the center in ever expanding circles. When a sufficient number of projections has been made conscious and archetypes individuated through this process, a self symbol, usually in the form of a *maṇḍala*, will be born. This is not a process of the conscious ego, however, but, again following his reading of Taoism, a letting go of ego in *wu-wei* or spontaneous action. The evolving self is not something that can be described, metaphysically or otherwise, but simply experienced.

All of this is important not just for our understanding of how Jung developed his basic ideas, but because it corrects some major misunderstandings. The first is that Jung's psychology is so dominantly intrapsychic or inwardly focused that for him everything comes out of the collective unconscious. The Taoist background helps us to see that throughout there is a balance between inner and outer in Jung's thinking, that the physical world is as important as the inner archetypes, and that both are expressions of the same fundamental pattern or whole, the *Tao*.

The second misunderstanding relates to the same basic problem. Commentators who have not seen Jung through his reading of Taoism have frequently charged him with being a gnostic—Maurice Freedman⁷⁹ and R. C. Zaehner⁸⁰ have branded Jung as “a modern gnostic.” Gnosticism places a one-sided emphasis on the subjective, the unconscious as the source of knowledge, a fact that Jung himself recognizes in *Aion*.⁸¹ The part of gnosticism that Jung accepted was that there was knowledge to be found within the psyche. But this was immediately balanced by his Taoist insight that any inner knowledge must be interrelated with a corresponding knowledge of the external world. This insight is basic to Jung's concepts of synchronicity and the self and effectively safeguarded Jung from becoming a gnostic. For Jung, the inner, though real, is always in tension with the outer, which is equally real. Jung's psychology requires that we expand our personality types of introvert and extrovert in ever widening circles until the opposite aspect is assimilated and made conscious in the new whole of the self, the *Tao*.

The third misunderstanding relates to suspicions, usually voiced by ministers or theologians, that Jung is a skeptic or agnostic, that he has done away with God by psychologizing God into an archetype. That this charge bothered Jung a great deal is evident from the attention it receives in his Commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.⁸² Basing himself on Lao Tzu's teaching, “The Name that can be spoken or described is not the true Name,” Jung seeks to demonstrate that he is neither a skeptic nor an agnostic but a direct experiencer of the divine. Following his reading of Taoism, Jung rejects metaphysics as having any grip on reality. All dogma, all theology, is necessarily one-sided because it engages in

making distinctions. The divine, the underlying whole, which gives birth to, supports, and receives back all of existence, provides the cosmic pattern in which all distinctions inhere. To know God, the *Tao*, the *Ātman*, requires not metaphysics but a direct experience of the whole—and that, Jung maintains, is available to us all through the Self.

It is not likely that theologians or metaphysicians will be happy with Jung's Taoist experience of the divine. But it is something quite different from skepticism or gnosticism. If it is to hit the mark, any discussion of Jung's religion would be advised to begin with the Taoist background and then to grapple with his contention that in Paul's *experience* of Christ "the deepest religious experience of the West and the East meet."⁸³ Jung seems to have been convinced that in Pauline theology Taoist and Christian thought coalesce.

NOTES

- 1 – Harold Coward, *Jung and Eastern Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).
- 2 – *Ibid.*, pp. 52–55.
- 3 – C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffe, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 373.
- 4 – *Ibid.*, p. 374.
- 5 – C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 6 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
- 6 – Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 207.
- 7 – *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 8 – Jung, *Psychological Types*, p. 214.
- 9 – John B. Henderson, *The Development and Decline of Chinese Cosmology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. xv. In an even more recent book, Benjamin Schwartz suggests the term "correlative anthropocosmology" as a more exact translation of the Chinese principle (*The World of Thought in Ancient China* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985]).
- 10 – *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 11 – *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 12 – *Ibid.*, pp. 154–155.
- 13 – *The Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu*, Chapter 25, trans. James Legge, in Harold Coward

- The Texts of Taoism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1962), pt. 1, p. 68.
- 14 – As quoted by Jung from Waley's translation; see Jung, *Psychological Types*, in *Collected Works*, 6:214.
- 15 – *Ibid.*, pp. 216–217.
- 16 – Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 374.
- 17 – C. G. Jung, Foreword to *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, trans. Richard Wilhelm (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. xxii.
- 18 – *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.
- 19 – W. A. Callahan, "Discourse and Perspective in Daoism: A Linguistic Interpretation of *Ziran*," *Philosophy East and West* 39 (1989): 171.
- 20 – Jung, Foreword to *The I Ching*, p. xxiv.
- 21 – C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973) (see *Collected Works*, vol. 8), pp. v–vi.
- 22 – Jolande Jacobi, *The Psychology of C. G. Jung* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 49–50.
- 23 – Jung, *Synchronicity*, p. vi.
- 24 – *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, trans. Richard Wilhelm with Commentary by C. G. Jung (New York: Causeway Books, 1975), p. 142.
- 25 – Ira Progoff, *Jung, Synchronicity and Human Destiny* (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 158.
- 26 – Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 350.
- 27 – Jung, *Synchronicity*, p. 99.
- 28 – C. G. Jung, *Civilization in Transition*, in *Collected Works*, 10:451–452.
- 29 – C. G. Jung: *Letters*, vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Adler and Aniela Jaffé (Princeton: Princeton University Press), p. 22.
- 30 – *Ibid.*, pp. 258–259.
- 31 – *Ibid.*, p. 447.
- 32 – As Robert Aziz has demonstrated, the "meaningfulness" Jung associates with synchronistic events consists in four interrelated layers of deepening significance: (a) the intrapsychic state and the objective event as "meaningful parallels," (b) the numinous charge asso-

ciated with the synchronistic experience (from R. Otto, a feeling of "grace" is conveyed), (c) the import of the subjective level of interpretation, and (d) the archetypal level of meaning (Robert Aziz, Ph.D. thesis, *C. G. Jung's Psychology of Religion and Synchronicity*, pp. 98–99; subsequently published by State University of New York Press, 1990).

- 33 – *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 34 – Jung, *Synchronicity*, pp. 69 ff.
- 35 – Nathan Sivin, *Chinese Alchemy: Preliminary Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 5.
- 36 – Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 2 : 281.
- 37 – Jung, *Synchronicity*, in *Collected Works*, 8 : 488.
- 38 – Chang Huai's "Treatise on Painting" as quoted in *Creativity and Taoism*, by Chang Chung-yuan (New York: Harper Colophon, 1963), p. 206.
- 39 – *Ibid.*, p. 207.
- 40 – Jung, Commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, p. 137.
- 41 – C. G. Jung, *The Symbolic Life*, in *Collected Works*, 18 : 68–69.
- 42 – C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, in *Collected Works*, 14 : 166.
- 43 – C. G. Jung, *The Holy Men of India*, in *Collected Works*, 11 : 576–586.
- 44 – Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 196–197.
- 45 – Jung, Commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, in *Collected Works*, 13 : 6–7.
- 46 – Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1957), p. 63.
- 47 – See, e.g., *Chandogya Upaniṣad* 6.12.1–3.
- 48 – See Karl H. Potter, *Advaita Vedanta Up to Samkara and His Pupils* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 76 ff. It should, however, be noted that Hindu Tantric systems share with Taoism a balanced emphasis on the inner and outer worlds. It just happens that Jung found his help in this regard from Chinese Taoist texts.
- 49 – Charles San, Introduction to *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, trans. Richard Wilhelm (New York: Causeway Books, 1975), p. xii. The book is said to go back in oral form to Lu Yen, an eighth-century Taoist adept.

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- 50 – Ibid., p. 4. It would be interesting to compare this Taoist notion of the transfigured body-spirit personality that survives death with the Christian doctrine of a resurrected transfigured body-spirit entity.
- 51 – Ibid., pp. 14 ff.
- 52 – Ibid., p. xi.
- 53 – Ibid., p. 87.
- 54 – C. G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, in *Collected Works*, 7 : 221.
- 55 – Jung, Commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, p. 89.
- 56 – Ibid., p. 90.
- 57 – Ibid., pp. 90–92.
- 58 – Ibid., p. 96. This is one of the few times Jung uses the term “conversion.”
- 59 – Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p. 197.
- 60 – Jung, Commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, p. 100.
- 61 – C. G. Jung, *A Psychological Approach to the Trinity*, in *Collected Works*, 11 : 156.
- 62 – C. G. Jung, *Good and Evil in Analytical Psychology*, in *Collected Works*, 10 : 463.
- 63 – C. G. Jung, “Ulysses”: *A Monologue*, in *Collected Works*, 15 : 126. Jung sees the many figures in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* as many small egos, like the many small egos of the drawing from *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. There is no one character or figure in the novel to represent the self.
- 64 – Jung, Commentary on *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, pp. 101–102. As a modern parallel to this description from the ancient Taoist text, Jung quotes from an experience of Edward Maitland: “Once started on my quest, I found myself traversing a succession of spheres or belts . . . the impression produced being that of mounting a vast ladder stretching from the circumference toward the center of a system, which was at once my own system, the solar system, and the universal system, the three systems being at once diverse and identical . . .” (p. 102).
- 65 – Ibid., p. 104.
- 66 – Ibid., pp. 106–113.
- 67 – Jung, of course, usually rejected the Eastern notion of individual rebirth, although toward the end of his life he came close to accept-

ing it. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he toys with the idea that rebirth might be conceived as a psychic projection and offers evidence from his own dreams (pp. 322–323).

- 68 – *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, p. 123.
- 69 – *Ibid.*
- 70 – *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- 71 – Lao Tzu, *Tao-Te Ching*, in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 139.
- 72 – Jung, *Commentary on The Secret of the Golden Flower*, pp. 128–129.
- 73 – *Ibid.*, p. 131 n. 1.
- 74 – *Ibid.*, pp. 131–132.
- 75 – *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 76 – “The Story of Carl Gustave Jung,” interview, BBC TV, 1972.
- 77 – Jung, *Commentary on The Secret of the Golden Flower*, pp. 133–134.
- 78 – *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 79 – Maurice Friedman, *To Deny our Nothingness* (New York: Delta, 1967), pt. vi.
- 80 – R. C. Zaehner, “A New Buddha and a New Tao,” in *A Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths*, ed. R. C. Zaehner (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959). Zaehner represents Jung as identifying God and the self with the collective unconscious (p. 404).
- 81 – C. G. Jung, *Aion*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 9, pt. 2, p. 223.
- 82 – Jung, *Commentary on The Secret of the Golden Flower*, pp. 128–135.
- 83 – *Ibid.*, p. 133. Jung frequently quotes from Paul, “No longer do I live, but Christ liveth in me,” as a manifestation of the self within a Christian context (e.g., p. 132).

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