

# OPPOSITION AND UNITY: SHAMANISTIC DUALISM IN TIBETAN AND CHINESE PRE-HISTORIC ART

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**Abstract.** This paper considers the possible development of dualistic thought through binary opposition, binary unity to dialectical dualism. The presumed scenes of fighting animals common in rock art and portable art, particularly in eastern Asia, are proposed to have had the role of dualist metaphors. The author also considers the frequent depiction of human faces or masks in the region's rock art and the role of the 'World Mountain', Mt Kunlun.

*The logic in mythical thoughts is as rigorous as that of modern science, and the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied.*

*Claude Lévi-Strauss*

## Structural anthropology

Collegiate books tell us that dualism began in the Greek Age. Yet since when did human thinking start? If human thought began with *Homo sapiens*, how, then, did it work without the basis of dualism? The cultural products of *Homo sapiens* are brimming with evidence of intellect and logic, founded on the notions of classification and binary opposition, and earlier traces of both occur from the Lower Palaeolithic onwards (Bednarik 1990). In other words, human thought would not exist without binary opposition. Philosophically speaking, from Aristotle and Plato to Hegel and Marx, dualistic logic seems to have developed along with the evolution of the human species. When we, however, carry out an intensive research into dualistic logic, we find that dualistic logic has eventually developed into a pure philosophy, but one whose ability to inspire development of society has been completely lost. What kind of role has dualistic logic played in human thinking and the process of civilisation? We should start our discussion from remote beginnings of the human being.

## Three kinds of dualistic thought

Three kinds of dualistic thought can be regarded as three stages of development: binary opposition, binary unity and dualistic dialectics.

### 1. Binary opposition

The definition of binary opposition is that the relationship between two contrary elements is purely confronting and struggling; nothing is unified or ever transforms into the reverse. This is the typical mode of thinking in shaman-

istic culture (Tang 1996a). In Lewis-Williams' point of view, binary opposition originated as early as the Upper Palaeolithic. He says:

Indeed, it seems probable that during the Upper Palaeolithic the great binary metaphor became a vehicle for multiple meanings that many have included notions of life and death, good and bad, though, of course, in formulations different from those that have run through the Western tradition down to the present day (Lewis-William 1996).

According to Bednarik (1990), the earliest trace of dualistic thought and its probable precursor is from the Lower Palaeolithic, when hominins distinguished between classes of objects, collecting those that were exotic and 'special' (such as crystals and fossils). Much later, this mode of thinking and cultural idea appeared as a basic motif in myths and epics all over the world. For example, in Tibetan historic sources, the myths and legends about the genesis of Bonism, Tibetan shamanism, give a prominence to binary opposition:

Firstly, two syllables 'hu-hu' from World Generator then came to the whole world. There are two tendencies about the genesis of the materials of the whole world. Firstly, a good-father came from a white egg, and he created all the good things; the black egg gave birth to a bad-father, and he created all the bad things in the world. The white man is also called 'shiner', and the god who discharges a positive function, the origin of good and the god of creator as well, while the black man represents negative, Non-Being, evils, famine, pestilence and disaster (Tucci 1989: 267-9).

A. Stein also gave the same description to the genesis myth of Bonism:

The black man is called 'Black Hell' (*dmyal-ba nag-po*). He makes all that is evil, divides day from night, lets fall

points the hawk for (killing) birds, the wolf for animals, men for cattle, the other for fish, demons for man. He creates discords, feuds and wars. He gives himself his own name 'master who likes Existence'. He gives soft warmth to the sun, shares out sun and moon anew, sets the stars in order, in short makes everyone happy. Even today, the pantheon is comprehensively summed up in the Tibetan bipartite term *Ha* and *aDre* (god-goblin), which clearly reflects a dualistic concept of existence (Stein 1983: 246–7).

Besides myths and legends, epics all over the world are also characterised by binary opposition. The essence of all epics involves the opposition and struggle between gods and devils, good and evil. But eventually, god's triumph over devils, good over evil, in which lies the cultural meaning of the binary opposition. This can be seen in the Tibetan epic entitled *Gesar*. As Stein pointed out, *Gesar*, the hero in the epic, dedicated his whole life to the suppressing of various devils (Stein 1983: 4). *Gesar* represents all that is positive, while the devils embody such things as famine, pestilence, paganism, rapacity, slaughter and others. In *Gesar*, some names of chapters clearly reflect the motif of binary opposition, such as 'The struggle between gods and devils: two holy mountains', 'The battle between white gods and black devils'. The epic begins with the struggle between the gods and devils, and how they win the battle in turn. Fighting between gods and devils is ceaseless. For Tibetans, the most important thing in daily life is how to defeat devils through helping gods or being helped by gods. Religious practices such as burning juniper branches, praying and circular stone heaps are relevant to the fighting between gods and devils. Moreover, many festivals and celebrations of Tibetans originate from this idea, such as horse racing, athletics and wrestling. Even today, wrestling is still a part of ceremonies. It symbolises the conflict between gods and devils, and the audience will often chant 'The gods of the sky are victorious, the demons are vanquished', as well as other exclamations (Tang 1996b).

On the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, at every crossroads is a big heap of mostly white stones. Sticks and wooden swords are set on the top of them. Every traveller that passes lays a stone on the cairn. At the same time he calls out, 'The gods of the sky are victorious, the demons are vanquished, *ki-ki so-so!*' The exclamations are war-cries, reflecting the warlike nature of the gods and the demons.

Tibetans hold that the human body, the home and the local environment are microcosms resting inside the other, but each of equal importance. The world at large, the macrocosm, is only the projection or extension of this inner world. The heap of stones is the reflection of 'the World Mountain' or 'the Cosmic Mountain', and the sticks symbolise the World Tree in the shamanistic cosmology. The very typical work which we follow here is entitled 'bSangs of the god, which honours kings (or victory)', and the myth in question occurs in the chapter devoted to gods of the sky. Mount Sumeru is described as a mountain in the centre of the world. The gods are described as living on the top of a big tree (the 'cosmic tree'), which grows on the top of the mountain. The tree's roots spread beneath the mountain's base, where the devils (*asuras*) live. The devils

covet the fruits of the tree, and a war between the gods (*devas*) and *asuras* ensues. In the morning, the *asuras* have the upper hand, but in the afternoon the gods are ahead. The world is peaceful when gods are victorious; otherwise, there are floods, pestilence and other disasters. For Tibetans, all the religious rituals are performed to ensure the gods' victory.

In fact, human activities, including art, have mostly been guided by the thought of binary opposition, on which our intellect and logic are founded. But its evolution in Chinese culture brings us to the second stage of dualistic thought.

## 2. Binary unity

Ancient Chinese culture is also characterised by shamanism (Zhang 1986: 4; Tang 1996c), in which binary opposition plays the most important part. However, during the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 B.C.), the philosophy changed and eventually made Chinese culture depart from that of the West. In other words, the shamanistic thinking of binary opposition started to transform into the dualism, which stresses binary unity. The work *Laotse*, written by Lidan, was the first to systematically demonstrate this new philosophical idea, whose purpose is to obliterate the distinction and opposition of dualism, and to uplift thorough transformation and complete unity as the only nature for dualism. This is more commonly known as the Chinese philosophy of *yin* and *yang*.

The typical shamanistic genesis indicates that the world was born from an egg. Due to the shamanistic nature of ancient Chinese culture, the myth of egg genesis is frequently mentioned in many historical sources, such as *Pangu* separating the sky and the earth, or *Huangdi* (Yellow Emperor) parting *yin* and *yang* etc. But it is *Laotse*, who narrated it in a perspective of philosophy. The egg that became the world is called 'the chaos' in his book:

There was something mixed up that had existed before heaven and earth were born. It was of loneliness, of independence without change, and of circuit without stop. It could be the mother for all the world. I don't know its name. But I am trying to give it the name 'Tao', and pen-name 'Great' (Zhu 1985: 100–1).

What is the Great Tao? *Laotse* gives a further explanation:

One *yin* and one *yang* make Tao, and creating creatures was called change (Zhu 1985: 127).

This is the so-called philosophy of Tao or *yin* and *yang*. In philosophical terms, the Tao is the entity that produces *yin* and *yang*, society before binary opposition, and the 'chaos' in the myth. Later, *Pangu* separated heaven and earth, and *Huangdi* parted *yin* and *yang*. Those two myths imply that human intelligence and culture, i.e. binary opposition, started to appear. Primitive chaos, then, was disturbed and order was introduced into human society. *Laotse* said that separation of heaven and earth and opposition of *yin* and *yang* resulted in civilisation, which also implies the downfall of society, antagonism, conspiracy, strikes and so forth. Therefore, if we want to get rid of this degeneration, we must firstly try to go back to 'chaos'. The only effective way to achieve this is to eliminate binary opposition in philosophy. *Laotse* denied opposition and difference in dualism of beauty and ugliness, easy and diffi-

cult, long and short, above and below, forward and backward etc. And Laotse also denied any moral value judgment in dualism, i.e. praising the positive. The only nature of dualism is association, unity, and dependence on each other and the ability to transform one into the other:

*Yin* and *yang* are changeable, one up while one down. The merging together of them results in perfection as chaos. They are in a condition of separation and amalgamation alternately. This is cosmic law and the vehicle wheel of the cosmos, whose terminal means beginning (Lu 1983: 30).

Thus in the Tao distinction and opposition do not exit. In the dualism, *yin* and *yang* fuse into one like a wheel with no beginning or ending. They are inseparably like water. Tao works like the alternative substitution of day and night produced by encirclement of the sun. Thus it is also called 'Round Tao'. In the Song Dynasty, this is diagrammatised as 'Tai-ji' ☯. This is the same explanation as Aristotles gave to the chaos, from which everything comes and to which everything eventually returns.

This is why Laotse's philosophy is considered as a retrograde philosophy. In all respects, including philosophy, politics and social system. Laotse suggested that we should go back to the time before the binary opposition. In perspective of digit. Tao is the mother of 'Two' (*yin* and *yang*), so Laotse also calls it 'One' or 'Oneness'. Since 'Two' makes society degenerate, we should abandon 'Two' or combine 'Two' to become 'One':

By obtaining One, the sky would be clear, earth would be tranquil, gods would be powerful, food would be abundant, all things on the earth would be full of life, the king could be an example to his people (Zhu 1984: 154-5).

Because One has a positive value judgement, Two, as the opposition of One, has a negative value judgement. The Chinese character 貳 (two) is not only used to express a number, but also used mostly in deprecatory senses, such as 'betrayal', 'to split' and others (Ye 1995: 26).

During the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220), Tao was well popularised. Archaeological information can show how comprehensively it was accepted. In the Neolithic age, in central China, the scene of a bird pecking a fish is the common motif painted on pottery (Fig. 1). This is the earliest diagram of the concept of binary opposition, or of *yang* vanquishing *yin*. Hui Nanzi, written in the Han Dynasty, explains this symbol:

Bird, one with feathers, *yang*; fish, one with scales, *yin* (Liu 1989: 24).

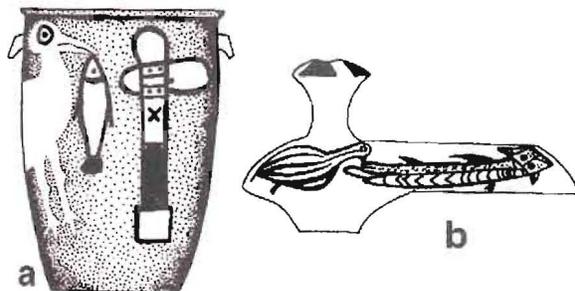


Figure 1. Scene of birds attacking fishes on painted pottery from Yangshao Culture, around 6600 B.C., in Henan (a) and Shanxi (b) Provinces.

Obviously, the scene of a bird pecking a fish reflects the struggle in dualism: a bird vanquishing a fish, *yang* vanquishing *yin*, positive vanquishing negative. During the Han Dynasty, however, the scene of a bird pecking a fish turned into the scene of a bird transforming a fish on the brick relief on the tombs in Henan province. Those composite figures also appear in the Han Dynasty book entitled *Shanhajing* (Fig. 2) This ancient motif, thus, became a symbol of a change from death (*yin*) to rebirth (*yang*).

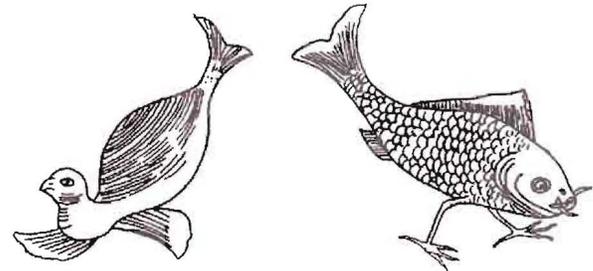


Figure 2. Bird-fishes from a Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) book entitled *Shanhajing*.

Even if Tao, the philosophy of *yin* and *yang*, had not been accepted as the orthodoxy in the Han Dynasty, the Tao still had a deep impact upon many things, such as the doctrine of mean in Confucianism and politics; Zen in Buddhism, in which even the distinction between life and death, the spiritual and the physical is denied; the medical theory of keeping an equilibrium between *yin* and *yang*; and the theory in painting following the principle between reality and unreality. In short, from the Han Dynasty on, Chinese culture started to develop a characteristic of its own, based on the thinking of binary unity.

Due to Laotse, aspects of Chinese culture, including philosophy, literature, art, medicine and religion, gradually departed from the West. The distinction between China and the West could be explained by the difference between 'One' and 'Two', which initially derived from philosophy. Compared with the West, ancient China was a philosophical society rather than a scientific society; the ancient Chinese stressed a spiritual world rather than an objective material world.

### 3. Dialectical dualism

The third stage of the development of dualism is dialectic dualistic, in which both opposition and unity are emphasised. Actually this is the dualism which we commonly comprehend. Dialectic dualistic is a pure philosophy that is not relevant to the pre-Historic art we are discussing here.

### Binary opposition and pre-Historic art

Since Franco-Cantabrian parietal art is an early art, and because it presumably reflects the human ideology of the time, we could start our discussion with it.

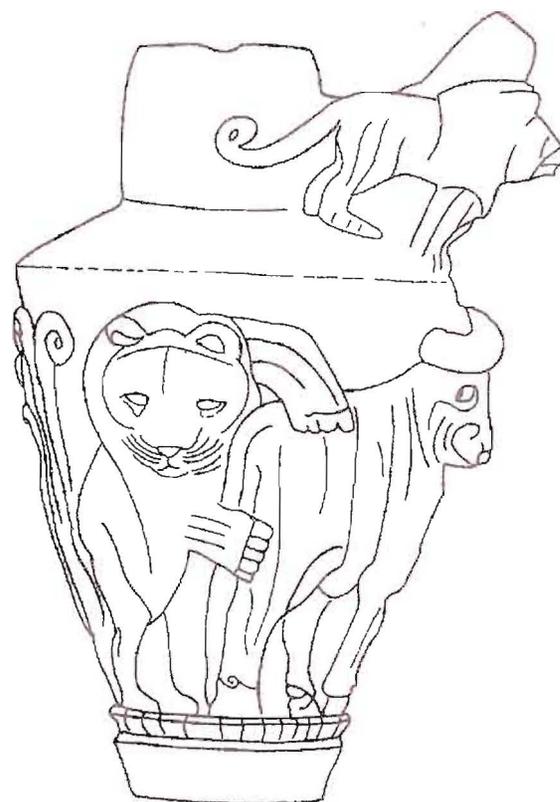
Besides Lewis-Williams, whom we mentioned above, A. Leroi-Gourhan also made a contribution in this respect. Leroi-Gourhan proposed after his structural analysis of Franco-Cantabrian parietal images that they are depicted in a dualistic structure of gender. Horses and bovinds account

for over half of the images in this parietal art. In his model horse and bovid are used to express the concept of gender rather than animal: the horse represents the male while the aurochs/bison symbolises the female. No matter what kind of animal, they are all depicted according to the symbols which show the animal's gender in a dualistic relation: juxtaposition, opposition, association and pairing. In a herd of animals, even different kinds of animals can be divided into two genders: goats, stags and mammoths embody the male while bulls and female deer represent the female. That is to say, in this classification the natural gender of an animal does not apply; artificial marks embody the animal's gender instead. An ancient cultural concept expressed through natural images, that of nature vs culture and male vs female, is postulated. Leroi-Gourhan does not explain why the Upper Palaeolithic people painted animals in such a way, or what cultural meaning parietal art might have. He does, however, suggest that it probably reflects a kind of primitive religious thought (Leroi-Gourhan 1967: 113–20), but his speculations and much of his chronological sequence are now widely rejected.

#### *1. Scenes of 'fighting animals'*

The presumed scene of fighting animals is a common artistic theme, which has been repeating in rock art. It could be taken as a reflection of the binary opposition of shamanism. The scene is predominantly composed of a beast ('tiger', 'leopard', 'eagle', 'wolf') and in certain cases, a so-called 'mythological animal' chasing or attacking its presumed prey ('goat', 'horse', 'cattle', 'deer' etc.). In the northern steppes of China, for instance, scenes of 'leopards chasing deer' and 'tigers attacking yaks' have frequently been discovered.

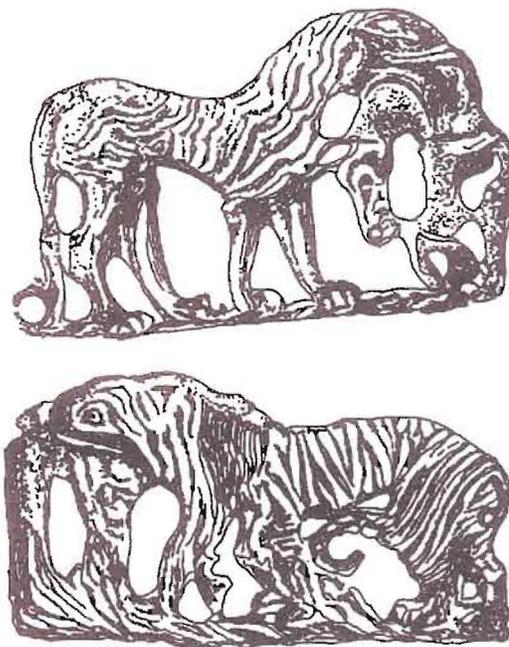
The appearance of the theme in its explicit and definite form was found in Mesopotamian art. A lion attacking a cow carved in the relief of a pot, preserved in the national museum of Iran, is a piece of work made by the Sumerians 3500 B.C. (Fig. 3). This theme represents a Sumerian legend: the cow is the symbol of the moon and the dark, while the lion represents the sun and light. It is a metaphor of light dispelling the dark (Lommel 1966: 11–19). This legend reflects something like the shamanistic thought of binary opposition, whose cultural meaning is that the positive vanquishes the negative. In shamanism as in most ideologies, basic binary opposition is composed of god and devil, white and black, light and the dark, right and wrong, powerful and powerless, up and down, much and less, big and small, holy and secular, fertility and infertility, strong and weak, success and failure, happiness and disaster, etc. The former represent the positive aspect and the latter represent the negative. This composition has a definite cultural meaning: the positive defeats the negative, and consequently, has a religious function that expels the devil and blesses and protects the people. For instance, in the northern steppes of China, the bronze plaques of the Han Dynasty are predominantly decorated with designs of 'fighting animals' (Fig. 4). Actually they are amulets rather than ornaments. As a system in early human thinking, these abstract cultural ideas seem to have been expressed mainly through symbolic forms of animals



**Figure 3.** Scene of lions attacking bulls on a stone pot from Mesopotamian culture, around 3500 B.C., after Strommenger.

and plants. Rock art is one of the symbolic expressions of these cultural ideas.

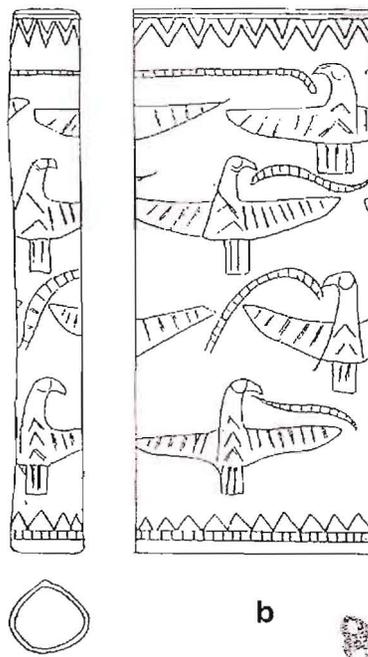
In Neolithic China, presumed scenes of animals fighting appeared frequently on painted pottery. A painted jar, for



**Figure 4.** Bronze plaques with design of tiger attacking deer of the Han Dynasty, from Inner Mongolia.



**Figure 5.** (a) Eagle and snake images made of gold, from ancient Egypt, after Zengtian Jinvi. (b) The scene of eagles pecking snakes on eagle leg bone, from Kayue culture in Qinghai, around 1000 B.C.



**Figure 6.** The scene of an 'eagle' eating a 'snake', modern Tibetan painting.

instance, discovered from tombs in Henan Province had a scene of a bird pecking a fish. Here, as we mentioned before, the bird represents *yang*, heaven, god and life, while the fish embodies *yin*, devil and most importantly, life over death. Correspondingly, in Europe and other places of the world, an eagle vs. a snake respectively symbolises heaven and hell, the sun and the dark, gods and devils. This was discovered as early as the time of ancient Egypt (Fig. 5a). A myth of ancient Egypt says: 'Apofis (in the shape of a snake, representing darkness) lives in darkness. He is the enemy of light. When night comes down he gets up from darkness, and waits there to attack and swallow sun-god Ra. He wants light swallowed by darkness' (Li Yongdong 1998: 88). In the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, this artistic theme has persisted from ancient times until today (Figs 5b and 6).

In Zhongyuan in the centre of China, however, due to Taoism, binary opposition transformed into binary unity during the Han Dynasty. Consequently, the scenes of a bird vs. a fish turned into a transformation of *yin* and *yang*, death and life or a symbol of intercourse between the male and female. Archaeological information, such as the scene of a bird (a fish) transforming into a fish (a bird), vividly shows us this transformation.

The other scene relevant to dualism is the myth of Dong Wanggong (king of the east) and Xi Wangmu (queen of the west). It is also an important design on the brick relief from the Han tombs (Fig. 9). Dong Wanggong has a compass, a symbol of sky or the sun (sometimes with a bird in it), in his hands; Xi Wangmu has a rectangle, a symbol of earth or a moon (sometimes with a frog), in her hands. Both of them are frequently depicted with the tail of a snake, which is often tangled.

Furthermore, binary opposition is also depicted through human social activities, such as hunting, wrestling, battle etc. The 'gladiator' designs on copper plaques are still used by Tibetans as amulets (Fig. 10). In *The golden bough*, Frazer pointed out that at a special pair of the Spring and

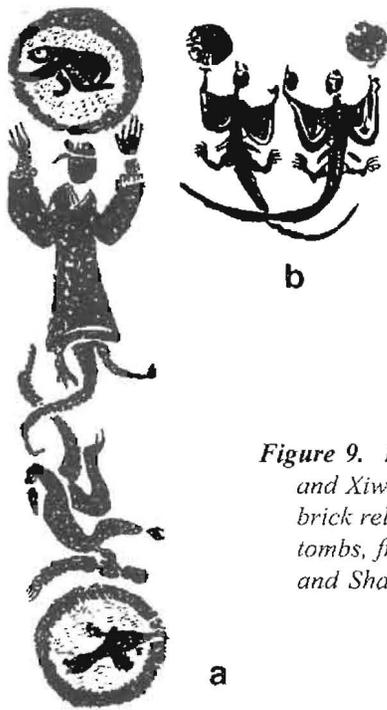
**b**



**Figure 7.** A 'tiger' attacking 'yaks' from Helimu rock art site in Qinghai, around 1000 B.C.



**Figure 8.** Scene of 'leopards' chasing 'deer', from the Ritu site in Tibet.



**Figure 9.** *Dongwanggong and Xiwangmu on the brick relief of the Han tombs, from Sichuan (a) and Shandong (b).*

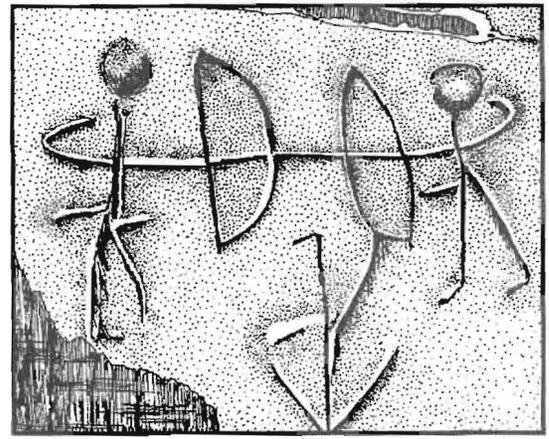
Autumn festivals people performed wrestling in the religious ceremonies. On these occasions the participants are divided into two teams, which represented Winter and Spring, light and dark, good and bad in a struggle respectively. In ancient German mythology, a wrestling was considered to be fighting between the god of Spring and devils. In oriental countries, wrestling was seen as a fight between Adornis and his enemies (Frazer 1987: 16). Okladnikov mentioned that, in the harvest day of the Yakut people, young people are divided into two teams that embody light and darkness, good and bad, to perform the wrestling in the ceremony (Okladnikov 1980). The Algonkin in North America play a game, which also divides people into two teams, one symbolising *life* and the other *death*. Yet the *life* team always wins (Levi-Strauss 1966: 31–2) (Fig. 11).



**Figure 11.** *Bronze plaque with pattern of 'wrestling' of the Han Dynasty, from Inner Mongolia.*

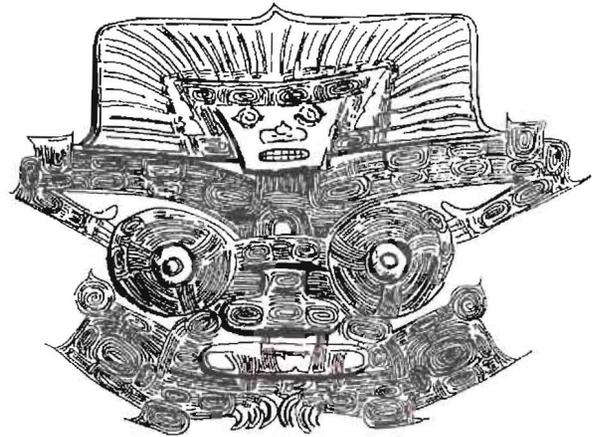
## 2. Depiction of the human face

In Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Shandong, Fujian and other provinces, many rock art sites containing the depictions of apparent human faces have been discovered. There are many theoretical explanations for the depiction of the human face, but few of them are clear. We try, here, to apply the theory



**Figure 10.** *'Gladiator images' from Lushan rock art site in Qinghai.*

of binary opposition to the human faces or masks. We should begin our analysis with the *yuzong*, the jade sacrificial objects found in the Liangchu culture in Zhejiang province. The Liangchu culture can be dated back to the Neolithic age, around 6000 years BP (Fig. 12).



**Figure 12.** *The sun god on jade-ware of the Liangchu culture, 3000 B.C., from Zhejiang.*

In ancient China, the *yuzong* was an oblation offered to the earth. The *yuzong* takes the shape of a square outside and is round inside, and in the middle it has a perforation. It is about 40–80 mm in both width and height. Most *yuzong* found in the Liangchu culture were carved with designs of human faces. In 1988, many *yuzong* were discovered from the Yaoshan site and the Fanshan site in Zhejiang province. In the middle of the Yaoshan site, archaeologists also found a square platform built of earth, which is about 70 × 70 cm in square and 65–85 cm in height. As for the usage of the *yuzong*, Zhouli, in a work of the Zhou Dynasty (1100–771 B.C.) about various religious ceremonies, gives a definition: yellow *yuzong* was used to worship the earth. Zheng Xuan, a scholar of the Han Dynasty, gave a further explanation:

Worshipped the earth with *yuzong*, especially in summer solstice, for the god was at the top of Mt Kunlun, which faces to Heaven (Ling 1985: 193).

This sentence seems to imply that Mt Kunlun is the same as the World Mountain or the Cosmic Mountain. The

word *Kunlun* is from the Xiongnu (Hun) language and means 'Heaven Mountain' (Tang 1996b), the only place leading to heaven. In the cosmic myth of shamanism, the World Mountain as the centre pillar or earth axle connects the heaven and the earth. In shamanistic regions, people could nominate a certain mountain as the World Mountain, and a big tree as the World Tree. If on a plain, people would build a high platform, or erect a pole, a stone heap or a palace as the World Mountain to connect heaven and earth.

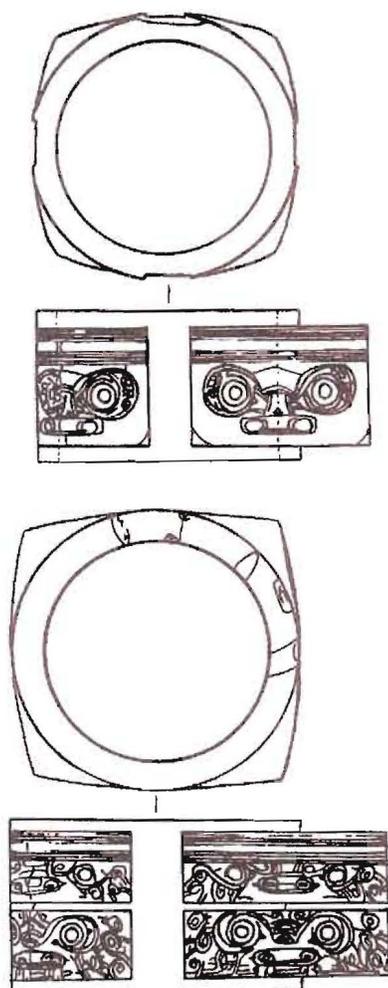


Figure 13. *Yuzong* with human face patterns, from the *Liangchu* culture in Zhejiang.

We can propose that the square platform called the *she* in Chinese, which means 'community', represents the World Mountain. Thus the human face on the *yuzong*, used to worship Mt Kunlun, the World Mountain, is the god of the *she*, and also the god of Mt Kunlun, the heavenly god and the god of the sun. The shape of the *yuzong* merits attention: the square outside represents the earth; the round inside represents heaven, and the perforation embodies the heavenly pillar or the earth axle that connects heaven and earth (Fig. 13). In this sense the *yuzong* could also be regarded as *Kunlun*. Historic work, entitled *Taipin Yulan*, of the Song Dynasty, describes *Kunlun* as air in the shape of a pillar leading up to heaven. *Kunlun* was the centre of the earth and the heavenly pillar.

Before we compare the design of human faces with the heavenly god and the sun god, we should first try to summarise the traits of the heaven god and the sun god in shamanism. The gods reside in heaven or on top of the mountain and tree. Therefore, they are always associated with birds (the eagle), mountains, trees, clouds, circles (the sun) and rays of light. Secondly, in many ancient myths, the sun was regarded as eye of the heaven. In Brahmanism, for instance, Surya, the sun god, is called 'the creator of light', 'the eyes of the world' (Ye et al. 1993: 274). The ancient Irish word '*suil*' means eye, but in some other European languages, such as Lithuanian and Latvian, it means sun (*saul*) (Gimbutas 1989: 221–30). Archaeological information about ancient Egypt provides more evidence that the sun god (also the heavenly god), the eagle and eyes combined with the sun god, Ra, and was called Ra-Horakhti (Fig. 14). But Horas was usually depicted as a pair of eyes, which were believed by ancient Egyptians to be able to bless people with health and happiness (Zengtian 1983: 2). The scarab amulets in ancient Egypt are also a symbol of the eye and the sun.

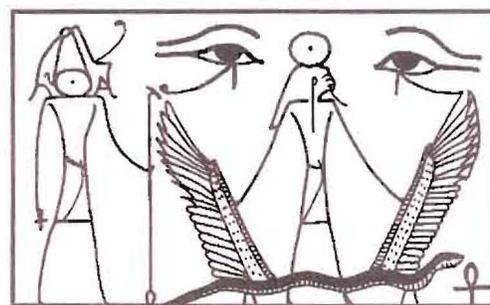


Figure 14. Eye image, representing Ra-Horakhti, sun god in ancient Egypt.

Now we return to the human faces, the gods of the *Kunlun*, referring to the ancient Chinese historic sources. The human face carvings on the *yuzong*, including in rock art, are the gods of the heaven and the sun. They have many names in classical literature, but the most important one was '*Huang Di*'.

*Huang Di* literally means 'yellow emperor'. But in the very beginning, in the Shang (1600–1100 B.C.) and Zhou Dynasties (1100–771 B.C.), '*Di*' meant 'god' (Fig. 15). The ancient Chinese used four colours to represent four directions: white/north, black/west, blue/east, red/south and the centre was represented by yellow. So '*Huang Di*' (yellow god) also means 'the god of the centre' (Xiao 1997: 213–28). Mt Kunlun was located in the centre of the earth, so it is worshipped with yellow *yuzong*. A historic book of the Han Dynasty, entitled *Yingdi Wangpian*, says that 'the god of the centre is called *Hundun*'. Etymologists believe that *Hundun* = *Kunlun* = *Huang Di* (Pang 1992). In *Mutianzi Zhuan*, the biography of Emperor Mu, written in the Warring States Period (457–221 B.C.), it is recorded that someone who could climb Mt Kunlun could visit the palace of the *Huang Di*. In ancient Chinese literature 黃 (*huang*, yellow) could be replaced by 皇 (also pronounced as *huang*, meaning *great*, *beginning* and *creation*). The structure of

this character reflects directly the Yellow God as the god of the *Kunlun*: the upper radical is 日 (sun), and lower part is 土 (earth) or 王 (king). It is a character which symbolises the connection of the heaven and the earth, and whose meaning came directly from a shamanistic genesis myth.

What traits do human faces of the *yuzong* and the rock art have (Fig. 16)? Their most salient feature is their eyes, which are large, and, in some cases, depicted as more than

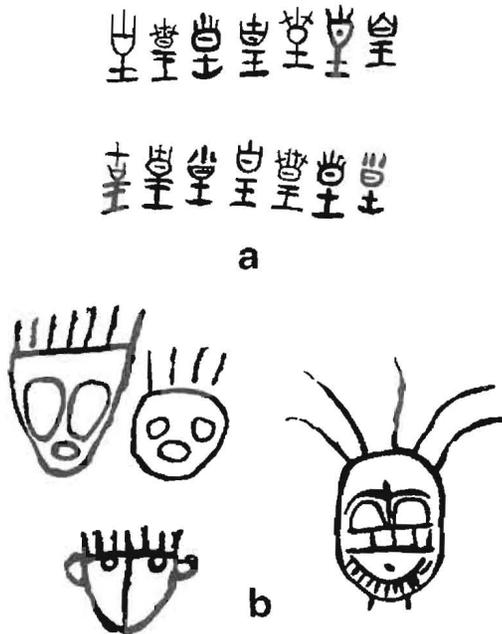


Figure 15. (a) Ancient Chinese ideographs for 'huang', meaning 'great, beginning, creation'. (b) Human face patterns called 'Huang Di', from the Yinshan petroglyphs site, Inner Mongolia.

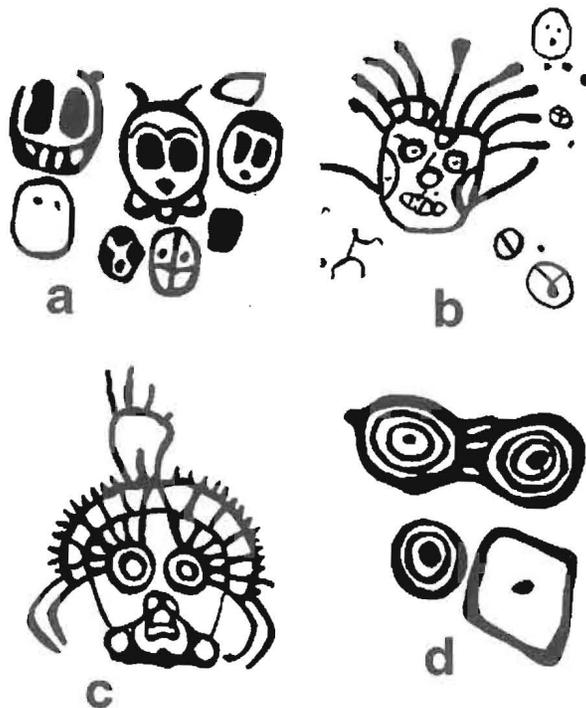


Figure 16. Petroglyphs of 'human faces', stressing eyes, from Helan Mountains in Ningxia.

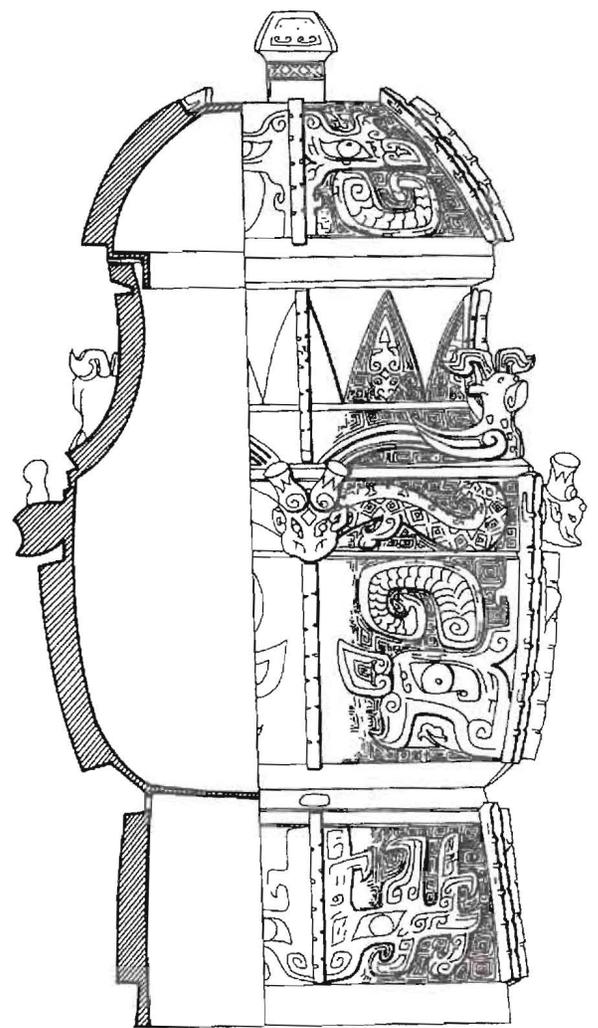


Figure 17. Taotie patterns on bronze-ware of the Shang Dynasty, from Shanxi Province.

one or two circles. Some human faces only have eyes that consist of more than two pupils. They recall a description in *Shanhaijing*, a work of the Han Dynasty, in which the Huang Di has eyes with two pupils. In the Bronze Age, eyes were given a further prominence. The design called *Taotie* (Fig. 17) is also the god of heaven and the sun. As we have already mentioned, the eyes are usually emphasised. But only a few scholars have found this to be true (Takayasu Higuchi 1990: 135–204).

The Chinese genesis myth holds that, in the very beginning, chaos was the only existence and, later, heaven and earth were separated, *yin* and *yang* were parted by Huang Di. Thus, only Huang Di is able to connect *yin* and *yang*, represent earth and heaven, death and life, secular and holy, devil and god, etc. Huang Di was also regarded as a symbol of rebirth, longevity and reproduction. So Huang Di said that mounting *Kunlun* made people become immortal and gods, for it was the place in which the Great God lived.

Because the gods live in the heaven or on the summit of a mountain, human faces are usually depicted besides on the *yuzong*, on jade in roundish and semiround shapes (heaven), semicircles with three projecting sticks (mountain), clouds, birds (Figs 18 and 19). As the sun god, some

human faces are depicted with rays of light or birds. As the World Mountain connecting the three worlds, heaven, earth and hell, Mt Kunlun was artistically and documentary described as a mountain with three levels or with a tree.

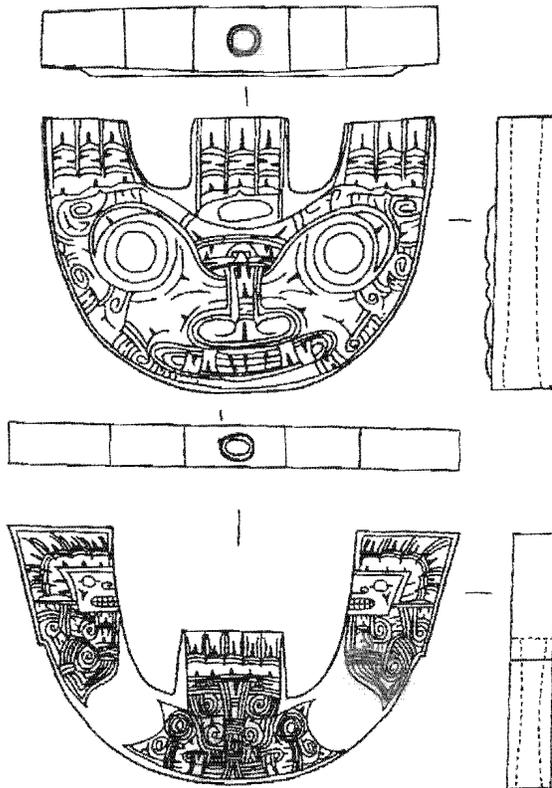


Figure 18. Human face patterns carved on two jades, whose shape represents the World Mountain, from the Liangchu culture in Zhejiang.

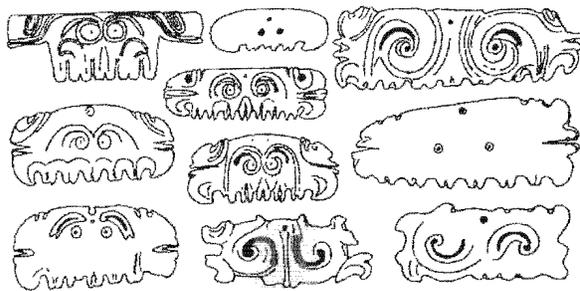


Figure 19. The heaven gods carved on jades in the shape of clouds, Hongshan culture, around 7000 BP, in Inner Mongolia.

In rock art, human face images are usually found in places considered to be the World Mountain, such as Mt Helan. In Xiongnu language *helan* means *heaven*, the same as *Kunlun* (Tang 1996b). Even if certain mountains, in which rock art of human faces is located, are not named *heaven*, they can be considered as World Mountains and Cosmic Mountains (Fig. 20).

Finally, we can come to a conclusion that the designs of apparently human faces in ancient Chinese art are not only the representation of the positive in binary opposition, but also are the image of Huang Di, the most important character

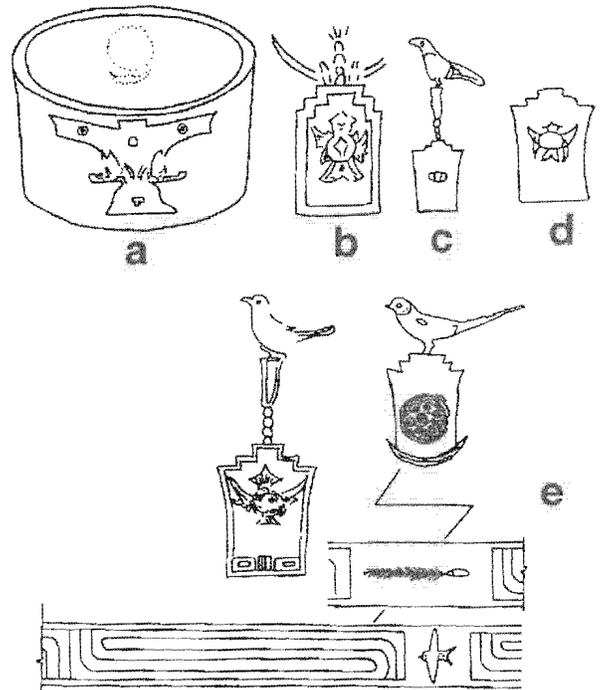


Figure 20. Jade designs representing the World Mountain and Sun God, from the Liangchu (a-d) and Hemudu (e) cultures.

in Chinese mythology. He was not only the god of the *she* (community), *Kunlun*, *Taotie*, heaven and the sun, but also the symbol of reproduction, longevity, rebirth, life and other cultural concepts.

### Conclusion

Through our analysis we can learn about the relationship between binary opposition thought and pre-Historic art in just a cursory examination. But it is enough to provide us with a new view and approach to pre-Historic civilisation. All cultural products, including art, derive from human thinking. Most of the pre-Historic cultural products came from the thinking of binary opposition. Levi-Strauss once used dialectic dualism instead, which, as we know, is far from the thinking of binary opposition and from the pre-Historic society and culture. But his approach of research is perfect, just as he said that the only difference between mythical thought and modern thought is the things to which we apply thinking.

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