

The Notion of Coldness in Huai-nan-tzu

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Professor Werner Eichhorn, an eminent specialist for the cultural history of China, analysed in his numerous studies very different problems including the cult of the God of Coldness in his latest book *Die alte chinesische Religion und das Staatskultwesen* (Leiden 1976). This encourages the present author to contribute a small study on a similar subject. Due to the lack of place a coherent account on Huai-nan-tzu's (= HNT) system of thought could not be presented.

When recently writing the study *A Mobile Freezer in China in B. C. 99?*,¹ dealing with the history of ice, I concluded that the HNT text presents a fair amount of ideas on coldness. Those ideas undoubtedly belong to its cosmology or, more exactly, to the author's – or authors' – concept of the regions surrounding China. It seems that HNT pays more attention to the north and thus to the relevant notions of coldness, ice, snow, etc. HNT states explicitly: „*The Chou penetrated to the four extremities but they did not spy into the north*“ (chapter 12, p. 205, lines 1–2).

At this occasion HNT relates the travels of Lu Ao, an erudite of Ch'in Shih-huang-ti, who, when wandering near the Northern Sea, passed the Great Yin (= North) and through the Dark Tower, Hsüan-ch'üeh, entered beyond the Meng-ku mountains (12, 204, 13). Hsüan is another symbol for the north. Later, in the end of the 1st cent. A.D., Wang Ch'ung disparaged those „Taoist Untruths“ (Tao-hsü) in the 24th chapter of his *Lung-heng* pointing i. a. to the same text of HNT.² Forke even identified Meng-ku with „Mongolian plateau“,³ undoubtedly because of phonetic similarity. Meng-ku is not the only denomination of the Far North in Han and pre-Han literature. In one of the fragments of Shen Pu-hai (died between 340–337 B.C.) we find the place-name Tan-erh⁴ and we might list more of such terms. It seems however preferable to find out why the notion of coldness and, for that matter, of its counterpart – heat –, may have acquired a relative importance in traditional Chinese thought.

It is the idea of cosmic harmony which we find i. a. in another, difficult fragment of Shen Pu-hai.⁵ The stress is on the differing methods of the ruler and of the minister. While the first, according to Creel, acquiesces (*yin*), the other acts (*wei*). We prefer however the translation of T.A. Metzger who translates *yin* as „*following and relying on spontaneous tendencies*“:⁶ „*Coldness is obtained by relying on winter to bring it about; warmth is obtained by relying on summer to bring it about; what else need the ruler to do?*“⁷ In order not to disturb the proper order of the nature the 5th chapter of the HNT, one of the „monthly ordinances“ type, states: „*Should during the last month of the winter the summer ordinance*

(*hsia-ling*) be introduced... the ice and the coldness would melt away and dissolve“ (5, 83, 15). This means that the summer condition would prevail in the winter.

There would be a similar situation if there would occur thunder during the winter and the hoarfrost during the summer. Both of it would „be born by the rebelling *ch'i*“ (8, 115, 7). Nevertheless if there is thunder and lightning during the winter while there is hoarfrost and snow during the summer, the forces of coldness and heat do not change“ (17, 292, 5). „It is like when the fire is hot by itself while the ice is by itself cold“ (10, 155, 11). There should be a proper time relation between the water, the „element“ or „phase“ most often alluded to by the author of HNT, and ice: „If the water moves towards the winter, it freezes and becomes ice. If the ice is meeting the spring, it melts and becomes water. Ice and water exchange themselves before and after as if something round would be running“ (2, 21, 2).⁸

There is even a relation between the water and the *ch'i*: „The cold *ch'i*, from the amassed *yin*, becomes water“ (3, 35, 6). On the other hand it is the *ch'i* of the *yang* which dissolves the frost (3, 41, 4). When the *ch'i* of the *yin* becomes victorious, it freezes and becomes hoarfrost and snow (3, 35, 13). Thus we see that *yin* is represented in different forms of aggregation. On the other hand the coldness and heat are both representatives of the *yin* and *yang* forces respectively and they, consequently, do not undergo any principal changes.

The principal forces manifest themselves even with different groups of people: „The sage dwells in the *yin* while the common man dwelt in the *yang*. The sage man moves in the water while the common man dwells on the hoarfrost“ (17, 301, 1–2).⁹ Kao Yu, probably in the beginning of the 3rd century A.D., comments that the Sage passes the water without following some trace while the common man merely follows the traces as left on the hoarfrost and snow.

The knowledge of coldness – snow, ice, etc. is indispensable since it differentiates men from primitive animals. The following Taoist anecdote may be found in several books. According to Chuang-tzu 17, „*Jo, the God of the North Sea, stated: ,You can't discuss ice with a summer insect – it is bound to a single season*“.¹⁰ HNT (1, 7, 3) states the same, with the difference that it mentions coldness instead of ice.¹¹ But the anecdote is of a political character as we may see if we compare it with a similar text in the Lü-shih *ch'un-ch'iu* 17: „One cannot induce the animals without bones (i. e. insects) to know the ice. If an enfeoffed ruler is able to understand those words, no calamity will be coming upon him“.¹² Kao Yu, who commented both the HNT and the Lü-shih *ch'un-ch'iu*, explains: „A ruler of a ruined country who does not know how to expel the desires and cruelty, who does not carry out humanity and favour, is like an insect without bones, born in spring and dying in fall– he does not know the ice and snow of the winter's coldness“.¹³

The ice, too, may be dangerous but at the same time it makes possible the foreseeing. „If one turns oneself on one place and treads on thin ice, (there may) be a scaly dragon below“ (17, 298, 9). The danger, according to Kao Yu, is that

this kind of dragon hurts the people. Speaking on the dialectics of the beginning and of the end, rise and fall, the author of the HNT quotes the *Book of Changes*: „When there is a hoarfrost, solid ice is not far off.“¹⁴ To which HNT (11, 170, 8) adds: „The sage man's observation of the end and of the beginning is subtle.“¹⁵ It might again be the sage who „explains the great by means of the small“: „One sees a falling leaf and knows the year's end; observing the ice in the vase, one knows the coldness of the realm“ (16, 286, 1). We have a similar text in the HNT chapter on the warfare¹⁶ which ends as follows: „The faraway is judged according to the near“.

Finally, among the HNT quotations devoted seemingly to the nature only, we have the following important one: „When the great coldness comes and the frost and snow have fallen, thereafter the luxuriance of the pine and the cypress are known“ (2, 22, 3). E. Kraft¹⁷ refers properly to Chuang-tzu¹⁸ but she somehow fails to notice that the quotation refers to Confucius and the troubles he encountered during his travels through China.¹⁹ After all, the quotation is that of Confucius himself²⁰ who refers, in the parable of the pine and the cypress, to the *Book of Songs*.²¹ Kao Yu is probably right when he believes that frost and snow symbolize the small people with their intrigues while the *chün-tzu* is represented by the well-known and evergreen trees.²²

Kraft, who studied the first two chapters of the HNT, does not try to answer the question whether the permanent circulation and permutation between the water and the ice may be interpreted as an interplay of birth and death, since the text of the HNT itself leaves the problem open.²³ We may state, as a preliminary conclusion, that the symbolism of water, snow, frost, ice, etc., as used in the HNT, is much broader.

Since the HNT 5, as well as the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* and some other books, represents a kind of peasant calendar (*yüeh-ling*), it presents inevitably some observations on coldness. It is during the spring, „when the easter wind dissolves the coldness, that the hibernating insects begin to shake and revive while the fishes carry ice on their back“ (5, 69, 9). To the contrary, when the frost is first falling, all working people (*pai-kung*) rest“ (5, 79, 8). When „the *ch'i* of the yang daily decreases, the water begins to congeal“ (5, 78, 10). During the ninth month „the water begins to be ice-bound and begins to freeze. The pheasants enter the great water and transform themselves into oysters“ (5, 80, 10). This is one of the periods of a more general transformation. During the tenth month „the ice becomes more strong, the earth begins to crack“ (5, 81, 15)²⁴. Finally, during the eleventh month, „the ice is frozen and thaws“ (5, 83, 15)²⁵.

Another relatively coherent account on the ice is to be found in the „geographical“ chapter 4 of the HNT (according to Erkes: Belehrung über die Erdoberfläche). We already know that HNT mentions the ignorance of the north by the Chou. This may be i. a. due to Ch'in Shih-huang-ti, who „attacked the Liao-River in the north and annexed Korea“ (18, 322, 1–3), that the author of the HNT acquired more knowledge (or inspiration for developing his phantasy) in this re-

gard. The North was known as Amassed Ice – Chi-ping – (4, 58, 6) and a mountain in the Far North had the name The Gate of Coldness (Han-men; 4, 58, 12). It was also denoted as a country which „*is dark, obscure, without light, where the heaven closes itself, a place where coldness and ice are amassed*“ (4, 61, 15–16). There is, in the north, even the permafrost, literally „*not dissolving snow*“ (4, 59, 13).²⁶

The last statement is explained by Kao Yu as a kind of parallelism: „*The south is warm and therefore we find there plants which do not die. The north is cold and the ice there does therefore neither melt nor dissolve*“. It is fairly possible that at some occasion the Han Chinese went as far as the permafrost zone of Siberia (a line between the upper reaches of the rivers Ob and Yenisei and, further to the east, Amur). Some elements of phantasy must have, of course, played some role, too, since we are informed (12, 193, 7–8) on a peculiar animal of the north. The former part of its body resembled the rat while the hinder one the hare.

Of course, even the people of antiquity had troubles with the cold and hot weather (cf. the beginning of HNT 13), there were calamities of hunger and cold (11, 186, 10), because the men are able „*to screen themselves from the wind and rain but they are unable to open and close the coldness and heat*“ (15, 265, 5). Nevertheless, the people of antiquity gave preference to their bodies and, somehow surprisingly, exposed them to the coldness and heat without using the fur or cover respectively (15, 265, 11). Of course, the feeling of coldness and warmth may be corrected by the movements of the body (2, 31, 11).²⁷ There is also another method: „*A man who is chilled takes the double cloth of spring while a man suffering from the heat looks for a cool breeze of the fall*“ (2, 27, 6).²⁸ But the meaning of the last quotation is deeper and we may accept the opinion of Kraft: „*D. h. man geht nur nach außen, weil einem innen etwas fehlt; doch gerade das Fehlende kann man außen nicht finden*“. ²⁹ In other words – men are unable to control the coldness and heat. As the HNT states almost immediately: „*What the men received from Heaven, the relation between flesh and skin to the coldness and the heat, is in fact a single one*“ (2, 29, 12).³⁰

Therefore the sages were not stiff as if they were frozen and congealed; to the contrary, they were able to transform themselves (13, 223, 6).³¹ The nature is ruled by two principal forces *yang* and *yin*, each of which „*either warms and scorches the sand or colds and freezes the water. Therefore the sage is very careful of what he amassed*“ (14, 248, 1). It may be right that the sage should be rather indifferent. HNT 7 (109, 13–14) presents a parable on a wall which has to be built and shall – inevitably – be liquidated; on ice which has to freeze and shall – with the same inevitability – disperse. This is very well explained by Kao Yu: „*It is best when, before becoming wall or ice, (the process of) the liquidation or of the freezing might (already) have been performed*“. It is, evidently, necessary to have the capacity to foresee and, if necessary, to evade the detours slowing down the reaching of the main aim – the transformation. There may occur quite strange things, f. i. when the glue³² is melted in the winter or when the ice is produced during the

summer but, as far as the Tao is concerned, it has nothing that private that it would follow (6, 91, 10).

The principal transformation is however that of the *ch'i* of the *yang* and *yin* forces respectively or, if we wish, that between the heat and coldness. „*The ch'i of the yang rises in the north-east and it expires in the south-west. The ch'i of the yin rises in the south-west and it expires in the north-east. The beginning of both the yin and yang harmonize themselves and succeed each other – they are mutually similar. But when the days of both of them become longer, they fight each other and the distance between them becomes great*“ (14, 248, 15–16).³³

Such a transformation coincides with the attitude of the sage who thus indirectly respects the two moving forces and pays, just as the author of the HNT does, great attention to the coldness (and heat). If we now come back to the circulation (Kreislauf) between ice and water as formulated by Kraft, we may conclude that it is but a part of a much larger circulation which we may, in agreement with the title of the study of T.H. Davis, call the dualistic cosmology of Huai-nan-tzu; the life and death do not seem to be relevant.³⁴

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- 1 Acta Orientalia Hungarica 31 (1977), 3, pp.311–346.
- 2 For the translation see A. Forke, *Lun-heng*. Part I: *Philosophical Essays of Wang Ch'ung*, Leipzig 1907, p.338.
- 3 Ibidem, note 6. For the commentary of Kao Yu and for modern commentaries to the Lun-heng cf. Huang Hui, *Lun-heng chiao-shih*, T'ai-pei reprint 1964, p.313. None of the commentators accepts the etymology of Forke.
- 4 Fragment 17 (3) as edited by H.G. Creel, *Shen Pu-hai. A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century B.C.*, Chicago 1974, p.375. We find the story related by Shen Pu-hai also in the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 17, 3, p.204 of the Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng edition.
- 5 17 (4). Creel, *Shen Pu-hai*, p.375.
- 6 See his „Ultimate Wisdom“ or „Applied Psychology“? – *A review of Creels's Shen Pu-hai*, p.23 in the newsletter *Early China* 2, Fall 1976.
- 7 Ibidem, pp.23–24.
- 8 Cf. Kraft, *Zum Huai-nan-tzu I*, pp.255, lines 29–34; II, p.174.
- 9 Yü Yüeh, p.641 explains, against the opinion of Wang Nien-sun, that the present text of the HNT is correct.
- 10 Wang Hsien-ch'ien, *Chuang-tzu chi-chieh* 1, 17, p.91; edition Shanghai 1956. The translation is that of B. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu* New York 1968, pp.175–6.
- 11 Evidently therefore Yü Yüeh, p.581 refers to another text which has „winter ice“.
- 12 *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 17, 3, p.204. Cf. R. Wilhelm, *Frühling und Herbst des Lü Bu We*, Köln 1971 reedition, p.270.
- 13 Idem. Cf. Kraft II, p.145.
- 14 Chou I, second hexagram. Translation by R. Wilhelm and C.F. Baynes, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, Princeton 1966.
- 15 Cf. Wallacker, *The Huai-nan-tzu. Book Eleven*, p.30.
- 16 A similar text is found in HNT 15, 264, 2–3: „Therefore in the shadow of the hall one knows the succession of the sun and of the moon; looking upon the water in the vase, one knows the coldness of the realm“. „Water“ instead of „ice“ is evidently a misprint; cf. the commentary of Yü Yüeh, p.633. This chapter of the HNT was thoroughly studied in Wallacker's study from 1972 but from the point of Liu An's military plans and psychology.
- 17 I, p.258, lines 20–22 and the note 286.
- 18 Chuang-tzu 8, 28, p.75; Watson, *The Complete Works*, p.319.

- 19 It is not only Chuang-tzu who refers to Confucius' troubles but especially the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 14, p. 152 (Wilhelm, pp. 196 and 496, note 60); there is a commentary by Kao Yu to the LSCC which is, surprisingly enough, not quoted by Yü Yüeh nor by Yang Shu-ta in their commentaries to the HNT.
- 20 *Analects* IX, 27; Legge, *Confucian Analects*, p. 225.
- 21 Legge, *The She King* II, I, VI, 6, p. 258.
- 22 Cf. note 19; for a different point of view see Kraft II, pp. 177–8.
- 23 II, p. 174.
- 24 For a similar statement see HNT 14, 248, 5.
- 25 HNT 18 also informs that „now, when the frost is falling down, the trees remain alive; when the ice melts, the crops will be arranged“ (18, 324, 9).
- 26 Erkes, p. 53, note 131 deals quite extensively with „amassed ice“ of HNT 4 – „das getürmte Eis“ but does not comment on the „not dissolving snow“. Cf. note 167.
- 27 Cf. Kraft I, p. 282, lines 3–4.
- 28 Yang Shu-ta, p. 20, refers to a similar but hardly understandable text of Chuang-tzu 7, 25, p. 53, Watson, *Complete Works*, p. 280, note 2, is not sure if he understood the text correctly.
- 29 Kraft I, p. 271, note 356.
- 30 Kraft I, p. 277, line 1.
- 31 Cf. also HNT 15, 262, 14.
- 32 For another example of contradiction between glue and varnish, ice and charcoal, see HNT 16, 273, 9–10; 11, 185, 3; 7, 109, 13–14 respectively; and the relevant translation in my study *A Mobile Freezer*, p. 339.
- 33 The text immediately precedes that on the sage who is careful of what he had amassed.
- 34 This is also the opinion of M. Loewe who writes on HNT's concept of a *chen-jen* that „he is prepared to accept life and death on the same terms as being manifestations of a single process“. Cf. his review of J. Needham, *Science and Civilisation* V, 3 in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* XL (1971), 1, pp. 187–8. – Let us still add that there is another quotation from HNT (2, 22, 12–13): the tune on the White Snow is mentioned there, allegedly from the Chou period, and very sad. Cf. Kraft I, p. 260, note 295.