

# The World Philosophical Significance of the Concept of Yin and Yang—Taking Slote's "Yin/Yang" as An Opportunity

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**Abstract:** *Slote transformed the traditional Chinese philosophical concept of "yin and yang" into "yin/yang" in his understanding, and applied it to many of Slote's own theoretical systems. This not only enriched his theoretical construction, but also proved the strong vitality of the concept of "yin and yang" in the formation and development of world philosophy. Slote called on Chinese philosophers to pay attention to the concept of traditional Chinese philosophical thought represented by "yin and yang". He used Feng Qi as an example to explain his world philosophy concept, and his "yin/yang" concept was the core of his world philosophy attempts. We can glimpse the possibility of the concept of "yin and yang" from Slote's attempt and uncover its philosophical significance in the world.*

**Keywords:** Yin and Yang; World philosophy; Slote; Yin/Yang.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Slote, a leading figure in the field of modern virtue ethics in the United States, recently aimed to establish a new philosophical system by elucidating the concept of "yin/yang" and explaining the inclusion of "yin/yang" relationships in various philosophical fields. This was extensively demonstrated and constructed in his book "The Philosophy of Yin and Yang". Slote's "Yin/Yang" attempts to bridge the gap between Chinese and Western philosophy, introducing traditional Chinese philosophical concepts into the discourse system of Western philosophy, towards his dual goal of solving Western problems and calling for Chinese philosophy.

## 2. BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF "YIN/YANG" IN SLOTE

After completing "From Enlightenment to Acceptability", Slote elevated the virtue of "complementarity" between yin and yang to a very high position. In his "Updating Yin and Yang" (2013), he stated that "yin/yang complementarity" can be seen as a prediction and clarification of the "complementarity" between "acceptance" and rational control pointed out by the latest developments in Western philosophical thought. However, just as Western philosophy overly emphasizes rational autonomy, China has not fully recognized its importance. Both Chinese and Western ideas need to seek a more balanced balance between autonomy/control and acceptance, but this idea of balance comes more from the concept of "yin/yang" rather than anything in Western philosophy. This exploration of Chinese and Western philosophy, which was sparked by the emphasis on accepting virtues, led him to innovate the interpretation of the concept of 'yin/yang', giving this concept a characteristic of the intersection and fusion of Chinese and Western cultures. In traditional Chinese philosophical views, yang is connected to heaven, yin is connected to earth, and heaven is higher than earth, so yang is higher than yin, but Slote does not believe that yang is higher than yin [1]85. Slote only advocates the complementary characteristics between yin and yang, which he named "yin/yang".

Slote mentioned in "The Philosophical Reset Button: A Manifesto" (2015) that Chinese thought has never gone to the extreme of rationalism like in the West. With the increasing influence and reputation of China around the world, Chinese philosophers and thinkers may be able to correct and reset Western philosophy by borrowing from their deepest historical traditions, and Chinese thinkers should not remain silent. Overall, scholars at home and abroad have not paid much attention to Slote's concept of "yin/yang", but have mostly focused on his virtue ethics and subsequent "empathy" theory, as well as the transformation and borrowing of care ethics and many issues related to "moral emotionalism". Its content ranges from metaethics to moral practice, from specific research on the theory of "empathy" to criticism and praise of "emotionalism", making it very rich in content and in-depth in research. However, there is a lack of attention and research on the progress of "yin/yang" and even other theories of Slote, and the existing English papers mainly rely on the evaluation and analysis of Chinese scholars. It can be said that

Chinese scholars are ahead in the research of "yin/yang" issues.

For a long time, the academic community has not provided a comprehensive introduction to his concept of "yin/yang", often staying at the correspondence between "yin" and "receptivity", that is, still within the ethical framework of his moral emotionalism. It can also be said that Slote's concept of "yin/yang" is a typical "for my own use", which is not completely consistent with the traditional Confucian and Taoist concepts of "yin/yang". Scholars' comparisons and evaluations of "yin/yang" have not been based on Slote's assertion that "yin/yang" is the foundation of his ethics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind. Therefore, in related articles, there is often a coexistence of praise for his contribution to Chinese philosophy and criticism of his misinterpretation of the concept of "yin and yang" in traditional Chinese thought, which fails to grasp the essence of Slote's "yin/yang" concept.

### **3. THE "YIN/YANG" ASPECT OF MUTUAL LEARNING BETWEEN CHINA AND THE WEST**

One of the purposes of Slote's use of the concept of "yin/yang" is to demonstrate to Eastern thinkers that "yin/yang can do more philosophical work [2]11." Our understanding and attitude towards Slote's proposition constitute the relationship between Slote and the Chinese intellectual community, which also determines how far the concept of "yin/yang" can go in the present and future. The philosophical exchange between China and the West has a long history, and Slote himself actively participated in it. For example, he had profound and rich ideological exchanges and integrations with Professor Jiang Chang on issues such as the interconnectedness of Chinese and Western virtues, the contemporary nature of traditional Chinese values, and the psychological basis of morality. In fact, we can connect Slote's communication with his concept of "yin/yang". Slote constantly engages in dialogue with the Chinese intellectual community and calls for a renewed emphasis on traditional Chinese thought represented by "yin/yang". The goal is to rely on a completely different ideological tradition from the West to find a path that is different from the West, and then feed back to the Western academic community to solve the problem of aging. Therefore, the present of 'yin/yang' is a possibility that Slote has found to solve the problem of excessive rationality in the West, and the future will be left to the Chinese intellectual community. Our attitude and choices determine where 'yin/yang' will go.

Professor Zhang Xiping, a leading figure in the history of Sino Western exchanges and Western Sinology, believes that "civilization should be regarded as a cultural system. Civilization is a big concept, and culture is an element and part of it. The cultural system is a civilization, so different cultural systems or civilizations need to exchange and learn from each other. Cultural types have their own shortcomings, and the internal mechanism of mutual learning among civilizations is the structural adjustment of various cultural elements within civilizations. This is the general rule and necessary path for the maintenance and development of human civilization [3]8." The essence of mutual learning among civilizations is not only the encounter, mutual understanding, and integration of one civilization with another, but also the development towards the larger concept of human civilization itself. Therefore, every positive mutual learning among civilizations is helping human civilization move towards a better future. Especially now that Sino US relations have entered a negative cycle, multi-faceted competition continues to squeeze and compress the space for cooperation, especially with the emergence of trade wars and other vicious competition, which has had a negative impact on both countries and even the world. As an American ethicist, Slote's emphasis and exploration of traditional Chinese thinking are even more difficult in this context.

Slote's attitude is very candid, and he even said, "You will become the gentlemen of Westerners, because the whole world will feel China's overall strength more strongly than ever before. So, face your own traditional philosophical beliefs with confidence! Help us (Westerners, people all over the world) press the restart button! I cannot find any reason why you cannot do this [4]42." This urges us to adapt to this situation as soon as possible and play an important constructive role in the survival and development of world civilization, the most crucial of which is cultural consciousness. Cultural self-awareness is to understand the essence and mission of culture in accordance with laws, and its essence is the consciousness and awakening of cultural values. Cultural confidence refers to the full affirmation, recognition, and courageous practice of cultural values and vitality by cultural subjects. Emphasizing the importance of cultural consciousness, emphasizing the need to enhance cultural consciousness, achieve cultural confidence, and reflect on cultural values. This fully demonstrates that we need to deepen cultural consciousness, strengthen cultural confidence, and have a relatively comprehensive and profound understanding of various concepts in traditional Chinese thought in order to better connect with Slote's earnest plea.

#### 4. YIN/YANG FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WORLD PHILOSOPHY

The study of Slote's concept of "yin/yang" is not only a sorting out of the core concepts he is establishing in his philosophical system, but also a description and evaluation of his innovative transformation and exposition of traditional Chinese philosophical thought. Slote paid close attention to Chinese philosophy and encouraged Chinese thinkers to attach importance to Chinese traditional thoughts. As Chinese people, they should respond accordingly. Mr. Feng Qi once emphasized: "From a global perspective, today we are in an era of mutual influence and convergence between Eastern and Western cultures. In order to establish ourselves in this era, we need to have a comprehensive and systematic understanding of Western culture, as well as a comprehensive and systematic understanding of Eastern culture. Abandoning one side is like losing an arm. After such in-depth understanding and research, many people will work from different aspects and fields, inevitably generating many different opinions and schools of thought. Mr. Feng Qi believes that "world philosophy is not Archie Bahm's comparative philosophy, but rather a consideration and attempt to integrate two or more mainstream, endogenous philosophical traditions in our land of existence: Indian philosophy, Chinese philosophy, and Western philosophy influenced by German philosophy [5]189." Slote is taking the path described by Mr. Fengqi, which is to construct a world philosophy. He is not simply comparing philosophy, but integrating "yin/yang" into all his theoretical systems, and the concept of "yin/yang" is the core of his entire system. So studying the core concept of "yin/yang" in world philosophy is not only a study of excellent achievements in foreign philosophy, but also a reflection on oneself, striving to inherit and innovate.

Slote mentioned in "The Philosophical Reset Button: A Manifesto" that Chinese thought has never gone to the extreme of rationalism like in the West. With the increasing influence and reputation of China around the world, Chinese philosophers and thinkers may be able to correct and reset Western philosophy by drawing on their own profound historical traditions. Chinese thinkers should not remain silent and believe that these ideas are sufficient proof of the value of Chinese philosophy. Our research and response to him is precisely a manifestation of "cultural confidence" and the inheritance and promotion of excellent traditional Chinese culture, therefore it has strong operability.

Starting from the analysis and interpretation of Slote's concept of "yin/yang", this article dissects and describes the role and function of this concept in various fields of his philosophical system. Subsequently, we will compare this concept with the traditional Chinese concept of "yin and yang", elaborating on the inspiration and response of Slote's innovation and transformation to us. Only by conducting a more in-depth study of the concept of "yin/yang", especially recognizing the fact that "yin/yang" was accidentally discovered by Slote after searching for it in Western philosophy, can we have a deeper understanding of the infinite potential hidden in traditional Chinese thought. This is just a key to the globalization of Chinese philosophy. The establishment of the Chinese territory of world philosophy can not only be achieved through exchanges and integration between today's philosophy circles, but also through the search for concepts that have existed for a long time to inject new meanings. Of course, it is not just the Chinese who inject new meanings. This is world philosophy.

#### 5. SUMMARY

The concept of "yin/yang" by Slote is of course not consistent with the rich and evolving "yin-yang" concept in traditional Chinese philosophical thought. Currently, the criticism in the academic community is mainly focused on Slote's "yin/yang" concept, which does not conform to the original meaning of "yin-yang" in the context of Chinese philosophy. However, this is actually a perspective from the Confucian standpoint. Slote has repeatedly evaluated that the Chinese academic community has long neglected the concept of "yin-yang", and it seems that only Taoism has given relative importance to the concept of "yin-yang". In modern times, the concept of "yin and yang" has been criticized as a naive idea that violates scientific common sense, especially at the level of worldview. Therefore, there is a general lack of emphasis and respect for the concept of "yin and yang". However, this does not conceal that Slote's concept of "yin/yang" may also be a form of harm to the traditional concept of "yin and yang". Slote's concept of "yin/yang" has entered both Western and Chinese academic circles, causing difficulties in understanding and having a negative impact on the interpretation and research of the concept of "yin and yang". At the same time, 'yin/yang' locks all its connotations onto 'complementarity', discarding the deeper connotations and values of 'yin and yang'.

But from another perspective, Slote's concept of "yin/yang" can be seen as a new unfolding of the context and a typical example of mutual learning between China and the West. The observer, the mirror, without mutual understanding, only observes its actions without knowing its taste, knows its nature without knowing its reason.

Slote obviously did not just focus on the transformation of the concept of "yin and yang" without understanding its essence. He grasped one of the most important characteristics of "yin and yang": "yin and yang complement each other", and without one, it cannot exist. And integrate the complementary relationship into more philosophical fields, treating ethics, virtue epistemology, and philosophy of mind with a "yin/yang" approach. This is a new path for philosophy to develop towards the present and the future, and it is also in line with the trend of the integration of world philosophy. Slote's concept of "yin/yang" is just one possibility of the concept of "yin and yang". This article introduces Slote's creativity and ideas, not only to prove that the concept of "yin and yang" still has strong vitality, but also to borrow Slote's own appeal; Chinese thinkers should not remain silent. Yin Yang "and other traditional Chinese philosophical concepts have great potential in the wave of world philosophy.

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