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SEEKING FOR THE ORIGINS The Dao of the Chamorro Creation Myth

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This paper discusses the similarities between the Chamorro creation myth and Chinese cosmology, drawing out parallels that suggest a co-incidence of archetypes which co-existed in the minds of the ancient Chinese and Chamorro peoples. It then relates these foundations to the contemporary Chamorro straddling the belief systems of Chamorro mythology and Christian religion.

She lifted his head upward and let life flow into the emptiness. —Chamorro Creation Myth

It is the woman primal mother, her gateway is the root of heaven and earth. —Dao Dejin VI

In the beginning, so the Chamorro creation myth goes, there was emptiness, nothing. The caretaker of this emptiness was a male and a female, brother and sister, Puntan and Fu'una.[1]

Puntan knows that he must die, and shares his plan for creation with his sister. The condition for creation is the death of Puntan, but Fu'una shares his plan. When he breathes his last, she lifts his head upward and lets life flow into the emptiness. Then Fu'una plucked out her brother's eyes and flung them high above her. Their brightness became the sun and moon.

His heart became the heavens, the drumming of his heart beats out the rhythm of night following day, seasons turning. Fu'una pounded and tilted until his body became the

earth. His breath and body had become the world he had imagined.[2]

Fu'una, feeling lonely, swam in the rivers and oceans, swam with the sharks and followed the whales until she reached a string of lovely islands. Then Fu'una walked into the sea, and she became a rock. As the sea broke over her, she broke into many pieces. Each new stone held her spirit. Each new stone was formed into a new kind of people. "As Fu'una dissolved, the grains of sand were carried throughout the world, giving birth to all mankind." [3]

It is significant that the notion of "source" expressed here is natural rather than metaphysical or theological. In this sense the Chamorro Creation Myth parallels the *Yuan-dao—Tracing Dao to Its Source*. The purpose of the Chinese text is "to trace out dao and nourish one's life in this watery sources." [4]

Yuan—source—is the continuing source or spring from which all things emerge and from which they draw their sustenance.[5] This spring is double male and female principle corresponding to yin and yang. They are like a

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brother and sister playing together, playing at creating the world. The creation is a kind of play, a roll of the dice—“Then Fu’una plucked his eyes and flung them high above her.”[6]

The masculine and feminine principles of the dao are diachronic, they give rise to difference in a balanced and harmonic way:

Dao gives rise to continuity
Continuity to distinctions,
Distinctions to plurality
*And plurality to proliferation*⁷

We should know also that no God or Goddess stands outside the process, guiding it and directing and controlling it as in Genesis. It is quite the opposite of Genesis—the creative masculine and feminine principles dissolve into their creation. They submerge and become the watery source and the process, without standing distant or apart.

The natural cosmology of classical China does not entail a single-ordered cosmos, but involves an understanding of a dynamic world that is the sum of *dao* constructed by a myriad of unique particulars—“the ten thousand things”—“the grains of sand were carried throughout the world, giving birth to all mankind.”

Creation involves a watery source in which dissolution is at the very heart of the process.

I am not suggesting that the Chamorro Creation Myth was influenced by some kind of diffusion or influence from China to the Marianas, but rather the co-incident of archetypes co-existed in the minds of the ancient Chinese and Chamorro peoples, through a process Jung would call “the collective unconscious.”

The natural cosmology of ancient Micronesian culture, as reflected in the Chamorro creation myth, does not entail a single-ordered cosmos, but corresponds to that of classical China, invoking an understanding of a dynamic “world” that is the sum of *daos* constructed by a myriad of unique particulars—“the ten thousand things.”[8]

Dao as the sum of these contexts trades the coherence that would privilege one order among many, for *continuity* among them. *Dao* as the context construed from a thousand per-

spectives is more or less coherent.[9] *Dao* is, thus, the complex process—the co-dependent generation—of the world itself that does not reduce to any single order. There is, rather, the orderly hubbub or bazaar, the floating opera of migratory birds or gypsies, the flowing crowd almost tumbling out of a stadium through almost-too-narrow exits.

The Chamorro creation myth seems off hand, improvisatory, casual in its process, like a roll of the dice. Our bias—“God does not play dice with the universe”(Einstein) is mocked by Nils Bohr’s reply “who is Einstein to say how God will play?”

The roll of the dice: “as the sea crashed over her—she broke into many pieces. Each new stone held her spirit.”[10] The semi-controlled chaos of quantum mechanics.

“As the great rock of Fu’una dissolved, the grains of sand were carried throughout the world, giving birth to all humankind.” There are two complementary processes going on here, the one in heaven, masculine, *yang*, that of Puntan, and that in water and earth, feminine, that of Fu’una, *yin*. Both involve the dissolution of the separate ego.

There is no question that the heart of Daoism involves the disappearance of the separated individual into the flowing river of the whole. If brother or sister did not disappear, no world would have been possible. From their complementary *yin* and *yang*, “from the love and respect (restraint) shown between brother and sister, the world began.”[11]

The water imagery of a river and oceanic source, in the Creation Myth, and in Daoism, challenges any tendency we might have to categorize and separate-out the world around us. “Water in many ways is a synecdoche for chi (gi), the sea of vital energy that is both *constitutive of the world and an expression of its activities.*”[12]

Water is yin-yang: at once the weakest and the strongest of things, the most pliant and the hardest, the most nourishing and the most destructive—interwoven, so one cannot separate “good and evil.” The knowledge of good and evil is treacherous, the Daoist hold, because it will delude one into thinking the two can be

separated, a delusion which exists as “the sickness of the mind.”[13]

Water is the key to Daoism and to the Chamorro Creation Myth. Water is transformative, moving as it does from shape to shape. At one moment water assumes the shape of its environment, only to surrender to formlessness in the next.[14] There is a suppleness here that is quite contrary to the Genesis accounts which tend to be rigid and contradictory. While Elohim and Yahweh Elohim are in conflict in the Northern and Southern versions of Genesis (Chapters I and II)[15] there is an intense tension that risks contradiction.

At the same time we ought to know the importance of shamanism to the Micronesian culture and to Chinese Daoist culture as well. And it is well to remember that in both cultures some Shamans are tricksters. The most famous shaman of ancient Marianas was such a trickster—*Lepe pee l mo'ng*. [16] *Lepe* was a natural born-not trained-shaman, but he appeared to his village to be crippled, dumb and crazy. In one legend he goes out with a canoe against a flesh-gobbling giant ghost monster and defeats him with a potion which he quickly prepares and which produces a magic shield which protects the crew and canoe from the monster—chaos.

In similar passages in the *Yuandao*, seeking for the Son of the Tao, “tao” and its surrogate “water” stand in for “sage” or shaman.”[17]

What does the trickster shaman signify in Chinese and Chamorro cultures? It suggests the importance of suppleness, of the protean, the reversible, the importance of laughter and the mockery of high seriousness—like Aliabades, they are quite willing to dance about on their hands, or stand on their head. It is a measure of the supple grace of their corresponding cosmologies that they find a little mischief a very healthy thing. It is a view of the world as play.

A water path (*dao*) becomes a path by people swimming in it. Water is *wu wei*—water does not purposely “do” anything, and yet the environment thrives because of its presence. *Wu wei*—always translated as not-doing, might just as accurately be translated as *deference*, or respect.[18] Each participant maintains his own

integrity, while contributing himself fully and without reservation to the *dao*'s nexus of relationships.

The optimum disposition among various participants in Chinese and Chamorro cultures is one of deference, each allowing the others to be what they are. Coercion is anathema, and is seen as wasteful, blocking creative possibilities.

By *wu wei*—doing nothing—is meant not being ahead of things in taking actions; by “leaving nothing undone” in both classical Chinese and Chamorro culture is making use of what is done by others; by “not imposing order” is meant not interfering, not imposing a substitute for what-is-so-of-itself; making use of mutual recognition and cooperation.

So to the Western mind the classical Chinese and Chamorro cultures seem rather passive, lacking in individualism, in personal forcefulness. But these are only negative characteristics for the left brain western mind.

What annoys and frustrates the Western mind about Chinese and Chamorro cultures is the absence of ontological assertions—assertions about a reality behind appearances—familiar in Western classical thought where there is some underlying substratum.[19]

For the Daoist thinker, there is no assumed “Being” behind the thousand things, no “One” behind the many, no “Reality” behind appearance. This is no principle of order—no supernatural One standing independent of the world to order it as a first cause. There is only the simultaneous collaborative unfolding of the myriad things or events.[20]

Christian philosophers of evolution in the West are continually drawn to the notion of intelligent design behind natural selection. Nothing like this obsession plagues the classical Chinese thinker, nor would it occur to one whose view of the beginning is shaped by the Chamorro Creation Myth.

Here we find the absence of a basis for making objective statements about the world. This makes fact and value interdependent and mutually entailing.

How would we construe the relationship between heaven (*tian*) and the human (*ren*) world? In the classical Chinese and Chamorro

views there is a continuity between the natural and the human. In the West there is a discontinuity between natural and human. This discontinuity is disguised in our childhood textbooks, so that we are not surprised to find the margins decorated with teddy bears and little pink bunny rabbits. The truth comes later. How much do we hide this flip-flopping between “Am I natural?” or “Am I human?” To be skilled at what is natural and equally good at what is human, it would seem to the classical Chinese and Micronesian mind, that only the *intact person (quanren)* can do this.[21] For us this notion of an “intact person hardly exists at all. We have to imagine a fantasy like Tarzan, while the Chinese have their “good man of Tao” in every village, what the Chamorro calls “Taga”—a well integrated individual.

*“How do we know what we are calling?
Heaven’ is not ‘human and vice versa?”*

-Zhungzhi [22]

We imagine either intelligent design or chaos, our left brains drawn to such left brain discriminations. Understanding, handling and maneuvering the *moving flow*, as the Taoist would say, to achieve both harmony and spontaneity requires a full consideration of both determinate and indeterminate forces, for each moment is unique, and is thus ceaselessly attended by a certain degree of unpredictability.[23]

This sense of indeterminacy within order is expressed in both Chamorro and Chinese languages. There are many expressions for “seizing the moment” in both languages, and we see this “seizing the moment” over and over in the Creation Myth as Fu’una creates the world out of her brother and herself, as a juggler flings pins into the air—“riding the dragon”, being in tune, hip to instantaneous timing, to achieve productive harmony.

“As a composite totem, the dragon possesses at least the head of a tiger, the horns of ram, the body of a snake, the claws of an eagle and the scales of a fish. Its ability to cross totem boundaries and its lack of verisimilitude to any living creatures strongly suggest that from the very beginning the dragon was deliberate cultural construction. The danger of

anachronism notwithstanding, the modern Chinese ethnic self-definition as the “dragon race” indicates a deep-rooted sense that Chineseness may derive from many sources.”

-Zhungzhi [24]

‘Riding the dragon’ can be thought of as a culture riding many different, even opposing world views. In China, a man who tried to reconcile, or integrate, Daoism and Confucianism, was doing a ‘straddle’ or riding the dragon. The same term would apply to a Chamorro who tried to ‘straddle’ the Chamorro Creation Myth and Genesis II. They’re wildly opposing world views. In Micronesia there would be three groups—those who converted to the new paradigm, lock stock, and barrel, and abandoned the old. The second group would silently reject the new and keep the old paradigm in their heart. The third groups take the biggest risks, they try to straddle the two world views, and end up ‘riding the dragon,’ so to speak.

‘Riding the dragon’ in a culture as rich and diverse as the Micronesian, the layers of world view tend to be disconcertingly various. Trying to straddle two world views as contradictory as the early Chamorro and the Christian could be risking psychosis, the bipolar syndrome. Moving between the two views without attaining integration could generate ambivalence, grandiose or persecutory streams, often shifting from one to the other. A straddler might inflate ego, thinking of himself as uniquely powerful, riding turbulence, contrary winds; at other times on the deflationary cycle, as extraordinarily weak and vulnerable, as a refugee or a spy caught in a web. Straddlers who are riding the dragon sometimes believe that their thoughts have been captured by outside thoughts capturing their mind. Occasionally they might think their thoughts are being directed by God. The effort always is to maintain some sense of order, to create a referee between opposing selves—to assert a primary actor. There is the effort to maintain limits in the breakdown of reality, to maintain boundaries between self and the outside world.

In ‘riding the dragon’—the layers of conflicting world view—the straddler might imagine himself as the chess board whose four sides

are labeled Madrid, Rome, Manila, and Mexico City. ‘Straddlers’ are in a difficult position, feeling cast out and ostracized from sides, the new faith and the old. They cannot go back, they cannot go forward. They twist and turn: There is a presumption of guilt. They have found the impossible center between East and West. The straddler accuses himself before the twin camps, inwardly, the road of self-accusation leads to chaos, not redemption. Jacob and Esau are the two sides of the straddler.

I meet ‘straddlers’ in my classes occasionally. They see how there was, as it were, a time of grace before the coming of the Europeans, a precious time of grace which is forever lost. It is as if he were unwinding himself like a mummy shedding layers of wrapping, revealing at the core of this island native a flowing shimmy, which dissolves the body armor that Wilhem Reich saw in Westerners’ tense postures.

Logo-centrism is at the heart of the Western myths of origin.[25] Naming is what God does and what man the mimic can do, so the distance grows *behind* the surfaces of the world. We are always faced by appearance and reality. But in the Micronesian and Daoist worldviews, there is no *behind*, no appearance. In the Chamorro Creation Myth, nothing lies *behind* any thing, nothing lies behind brothers and sisters, *yang* and *yin*.

Micronesia before the Spanish was neither dualistic like Greece nor monistic like India. There was dao: “world-as-such”. The Micronesian “world-as-such” is unique, processional, and transitory, and the viewer is always inextricably interwoven within it. Micronesians are interdependent with the world in which they swim, simultaneously weaving it and being woven by it. Agents cannot step outside the picture in any final sense, as in classical Western and Christian thought. A human being is not a process of individuation but integration and disintegration.

Death is faced with astonishing equanimity in the Marianas legend. Death seems hardly to be an issue at all, since in these two, Puntan and Fu’una, their individuality is not yet sufficiently differentiated from the social group. They are members of a primitive society, like

that of the Chinese addressed by Lao-Tze. He is not addressing the people in the cities, he is addressing the country people, and his work is a pain to the original state. For Lao-Tze, man has not yet left the garden of Eden, the prospect of death is terrifying only to the ego, to that part of the self which has come to experience itself as an entity separated from the world.

To the extent that the brother and sister are identified with the deeper layer of the self which is implicated in the procession of the ancestors, the generation and the earth, the prospect of individual death has less impact. In the Creation Myth these is no reason to suppose that the annihilation of whatever self there is will have a negating effect on what follows. In fact it is the necessary condition in the whole procession.

What we have, I suggest, in present day Micronesians is a dissociation of sensibility, a dissociation between the layer of belief system belonging to the Chamorro Creation Myth, and the layer above it, the Christian layer. It is not that present day Chamorros do not believe the Christian creed; they have probably learned how to suspend disbelief sufficiently to appropriate the ‘right’ attitude. But that would not really matter, for I think the real deepest affiliation—deeper than belief—is the sense that he who speaks does not know/ and he who knows does not speak’. It is an affiliation with silence that refuses to absorb the logocentric ground of Western beliefs. Nothing else matters.

In the great Australian film *Walkabout*, (1968) Peter Weir shows how two Europeans, a brother and sister, get lost in the outback after their father drives them out for a picnic and then tries to kill them, before killing himself. They wander the outback ‘as if’ they knew the way home, continually babbling tags of speech and ready-made formulas and stories they’ve learned in school, to calm their panic. The aborigine who finds them and saves them by bringing them back to civilization is himself disoriented and finally destroyed by their manic logocentrism.

If a present day Micronesian shaman sees *Walkabout* he might repeat (of the girl and boy)

that saying of the African shaman: *You're a big white chicken, but you don't know your weight in okra soup.*

But probably the shaman would feel the aborigine had made a serious mistake by becoming entangled with the Europeans at all. After all, to quote that shaman again. *The rat is a big shaman but he's not going to pray on a cat's skin.*

Isn't this what the aunties mean when they say to their children, my students, "Don't read scripture, it will drive you crazy." Or, as Lao-Tzu said in the opening poem of the *Dao De Jing*: *The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao.* If this Eastern matrix remains at the heart of the Chamorro psyche, unspoken and perhaps unspeakable, then the people may secretly regret that the Europeans and Americans ever came here at all, and may wish that someday those ships may return to take them home.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Chamorro Creation Myth" in *Marianas Island Legends: Myth and Magic*, retold by Bo Flood, Honolulu, Bess Press, 2001, 1-4.
- 2 Ibid., p. 2.
- 3 Ibid., p. 4.
- 4 *Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to Its Source*, translated by D.C. Lau and Roger T. Ames, NY, Ballantine Books, 1998, p 13. Yuandao means literally "to trace out Dao and nourish one's life on this watery source."
- 5 Ibid., p.13.
- 6 "Chamorro Creation Myth" in *Marianas Island Legends: Myth and Magic*, p. 2.
- 7 *Yuan Dao*, p. 16.
- 8 Ibid., p. 16.
- 9 Ibid., p. 16 (According to Roger T. Ames, introduction).
- 10 "Chamorro Creation Myth" in *Marianas Island Legends: Myth and Magic*, p. 4.
- 11 Ibid., p. 4.
- 12 *Yuan Dao*, p. 17.
- 13 from Zen Poem (author anonymous) in *The Way of Zen* by Alan Watts, NY, Random House, 1957, "Empty and Marvelous", p. 115.
- 14 *Yuan Dao*, Introduction, "A Watery Source", p. 17.
- 15 See Richard Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible*, NY, Harper and Row, 1987, "J and E", p. 61-69.
- 16 *Marianas Island Legends*, "Half man but strong Magic: the Legend of Lepe' pee' l mo'ng", p. 27-37.
- 17 *Yuandao*, p. 41.
- 18 Ibid., p. 52. Also. See *Dao De Jing*, poem two: Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing (Creating, yet not possessing) Working, yet not taking credit.
- 19 *Yuandao*, p. 19-20.
- 20 Ibid., p. 19-20.
- 21 Ibid., p. 36.
- 22 Ibid., p. 36.
- 23 Ibid., p. 36.
- 24 Ibid., p. 44.
- 25 In the sixteenth century the Jesuit missionaries in China were translating the fourth Gospel of John into Chinese, and they began the opening verse "In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God and the Word was God" by changing Logos to *Dao*: "In the beginning was the Dao, and the Dao was with God, and the Dao was God." When the version was sent to the Vatican, the Magisterium had a fit. 'You cannot translate Logos as Dao, they are opposites, and it would be blasphemous' was the general reaction.

The magisterium was correct based on Thomism, but if Meister Eckhart or Pseudo-Dionysus had been on the panel, there might have been a different verdict, for their view of the Word (Logos) is that it is unspoken, unknown, unspeakable and fundamentally beyond all knowledge. That is entirely in line with the *Yuandao*. The subversive mystical "fifth Column" in Catholicism would find the concept "Dao" a perfect surrogate for *the Word*.

Meister Eckhart would understand "Dao" in terms of his way of "releasement" (*belussenheit*) and detachment, and thereby through the death of the ego, from God to "absolute nothingness" of the Godhead. "In his preservation of the 'nothingness' of the Godhead in the ground of the personal 'God' he stands and develops his thinking 'on the other shore', beyond theism and atheism, in the place where conversely the independence of the 'soul' is grounded in essential oneness with the being of God" says Martin Heidegger (*Heidegger and Asian Thought*, edited by Graham Parkes, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1987 quoted in "West-East Dialogue" by Otto Poggeler, p. 48) and so it is Meister Eckhart and Lao-Tzu who support Heidegger's attempt to lead us out of the Western metaphysical tradition.

We need to be clear here where Eckhart and Lao-Tzu join company. In his Neoplatonic period where he is still attached to traditional religious language, he would not be walking the same path as Lao-Tzu. What is crucial for our

argument is Meister Eckhart's *last* "mystical" experiences, in which he leaves the Neoplatonic and metaphysical path behind. Daoism could be characterized by the injunction: "Be natural. Just live." Daoism speaks of the unity of man and nature (*t'ien jan ho yi*). It would appear that man's problems stem in great part from logocentrism, from becoming separated from *t'ien*.

A comparable understanding of nature is found in Eckhart in his analogy of the horse running into the open meadow. A comparable understanding of nature is found in Lao Tzu and in the Chamorro creation myth.

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