

*Olivia CATTEDRA**

**AN INTRODUCTION TO CUATERNARY ONTOLOGY,
ACCORDING TO MĀṆḌŪKYA UPANIṢAD AND TAO TE CHING, 42**

Abstract: The texts of *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* and *Tao Te Ching* show how Brahman and Tao share an analogous nature from which derives an ontological matrix which is the start point as well as the goal of the dynamics of the Multiplicity. As we have shown, these dynamics spread in these four levels of reality and, while the Indian tradition offers a precise description (which is functional to its eschatological intention), the Chinese describes the descent but only suggests in a metaphorical language the mystery of the returning path. In both cases, reading and meditating on these old treatises retain and enhance their value for the modern man since they push him and his mind behind the reductionist view which pervades the fragmentary perception of reality allowing an essential widening of his consciousness, along with its spiritual and ethical consequences.

Keywords: *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, *Tao Te Ching*, Cuaternary Ontology.

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The symbols of the well and of the fountain inspired the pursuit of wisdom. The connection between them suggests the need to strive for one's own interiority (well) as a condition that allows the formation of the fountain and of its flow, as a consequence. In the same spirit, Confucius preached the confluence of external teachings and internal reflection as a point of synthesis that is unique to each person. To the world of today, contemplation seems to be urgent and irreplaceable if men want to rediscover their essential unity. These dynamics of the real world will allow men to restore their harmony with nature and to assume the real implications of the so called "Indra's net", the old analogy for interdependence.

This concept of interdependence, which is the metaphysical antecedent of the concept of globalization, requires an analysis that exceeds the horizontal comparison between micro and macrocosm and also requires the recognition of a vertical conception of reality expressed through different levels of being. Again, this vertical vision is described by the old tradition as the metaphysical reality, while its exploration by man, as a contemplative being involved in different contemplation or meditative practices, runs toward the mystic world and its manifold expressions.

* Researcher, Ph.D., CONICET/FASTA (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas / Fundación Argentina Santo Tomás Aquino), Mar de Plata (Argentina).

Even though the Indian sages proclaim that the world is a dream, man demands answers. One of the major Indian philosophical treatises says that a man lives his life between two dimensions: the relative, *saṃvṛti satya*, and the absolute, *paramārtha satya*. In the context of two of the major oriental civilization, we can notice that while India contemplates, dreams and abides still, China dances, fights¹ and hides. Stillness and motion, the practical aspects of the pan-Asian Yoga, join together to integrate the light of the East.

These different dimensions of Being are perceived through the higher experiences of the soul. The Italian scholar E. Zolla (2000) distinguishes between mysticism and metaphysics through a numerical analogy: the difference between One and Zero. The metaphysical experience (non-duality) can be symbolized by zero, while the mystical experience is represented by one. Moreover, Zolla believes that Western mysticisms reached unity (as we find in the *sāṃkhya-yoga* tradition) while Eastern experiences generally achieved the experience of Zero². Zolla's distinction coincides with the Indian sources³, especially with the synthesis of *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*.

Behind the statements of Zolla, we can guess a metaphysical structure which is also found in the Chinese tradition. *Tao Te Ching*, a composite and complex text which seems to go back to different roots or schools of transmission, offers the possibility of this comparison in some of its chapters. Victor H. Mair considers Lao Tse as the Old Master who compiled a prior oral tradition; hence, he suggests the existence of a hoard of authors dating back to the period of the oral tradition, essentially connected with India. He states: “[...] I view the core of the *Tao Te Ching* as having derived from the oral tradition rather than from a single author (*Tao Te Ching*, 12)” and adds: “[...] another radical departure from the past is my recognition of the *Tao Te Ching*'s intimate relationship to the other well known oriental classic: the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Having read both of them in their original languages repeatedly and attentively over the past two decades, I have come to believe that they are connected in an essential way [...]”(xv).

We will try to compare the thematic aspects that are developed in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* and *Tao Te Ching*, 42. Both treatises converge in an ontological matrix consisting of four levels of reality.

These levels, both as levels of experience and consciousness, have specific features which spread downwards when they shed light on the movement from being to becoming, or expand upwards when they describe the states of the consciousness man, in his attempt of liberation or realization. As we will try to show, this ontological range is described in a cosmic and descending way in the Chinese philosophy and in an anthropologic and ascending way in the Indian tradition.

¹ We should remember that the *Tao Te Ching* is both a mystic and political text and that Sun Tzu starts by citing the *I Ching*.

² F. Staal does not agree with this criterion, cf. D. Loy, *No dualidad* (Barcelona, 2000), p. 305.

³ It would correspond with the third and fourth states described in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*.

In other terms, while Being descends to man and his becoming as multiplicity and a centrifugal drive, man ascends towards Being through interconnection and concentration.

Number four is a repeated and meaningful symbol in these treatises. Number four has two different and opposite meanings. In one case, the fourth level (*Tūrya*) implies the Supreme. In the other, four (represented by the square) symbolizes matter as the lowest ontological level and, as such, the sensitive material world. Surprisingly, the numerical symbol of the sensible world turns into number six in the Chinese world, as we shall see. Meanwhile, the number eight (4x2) is the absolute symbol of the intermediate or subtle world in both traditions⁴.

In the *Vedas*⁵ and in the *Upaniṣads*, we find the roots of the Indian ontology based on a hierarchy organised in a quadruple pattern of reality.

For instance, the story of Satyakāma, disciple and teacher at the same time (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, IV.33), as well as the dialogue between Indra and Prajāpati (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, VIII.4) are some of its antecedents. Both examples suggest paths of ascension, integration and realization and they imply the notion of levels of consciousness. As we stated earlier, the becoming of Being is shown in degrees, and the man who seeks his fulfilment knows, experiments, and recognizes them through different levels of consciousness such as waking state, dream, deep sleep and the Fourth state. Therefore, we can clearly see how ontology and epistemology converge in the doctrine of the states of consciousness.

This confluence involves the answer to some fundamental questions: how is it possible that Unity, Being, Reality manifests as a garland of illusory and *almost* real flashing lights. How is it that what seems to be multiple is really one, but still multiple? Why the substratum that changes remains the same and is not changed by the Becoming, as a process? How is it that what seems to be separated is in fact united without being different or united? For a man, the awareness of this level, as a direct experience, means the liberation from the cycle of the *samsāra*. Besides, it constitutes the unfathomable experience of the *Tūrya*.

*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*⁶ states that:

“3. The first quarter is *Vaiśvānara* whose sphere (of action) is the waking state, whose consciousness relates to things external; who is possessed of seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and who enjoys gross things.

4. *Taijasa* is the second quarter, whose sphere (of activity) is the dream state, whose consciousness is internal, who is possessed of seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and who enjoys subtle objects.

⁴ For example, the octogon, the eight classical columns of the temples that join the domes and the bases together, the eight *apsaras* of the Indian world, and the various configurations or heavens of the eight trigrams in China.

⁵ Cf. Rg Veda, X.129: a similar notion in V. H. Mair, “Heavenly Questions”, in *Idem, The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (New York, 1994), p. 371 *sqq.*

⁶ We will use the translation of S. Gambhirananda, *Eight Upaniṣads*, 2 (Calcutta, 1977). The passage is derived from previous sources such as *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, V.12.17 and *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, IV.3-10.

5. That state is deep sleep where the sleeper does not desire any enjoyable thing and does not see any dream. The third quarter is *Prājña* who has deep sleep as his sphere, in whom everything becomes undifferentiated, who is a mass of mere consciousness, who abounds in bliss, and who is surely an enjoyer of bliss, and who is the doorway to the experience (of the dream and waking states)”.

The first quarter, *Vaiśvānara*, the waking state, corresponds to the sensitive becoming. This is the typical dimension of the “objective and concrete” world of *nāma-rūpa*, but it also describes the world of multiplicity and the evanescent time. For man, the waking state is the weakest point as it depends on the duality subject-object and it is the most transitory and full of multiplicity.

The second level, *taijasa*, the dream state, understood as a higher dimension, corresponds to the ideal world from which the becoming begins. As an ideal dimension, it contains a kind of essential stuff which, in turn, precedes existence. Therefore, it implies the “cosmic reality [...] a network of ephemeral names”⁷. In this world, duality remains as a subtle and psychological level in which there is an inherent tendency towards purification and ascension. In so far these tendencies are developed; the perception of multiplicity becomes narrower and weaker. This dimension is the world of *tanmātra* which corresponds, in turn, to Plato’s ideal world and also relates to a certain extent to the archetypes of the modern analytical psychology.

Prājña is the unified and full state of consciousness that corresponds to the fullness of Being: Brahman *Saguṇa* or *Īśvara*. When this level is conceived as the principle of manifestation, it acquires both an ontological and cosmological nature, since it refers to Being and also accounts for the beginning of the cosmic development. According to the Vedic sources, the vehicle of this descent is the wonderful creative power of the Being and its first “hypostasis”, the Lord (*Īśvara*):

“[...] This one is the Lord of all; this one is Omniscient; this one is the inner Director of all; this one is the source of all, this one is verily the place of origin and dissolution of all beings [...]” (*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*, 6)

This Lord creates, originates the multiplicity from its perfect Unity. The multiplicity (*nāma-rūpa*) descends from it through the power of his *māyā*, as projection⁸. For this reason, *māyā* will be identified as the principle of duality⁹ and, as such, it has two aspects or functions: its projection force and, at the same time, its concealment power. The latter will have consequences at an anthropological level.

For the contemplative man, the ascent and the return of the soul through different states of consciousness imply not only a purification, but also an experience which can be defined as a paradox: it is “individual” but “non-personal”¹⁰. This path will be trodden “against the flow” or in a reverse order (*pratiloman*). Therefore, the force of *māyā* will be overcome. In this case, the soul is

⁷ Cf. F. García Bazán, “Sankara y lo Absoluto: el Brahman y la caracterización Sat-Jñāna-Ānanda hasta la síntesis del Upadesasāhasrī”, *Fragmentos de Filosofía*, 4 (1994), p. 42.

⁸ Cf. *Gauḍapāda Kārikā*, I.6-9 and B. Raj Sharma, *The Concept of Ātman in the Principal Upaniṣads* (New Delhi, 1972), p. 235.

⁹ Cf. R. Baine Harris, *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought* (Norfolk, 1982), p. 181-209.

¹⁰ M. Biarreau, *El hinduismo. Antropología de una civilización* (Barcelona, 2005), p. 168.

surrounded not by *māyā* as such, but by *avidyā* (ignorance), which shall fade away in a later stage.

The state of *Prājñā*, the fullness of the Lord, is defined as an undifferentiated mass of knowledge: *Prājñaghana*. This concept is deeply connected to the mystery hidden in the Chinese symbol and image of the Tao which “can be named”.

Finally, the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* explains the Fourth State, or *Tūrya*, as the Supreme. In Sanskrit, *Tūrya* means *the fourth* and it alludes to the unfathomable condition of the Absolute state, which, by its very nature, prevents any kind of nomination or definition that could reduce it to elements of the becoming. This is the “*Nirguṇa* Brahman”, the source of the previous *Saguṇa* Brahman, according to the later developments to be found at in Gauḍapāda’s disciple, Saṅkara.

This is the Ultimate Reality, the Being beyond the name, non dual and analogous to the experience of zero. In the Chinese tradition, it is called the nameless Tao (*Tao Te Ching*, 1).

Thus it is clear that both traditions share and describe the same ontological level: Nameless *Tao* = *Brahman Nirguṇa* = *Tūrya*: “The inexhaustible non-dual One is the one who orders – the Lord – able of eradicating all sorrows. This effulgent *Tūrya* is held to be the all-pervasive source of all entities” (Gauḍapāda, I.10)

Mahadevan (1955), Karmarkar (1953), C. Martín (1997) and D. Loy offer analyzes on this topic. C. Martín (40) combines the ontological and epistemological approaches and refers to the supreme state as the Original Consciousness which has a suprarational nature. In addition, the Spanish scholar points out how the consciousness of being implies a practical metaphysical experience, clarifying some ambiguous interpretations made by modern psychology.

The essence of Being, which is beyond Becoming, is the absolute real – *paramārtha* – and its essence points to the experience of non-duality: *advaita*. In this condition merge the starting point and the goal, its immanent and transcendent dimensions. The characteristics that the notion of non-duality assume in Gauḍapāda’s teachings are non-origination (eternity) and non-contradiction¹¹. The pervading symbol of the central teaching implicit in the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* is the sacred syllable AUM, and therefore, it assumes or implies an “ascending” perspective, from the multiplicity to the One.

As it regards the Chinese tradition, we can see the reverse of the medal, as we can find several chapters of the *Tao Te Ching* that illustrate the Taoist ontology, especially *Tao Te Ching*, 42 which describes the irradiation of the levels of reality in their descendent order: From the One to the multiplicity.

“The Way gave birth to unity
Unity gave birth to duality,
Duality gave birth to trinity,
Trinity gave birth to the myriad creatures”.

¹¹ Cf. *Gauḍapāda-Kārikā*, III, and also C. Martín, *Conciencia y realidad* (Madrid, 1998), p. 45 sqq.

In this case, the first level corresponds to the Absolute. Tao precedes everything, it cannot be named and produces the One: the Nameless Tao or the Not-being (*Tao Te Ching*, 1). The nameless is not a negative entity. Namelessness suggests that, in a metaphysical sense, language is not appropriate. While going into silence, the text becomes cryptic and gets closer to the mystery which shall be revealed only in a direct experience, remaining ambiguous for analytic interpretation. The awareness of this fact is particularly valuable for the actual man and its reductive, fragmentary and analytic view of what he considers as reality.

From *Tao Te Ching*, 38 to 42, the text flows between not-being and being: the nameless Tao and Tao. The primary hierarchical descendance is described in *Tao Te Ching*, 40. In it, the nameless Tao is spoken in terms of nothingness: “[...] 40.3 All is born of something, something is born of nothing [...]”¹².

At the next stage, this Absolute and Inexpressible Tao begins to manifest itself as being and source of becoming. *Tao Te Ching* 37–39 recovers *Tao Te Ching* 1 and 2, where Tao was shown as unity, conceived in a double sense: as the source of becoming and as the goal of the Return.

Chen and Mair both agree that *Tao Te Ching* 39 establishes unity as the foundation and origin of everything, prior to the duality *yin-yang*. This is the beginning of the ontological cycle that ends in chapter 42: “This chapter presents the *Tao Te Ching*’s theology in a nutshell. Chapters 38 and 39 speak of reversion to the source as the movement by which a being fulfils itself. This chapter identifies reversion as the very life of Tao itself. Reversion in this chapter is not the creature’s return to the source but the return to the source in the world. Tao is nothing that returns to give rise to the world of being. After this chapter on fundamental ontology and cosmogony, the reader would do well to proceed directly to chapter 42.1, which is on cosmology [...]”¹³.

In her analysis, E. Chen refers to the two major metaphysic branches of the Chinese philosophy: the *Tao Te Ching* and the *I Ching*. She observes a close connection between chapter 40 of *Tao Te Ching* and chapter 24 of *I Ching*, since the meaning of Tao is Return. This shows the non dual coincidence of the ontological descent of being and the elevation of the mystic soul. Chen refers to this as the confluence of the macro and microcosm.

The Tao “that has a name” is fraught with duality: within this unity that can be named lies its polarity. This is the world of *yin-yang*, the basis of the classical cosmology. Given its dual nature, this world admits a certain proximity to the Indian notion of *māyā*, but it has some distinctive features. The functioning of the Yin-Yang accounts for the articulation of the antagonistic and the concurrent, of the rhythms without form. The details of this process could be as following¹⁴:

¹² Cf. Man-Jan Chieng, Lao-Tzu, “*My words are very easy to understand*”, translated by Tam C. Gibbs (Berkeley, 1991).

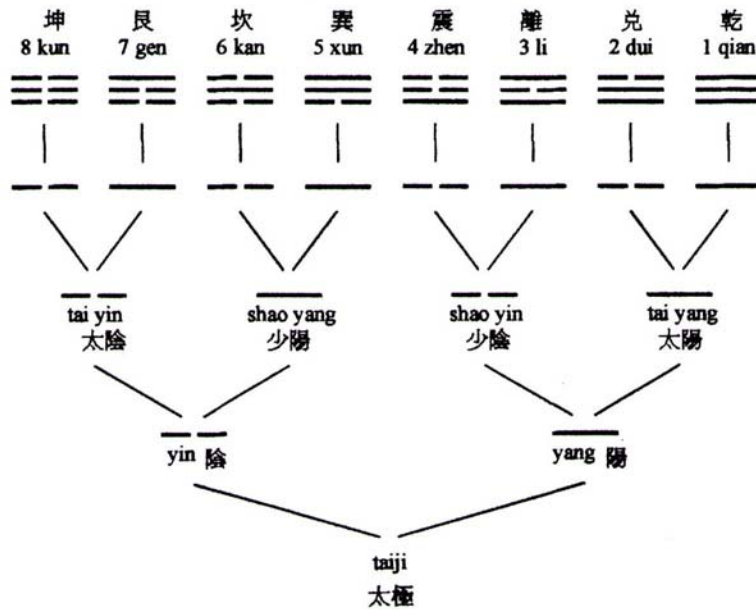
¹³ K. Ch’ en, *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism* (Princeton, 1973), p. 152.

¹⁴ Cf. F. García Bazán, *Neoplatonismo y Vedānta I, la doctrina de la materia en Sankara y Plotino* (Buenos Aires, 1982).

- * Origin, source (*Tao Te Ching* 1) “[...] the Tao that has a name is not the absolute Tao [...]”
 - * Concentrated unity (centripetal)
 - * Blossom unity (centrifugal) The Tao “which has a name” as One/Unity
-
- * Duality
 - * Duality as a rhythm, complement Duality in all its possibilities
 - * Duality as opposites

The antagonism evolves into the Trinity. Rhythm gives way to the pure forms and they engender existence. This Trinity or ternary world of the Chinese ontology is symbolized by the basic and ideal forms of the heavens: the trigrams. These are the symbol of the principles that form the subtle becoming. In the trigrams we find the matrix or the essential forms of the cosmic level, from which all things emanate: the world of time and space. “Trinity gave birth to the myriad creatures.” (*Tao Te Ching*, 42).

This dimension implies an infinite complexity that is shown through the different designs or orders of the trigrams¹⁵. The following drawing displays the deployment from Tao to the level of the trigrams.



These drawings illustrate the Becoming and they were made in a relatively late age of Chinese philosophy.

¹⁵ According to some scholars, this ontological level includes the Becoming of the *Wu Hsing* and also the ideal and formative principles which have a dynamic and somehow unstable nature.

The teachings concerning this level of reality were transmitted through the different diagrams which show different orderings of the trigrams. Most particularly, we find the diagram of the Supreme Ultimate: “The name *taijitu* [...] or the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate has come to refer to a number of Chinese cosmological images that explain the concept of a primal entity and its generative principle”¹⁶. This mythical origin dwells in mystery. That is why this diagram reappears in the Sung period and circulates in texts related to Taoist esoteric alchemy around the tenth century¹⁷.

Hu Wei, ca. 1690, is responsible for the most comprehensive and enlightened studies on these mystic and magical diagrams.

Another author, Zhang (1761–1802), related to the *Yijing* school, considers that the original form of the *Taiji* diagram appears in the cosmological speculations of the early Ming. This author is extremely reluctant to accept the possibility of an esoteric oral transmission and decides in favour of the data provided by the concrete evidence.

The image of the *Taiji Tu* diagram is composed both of the circle of trigrams and the dynamically separated circle of the *yin yang*. Although completely different in its pictorial qualities, their analysis tends to show or teach that these two graphics were related among them at different cognitive levels and, as such, they functioned in distinctive visual systems of expression and different symbolic relevance.

As for how the trigrams are presented in the *taiji*, we find that these are introduced in the Xiantian form. It shows the increasing and decreasing phases of *yin and yang* as pairs of trigrams. Its development illustrates not only the interaction of heaven and earth, but also the creative principles that underlie the cycles of nature, such as the phases of the moon¹⁸. Excluding the complex speculations about the diagram, it is clear that its dominant element corresponds to the arrangement of the trigrams, which, in turn, acquires its symbolic force, since the *Yijing* “becomes the classical source for cosmological speculation and prediction”¹⁹. The symbolism of these trigrams was closely followed, but in a clearly secondary way, by the numerical speculations²⁰. Their conceiving started around the third or the second centuries BC and reached its final and most perfect form in the 12th century. At that moment, the scholars of the Southern Sung Dynasty emphasized the presence of the post-mundane arrangement of the trigrams (also known as the *Houtian* arrangement) that attempts to “describe the cyclic changes of the seasons and days and by extension the future of the world”²¹.

R. Wang states that there are various teachings of the sages which appear in different diagrams, confirming again the presence of the symbol as the specific

¹⁶ F. Louis, “The Genesis of an Icon: the ‘Taiji’ diagram’s early history”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (2003), p. 145.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁰ This aspect was thoroughly studied by L. Granet.

²¹ F. Louis, “The Genesis of an Icon: the ‘Taiji’ diagram’s early history”, p. 155.

language of metaphysics²². Again, the cosmological analysis that shows the descent from One into the Multiple can be described both as the cosmological becoming that results into the five elements (*Wu Hsing*) and the symbolic distribution into the trigrams and their arrangements.

Specifically, the *Taijitu* is taken up by Zhou Dunyi, who included the old Taoist cosmology in the Confucian ethics, after removing the “fantasy and mysticism of Taoism”²³.

His short treatise *Taiji-Shuo* consists of only 256 words and dates back to the Sung dynasty. It is considered of utmost importance because it strengthens the argument that the descriptive exegesis of the arrangement of trigrams points to the essential world. This means that it depicts the returning path to the source. Among the parallel sources that have inspired Zhou Dunyi, there are some alternative diagrams, such as the *wujitu* or the diagram of the Great Void. Its authorship goes back to the Taoist hermit Chen Tuan (906–89), who may have written or drawn this diagram in the famous cave in the Mountain Hua.

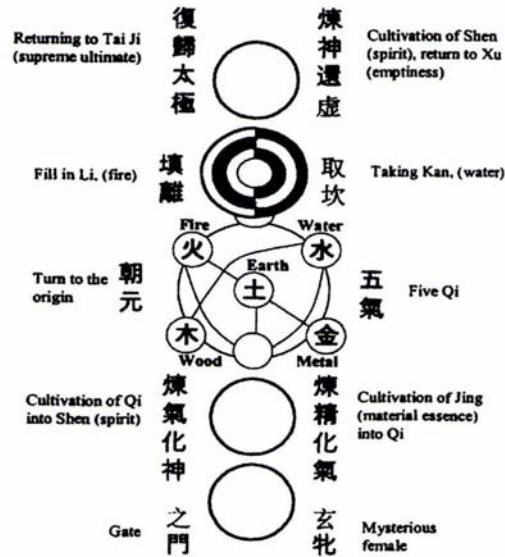
Our thesis becomes evident in these two diagrams as far as, while the *Taijitu* shows the *descending* dynamics from the One to the Multiple, that is, the cosmological becoming, the *Wujitu* indicates the *ascending* path which is identical with the returning process²⁴.



²² “Within this *xiangshu* tradition, diagrams (*tu*) were a familiar and effective way to communicate knowledge, especially knowledge that was conceptual or of a schematic nature”: R. R. Wang, “Zhou Dunyi’s diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained (“*Taijitu shou*”): A Construction of the Confucian Metaphysics”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (2005), p. 309.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 311.



Finally, S. Cammann confirms that the different octagonal arrangement systems show different ontological possibilities within the plane of the Trinity of the Chinese ideal world.

The other famous designs, the arrangements of the mythical Emperor Fu Hsi and of the historical king Wen, are described as the heavenly levels. Each of them generates various difficult to interpret schemas, mostly recovered after the Sung dynasty by geomancy, astrology and amulets, found not only in China but also outside its boundaries. An extreme and very popular example is the Ruibal turtle in the Tibetan symbolistics²⁵.

Finally, going down to the next ontological level, this trinity gives birth to the myriad creatures, establishing the last ontological level as described by the *Tao Te Ching*, 40: “the ten thousand names” or “the ten thousand things”. It represents the terrestrial and material beings that are spread everywhere and which, at their due time, will go back to their Origin (*Tao Te Ching* 16).

This sensible and temporal order, linked to the lowest form of the post-worldly heaven of King Wen, is expressed in the *I Ching* under the complete cycle of the hexagrams that are derived, in turn, from the duplication (duality) in time and space of the trigrams.

Surprisingly, as it was pointed out before, the numerical symbol of the phenomenal reality, described in the Indian world in terms of the first quarter (*pada*)²⁶ and its relationship with the square and the cube, reappears in the Chinese world as the number “six”.

²⁵ S. Cammann, “The Eight Trigrams and their uses”, *History of Religions*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (1990), p. 316.

²⁶ The *pāda* mentioned by the *Vedas* and *Māṇḍūkya-Upaniṣad*.

Another relevant difference between these two traditions is that while the Indian phenomenal world is particularly ephemeral and “illusory”, Chinese philosophy seems to state the opposite. The world of time and space is real, this statement being in harmony with the historical and concrete perspective of the Chinese culture. The “unreality” ascribed to the historical and concrete level of existence is weaker than in the Indian speculations. The hexagram symbols point to this level, they are the archetypes of this world, the phenomenal level of *nāma-rūpa* (in Indian terms), impermanent but real. The hexagram preserves its ideal nature and its function is to represent the rhythmic transformations explained by the *Book of Changes (I Ching)*. Therefore, it differs from the mere ephemeral nature of the Indian waking state which is pure unreality (*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*).

The symbol of the hexagram represents the ten thousand names or ten thousand things. Mair explains:

“[...] Literally ‘ten thousand objects’, this expression refers to all things in the universe that have existence or being, in contrast to their origin – the Tao – which is without existence. The figure ‘ten thousand’ signifies the vast variety of creatures and things in the world. It stands in opposition to the unity of the Tao from which they spring. The Old Chinese pronunciation of *wan wu* was roughly *myanh-war*. This expression is clearly related to English ‘many varieties’. The connection between *myanh* and ‘many’ is obvious without having to cite earlier Indo-European antecedents. Still more striking is the affinity between Chinese *var* and the Indo-European root *var* of ‘variety’, since both originally referred to the multicoloured fur of animals [...]”²⁷.

Therefore, we consider that the texts of *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* and *Tao Te Ching* show how Brahman and Tao share an analogous nature from which derives an ontological matrix which is the start point as well as the goal of the dynamics of the Multiplicity. As we have shown, these dynamics spread in these four levels of reality and, while the Indian tradition offers a precise description (which is functional to its eschatological intention), the Chinese describes the descent but only suggests in a metaphorical language the mystery of the returning path. In both cases, reading and meditating on these old treatises retain and enhance their value for the modern man since they push him and his mind behind the reductionist view which pervades the fragmentary perception of reality allowing an essential widening of his consciousness, along with its spiritual and ethical consequences.

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²⁷ V. H. Mair, “Heavenly Questions”, p. 137.

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