

The 04th Century

In the 06c,¹¹ as India urbanized and trade prospered, there appeared the first of the Upanishads. These are popular, not priestly texts: they show outsiders teaching the priestly Brahmins or besting them in argument. Of them, the early Brhad-Āranyaka (BrA) and the later Íśâ Upanishad (IsU) were written in Videha, which was near the lower Ganges Valley, the homeland of Buddhism.¹² Both these Upanishads are echoed in several Chinese meditation texts.

Breath control is basic to the Upanishadic worldview. Thus:

7:11 (BrA 3:9, excerpt, 06c?).

On what are you and your self (âtman) founded?
 On the out-breath.
 On what is the out-breath founded?
 On the in-breath.
 On what is the in-breath founded?
 On the inter-breath.
 On what is the inter-breath founded?
 On the up-breath.
 On what is the up-breath founded?
 On the link-breath.

Of this self (âtman), one can only say “Not . . . not . . .” He is ungraspable, for he cannot be grasped. He is undecaying, for he is not subject to decay. He has nothing sticking to him, for he does not stick to anything. He is not bound; yet he neither fears nor suffers injury . . .

Breath control typically involves the suppression of desires:

7:12 (BrA 4:4, excerpt, 06c?).

When they are all banished,
 those desires lurking in one’s heart,
 then a mortal becomes immortal
 and attains Brahman in this world.

Considerably later comes the Íśâ Upanishad, named for the Lord (variously Íśâ or Íśvara) Ātman, a concept of breath or the self as filling the universe:

7:13 (IsU, excerpts, 04c?).

This whole world is to be dwelt in by the Lord (Íśâ),
 Whatever living being there is in the world . . .
 Although unmoving, the One is swifter than the mind,
 The gods cannot catch it, as it speeds on ahead,
 Standing, it outpaces all others who run . . .

¹¹Precision is impossible; we here follow Olivelle *Upanisads* xxiv and following, except that we doubt that a long lull occurred in the middle of the Upanishadic period.

¹²Michael Witzel, cited in Olivelle *Upanisads* xxxix.

It moves – yet does not move.
 It is distant – yet near at hand . . .
 When a man sees all beings
 within his very self,
 and his self within all beings,¹³
 It will not seek to hide from him . . .

An Analects reference to Yén Hwéi in c0360 calls him “empty” (kūng 空), a common term for one whose mind has been emptied of distractions by breath control. He is contrasted with Dž-gùng, who was seen as a successful merchant:

7:14 (LY 11:18a, c0360). The Master said, Hwéi is almost there, is he not? He is often empty 空. Sž does not accept his fate, and has traded to advantage. If we reckon up his results, then he is often on the mark.

There is “empty” success and “full” success, and the former is the better.

The Dàu/Dv̄ Jīng we have met as a statecraft text of mystical type. Its oldest chapter treats meditation in the paradoxical style of the Íśâ Upanishad:

7:15 (DDJ 14, c0346).

Look but cannot see it:
 its name is Yí 夷.
 Hearken but cannot hear it:
 its name is Syī 希.
 Feel but cannot find it:
 its name is Wēi 微.
 These three are inexplicable,
 So we put them together into One.

If we combine “these three” into one, we get approximately phonetic Ishvai.¹⁴

Its top is not bright,
 Its bottom is not dark,
 Continuous, it cannot be named,
 And it returns to where there are no creatures.
 This is called the Form that has no form,
 the Image of what has no substance;
 This is called the ineffable.
 If you go to meet it, you do not see its head;
 if you follow after it, you do not see its back.

¹³This theme is precisely echoed in the late Mencian writings; see **#7:25**.

¹⁴The suggestion that these three lines are an esoteric way of spelling out Íśvara, Lord Átman, is due to Liebenenthal **Lord**. Against it is the fact that two of these lines are reversed in the 02c Mǎwángdwēi text of the DDJ, the oldest text of this passage. But MWD reverses other things too, up to and including the “Dàu” and “Dv̄” sections of the text itself, so its evidence against the received order is not necessarily conclusive

Hold to the ancient Way
to master modern situations.
To be able to know the ancient Beginning:
This is called the main thread of the Way.

So a knowledge of an ancient and powerful entity, the Dào 道 which cannot be directly apprehended, but is something like the Way the universe works, is here to be applied to contemporary problems. A further claim is that others, in ancient times, were already skilled in this application:

7:16 (DDJ 15, c0344).

Those who of old were good at being officers
Were exquisite 微, subtle 妙, mysterious 玄, profound 通;
So deep they cannot be known.
For them, I therefore make this ode 頌:
“Cautious, like crossing a stream in winter,
Hesitant, like fearing neighbors on all sides,
Unassertive, like one who is a guest,
Reticent, like something dissolving,
Simple, like uncarved wood,
Turbid, like muddy water.”

He who, though muddy, can be still, will gradually come clear.
He who, though calm, can yet move, will gradually come alive.
One who keeps to this Way does not wish to be full.¹⁵

The goal is to be part of a process, and not its final stage. The image of crossing a stream in winter (over uncertainly firm ice) may remind us of the last words of Dzŕngdŕ in 0436; they quote a poem which is now part of the Shŕ:

7:17 (LY 8:3, 0436). When Dzŕngdŕ fell ill, he summoned the disciples at his gate, and said, Uncover my feet, uncover my hands. The Poem says:

Tremblingly and full of fear,
As though I verged the deep abyss,
As though I trod the thinnest ice –¹⁶

but now and hereafter, I know I have come through safely, my little ones.

Dzŕngdŕ seems to have been the inventor of the Last Words topos in Chinese literature; this he did in his portrait of Confucius' death in LY 7:35 (#7:8). Here, he stars in his own script, and sounds the same note as did “Confucius:” a difficult crossing safely negotiated. Did the language of the meditation texts – a personal peace difficultly achieved – affect this summary of his life?

¹⁵We here follow the Gwōdyèn text. The later standard text has several additional lines, which add little to the thought of the passage.

¹⁶These lines match our Shŕ 195, but *almost* match Shŕ 196, whose sense is more appropriate to Dzŕngdŕ's statement. The text, and undoubtedly the inventory, of the Shŕ seem to have been still in a somewhat fluid condition at the time of Dzŕngdŕ's death.

The DDJ school founder died in 0336 and was succeeded by the person who was later always associated with the text: Lǐ Dān or Lǎudǔ. He moved quickly to develop the statecraft side of the school's teachings. The Indian concepts of oneness and wholeness (#7:13, #7:16) now recur in a paradoxical form:

7:18 (DDJ 22, c0336).

Be crooked, and you will be whole 全.
 Be bent, and you will be straight 直.
 Be exhausted, and you will be filled 盈.
 Be worn, and you will be renewed 新.
 Have little, and you will gain.
 Have much, and you will be troubled.
 Thus the Sage holds to the One
 and is the pattern for the world:
 Does not show himself,
 and so is famed.
 Does not assert himself,
 and so is known.
 Does not obtrude himself,
 and so succeeds.
 Does not flaunt himself,
 and so endures.
 It is just because he does not contend
 that no one in the world can contend with him.
 What of old they said, “Be crooked and you will be whole” –
 How can it be mere words?
 If you are truly whole 全,
 then you will cause others to give you their loyalty.

Here is the new promise of a practical statecraft (“give you their loyalty”) and a new kind of ruler: reticent rather than assertive, and yet wholly successful.

At the end of the 04c, as the DDJ school under Lǎudǔ's leadership developed its meditationist model for the ruler, the position of the meditative Yén Hwéi in the increasingly ritualized Analects tradition became untenable. The Analects proprietors first tried to ritualize him:

7:19 (LY 12:1, c0326). Yén Ywān [the formal name of Yén Hwéi] asked about rǎn. The Master said, To overcome the self and turn to propriety is rǎn. If one day he can overcome himself and turn to rǎn, the world will turn to rǎn along with him. To be rǎn comes from the self; does it then come from others? Yén Ywān said, I beg to ask for the details. The Master said, If it is improper, do not look at it. If it is improper, do not speak of it. If it is improper, do not do it. Yén Ywān said, Though Hwéi is not quick, he begs leave to devote himself to this saying.

To see Yén Hwéi, who in an earlier century (#7:3) was praised as unequaled among the disciples for his perception and his grasp of Confucius' maxims, here reduced to begging for clarification like a novice, is a painful spectacle.