

死而不亡

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The expression 死亡 *sz-wang*, lit. "to die and to perish" is in present-day Chinese a synonymic compound meaning "to die", as it is given in every dictionary I have been able to consult. But originally this seems not to have been the case. For real synonymic expressions exist in no language, no idiom permitting itself this luxury, as Georg von der Gabelentz once said. So we may assume that every so-called synonymic compound is originally only a consociation of related but not identical expressions, to use this very significant term recently created by Bogislav von Lindheim.¹ Then if we want to understand the origin and the primary meaning of a so-called synonymic compound, we must inquire into its history.

In our case this is comparatively easy, as the phrase occurs in ancient Chinese literature where the different meaning of its component parts is still evident. This is first of all the case in Lao-tse, Ch. 33, from which the title of this paper is taken. There it is said: 死而不亡者壽 "who dies but perishes not is long-lived".

The commentaries give a number of different explanations of the passage.² T'ang Hsüan-tzung³ says that "to die" means "a natural end" (天理⁴之終) and "to perish" as much as "a premature death" (夭枉之數) against which the Taoist by means of his life-prolonging practices is secure. Others connect the expression with the Taoist death-meditation.⁵ So Lo-shih 羅什 (Kumârajîva) says: 在生而不生曰久, 在死而不死曰壽 "To be in life without being alive means to endure, to be in death without being dead means to be long-lived".⁶ Others again understand it in the

¹ Lindheim, B. v. *Zur Methodik bedeutungsgeschichtlicher Studien*. Forschungen und Fortschritte, 24 (1948), 110-13.

² It is generally acknowledged that the reading 亡 is the correct one, as the v.l.s. 忘 "to forget" and 妄 "wrong" make no sense, though the latter must have been the original wording of Ho-shang-kung. See Ma Hsü-tun 馬叙倫, *Lao-tse ho-ku* 老子駁詁, 1, 141b.

³ *Tao-tsang*, No. 672, 1, 4, 17a/b.

⁴ The reading 分理 is evidently a mere misprint, as the context shows.

⁵ On this form of meditation, see Rousselle, *Die Typen der Meditation in China*, Chinesisch-deutscher Almanach für das Jahr 1932, p. 30.

⁶ Li Ch'iao 李翹, *Lao-tse ku-chu* 老子古注 (1929), 1, 45a; comp. Erkes, *Kumârajîvas Lao-tse-Kommentar*, Zeitschrift für Missionskunde und Religionswissenschaft, 50 (1935), 51.

sense of spiritual immortality, so Wu Ch'eng 吳澄 explains: 厭世之後, 雖去其宅, 而此心常存 "After having had enough of the world, though one leaves one's home, the mind eternally remains".⁷ Also Yang Tseng-hsin 楊增新 says: 死而不亡, 是說形亡而神不亡 "To die and not to perish, this wants to say that the form perishes but not the spirit".⁸ But in another passage of his commentary, he defines long-livedness as a sort of moral immortality: 道亡, 則雖生猶死, 道存, 則雖死猶生 "If the Tao is lost, then, though one be alive, one is like dead. If the Tao remains, then, though one be dead, one is like being alive".⁹ And elsewhere he merely understands it as individual immortality perpetuated through the descendants: 子之神即父之神之所留 "The spirit of the son is that wherein the spirit of the father dwells".¹⁰

By most commentators, a similar symbolical sense is attributed to the sentence. "If the human body dies, then Tao is still as if it existed" (人身沒而道猶存), says Yü 豫, a modern Taoist writer,¹¹ following Se-ma Kuang 司馬光 who simply says 身沒道存 "the body dies and Tao remains".¹² Ch'en Teng-chie 陳登澥 compares the long-lived Taoist who dies but perishes not to the *hsien* 賢 "worthy" of Confucianism and the 巨子 *chü-tse* "great scholar" of Mohism.¹³ Other interpretations even look upon the passage as the expression of a mere subjective feeling: 苟知死而有不亡者, 則壽夭一也 "If one knows about dying and not perishing, then to live long and to die young are the same".¹⁴ Ma Ch'i-ch'ang 馬其昶 says, alluding to *Lun-yü* (Analects) 4, 8, where Confucius says "If one hears of Tao in the morning and dies in the evening, it is well", "if one has heard of Tao, then there is no perishing but existence" (聞道則有不亡者存).¹⁵

Others understand it as the peculiar state reached by the perfect Taoist in that stage of meditation where neither existence nor annihilation are experienced. Sung Hui-tzung says that the Taoist feels 無古無今而入于不死不生 "neither the past nor the present, but enters a state which is

⁷ *Tao-tsang*, No. 698, 1, 2, 2, 13a (Ch. 27 of Wu Ch'eng's edition).

⁸ *Lao-tse jih-chi* 老子日記 (1926), 3, 56b.

⁹ *L.c.* 3, 58b.

¹⁰ *L.c.* 3, 58a.

¹¹ *Lao-tse yüe* 老子約 (1919), 2, 12a.

¹² *Tao-tsang*, No. 683, 2, 5b.

¹³ *Lao-tse chin-chien* 老子今見 (1929), p. 21.

¹⁴ Yen Fu 嚴復, *Lao-tse Tao-te-ching p'ing-tien* 老子道德經評點 (1906), quoted by Ch'en Chu 陳柱, *Lao-tse chih-hsün* 老子集訓 (1928), p. 55. T'ang Hsüan-tzung *l.c.* already points to *Chuang-tse* 2, 22a (*SBE*, 39, 188, a passage also found in *Huai-nan-tse* 17, 2b): 莫壽於孺子, 而彭祖爲天 "Nobody lives longer than a still-born child, but P'eng-tsu died young".

¹⁵ *Lao-tse ku* 老子故 (1920), 1, 19b (Ch. 10 of Ma's edition).

neither death nor life",¹⁶ and Su Tse-yu 蘇子由 thinks it means that "the men of the highest virtue in antiquity were such as were able neither to live nor to die" (古之至人能不生不死者也).¹⁷

But all these explanations are too much imbued by philosophical speculation and too far advanced to be of use for elucidating the origin of the phrase. In order to find this out we have to turn to its first occurrences in Chinese literature which alone may be able to shed some light on the question.

The oldest passage which I have found occurs in the *Chou-li*, where it is said of the Ta-tsung-po: 以喪禮哀死亡 "with the funerary ritual he mourns over the *sz* and *wang*".¹⁸ Several parallel passages accompanying the sentence show that *sz-wang* is not a compound but designates two different conceptions, as the commentaries also explain it. Chu Hsi (cited by Biot) says that *sz* means a dead person and *wang* a buried corpse. This distinction is confirmed by a passage of the *Ta Tai Li-chi* where it is said of Huang-ti: 死而民畏其神百年, 亡而民用其教百年 "When he died, the people feared his spirit for a hundred years, when he was buried, they used his instructions for a hundred years".¹⁹ From this passage it becomes clear that the *sz* was regarded as being still alive and thereby able to influence the living, whereas the *wang* was completely gone and only remembered by his life and teachings. From this it appears that the distinction between *sz* and *wang* seems to have been caused by the belief in two souls which the Chinese share with most peoples. In death, the *hun* 魂 "spiritual soul" left the body, whereas the *po* 魄 "bodily soul" remained until the body had dissolved.²⁰ So the *sz* seems to mean a dead man who is still in possession of his enlivening principle and thereby able to act and to exert a certain influence on the living, a "living corpse", whereas the *wang* is one whose body has dissolved together with his *po*. He therefore leads no longer a concrete existence and is regarded as powerless and negligible.

The expression *sz erh pu wang* thus seems to point to Taoist practices which tried to secure a kind of perpetual life after death by preserving the body and thereby enabling it to retain the enlivening soul and its power. This is also meant by Lie-tse in the following passage: 故雖終而不亡常也 "Therefore he who, though having found his end, does not perish, lives in eternity".²¹ But in later Taoist literature, this distinction becomes uncertain. So in the saying of Wen-tse: 爲義者不可以死亡恐也 "Who

practises justice, may not fear death and dissolution",²² it is not clear if still two different conceptions are intended or if *sz-wang* has already become a connected compound. The latter alternative would imply that the underlying notion had become lost or obscured.

In non-Taoist literature, *sz-wang* seems already in older works as the Tso-chuan generally to appear as a mere synonymic compound. Here it is found in the following passages:

VIII, 11: 吾不能死亡 "I am unable to die".

IX, 21: 與其死亡若何 "what about his death?"

X, 5: 忘其死亡無日矣 "to forget that death may take place shortly".

X, 13: 二三子若能死亡 "if you, gentlemen, are able to die".

X, 20: 子死亡有命 "the death of my son is fate".

X, 21: 死亡有命 "death is fate".

In none of these cases the parts of the compound can be taken separately, from which it appears that in the time of the Tso-chuan the phrase had already become a fixed compound and lost its original meaning. In Taoist literature, it seems to have preserved this somewhat longer, probably because the underlying notions were longer alive in Taoist circles.

¹⁶ *Tao-tsang*, No. 674, 1, 2, 20a.

¹⁷ *Tao-tsang*, No. 685, 2, 21a.

¹⁸ *Chou-li* 5, 12b (*Ta-tsung-po*, Biot I, 423).

¹⁹ *Ta Tai Li-chi* 62 (7, 2a; *Wu-ti-te*, Wilhelm, p. 282).

²⁰ *Comp. Tso-chuan* X, 7.

²¹ *Lie-tse* 4, 4b (Wilhelm, p. 43).

²² *Wen-tse* 3, 1b.