

# Compatibility between Tiandi Jiao's Concept of 'Incubating the Physical by the Non-Physical' and the Mystical Concept of 'Cosmic Man'

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## Abstract

In the language of Western science, we can say that the emergence of life on earth was made possible by what Edmund Wilson calls a "consilience" (a seamless consonance) among laws in many domains. According to the biologist Michael Denton, whatever aspect of the material substrate we examine on planet earth, we find fundamental conditions favorable for life. These conditions range from the properties of water (viscosity, surface tension, freezing point, specific heat) to the wavelengths of sunlight; from the chemical properties of common elements (yielding emergent properties of geometrical variability, energy conversion and information storage) to the geological distribution of trace elements needed for life. The evolution of life on earth indeed depended on consonance of a great many laws and conditions. Clearly the origin of life on earth goes deeper than any fortuitous combination of building blocks in real time. The deeper origin clearly lies in a system of harmonious relations among laws governing many domains. How was such harmony arrived at? What kind of cause could possibly lead to the mutual adjustment of laws? The human mind reaches for a cause that transcends matter. In *A New Realm*, Lee Yu-chieh discusses the idea that the physical universe is incubated by the non-physical universe. This statement is closely related to the doctrine that spirit-entities called *hezi* are part of matter. Thus a divine potency is always at work within and around the process of material evolution. In the words of Lee Yu-chieh, "The non-physical realm encompasses the physical; the non-physical realm incubates the physical; the non-physical realm creates the physical." In view of such doctrines, this writer is motivated to ask what kind of challenges spirit-entities face--what role do they play--in the evolution of earthly life. How can we, as finite sentient beings, understand and resonate with the inner dimension of becoming that is experienced by spirit-entities. Western science points to the mutual accommodation of natural laws as a precondition for life. This writer believes that such harmony among laws is compatible with the idea that the non-physical realm incubates the physical. This writer further believes that incubation of the physical realm by the non-physical is compatible with the idea of "cosmic man" in the Western mystical tradition. These ideas represent a relatively broad-minded religious vision, because they do not view the emergence of life from an angle of theism-versus-atheism. Instead, they envision a potency at work in the cosmos which incubates consciousness and personhood.

## 談天帝教的"無形運化有形"與神秘主義 傳統中"宇宙人"觀念的呼應

By Denis Mair

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### 摘要

用西方科學的語言,可以說生命之所以能出現在這個地球上,是因為多種領域的規律都能呈現一種天衣無縫的協調性,即生物學家埃德蒙·威爾遜所論述的"共躍性"(即動態中的協調性)。案生物學家邁克爾·丹頓的說法,無論我們切入生命物質基礎的任何方面,都會發現有利於生命的條件。這些條件包括水的性質(黏性、表面張力、結冰溫度),還有太陽光的波長,除此以外還包括普通元素的化學特性(其組合體具備多種功能,包括多樣幾何建構、能量轉換、信息儲存等),以及微量元素在地幔中的分布。因此可以斷定,生命在地球上的進化,確實有賴於各種基本規律之間的高度調和性。可見,生命在地球上的起源,不是物質成分的任何一次偶然組合所能解釋得清楚。更深的起源一定在於多種規律所組成的和諧體系。但是這種和諧性到底是怎麼達成的?甚麼樣的因緣才能導致規律之間的調適性?尋求真理的人心免不了要追溯到一種超越物質的前因。在《新境界》的附錄中,李玉階先生提出了"無形運化有形"的論述。在李玉階的思想體系中,這個觀念跟"和子論"息息相關,也就是說,精神(即性靈和子)是物質的組成部分。因此在進化的過程中,無論在生命體內外,都有一種神性的力量或性能不停地在運作。按李玉階的說法,"無形涵蓋有形,無形運化有形,無形創造有形"。受這種信念的啟發與感動,本文作者提出一系列問題,比方說,在孕育人間生命的過程中,性靈要面對甚麼樣的考驗?要扮演甚麼樣的角色?作為精神生命,祂體驗的是什麼樣的內景歷程?要如何跨越各種時間、空間、狹隘個體上的隔閡?我們作為有限的生命體,要如何了解祂,如何跟祂起共鳴?通過西方科學,我們知道各種自然規律的高度協調性是孕育生命的必備條件。作者認為這種規律性的和諧體系完全符合"無形運化有形",也是"無形運化有形"的一種重要體現,因此也應該是某一種性靈所運化的結果。作者還認為"無形運化有形"完全符合西方神秘主義傳統的"宇宙人"觀念(就是說大宇宙一直在醞釀一種人格,一直為一種高尚人格的登場而做準備)。這些觀念可以體現一種比較圓融的宗教觀,能跳開有神論與無神論的爭端,也能跳開精神與物質的二分法,直接去體認宇宙間那種孕育意識、孕育人格的力量。

關鍵字：無形運化有形、神秘主義、宇宙人、精神生命。

# Compatibility between Tiandi Jiao's Concept of 'Incubating the Physical by the Non-Physical' and the Mystical Concept of 'Cosmic Man'

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## Part One

1. *Xingling* 性靈 is a common traditional term for what we would call spirit or soul, with a certain difference of emphasis.[1] I base my discussion on what I learned in the Daoist-influenced group Tiandi Jiao 天帝教. The *xingling* is a non-physical entity which is attracted to the body by certain laws or forces, which can be described as yin-yang attraction. The “Xici Treatise” of the *Yijing*, Part I Chapter IV, uses the word *youhun* [roaming soul 遊魂],[2] which is an old synonym for *xingling*. [3] *Xingling* is a term which has been used, in a Daoist religious context, to place embodiment or incarnation in the natural order. A *xingling* is involved in making the body what it is. The *xingling* is ethereal yet conditioned, changing from various forces acting on it and from resonance with other conscious entities. This is unlike the emphasis on timelessness in the Western view of spirit. *Xingling* is yang, and as the *Yijing* tells us, “*qian* [pure yang] knows through change.”

2. The concept of *xingling* lets us visualize spirit as an animating component of the universe. It acts from within matter like the yeast in bread. It is not separate from the natural realm, because even when it does transcend the material world, it still exists in a state of balance or complementarity with that world.

3. At every step from minerals up to humans and immortals, the *xingling* allows material, natural evolution to be consistent with spiritual evolution. Evolution continues in the non-physical realm, because *xingling* can master laws of divinity to be active on higher planes.[4] The concept of *xingling* is in many ways compatible with the scientific world-view.

4. *Xingling* reach higher planes because they are able to harmonize natural processes leading up to the planes they reach. Immortals get to where they are because they make a contribution to life in the cosmos:

All higher *xingling* are in a state of resonance with lower levels of existence. At whatever level, *xingling* are local agents of creation.

5. ‘*Xingling*’ fits with the important Asian concept of self-nature. Self-nature (*zi-xing* 自性) and *xingling* are concepts native to Chinese religious thought: they are often used where we would use “soul” or “spirit.” “Seeing into self-nature” is another way of saying “enlightenment” in Chinese Buddhism. Buddhists describe self-nature as infinitely open, or “without fixed substance,” or empty. Because *xingling* exists in interchange with all of nature (broadly defined),

it too can be conceived of as empty. But in Chinese religion ‘emptiness’ has a positive sense. The Confucian Zhang Huang, writing in his *Yijing* commentary about Hexagram #26 (Great Taming), had the wonderful intuition that even the most solid, massive phenomena of the material world ultimately originated from the void.[5] Daoists speak of ‘vacuity’ 冲虚 as a realm of freedom. Daoists also think of non-being (“*wu*”) as a creative source, because the existing universe emerges from non-being. Since existence (“*you*”) is already nailed down within certain forms and laws, the most creative possibilities always emerge from non-being. In a context of Daoist cultivation, emptiness gives us receptivity to higher sources of innate *CHI* (炁). It is by entering the deepest levels of quietude that we find the *CHI* that emerges from non-being. Thus the concept of *xingling* connects with Buddhist teachings of empty self-nature, and with Daoist ideas of creative non-being. The open emptiness of *xingling* fits with our natural intuition about selfhood being stretched over an abyss of non-being. *Xingling* moves about in a realm having many shades of betweenness---at the interface of the physical and the non-physical, of life and death, of being and non-being. Because the *xingling* concept is open to Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist interpretations, we can see that dialogue is an important part of Tiandi Jiao’s belief system. Confucians and Daoists have been in dialogue for over two millennia, and this dialogue belongs to the deep structure of Chinese culture. In fact Confucius and Laozi have never really stopped the discussion which they began when Confucius visited the state of Zhou. Their discussion has been continued through their disciples and through their enduring influence. It still continues within a syncretic religion like Tiandi Jiao.

6. The concept of *xingling* parallels the Gnostic concept of the divine particle which falls into lower

planes and becomes lodged within matter. In Gnosticism and Hermetic doctrine, the divine particle takes

on impurities as it descends into material planes. In the Wuwei Lineage of Chinese folk religion,[6] from which Tiandi Jiao emerged, the *xingling* takes on impurities while inhabiting material bodies. In Gnosticism, the divine particle often forgets its origins; in order to find its way home, it often needs to be reminded. The way back lies in casting away impure constructs which have bound the soul to fallen creation. This is a gnosis that cuts through worldly knowledge. In the Wuwei Lineage, some *xingling* also forget their origin and may recover it through gnosis. But the creation is not ultimately fallen: rather, conscious *xingling*, as part of ongoing creation, are constantly involved in holding it together. *Xingling* strive and raise themselves through sympathetic resonance with higher levels of reality. The supramental gnosis in Hermetic doctrine corresponds to “mindfulness of highest heaven” (昊天心法) in a Tiandi Jiao context, which lets go of mental constructs and makes one receptive to spirit yang *CHI*.

7. There is an area of modern inquiry in which the idea of *xingling* can be applied productively---that is,

the *xingling*’s relation to the brain. This area of traditional thought is strewn with pointers (and plenty of

unclear places). The brain is a physical organ which can yield an electroencephalogram showing collective activity of neurons. The *xingling* is the entity of spirit-consciousness. How do the two relate? Simplistic notions of their relation say that the soul is like a driver, and the body is like an automobile. This is a crude and clumsy metaphor. The body includes a brain which produces complex patterns of waves. So we have to allow the body’s ability to produce neurally-

conditioned mental states. The brain produces a profusion of electric waves on its own. These brain-waves correspond to many possible directions of thought---therefore notions of all kinds are constantly bubbling up in the brain. The organic brain, not the *xingling*, is the source of random notions. But the *xingling* interacts with these notions. From its higher vantage point, it harmonizes and mediates the various conflicting notions. If it consistently identifies with morally positive notions, these become highlighted/facilitated, and the brain will produce them more consistently. If the *xingling* identifies with negative notions, the brain will be guided to produce them consistently, and the *xingling* will go down with them. Thus the *xingling's* role in human thought is like its role in natural creation: to mediate among laws and harmonize natural processes.

Some writings in Tiandi Jiao's mediumistic tradition describe *xingling's* relation to the interlocking organ-based phases (kidney-water, lung-fire, etc.) in Chinese medicine. *Xingling* in the form of *shen* is a coordinator of the vital energy systems of the body.[7] In this context it is interesting to consider that the Daoist system of cultivation speaks of transmuting *jing* (bodily essence) to *qi*, and then *qi* to *shen* (animating spirit). When *shen* is narrowly allied with bodily processes, it is called *yin shen*. But *yin shen* transmuted to a higher energy state, with an orientation toward its presence in the cosmos, is called *yang shen*. *Shen* gains impetus from a tempering process which interfuses currents of *jing* and *qi* at progressively higher levels. Thus the body's vitality is seen as useful for refining and tempering *yang shen*, and Daoism goes on to speak of 'refining *shen* back to the void,' or 'ascension of the *yang shen*.' In fact, *yang shen* is another way of talking about the self-realized *xingling*, aware of its place in the cosmos, and able to decide its own comings and goings.

8. A *xingling* always exists in a dynamic balance with some kind of yin substrate. Such substrates are 'matter' in a functional sense, but they can exist at many levels. It is characteristic of yin to coalesce. At relatively lower levels of energy, we see the principle of like-attracts-like in many places. And when the energy level rises, it is common for aggregations of like elements to attract something different. This is not just a sub-atomic phenomenon. Consider a multicellular colonial organism, such as a volvox: all of its cells are alike (like attracts like). When this simple colonial organism reaches a certain level of life-energy, something different enters in. An organizing intelligence changes things, forming tissues and organs. We can say that these material, unorganized cells attracted their opposite---something immaterial---which informs intricate new structures. This fits with the principle of yin attracting yang. If we are talking about a body attracting a *xingling*, it gets complicated, because any organic thing of respectable complexity has gone through an evolutionary process, and thus should already have some kind of *xingling* in it. Maybe lower-level *xinglings* develop to the next stage themselves, and merge to form a new advanced *xingling*. Maybe they develop under influence from yang emanations of higher-level *xingling*. Or maybe a certain object (already containing *xingling*) is yin compared to the higher state it could reach, so it attracts a higher-level (yang) *xingling* toward itself. Then the higher-level *xingling* absorbs the one that was already there. All this is intuition, but the distribution of *xingling* in the natural world is a complex mystery. Conventional descriptions of spirit in the material world are cartoonlike (i.e., the spirit gets into its body-car and drives to its destination). But in reality it is more a continuous enfolding and doubling back. In my mind's eye I see a mixing bowl with different colors of batter swirling together. If we ever get a vision of the distribution of *xingling* in the material world, it will convey spiritual awe together with the rigorous intricacy of science.

9. In the matter of birth and death, the *Yijing* has this to say: “[The yin of] *jing* and [the yang of] *qi* make a living thing; the roaming of spirit causes it to change.” Here life and death are being described as a yin-yang change, and we can visualize some kind of yin-yang attraction leading up to birth. Wherever there is a dynamic balance of polarities, there is a *taiji* 太極. According to Zhu Xi, there is a great *taiji* of unfolding cosmic change, and every living thing also has a small *taiji* of its own. We can visualize the *xingling* together with the material body making up a *taiji* symbol, with yin and yang intertwined. At death there is another change, and why does it happen? According to the Tiandi Jiao text *A New Realm*, material particles and *xingling* form the unity of a living thing, but at death there is no more attractive force holding the polarities together. The ‘roaming spirit’ may be driven out by some trauma. Or maybe it gets involved in other dynamics, so it stops clasping this present one. According to *Xin jingjie* (*A New Realm*), after a *xingling* has been incarnated for some time, it takes on a temporal imprint.[8] This becomes like a yin component within the *xingling* itself. The *xingling* becomes a *taiji* unto itself, and having internalized its own yin burden, it is attracted less firmly to the body’s yin. Also, by this time it has developed firmer resonances (another kind of yin-yang relation) with higher *xingling*. Thus it is time for the *xingling* to let go of the body. The progress of this *xingling* toward another life will be rule-governed, like any natural phenomenon, but the laws of the transitional, transcendent realm are moral and spiritual (involving that *xingling*’s karma), not material. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* talks about the laws of this realm, which it calls the Bardo realm. This realm is very much a part of religious Daoism, and it is implied in practices of Chinese folk religion.

The world view of the *Yijing* is present in the background of this belief system; it is a framework which has symbolically defined the great space within which all yin-yang changes take place. I hope to take these ideas about *xingling* gained from my stay at Tianren Seminary and apply them to my reading of the *Yijing*.

## Part Two

All the above aspects of *xingling*’s action in nature are localized examples, manifested in particular natural domains. Now I would like to talk about what role *xingling* seems to play in the overall natural order. My thoughts on this matter were guided by implications of the doctrine of *xingling* in Tiandi Jiao. In particular, as translator of *A New Realm* 《新境界》 and Lee Yü-chieh’s books on meditation, I had chances to ponder the idea of *xingling* at length.

In contemplating the fabric of reality in our cosmos, I am awestruck at every turn by how nature’s laws in one domain mesh with laws in other domains. Simply from naïve observation, one observes a great wealth of possibilities for living things to carry their activities beyond one domain and into another. What is more, activities of beings often partake of different domains at the same time. The different domains are evidently dovetailed so that events in one realm resonate with events in other domains. In other words, different regimes of natural laws mesh together into a macro-system that allows beings to create and develop beyond where they started from. A good term for this over-arching system is the *daoti* 道體. *Daoti* is another name for Dao, but the word *daoti* emphasizes that the Dao is not just an aggregate of natural laws—it is a body/system (體) of laws that fit together in a way that gives them creative potential. The *daoti*,

then, is eponymously a “way” of interweaving natural laws that makes life and self-actualization possible. As to how that interweaving happened, the Dao seems to be the best explanation for itself. We can say that the creative interweaving of natural laws happened in the mind of God, or we can say it happened at the highest level of organization in a living cosmos. From our limited human perspective, the choice of words is mostly semantics. We can only observe how the Dao provides for growth and self-realization in specific contexts now, and from this we can try to extrapolate how the Dao may have provided such things within a broader natural sphere, or in a more remote, originative time. Thus it seems to me that scientific inquiry and spiritual inquiry have tremendous amounts of things to teach and learn from each other. There are tremendous amounts of things worth holding dialogue about.

In his original Preface to *A New Realm* and in a lecture given Nov. 29, 1981, Lee Yü-chieh discussed the relations of the physical cosmos to the non-physical cosmos. He made a number of statements that to my mind carry axiomatic force and weight:

- # Matter coalesces out of the natural order. The natural order is pervaded by life, and life is pervaded by the natural order. (p.131)
- # First there was the non-physical cosmos; after that there was the physical cosmos. (p.135)
- # The non-physical envelopes the physical; the non-physical incubates the physical; the non-physical creates the physical. (p.136)
- # The term “non-physical cosmos” refers to the cosmos constituted by *xingling*. (p.136)
- # The non-physical cosmos exerts inconceivable controlling and harmonizing force on the physical cosmos—the material world. (p.136)
- # The Lord of Heaven abides at the center of the cosmos...At all times He draws on His own ability to activate the energy of suns in all solar systems, enabling them to produce unending fusion and radiation.(p.137)
- # The ultimate constituents of matter are etropions [material particles] of the physical cosmos and harmonons [*xingling*] of the non-physical cosmos.[p.138]
- # Space is the site where these two basic components [material particles and *xingling*] are brought into adjustment and unified.[9]

In the language of Western science, we can say that the emergence of life on earth is made possible by what Edmund Wilson calls a "consilience" (a seamless consonance) among laws in many domains. In my view, the seamless consonance of laws is evidence that the non-physical realm has “incubated” and “created” the physical realm. But how can we say that a spiritual dimension is at work within matter when our instruments can only measure physical processes? I believe the potency to interweave laws belongs to the domain of spirit, and we can see its work in all material things. Even if we cannot sense the presence of *xingling* active in evolutionary processes around us now, we can extrapolate from interwoven-ness of laws of matter to recognize the activities of *xingling* that surrounded the emergence of matter. As Lee Yü-chieh wrote in *A New Realm*, “The temporal and spatial aspects of the cosmos cannot be divided.”[10] In other words, what we see right now in the space before us cannot be divorced from the formative processes operating down through time that made it appear. So the material entities we see bring with them the codified memory of processes that laid the template for their existence (i.e. the interweaving of laws). Even though such actions by *xingling* were involved at another time, that time is still with us in the present spatial fact existing as a result. So we cannot say

that matter is lacking in spirit, even if we fail to resonate with the spiritual dimension of matter now, because the spiritual dimension of matter's origin is always implied by matter. This reminds me of the French phrase “*Ça a été*” (the thing that was there). This phrase was used evocatively by Roland Barthes to talk about the lingering presence of a person registered in a photograph.[11] Of course the person in an old photograph is absent, but yet the time when the photograph was made is enduringly bound up with that photograph. In the same way, the spiritual dimension of the formation of matter is always **with** matter, so spirit can never be fully stripped away from matter.

On another level, we can infer the workings of *xingling* that surrounded the emergence of early life forms—the first cells. Although “survival of the fittest” works as a mechanism of selection after life has already appeared, it does not explain how life got here. “Survival of the fittest” does not explain how energy conversion cycles and coding for proteins could have come into existence within the protoplasm of cells. There is no way for incremental stages of such things to function while they are undergoing improvement. In fact, they are totally useless at their half-way, incremental stage. Here randomness is not an answer, so we have a mystery on our hands, and mystery is a place where *xingling* dwells.

According to the biologist Michael Denton, whatever aspect of the material substrate we examine on planet earth, we find fundamental conditions favorable for life. These conditions range from the properties of water (viscosity, surface tension, freezing point, specific heat, thermal conductivity) to the wavelengths of sunlight; from the ratio of different gases in our planet's atmosphere to our planet's size and weight; from the chemical properties of carbon-oxygen-hydrogen (yielding emergent properties of geometrical form, energy conversion and information storage) to the geological distribution of trace elements needed for life.

In his masterful work *Nature's Destiny*, Michael Denton lays out these features of our environment in a coherent framework. Take for example what he says about water.[12] He notes that one conspicuous property of water is its strong surface tension. Because of this property, water can be drawn up through thin tubules in plants, relying on an unbroken chain of water molecules. If water lacked this property, it would be impossible for plants to draw water from their roots by transpiration (evaporation of water from leaves). On the other hand, water has another remarkable property—its viscosity is zero. If water were even slightly viscous, it would be impossible to pump blood and other fluids through thin vessels and capillaries, because there would be too much friction. The juxtaposition of these two properties—high surface tension and zero viscosity—seems paradoxical to me. Why wouldn't high surface tension (the tendency to form molecular chains by adhesion) cause water to be a little bit viscous? But no, water has zero viscosity. Strange! But this is only the beginning, because water has several other complementary pairs of properties that make life possible: for instance, water in liquid form is a good conductor of heat, but when it is frozen it is a good insulator.

Another example that Michael Denton gives is sunlight. The light given off by Sol, our sun, is mostly in the visible spectrum, which is the wavelength of light suitable for photo-synthesis. (Chlorophyll molecules contain copper atoms which are excited by visible wavelengths of light, and chlorophyll molecules can transform that photo-excitation into chemical energy.) Only a small percentage of the sun's light is emitted in non-visible wavelengths. If we draw a graph of

the wavelengths coming from the sun, there is an extremely sharp peak at the visible wavelengths which flattens at other wavelengths. If that peak were shifted a little bit toward the ultra-violet side of the spectrum, our planet would be bombarded by too much ultra-violet light. That would make life nearly impossible on earth, because too much ultra-violet light would cause too many genetic mutations. If the peak were shifted toward the infra-red side of the spectrum, the surface of our planet would be too hot for life. Our sun gives us just the right kind of light.

Of course the special characteristics of carbon-hydrogen-oxygen chemistry are important to provide conditions for life. Combinations of these elements form molecules that have a great variety of functions. For instance, when amino acids (compounds of carbon-oxygen-hydrogen-nitrogen-sulfur) are combined in chains, they form proteins that take countless shapes and do different things within the cell. They can form energy transfer molecules. They can form information storage molecules (DNA bases). They also form enzymes with varying surface contours that act as templates to bring other atoms together, thus facilitating the production of compounds needed by the cells. All functions of these various molecules depend on emergent properties of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and sulfur atoms interacting with each other.

Michael Denton also talks about the subtle role of trace elements in living systems. Here are some of the elements needed in small amounts for life: zinc, iodine, iron, chromium, manganese, cobalt, nickel, molybdenum, silicon, copper, boron, vanadium, selenium and fluorine. Some of their uses are unknown, but they are found in all living things. Although Michael Denton is a rigorous scientist, he does not shrink from making bold hypotheses and conjectures. Here is his mind-boggling insight about the availability of trace elements: Trace elements on the earth's surface are limited, and they are eventually washed away by water. Living things on the earth's surface need to absorb these trace elements, but this would be impossible in a static environment. Michael Denton observes that the rising of mountain ranges from the earth's crust brings up trace minerals from the earth's core. He hypothesizes that the rate of depletion by runoff is fairly well balanced with rate of replenishment by crustal upheaval.[13] This is a wonderful example of the Michael Denton's scientific imagination. It is also a reminder of how natural laws in widely different domains need to mesh together before life can be possible.

The evolution of life on earth indeed depends on consonance of a great many laws and conditions. Clearly the origin of life on earth goes deeper than any fortuitous combination of building blocks in real time. The deeper origin clearly lies in a system of harmonious relations among laws that govern many domains. How was such harmony arrived at? What kind of cause could possibly lead to the mutual adjustment of laws? The human mind reaches for a cause that transcends matter.

## **PERSONAL CONCLUSION**

We have seen that in *A New Realm*, Lee Yü-chieh discusses the idea that the physical universe is incubated by the non-physical universe. This statement is closely related to our faith's doctrine that spirit-entities called *xingling* (harmonons) are part of matter. Thus a divine potency is always at work within the process of material evolution. In the words of Lee Yu-chieh, "The non-physical realm encompasses the physical; the non-physical realm incubates the physical; the non-physical realm creates the physical." In view of such doctrines, this writer is bemused by the

restless leaping after certainty that points to “intelligent design” in the cosmos and posits a creator as the agent of design. I think the concept of “intelligent design” in itself seems “designed” to lend itself to a creationist cosmogony. The idea of intelligent design implies the outlook of an engineer, as if a number of engineering problems were solved by an intelligence that stood outside of the nature and treated it as an object. However, the kind of problems that had to be solved to interweave to laws of nature, to me, do not seem like design problems. If you look at any specific slice of nature, you can find engineering solutions—such as kinesins, part of the transport machinery of the cell—which are little protein-built machines that actually move by propellers![14] But you can’t really “solve” the problems of how or why kinesins got built unless you “solve” much bigger problems behind them (such as why carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen and sulfur atoms have the independent and interactive properties they do), and then even bigger problems behind that (such as what kind of accommodation among supersymmetries must have been necessary—prior to the emergence of sub-atomic particles—to calibrate those particles’ force-ratios and constants?). To me, as the problems get bigger and more all-embracing, they look less and less like engineering solutions. They look to me more and more like subtle potentials incubated within a pre-cosmos that was striving to come alive; they look like they descend from overarching ordering principles that were incubated on the ethereal level of non-embodied, non-differentiated *xingling*—before matter even emerged. The same laws that govern the behavior of plasma also apply in governing the behavior of discrete atoms and who knows what other states of energy-matter. The only relation this has to “design” is that such an marvelous, vitally interwoven fabric of principles has the pleni-potentiality to allow re-calibration over and over again, yielding constants suited to whichever stage matter reaches, such that on any of those stages there are possibilities for an instrumentality that allows for certain achievements of “design.” However, we cannot say that what got interwoven at the origin-level was a “design.” Perhaps it was the cosmos fighting to bring itself alive while still at the level of potential. My imagination shows me a scenario. (I have written about this at more length in an article titled “Kun Is a Tease” on my website: [www.yijingpoetics.net](http://www.yijingpoetics.net)) At a certain stage the imperatives of supersymmetries began to focalize upon a number of nodal centers. The nodal centers had to interact with each other; at the same time they had to “represent” the supersymmetries running through them. In order to arrive at an accommodation, they began to “spin,” which is another way of saying they entered a highly dynamic ever-changing yet somewhat stable state. (Tiandi Jiao’s mediumistic texts on cosmogony mention that even before the physical cosmos emerged, there were regimes of “spiral harmony” in the non-physical cosmos.) Only in this way could they keep the huge traffic of flux states running through their evolving system. At that level of pure spirit-energy, more things had to be brought into consonance than we mortal souls can conceive of. And one means of achieving consonance was to focalize the huge pattern-forming capacities of super-symmetries upon forms that coalesced and consolidated into more concrete phenomena, perhaps in a series of levels. Thus pre-material forms were “bumped” into lower dimensions, and from there particles were “bumped” into physical dimensions. Yet these concrete forms or particles which emanated from the void carried an imprint of those intricate, interwoven symmetries. In other words, material forms such as atoms became vehicles for the intricate symmetries of their pre-material history. That is perhaps why material particles retain a propensity to interact in such intricate ways.

We cannot say that the sun “designs” its own coherence---we can only say its coherence is an existential fact. It would be presumptuous to say that we “know” that the sun is merely a lump of

brute, inanimate matter. We don't really know how what principles of order contributed to harmonizing the inner operations of the sun; we do not know which levels of existence contributed those ordering principles that governed (and still govern) the causal chain that made the sun. As we trace the ordering principles that made the sun, we arrive at a mystery: it is very likely that those ordering principles were interwoven before there were such things as hydrogen and helium atoms.

I see intelligence in the sun—not as an object of design by someone or something, but in the sun's mode of being. As for the level of origin, which surely involved meta-energy and flux states more massive and subtle than any phenomena on our material plane (including solar fusion), it would be even more presumptuous to say that incubation on the origin level constituted some kind of “design decision” aimed at our level. To say that design decisions were made at the origin level would imply there was instrumentality at that level, plus knowledge of what results a specific design would have. That further implies a knower who could his represent knowledge in a “theater of consciousness.” This is a presumption on at least three counts. First, capacity to represent known things in a theater of consciousness is not the only valid model of intelligence. We are still trying to understand what intelligence is. Second, the concept of “design” seems necessarily oriented toward a known result, but perhaps the ordering principle on the origin level was/is oriented toward producing unknown results rather than known results—the more unknown the better! Perhaps the kind of intelligence involved at the origin level would have aimed for anything but a “known” result, because a known result would have foreclosed “unknown” possibilities. Third, evidence of intelligence in the cosmos does not have to be attributed to a designing agency. When we see signs that intelligence was at work in the cosmos, why not say it is evidence that the cosmos is intelligent, albeit in a way that we cannot yet fathom? It is a very human habit to isolate some inanimate corner of the cosmos and point to it as proof that the cosmos is not “intelligent.” To see its intelligence, we really have to take it as a whole; we have to look at how the whole develops and allows living things to emerge. We have to spur ourselves onward to peer into that coherence as deeply as we can. Faith is not going to tell us everything, but there is no reason faith and inquiry should not go hand in hand. Perhaps there is a level of activity in the cosmos where its organizational principles were and are still being interwoven. We don't yet know how to orient ourselves toward that level; we don't yet know how to point to it and respect its “intelligence.” However, we seem to know fairly well how to denigrate its intelligence. We point to inanimate matter as “evidence” that the cosmos was and is not intelligent. Some like to say that an unintelligent cosmos, however marvelous its forms may be, “clearly” stood in need of being designed by an intelligent being.

Since the cosmos allowed an intelligent being like myself to emerge, I am determined to expand my idea of intelligence until it includes the order and generative potentials we see in the cosmos. I don't want to say that what engendered me is less “intelligent” than I am. I think the opposite is probably the case.

Rather than seeing inanimate matter as “evidence” that the cosmos is unintelligent, I see it as precisely the opposite. The properties of matter are simply too marvelous to belong to a whole that is unintelligent or stupid in any way. The formative principles working in and around and through matter are part of matter, and they tie back to that marvelous origin level where principles were interwoven.

Because of the above considerations, I do not think we would be justified in “deducing” that design decisions were made at an origin level. (We need to maintain an attitude of humility about our ideas of design, which are probably still fairly narrow.) What we can say is that whatever principles were incubated and woven on the origin level have trickled or emanated down—to our coarse material level—in such a way that we find ourselves within a bewilderingly marvelous order where the wavelength of sunlight, the chemistry of carbon, the surface tension of water, the availability of trace elements and thousands and thousands of other aspects of our world constitute an environment where living things can grow and evolve. If all of this had been done by “design,” I personally doubt it would be as flowerlike as it is.

Maybe we cannot call a flower intelligent, but in the overall process that grows a flower there must be some kind of intelligence. I admit that am unable to understand what the intelligence at work in the cosmos really is. Therefore I borrow Tiandi Jiao’s faith-based word, which is also a good traditional Daoist word, and call it *xingling*—because giving it this name helps me to respect it and to sympathize with its evolutionary trials.

I don’t know whether the highest creative level of the cosmos should be thought of as God or as the community of spirit-entities called *xingling*. This fertile ambiguity is built into Tiandi Jiao’s belief system. As I mentioned, religious dialogue is a built-in feature of a syncretic faith such as Tiandi Jiao.

In Tiandi Jiao, our seminary at Sun-Moon Lake is called Tianren Seminary and our academic center is called Tianren Research Institute. The word *tianren* 天人 (literally “heaven-humanness”) comes from one of our Church’s scriptures, received by a medium in the 1940s, titled *Tianren qinhe zhenjing* (天人亲和真经). This scripture speaks of the “ten categories of *tianren* writ large” (十大天人). The concept of *tianren* is similar to *xingling*, but the emphasis is on different levels of manifestation of human-like qualities in the cosmos. At the lower levels, they are self-centered and narrowly self-righteous (all-too-human). At higher levels of the *tianren* continuum, we find immortals who never give up striving to save themselves and others.

It is a challenge to believe that *xingling* exists both within and around matter. It is a challenge to localize spirit in matter; it is also a challenge to respect matter for being a vehicle of spirit, but if we can do this, we will discover new things about spirit and new things about matter each day. This is a kind of challenge that allows us to keep learning within our faith.

I don’t think *xingling* could have designed themselves; rather, I think they evolved thanks to facilitating circumstances that emerged from the origin level. I believe the level of *xingling* has inner vistas, and I believe each individual *xingling* goes through trials in order to keep the life of the cosmos going, just as we go through trials to keep our human community going. We human beings are a very special aspect of life in the cosmos: we are given a chance to bring life out in the open, to experience it and argue over it from a thousand different angles. We are allowed to imagine the lives of others. We are gifted with a vision of life’s hopeful but perilous adventure. Once we begin to identify with the large “body” that envelopes and incubates and fosters our narrowly human selves, we realize that the universe has been incubating humanness-writ-large for a long time. To me, even the sun with its light wavelengths suitable for photosynthesis seems

part of the larger body of cosmic man. Once we live within the larger body of cosmic man, we know the snow leopard is our brother. If we cannot see brotherhood in a snow leopard's face, although we may be human in a narrow sense, we still haven't recognized what "cosmic man" is. The dispensation of this world has seemingly made things easy for humans; it has paved our way and laid many things at our feet. As a result, we can easily get cocky and suppose we live in a human-centered world. We need to suffer through many life ordeals, or we need a tremendous root of wisdom, to arrive at the subtle truth: namely, we will never know how human-centered the cosmos really is until we begin to identify with the extended, spiritual-and-material body of cosmic man.

### Notes:

[1] *Xingling* refers to individual spirit-entities, yet it is also tied to the philosophical idea of *xing* ('fundamental nature of a person'). *Xing* was an important category in orthodox Confucianism.

[2] The relevant passage in Wilhelm's translation, with certain minor revisions (italicized), reads as follows: "Looking upward, we contemplate...the signs in the heavens; looking down, we examine *the patterns* of the earth. Thus we come to know the circumstances of the dark and light. Going back to the beginnings of things and pursuing them to the end, we come to know the lessons of birth and of death. The union of *bodily essence* and *vital energy* produces all things; [the escape of] the roaming soul brings about change. Through this we come to know the conditions of outgoing and returning spirits."

[3] This passage seemingly points to a pre-Buddhist, native idea of transmigration. However, later orthodox Confucianism has been reluctant to posit the *youhun* as an entity which moves through cycles of incarnation. It prefers to equate *youhun* with *xing* (fundamental nature), which does not come and go, but is more or less manifest. This is the approach that Zhang Zai of the Northern Song took in his *Zhengmeng* to debunk Buddhist ideas of reincarnation.

[4] The concept of "laws of divinity" is discussed in the Lee Yü-chieh, *Xin jingjie* 《新境界》 (A New Realm), Dijiao Press, Taipei, 2008, p. 69-84.

[5] See Zhang Huang 章潢 quote is from his commentary *Zhouyi xiangyi* 《周易象义》, republished in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* 《续修四库全书》, Jing Section, Vol. 9, p. 452.

[6] Wu-wei Lineage 无为教, as discussed by the Taiwan religious historian Zheng Zhiming 郑志明, is a syncretic folk religious tradition that developed independently of orthodox Daoist and Buddhist traditions, though it incorporated many elements from them. (See 《无生老母信仰溯源》, 文史哲出版社, 1985 and 《先天道与一贯道》, 正一善书出版社, 1990.) Zheng claims that the what he calls the Wuwei Jiao or Xiantian Dao lineage been the major folk/syncretic lineage in Chinese religious history since the late Ming. The first historical figure associated with this lineage is Luo Qing 罗青 of the early Ming era. As it developed into sects and mixed with other traditions, this lineage was sometimes suppressed by authorities during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Some of the unique ideas and features of the Wuwei jiao lineage are: 1) "vacuum as

homeland” 真空家乡; 2) a “golden disc” in heaven incubates or fosters “original spirit-seeds”; 3) the original spirit seeds fall to earth and incarnate; 4) the original spirits forget their origins; 5) the Birthless Holy Mother 无生圣母 takes pity on them and sends immortals to rescue them from apocalypse; 6) a plain silk screen may be used in worship. During the Qing this lineage took the form of Yiguan Dao 一贯道, which was linked to Zhai-jiao 斋教 in Taiwan. One faith that emerged from this lineage during the Republican Period Tiande jiao 天德教, which was the faith embraced by Lee Yü-chieh’s teacher Xiao Changming 萧昌明. This lineage was one of several influences on Lee Yu-chieh. (Lee was also strongly influenced by orthodox Daoism.)

[7] Energy in the body is traditionally thought to take one of three forms: *jing*, *qi*, and *shen*. *Jing*, which is carried in the body’s fluids, is a sublimation of bodily energy, and it is carried in the body’s fluids. *Qi* is vital energy or subtle breath, and it circulates in its own meridian systems. *Shen* is the intelligence of the body: it is distributed throughout bodily processes with power to regulate and penetrate. For a discussion on *shen*’s interaction with extra-corporeal forces as it raises its own level and regulates the five organ eMediumistic texts received at Tianren Research Institute by Sang Min-chieh 桑敏接 in 1995 and 1996 discussed how *shen* has a three-fold role: to interact with extra-corporeal forces, to regulate energies of the five organ systems, and to harmonize psychic processes.

[8] *Xin jingjie* (A New Realm), pp. 69-74.

[9] *Xin jingjie* (A New Realm), pp.131-138.

[10] *Xin jingjie* (A New Realm), p. 131.

[11] For Roland Barthes, “*Ç a a été*” was an important notion in his explanation of photography’s appeal. See Richard Howard, trans., *Camera Lucida*, Hill and Wang, 1981, pp. 76-77.

[12] Michael Denton’s discussion of water: *Nature’s Destiny*, Free Press, 2002, pp. 19-47.

[13] *Nature’s Destiny*, pp. 71-100.

[14] See “The Workhorse of the Cell: Kinesin,” *Evolution News and Views*, Dec.23, 2014. [http://www.evolutionnews.org/2014/12/10\\_of\\_our\\_top-t\\_1092191.html](http://www.evolutionnews.org/2014/12/10_of_our_top-t_1092191.html)