

Unique Principle

The Philosophy of Macrobiotics

George Ohsawa

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Unique Principle was originally published in French by J. Vrin Philosophical Library in Paris in 1931. It is George Ohsawa's first book and is thus very important to understanding his unique philosophy. The English edition was edited by Herman Aihara. A complete list of Ohsawa's writings can be found in *Essential Ohsawa*, edited by Carl Ferré.

With appreciation—Robert Nissenbaum

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Preface to the English Edition

This book is unique, not because of its name or its contents, but rather how it was translated and published. The translation of this book was started by a group of macrobiotic practitioners in Chico, California about seven years ago. Lou Oles, one of the group, then moved to Los Angeles and continued the translation.

After Lou Oles died in 1967, the work moved to Boston, where I am uncertain how many people worked on the book's translation and revision. Strangely, however, on one day this year, I found the completed translation on my desk at George Ohsawa Macrobiotic Foundation in San Francisco. I started plans to publish it right away. Thus, the translation of this book was completed after passing through many lives, cities, and times, covering the east and west coasts of the United States and almost one decade of the 20th century.

George Ohsawa visited Paris via the Siberian Railway without any financial support and then published his first book, *Unique Principle*, in French (Vrin Company, Paris) in 1931 at the age of 38. More than forty years have passed since it was first printed in France. We are very happy and proud that we are able to publish this in English at last. We are sure that this is a great book for people who wish to study Eastern philosophy and its application in the various fields of science. However, the most important contribution of this work to modern society is in the fact that it will lead people to a better and deeper understanding of the principle on which Eastern religion, morals, character, living customs, and science are based. And this understanding, in turn, will help people lead happier and

healthier lives.

On this Thanksgiving Day of 1971, I am so grateful to everyone who has helped to make this publication possible, especially to Lou, Armand, Fred, and Joyce for their translating, editing, and typing; and to Ken Burns for his work revising the *Tannishyo*. Also, many thanks to Marvin Mattelson for the cover design and I have no way to name the many people who remain anonymous who donated their time and work to realize the dream of having this publication printed.

– *Herman Aihara*
1973

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Introduction

To offer to the Western World a key to the philosophy and science of the Far-East, one which at the same time opens the mysterious door of the so-called “primitive mentality,” is a daring gesture for an Oriental to make. This key is the “universal law,” the “unique principle” of ancient Chinese philosophy and science more than fifty centuries old.

Today, the Orient is so taken with the importance of the dazzling civilization, philosophy, and science of the West that few Orientals take any serious interest in their own ancient philosophy and science. Everyone recognizes the *I-Ching (Book of Changes)* and the *Ni-Ching (Canon of Houang-ti)* as the surest sources for them but no one studies these overly famous prehistoric books with a philosophic spirit and modern scientific approach. A few Japanese doctors study the *Canon* very superficially, and this only in their capacity as “doctors,” but disregard the *I-Ching*; a few Japanese philosophers read the *I-Ching*, but never the *Canon* except as “philosophers.” However, the ancient philosophy is actually grounded in science, and the ancient medicine depends entirely and solely on the philosophy. It is impossible to understand one or the other without having deeply examined the ancient fundamental ideas, which are expressed in the theory of the two activities Yin and Yang.

I shall call this theory *In'yology*. In'yology is the most positive philosophy of the Far-East. It embraces all sciences. I believe it best enables the Westerner to understand Buddhism and, thereafter, all the most profound philosophy of the Far-East where all the practical sciences of life—medicine, biology, economics, and sociology, for example—are found in one extraordinary and harmonious synthesis.

“Did the philosophy of the Far-East ever exist, or does it exist now?” I am asked.

“Yes and no.”

If the goal of modern Western philosophy, such as the philosophy of Kant, is “to know oneself,” the Orientals had and still have something analogous to it. At least that much can be said. But the philosophy of the Far-East goes beyond this point. It is indeed a deepened, delicate, and most complete study of the theory of knowledge similar to that of Kant; furthermore, it is practical to grasp and easy to follow by everyone. It goes beyond the confines of simply knowing oneself. It is a practical culture, ethical, scientific, and esthetic at the same time.

In the Orient, it is forbidden to analyze and reconstruct fundamental knowledge in any manner. Truth, beauty, and good are each only one interpretation of the unique, all-embracing law. They are “several equal to one.” They must never be considered separately, not even in imagination. One cannot have a perfect conception of universal law by synthesizing it bit by bit from various pieces. The “river” could not be reconstructed even if one were to gather all the drops of water that apparently formed it. In the Orient, instead of analyzing, one must widen the synthesis, ever more endlessly unifying all knowledge and, above all, one must practice it in daily life.

Lao-tse has said, “Without practice, no virtues.”

Ancient Chinese philosophy, as well as that of the entire Far-East embraces both a theory of knowledge and its application to practical existence.

“Has the science of the Far-East ever existed, or does it exist now?” I am asked.

“Yes and no.”

Western science has for its goal the perfect knowledge of the chronological sequence of phenomena, in order to profit from them. It is active and positive. Oriental science, on the contrary, is negative and passive. A perfect understanding of the law of order is its starting point, not its goal. That is to say, it does not carry on any research—it has no need of it—but it strives to live and utilize the

perfect knowledge confirmed to it by philosophy, its sovereign to whom it is faithful and obedient.

According to Augustus Comte, human understanding developed from theology, went to metaphysics, and reached positivism. In the Orient, it appears to me, it has been the reverse. Knowledge developed from positive science and reached divinity via metaphysics. It finally achieved the perfect understanding of the highest unifying principle.

From its beginning, science in the Orient has been perfectly governed by philosophy. The wise man, the great philosopher, was the one who arrived at a perfect understanding of the unifying principle that governs the causality of all the phenomena of the universe. Ancient Oriental science explains the system of the universe and all the phenomena that occur in it by the law of *In'yology*, somewhat as modern physics is explained by the atomic theory. The theory of Lavoisier in chemistry has its equivalent in the law "Musyonin," which says exactly the same thing about matter.

But the use of science was strictly by philosophy. One might say that science is the scaffold of the great philosophical structure; it no longer has a reason for being when the latter is erected.

But even if theoretically we do away completely with these differences between Western and Oriental philosophy, on the one hand, and between modern and ancient science on the other, there still remains another very great one. It is the fact that philosophy and science are but one in the Orient. Philosophy is the sole fruit of science—it is the awaited ruler who, once born, will govern all of science forever. The synthesizing scientific research of the ancient peoples led to the perfect understanding that permitted them to grasp the intimate nature of all phenomena. It is absolute knowledge in the face of which neither time nor space exists.

It is the sublime unique law that explains past and future just as it does the present, the invisible as it does the visible, the imponderable as the ponderable, that which cannot be heard as well as that which can, the mineral world as well as the organic world. Were it only a simplistic system produced by an overly naive imagination,

we should at least respect its theory and study it seriously to cut from it the few bits that might be interesting to us from the historical point of view.

In'yology, that is to say, the unification of science and philosophy, was invented by the ancient Chinese emperors. The activities Yin and Yang, which are the basic units presented to us by this philosophy, constitute all the phenomena, assimilate one another, and almost represent $\gamma\lambda\eta$ of the physiologist DuBois-Reymond. But *In'yology* offers, beyond this, that which produces $\gamma\lambda\eta$. We shall examine it later.

All that I have said until the present concerns ancient China, because I will deal solely with the formation of the spirit of the Far-East through philosophy and science, from its prehistoric origin until the 5th century before Christ; that is, until the period when Confucius, Lao-tse, and Sakyamuni began to enlighten the world. There is nothing of further interest following this period from our particular point of view because philosophy and science had already been perfected prior to this time; the subsequent march of history only brings us discussions of minute, useless details due to the superficial or erroneous comprehension of the fundamental principle. It is the slow march of decadence in China, India, and Japan.

There have been no additions or rebirths of *In'yology*. Today, only fortune tellers and magicians pay any attention to it. It has been abandoned and misunderstood by men of science. Its true significance, so practical at its origin, has been lost. It has been clouded over by enormous symbolic difficulties. The only reason it has not totally been lost is thanks to its amazing simplicity and to the record of Confucius' study of it via the *I-Ching* during the last twenty years of his life.

The great Buddhism, Mahayana, has disappeared in China and India. *In'yology* has disappeared everywhere. Such is the present condition of the philosophy of the Far-East. Can it grow again or is this the final spiritual fall of the Oriental people?

In order to grasp the unifying principle of Chinese science and philosophy, one must bear in mind that the mentality of the Orient is

in every way the antipode of the Western mentality.

At first glance, its philosophy appears negative as opposed to positive. In reality, it is above objectivity and subjectivity.

Neither its science, its religion, nor its philosophy require or demand any propaganda whatever; on the contrary, they insist on secretiveness. "Hide the truth," says the wise man.

The truly traditional education does not have exterior and material knowledge as an aim. It only wishes to teach us our own smallness and ignorance of ourselves and strives to develop to the highest level the practice of the "instinct-intuition" (see "Theory of Knowledge," Part 2).

The logic of daily life is the opposite of the West. The least example can prove it. An address is given in the following order: the country, the city, the street, the house number, the name of the recipient.

Syllogism differs likewise.

And, in daily life, the greatest and smallest extremes are always ruled out; one states the conclusion only. If one should say to any uneducated worker in Tokyo:

"You are mortal because . . ."

"Berabo-me!" (You are an idiot!)

...he will interrupt you before you are through speaking. Reasoning is unbearable and much too heavy for Orientals due to the traditional training of the intuition. Such is the cause for the relative lack of skill of the Japanese in international diplomacy. Ordinary reasoning is more or less scorned by tradition and, even more so, the analytical scientific reasoning. The conclusion alone must be expressed in as precise and as limited a choice of words as possible. In the course of my Western studies during these last two years, the greatest difficulty I have found has been acquiring the habit of Western word expression. At all times, under all circumstances, I used to state the conclusion only. This appeared at first incomprehensible, then annoying, bothersome, and strange to my French professor.

Our conversation without any apparent reason seems mysterious

to Westerners. One example:

Sakyamuni Buddha one day showed a flower to the disciples gathered near him, saying, “Today I am yielding to you the entire secret of our philosophy—this is it.”

No one seemed to understand him. A single disciple smiled, looking at him.

“You have understood me. I give you permission to teach in my place,” said the Buddha. Even he did not want to create any detailed explanation.

Simplification is the order. For example, in Buddhism the entire philosophy, which was dealt with in innumerable books, has been systematized into the 600 volumes of *Maha Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra* (see Appendix), which in turn have been condensed into a mantra (master-words) of 17 or 18 syllables, and finally into one syllable: *Aum* or *Om*.

The spirit of the philosophy best shows itself in the simplest form; words hide its true nature.

The secret of Chinese science and philosophy is also condensed into two words: Yin and Yang, the theory of the polarized monism that I will explain in Part 2.

According to tradition, never must the secret of the philosophy and science of the Far-East be translated into an analytical form. However, I have been the first one to violate this unspoken rule. The unifying principle itself has never been clearly presented. From antiquity to the present day, no book, no document expresses the twelve theorems of the unique law; I have purposely formulated them for the benefit of the West. This is an untenable procedure according to tradition. Therefore, I shall not show them to my Oriental students.

Not only have I explained the unique law in a manner more or less modern, but I have developed it into a theory of being and a theory of knowledge; furthermore, I have been led against my will to offer several applications in the specialized sciences. These are enormous sins. Everything is explained to an inexcusable degree.

Nevertheless, all this may still appear vague to Westerners. Cer-

tain scientists are already asking me for more detailed explanations, charts, a complete classification of foods, of produce, of vegetables and animals according to *In'yology*. We do possess such complete charts: the medical encyclopedia that Li-Che Tohen published in 1578 after devoting 26 years to its study. But a classification is not very practical because of its essentially relative and changing nature. This will be understood well enough later.

I would say that one ought to strive to grasp the unifying principle of the philosophy and science of the Far-East without dissecting it through analysis. One must understand fully its pliability to learn how to apply it to all of modern science. In order to reach this peak of understanding, I believe, there is only one road: constant and ever-deepening reflection. This too-detailed exposé must be abandoned after it has been well assimilated in order to meditate on the substance of it at every moment, in order to read it in daily occurrences. (Note-taking is actually scorned in Oriental teaching of all *In'yological* or traditional science or philosophy.)

The theory of polarized monism of *In'yology* has an organic mechanism invisible to mechanical researchers. It is like the "flying arrow," out of reach of those who want to possess it through analysis; once one has grasped it, it no longer is the "flying arrow." But if one considers it as an abstract movement, the *arrow* no longer exists.

Chronology

I confess that I am not profoundly interested in the chronological question because the Oriental mind has no bent for this kind of order, which requires extreme precision. Orientals can only present all the possible material about their tradition without any exaggerated explanation.

The traditional chronology that almost all the modern Oriental specialists accept is the following: Fou-Hi, 2900 B.C.; Sin-Wong, 2780 B.C.; Houang-Ti, 2640 B.C.; Iu (Ou) 2200 B.C.; Tcheou-Kong, 1100 B.C.; Confucius, 552-479 B.C.; Sakyamuni, 564-484 B.C.

But certain scholars do not follow these dates. Some of them

take the period of Fou-Hi back as far as 8,000 B.C. Others deny entirely the historical truth of all these great personalities. My teacher, M. Nishibata, for instance, does not accept the existence of Houang-Ti. He believes that the *Canon of the Emperor Houang-Ti* was written somewhere in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C. by an unknown writer. As yet, I cannot publish my own chronology, nor am I acquainted with the chronology of Chinese development established by Western scholars, having busied myself with the study of natural and physical sciences since my arrival in France. I have not read the French sinologists; I have only thumbed through Chinese science as presented by Prof. A. Rey in Book VI of *Science Orientale dans L'Antiquite* and have found it precise.

My chronological order is not precision-bound and has two foundations. The first is biological; the second is a general biological philology, which should not only define the etymology of the Chinese, and especially Japanese, language, but must be a fundamental contribution to general philology. Part one of my study is completed—I have discovered biological particulars of a remarkable nature:

1. All the great men, all the emperors, and all the ancient philosophers were incapable of perceiving light rays below 4900 or perhaps 4400 Angstroms. Therefore, they were all blind to blue, indigo, and violet.
2. They had a great many more teeth than modern man.
3. Their breathing and their pulse were much less intense, etc.

I have deduced from these particulars and from the disappearance of them in the race something new from the chronological point of view.

I shall wait several years to publish my conclusions.

Furthermore, for several years I have had a rather childish notion that the prehistoric Chinese, at least under the reign of the “three augusts,” inhabited land quite other than China as it is known today.

The solar eclipses in the period Hia observed by the Chinese at the observatory of Fond must have been produced, according to the

calculations of Goubil, on the darkest nights at this location (see the *Science Orientale* of Prof. A. Rey). The witnesses that described them, therefore, must have lived in a country other than modern China. This fact permits us to suppose that the observatory was situated at 70 or 80 degrees longitude west. It is well known that any people who emigrate take along with them the names of their native sites.

Further, I want to obtain permission to consult and to copy, if possible, the *Canon of the Emperor Houang-Ti* in the oldest edition kept as a national treasure at Ninnaji Temple in Kyoto. If one could discover the old books that the expedition of the Emperor Tsin-Chi-Houang brought to Japan before the great fire of the year 213 B.C., the actual chronology would be greatly clarified.