

Week of Education 2025

(Re)balancing education
A taoist perspective

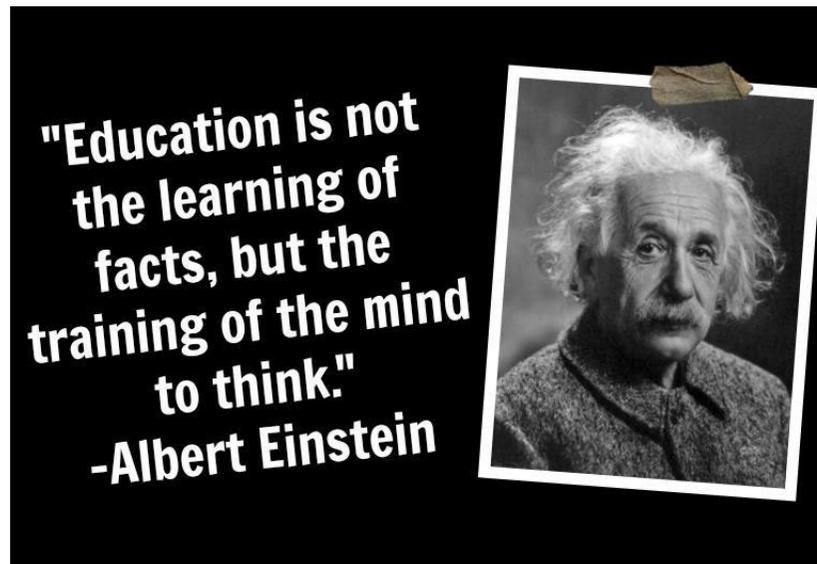


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Date: 19th of May, 2025

Warming up

- Who is from the UT?
- Who has a teaching profession?
- Who experienced a (fundamental) change in behavior / mindset in the students the past few years?

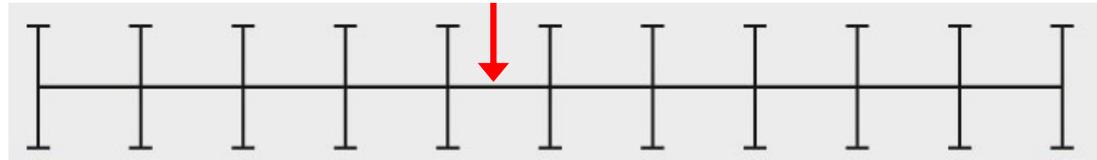


This presentation - outline

1. The motive: observations in my current teaching in CreaTe BSc.
2. Initial thoughts on what is happening
3. A very brief introduction to Taoism and Taoist principles & Crafting a holistic viewpoint on education based on Taoist principles: balance, growth, natural principles
4. Expanding this with 4 modes of engaging with the world and self by Carl Jung (personality types)
5. Diagnosing what is currently taking place
6. Paths forward to rebalance

This presentation

- On a scale from light to dead serious: midway light - serious



- I hope everybody can get inspired and take something home of today
- And I hope I can learn from you and establish some new connections

0. Who is Erik?

- Erik was born and raised in Leeuwarden.
 - 1998 – 2002: MSc in Electrical Engineering (UT)
 - 2002 – 2006: PhD in Bios – lab on a chip group (UT)
- Since 2012 involved in BSc program Creative Technology (CreaTe) primarily as a lecturer of theoretical (EE based) courses, projects and graduation projects.
- Since 2020 also involved in BSc. Honours course “Origins” (part of the Shaping the Future track).
- Passions in life:
 - Music lover
 - Martial arts (Karate, Tai Chi) and Eastern philosophies
 - Community, gardening,

1. Observations (heavily generalized)

- My observation of 1st year groups in the past three years:
 - 2022 – 2023: very active and engaging group. Discussions during courses on content; curiosity. Spirit
 - 2023 – 2024: more distanced group, less interactions, lower attendance in tutorials
 - 2024 – 2025: by far the most distanced group I have experience in my teaching at CreaTe. Lowest attendance ever during lectures, few questions about content, curiosity to know not (so) visible, e-mails mostly about “getting security” and boundary conditions (do I pass the course with these grades; what if I fail the lab 2 but do the assignment well, etc.).
 - Words that came to mind: *Consumerism, economic studying, checkbox education*

2. Initial thoughts on what is happening

- A “resigning generation”? What we do (stemming from a tradition) no longer works? Mismatch in needs?
- Too much distraction? We (uni) have to compete with social media, a technologically connected world that is always “on”,
- Too much distraction (2)? Role models and examples push you to be very active in various fields. Study has been “reduced” to “just” one of those activities and has reduced in relative size and proportions in minds of young people.
- Altered mindset? Is uni seen as a collection of checkboxes that needs to be passed and not as a pathway to develop self and learn essential skills. A more mechanical and consumerist outlook on study instead of an experiential one and relevant one.
- Resilience ...

2. Initial thoughts on what is happening -2-

- Prospects after study and outlook on life in general have diminished. Less spirit to work towards and for a better future
 - Study: does not prepare for a working life young people aspire to and envision (no to 9-5 jobs...)
 - Future in general: hard and tough life (e.g. Dutch housing market, geopolitics, climate crisis, etc.)
- And as the outside worlds is constantly “on” and the students (and we too by the way) are exposed to a constant stream of images, it cracks the spirit of young people. And it makes them anxious for the future.

2. Initial thoughts on what is happening -3-

- Distorted and volatile role models and with that, a distorted outlooks on meaningful living.
 - From local to now global.
 - It creates the illusion of fast, quick-fix, impactful, etc.
 - And gets people out of reality concerning the slow process, patience, perseverance, stamina, (of which university education and research is full of)
 - Little learning from older generations, little transfer of life experience (wisdom) from older generations

2. Initial thoughts on what is happening -4-

Taoist metaphor:



3. Taoism [1] (the Way)

- Chinese philosophy spanning more than 2000 years
- Key points
 - Taoist ethics emphasize compassion, simplicity, and humility.
 - Taoist thought focuses on wu wei (“action by non-action”), spontaneity and emptiness.
 - An emphasis is placed on the link between people and nature. Taoism teaches that this link lessens the need for rules and order, and leads people to a better understanding of the world and why things happen.
- Central is concept of duality. E.g.
 - “To return to source is true knowing.
 - To be simple is to be truly complex.
 - To let go is to truly grasp.”



3. Dualities



- Opposing poles
 - Complement each other
 - Need each other for wholeness
 - Balance
 - Dynamic

YIN-YANG SYMBOL

Yin and yang are present in all things - love, career, or life in general. Opposing forces must be balanced the right way in order to achieve harmony. The symbol represents completion and that duality is required to achieve equilibrium

YIN		YANG	
Dark		Light	
Moon		Sun	
Water		Fire	
Cold		Warm	
Softness		Hardness	
Femininity		Masculinity	
Passiveness		Activeness	
Stillness		Movement	
		Curved Line - Represents movement and the dynamic flow of energies	
			Dots of Opposing Colors - Symbolizes that neither is absolute, but contains some of its opposite within it

symbolsage.com

3. Influences of Taoism in Chinese culture



Healing (e.g. acupuncture, diet, herbal medication)

Philosophy (practical)

Meditation, enlightenment, longevity

Martial Arts (e.g. Kung Fu, Tai Chi, Wing Chun)

And more...

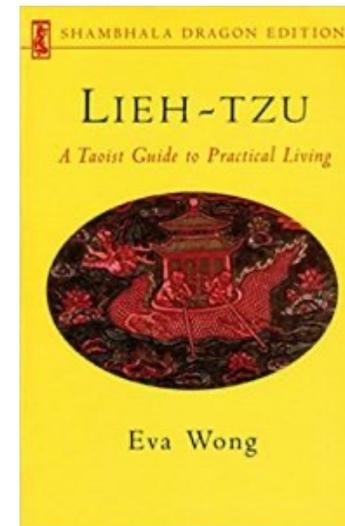
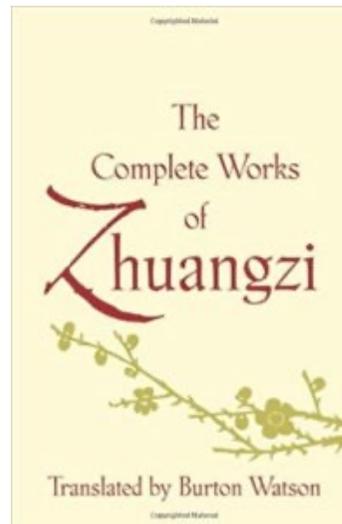
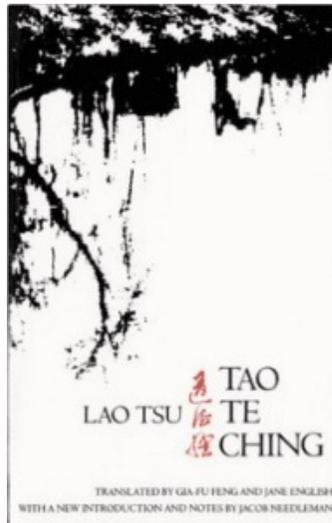


Roots: Taoism

3. Famous writings in Taoism



- LaoZi (Lao – Tze) (Tao Te Ching)
- ZuangZi
- LieZi



3. Taoist Examples: be like water



Tao Te Ching – Verse 78

*Nothing in the world
is as soft and yielding as water.
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,
nothing can surpass it.*

*The soft overcomes the hard;
the gentle overcomes the rigid.
Everyone knows this is true,
but few can put it into practice.*

*Therefore the Master remains
serene in the midst of sorrow.
Evil cannot enter his heart.
Because he has given up helping,
he is people's greatest help.*

True words seem paradoxical.

(translation by Stephen Mitchell, 1995)

3. Taoist Examples: be like water



Tao Te Ching – Verse 8

*“The supreme good is like water,
which nourishes all things without trying to.
It flows to low places loathed by all men.
Therefore, it is like the Tao.*

*Live in accord with the nature of things.
In dwelling, be close to the land.
In meditation, go deep in the heart.
In dealing with others, be gentle and kind.
Stand by your word.
Govern with equity.
Be timely in choosing the right moment.*

*One who lives in accord with nature
does not go against the way of things.
He moves in harmony with the present moment,
always knowing the truth of just what to do.”*

3. Taoist Examples: empty the mind



Tao Te Ching – Verse 16

*Empty your mind of all thoughts.
Let your heart be at peace.
Watch the turmoil of beings,
but contemplate their return.*

*Each separate being in the universe
returns to the common source.
Returning to the source is serenity.*

*If you don't realize the source,
you stumble in confusion and sorrow.
When you realize where you come from,
you naturally become tolerant,
disinterested, amused,
kindhearted as a grandmother,
dignified as a king.*

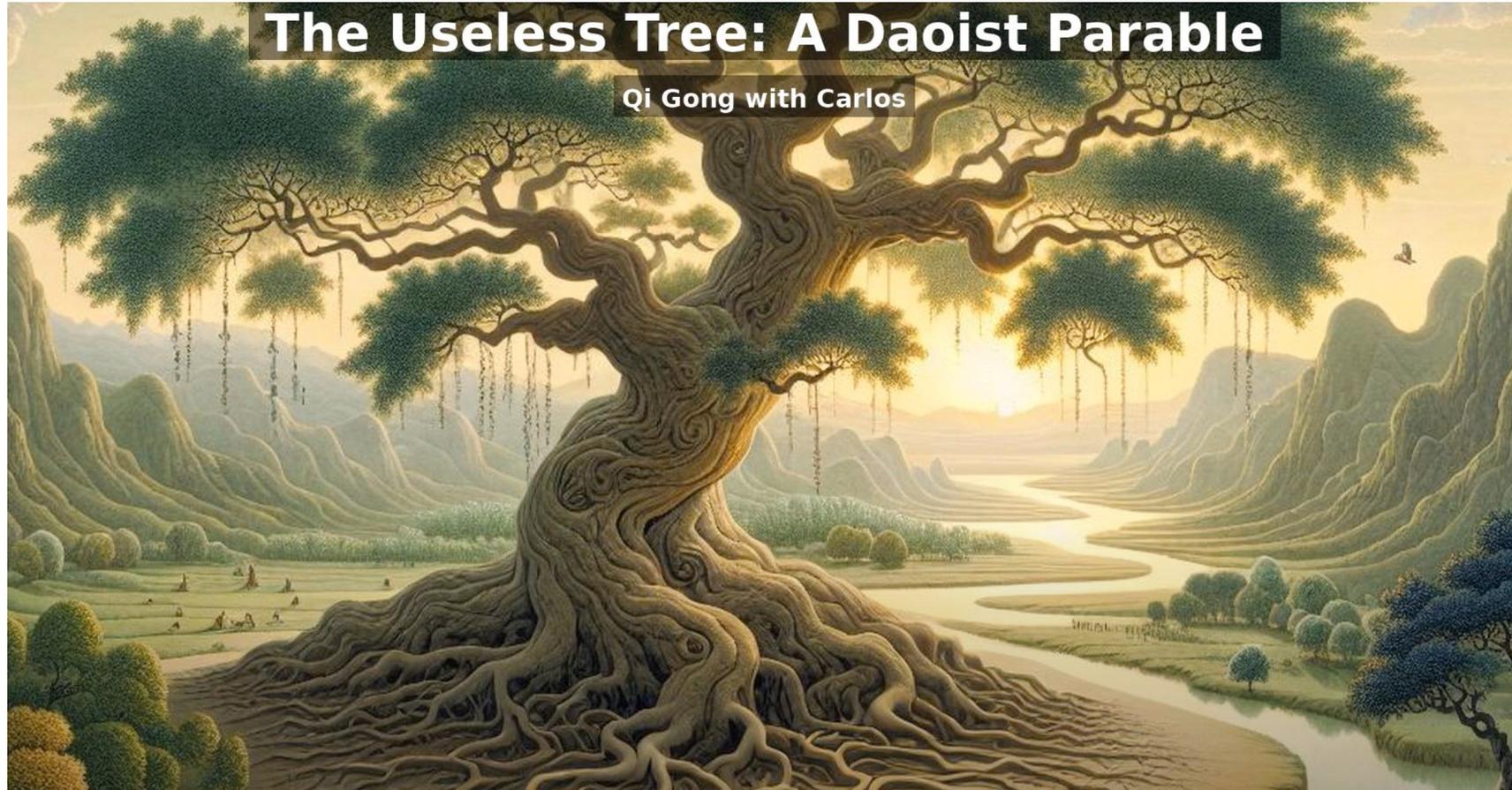
*Immersed in the wonder of the Tao,
you can deal with whatever life brings you,
and when death comes, you are ready.*

(translation by Stephen Mitchell, 1995)

3. Taoist Examples: useful - usefulness



From ZhaungZi – the gnarled tree



3. Taoist example: inner and outer



The rainmaker

“There was a drought; for months there had not been a drop of rain and the situation became catastrophic. The Catholics made processions, the Protestants made prayers, and the Chinese burned joss sticks and shot off guns to frighten away the demons of the drought, but with no result.

Finally the Chinese said: We will fetch the rain maker. And from another province, a dried up old man appeared. The only thing he asked for was a quiet little house somewhere, and he locked himself in for three days.

On the fourth day clouds gathered and there was a great rainfall at the time of the year when no heavy rainfall was expected...

3. Taoist example: inner and outer (2)

... the town was full of rumours about the wonderful rain maker. One person approached him and asked:

'They call you the rainmaker, will you tell me how you made the rain?'

And the little Chinaman said: 'I did not make the rain, I am not responsible.'

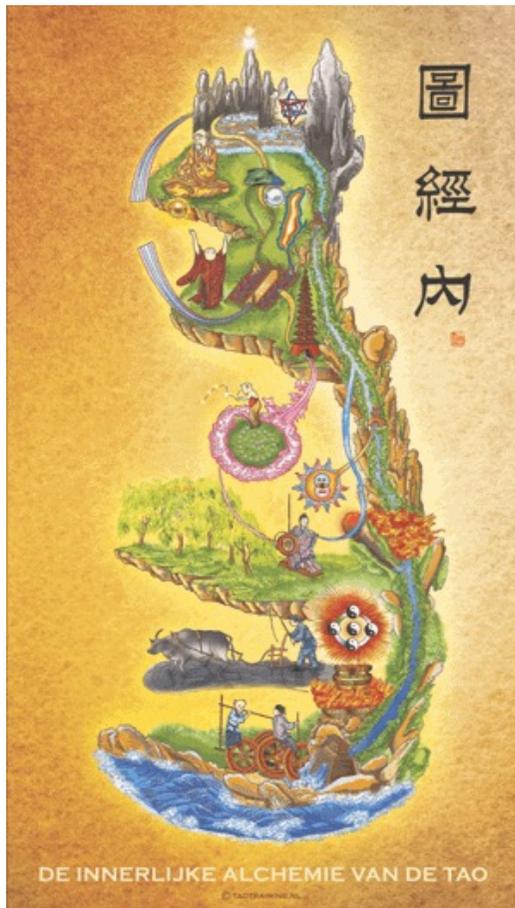
'But what have you done these three days?'

'Oh, I can explain that. I come from another country where things are in order. Here they are out of order, they are not as they should be by the ordnance of heaven. Therefore the whole country is not in Tao, and I am also not in the natural order of things because I am in a disordered country. So I had to wait three days until I was back in Tao, and then naturally the rain came.'."

Carl G Jung, ("The earth has a soul", ed. M. Sabini, North Atlantic Books, Berkely, Ca (USA), 2016, p. 211-212)

3. Taoist example: Inner and outer climate

Inner landscape,
inner climate



Outer landscape,
outer climate



Taoist perspective: if one is out of balance the other one is too. Do not only “fix” the outer one, also become aware of the inner one and (re)balance the inner world. Nature will do the rest...

3. Growth is natural when there is balance

When there is Balance, there is Centre

When there is Centre, there is Root

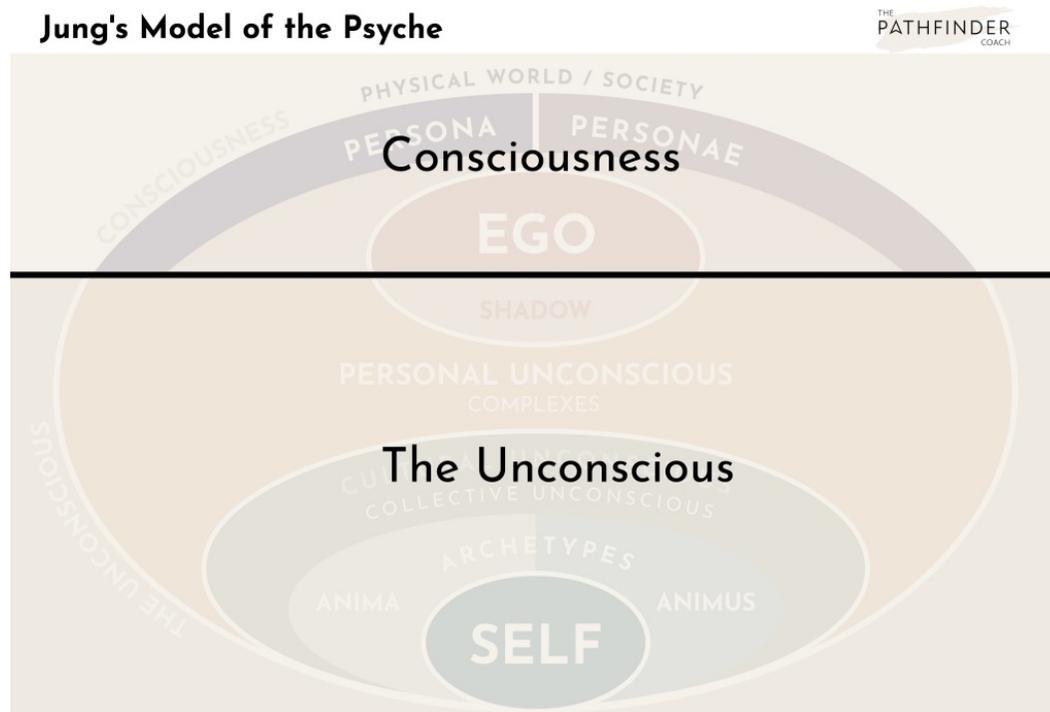
When there is Root, the Shen (Spirit) can grow

Principle of Tai Chi



And when there is no root, there cannot be growth → frustration, disengagements, quitting, fleeing, destruction (uprooted tree metaphor at the start)

4. Conscious & unconscious



Carl Jung (1875 – 1961 – Swiss psychologist and a student and co-worker of Freud)

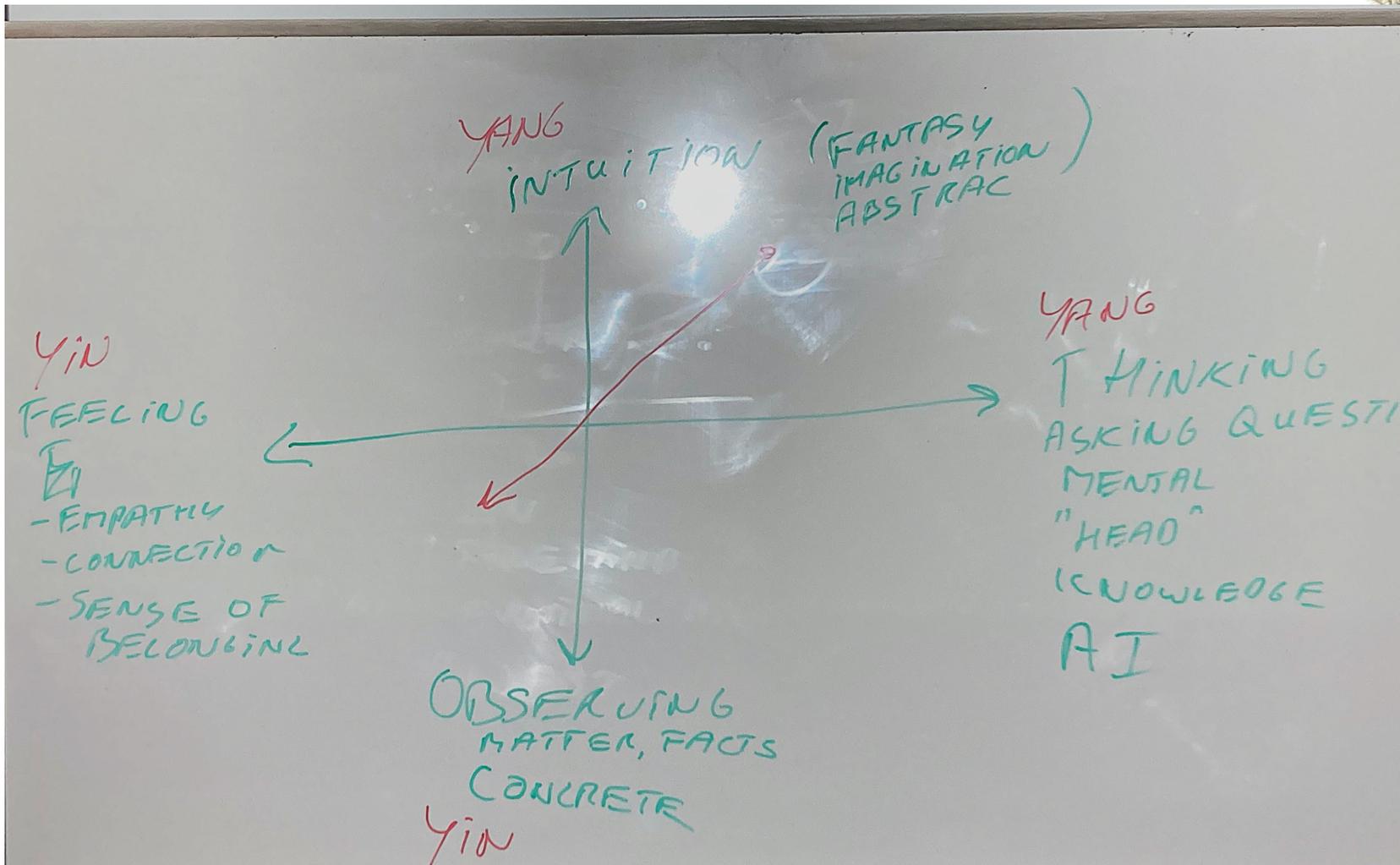
- Consciousness and unconsciousness are in intimate relationship. The unconscious is very much an alive and driving and steering force. It will always strive for (re)balancing the one-sided approach of consciousness.

4. Four personality types



- Intuitive (phantasy, dreaming, imagination, abstract) versus observing (facts, matter, concrete)
- Thinking (thoughts, mental, questioning, information processing, knowledge, head) versus feeling (feelings, wellbeing, connecting, empathy, compassion, feeling part of, feeling hold, sense of belonging, heart, etc.)
- How does psyche balance this force field?

4. Four personality types (notes from board)



5. Diagnosis from Taoist perspective



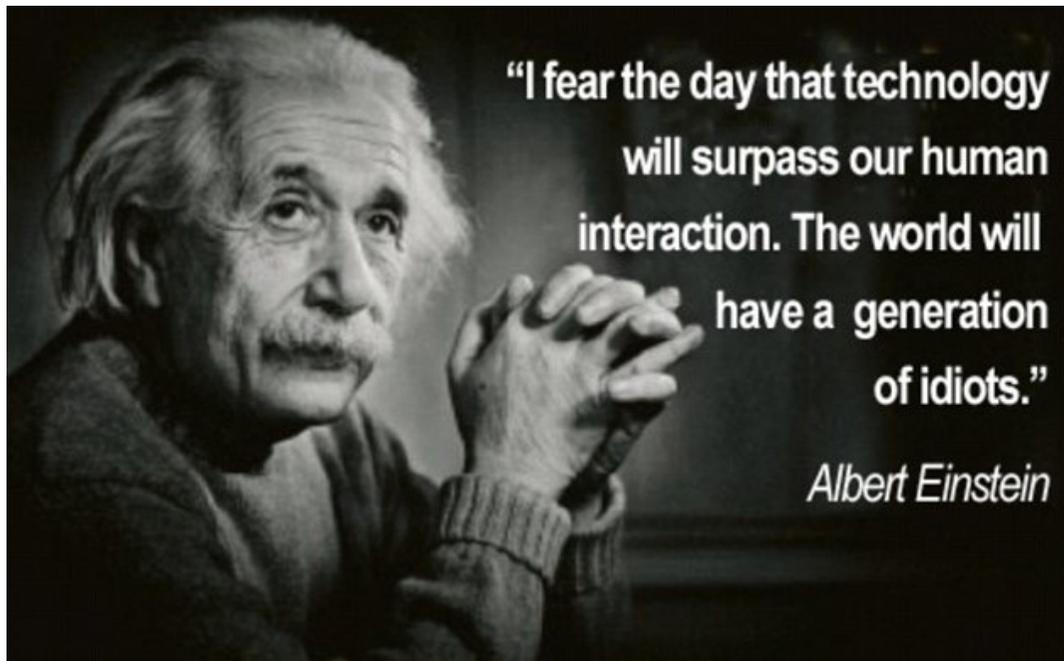
- The world gets more Yang (heated, active, chaotic). Less attention for Yin (reflective, passive, recharging, patience)
- Thinking (yang) vs feeling (yin): much more emphasis on thinking (yang) which is aligned with technology enabling and stimulating this trend. Loss of feeling (yin).
- Intuition (yang) vs observing (yin): much more emphasis on phantasy / wishful thinking aspect of intuition (yang) and less on observing powers and slow processes (yin).

The compensatory nature of the unconscious will (forcibly) redirect the one-sided approach / mode of our conscious stance. Either this system breaks down or we voluntarily focus on rebalancing.

5. A diagnosis by Carl Jung and warning by Albert Einstein

“Everything possible has been done for the outside world: science has been refined to an almost unimaginable extent, technical achievement has reached an almost uncanny degree of perfection.

But what of man, who is expected to administer all these blessings in a reasonable way? He has simply been taken for granted....” [1]



[1] Carl G. Jung, *"The earth has a soul"*, ed. M. Sabini, North Atlantic Books, Berkely, Ca (USA), 2016, p. 164

5. A diagnosis of Carl Jung on these times:

”... [There was] a time when rational, spatially grown, present-day consciousness was not yet separated from the temporally grown, historical psyche. The separation is indeed inevitable but it leads to such an alienation from that dim psyche of the dawn of mankind that a loss of instinct ensues. The result is instinctual atrophy and hence a disorientation in everyday human situations

...despite its undeniable successes the rational attitude of present-day consciousness is, in many respects, childishly unadapted and hostile to life.

...To remain a child too long is childish, but it is just as childish to move away and then assume that childhood no longer exists because we do not see it. ”

Carl G Jung

(“The earth has a soul”, ed. M. Sabini, North Atlantic Books, Berkely, Ca (USA), 2016, p. 75)

5. Pathways forward from Taoist perspective



- A vision on what university needs to be in these times. It is a bridge in between the study phase of life and the working phase of life. High emphasis on learning to think critically and to learn to take and carry responsibilities (civility).
- Bringing **back** the yin-aspect of learning to observe (crucial for any critical thinking and any researcher!). With that come Taoist like patience, getting feel for slow processes, perseverance, etc. Moving from fastfood to slowfood → moving from fast-education to slow-education.
 - Quick win: ditch the tech distraction in classes! Work again, if possible, with slow media like paper.

5. Pathways forward from Taoist perspective



- Bringing **in** the yin-aspect of feeling into university life and study. Well being aspects, social aspects, team dynamics
- A BILDUNG (holistic) view on people. It is not only about learning skills at a university. There is also self-development, personal growth. Only emphasizing aspect related to our thinking facilities are no longer enough and self-validating.
- In line with the tree analogy:
 - do not only feed the crown (information, consciousness, “light”, etc. accelerated by all tech.).
 - Also pay attention (again) to the roots. What are our roots in this culture and society? Let us get aware, bring back and conserve our roots.

Let's include nature ... in a balanced way

“Too much of the animal distorts the civilized man, too much civilization makes sick animals.

“Nature must not win the game, but she cannot lose....”

Carl G Jung

(“The earth has a soul”, ed. M. Sabini, North Atlantic Books, Berkely, Ca (USA), 2016, p.206 and 210)

Thank you for your attention



Thank you!