



## Scrutinizing Harmony and Interference with the Tao in The Five People You Meet in Heaven

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### ABSTRACT

This article analyses Yin Yang principle of Taoism in the The five people you meet in heaven (2003) precisely; using Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching (400 BC), an English translation by Stephen Mitchell (1988). The researcher seeks the presence of Tao in the novel: an underlying order that flows through the universe and governs everything. The paper discusses the scenarios in the novel where characters and events either manifest the harmonious balance rooted in Yin Yang philosophy that brings about peace, tranquility and overall balanced life, or indicate a noticeable disruption in the natural flow of the universe/ Tao bringing forth destruction and turbulence. The research particularly assigns the qualities of Yin and Yang to different entities or situations in the novel and studies the outcome of its harmonious balance, if aligns with the Tao, or the dire consequences of interference in it. Through the identification of these instances, the research attempts to substantiate how the whole narrative structure of the novel including its character development align perfectly with the Taoist principle of balancing Yin and Yang.

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## 1. Introduction

The article scrutinizes a subtle presence of Tao by seeking events and instances from the novel aligning with Yin or Yang, following their balance in contributing to the natural order of universe or the Tao, and, imbalance resulting in sheer catastrophe. The research utilizes Lao Tzu's philosophy of Taoism, operating on its foundational principle of Yin and Yang. Lao Tzu in his theory of Taoism explains Tao as a mysterious force that flows through the universe and guides everything in it towards balance. It is a source of all existence, the natural order, and the recurring process of cyclic change. Yin and Yang are the complementary forces emerging from the Tao and are described and differentiated through their distinct characteristics. Yang embody characteristics of being active, expansive, bright, masculine, white, hard, exterior, young, warm, creative, light and usually associated with sun, mountains and heaven. However, the Yin embody features like being passive, cold, dark, internal, still, wet, soft, contractive, feminine, black, old and is also associated with earth, moon, valleys. He also describes the concept of "Wu Wei" or non-action that this paper meticulously explores. It is explained as the act of doing nothing or acting in effortless alignment with the Tao by freeing oneself from ego-driven actions. The objective of this research is to scrutinize the moments in the novel where characters become one with the Tao through forming a balance between Yin and Yang, and find peace or those where deviation from it result in an utter tragedy, due to the overpowering of one force over the another. The objective extends to the comparison of the qualities of the Master as described in the book (those who exemplify non-action) to those of character in the novel as they move closer to the Tao, thus, fulfilling research purpose: gaining wisdom of the universe by identifying the Yin and Yang as parts of everything present in it and to live in the harmony with the both energies, thus actively improving lives.

The author of the novel, Mitch Albom is an American journalist, playwright, novelist, screenwriter and musician. His important works include his recent memoir *Finding Chikka* and his other novels like *Tuesdays with Morrie*, *The time's keeper*, *Have a little faith*, *The little liar*, *The first phone call from heaven*, *The five people you meet in heaven*, and its sequel, *The next person you meet in heaven*. All of his work potentially deal with the themes of life and death, spirituality, afterlife, love and loss, familial relationships, wisdom, self-reflection, healing and forgiveness. However, the novel chosen for the research is *The Five People You Meet in heaven* (2003), since its underlying pattern aligns closely to the subject of theory selected. The novel follows the story of a maintenance worker Eddie working at an amusement park called Ruby Piers. He dies pushing the little girl named Amy or Annie away as the cart of a ride comes loose and falls over him. It was his eighty-third birthday. When he wakes up he finds himself in heaven where he meets five people on each stage that teach him something significant about his life. To his surprise, the first stage of heaven is the old Ruby Piers. There, he meets The Blue Man, his first person in heaven, who teaches him an important lesson that paves the way for the advancing narrative: everything and everyone is intertwined in some way and nothing is ever random. At this point, Eddie inquires the Blue Man whether he had managed to save the little girl and the Blue man says nothing but disappears as Eddie is transported to the next stage in heaven. It is a place from Philippians where Eddie had served with the captain and his fellow soldiers.

Here he meets the Captain who teaches him the lesson about beauty of sacrifice through the story of their escape from war, after they had burned down the barn. On the third stage of heaven Eddie meets Ruby, the lady on whose name, Ruby Piers is named after. She teaches him the importance of forgiveness through Eddie's austere father. Only by forgiving his father, he moves forward to the next stage where he meets his beloved wife Margret. She teaches him that love is everlasting and it does not have to die away with the person. When Eddie moves to the fifth stage of heaven he meets a little Asian girl named Tala. He learns that he had caused her death the night of fleeing war with his fellow soldiers and captain. He grieves over his relentlessness as Tala helps him achieve eternal redemption. She teaches him that everything had a purpose in grand scheme of things, including Eddie having to work at Ruby Pier. She teaches him that, in grand scheme of things, it was his destiny to work at the Pier, safeguarding the life of many children including Amy and those from the past and even future who are yet to be born, even though he did not have any of his own. The novel ends with Eddie floating towards Margret's embracing arms as she welcomes him in Ruby Pier, their final heaven. As Eddie's arms meet hers, a certain sense of peace takes over him. There have been various dissertations on the novel *the five people you meet in heaven* (2003) with data regarding interconnection of life, exploration of Eddie's character and transcendentalism, and complex analyses from other aspects of the novel.

However, this study strictly focuses on the unity and harmony of the opposites as of Yin and Yang in contributing to the wholeness of the universe, its inhabitants and the overall health of the cosmos. Eddie's understanding of it leads to his peace, health and success in both his lives. Moreover, the theoretical framework serves a unique exploration of Eddie's understanding of his life, emphasizing the importance of symmetry and balance throughout the novel. When he understands the significance of balance in his life and conforms to the counter response gravitating towards this balance, he arrives at Tao, which ensures his spiritual, emotional and physical fulfilment. However, in deviation from the Tao, he receives no nourishment and his life becomes upside down, for he stands in opposition to the natural world or the supreme natural order of the universe.

## **2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This literature review quotes the reviews of other researchers, authors and explores adjacent articles, books, magazines and documentaries related to the topic of the research. It also studies various conducted researches on the novel *the five people you meet in heaven* (2003) with data regarding interconnection of life, Eddie's character analysis and transcendentalism, along with reviewing other myriad aspects of concern regarding Lao Tzu's theory of Taoism. The literature review also highlights other works of author aligning with the theory of concern, its criticism and views of other researchers on Lao Tzu's theory of Taoism and its underlying Yin Yang principle. Different researches have been conducted on the novel highlighting different aspects of it. Most of the researches engage in literary studies including profound analyses from unique perspectives however, little follow the linguistic approach to the

respective novel. Nonetheless three of these discuss the structural approach employing theory by Jean Piaget as conducted by Elizabeth (2010), Huda (2012) and Rio Eka Nugraha (2016). Rio Eka Nugraha aims to analyse the theme, setting and complete psychological and physical growth of Eddie. The researcher concludes with a claim that encountering someone or something always teaches one something about life. Huda (2012) analyses the lessons Eddie learns from five people he meets, using Jean Piaget structural approach. A research by Maulana Mansyur (2010) discusses the semiotic analysis of the novel through the relationship of sign, object and interpretant to derive meaning utilizing Pierce's semiotic theory. Furthermore, another particular research by Hilmawan and Jatmiko (2018) investigates Eddie's psychological problems in the respective novel, navigating them through the theory of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud. In addition, Atika Khoeriyah (2016) explores the concept of Heaven as described in the novel and compares it to that in Islam utilizing Quranic verses for effective exploration. He uses the technique of intertextual analysis from Julia Kristeva as well as Islamic research methodology for thorough investigation, and draws a parallel between both identifying similarities and contrasts in the end. Moreover, Elizabeth (2010) uses a psychological approach to determine the effect of the five people on the main character's perceptions of their previous life. Finally, Astuti and Thoyibi (2020) studies the grand thematic concern of interconnectedness of life utilizing a sociological perspective of cause and effect.

A number of researches have compared different theories about opposites to that of Lao Tzu's. According to Feng Yu-lan's theory of reversion, when something develops to its extreme, it naturally reverts to its opposite (Feng, 1948). This idea is reflected in Lao Tzu's concept of "reversion" or "return," where extremes lead to a change in direction. A strong example is from Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* "Reversion is the movement of the Tao" (Mitchell, 1988), that emphasize the cyclical nature of change. Similarly, Yang Jung-kuo establishes that in conflicts between opposites, the seemingly weaker (such as the soft or the weak) can overcome the stronger (such as the hard or the strong) in his theory of overcoming opposites (Lau, 1958). However, Hu Shih emphasizes that opposites are interdependent and define each other. Without one, the other cannot exist; for example, there's no concept of beauty without ugliness, or good without bad. This view underscores the complementary nature of opposites in maintaining balance and harmony in the world (Lau, 1958). Similarly, a heavy body of literature deals with different interpretations and reflections on Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, textual criticism, Wing-tsit Chan's Review of Lao Tzu: *Tao te ching* and significance of Tao. Multiple studies are conducted on Tao as inner experience and exhaustive number of investigations on the concept of nature and its elements in Chinese Taoism. And many of the previous studies establish extensive views on the concept of Taoism, including the vast terms of action and non-action in counterpart Chinese religions like Buddhism and Judaism.

However, the selected theoretical framework for this particular research is Lao Tzu's philosophy of Taoism and its foundational principle of Yin Yang, taken from an English translation of Lao Tzu's ancient book *Tao Te Ching* (400 BC) published in 1988 by Stephen Mitchell. Principle of Yin and Yang originated vaguely back in 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE in China, however its exact period of origin is uncertain. The philosophy gained prestige through Chinese school of Yinyang that profoundly studied cosmology and philosophy at that time. The principal figure and advocate in the history of Yin Yang is observed to be Zou Yan (305 BC-240 BC). Yin and Yang is essentially the principle that exemplify balance. It represents the coexistence of contradictory forces in the universe. These opposite forces attract and complement one another and work in harmony unlike western dualism. Put these together and life is born. In Chinese mythology, Yin and Yang were the energies born from chaos as a result of creation of the universe. They were believed to be coexisting in harmony at the very core of the earth, and as a result of this balance in the cosmic plan the first human being was born. That is why human beings essentially have chi which is considered as a manifestation of Tao in human body. The term Yin Yang was used for the first time in the book advocating Confucianism *I-Ching/ Book of changes* dating roughly back to 1000 BCE. It is traditionally written by King Wen of Zhou, living at the time of Western Zhou dynasty, however Fu Xi, a legendary figure who ruled ancient periods of Chinese history, is also indirectly credited with this work essentially because his ancient cultural contributions in cosmology are reflected in the original text of the *Book of changes*. The book expresses that constant fluctuation between two opposite tensions being Yin and Yang is essentially accountable for the way the life is on universe and overall cosmic health. In a state of harmony between Yin and Yang the universe runs smoothly while in the case of tremendous imbalance, catastrophes may occur. However, one cannot claim whether the principle of Yin and Yang was first reflected in Taoism or

Confucianism because both the philosophies originated around the same time period in China, as both their respective founders were believed to have lived in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. In Lao Tzu's Taoism, a balance between Yin and Yang or recognizing unity of all is crucial for the health of the cosmos and moves one closer to being one with the Tao. However, Confucianism focuses on moral compass in all social matters, suggesting that one should only act with virtue in every situation in order to secure order and unity. It is thus inclined towards Yang while Taoism favors the Yin, in terms of non-action to be one with the Tao.

Tao is the mysterious force that flows through the entirety of cosmos and drives the universe guiding everything in it towards balance. Lao Tzu exclaims that Yin and Yang arrive in Tao, in his book *Tao Te Ching* "The Tao births one. One bear two...attain harmony" (Mitchell, 1988). He also uses the term "ten thousand things" to refer to Tao being the ultimate source of existence in the universe, even life (Mitchell, 1988). That is to say life can only exist where there is Yin and Yang. Yang gives form to all things, without it nothing can come into existence. While without Yin, nothing can pass out of existence. Yin and Yang is the reflection of Taoism, which encourages people to accept and live in harmony based on this principle i.e. accepting the intangible concept of being and non-being that keeps creation in balance. The principle shows that everything in the universe has its opposite and is recognized by its contrast as Lao Tzu explains "When something is seen as beautiful, the other thing becomes ugly" (Mitchell, 1988). The inevitable contradiction is the way of life as it all part of the balance of Tao. The whole concept of Yin and Yang in Taoism is built upon their symmetric correlation. Contrasting energies create order in the universe thus, creating a flow of Tao as Lao Tzu further claims "Being before and being behind give the idea of one following the other". Thus, one learns to stop fighting the order of the universe and in this way Yin and Yang provide him optimism and resilience to go through life i.e. knowing a moment will pass even if it is full of sorrow, for the joy (opposite) must follow for balance to be achieved. The example could be understood by considering knowing as a sign of hope (the Yang) in sorrowful situation being the Yin. Thus, advocating the concept of one containing a bit of the other in it and the ultimate interchangeability from one to another as preached in *Tao Te Ching*, "Being and non-being create each other...follow each other" (Mitchell, 1988).

Moreover, Lao Tzu preaches the idea of surrendering oneself to the natural flow and never resist against it in order to achieve Tao. When Tao is achieved, everything in the universe falls in harmony that secures internal and external health and of cosmos and everything present in it. He explains in the book "In harmony with the Tao...endlessly renewed" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 39). In addition, Lau Tzu also, teaches the concept of reversion in *Tao Te Ching* "return is the movement of Tao" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 40) that suggests the idea of something developed to an extreme, take an overpowering Yang for example, being shifted back to its opposite i.e. the Yin. Thus, explaining the pattern of recurrent cycle of life and death, or for instance, any potential binary opposites. In contrast, the theory also warns one not to intercede in the way of Tao or natural law of the universe, and if done so, gives underlying threats of catastrophes like plagues and wars etc. *Tao Te Ching* claims that interfering with the natural law brings about chaos in the cosmos. As the balance is lost, the atmosphere becomes toxic further paving the path for greater tragedy as "creatures become extinct" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 64).

### **3. Research Methodology**

The research employs a qualitative methodology to prove the presence of Tao in the novel through the lens of Yin Yang principle of Taoism. The study utilizes both primary and secondary source for research, primary source being the novel itself and secondary source being various articles, previous dissertations, reviews, interpretations and criticism of various philosophers and researchers, newspapers and books written on the topic of interest regarding theoretical framework. The research begins with an introduction, a comprehensive literature review and then work its way up to a dense analysis and discussion on the research, and finally ending with a precise conclusion.

### **4. Discussion**

This chapter attempts to scrutinize certain events and instances from the novel aligning with Yin or Yang, following their balance in contributing to the natural order of universe or the Tao, and, imbalance resulting in chaos and tragedy. The researcher takes Lau Tzu's book *Tao Te Ching/ Book of the way* (400 BC), translated by Stephen Mitchell as a source for theoretical

framework. Lao Tzu preaches the concept of Tao in his book *Tao Te ching*. Tao can be vaguely explained as a primal essence or the natural law of universe or the way in which the universe works and Lao Tzu claims that Yin and Yang arrive at Tao in the chapter 42 of *Tao Te Ching* (Mitchell, 1988). Moreover, he also explains the outcome of being in accordance with the Tao and going against it in his book which the researcher aims to interlink with the respective novel taken for the research. The novel illustrates a prime event from the Blue man's life when he takes a wrong medicine to calm his nerves that ultimately turns his skin to blue colour. The doctor prescribes him silver nitrate that is later discovered to be a poison as a result of primitive medicine at that time. He first takes the silver nitrate in little amount and his skin colour changes to ash grey. He then chugs more of it until his skin turns completely blue (Albom, 2007). This occurrence suggests a disruption in the balance of chi present in human body (the vital force that flows through all living beings to sustain life) as studied in traditional Chinese medicine. Chi and Tao, in this context, are closely related as Chi could be understood as a manifestation of Tao in human beings. The Blue man says that he was a "nervous child" since his childhood and grew up to be a "nervous man" hinting at the possibility of naturally being the way that he was Albom (2007).

However, the violent environment he worked in with his father made him even more anxious. Clearly, the problem started way before he took the wrong medicine to calm his nerves. Firstly, the earliest incident that indicated an interference with the natural law or Tao, began at the Blue man's own home. His father was a violent man who dragged him into a hostile and chaotic workplace environment that was not suitable for a child, thus, interfering with his Tao that ensured the health of individuals and the cosmos. In this way Yang was overpowered and the balance was disrupted, essentially requiring a return or reversion to restore balance, thus, gaining health. However, the Blue man took a powerful poison (another Yang) in place of a medicine that made things even worse by disrupting his chi. Thus, as chi is disrupted, the Blue man disrupts his Tao or the natural flow in his body. The balance between Yin and Yang energies is lost as the wrong medicine entered the body. Moreover, the over consumption of the medicine led to further overpowering of one energy (Yang), disrupting the balance completely, turning his skin tone from skin to ash grey, to blue. Lao Tzu states in his book the consequences of deviating from the Tao: "When a person interferes with the Tao, the balance is lost...extinct" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 64). Lao Tzu fundamentally explains in this chapter how chaos and tragedy unfolds when one fails to observe Tao and rather act against it bringing forth desolation and destruction.

Another significant detail of the Blue man described in the novel that aligns greatly with the phenomenon of reversion in Taoism is, when he finally leaves after teaching Eddie his first lesson and his skin color changes to back to normal. His life on earth was chaotic due to the imbalance and dominance of one energy over the other. However, his later actions may hint at his effort of returning back to the Tao, restoring balance to achieve harmony and peace. For instance, after his skin turns blue he agrees to join a carnival as The Blue man, which helps him financially for a while. This act of surrendering to the flow or the state of passivity aligns with the Yin unlike other major actions and incidents in his life explored above (yang), thus, improving his financial condition, providing him livelihood for the better. Moreover, he understands the interconnection of lives on Earth, how one has to die for other to live and does not question this cycle but rather accepts it (Yin). When the Blue man meets Eddie in heaven, he is not enraged at him for causing his death, rather he embraces this fact and does what he is put there to do. Thus, as he leaves Eddie to meet his next person in heaven, his skin changes into a perfect, even and "loveliest caramel shade" with no scars or marks (Albom, 2007), highlighting the magical moment of arriving at the Tao, balancing Yin and Yang, restoring health, peace, harmony and unity internally and externally. As Lao Tzu confirms the concept in his book *Tao Te Ching* "In harmony with the Tao...easily renewed" (Mitchell, 1988), and "Stop trying to control...the world shall govern itself" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 57) where he explains the outcome of being one with the Tao and further guides one to non-action or letting go in order to be one with it.

Similarly, the author artistically conveys the paradigm of achieving Tao through a pair of oxymoron in a paragraph of the novel. He meticulously describes a scene from Eddie's birthday, how Mickey lifts him up playfully as other kids laugh and cheer with Eddie, who is now "upside down" (Albom, 2007). He then flips Eddie "right-side up" back again as Eddie runs towards his mother (Albom, 2007). He tells her how brave he was for being held upside down and she says she knows. She tells him how proud God will be of him for being a wonderful little boy at his birthday "that will make the world feel right-side up again" (Albom, 2007). The oxymoron upside-

down and right-side up, if closely observed, indicates the concurrence, correlativity and coexistence of binary opposites as Yin and Yang, in this case right-side up and upside down respectively. Extensive inquiry of this particular section identifies the subtle presence of Tao, the entire idea of which revolves around balancing Yin and Yang, being one with the natural order of the universe and to not fight against it. Eddie comply with the Tao when he does not resist against Mickey as he is held upside down and then again, when he is put back to his original position right-side up. Rather, he embraces both the opposites (representing contrary situations in his life from his childhood to his demise and beyond) that maintains equilibrium in the natural world and cosmos as God (the manifestation of natural forces) is proud of him, thus, being one with the Tao.

A strange yet somewhat familiar voice of an anonymous man addresses Eddie as he transcends from the first stage of heaven to the second about how he had gotten all the vaccines and shots required to prevent diseases before going to the war yet he still died, away from the war, as a healthy person. He speaks of the inevitability of death, which is a natural phenomenon of the universe and human impulse to rebel against it. However, this aspect of human psyche deviates one from the Tao according to the master, which in turn results in chaos, misery and disarray as proposed by Lao Tzu in *Tao Te Ching* (Mitchell, 1988). Moreover, Lao Tzu explicates the attributes of the master (that who is one with the natural law of universe or the Tao) and claims that he surrenders to "whatever moment brings", embraces the ultimate reality of death and clings to "no illusion in his mind" and neither shows any opposition against it "in his body" (Mitchell, 1988). It is thus, in clear contrast to the anonymous man's desperate effort of trying to gain ultimate control over his death as substantiated by the master, Lao Tzu himself. Similarly, the very idea follows when the Captain admits to Eddie that all the inoculations he had gotten for "tetanus" and "yellow fever" was nothing but a fool's errand, suggesting that death is inescapable and an ultimate reality one must face in order to get closer to Tao (Albom, 2007).

The Captain, the second person Eddie meets in heaven, come across as closer to achieving Tao as he attempts to reverse the cycle back to Tao in understanding the utmost reality of death and decay (Yin) amidst the aggressive war (Yang). In an environment overtaken by war (yang) he gives up his life (Yin) thus bringing about a balance. Captain also admits to Eddie that he was the one who had shot his leg to save him from burning fire that night, at which furious Eddie strikes blows at him in effect, to which he does not counter or retaliate. By doing so, the Captain achieves the Tao as he stops controlling or resisting the way things are. He accepts the reality of death and does nothing to resist it as he does nothing to resist Eddie's fierce blows. Thus, in embracing both Yin and Yang, he comes a step closer to the Tao: looking towards the murky sky of battlefield (Yin) while the skies of "heaven" appear before him (Albom, 2007), aligning with *Tao Te Ching's* chapter fifty, sixty-four and thirty-nine that discuss the traits of a Master who aligns himself with Tao and the magical outcome of harmonizing with it.

In addition, the author paints a rather vicious yet realistic image of the war by giving an account of what had happened the day when Eddie along with his Captain and soldiers fled the scene, setting the place on fire. The author calls a newly liberated soldier "furious" (a quality that aligns strongly with Yang) who, wants vengeance and "balancing of accounts" (Albom, 2007). And that is exactly what Morton (one of the captive soldiers) demands as he, along with others burn the barracks before leaving. It is however important to recognize the skilful utilization of the phrase balancing of accounts by the author, where it essentially suggest the idea of equal and direct retaliation i.e. given the misery inflicted on soldiers by the enemy, the soldiers must inflict pain upon the enemy with same intensity. However, if viewed from a different angle i.e. through Taoist perspective, the idea of balancing of accounts signals towards the balancing and harmonizing of two opposite but equals, essentially Yin and Yang, of which the whole universe is made. In this case, Morton and his fellow soldiers fail to establish a balance between the two forces, as he is already raging with anger (a Yang) on the account of which he burns down the whole place in order to gain a desperate sense of control, which is again another Yang as fire is active, expansive and involves heat. Lao Tzu, in contrast to which propagates the idea of "non-action" in his ancient book *Tao Te ching* that involves the act of doing nothing and surrendering to the natural flow for universe to run smoothly (Mitchell, 1988).

On the other hand, trying to gain power or control over something will only add to chaos and disorder as warned by Lao Tzu in chapter fifty-seven of *Tao Te Ching*. Moreover, it is also

crucial to consider the backdrop, in which these events occur, that being a Philippian war (yet another powerful Yang as substantiated in the previous chapter). Thus, as the environment continuously grows dominant of one energy, the balance is lost bringing about disaster and tragedy of little Tala being burned alive (yang) inside the barrack she was hiding, thus consequently, losing her life (a Yin). This scenario aligns with Lao Tzu's concept of cycle of reversion towards Tao, where he explains that when something reaches its extreme, it ultimately returns back to its initial position. In this case, the equilibrium disrupted by recurring and overpowering Yang (war/angry soldiers/setting fire/killing Tala) shifted back to subservient Yin (Tala's death) and later, her forgiveness (another yin). Thus, in essence, the overall scenario conforms to the Taoist maxim of interfering with the Tao that results in sky turning murky, "earth shrinking", "equilibrium collapsing" and mortals dying (Mitchell, 1988, p. 64). In addition, the cycle keeps moving towards Tao, forward or backward, to ultimately achieve balance as a natural law of universe. On the other hand, as Eddie dies he feels Tala's soft grip (Yin) over his firm hands (Yang). As the two come together, an equilibrium is obtained and Tao is achieved. Lao Tzu sketches an image of the world in a magical moment of the Tao, where all comes together, "content" with the way, continuously "repeating", ever "renewed" (Mitchell, 1988). As Eddie regains conscious, he realizes his "worry" is gone and his "pain" is no more and he becomes one with the universe "floating" in the colour-changing sky (Albom, 2007).

Tala is the innocent little girl who had taken Eddie to heaven (Yang) and also becomes the fifth person he meets there. She is, at the same time, the one he leaves behind burning in the barn on the night he fled the war along with Morton, the Captain and others, causing her death (Yin). Eddie "burns" Tala (Yang) in the fire, during the Philippian war (another Yang), and as she dies (Yin), she forgives him (another Yin) thus reverting the cycle back to Tao, breaking the multiplying effect of one dominant force (Yang, in this case) overtaking the universe (Albom, 2007). She asks him to "wash" her burns that she had gotten as a result of the grand fire Eddie and his fellows initiated (Albom, 2007). And as he washes them off (Yang), sobbing, they begin to disappear hinting at the reversion towards Tao, Eddie's guilt, remorse and finally, acceptance (the Yin) paving his path towards redemption (the Tao). As he finds Tao, a "river" washes him and Tala off of every hint of suffering ever felt or experienced on Earth as they become as light as babies, as fresh, as new Albom (2007), aligning strongly with Lao Tzu's elucidation of one arriving at the Tao in chapter thirty-nine of *Tao Te Ching*. Thus, in the extraordinary moment of Tao, appears before him, a heaven on earth (Yang in Yin), as he looks from above the skies (Yang) down towards the ruby pier on earth (Yin). Hundreds of young children and both elderly men and women from the past, present and future were thanking him for the lives he had affected, secured and saved from his time in piers to many more years to come. As Eddie (Yang; as male is generally associated with Yang) floats forward he finds Margret, his better half (Yin; as female is associated with the Yin), welcoming him in a tight embrace and a sense of tranquility spreads over him, the kind he had "never known before" (Albom, 2007). Lao Tzu substantiates the respective point in *Tao Te Ching* claiming everything attains "harmony" when "a male and female" come together (Mitchell, 1988) thus, achieving balance for peace and health of the cosmos that helps sustaining life.

Moreover, the whole structure of the novel and the way in which it is written conforms to Taoist principle of interconnectedness, interchangeability, and interdependence of binary opposites, thoroughly linking diverse assorted stories into a complete whole. For instance, the novel is divided into two halves of Eddie's life i.e. that on Earth and heaven, one coming after another alternatively. In addition, there is a subtle recurrent pattern that is maintained by each following chapter except for the first few as the story progresses: Eddie's birthday, the first person he meets in heaven, a chapter interlinking the two, Eddie's birthday, his first lesson and so on, following the exact order ahead. Furthermore, the author utilizes multiple strategies of putting contradictory ideas together i.e. novel beginning from the end of a character's life and Eddie dying on his birthday etc. Similarly, the author also explores multifaceted relationship between different oxymora in the novel as substantiated in previous chapter. All of these techniques align perfectly with the philosophy of Taoism and its underlying principal of Yin and Yang as thus, explored through *Tao Te Ching/ The Book of the Way*, a translation by Stephen Mitchells.

## 5. Conclusion

The research scrutinizes harmony and interference with the Tao in the novel *The five people you meet in heaven* (2003) and proves the respective outcome with reference to Taoist philosophy. The study deconstructs various scenarios from the novel into Yin or Yang as per their respective characteristics probing into their complex relationship, uncovering their aspects of interconnectedness, complementation, interdependence and exchangeability with the help of Taoist philosophy of Yin Yang. It also actively explores the idea of non-action or surrendering to the natural flow as a source of reverting back to Tao or moving close to it thus, attaining peace and stability eventually. The researcher utilizes English translation of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* (1900) by Stephen Mitchell as a primary source for theoretical framework and applies the theory of Taoism along with Yin Yang principle to cater overall research. The discussion follows various binary opposites from the novel and categorise them into either Yin or Yang depending upon their nature within the given context. In the research, ones aligning with Yang embody characteristics like being active, expansive, bright, masculine, white, hard, exterior, young, warm, creative, light and also include sun, mountains and heaven. However, the Yin embody features like being passive, cold, dark, still, wet, soft, contractive, feminine, black, old and is also associated with earth, moon, valleys and interior, thus, classifying as such with the Yin. So the research examines the relationship between each binary opposite and divulge their system of anatomy which includes the correlation i.e. how one does not exist without the other and is recognized and understood by its opposite.

Moreover, discussion further navigates the presence of Tao in the novel that ensures harmony, peace and health of individuals and the cosmos both internally and externally. In this respect, the study seeks scenarios from the novel that align with the concept of non-action (the act of doing nothing, resisting nothing) to achieve success and inner peace. In doing so they become one with the Tao or natural flow of all things in universe, or in grater scheme of things, the entirety of cosmos, for example The Blue man and the Captain and Margret. In addition, other characters particularly Tala and Eddie practically depict through their actions, what it is like to reach equilibrium and achieve the Tao, ensuring peace and redemption. The study also explores the ultimate imbalance of both the opposites due to a strong opposition of one energy over the other, resulting in major catastrophes like war leading to further destruction and decay i.e. Tala's death. In addition, this research is limited to Taoist perspective of examination and does not view the discourse with Confucian lens of Yin and Yang or any other western philosophy of dualism. The research debriefs how seemingly opposites in the novel relate to the interdependence and interoperability of universe around Eddie and his understanding of everything in it. It also scrutinizes the moments where characters become one with the Tao, finding peace, or those where deviation from it result in an utter tragedy. Finally, the research also study the qualities of The master as described in the *Tao Te Ching* to those of character in the novel as they move closer to the Tao, in exploring their behavioural development. Thus, Eddie's journey teaches the wisdom lied in being with the Tao thus, embracing the balance of interconnected opposites in every aspect of life, thereby, achieving a deeper sense of wholeness and harmony with the world and whole of the cosmos.

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