

QI IN MEDICAL TEXTS



We have looked at philosophical texts on qi which show the evolution of Chinese thinking before the second century BC. Now we will focus on medical texts, the most basic of which are the Suwen, Lingshu and Nanjing. We will examine these texts in the light of what we have already seen in order to understand how the qi which is basic to the theory and practice of medicine is exactly the same as the qi which we have already studied in classical texts. What is specific to medical theory is the way in which the qi acts according to the movement of life in a human body and how that determines health and disease.

Qi

The differentiation of qi

As soon as qi is perceptible it manifests as yin yang qi with all its expanding and contracting movements and differentiations, and expresses itself through what we can call substance. This is a form, or appearance. When we speak of qi in general or of qi being everything, we cannot perceive it because it is just a kind of potential. But when some of that potential is realised then there is form, and we can see what kind of qi is acting by the transformation enacted through the form. That is the basis of medical theory. By observing qi through the forms it takes, by knowing what kind of qi is at work, whether all the necessary transformations are proceeding well at each level of the physiology and even the psychology, and by reading signs shown by the form or body, we can know what kind of qi is disturbed.

The qi acting in the universe serves as a model for the qi acting in a human life. Through it we have the complete expression of yin yang qi, for example through nutrition/maintenance (ying) and defence (wei), the couple of blood and qi, or through the body form. The qi of the five elements (wu xing) contain all the possible activities of qi at work in the universe and in the human body. Inside a human being this is represented by the qi of the five zang, with the five zang corresponding to the five elements or phases. These five inner movements of life or qi, expressed through temperament, tendencies, will and so on, represent all the physiology and psychology of the individual. As we saw in the text from the 25th year of Duke Zhao in the Chunqiu Zuo zhuan, the six qi of heaven penetrate

the earth, eventually provoking disease. Within a human being these six qi are also the six great tendencies of the heart/mind, the six emotions or passions:

'In mankind the likes and dislikes, elation and anger (xi nu), sorrow and joy (ai le), are generated from the six qi.'

We saw previously the shift which took place in the value of the associated numbers, and what appeared in the most ancient texts as the six qi became, through the prevailing influence of five element theory, the five qi. They are nearly the same thing, and we can see in medical texts that six qi or six perverse influences are still referred to, but we may also have the five qi coming from the surrounding environment and as pathogenic agents. So do not be surprised to sometimes find six qi and sometimes five, it is simply that through time five element theory became prevalent and was used as the foundation for all organization of knowledge.

External qi pervading everything remained in medical theory as that which made life, but also as that which endangered life. We saw exactly this same understanding expressed earlier in many of the classical texts. Perverse energy is an expression which occurs in texts predating the medical texts. It is an expression that we find from the middle of the third century to the end of the first century BC. Perverse qi is qi which disturbs the correct functioning of human behaviour or the human mind. It is the cause of physical disease, and medicine understood it as pervading influences able to disturb the correct order of life and qi.

In the historical progression of the texts, we see the individual becoming more and more responsible for their own qi, with an emphasis on the importance of the centre and the heart/mind. Each time something goes wrong within an individual, it is because they allowed a disorder to settle within them, even if the cause is a perverse influence coming from outside. The individual's own weakness and lack of consciousness and care allowed the perverse qi (xie qi) to penetrate them, because they were not perfectly harmonised with the flux of life. Human beings are not just the potential of life, they must behave as the expression of this potential of qi, then they will always be in a state of natural life and there can be no disease.

Of course nowadays there are very few people who are able to live in this state of being. We have to deal with so many different situations, with the qi of our surroundings, with the movement of qi by our temperament and emotions, and also with the renewal of qi from respiration and food. There is an important link between qi and the stomach, and between qi and the lung. Nutrition and respiration are both essential for the renewal of qi, not only for strength, but also for the quality of the qi that creates our life - making character as well as physical strength. Chinese medicine is simply a precise and specific expression of the general understanding of qi.

Another point developed in the medical texts is that all qi expressed through the five zang or through yin yang, is just one qi existing in a unity. This oneness is expressed as ancestral qi (zong qi) or authentic qi (zhen qi) or correct qi (zheng qi). Correct qi is not defence or nutrition, or blood and qi, or lung qi. It is all of these working together with a mutual understanding. The other idea which is not so well developed in medical texts, is that of original qi (yuan qi). Original qi is the beginning of a specific life, the potential which has found a way to express itself through an individual bodily form.

This is a person's proper nature, the model for the correct functioning and renewal of all the qi which makes the movement of their life, and which transforms and keeps the body's form.

QI AND SHEN

Since the human being is responsible for the movement of their own qi there is a relationship established between the qi and the spirits (shen).

We will not look deeply at this subject, but everything which is said about the qi and the movement of qi also has to be considered in relation to the spirits. The spirits are not the same thing as the will. We can say 'I am responsible, I decide how I behave, how I eat and breathe', as if it is my will which is responsible for the movement of my qi and therefore my good health. In a way this is true, but the point is that this is not the real basis of life, and hence from the Chinese point of view you cannot do something by your own will and judgment, or even knowledge, and be completely right. It is not possible because we are limited in time and space, and in our knowledge and perception of things. The point is that we have to allow the movement of life within us to be what it is. For the Daoists it leads to the end of seeking and thinking, which means that it is just by letting go and abandoning the idea that it is what I think, know and want which decide who I am. In the fluidity of all life, my own individual life is just an expression of my origin. The ability to be one with the movement of life is the ultimate goal. This is where the qi and the spirits are one in the unity. It is at the level of the multiplicity, of the duality of life and the expression of my own particular life and the work I have to do, that we can say the spirits are the guide of the qi.

SUWEN CHAPTER 3

Suwen chapter 3 presents the yin and the yang aspects of qi, with the yang qi being expressed as the defensive qi (wei qi) and the yin qi being expressed through food and nutriment and all the rebuilding and reconstructive power of the essences (ying qi). The yin yang qi inside the body expresses the differences between yin and yang. The yang is like the sun, which spreads out but gives a firmness and strength. The yin is what is condensed making substance and form, a richness enabling and nourishing the spreading out of the yang.

'From ancient times, communication with heaven, the trunk of life, has been rooted in yin yang.'

Here we have something which is in the chapter's title, Sheng qi tong tian, the qi of life communicates with heaven, or the qi which gives life is the qi of all living beings. The meaning is that the qi which makes your life only does so because it is an expression of the natural order of life. This communication with the natural order of life and with heaven above, must be continuously maintained.

The character used for 'trunk' is ben, which depicts a tree with its roots penetrating the depths. This character is used for trunk, root, and as we have seen, for basis and source. Communication with heaven is what gives the qi the ability to make a living being. So if this communication is interrupted or damaged, it is exactly the same thing as damage which is inflicted at the very basis of something. We may try and do whatever we want with qi, but if you are not following heaven or the natural

order of life within you in some way, you will not succeed in maintaining either your life or your health.

Whenever there is life, or the expression of something which appears at the moment of birth and disappears at the moment of death, yin yang is at work. We need form, and even in the very first stage of development of an embryo, there must be the expression of the power of the qi through this form. The form is the first expression of heaven or the natural order, the making of a beginning. With this beginning and with the original qi (yuan qi), it has the potential to realize itself little by little through the growth and development of a form. So each living being and each specific manifestation of life is yin yang. After that the whole life can develop.

'In the space between heaven and earth, inside the six junctions (liu he), the qi of living beings, in nine territories and through nine orifices (jiu qiao), in five organs (zang), and through twelve rhythms (jie) all communicates with the qi of heaven.'

The six junctions (liu he) are all the qi of the universe which exists between heaven and earth, and all the communication between the six qualities of the qi of heaven and earth. Every living being exists between heaven and earth and within these exchanges of qi which make up the universe as we know it.

The nine territories were the traditional division of Chinese territories into nine provinces, but they are also a division of the body, three by three. There is the division by three in the triple heater, but also the division by nine, for example the nine pulses. Within the body there are differences in the qi animating the various areas and functions, and we can feel that in the nine pulses. Also, the term 'nine orifices' is used here for all the communication between the centre and the periphery, upward and downward.

The five zang are the inner life and the means by which essences are kept deeply and actively inside. They are five ways to store, manage and regulate life. There are twelve rhythms which represent the twelve meridians. These are twelve ways to articulate the qi of life, for example through blood and qi. The qi which constantly makes life communicates with the qi of heaven, and is always in a process of interaction with what gives the natural order of life, our proper nature. A little further on in chapter 3 it says:

'The yang qi is like the sun in heaven. When it loses its place, life is broken and the beings no longer shine. Whether the heavenly influx is regularly distributed depends on the solar radiance. Thus the yang soars upwards and ensures defense at the exterior.'

This alludes to the defensive qi (wei qi), which is like the sun in heaven with the same movement of rising at dawn, extending itself at the surface of the body, and disappearing into the depths at sunset. The movement of defensive qi is based exactly on the model of the sun with all the power and capacity of the sun to give warmth and to embrace and stimulate emotions and activity. 'Defence at the exterior' alludes to the best expression of the yang movement of qi which has a propensity to move outwards.

SUWEN CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 of the Suwen is one of the most important texts for the theory of medicine, and also for the complete understanding of life through yin yang and the five elements. This chapter presents a statement of the most basic theory which has already been at work for 2,000 years.

'Cold (han), at the utmost (ji), gives rise (sheng) to heat (re). Heat, at the utmost, gives rise to cold.'

Cold and heat are used here to represent yin and yang and their manifestations. In life, yin and yang are the double expression of qi, never two qi. We must never see yin and yang as two separate qi. With the yang movement of qi there is evaporation, rising up, expansion and heat, while with the yin movement there is condensation, freezing, downward movement and cold. This is a double expression, and the effect of the cold and hot qi are felt inside the body. In the process of life, the cold or the yin cannot go so far that the return to the yang is not possible, because that would be death. So when in disease the cold is severe, the body will warm up, and conversely, if the patient does not die from a high fever, the body will cool down. In physiology, this is also the rule for all ascending and descending, concentrating and expanding movements. It is the same in nature when the warmth comes after the greatest frost of the winter. This is the movement of qi.

'Cold qi generates (sheng) unclear (zhuo); hot qi generates clear (qing).'

Here we have to understand that unclear and clear are used only for the yin and yang movements of qi. What is unclear is lead by the yin and what is clear is lead by the yang. We saw this in Huainanzi chapter 3. After this there is a specific reference to particular areas of the body and the digestive process:

'Descending, the clear qi (qing qi) produces (sheng) diarrhoea with undigested food. Ascending, the unclear qi (zhuo qi) produces (sheng) distension and swelling.'

In this case the clear qi corresponds to the essences which are assimilated and circulate through the body. This is a yang movement. The unclear qi corresponds to what is heavy, moves downwards and is finally eliminated. The text refers to that which is not assimilated by the body, but this is only in the context of the digestion of food. If you take the example of body fluids, the thick ye are called unclear and the thin jin are called clear. But the ye fluids are the richest in essences. This seems a contradiction but the ye fluids have a yin movement. They are more concentrated and do not move quickly as do the jin fluids through the layers of the skin or the bulk of the flesh. Instead, they concentrate themselves in the orifices and membranes, which is more of a yin movement. It is the opposite for the jin fluids which are moved outwards. This is the reason why the ye are called unclear.

When we say cold qi generates unclear and hot qi generates clear, this is the basis of understanding the action of the yin yang qi inside the body. In certain circumstances you could say that heat also generates the unclear, for instance when dense body fluids are overheated they become unclear. But this is another level of understanding. We are not speaking here of pathological heat or cold, we are

speaking of the normal healthy movements of cold or hot qi. Pathology is when this basic movement is disturbed.

'These contrary activities of yin yang are diseases, an opposition to the natural movement of life (ni cong).'

This is one of the most basic definitions of disease and pathology. If the clear qi produces diarrhea, it is because warm qi is not hot enough, and digestion cannot function properly. Because of this lack of transformation, essences will leave the body via the lower orifices. Not enough heat is coming from the lower heater to support the yang of the spleen, so there will be diarrhea with undigested food. The clear is below. Alternatively if there is too much cold then this leads to a distension and swelling throughout the stomach or chest, the congestion rising up through the body.

These are just two examples of yin and yang qi losing their place, not being in good balance and not cooperating with one another. Cold and heat have to be in harmony in such a way that all the heat rises up from the yang of the kidneys, the authentic yang, leading to the correct functioning of everything and allowing the clear to be under the yang movement of distribution. The cold also has to be in the right place and in the right proportion, retaining, but not blocking or injuring the heat. So the activity of the qi is primarily seen as yin yang and with the first disturbance of cold and heat comes the natural opposition to the correct movement of life. This is what is called disease. Each time there is a movement which is not the natural movement of qi, it is said to be disease. This is interesting because this definition of disease very different to that of western medicine. Disease for the Chinese is that there is something wrong in the balance of qi.

After that we have an example of the clear and the unclear:

'Thus, clear yang makes (wei) heaven and unclear yin makes earth. Ascending, the earth qi makes clouds, descending the heaven qi makes rain. Rain (yu) comes from earth qi and clouds (yun) come from heaven qi.'

Here we can see the production of the universe via the double movement of yin yang qi, and the model in nature for all the processing of liquids that goes on inside the human body. The images of water, clouds and rain are used because this is the best way to understand qi since water also has a changing form. It can be water, vapour or ice. Water is universally considered to be the best example of the way qi works. Here the yin yang qi is acting between heaven and earth under the attraction of heaven and the receptivity of earth. The clear yang, the ascending vapour, makes clouds, and the unclear yin, descending, makes rain which penetrates the earth with a movement of condensation. So there is always an exchange, and the constitution and reconstitution of what is heaven and earth inside the human body is maintained. For example, it is the ascending of the clear yang which enables us to renew the 'heavenly qi' in our head, allowing the correct functioning of the brain, the sense organs and the heart. A great deal of pathology arises when the clear yang cannot ascend. It is through this movement that the physiology and psychology of everything pertaining to heaven exists within us. With this kind of text we cannot interpret just at one level, we must take in the whole picture. With the rain coming from earth qi the clouds evaporate through the attraction of heaven. The rain which falls from heaven also falls because of the attraction of earth. Within the body there is a similar attraction

upwards and downwards. For instance, the kidneys are the basis and foundation, but they are also able to attract things into the depths, and to give life to the power of the yang. If we consider the lung, the lung attracts the qi in order to spread it around the whole body. But it also exerts a pressure downwards to make rain or the good circulation of fluids. At each level of our life and functioning we have something similar to this great movement of yin yang qi in nature. After this the text continues:

'So the clear yang appears (chu) at the upper orifices (shang qiao), and the unclear yin appears at the lower orifices (xia qiao).'

Here we have the couple of ascending and descending, the yang movement pushing the essences and the clear yang upwards to the head and the sense organs, and the unclear yin going to the lower orifices, and in the process of digestion becoming what is eliminated.

The clear yang spreads up (fa) to the texture of the skin (cou li), and the unclear yin goes (zou) to the five zang. The clear yang gives fullness (shi) to the four limbs, and the unclear yin returns (gui) to the six fu.'

This seems to be a contradiction. Here the unclear yin goes to the five zang, in which case it cannot be the waste which is eliminated. We have to take 'clear' and 'unclear' as the double movement of qi in all things. So what is yang qi goes outwards, diffusing through the skin, and permeating the four limbs for muscular movement. It is a centrifugal movement, while the yin has a centripetal movement with the essences going inwards to the five zang and six fu. In this double activity of yin and yang, the yang makes the strength and the yin makes the substances.

'Water is (wei) yin and fire is yang. Yang makes (wei) the qi and yin makes the tastes (wei). The tastes return (belong to, gui) to the (body) form (xing), the form returns to the qi, the qi return to the essences (jing), the essences return to the transformations (hua).'

We have here another couple within yin yang, qi and taste. The tastes are all the substances able to renew the essences and life. After that there is a sentence which says that the tastes return to the body form, the form returns to the qi, the qi return to the essences and the essences to the transformations. All of these statements are linked by the character gui, to return, or to belong to, to go back to one's place of origin. Gui conveys the idea of an arrival somewhere by someone carrying a duster and a dustpan. This represents the wife or bride. It is literally the arrival of the bride at the house of her husband, which is not exactly a return since she has never been there before. What is important is the sense of going to a place where you are able to fulfil your proper nature, and completely realise who you are. Therefore the tastes are for the body form, they are to maintain the essences and to build the form of the body. But the form itself is the place for the expression of the qi. Without form there is no manifested qi. The qi keep the essences inside and make and sustain life. They make life through transformations. Throughout this passage then, the prevalent notion is that of qi.

'The essences eat (or feed on) (shi) the qi. The body form eats (or feeds on) the tastes (wei). Transformations produce (sheng) the essences.'

The essences feed the five zang and enable them to release the qi which makes our physiology and psychology. It is through the transformations of digestion that we can keep and assimilate the

essences. But it is also through the perpetual transformations which are made by the qi that we may keep the body fluids in the right place and the essences acting normally.

'The qi produce the body form (xing). The tastes injure (shang) the body form. The qi injure the essences. The essences, through transformations, make (wei) qi. The qi are injured by the tastes.'

There are many practical examples of this. What is interesting is to see that the relationship between qi and essences is a very strong one. In fact there is a triple relationship between qi and essences. There is the relationship of the qi with transformations through the essences, but the qi are also in relationship with the body form and with the tastes. Qi is at the centre of everything which is made by the five aspects of the maintenance of life: the qi, the essences, the body form, the tastes and the transformations.

Qi and fire

We will now look at the relationship of fire with qi. Both qi and fire are aspects of yang:

'Strong fire (zhuang huo) feeds on (shi) qi and the qi are nourished (shi) by gentle fire. Strong fire dispels (san) the qi and gentle fire produces (sheng) qi.'

The relationship between qi and essences is the basic yin yang relationship of the body and of everything which makes the movement, transformation, warming, rhythm, and strength necessary to keep the essences inside and in such a way that they can be active. But we can also speak of tastes and qi and therefore have a dialectic between the qi and the body form. The relationship between the body form and the qi is between that which has a form to express life and that which operates life inside that form. An analogous relationship exists between the essences or the qi and the tastes. So this 'gentle fire' (shao huo) describes the qi when it is transforming well and maintaining balance with the yin. It is able to do this because it is sustained by the moderate power of the yang, by the original fire or the fire of ming men, which is always a gentle fire giving good rhythm to the circulation and allowing all the operations of life to be performed well, without destroying essences, body form or tastes. If the fire is too strong, then that will destroy the essences, and if they are destroyed they cannot feed or make qi.

Heat and cold

Other relationships between the qi and the body form are spoken of later in the text of Suwen chapter 5:

'Cold injures (shang) the body form (xing) and heat injures the qi. Injury to the qi gives pain (tong), Injury to the body form gives swelling (zhong). Thus if there is first pain and then swelling, the qi injures the body form, and if there is first swelling and then pain, the body form injures the qi.'

Cold is a yin movement of qi and so it will go to what is a yin manifestation in the body form, but heat is on the yang side and will have a direct relationship with the qi as representative of the yang. The yin can therefore injure the qi, and give the yang power of the qi a destroying strength, while cold can stop the transformations effected by the qi, and can stop the transformation and maintenance

of the body form. When there is injury to the body due to cold and the yin movement of qi, there is a kind of condensation which gives rise to swelling. The qi no longer transforms and transports the body fluids and there will be oedema. When the qi is injured first, for example by heat, initially there will be pain and afterwards swelling. What is clear is that the qi always precedes the form. There is no form if there is no qi. There is no maintenance or transformation of the form without qi. On the other hand, without a form there can be no expression of qi.

The five atmospheric influences and the five emotions

The text goes on to present wind, heat, dryness, cold and dampness, which are the five qi of the environment, and expressions of the qi of nature. They are also pathogenic agents within the human body. The five qi generated inside the human body by the five zang are manifest through the five emotions.

'Heaven has four seasons (si shi) and five elements (wu xing) for generating (sheng), growing (zhang), gathering (shou) and burying (cang), to produce cold, heat, dryness, dampness and wind.'

These are the four natural actions of each of the four seasons: generating for the spring, growing for the summer, gathering for the autumn and burying, or keeping in the depths, for the winter. Cold, heat, dryness, dampness and wind are the five atmospheric influences representing all the qi of nature.

'A human has five zang and, by transformations (hua), five qi, to produce elation (xi), anger (nu), sadness (bei), grief (you) and fear (kong).'

These are not the seven emotions, or the six expressions of the will. They are five because we are within the model of the five elements. Everything which is generated within, not only as the five qi but as all the activity and physiology of the activity of the five zang, influences the mind and behaviour as these five great tendencies of the temperament.

The text goes on to discuss the qi and the body form. The body form is the first thing to be exposed to the qi of nature or of the exterior. The point being made is that the emotions can also penetrate the bodily form and disturb the inner balance. Everything which happens in the body is under the authority of one's own qi.

Elation and anger injure the qi. This is a very old idea which we find in Zhuangzi. Yin yang qi is injured by all the emotions that we allow to settle in ourselves. Violent anger injures the yin and violent elation injures the yang. Due to the consequent weakening the qi moves upwards and the vital circulation becomes congested. Vitality therefore leaves the body. This all occurs when things are not well balanced. If elation and anger are not well regulated, if cold and heat are excessive, then life is no longer strong. Life must be regulated to keep it in such a way that what occurs on the exterior will not really disturb the qi or the body form.

SUWEN CHAPTER 2

Suwen chapter 2 presents the four seasons, which are not only the model for the qi and all its variations in nature, but also the rhythm which all life is subject to. We observe the four seasons from outside, but as living beings among the ten thousand other living beings, we are part of the universe and feel the same rhythm of the four seasons inside ourselves.

'The three months of spring are called springing up and unfolding (fa chen). Heaven and earth together produce life (sheng) and the ten thousand beings are invigorated. At night, one goes to bed; at dawn, one gets up. One paces in the courtyard with great strides, hair loose, body at ease, exerting the will (zhi) for life, letting live, not killing; giving, not taking away; rewarding, not punishing. This corresponds with the spring qi (chun qi). It is the way (dao) that maintains the drive of life. To go against (ni) this would injure the liver, causing disturbance due to cold in summer, through an insufficient contribution to growth.'

During the spring, if we behave in a spring-like manner, it is not only because we absorb the quality of spring from nature and act accordingly, but also because in our own lives there is a feeling of surging upwards and springing forth which we have to follow. This internal spring is felt in the season of spring and also in the springtime of life, youth. It is found in each situation which is spring-like and in which we have to follow this kind of rhythm. When it is spring in nature it is also spring within my individual life, in my psychology and physiology. And there will be difficulties if I oppose this natural movement of spring by behaviour which goes against the season.

I must accompany the movement of spring in nature with corresponding movements in my own body, for instance 'pacing the courtyard with great strides, hair loose, body at ease', and let the blood run in the muscles and invigorate the head, freeing the circulation of the liver and allowing it to flow right up to the extremities. At the same time I have to exert my will, but only in a certain way because I must act in accordance with the moment of time. I must not force myself in this, but do it just because it fits with how I am at this point in the seasonal cycle.

To go against this vital movement of qi would injure the liver. Every time a certain quality of qi prevails within my own personal rhythm, if I block it or go against it, it will create a disorder leading to an imbalance, which is disease. The importance of Suwen chapter 2 is in this perspective of the inner life which is really the basis for the unfolding of the qi.

LINGSHU CHAPTER 75

Lingshu chapter 75 is interesting because it describes the variety of qi.

'Needling regulates (tunes) the qi (tiao qi). Qi accumulates in the stomach in order to circulate as nutrition (ying) and defence (wei), each according to its own pathways.'

Tiao qi is a very common phrase. Tiao is a character which is often used to express any kind of treatment influencing the qi, or a function or meridian. It means to regulate, to tune as with a musical instrument, to blend in the right proportions, or to adjust. It is not really the result which is important here, it is the action. So the definition of acupuncture here is tiao qi. You do something with the qi which is like tuning a piano, and you try to make it more harmonious.

There follows a presentation of qi in the human body. The classical texts never give a complete clarification of all the various types of qi in the body, but here we have a presentation of several types, the ancestral (zong), the authentic (zhen), the correct (zheng) and the perverse (xie).

'Qi accumulates (ji) in the stomach in order to circulate (tong) as nutrition and defence, each according to its own pathways.'

This idea is found in a lot of texts. Everything starts with the stomach, especially in the Neijing school. This represents posterior heaven for the renewal of qi. We are not speaking here of body fluids or substances or food itself proceeding through the intestines. We are only focusing on the renewal of qi by the work of the stomach.

The character ji can also be used with a more negative connotation, to mean a blockage. But in many texts ji has a positive meaning, and in these cases there is another aspect to it. The accumulation is not a substantial one. It is not a piling up, it is rather that something comes again and again, and gets better and better. For instance, when you accumulate experiences or knowledge you do not pile them up, but you make your vision more accurate and clear. When you repeat the movements of qi gong each morning you accumulate something which is a good functioning of your qi.

In this text, when qi is accumulated by the stomach the meaning is not that the qi is piling up in the stomach, but that the qi is regularly renewed by the proper functioning of the stomach. The qi comes, is renewed and then released. All the qi which is accumulated circulates, tong. So there is no contradiction here between accumulation and circulation. Circulation is made by means of the constructive ying qi and defensive wei qi each following their own way.

Ancestral qi

'The ancestral qi (zong qi) flows to the sea, it goes down, flowing to the street of qi; upwards it goes to the respiratory pathway.'

The sea referred to here is the sea of qi in the middle of the chest. Street of qi is the point name of Stomach 30, but it is also the name of all transportation and guidance of the qi in the legs.

Authentic qi

The next definition is for authentic qi (zhen qi) which is received from heaven:

'The authentic qi is that which is received from heaven. Together with the qi from food it gives the person (shen) their force.'

'That which is received from heaven' we can understand either as respiration or the origin. What is given by heaven is our own original nature, our destiny. But the text continues saying that together with the qi coming from food it gives full strength to the individual and their body form. In this case, because the authentic qi is specifically related with the qi from food, we can understand the authentic qi as qi of heaven, and the qi of heaven as respiration, as opposed to food which is qi of earth.

The problem is that the text does not conform with the definitions we use in English now. Here, authentic qi is used for the qi of respiration, but nevertheless as the qi of heaven it is not only

respiration but the whole order of life. So we can see that in another context it is possible to understand authentic qi not specifically as the qi of respiration but as qi which follows the natural order of heaven in myself. When all my qi follows the natural order it is expressing the full potential of my origin, and it is natural, heavenly and authentic. We have to be clear about the difference between authentic qi and between what is called correct qi (zheng).

Correct qi

The correct qi (zheng qi) are the correct winds (zheng fang). They each come from a specific direction or territory. They are neither the wind causing (pathological) fullness, nor the wind causing (pathological) emptiness.'

The correct wind of the north is the wind or qi which comes from the north. The north is the same thing as the winter solstice, and the south is the same thing as the summer solstice. The west is the autumn equinox and the east is the spring equinox. The four intermediate directions mark the beginning of each of the four seasons. For example, the north-east is the beginning of spring. It is normal to have a particular wind coming from the north when you are in the depths of winter. This is what is called a correct wind. It would not be correct if you had a winter wind blowing during the beginning of autumn, or a winter wind coming from the east or the west. That would be a perverse wind. So what is called the correct qi in this text refers to every kind of qi being in the right place at the right time.

If something goes wrong you can rectify it, and zheng also means to rectify. So zheng is to follow the rule and not to overdo it. Very often not following the rule is the same thing as overdoing something. This is an idea from the Han Dynasty. Zheng is made with the character meaning to stop. It is the mark of the footprint. You stop when you have reached the limit or line. Not to be able to stop is seen as the beginning of all kinds of disorder. It is not good if the north wind extends itself by blowing northeast or northwest, or if the winter wind continues to blow during the spring. That is also a disturbance because it is not following the regular alternation and movement of the qi in nature. We have the image of the eight winds, but also of the five qi or the five zang. They must all be in the right balance, not prevailing over or dominating the other. It is possible to see every kind of cycle or relationship between the five elements behind that. When nothing is going wrong, when everyone is following their own destiny and doing what they have to do, that is correct qi. Then we can understand what comes next in the text which is perverse qi, xie qi. Perverse qi is exactly the opposite of zheng qi both inside and outside the body.

Perverse qi

The character xie is a representation of a canine tooth. What is interesting is that this character was also used in place of another with the meaning of a soiled or stained garment, something that is no longer new and pure, but polluted. Consequently the character has taken on the meaning of depraved, something that does not follow the normal rules, is not in the right place and order, and is perverse or evil. The Lingshu is a medical text, so the meaning of xie is primarily 'pathogenic' since xie is not

used as evil in medical texts. But for the Chinese the character certainly has this broader meaning, even though evil may be a little bit too moral in connotation for us as a translation.

The definition given here for xie qi is that it is xu feng, the wind taking advantage of an emptiness. This wind behaves like a thief, and injures human beings. Here we have the idea of perverse qi as qi which is out of place. It is either extending too much, or coming at the wrong time and in the wrong place, as for instance untimely cold during the summer. It is interesting that it is called xu feng. This kind of qi always takes advantage of a deficiency in your own system. If you are functioning completely normally and healthily there is no reason for an excess of cold or an unexpected wind to surprise and disturb you. But this kind of wind can harm you, and it behaves like a robber. The image of the robber wind is a popular one. It robs your life because it destabilizes and disorganizes all the qi making up your physiology, the process of your transformations, the storing of your essences, and the maintenance of your body form.

Suwen chapter 2 says:

'When the qi in heaven is clear and peaceful (qing jing) then the light is brilliant (guang ming). If heaven's virtue is stored indefinitely, nothing descends. When heaven retains its brilliant virtue (tian ming), then sun and moon are deprived of radiance (bu ming), perverse influences (xie) injure all hollows and orifices and thus the yang qi is blocked from within and without. The qi of earth cannot show its brilliance, clouds and mists no longer produce essences (jing), and this meeting above does not produce the descending white dew. Exchange and communication do not occur. The ten thousand beings no longer follow their destiny in life, even the great trees perish in large numbers.

'Once the qi has become unhealthy (e qi) there is no more surging of life (bu fa). Winds and rains are in disorder, the pearly dew does not descend and vegetation no longer prospers. The robber winds rush around in gusts, torrential rains keep pouring down. The four seasons of heaven earth no longer support each other. The way has been lost. Even before being completed everything is already destroyed.

'Only the saints, following the natural course, themselves escape all harm and save the ten thousand beings from extinction. The qi of life (sheng qi) does not run dry.'

This is an important Chinese text because it describes the human body and the cosmos using the same vocabulary and characters. It suggests that we should be clear and peaceful (qing jing), calm and serene in our heart/mind. This is not the heart as one of the five zang, but as the centre of the self, the oneness of the five zang. This heart is really heaven. 'Heaven in me is virtue, earth in me is qi', as is said in Lingshu chapter 8.

When the clear and pure essences are nourished through the work of the five zang, then life is brilliant and the radiance of the spirits, shen ming is able to appear. This is the radiance, the splendour, the light and the enlightenment coming from the presence of the spirits because of the calmness of the heart and the lightness of heaven. In this case, nothing can happen to you and all works well. But if heaven's virtue is stored indefinitely then nothing descends. Heaven retains its brilliant virtue but the sun and moon are deprived of their radiance. Nothing comes from the heart because there is a kind of blockage. There is no longer any display or spreading out of the influences or inspiration or light coming from the spirits. If the heart cannot spread this influence, the sense organs and upper orifices are deprived of their radiance and cannot function properly. And anywhere in the body the harmful results of this deprivation of inner radiance will be felt.

When this happens and the heart is not spreading the light of life, then perverse influences injure the hollows and orifices. In all the openings of the body, visible and invisible, there is a possibility for robber winds to enter, and the body is vulnerable to all the potential problems of qi at the level of yin and yang. Yang qi is blocked and the qi of earth cannot show its brilliance. Clouds and mists no longer produce essences, so there is disaster and all kinds of diseases may arise. In such a condition there is no chance of remaining in good health, and little by little it is impossible, through the transformations of the qi, to reproduce the essences that are the basis of life. Although the robber winds come from outside, this situation arises because of an emptiness within.

Just after this passage, Suwen chapter 2 continues with a description of a catastrophic situation in which everything is out of order and out of season. There is constant wind and rain and disorder. Nothing follows the correct order of life and the result is disastrous for all living beings. The text says:

'Only the saints, following the natural course, themselves escape all harm and save the ten thousand beings from extinction. The qi of life does not run dry.'

We know that as human beings we will face difficulties, but we must also acknowledge that it is always possible not to give way to the disruption of our qi. A sage is always able to maintain the regulation of life, perhaps even when dying. To be human is to follow the natural order, and it is also the only way to nourish life and be healthy. If you are healthy you follow the natural order in yourself, you have light in your heart, and a spiritual life which is also the natural life. So not only is there no harm for the sage but there is also a kind of virtue and influence emanating from him, permeating others and helping them to restore the balance of their lives. This is an idea which is found in Daoism, but which is included in the text here as a different kind of perspective. If you are really weak, perverse qi could be any kind of influence taking advantage of your weakness. If you are not weak it could be unexpected circumstances, irregular atmospheric conditions, or strong pressure in the prevailing qi, which becomes perverse because it is so strong that it enters and harms you. But if you keep your heart peaceful, you will be able to maintain all your defences in the correct balance in order to preserve the correct functioning of your zang and zheng qi. In this way you will not be overwhelmed by influences coming from outside, even if there is a lot of pressure.

ORIGINAL QI

Original qi (yuan qi) is not really presented or explained in the Neijing. The notion of yuan qi in Chinese thought was not elaborated at this time. It developed slowly and came later with characters describing the concept of origin. The best texts are Nanjing difficulties 8 and 66. In Nanjing difficulty 8, within the part of the text dealing with the pulses, there is an unusual passage. It speaks of an instance when there is no imbalance in the pulses but the person dies. The reason given is that the root that sustains the patient's life is finished or cut. The text says:

The twelve meridians (jing mai) are connected with the source (yuan) of the vital qi (sheng qi). The source of the vital qi is the root and foundation (gen ben) of the twelve meridians, that is the qi moving between the kidneys (shen jian dong qi).'

Sheng qi can be translated differently according to the context. It could be life-giving qi or the qi of life, or the qi sustaining living beings, or vital qi. Here the text is talking of the source of this life-giving qi, and the character used in the Nanjing is yuan. Etymologically yuan is made with flowing water, which is white, pure and clear. The part surrounding it is the rock or cliff from where this water flows.

There are a lot of ideas contained in this. The water is pure at the origin of the source. It is afterwards that the water may become unclear or turbid with rain or mud, or with all the things people wash in the water. The general idea is that the water keeps running, and by doing so it becomes clear again. The challenge is to be able to accept the dirt of the world, just as we have to accept heat and cold and so on, and just continue flowing onwards towards the sea. Water is a model of life because it always follows its own nature. By doing this it follows a movement, and by keeping to that it is able to remain clear, or become clear once again. It is the same in our own nature. We have a source and an origin that is completely pure and clean. If we speak in terms of qi, yuan qi is the potential of qi, which is then expressed in a specific form. This is our proper nature which we must retain.

Coming back to the quotation from Nanjing difficulty 8, ben is a root, a basis or foundation. The character gen is also made with the image of a tree, but is used more for the physical roots themselves. Gen can be used with the more figurative meaning but ben has a wider use because it expresses how the tree is planted and rooted, and its use as a metaphor is greater. The title of Lingshu chapter 8 is Benshen, rooted in spirits. The spirits are what hold the whole life, the basis and the foundation. Sometimes this is translated as natural spirits, since the basis of my life must be what is natural to my life.

The idea of ming men appears in the Neijing but it is not exactly the same as in the Nanjing. Nanjing difficulties 8 and 66 speak of yuan and yuan qi while difficulties 36 and 39 speak of ming men. They do not appear together, but there is not much difference between them. It is really a question of evolving vocabulary because when the Nanjing was written, a complete synthesis of terminology had not yet been made. The Nanjing was intended to explain the Neijing, but the Neijing we have now is not the same Neijing as they had then.

'The qi moving between the kidneys' is a very old conception of the origin. It represents the yang between the yin, with the movement of the qi as yang and the two kidneys representing the yin or water. This resembles the trigram for water kan, which has one yang line between two yin lines. The origin and its constant presence in the body are represented frequently in the Neijing by the kidneys. If the kidneys are really seen as the mediation between the origin and the development of an individual life, it is related to the idea of water as the first of the five elements, and as the origin of everything.

Another aspect which is perhaps not stated overtly but which is nevertheless understood is the way that we speak of heaven and earth but also of yin and yang. Heaven comes first and earth second, but in the couple of yin yang, yin comes first and yang second. Heaven is always first because heaven gives the initiative and the beginning to a process, then earth follows, obeys, gives form and achieves completion, but only under the authority of heaven's inspiration. In a living being we have the origin

or original impulse, the yuan qi, but as soon as we have the expression of something within that, the yin must come first. We have to have a form for the qi to become specific, and inside the form we always need the yin and the essences in order to release the qi. As we saw in Suwen chapter 5: 'the essences by transformation make qi'. The production of qi is always based on the yin. It is always by calmness and tranquillity that the movement and quality of qi is maintained.

On the ren mai there are two seas of qi (Ren 6 and Ren 17), the movement of the yin allowing the display and renewal of the yang. Ming men fire is the original impulse that sustains all the movement of life just as the original impulse sustains the movement of an arrow until the end of its flight. The original fire or yang sustains the functioning of all the organs, and all the qi of the organs in the body until the end.

This vision of the origin is not only in the past but also the strength of the present. A river remains a river because of its source. If you cut off the source there is no more river. In the character yuan there is always something which is flowing from the source. If our life is comparable with the river there must be something that is continually being given by the origin. The origin is always present and always sustaining life. If we cut off the origin we cut off the source and that is the end of life. In this way we say that the twelve meridians are connected to the source. In other texts it also says that the extraordinary meridians du mai and ren mai are connected to the origin. They do not use exactly the same vocabulary but the meaning is the same, and it is this character yuan which is used, not the other one, which can also be used for original qi.

The character yuan has something above and descending represented by the top line, that which is coming from heaven for instance. The second line represents the goodness descending. This traditional etymological interpretation from the first and second centuries AD does not reflect the historical one that what is above is descending on a man, represented by his two legs. This is the idea of yuan as something from heaven descending upon us. It is the origin, but more as the principle of the origin, and the beginning of a very specific process. The difference between these two characters for yuan is that the first is a gift from heaven, my true nature, and the principle of my whole life. It states that what is at the origin is natural to me and is the way I ought to be. In the other character there is the suggestion of a continuous emergence of the original pattern, which allows everything to function. So my qi will be patterned on the origin and the true natural order, flowing in the right direction and in the right pace, without any kind of perversion.

Coming back to the qi moving between the kidneys, we also have dong qi. Dong means to move or movement, but it is also to beat, as in the beating of the heart or the pulse. A dong mai is an artery, a circulatory vessel with a beating movement. It is also the beating that defines a living being or those who are able to move. Dong suggests the idea of all the movement of life. We cannot see this qi but it is for the movement of life, and later it appears through the form the qi has made possible. Nanjing difficulty 8 continues:

'This qi is the foundation of the five zang and the six fu, the root (gen) of the twelve meridians, the gate (men) of exhalation and inhalation. The source (yuan) of the triple heater. It is also called the guardian of the spirits against perverse influences (shou xie zhi shen).'

The image of a gate or door (men) is very often linked in classical texts with the root (ben) of something. It indicates dialectic between what is at the root and what is in the opening.

If the qi is the root and foundation of the twelve meridians, of the five zang and the six fu, of exhalation and inhalation, what else can it be? Being the source of the triple heater is explained in difficulty 66, which presents the idea of original qi but with the image of the source. The qi is also called the guardian against the perverse influences.

'The qi moving between the kidneys (shen jian dong qi), below the navel, is the vital destiny of a human being (ren zhi sheng ming). It is the root and foundation (gen ben) of the twelve meridians. Hence it is called original (yuan). The triple heater is the envoy able to make differentiation (bie shi) for the original qi (yuan qi). It (the triple heater) masters the circulation of the three qi (san qi) and their passage through the five zang and the six fu.'

How can we guard the spirits and go against the perverse influences if not by being faithful to the original pattern? To be faithful to that and then follow the natural movement of qi just as water follows its own natural course, to be at one with the natural order and heaven, that is the way to guard the spirits. The text continues:

'Hence this qi constitutes the root and foundation of man (ren zhi gen ben). Once the root is cut, the stem and leaves wither.'

In the Huainanzi it also says that if you draw a tree by the root it will come with the last of the leaves, but if you try to draw it by one leaf or one branch you just get that leaf or that branch and nothing else.

When Nanjing 66 says: 'The qi moving between the kidneys, below the navel, is the vital destiny of a human being (ren zhi sheng ming)' it is not referring to a specific anatomical location because 'between the kidneys' is not below the navel. But this is not written from an anatomical perspective. This text is considering the qi which is the foundation, and which is not exactly located but is represented centrally in the lower abdomen or heater, at the very foundation of the trunk and the whole being. 'Below the navel' is the sea of qi (Ren 6) on the ren mai, and all the other points which allude to the origin of life. It is also where we have the link with the power to reproduce life. All this is mentioned in Nanjing difficulties 36 and 39. Ming men and the power to reproduce life must be linked with the power to produce life. What gives me life also gives me the power to give life to another being. All that is related to the kidneys, but not to the physical kidneys in their correct anatomical location, but to this whole area below the navel where they are present with the quality of their qi.

The qi moving between the kidneys is the vital destiny (sheng ming) of a human being. The character ming has here the meaning of destiny. It is what I am supposed to do and be, following the natural order of things. For example, if the king sends a messenger with a mandate to do something, that is ming. The messenger has been given a mission to accomplish, and the means to do so. It is the same thing with human destiny. My true nature is my mandate, being what I am. But being my life, it is also my destiny. I fulfil my destiny by just behaving according to the qi given to me at my origin. The reference to the triple heater is specific to the Nanjing. It is here because it is three as the expression of the multiplicity. We have the one: one original qi in the likeness of heaven and in my

unity and oneness. But we are also living in the multiplicity because the life which is one is also expressed through a bodily form existing between heaven and earth, and with all the diversity of the twelve meridians and so on. This diversity is expressed at the first level by the number three, which is the natural number of qi. Through the number three we perceive the manifestation of the oneness of the origin. Two is the pre-requisite of the manifestation, not the manifestation itself. Two is differentiation within the wholeness of one, allowing the inner rhythm of life in the qi (yin and yang, heaven and earth) to appear. Yin and yang cannot exist or be seen in themselves separately, only in their multiple inter-twinings.

Many other texts mention this idea, for example the Daoists talk of the san yi. The meaning of san yi is the three represented in the oneness. We can represent the one only with the three. Three is necessary for the expression of qi in form, and for life in all its diversity. The three kinds of qi are explained in a variety of texts as corresponding to each of the levels of the triple heater, with the zong qi in the upper heater, the constructive ying qi in the middle heater and the defensive wei qi in the lower heater. The triple heater is triple for that reason; it is the relationship between the one and the three.

When the text says that the triple heater is the envoy able to make differentiation (bie shi) for the original qi (yuan qi), the differentiation or separation itself, the bie, leads to the appearance of something. In fact it is only by separation that something can happen and appear. For instance in the Huainanzi and in other texts, which present a possible theory of genesis it is said that in the midst of the chaos and the infinite but undifferentiated potential there is a separation of the clear and unclear in order to make heaven and earth appear. Bie is the distinction between appearance and specificity in the functioning of qi, but based, and remaining based, on the origin and original impulse. The foundation for the three kinds of qi (zong, wei and ying) is just the constant expression of the potential of the origin. The origin is always the potential which I have to fulfil, but it is a potential as a reality not just as a concept or idea. As soon as there is the beginning of a process, there is a necessity to follow that process. The ideal is to follow it spontaneously. There is a famous quotation from Hegel in which he states that freedom is present necessity. That is very Daoist!

Question: Is there ever a specific link made between the yuan and the jing essences?

Not in this text. Later on there are a lot. The Neijing also makes a link with the essences via the kidneys. If the kidneys store the essences and are responsible for providing all the essences in the body these are not only the essences of the kidneys, for example bone marrow, or those for the production of liquids and blood, but they are also to make the seed of life. The seed of life is present in the sperm and blood to produce another life. Later texts give more specific explanations.

THE ROLE OF THE STOMACH

Lingshu chapter 60 says:

'The stomach is the sea of qi and blood coming from the liquids and grains. The clouds and qi (yun qi) which come from this sea circulate everywhere under heaven. Qi and blood that come from the stomach form the trenches (tunnels) of the meridians (jing sui).'

Here we have a vision of the qi of the stomach sustaining the renewal of yin and yang, nutriment and defence, and blood and qi. This is at the very basis of what in later texts is called posterior heaven. If the qi of the stomach is insufficient, for example due to starvation, the qi of the whole body is soon unbalanced. We see in Suwen chapter 18:

‘The normal qi of a well-balanced man (he who follows the norm of life) is received from the stomach. The stomach is the normal qi of a well-balanced man. When a man no longer has the qi of the stomach then it is called counter-current (ni) and this counter-current is death.

The three trenches

Lingshu chapter 71:

‘When the grains enter the stomach, they divide into three trenches (san sui), residues and waste (zao po), body fluids (jin ye), and ancestral qi (zong qi).’

This passage has the same character, sui, as we saw for the trenches of the meridians in Lingshu chapter 16. The image is of a trench with a lot of circulation. A modern analogy would be a large pipe underneath the street containing all the other pipes for gas and electricity and so on. A lot of circulation is contained within a protected area. We find this expression sui used for the twelve meridians because they are twelve kinds of trenches used by all sorts of circulations. The three trenches coming from the stomach mentioned in Lingshu chapter 71 do not represent something physical, but indicate that from the work of the stomach there are three ways of circulating because there are three kinds of form: the residues and waste (zao po), the body fluids (jin ye) and ancestral qi (zong qi).

These three represent one kind of circulation for each level of the triple heater. What is heavy and thick will descend and become the residues and waste which are processed by the lower heater. The bodily liquids, jin ye, which are linked with the middle heater, are used for the renewal of the form, and the zong qi, located in the sea of qi in the upper heater, is for all the qi without form and which rises upwards.

THE TRIPLE HEATER AND ZONG QI

The text of Lingshu chapter 71 continues by presenting three kinds of qi, ancestral, constructive and defensive. There is a first division into three and then a second division into three related to the three levels of the triple heater and the stomach in the centre. The triple heater represents the triple aspect of the lifegiving qi.

‘The ancestral qi accumulates in the middle of the chest (xiong zhong). It goes out at the larynx, passing the vital circulations of the heart and makes inhalation and exhalation function.’

The character for accumulation, ji, is the same as we saw earlier in Lingshu chapter 75. Here the qi is accumulated in the stomach to allow the circulation of nutrition and defence. There is no congestion of qi or blockage. If qi accumulates without circulation there will be a blockage. In Lingshu chapter 71

all the qi converging in the middle of the chest is disseminated and circulates like clouds spreading everywhere under heaven.

The qi is attracted by the middle of the chest, attracted by its position in the upper part of the body, just as the sui always attract water. Water accumulates in the sea, but the sea never overflows. As water is accumulated it evaporates in the form of clouds and mist, so nothing is blocked and everything remains in its place. Qi is constantly attracted but if it follows its natural movement it goes upwards. Water, following its own natural movement, goes downwards, to the sea, which is in the lowest position.

The qi naturally goes to the upper heater, to the sea of qi in the middle of the chest, and appears at the level of the larynx. It passes through the circulations of the heart in order to make exhalation and inhalation work well. This is the presentation of zong qi in Lingshu chapter 71.

The beating of the heart is also linked to the zong qi in Suwen chapter 18. The heart and its circulation ensures a regular movement of blood and qi which can be felt at the pulse. It is very clear that what is called zong qi is that which gives the rhythm for all circulation. It is the merging of all qi and if it merges well it is in balance. If the balance is correct the rhythm will also be correct, and respiration will be regular and full. It is the same for the beating of the heart and the movement of life through the blood and qi of the whole body. All of this relies on zong qi.

The character zong is made with the image of a roof of a building at the top, and below the influence emanating from the ancestors and descending upon the offspring shi. In the classical interpretation of the character from the second century AD, the three vertical lines were interpreted as the manifestation of a triple form of what is above, for instance the sun, the moon and the planets (cf Wieger's Chinese Characters Lesson 3D). Specifically in this character they represent all the spiritual influences coming from heaven.

This element forms part of the character for spirits, shen, and part of many other characters meaning sacrifice, or that which comes from heaven as blessings. What is hidden in heaven is descending to earth with the sun, the moon and the planets as a triple manifestation.

Influences descending from heaven suggest the first meaning of the character zong, which was a temple for ancestor worship. This was the place where family members gathered together to perform rituals to help the ancestors, and to receive blessings and inspiration from them. The rituals ensured the continuity of the life of the lineage. So we can understand why the character zong also has the meaning of ancestors, or the continuity of the ancestors.

During their lifetime a Chinese person can have a lot of names, a birth name, nicknames, names given by friends or by themselves when something changes in their life, but after death they are given a posthumous name, particularly if they are the emperor. If you look at the list of posthumous names of emperors you will often find the character zong, but never for the first emperor of a dynasty. Zong is only used for the continuity of the line. It also has the meaning of an important gathering because it is the gathering of all the members of a family, along with all the deceased members too.

Through zong we understand how we have to be faithful to the origin, how to ensure the continuity and the expression of that. Just by understanding this character in Chinese we can realize the potential of the origin through zong qi. It is the blending of all kinds of qi in order to make a good rhythm and

balance of harmony in blood and qi, yin and yang and so on. If you translate zong by 'gathering' it is not enough, if you translate it by 'ancestral' there can be a lot of misunderstanding. There is really no absolutely true translation. In English and French we simply do not have the same concept, so we must go through the Chinese meaning in order to understand.

DA QI

The relationship with respiration, with food and the stomach is all presented in the text of Lingshu chapter 71 as we saw previously. In Lingshu chapter 56 there is a sentence which expresses similar ideas, however, it does not refer to zong qi but to da qi:

The great qi (da qi) which beat without circulating, accumulate in the middle of the chest (xiong zhong); the name is sea of qi (qi hai).'

This is the same idea as the beating of life with the moving qi in the chest. You can see the movement in the beating of the heart. When it circulates it takes other names: blood and qi, nutrition and defence, or whatever else. It does not take the name of zong qi.

YING QI

The character ying is very simple. It has the fire character (huo) twice at the top. To have two fires side by side like this is different from having them one on top of the other, which would indicate too much fire, or an intense burning. Fire next to fire suggests a gentle fire, acting as life-giving warmth and light, and providing the means for cooking. Underneath this is a depiction of something which is usually understood as a fence around a village or a military encampment (cf Wieger's Chinese Characters Lesson 90G). Inside the encampment is a representation of barracks or tents.

This is the depiction of a basic settlement, a village with everything necessary for life, or the organization of a military camp with everything in the right place and order. Ying is often used in classical texts. We have seen it in relation to earthly organization, in parallel with the character jing, the character for the meridians which reflect heavenly organization.

Ying is the building up and completion of something, an organization to ensure the achievement of a goal. Ying means to organise, to manage and express something, to nourish something with the meaning of caring for it and enabling it to express this organization. After this there is the maintenance of that organization, and the ability to take care of all aspects of its life, not only in terms of food but also of on-going repairs. So a translation of ying by 'nutrition' is not exactly bad but is not enough. It is too narrow because ying is more than to nourish. It means to take care of all the earthly, yin aspects of life inside the body: to build, to repair, to maintain, to nourish, to act in such a way that all the substances and essences are transported to the right place where they can be used for their specific purpose.

Lingshu chapter 71 says:

The ying qi produces the body fluids by secretion. It pours into the vital circulations, it makes the blood by transformation. It gives splendour and prosperity (rong) to the four extremities (limbs). Inside it pours into the five zang and six fu, and it corresponds to the laws of the passing of time (ke shu).'

This means that we have relationships between the ying and the body fluids, jin ye, as if the jin ye were a kind of secretion from the ying qi. The ying qi covers everything the qi is able to do when it transports and transforms in order to maintain the body form, liquids and flesh and so on. It embraces all the activities of qi leading to the use of any form of the essences.

The ying qi are related to the body fluids because part of the body fluids, specifically the ye, maintain the form, bring nourishment and so on. Both are linked with the spleen and stomach, and with the middle heater in coming from the assimilation of essences at that level, but they are not equivalent. When we speak of ying we speak of all these general activities. When we speak of body fluids we speak of very specific body functions which are not only for maintenance or nutrition but are also closely linked with defensive qi. The jin are more closely linked with defensive qi and with all the effects of clearing, cleansing and refreshing. All these functions are closer to defensive qi than constructive, nutritive qi.

Because they have a substance and form, the jin are the result of the work of the qi in the middle heater. They also have relationships with the vital circulation, specifically blood and qi. The relationship with blood is made through transformation. Blood is not a body fluid as such, but it comes from the activity of qi natural to the middle heater, and at the level of the spleen and stomach, expressing the capacity to build, rebuild and maintain. Blood has the function of nourishing and maintaining, but it is not the same as ying qi. Perception and knowledge, spirits and consciousness are stored in the blood, which is not the case for ying qi.

The mai are the vital circulation of all the fluids and blood in the body, and there is a strong presence of ying qi within the mai. The ying qi deals with what is heavy and full, the yin, and has to follow some kind of path and be pushed by the impulse of the vital circulation, just as the blood circulates. The image often given in texts is that of the movement of an army. The head chariot or tank and the bulk of the men and equipment travel on the road while various scouts, not carrying heavy equipment, move around at a distance from them, but they need to come back to the main part of the army for food and supplies. This is the relationship between the nutrition and defence and the vital circulation (mai), and why the ying qi is said to circulate through mai and the wei qi outside the mai. But reconstruction is at work everywhere within the body, within the skin, at the level of the body hair and so on. It also works in the depths of the flesh where there is much to rebuild and maintain. Defensive qi is felt everywhere, at the surface and in the depths.

The character used for bringing splendour is rong. The upper part is exactly the same as in the character ying, but underneath instead of a barracks there is a tree representing vegetation. The meaning of rong is that when everything is well maintained and nourished, there is a prosperity given to life, and this is visible on the exterior as a kind of splendour. When the sap is circulating well in a tree and you can see it in the colour of the leaves and in the consistency of the branches. Rong can be used in medical texts to mean the external sign of good maintenance inside the body. The five zang and six fu represent all the various functions of the body fluids and nutriment - everything which makes the substance necessary for the good functioning of the organism.

That the ying qi 'corresponds to the laws of the passing of time' is just to say that it circulates through the vital circulation (mai) in the body, according to the rhythm given by the zong qi, and by the

beating of the heart. And that inner rhythm is constant day and night. Our hearts beat with nearly the same rate during the day as during the night and it is the same for respiration. Therefore in this very short text in Chinese we have the essence of ying qi.

WEI QI

The character wei is easy to explain because it is made with xing, to circulate, to move, or to walk, which is the character translated as 'element' in the five elements. It gives the idea of a motion which is very regular, with a nice alternation of yin and yang. It is as regular as the course of the planets or the sun and moon and is a character which is used for the movement of the heavenly bodies. In the middle is one of the characters for leather; not the rough animal hide itself, but the hide when it has been worked to make something. It is used to give warriors protection, so immediately there is the idea of something which protects. Wei therefore depicts a regular motion and the protection provided by leather, and is the defence, the guard around the palace or the protection around something. We see in Lingshu chapter 71:

'The wei qi comes out with the rapidity and eagerness of brave qi. This circulation takes place first in the four limbs, and especially where there is a separation between the flesh (fen rou), between the layers of skin, without stopping.'

These are the qualities which we always find in descriptions of defensive qi. The idea of something warrior-like underlies it. The bravery and ability to move forward is the yang movement. This is the contrary of ying qi because it does not circulate under the impulse given by the mai, the vital circulation, but is itself full of eager strength and being yang is able to circulate by itself. It is not in charge of transporting nutriments, and being formless it can circulate through even the most imperceptible crevasse or crack in the body. We can understand fen rou as the place where there is a split or separation in the flesh, from the large valleys to the invisible places inside the mass of the flesh. We know from other texts that there is no mass or bulk which is not completely pervaded by a multitude of unlimited circulations. The qi pervades everything, and here it is yang in nature. Lingshu chapter 71 continues:

'In the day it circulates in the yang and in the night it circulates in the yin.'

The yang force is everything which is linked by the yang and represented by the yang meridians, by yang activities and muscular movement, and by the opening of the sense organs. During the night it circulates in the yin represented by the yin organs, the five zang. This is when we are at rest, not moving our limbs, and not orienting our sense organs towards the exterior. During the day it circulates in the yang and enables us to be directed towards the outside. During the night it goes to the yin to regenerate itself. The comparison with the sun is important because during the night the sun regenerates itself in order to be ready for the next morning. The sun's mother takes care of him on the other side of the earth! This is exactly the same metaphor used for wei qi. During the night it has to be regenerated, just as we saw earlier with the scouts or soldiers who have to come back to their barracks to eat. Otherwise they will be lost and killed.

The details of the circulation of wei qi are also found in Lingshu chapter 76. It always starts with the kidneys and follows the ke cycle: kidneys, heart, lung, liver and spleen. It is always by the proper circulation of the shao yang of the foot that the wei qi circulates in the five zang and six fu. It is always by means of the kidneys that it circulates in the depths during the night. This link with the kidneys is very important for the defensive qi. We will see more of this by looking at Lingshu chapter 18:

'Man receives the qi from grains. The grains enter the stomach to be transmitted to the lung. The five zang and six fu will all receive this qi. What is clear (qing) produces the ying, what is unclear (zhuo) produces the wei.'

This is within the specific context of the digestion because the grains are the starting point. In the process of digestion that which is assimilated first is called clear, and in this context that is the ying. That which is unclear descends to the lower abdomen and lower heater, and this goes on to form the wei qi coming from the lower heater.

'The constructive ying qi circulates within the vital circulations (mai). The defensive wei qi circulates outside the vital circulations. The constructive qi runs its circuit without stopping 50 times and is once again the big reunion (da hui). Yin and yang interlink and interconnect like a ring without end.'

So when the qi is with the yang there is activity, and when the qi is with the yin there is rest. Further on Lingshu chapter 18 states:

'That which nourishes (ying) comes out of the middle heater. That which defends (wei) comes out of the lower heater (or according to certain texts the upper heater).'

Here there is an obvious relationship between the unclear qi and the lower heater. But if there is a relationship with the lower heater there is also a relationship with the kidneys, specifically through the shao yin of the foot. From this we know what gives this essential qi its yang quality. The best of the essences are used to nourish and maintain the body through the nutriment and fluids and also by the blood.

What remains, because it has a kind of strength given by the process of digestion and assimilation, renews the forces of qi, and is able to give to this qi the very yang quality which is something related to the lower heater, the kidneys and the shao yin. It is certainly related to the yang of the kidneys or to the fire of the lower heater. This is the fire within the yin, ming men, the authentic yang. It is through this that the wei qi, with its strength coming from nutrition, is able to make its defence, obeying the rhythm of life, and expressing the yang power at its source in the kidneys and the lower heater. In the same way the constructive and maintaining ying qi expresses the nourishing power of the earth and the ability to give form, being sustained by the kidneys and the gentle fire of the yang of the kidneys in order to be able to make all the forms of life. This is on the yang side because we need to have this relationship with the origin as well. The wei qi therefore also expresses the fire, or yang, of the origin through what is assimilated by the digestion.

It is through the lower heater and specifically the yang of the lower heater that the wei qi takes its yang power. The wei qi circulates through the chest and the upper sea of qi, and is able to circulate

through the upper heater. From the upper heater comes the wei qi and whatever else is circulated by the qi: the ying, the blood and the body fluids. So we know that the wei qi, with its special effect on the outer layers of the skin, has a double link which is also described in Lingshu chapter 18, a link with tai yang, the bladder meridian, with the lower heater and the water element, and the yang of the kidneys. The defensive qi has a lot to do with tai yang. This is developed in the Shang han lun and its school.

The defensive qi also has a relationship with the lung and the skin. It is linked with the movement of the lung and the spreading out of qi by the lung up to the periphery of the body and the outer layers of skin. This is not a contradiction. We have to see that it must be linked with the origin in order for the strength given by food to become defensive qi, just as there is also a link with the lung and its qi in order to propel it outward to the furthest layers of the skin. Both nutrition and defence are part of what is in the zong qi, and what is distributed with the good rhythm given by the zong qi.

QI AS MIST AND DEW

Finally there is a description of qi given in Lingshu chapter 30:

'The upper heater spreads and propagates the tastes of the five grains. It invades the skin like smoke; it gives power and strength to the body and moisture to the body hair. It is like mist (wu) and dew (lu). That is called qi.'

Here the qi is spreading from the sea of qi in the upper heater, diffusing the essences coming from food, and permeating the skin like smoke. It gives the yang aspects of power and strength to the body, and moisture, the yin aspect, to the body hair. Mist is a kind of vapour which is nearly water, and dew is water which is nearly qi. This is a very good definition of the circulation from the upper heater.

We can categorize yin yang qi as nutrition/ maintenance and defence, blood and qi, or essences and qi. They are different but they are also intermingled, and they must be in balance. Whenever there is an imbalance this is the beginning of a process which leads to disease.