



Qi

An understanding of qi is central to Chinese philosophy, art, medicine and movement therapies, but we often rely on vague terminology, using the catch-phrase 'energy' to explain what qi is. A Study of Qi contains detailed descriptions of the various differentiations of qi, but also a wide-ranging philosophical investigation into the origin and development of the concept of qi itself. Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée explores the philosophical texts of the Zuozhuan, Zhuangzi, Huainanzi and Mencius, as well as the medical texts of the Neijing and Nanjing, to provide context and depth to our understanding of this ever-present but elusive activity of life. **'Qi is an expression of the natural order of life'.**

[AcuCentre Editorial Note: Although some Chinese characters have been retained in these two .pdf files, the great majority have been excluded. Readers are urged to refer to the original text for complete and entire content].

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FOREWORD

'Qi itself is neither a substance nor a spirit.' This simple statement expresses some of the enigma which is qi. By declaring what qi is not it challenges us to think more deeply and precisely about what qi is and how we perceive, experience and use it in our lives. Likewise this new book.

Qi manifests itself in all phenomena, and is inseparable from that manifestation, so its universality ought to make it easily accessible and understood as a concept. However, even if we are practitioners of oriental medicine or of the various art forms and movement therapies which employ qi as an instrument or a method, we often persist with very vague notions of what we are trying to influence and direct, and we rely on the catch-all term 'energy' to explain what qi is.

This book is an edited transcript of two seminars given in 2004 in London by Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée. It not only contains detailed descriptions of the various differentiated kinds of qi, but also a wide-ranging philosophical investigation and explanation of the origin and development of the concept of qi itself. It begins by looking at the historical evolution and use of the Chinese character for qi, and after this there are sections on how it appears in both philosophical texts such as the Zuo zhuan, Zhuangzi, Mencius and the Huainanzi and in the medical texts of the Neijing and Nanjing. These give context and depth to our understanding of this ever-present but elusive activity of life.

Chinese characters are included throughout the text for clarity and precision in understanding original Chinese texts. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Chinese are by Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée. We refer to the source book Chinese Characters by Dr S.L. Wieger (Dover Language Books) where appropriate. Qi, in Chinese, is neither singular nor plural. Elisabeth has suggested that the plural is often a more accurate translation. Qi will therefore appear as singular or plural depending on the context.

'Qi is both everything and the specific all at the same time. It is the power of life.'

Caroline Root and Sandra Hill June 2006

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of these seminars is qi, and as it is impossible to present a complete history of qi in such a short time, I have chosen passages from reliable texts which represent an interesting aspect of qi or illustrate the evolution of the concept of qi. The first part of the seminar will focus on philosophical texts, many of which originated around the second century B.C. Later we will look at the medical texts of the Neijing and Nanjing.

In the centuries before the Christian era, there was a gradual development of the notion of qi as it grew towards our present day understanding and use. This progression was consistent with the general development of thought and laid the foundation for the building of yin yang and five element cosmology.

We do of course have a problem with dating Chinese texts. Some we know for sure were written before the first century BC, but it is often difficult to know exactly when. Some texts are genuinely from the third and fourth centuries BC, others may be forgeries written in the first century BC! This is one of the reasons why it is impossible to make an accurate chronological history.

So this is not a history of qi as such, but simply a brief study of the development of the notion of qi as far as we can ascertain it.

THE ORIGINS OF QI

Wind

In order to understand the origin of qi we must first look at the concept of wind. A character for qi itself does not appear in the early oracular and bronze inscriptions, or in the most ancient Chinese texts, such as The Book of Documents, Shujing, or The Book of Odes, Shijing. What we do find in the very ancient oracular inscriptions of the twelfth, thirteenth and even fourteenth centuries BC is the character for wind, and these early descriptions of wind have some of the qualities which will be later attributed to qi.

There are several different kinds of wind, for example the four winds and the eight winds, and each of these contributes to the growing concept of qi. In the beginning qi appears as something coming

from heaven and penetrating earth. It has an influence on earth and provokes a reaction, as for instance with the qi that makes cold and heat, day and night, wind and rain.

Yin and yang

(陰 陽)

Later, qi will be understood as what is behind yin yang and this is a very important shift. We cannot speak of qi without speaking of yin yang, and we cannot speak of yin yang without speaking of qi. For instance, yin and yang appear in early texts as two of the six qi of heaven. They are like cold and heat, which is to say they are not only the bright, sunny side of a hill, but also the shady side. More than that they are the cold and heat which are the result of being in the sun or shade. Yin and yang will become a kind of differentiation of qi, as qi will become the influence behind any kind of manifestation. Yin qi will become the principle behind cold and cooling and yang qi will be the principle behind heat and warming.

We can see these differences evolving, and this development will be linked with changes in the weather and the passing of time, which is seen as a movement of qi and yin yang, with cooling from summer to winter and warming from winter to summer. So here qi is being used to codify the movement of time, and that movement is seen not only in the four seasons but also seen in the progress of each day. Many of the texts describe all this.

Internal qi

As the understanding of qi evolves into what is behind the appearance of things, there is the development of what we may call analogy. For instance, the same kind of qi making wind and tempests in nature is also seen to make anger. Therefore in early texts there is a relationship between the six qi of heaven and the six qualities of qi within a human being. These texts show the development of qi not only outside in nature, but also inside a human being. An example of this is seen in the Zhuangzi, where qi is seen not only as that which lies behind any given phenomenon, but also as the link between different phenomena presenting similar characteristics. For instance, what is behind anger and wind may also be behind all kinds of violent impulses at the beginning of something; a rising up movement, like the sunrise, or springtime.

Through this linking process we have the possibility of developing a cosmology based on qi, yin yang and the five elements. The concept of the five elements or agents, (wu xing), developed around the third century BC. It was not possible to develop a cosmology of correspondences before having a substantial enough notion of qi to make these links, which occurred around the fourth and third centuries BC.

Qi and the origin of life

At the end of the third century and the beginning of the second century BC, qi was linked with the origin and production of life. This is very logical, but the shift came with the understanding that qi is not only the power of transformation making life appear, but may also be considered as the origin of life itself. This allows us to ask what kind of relationship exists between qi and living beings,

between qi and form? By 'form' we mean everything that has a specific and perfect quality; form requires substance and essences. The beginning of form is the yin concentration and condensation of qi, which allows substance to appear. When qi becomes yin and yang it is subject to the movements and transformations which create opposition. Within this duality of essences and qi, form and qi, the qi will be specific with specific qualities and no longer in totality. Therefore it may be changed, altered and even perverted, especially by the power of human nature.

So what is the relationship between qi and the spirits? The qi itself is neither a substance nor a spirit. What we may say is that qi manifests through phenomena, and is inseparable from that manifestation to which it gives specificity and movement. On the other hand we cannot say that qi is the same thing as these phenomena or beings.

When things cease to be the qi does not disappear, but no longer having a form, it can no longer be perceived. So we could say that it is a kind of infinite and indefinite potentiality. But 'potentiality' sounds like an abstraction, which is not the case with qi. It is a reality. So finally we come to the understanding that everything is qi, and qi is everything that exists.

Therefore heaven and earth and all that is between them, everything that may envelope them and all the beings and phenomena existing between them, are just specific manifestations of qi which exist for a while. If it is an emotion it is for today. If it is a mountain it is for longer. Eventually we have the vision that everything is qi, right up to the point that the essences themselves are just a concentration of qi.

The Chinese also have a passion for unity, and through their vision of qi found the unity of all things. Within this vision, my qi is not exactly my own, it is mine because it is my life at the moment. And it is the same thing with my spirits. My spirits are not specifically my own, they are mine because they are effective in my life at this moment. If my life comes to an end, the spirits and the qi will not disappear but they will be something or somewhere else. They will continue to participate in the infinite and unlimited movement of life. This is not an adequate description because we are deficient in language to speak of what lies behind the appearance of living beings. But qi is at that level; it is at the level of the origin of all manifestation of life. So the colour, the sound and the smell of a specific being are all a matter of qi.

At the same time, we also have the idea of qi as the yang side in all yinyang relationships, such as blood and qi, essences and qi, body form and qi. So the question is whether the qi are able to be the natural order of life on their own or do we need to add something? This 'added something' has been called by different names according to the era and the school of thought: the Dao, the Li, the principles of the Confucian school, or the shen. There are several approaches in later texts, but essentially the feeling is that the qi follow 'guidance' from heaven in some way. But we have to be careful here, because even if the qi are in relationship with something giving guidance, there is no duality. Ultimate reality is always the merging of opposites in unity. We have to be very clear about this because it is an error that is sometimes made in the west.

The cosmology which we see in Chinese medicine and in Daoism is based on qi, yin yang and wu xing (the five elements/agents). A rich understanding of the notion of qi is necessary to allow this cosmology to exist and to function with all its correspondences. If qi was just cold or heat for example, it would not be possible to have a foundation for this complex cosmology. Obviously the diversity and richness of the concept of qi was not present in Chinese thinking before the third century BC, there was no trace of it then, and therefore no possibility of such connections being made in order to establish a cosmology.

If you open a good Chinese dictionary you may find under qi several meanings which are an expression of the various historical uses of qi. For instance, there can be a state of undifferentiated totality in which everything is qi. It can be the life-giving principle, original qi, or the components of the constituent agent of all which exists. You can also have the idea of the life force and activity in any organism or phenomenon, the vigour of motion, energy, the animating forces of the universe. Qi is also used for more observable things, for instance breath, steam, gas or vapour. All of these are found in this character.

Qi gives movement, change and transformation to the various expressions of life, and allows the manifestation of specific qualities and aspects. For instance, in nature it is air, but it is also the state of nature itself, the weather and the atmosphere. It is each of the four seasons, and each of the 24 periods of 15 days which form the solar year. The 24 periods of the year are called jie qi. Qi is also used to express any amount of time.

In the organism qi can be used to mean breathing, exhalation, or any kind of utterance. It can also describe colour and appearance, and is the manner, attitude, bearing and expression of the container. For example, the expression which I have on my face is the result of qi. My demeanour and body language are all a manifestation of qi, as are my temper, temperament and emotions. 'Spleen qi' (pi qi) is a popular expression in Chinese for the mood of the day, and to be in a bad mood is to have bad spleen qi. Of course qi is also used for the yang expression of anger, to make qi is to be angry, but it is also used for a state of mind, and the natural movement or disposition of the heart. So it is used for the vital forces, not only of the body with the strength of the constitution, but also for the force of the mind. Thus the intelligence, or will power of any being is also qi. To be animated or spirited is due to qi, and it is used for everything that can be expressed. When looking at calligraphy, you may say there is qi within the characters. This is something that is felt. The idea of qi lies behind all kinds of manifestation, and at the same time it is the life-giving force.

This understanding of qi, and our ability to perceive it, lies behind all the various methods of diagnosis used in Chinese medicine, the movement and quality of qi being an expression of what lies beneath.

THE CHARACTER FOR QI

The character qi (氣) does not appear in any archaic inscriptions or even in the earliest Chinese written texts. The outer part is found in old texts and in oracular inscriptions where it means to ask or

to pray for. (气) It is something that is coming from below and rising up. So the general meaning in ancient times was to make a ritual prayer.

By the time of the Shuowen Jiezi, the etymological dictionary published at the beginning of the second century AD upon which Wieger's 'Chinese Characters' is based, a lot of the original forms of writing had been lost, along with the primitive meanings. For instance, in trying to explain this character, the writers of the Shuowen Jiezi did not know that the primitive meaning was to pray, to offer a prayer, or to demand something. So the analysis of this character is of ascending vapour forming clouds. The movement is nearly the same. Something ascends from below and accumulates above with a kind of purpose. This idea is developed in the complete form of the character qi. The ascending vapours now come from the cooking of grain, because inside the character for qi there is a

bursting grain. (米)

In this character for qi we can see a relationship between the grain boiling and bursting, and making something appear in the form of a vapour with the strength to lift up the lid of the saucepan. So we need to include in the meaning the idea of a kind of heat and force which makes things function. Little by little the character qi was charged with all these meanings.

THE CHARACTER FOR WIND

The character for wind, feng, (風) has some similarity with the character for qi in the

movement of the air or vapour represented by the outside strokes. (几) Inside there is the image

of an insect or little worm. (虫) This is a general character used for a lot of little creatures.

When you have one you have ten thousand! This suggests that wind is present because all these insects are moving and perhaps the wind is able to awaken their metamorphosis and put them in motion, especially in the springtime. This is a nice image of life in all its transformations (sheng hua). In spring in the south of China or Taiwan there is a sudden rainy season. Then one day the sun shines and during the evening a lot of insects appear. First they fly, then they become little worms and after that they disappear, all in three days or so. So when the Chinese speak of 'the rain of insects' they are speaking of observed reality. It is not just a poetic image.

So when we look at the character for wind, it is not only that there is an insect in the wind, it is a lot more than that. As is said in the Shuowen Jiezi, it is the wind which makes the insects appear and transform. This is a very old idea of the wind being the power able to make life appear in insects and vegetation, and to give them the ability to be transformed. With insects it is metamorphosis and with grains it is the ability to grow and ripen. Certainly, back in the ancient times of the twelfth, thirteenth or fourteenth centuries BC, the wind appears to have been considered this kind of lifegiving and transformative power; the breaths sent by heaven to awaken life within the earth.



The character for phoenix (鳳) is similar to that for the wind, and has the same pronunciation, feng. This is not by chance. The ancient character for wind represented a phoenix with a proud and fierce bearing. The phoenix was one of the assistants of the Supreme Being, the Great Ancestor, in charge of the four winds and the four territories organized around the centre where the reigning power was established. This cosmology was the foundation of the Shang-Yin dynasty. Even at this very remote period in time there was a notion of different winds. A wind from the south was not the same as a wind from the north or the east. Wind was also considered a messenger of the Supreme Being, bringing life, transformation and fertility, all that is necessary for the development of life. Wind came from heaven and had an action on earth, for instance on insects or on vegetation. Clearly this is a basis for the beginning of the notion of qi. A character for qi had not yet appeared with a fixed meaning, but the wind and its effects were certainly a way of perceiving the vital forces.

QI IN PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS

CHUNQIU ZUOZHUAN

We will begin with the Chunqiu Zuo zhuan, the commentary of Mr Zuo on the historical chronicle called the Spring and Autumn Annals. In fact it is not certain that it is a commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals at all, but it is probably a text from sometime between the first and third centuries BC, with some rectification made in the first century BC. It might even be a forgery from the first century, but if it is it is a good one because we cannot decide! If it is a forgery, it is an attempt to reinstate the way of thinking of previous centuries.

The book is the year by year presentation of the succession of the Dukes of the kingdom of Lu from the eighth to the fifth centuries BC. Lu was the home state of Confucius and this is the reason why the treatise is said to be written by Confucius. Certainly he knew the basic writings. The following is a text of Duke Zhao or Zhao Gong, in the first year:

'Heaven has six qi (liu qi) which descending generate five tastes (wu wei), issue as five colours, are evidenced by five sounds, and in excess they generate six diseases. The six qi are yin and yang, wind and rain, darkness and light (yin yang feng yu hui ming). They divide to make the four seasons (si shi) in sequence, make the five rhythms (wu jie), and in excess bring about calamities.'

After this the text continues:

'From yin in excess, cold diseases. From yang in excess, hot diseases. From wind in excess, diseases of the extremities. From rain in excess, diseases of the stomach. From darkness in excess, diseases of delusions. From light in excess, diseases of the heart.'

Here yin and yang are associated with cold, felt in the shade, and heat, felt in sunshine, and express the possibility of cold and heat generating illness inside the body. This is one of the first major texts on the influence of qi, and here for the first time the qi are described as coming from heaven. The three pairs or couples of qi from heaven result in the appearance on earth of the five tastes, the five colours and the five sounds; six being related to heaven and five to earth. The six qi of heaven appear inside the earthly beings by giving them specific tastes, colours or sounds.

Systems of five qi and six qi

There are several points to note about this. First of all we are not within the cosmology of the five elements here. The series of five existed in China from a very early time, but it is not because this series existed that we later had a cosmology based on the five elements. We are probably more used to five, as an odd number, being linked with heaven and yang, and six, as an even number, with earth and yin. But at this time during the fifth and fourth centuries BC, six was more likely to be the number for heaven, so here there are six qi in heaven, three pairs of opposites, which are the origin of a reaction by and on earth. It is after the second century BC that odd numbers are linked to heaven and even numbers to earth. Five was then linked with heaven.

So why in medicine do we have two series of atmospheric influences coming from outside, one ruled by five and one by six? The reason is because we have two systems. There is the remainder of the liu qi system, the six qi of heaven, and there is the system by five which came afterwards, with the five qi corresponding to the five elements and five influences coming from heaven.

In this text, the six qi generate something on earth, and not only on earth but in human beings too. And of course, human beings generate the six kinds of illnesses. These illnesses and calamities in nature exist because there is excess. So we have the idea of the correct and perverse qi, although it is not yet called 'perverse', just excess. This is qi which does not follow the good rhythm or natural movement of life, and which therefore invades the earth or the body like an enemy. The character translated as 'excess' is yin, meaning irregular or deregulated; it is also found in medical books. It is often used for irregular qi coming from outside, and in the vocabulary of medicine we have the six yin, wind, cold, heat, dryness, dampness and fire. It is a character often used with the idea of licentiousness, but also of invading in order to put in the wrong direction. For instance, if you are with friends and they are involved in debauched behaviour, little by little you will be influenced by their excess. They will be too strong for you to remain correct. So this qi is too strong not to affect the normal way of life. Life cannot retain its correct pattern, and therefore there are calamities on earth, or illnesses in the body. These six qi, which result on earth in various series of five, are also the basis for the four seasons. They are the regular alternation of weather and time, which makes the rhythm of the seasons. They are yin and yang or cold and heat, progressing throughout the year to make the seasons, wind and rain creating the weather, and light and dark bringing the alternation of day and night.

The five rhythms and the regulation of qi

These rhythms are the jie, which etymologically means the knots in bamboo. In its structure bamboo expresses the alternation of yin and yang, emptiness and fullness, activity and rest, display and concentration. In the Shuo Wen Jiezi the explanation of the character jie is to take a measured amount of rice in a pot. The cooking pot containing boiled white rice (bai) and the spoon (bi) are depicted in the character along with the idea of a measure, with the bamboo radical up above. So the meaning is to be able to have a regular measurement, similar to that of the articulations on a bamboo shoot. Jie is therefore linked with qi because it is important for qi to have an even measure, and not to be in

excess or deficiency. But at the same time jie contains ideas of alternation and rhythm. Qi is always yin and yang passing from cold to heat, concentration to dispersion.

The five rhythms (wu jie) give the solar year an organization by five. The eight jie, or eight rhythms of the year are the two solstices, the two equinoxes and the four beginnings of each season. They are the days of the year when there is a kind of 'knot' regulating all the movement of qi. And we have seen that the 24 periods of the year are called jie qi.

In this text from the Chunqiu Zuozhuan, we can see that there is a lot of information coming from a more ancient cosmology, but it is not quite the same as the more evolved notion of qi or the five elements, or even yin yang. In this text yin yang is not yet the blueprint for all coupled concepts. It represents one among several. Here yin represents the cool of the shadows and yang the heat of the sun. These ideas will gradually evolve into an expression of qi itself, but that will be later.

Staying with the Zuozhuan I will take another text from the same chapter, Duke Zhao's first year. It says:

'The sage respects the four moments of time.'

In Chinese this is 'jun zi you si shi'. Jun zi is the name given to a sage or a gentleman. You is to have, si is four and shi is a moment of time, or more specifically an hour, day or season of a year. The phrase si shi usually means the four seasons, but with Chinese the translation always has to be made according to the context. In this text it does not refer to the four seasons but to the four divisions of the day.

'In the morning he holds an audience. During the day he collects information. In the evening he writes down the orders. During the night he rests.'

An audience would involve listening to people seeking arbitration or judgement. This takes place in the morning because at dawn after the rest of the night we are in a more balanced state, and is reflected in medicine with the practice of taking the pulse at dawn when the qi is balanced. We rest at night in order to let the qi come back to a more normal movement and to let the yin restore the quietness and good rhythm of that movement. The prince normally held his audience at dawn. This was explained in the Book of Rites, one of the Five Classics written around the second century BC, as being because at dawn there was a perfect state of balance. Taking advantage of the rest of the night and not yet being in disorder caused by the agitation of the day. This is why when you want to take someone's pulses away from the specific circumstances created by their daily activity, you take them at dawn.

During the day the sage collects all the necessary information. As a wise and powerful man he does not go to work in a field and come home at night exhausted. He needs to gather information in order to find the right way to govern, which is the way of the leader. To be a leader is to find a centre which has a deep root in the reality of life. In the evening when he has collected information and centered himself within the cosmos, then he can take decisions. At night, he rests. What follows is more interesting:

'Doing that he is able to regulate the diffusion of his qi (jie xuan qi qi).'

We have looked at the character jie to regulate. Xuan is familiar in Chinese physiology associated with the lung, and is the idea of disseminating, spreading out everywhere, but following a good rhythm in doing so. The sage regulates the diffusion of his qi. It continues:

'Acting in such a way that the qi will not block or stagnate.'

We find this in a lot of other texts, that the great problem with qi, in nature as well as in the human body, is blockage from stagnation. Water provides a good image of this. Water must circulate normally, not to stagnate or block. If it blocks or stagnates then it becomes unhealthy. In the body it is the same thing. The problem is how to avoid an excess of qi or an invasion of qi, which may disturb our own qi. Through our own behaviour we have to make sure that qi is diffused regularly without any blockage or stagnation. Blockage or stagnation will lead to 'physical exhaustion, lack of clarity in the heart/mind, and confusion in thoughts and thinking'.

Therefore, if you are wise enough you can understand something about the rhythms of nature and qi, and know that the regulation of qi is not only a question of weather but also of good health. And although human beings may be subject to invasion due to some kind of excess in the surrounding qi, they can also take advantage of their human ability to keep a natural rhythm of qi inside themselves. Following the four movements of time and the rhythms of each day, allows the body and heart/mind (xin) to be in perfect condition with strength of body and clarity of mind.

So this is not only a question of the qi within an individual, but of how it can be regulated by means of individual behaviour. This idea was developed more and more through the centuries BC, until finally the individual is seen as ultimately responsible for every kind of disorder. This is something which we find in chapter 55 of the Daodejing: 'The heart puts qi into action as envoy (xin shi qi)'. In the context of Laozi chapter 55, the heart is making the qi too active and the result is violence. But nevertheless this shows that the heart is considered to be responsible for putting the qi into movement.

THE ART OF WAR

We find this idea everywhere, for example in the Zunzi (The Art of War) chapter 7:

'A whole army may be deprived of its morale (its qi); a general may be deprived of his heart (his mind, his fortitude). In the morning, the qi is eager, at noon, it flags; by evening it is home sick. Thus the expert in the military avoids [the enemy] when its qi is eager, but attacks when it is flagging or home sick. This is to control the qi.'

Here we have a passage about the morale of soldiers, but what is usually translated as morale is in fact qi. It is about the qi of the soldiers according to the various times of day. For example, in the early morning at dawn the soldiers are full of qi, but during the day there is a slowing down of this impetuosity, and when the evening comes the soldiers sink back to their home place, so there is a diminution of their qi, or a kind of stagnation if you like. In a treatise on the art of war this would be an indication of when to attack the enemy army; you attack them in the evening, never at dawn. But of course you have to pay attention to the qi of your own soldiers. This shows that in a text

completely different from the Laozi there is the same idea of qi, the rhythm of the qi inside a person, and the way to manage that.

THE SIX QI

In the text of the 25th year of Duke Zhao from the Chunqiu Zuozhuan, there is a passage that directly relates the six qi of heaven to what happens inside a human being at the level of their inner disposition and tendencies. It reads:

‘In mankind the likes and dislikes, elation and anger (xi nu), sorrow and joy (ai le), are generated from the six qi. Therefore, take care to model yourself on appropriate categories in order to control the six inclinations or wills (liu zhi).’

Here again we can see the relationship between atmospheric conditions and feelings in human beings. In medicine we often have five expressions of will and seven emotions, each with the symbolic values of five and seven as they were in the period of the expansion of medical thinking. But at the time of this text there were six kinds of emotions or inner dispositions, usually seen in three pairs of opposites, for example elation and anger. Here the six qi are not only the six qi of the surrounding environment, but also six kinds of movement, or modes of activity, which are inside a person and generated by them. In medical thinking they are generated by the five zang. This gives rise to the idea that the qi must be guided. We must model our conduct on a particular pattern in order to have well circulating qi, moving with good timing and rhythm. This is why the text says that you must take care to model yourself on the 'appropriate categories'. But what are the appropriate categories? They are a kind of pattern of conduct, for instance what to eat, what kind of music to listen to, how to behave, and what rites and rituals to perform. Rituals are always, according to the traditional Chinese view, the way to model oneself on nature. One of the best ways in ancient times to understand the movement of qi in nature and natural behaviour was through ritual and rite. By following the rites which teach you how to behave, what and when to eat, how to dress, what kind of music to listen to and so on, you regulate the six qi inside yourself. Another passage from the Duke Zhao's 25th year says:

‘Ritual (li) is the standard (jing) of heaven, the principle (yi) of earth, and the conduct (xing) of man. Heaven and earth have their standards and men take these for their pattern, with the light of heaven as model and the generation of earth as basis, the six qi are generated using the five processes (wu xing). The qi become the five tastes, issue as the five colours, and are proclaimed as the five sounds.’

Therefore through ritual we know how to dress in the appropriate colours, how to eat the appropriate grains and meats and so on. We regulate our internal qi, and thus regulate our inner disposition and emotions. In this way we naturally control or govern the six wills (liu zhi). Zhi is usually translated in medical texts as will, or will power, but in earlier texts it was simply an inclination or propensity. It is normal to like or dislike certain things, but it must be an appropriate and controlled response, not an excessive reaction. If your qi is in good order you will act appropriately with all your own tendencies and propensities, but if your qi is in disorder then your reactions and emotions will also be out of

control. Harmony, he, is always composed and the result of several things, or of everything coming together.

In another text from the 20th year of Duke Zhao, there is the story of a prince who is behaving badly. The head of the kitchen, not the chef, but a high ranking official, asks why the prince is behaving so badly. He says that there are three people responsible. As head of the kitchen, he is responsible for whatever enters the prince by mouth, the master of music is responsible for what enters by the ear, and another high official is responsible for what the prince's eyes see.

'The tastes guide (xing) the qi, the qi makes the will (zhi) solid (shi), the will fixes speech (the word) (yan).'

This is a very old idea that can be found in many other texts, for example the Guoyu, the Speech of the Kingdoms, a very ancient text, perhaps from the end of the fifth century BC. It says:

'The mouth draws in taste and the ear sounds. Sounds and tastes generate qi. The qi in the mouth becomes speech and in the eyes becomes light (ming, good vision).'

This is a similar idea that everything that penetrates the body with or without a form, for instance tastes proceeding through the mouth and stomach and sounds entering the ear, produce and pervade the qi inside the individual. Because of that qi the person is able to speak, see and whatever else is done.

Food and qi

Coming back to the previous text of Duke Zhao's 20th year about the kitchen master, the three sentences are very interesting. The text says that the tastes activate and guide the qi. There is a very strong and primitive link between food and qi. It is vitally important to eat carefully because it is not only a question of good health but a question of good qi and its regulation. The qi is able to make the will solid, and the will is the able to direct and form the inner disposition. It is your inner disposition that determines what you say. For a prince, it is important to give orders when it is appropriate. To do that he has to have a firm and solid direction in his mind, and to achieve that his qi must be well regulated by appropriate and well balanced food. A little bit later in the text the prince asks:

“Are harmony and identity different?” Yanzi answered, “They are. Harmony may be illustrated by broth. You have water and fire, vinegar, pickle, salt and plums, with which to cook fish. It is made to boil by the firewood, and then the cook mixes the ingredients, harmoniously equalizing whatever is in excess. Then the master eats it, and his heart/mind is made equable.” (Based on the translation by Fung Yu-lan)

So here the chef is creating harmony in the broth, just as one composes a recipe. All the tastes must be present, but in the right proportions so that one is not dominant. One taste can prevail according to the season, for example, it is normal that the broth would be a little bit sour during the springtime, but not too much so. All this is a metaphor for the balance of the emotions. The emotional balance or equilibrium of the mind is not a stable thing, it is always changing and evolving according to the individual life, the season, the circumstances and so on, but it must always remain in the right

proportion and balance. Ping is to make equable, to put in balance, with the idea of a peaceful balance.

The texts ends by saying that the ancient kings, who were very wise, combined the five tastes and tuned the five sounds in order to put the heart in balance and to govern perfectly.

All this is a question of qi. The correct rhythm will always be achieved through the regulation of qi. There are many texts which show this, one of which is a very important book written around the middle of the third century BC, the Lüshi Chunqiu, the Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Buwei. In the last chapter of this book it says:

'Grains, when they are harvested at the right time, have a pleasant smell and a sweet taste. They give the qi splendour. During the period of the one hundred days of this good grain, another result is that one will have acute and accurate sight and hearing, and clarity and wisdom in the heart and mind. The four limbs will be strong and firm. Pernicious qi will not enter you, so your body will not have any serious disease. The Yellow Emperor said: "If something is not regular and correct in the four seasons, start by regulating the five grains."'

MENCIUS

This text from the end of the fourth century BC is a kind of parable about Ox Mountain.

'There was a time when the trees were luxuriant on Ox Mountain, but as it is on the outskirts of a great metropolis, the trees are constantly lopped by axes. Is it any wonder that they are no longer fine? With the respite they get in the day and night, and the moistening by the rain and dew, there is certainly no lack of new shoots coming out, but the cattle and sheep come to graze upon the mountain. This is why it is as bald as it is. People, seeing only its baldness, tend to think that it never had any trees. But can that possibly be the nature of a mountain? Can what is in man be complete lacking in moral inclination? A man's letting go of his true heart is like the case of the trees and the axes. When the trees are lopped day after day, is it any wonder that they are no longer fine? If, in spite of the respite a man gets in the day and night and the effect of the dawn's qi on him, scarcely any of his likes and dislikes resemble those of other men, it is because what he does in the course of the day once again dissipates what he has gained. If this dissipation happens repeatedly, then the healing influence of the night qi will no longer be able to preserve what was originally in him, and when that happens the man is not far removed from an animal.'
(Mencius, Book VI, part A, paragraph 8, translated by D.C. Lau. In certain other editions of Mencius, you will find this passage in chapter 11 section 8.)

What is translated as the 'healing influence of the air in the night' or 'the healing influence of the night qi is simply ye qi, night qi. Furthermore, what is translated by 'the effect of the morning air' is the dawn qi, the qi at the beginning of the day. At dawn the qi is in a natural state of balance, and because of this it is quiet. Because it is quiet you have clarity of mind. Because you have clarity of mind, as is said in Daoist texts such as Zhuangzi chapter 15, you are able to be in the Way. Or in a Confucian text you may say one is able to see clearly what is good and what is bad.

The character for dawn used in this text is the character dan, which represents the growing of the sun. The sun is seen rising above the horizon. This dan is well known, but dawn is also expressed by the phrase ping dan: dawn as a time when everything is in balance.

Continuing with another text from Mencius we can begin to consider qi related to the will and the heart. This famous text is from Book II, part A, paragraph 2, or Book II section 2 according to the numbering system.

'I wonder if you could tell me something about the heart that cannot be stirred (bu dong xin), in your case and in Gaozi's case?'

'According to Gaozi, "If you fail to understand words (yan) do not worry about this in your heart (xin); and if you fail to understand in your heart, do not seek satisfaction in your qi." It is right that one should not seek satisfaction in one's qi when one fails to understand it in one's heart. But it is wrong to say that one should not worry about it in one's heart when one fails to understand words. The will (zhi) is commander over the qi (qi zh zhi) while the qi is that which fills the body (ti zhi chong). Where the will arrives, there the qi halts. Hence it is said, "take hold of your will and do not abuse your qi".'

'As you have already said that where the will arrives there the qi halts, what is the point of going on to say, "take hold of your will and do not abuse your qi"?'

'The will, when blocked, moves the qi (dong xin). On the other hand, the qi, when blocked, also moves the will (dong zhi). Now stumbling and hurrying affect the qi, yet in fact palpitations of the heart are produced.'

'May I ask what your strong points are?'

'I have an insight into words. I am good at cultivating my "flood-like qi" (hao ran zhi qi)

'May I ask what this "flood-like qi" is?'

'It is difficult to explain. This is a qi which is, in the highest degree, vast and unyielding. Nourish it with integrity (zhi yang) and place no obstacle in its path and it will fill the space between Heaven and Earth. It is a qi which unites rightness (yi) and the Way (dao). Deprive it of these and it will starve. It is born of accumulated rightness and cannot be appropriated by anyone through a sporadic show of rightness. Whenever one acts in a way that falls below the standard set in one's heart, it will starve. Hence I said Gaozi never understood rightness because he looked upon it as external.'

(Based on D.C. Lau's translation)

In this passage from Mencius the qi is the sensitivity and activity of our innermost nature. But this richness, this power within, needs regulation, which is given here by the will.

This text is one of the most important about qi in ancient classical Chinese. It says several things.

First, that there is a relationship between the qi within which makes life, and the state of mind and the balance of their heart. Here we have what Mencius called the heart that cannot be stirred. This is a heart which is not moved, which means not agitated or disturbed. This is nothing to do with the beating of the heart. I say this because in Chinese the same character dong is also used for the beating of the heart.

All sorts of movements can put your heart out of balance. But how does that happen? There are several ways. We understand that qi is always at risk of disturbing the heart. The problem is that the same qi which is the troublemaker is also the life-maker. The same qi is both the power of your life and the disturber of your life.

The first question is how to maintain an unstirred heart. The answer is 'if you fail to understand words, do not worry about this in your heart'. This means that if there is something which you are unable to express clearly, do not try to understand it by thinking, because if you are unable to express it clearly and accurately, the effort of thinking will only result in an increase in the uncertainty and confusion. When everything is functioning well and everything you see and receive is transformed well, it gives clarity to your heart and mind, which is expressed through clear speech. If your speech is not clear, it is because there is something wrong in the qi. If you attempt to make clarity with the heart/mind you will not succeed and will only increase the confusion. For example, if I have to make a decision about which road to take it may be clear at once, but if it is not I may have to think about it. But the fact is that this kind of thinking is dangerous, because if I were able to know, I would have had a clear idea straight away. To try to remember can really increase the confusion. Asking your instinct to tell you what to do is the same thing. It will be wrong because your internal qi is not well regulated and it cannot indicate the right way forward.

Qi and the will

When the heart is in perfect balance and all the movements of qi are well regulated, then thinking is clear. This is the reason why Mencius goes on to discuss the relationship between the qi and the will or intent (zhi), the inner orientation of the mind. The relationship between them concerns the guidance given by the zhi to the qi.

As we saw earlier, the qi is generally understood as an unlimited vital force, but not exactly as the guide or ruler of life. Life is a spontaneous activity of the qi, but there is also something which makes this activity regular as well as spontaneous. It is this that we have to embody in ourselves as human beings, and which is called 'Heaven' or the 'Way'.

This can be seen in the well known medical classical text, the beginning of Lingshu chapter 8:

'Heaven in me is virtue (tian zhi zai wo zhe de ye),
Earth in me is qi (di zhi zai wo zhe qi ye).'

Why is the qi related to earth? It is because qi represents all the possibilities of the expression of life appearing on earth, and in the human body it is the multiplicity of what makes our life. But before the qi there is the virtue (de), the uprightness of the movement coming from heaven. (Cf. The Heart in Lingshu Chapter 8, Monkey Press, 2004)

Here we have a sequential relationship between the qi and the will. The will, or intent, guides the qi through the inner orientation coming from the heart. If this is so everything will be in order. If one cultivates oneself by all the means available, such as education or the rituals of the Confucian school, the will is in front and the qi will follow. There is an activation of the qi. But any kind of excess or lack of regulation in the movement of qi will lead to a disturbance in the peaceful rhythm of the heart or the balance of the mind, which in Chinese is the same thing.

Flood-like qi

The description of 'flood-like qi' (hao ran zhi qi) in the text from Mencius is a very famous phrase. Hao is a meeting of something which is pervasive or flowing everywhere. It has the water radical on the left side. Ran, with the fire radical beneath, is something natural, something that goes by itself. There is nothing artificial about it. It is a kind of sea which is at ease. In this sentence we have the feeling of qi which is extending everywhere quite naturally, and there is a sense of the unlimited power and presence of that qi in every living being. Mencius himself said it is difficult to describe and explain this. This kind of qi is extremely powerful and vigorous, and when it is maintained and sustained with uprightness and rectitude, then it fills everywhere between heaven and earth. This is also the beginning of a kind of cosmic consciousness, with the qi within and the qi without being the same. The internal qi, if maintained correctly, is unlimited. It allows participation in the cosmic life. The qi is unlimited, inexhaustible if we guide it correctly, and do not pervert it by inappropriate will and desire. These ideas are developed later on in Mencius.

In the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong) there is a final achievement of its expression in the man who is a sage and able to embody this qi. Not only is he well centred but he is also the centre of heaven, earth and the whole universe. Through our qi we have to develop interaction with heaven and

earth, leading to the theory expounded in the second century BC of the three powers: heaven, earth and mankind. When we speak of the three powers we have to understand that human beings have power, together with heaven and earth, to balance that which exists in themselves, in nature and also in the cosmos.

QI AND FORM

In the Zuo zhuan, in Duke Zhuang's 14th year, there is a story about some people who saw two serpents fighting at the gate of the city:

'Before this, two serpents one inside and one outside, had fought together at the southern gate of the capital, till the inside one was killed. It was six years after this when Duke Li entered. The Duke (of Lao) heard of the circumstances and asked Shin Seu saying, "Has Tuh's restoration come from that supernatural appearance?" The answer was, "When men are full of fear, the breath (qi) as it were, blazes up, and brings such things. Monsters and monstrous events take their rise from men. If men afford no cause for them, they do not arise of themselves. When men abandon the constant course (of virtue), then monstrosities appear. Therefore it is that there are monsters and monstrous events.'

[Based on the translation by James Legge]

The answer is very interesting. It says that when a man is fearful, the qi that is exhaled is like a flame that attracts something. This attraction comes from the man himself. The explanation is that when a man has something in his heart, the qi emanating from him is almost in a physical form. It carries something of the disposition of the heart and the feeling of the man, and this qi is given form.

Remember that in medicine qi always precedes the taking of a form. Qi creates the form to be taken. Qi has diverse qualities and balances, but must always be present to make a form appear, even if the form is very subtle, like changing clouds. A feeling in the heart of the people produced the qi referred to in the passage from Duke Zhuang's 14th year, and in this case the form taken had the image of two struggling snakes. So these kinds of apparitions can have their origin in human beings. This is very interesting in such an old text, and later it will become more developed. As human beings we not only receive qi but we release qi, through breathing and through being who we are and what we feel. The qi released by human beings has an effect on the balance between heaven and earth. When there is something wrong in the behaviour of an individual, strange apparitions and bizarre phenomena start to appear. This theory flourished during the Han Dynasty which was roughly 200 BC - 200 AD. Generally speaking there are two layers of strange phenomena. There is a kind of lower level, for instance the raining of frogs, which is a way for nature or heaven to give a warning that there is something wrong and it must be rectified. The second level occurs if no correction is made, and then there will be real calamities.

HUAINANZI AND THE GENERATION OF QI

Question: What is it that holds the qi in place? Do the forces which produce the qi have to be held in place?

It is difficult to speak of the generation of qi. There are several texts with several different approaches. It is more that qi is everywhere and everything. There is a text in the Huainanzi chapter 7

that says at first there is a kind of undifferentiated one-ness. There is qi, but we cannot see anything, it is not yet yin or yang, and there is no creation:

'Of antiquity (gu), before heaven and earth even existed, there were only images (xiang) without forms (wu xing), profound, opaque, vast, immobile, impalpable and still. There was a haziness, infinite, unfathomable, abysmal, to which no one knew the door (men).'

If the universe, the unlimited cosmos, is seen as qi we must also look at the cosmos as having a self-producing and self-regulating role. It is not that we create qi or that qi is created, but that there is the manifestation of life through the qi and the forms which the qi enables. So it is difficult to speak of a creation of qi because in a way the qi is already here. It has always been here, before time and space, and through what is here we may perceive the differentiations making time and space, heaven and earth and all living beings. These are all inside the wholeness and the oneness. Nothing can really be exterior. This implies that there is no creative process as we know it, because if there is a creative process there is a schism between creator and creation, and that does not exist in the Chinese mind. This is of course the basis of the dao, and qi is just the result of making the multiplicity appear through yin yang and through heaven and earth.

At the beginning of Huainanzi chapter 3 (from the beginning of the second century BC) there is a great text that fits with this inquiry:

'When heaven and earth were not yet formed (wei xing) it was amorphous, vague, a blank, a blur. Before the primal beginning (tai shi) the Way (dao) began in the tenuous and transparent. The tenuous and the transparent generated space and time (yu zhou). Space and time generated the qi. There was a dividing line (ya yin) in the qi. The clear and soaring spread out to become heaven, the heavy and muddy (unclear) congealed to become earth. The concentration of subtle is easy. The concretion of the heavy and muddy is difficult.' [Based on a translation by John S. Mayor]

The whole of this chapter deals with qi, yin yang and so on. Therefore this is one of the first texts on what we may call cosmogenesis. It is a very beautiful text, but difficult to translate.

In Huainanzi chapter 3 we are introduced to the concept of original qi, which is the starting point for the process of the production of a specific life. Original qi is just the beginning of differentiated life. We have to understand this not chronologically, but as a constant movement of appearing and disappearing related to the forces of heaven and earth.

At the beginning of the Huainanzi chapter 7 it says that the finest and most essential qi makes human beings and the less refined qi makes animals:

'The coarse qi (fan qi) made inferior animals (chong), and the finest qi (jing qi) made humans.'

I want to look briefly at another text from near the end of Huainanzi chapter 1. It is a kind of continuation of the text from Mencius. We have three things, the spirits (shen), the qi and the body form (xing), in their proper relationship:

'The body is the dwelling place for life (xing zhe sheng zhi she ye).
The qi is the plentiful strength of life (qi zhe sheng zhi chong ye).
The spirits are the guide for life (shen zhe sheng zhi zhi ye).'

She is a dwelling place. Chong is something which is abundant and strong, a fullness of power. Zhi is a control. What are here called the spirits is the same as the will in Mencius. If one of these three loses its place all three will suffer. The text continues:

'If the body loses its place of rest it will deteriorate and wither. If the qi is used against that which gives it its real full strength, it will collapse. If the spirits are overactive they become confused.'

Following this the example of a madman is given. The madman cannot avoid falling into fire or water and acting as if he were drunk. The text asks if this is because he lacks a body or spirit or qi or will. The answer is no, it is just because he uses those things in a crazy, erratic way.

These kinds of texts help us to put qi in its proper context. It is difficult because qi is both everything and the specific all at the same time. It is the power of life, but human beings always have a need for guidance. If we need guidance as human beings this guidance has to be in the form of a natural guidance: heaven, spirits, or the Way. I would just remind you, without much commentary, of Laozi chapter 42:

'The dao gives birth to one. One gives birth to two. Two gives birth to three. Three gives birth to the ten thousand beings. They carry the yin on their back and hold the yang in their embrace.'

After that there is the sentence:

'The powerfully blending qi are for making harmony (chong qi yi wei he).'

Chong is a kind of rushing or dashing, but at the same time it means to infuse. Chong qi is the power of qi that comes from the blending of yin yang and the collaboration of all the qi. The qi being yin and yang are composed in a perfect harmony, so chong here implies that there is a blending but of a tranquil nature. It is the power coming from the blending and the harmony which will make life. If you are alive it is because your qi are able to maintain a proper harmony, and it is the same thing in nature itself.

XUNZI AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Xunzi was one of the great Confucian philosophers. This is a quotation from chapter 9:

'Water and fire possess qi, but they do not have life (sheng). Plants and trees possess life but do not possess awareness (zhi). Birds and beasts possess awareness but do not possess the sense of duty (i.e. the sense of what is right and appropriate). Human beings possess qi, life and awareness, and add to them the sense of duty (yi).'

Everything has qi. Water and fire, which are halfway between what has form and what does not, have qi, but it is difficult to say they are living beings because they do not really have a shape. Vegetation not only has qi but appears and disappears, so is said to have life. Animals move freely and not only have qi and life, but also a kind of consciousness or awareness. This idea is also discussed in chapter 19 of Xunzi in the context of blood and qi.

'Among all the living beings between heaven and earth, those having blood and qi possess awareness (zhi).'

In the case of some large birds and animals, if one loses its mate or is separated from its group, then even after months or a whole season have passed it is sure to circle its old home when it passes by. This is one kind of awareness, and it is the same character, zhi which we translate as knowledge. But this is not enough, and as a human being we have an additional sense of what is appropriate and just. Qi is therefore everywhere, right from the very beginning, before living beings even appeared. Without qi nothing is possible. We will see that again in Zhuangzi chapter 2. The same idea is presented in the Book of Rites, the Liji, one of the five classics. It is from a treatise on music called the Yueji.

'By nature man possesses blood and qi, and a heart that allows awareness. Grief as well as joy, elation or anger do not exist permanently within. They are reactions to the incitement of objects. It is then that the art of the heart intervenes.'

The definition of human beings is that they are made with 'xue qi xin zhi'. It means that the proper nature of a human being is to have blood and qi, and an awareness coming from or directed by the heart/mind. All the feelings of grief and joy, elation and anger are reactions to external things. But reacting to external things puts the emotions into motion, and they are really a disturbance in the regulation of the qi which in turn causes a disturbance to the heart. This is the reason why we have to act according to form and cultivate the art of the heart.

ZHUANGZI AND THE EXPRESSION OF LIFE

Zhuangzi chapter 22 says:

'Man's life is a coming together of qi (qi zhi ju). If it comes together, there is life (sheng). If it scatters (san), there is death (si).'

This sentence is often quoted to explain that life is a process of the condensation of qi, to make essences and qi. Death is a dispersion of qi. The beginning of chapter 2 of Zhuangzi says:

'The great clod belches out qi and its name is wind. As long as it does not come forth nothing happens. But when it does then ten thousand hollows begin crying wildly. Can you not hear them, long and drawn out? In the mountain forests that lash and sway there are huge trees a hundred spans around with hollows and openings like noses and mouths, like ears, like jugs, like cups, like mortars, like rifts, like ruts. They roar like waves, whistle like arrows, screech, gasp, cry, wail, moan and howl. Those in the lead cry out yeee! Those behind call out yuuu! In a gentle breeze they answer faintly, but in a full gale the chorus is gigantic. Then when the fierce wind has passed on all the hollows are empty again. Have you never seen the tossing and trembling that goes on?'
(Translated by Burton Watson)

This is the beginning of the text in Chinese:

Da kuai yi qi, qi ming wei feng

大塊噫氣，其名為風

wu zuo zuo ze wan qiao nu hao

無作作則萬竅怒呿

The great clod stands here for the earth and is the condensation of yin qi in a couple relationship with heaven. The clod belches out (yi) qi and its name, ming, is wind, feng. To 'not come forth', wu zuo is to be without. Zuo is to come forth or to start to act. When the wind begins to move then the ten thousand openings start crying wildly, or burst out howling. Wildly (nu) is the character for anger, it is an impetuous impulse towards something, a wildness, or a bursting out in anger. To cry (hao) is to utter some kind of loud sound. Howling is a good word.

A.C. Graham translates these opening sentences as:

'The hugest of clump of soil blows out breath, by name the wind. Better if it were never to start up. For whenever it does ten thousand hollow places burst out howling.'

This is a vision of the earth as a great mass pierced with many hollows, openings or apertures. They are like the caverns, caves, or grottos we see in mountains or among rocks. These openings go deep inside the earth. Qiao, hollow, is the character translated as orifice in the medical texts. The upper part of the character xue is also found as part of an ancient expression, feng xue, the caverns of the wind. These are all the openings by which the wind, coming from heaven, enters into the depths of the earth to stimulate the vital transformations. This is an ancient notion and certainly one of the first models for the body image, because the body itself is a mass, a kind of great clod, but open to penetration by qi coming from the outside. So it is not by chance that the character xue is used in Chinese for acupuncture points. This text from Zhuangzi presents an image of the earth, but many of the characters could also be used to describe the human body.

The wind is coming down to earth like clouds belching out qi, and the qi coming from earth is a reaction to what was sent from heaven. There is always this kind of response. The wind acts first, but there is an aspect of the wind that would be 'better if it were never to start up'. When the wind is motionless it is in nothingness (wu), having nothing, not even its own blowing. This is a good expression of qi before coming into form. When the wind blows we know what kind of wind is blowing and we can see and hear all the exhalations and effects of the wind passing through the different beings, as through their effect in the form we can see the various qualities of the qi. The example given later in this text is of wind blowing through big trees, and through eight openings making eight kinds of noises. The number eight is of course the traditional number of the winds, representing all the variety of qi.

When we perceive something about the wind, we perceive something about qi. When qi is acting within a form, it is manifesting through something which is perceptible. But is this the only possibility? The Daoists knew that it was not. They understood that there is a way to exist which is without a form, and which is just a merging with the dao or uniting with the infinite and undifferentiated potentiality.

In this text we have the concept of qi related to the wind when the wind is not acting. If the wind is not blowing we cannot say there is no wind or that the wind does not exist. Zhuangzi is saying something very difficult in these two sentences. We saw earlier the idea of the qi being expressed in all living beings and forms, and also being behind everything. We can see this here too. We are beings with qi coming forth or blowing, but we know that what we are relies on what has nothing

(wu). Qi also exists at the level of the wu. This is the root of all the questions of to qi which we find in later texts. It is not a double aspect of qi; it is the same qi, but condensing and appearing through forms, or being imperceptible and existing as a potentiality. This is the reason why this passage is so important and so difficult to understand.

Question: Where does Graham's 'better' come from? ('Better if it were never to start up.')

Graham chose to say 'better', and perhaps he is right, because from the Daoist point of view of Zhuangzi, it is better to come back constantly to the root which is on the side of the wu, the no-thing, the oneness, the dao and so on.

Following this passage in Zhuangzi there is the image of a human being as a big tree with the wind gently prompting a reaction. Then the wind comes wildly and the reaction is wild. We receive qi and we react appropriately according to the qi. But the point is that for the tree, when the fierce wind has passed there is no longer any activity and the hollows are all empty again. They recover their emptiness, and no activity or wind or emotion or anything is retained. This is the problem with us human beings, because even when the wind has passed through us we continue to be full of qi and full of emotions and concerns. We are unable to return to the emptiness that is the free and gentle circulation of qi, and which is the state of the master as presented at the beginning of chapter 2:

'Ziqi of the south wall sat leaning on his armrest staring up at the sky and breathing - vacant and far away as though he'd lost his companion. Yan Chen Ziyou who was standing by his side in attendance said "What is this? Can you really make the body like a withered tree and the mind (xin) like dead ashes? The man leaning on the armrest now is not the one who leaned on it before." Ziqi said "You do well to ask the question Yan. Now I have lost myself. Do you understand that?"'
(Translation by Burton Watson)

Ziqi had returned to emptiness, and his disciple was astonished. The master was exactly like a dead tree, with everything totally still. We have come back to the same point, and here there is the idea of cultivating the emptiness of the heart in order to cultivate good movement and control of the qi.

Another text from Zhuangzi chapter 18 is about the death of his wife:

'Zhuangzi's wife died. When Huizi went to convey his condolences, he found Zhuangzi sitting with his legs sprawled out, pounding on a tub and singing. "You lived with her, she brought up your children and grew old" said Hui, "it should be enough simply not to weep at her death, but pounding on a tub and singing - this is going too far isn't it?"
Zhuangzi said: "You are wrong. When she first died do you think I didn't grieve like anyone else? But I looked back to her beginning and the time before she was born (wu sheng). Not only the time before she was born but the time before she had a body (wu xing). Not only the time before she had a body but the time before she had a spirit (wu qi). In the midst of the jumble of wonder and mystery a change (bian) took place and she had a spirit (you qi). Another change and she had a body. Another change and she was born. Now there has been another change and she is dead. Just like a progression of the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, winter.
Now she's going to lie down peacefully in a vast room. If I were to follow after her bawling and sobbing, it would show that I did not understand anything about fate. So I stopped."
(From the translation by Burton Watson.)

The text speaks of the time before she was born. In Chinese, shi er ben wu sheng. Shi er is in the beginning, and ben means both basically and originally. So originally there was a state without life. Moreover, it was without a form (wu xing). There was something even more fundamental, which was to be without qi (wu qi). So this state of being without qi, or perceptible qi, was a state of

complete indistinction. But in the midst of all this indistinctive, wondrous and mysterious state, there is a change. This change, *bian*, is another kind of what we will later call original *qi*. In the midst of indistinctness and confusion there is a change and a starting of the process of life. As we saw in *Huainanzi* 3. Because of this change there is *qi*. Having *qi* and through a change in that *qi* there is form, and having a form and another change there is life or a living being, *sheng*. Death is just another change, and so it goes around the circle. The problem here in the Burton Watson translation is that *qi* is translated as spirit which is not really what it is.

Here, then, we have the beginning of the idea of original *qi*. It is not yet called original *qi*, but through these texts we can understand what original *qi* will be. Later on in the medical texts it will be clearly stated that it is the beginning of a process, or the potential of a beginning, towards the manifestation of something. The appearance of the *qi* is also the appearance of yin yang.