

**YIN YANG IN CLASSICAL TEXTS (2006) Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée.**

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Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée continues her study of the Chinese classical texts with an exploration of the concept of yin yang. Guiding us through the early writings of the Spring and Autumn Annals, the Daoist classics of Laozi, Zhuangzi and Huainanzi, and the medical texts of the Yellow Emperor, the Neijing Suwen, she explains the development of these ancient ideas which provide the basis for Chinese philosophy and medicine.

'There is no way to have yin without yang or yang without yin. They are always a double facet of every living being and every phenomenon. And they are fertile, sustaining life only by their deep harmonious alliance.'

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## FOREWORD

'There is no way to have yin without yang or yang without yin. They are always a double facet of every living being and every phenomenon. And they are fertile, sustaining life only by their deep harmonious alliance.'

Following **A Study of Qi**, Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée continues her exploration of the Chinese classical texts with an in-depth look at the concept of yin yang. Guiding us through the early writings of the Spring and Autumn Annals, the Daoist classics of Laozi, Zhuangzi and Huainanzi, and the medical texts of the Yellow Emperor, the Neijing Suwen, she explains the development of these ideas, from their early associations with the weather and their interpretation as heat and cold, light and dark, to their more wide spread use to compare and contrast any phenomena, and to explain their movement and interaction.

Along with the concept of qi, an understanding of yin yang helps us to penetrate the Chinese mind and to understand the world view which lies behind classical Chinese thinking. It is a world view quite different from that of the modern West. It speaks of relationship, mutual resonance, constant change and transformation. And yin yang is that which underpins this inter-relationship and co-dependence, giving the fundamental rules for life and the possibility of living in harmony with nature. These ancient texts suggest a universe in which human beings are part of the larger web of life, but not merely a part - they are responsible for their actions, their emotions and for their health; and by extension, responsible for the health of the planet.

Yin Yang from the Classical Texts is an edited transcript of two seminars given in 2005 in London. Chinese characters are included throughout the text to clarify the meaning of key terms. Where appropriate, the ideograms are explained in detail. We refer to the source book Chinese Characters by Dr. S. L. Wieger (Dover Language Books) for etymological explanations of characters. Qi is often used in the plural, which is a more accurate translation for texts of this time. It will appear as singular or plural depending on the context.

Elisabeth has used existing English translations of some of the non-medical texts. These are listed at the end of the book. The medical texts are translated by Elisabeth.

Whether you are a practitioner of Oriental medicine, body work or martial arts, or have a more philosophical and spiritual interest in Chinese classical thought, we hope that this study of yin yang will clarify and enlighten your thinking and practice.

**Sandra Hill, November 2006**

[**Acu Centre Editorial Note:** While the content and style of Elisabeth Rochat's excellent text have largely been retained in these two .pdf files, including a good number of the Chinese characters, most of the characters found throughout Rochat's YIN YANG text have been excluded. Otherwise, everything else is here except the index. The reader is urged to refer to the originating text for complete and original content].

## CHARACTERS FOR YIN YANG (陰 陽)

We will begin by looking at the earliest meaning and etymology of these characters in the classical non-medical texts. There is a common part in both characters which is the ancient symbol

representing the slope of a hill. (阝) In the character for yin,

(陰), the lower right part represents clouds (云) which evaporate from the earth and accumulate in the sky; the top part is a meeting, a gathering, which also suggests the idea of something which is here now (今). So the character suggests clouds which are gathering on the slope of the hill.

In the case of yang (陽), the upper part of the character is the sun rising above the horizon (旦), or dawn, and the lower part suggests movement, or setting something into motion, and is sometimes understood as flags or banners moving in the wind (勿). So there is an image of the rising sun setting everything in motion, which is mirrored in the rising yang at the beginning of spring stirring everything to life.

These two characters also have the meaning of the shady and sunny sides of a hill, and this is found in the ancient books of China such as the Book of Odes (Shi Jing) and the Book of Documents (Shu Jing), which are two of the Five Classics, and also in other ancient texts. Certainly one of the first

uses of these characters was to classify and contrast natural phenomenon. In early bronze inscriptions and other ancient texts, we find other meanings. The character yang, for example, is used for the north bank of a river, and yin for the south. This is the opposite to what you might expect, as the north is usually associated with yin, the south with yang, but here yang represents the north although south facing, side of the river, the side which is usually in the sun.

In early bronze inscriptions yin is used to describe the cover or lid of a ritual vessel, and yang for the vessel itself. Here too yin and yang are used as a pair of opposites. The open part is yang, and the yin that which closes and contains. In other ancient texts yin may refer to the part of a chariot wheel which is close to the hub, the rim being called yang. In the Book of Odes the character yang is used for the unfurling and waving of a banner, and from that came the idea of all kinds of movement and manifestation; to make an appearance, or to exhibit at the exterior. In contrast yin has the meaning of what is unseen, hidden, concealed, secret. For example the genitals in the human body, which may be called the yin, and also the idea of covering, protecting and burying. In the very early use of these characters, it is possible to see the same ideas that later become known as the opposite movements of yin and yang.

Several meanings come from the idea of opposing natural phenomena, which in turn arises from the image of the sunny and shady sides of a hill, and of sunny and cloudy weather. And as we know, the sun does not shine all day long and the rain does not fall all the year round, there is alternation. Yang is not only the sun, the sunny side, or sunny weather, but light, brightness and also the warmth or heat that we feel when we are in the sun. Conversely, yin is the darkness and obscurity of cloudy weather and also the cold that we feel when we are in the shade.

In the Mozi, a text of 4th century BCE, yin and yang are used to describe changes in weather, with the alternation of sun and clouds, cold and heat, and by extension to describe all opposite natural phenomena. But they are also used together to suggest the passing of time, particularly the seasons of the year. This is the basis of the concept of the yearly cycle as a development of the yang, a warming which begins in the depths at the winter solstice and manifests itself more fully in the spring; while the yin, appears at the summer solstice as a gradual cooling, which grows slowly until it is most prevalent at the winter solstice. This kind of warming and cooling in all its variations is one way to look at the complete cycle of the year.

The Yin Yang School, which developed at the time of the Warring States between the 5th and 3rd centuries BCE, based the science of the calendar on this understanding of yin yang and its expression through the four seasons of the year. 'Yin yang and the four seasons' (yin yang si shi) was to become a very popular expression commonly used to describe how the yin yang qi passes through all possible variations and induces all possible transformations, seen for example in the growth of plants and the maintenance of life of the ten thousand beings.

In the Historical Records, Shi Ji, published in the 1st century BCE, Sima Qian presented all the great schools of thought, and the Yin Yang School is included as one of the six great schools of the Warring States period. He considered the 'art of the yin yang to be great', but observed that it also brought about many taboos, and imposed too many restrictions and reasons to be fearful. But the harmony and order of the four seasons he saw as something of great value.

During the time of the Warring States there was also an evolution of the concept of qi which became not only the quality of something coming from heaven, for example the wind moving things, or heat giving warmth, but also that which underlies any kind of phenomenon, or any kind of expression within a living being. The concept of qi gradually evolved to include that which underlies a series of phenomena, where the qi of the autumn, for example, is seen as underlying the falling of the leaves, the colour of the white frost, the severity and strictness of the people in charge; it is behind every kind of correlation. And this of course is the basis of the theory of yin yang and the five elements (wu xing) which is a complete system of correlation and correspondence at each level of the cosmos, between human beings, human society and all the possible expressions of qi within nature.

## **YIN YANG IN PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS**

### **CHUNQIU ZUOZHUAN**

Alongside this evolution of the concept of qi is the evolution of the theory of yin yang. In texts such as the Chunqiu Zuo zhuan (Spring and Autumn Annals) there is a presentation of the six qi of heaven which descend to earth and generate all kinds of phenomenon, for example the five tastes, the five sounds, the five colours, and so on. And these six qi are listed in the first year of the Duke of Zhao as yin and yang, wind and rain and darkness and light; the characters for darkness and light being different to yin yang. In this context yin and yang are to be understood as cold and heat; cold which comes from cloudy weather or the shade, and warmth which comes from the sun. As an extension of this first image, yin and yang become not only the cold felt in the shade and the warmth from the sun, but the very principle of cold and heat. Through the principle governing the cold weather coming in autumn and winter and the hot weather beginning in spring and arriving at its full strength in summer, yin and yang are gradually understood as being behind all kinds of warming and cooling. And as we have seen, that was used in the school of yin yang to describe the variations of the calendar.

It was through these variations in the calendar that attempts were made to establish what will bring good and bad fortune. For example there is a passage in the Chunqiu Zuo zhuan referring to the sighting of several signs in the sky, shooting stars and herons flying against the wind. These signs were said to represent a yin yang disorder because they were abnormal occurrences. An historian is asked if this is a good or bad omen. He said that many important people will die and during the following year there will be disturbances and riots. The Prince will be able to govern over the others, but that will not last. After that the historian, who was a sage, suggested that the Prince did not ask the right question:

'He asked me if these were signs of good or bad fortune. But the right question would have been to ask what is the reason for good and bad fortune. It is not something pertaining to yin yang which produces good and bad fortune, it is from men themselves that good and bad fortune are produced.' (16th Year of Duke Xi)

In this text from the 3rd century BCE, yin yang is used to describe the normal alternation and appearance of natural phenomenon. There are signs of disturbance in the yin yang. It is normal for the summer to be warmer and the winter to be cooler, but if there is a disturbance in this natural order it

is a sign that something is not following the great order of the universe, the great order of life. So it may be correct to say that this is an omen of good or bad fortune, but the question that we should always ask is why? The disorder does not occur because of the yin yang, the yin yang is just a way to interpret what we see. It is necessary to go further and ask ourselves what or who is the cause of the disorder? Of course, there is already the suggestion here that human beings are causing the disorder by their behavior, inducing an imbalance in the natural order that we may see as an aberration in the interplay of yin yang.

## LÜSHI CHUNQIU

In Book V chapter 5 of the Lüshi Chunqiu, The Spring and Autumn Annals of Mr. Lü, published in 239 BCE, we see that yin yang was used at this time to describe all kinds of phenomena. Lü Buwei was a very rich merchant, involved in many political plots and intrigues. He was an historical figure, but he did not write the text himself, he ordered it to be written. It is an important book because it speaks of many things, and was written at a time when there was much synthesis of knowledge. It is a syncretic book, bringing together ideas from different sources, and as was usual at this time, it was not just the work of one author, but more a compilation, a gathering of information, expressing the thinking of several schools. There is a chapter based on the ideas of the Yin Yang School, and so on.

In the past, when the ancient Zhuxiang ruled the world, there was an excess of wind that caused the yang qi to gather and accumulate, the myriad things to disperse and scatter, and the fruits and nuts not to ripen. Knight Da therefore invented a five string zither with which to attract the yin qi and arrange the survival of the various living things...

In the past at the inception of the Yinkang clan, the yin coagulated in great amounts and accumulated excessively. The watercourses were blocked and obstructed, and water could not flow out from springs. The qi of the people became thick and clogged up, and their muscles and bones tight and constricted. They therefore invented a dance with which to spread and guide the yin.'

(Based on a translation by Knowblock and Riegel)

This text is from around the middle of the 3rd century BCE, when the expressions yang qi and yin qi were already in use. The first part describes a general situation where there is an excess of yang qi causing all living beings to be in a state of imbalance and impending death. The ten thousand beings are scattered in a kind of dispersion, spreading outwards, which is of course the nature of the yang movement within all living beings. Here it is in excess, burning them up and causing a kind of dis-aggregation where nothing can hold together.

On the other hand there may be an excess of yin coming from blockage and accumulation, creating the Opposite state. With the yang there is dispersion, jie, which is to un-knot, to dismember; articulations no longer hold together. The original meaning of this character jie is a kind of dismembering, where the limbs of an animal, or maybe a human being, are pulled off. This is an illustration of an excess of yang, which is forcing things apart; there is an inability to hold together, or to gather, within the ten thousand beings.

In the opposite situation, the excess of yin, the character zhi is used. This is a character which we often find in the medical texts with the meaning of blockage; it is not only used for the movement of the yin. The character fu, hidden, concealed is also used here; it is found in medicine as the hidden

pulse. The yang is in relationship with the wind (feng); there is an excess of wind which causes the yang qi to gather. But for the yin there is a natural relationship with water (shui), and it is common to find that with an excess of yin the waterways are no longer able to follow their normal course. They are blocked and obstructed, and there is no circulation.

What is important for the yin yang qi is that they ensure exchange, communication and circulation; because the yang has the ability to disseminate, but here it is exaggerated and in excess. When there is an excess of yin, the ability to make this movement and circulation has gone, so there is blockage and obstruction. Not only the rivers in nature are blocked, for instance by ice, but the qi within the bodies of the people is blocked, in such a way that they have a kind of inability to move their muscles. They are completely blocked. There is no circulation or movement of qi to make their bones and muscles move.

The most interesting thing about this text is that it suggests the idea that as human beings we are able to re-establish balance, not only in our own body, but in the whole of nature. This is a theory which was developed throughout the third century BCE. At the very beginning of this century Xunzi proposed the idea of the human being as one of the three powers, heaven, earth and mankind. And this was not just an idea, it was considered a reality. Humanity, or the sovereign as the representative of humanity, is responsible not only for its own health, but for the health of the whole. This was a very fundamental understanding for the Chinese at this time.

Let us look more closely at the example of the yin, because it is easier to understand.

'They invented a dance with which to spread and guide the yin.'

The last characters of the sentence are xuan duo zhi. Xuan is to spread, to diffuse, the character later used in medical theory for the function of the lung to disseminate the qi to the skin, or the periphery of the body. The character suggests a kind of propagation with everything circulating well in all directions. In this context dao is to guide, as in daoyin massage. Zhi here is a pronoun, meaning it or them, and we can interpret this as the yin, or we can understand it as qi. I prefer to translate this, 'In order to propagate and guide the qi'. In this text this is closer to the meaning. The dance is obviously a dance to make the qi circulate within the body, and in the muscles and bones, but we have no way of knowing whether this xuan dao zhi was a technical term. Perhaps it was, because of the use of dao, but we have no way of knowing for sure. It is obviously a kind of qi gong, but this character used here for dance (wu) is a very general one, not for a type of health exercise, but some sort of dance or pantomime. It is a way to move the body in order to free the circulation of the qi, enhance the movement of the yang and help the distribution and dissemination of the qi which will in turn make movement easier. What is important is that in doing this dance, balance is re-established through the intervention of the human being; not only within the individual, but also within the universe.

We can see something similar in Suwen chapter 2:

'The four seasons of heaven and earth no longer support each other... only the saints following the natural course escape all harm and save the ten thousand beings from extinction.'

Even if there is a disorder in the yin yang of the four seasons, the sage has to be able to maintain the natural order within himself, not only to keep himself free of disease, but to preserve the life and ensure the survival of all living beings. This is possible because he is participating in the maintenance of the balance of the qi of the universe. This is an idea that is found in many other texts of this time. If we return to the presentation of the yang, we see that the fruits and nuts are unable to ripen on the trees because there is no way to maintain them, no way to maintain their essences, speaking in medical terms. So a sage makes a kind of zither with five strings, in order to encourage the yin qi to come back. The sound of music attracts the yin qi in order to stabilize the multitude of living beings.

## GUO YU

Returning to the idea of cycles and nature, we can look at another text, the Guo Yu. The meaning of the character guo, is country, state, or kingdom; and yu is speech or discourse. The English translation would be Speech of the Kingdoms, or Discourses of the State.

The state of Zhou is about to perish due to a disturbance of qi. There have been great earth tremors within the beds of the three rivers of the kingdom of Zhou; the people are concerned and the king had asked to know the reason why it occurred. A venerable sage with the name of Fu Yang gave him this answer:

'Zhou is about to perish. The qi of heaven and earth do not of themselves lose their proper order, and if they transgress this order it is because the people have put them into confusion. When the yang is concealed (yang fu) and cannot come forth and when the yin is depressed (yin po) and cannot issue out then there are earthquakes. At the present time these three rivers have suffered from an earthquake, which is because the yang has lost its proper place and has dominated the yin. The yang having lost its place is occupying that of the yin. The rivers and streams must necessarily be obstructed.' (Translation by Feng Yulan)

This text presents several ideas. The first is that it is possible to have an apparent disorder in nature which is actually part of the greater order, a minor disruption in the pattern of the seasons may still be part of the natural order. But as we saw with the last text, disorders may also be omens or signs of an imbalance which is due to the behavior of the people. If the qi of heaven and earth do not lose their proper order by themselves, who is to blame? It must be the third power, mankind! This is interesting because it means that the whole concept of qi has developed to allow this kind of thinking. It suggests that the work within the body or the work with music is able to stimulate, attract or balance the yin yang qi in one way or another and this has an effect. And of course that is also the reason why mankind is able to disturb this order. The effect here is on the yang qi which is said to be concealed, hidden, fu; a character which is classically used to describe the yin is here used for the yang. The yang is hidden, concealed and cannot come out, chu.

It is interesting that we do not see the contrary for the yin. There is no suggestion of the yin scattering, because that would not make sense. The yin cannot disseminate anything. It may be scattered by the over powerful yang, but it cannot scatter itself. There can be an excess of yin leading to a blockage of yang, which is simply the inability to establish or to maintain the free communication and circulation essential for life. So this is an imbalance due to the yang losing its place. And that will manifest itself as an excess of yin, a blockage. The yang qi are blocked and oppressed by the yin qi

by this movement of pressing down. The weight of the yin causes the inability to flow, to circulate and so on. At the same time the yang qi are trying to force their way out, and this explains the earthquakes in the beds of the three rivers.

The text says very clearly that this comes from within mankind and is related to their behavior. This is the reason why the kingdom is about to perish. It is not about to perish because there was an earthquake, but because of the imbalance of the yin yang qi which caused the earthquake and which was due to the poor state of the people governing the kingdom.

The image of yin yang in this text is still very close to that of natural forces, but now it is seen as the very principle of their interaction. Here there is a blockage of the yin qi and it is the same thing whether it is seen in the behavior of the mind or in the body, the river bed, or the earth. In this text we can see that the qi of heaven and earth are finally called yin yang; there is a well established relationship or correlation between all the qi which are expressing the exchange between heaven and earth, and the yin yang qi. When the qi first appears in the universe, between heaven and earth, it is always yin yang qi. The balance of yin and yang is essential to the qi, and that balance is also the rhythm within the cycle of the year, the development of the yang and the prevalence of the yin, making up the qi of the year. This is a very basic idea.

We cannot really speak of the yang qi as separate from the yin qi. The qi disseminates and conceals, but in alternation or with an harmonious blending and intermingling. This is the basis. After that we may speak of the yang qi as that which is active, bringing about transformation, stimulating movement and so on, but in this case what do we call the yin qi? That must always depend on the context. In the medical texts, the yin qi may be called the essences of nutrition, but it is simply whatever is ruled by the yin movement of the qi, a movement towards the depths, the act of keeping and storing in the interior, and of being very slow. Of course, this is the difference between nutrition and defence. But what is our idea of nutrition? Or the building and reconstruction of qi? It is several things at once. It is everything that is transported and transformed as nutrients, but also it is the kind of qi which allows this slow movement within, as opposed to the vivacious movement towards the exterior of the defensive qi. We will return to that later.

## ZHUANGZI CHAPTER 25

Before looking at Zhuangzi chapter 4, which is certainly one of the earliest texts to describe yin yang qi at work within the human body, we can look at some other chapters, which give a presentation of yin yang in nature. Zhuangzi translations are from Burton Watson.

'Heaven and earth are forms (xing) which are large. The yin and yang are qi which are large. And the way (dao) is the generality that embraces them.'

Here we can clearly see that yin and yang are taken as the manifestation of qi, and qi as the expression of life which forms everything between heaven and earth. Everything between heaven and earth is a form. Earth is a form, heaven is a form, and by form we are not supposed to understand a compact form, but something which has quality and definition. Heaven and earth are a couple within a particular reality. They exist independently, by themselves, there is heaven and there is earth.

Yin yang is the total and complete expression of the qi in its alternation and composition. Of course, because this is a Daoist text, that is the determination and expression embraced and contained by 'the way' (dao). This is also a way to say that as soon as we move from the reality of the one to the two, there is the potential for expression. In its first definition, we may speak of qi as absolute potentiality, the infinite and indefinite potentiality, which is the same as da xu, the great void of Neo-Confucianism; something which is without any kind of quality or determination. And then of course we can no longer speak of it!

When we speak of qi as perceptible, apparent through form and being, we are then talking about the yin yang qi. This qi will be determined and clarified by the intermingling and blending of the yin and yang which constitute it. For instance, the qi of the winter is more yin than the qi of the summer. But the qi of the winter is not exactly the same kind of yin qi as the qi of the autumn. There are many examples like that. When we speak of heaven and earth we are already in the world of form, living with quality and definition. And all these qualities and definitions may be presented as a specific kind of qi which we can analyse in terms of yin yang. Of course, we can also analyse it in terms of the five elements, but the analysis by yin yang is the most fundamental.

'The way' is the place of absolute potentiality for any kind of life, any kind of quality, which in the Laozi is called, wu, the 'not having', nothingness. But not having what? Not having anything! And by 'not having', having all the potential. We can see the same idea in Zhuangzi chapter 17:

'I take form (xing) from heaven and earth, and receive qi from the yin yang.'

The character xing means the bodily form, or to take form. Form refers not only to the body but any kind of form, and more specifically the form through which we can see the patterns and workings of the qi. The form of the body is constantly changing, because it is nothing but the manifestation of qi. Heaven and earth provide the potential for form. Heaven stimulates the beginning of the constitution of the form, earth achieves the form. The form is realized because qi is at work; qi coming from heaven and qi coming from earth. The form is nothing other than the manifestation of qi. Heaven and earth are also forms. Heaven has some kind of manifestation, seen in clouds, heat and cold, or the four seasons. We may also say that the earth provides the ability to take form, and that any kind of form is perceptible through the earth. Let us take the example of the four seasons. The four seasons, in their natural order, are the expression of the yin yang qi of heaven, but they are perceptible only because we are able to see the transformation on the form of the earth, in plant life and of course in ourselves. From these patterns we may discover the natural order of the qi; the balance and alternation and succession and so on, teaches us the natural order, and we are able to integrate it into our lives. The yin yang qi of heaven is made perceptible through form on earth.

In this case, the number four is associated with the earth; it is the number for the forms taken on earth, the main pattern being the four seasons. The number three is the proper number for the qi and is associated with heaven; it represents all the potentiality of the qi between heaven and earth. There are several ways to look at this. It is not simply because it is said in Zhuangzi chapter 25 that heaven and earth are forms which are the greatest, that we may say that heaven has a form, we may also look within the context of how a form is taken. The qi of heaven is received and given the ability to make

form on earth. This is not a contradiction. There are just several ways to speak about the same thing. The texts says that I take my form with heaven and earth, and receive qi from the yin and yang. So here we also have the idea that all that I am is made from heaven and earth, providing my life through my specific form and that my qi is nothing other than the yin yang qi of heaven and earth. Later in chapter 17 it says that if you want to make heaven your master, and do away with earth, or make yin your master and do away with yang this is impossible. This is obvious, but the text is just making it very clear that you cannot have earth without heaven or heaven without earth. You cannot have yin without yang, or yang without yin. This is just impossible. You can only go with the qi which are the balance and rhythm of yin yang. You emerge with yang and recede with yin in all the phases of your life.

## ZHUANGZI CHAPTER 22

Let us look at Zhuangzi chapter 22 where again we find this link between yin yang and the four seasons.

'There is nothing in the world that does not bob and sink, to the end of its days lacking fixity. The yin and the yang, the four seasons follow one another in succession, each keeping to its proper place. Dark and hidden (the way) seems not to exist and yet it is there; lush and unbounded, it possesses no form (xing) but only spirits (shen).'

There are some very important characters here.

天下莫不沈浮

*tian xia mo bu chen fu*

In this first sentence chen and fu are translated as to sink and to bob. Chen, through the use of the water radical, gives the idea of going to the depths of the water, to be immersed, and fu is the opposite, to float on the water. These are the two terms used to define the yin and yang qualities of the pulse, a deep pulse and a floating or superficial pulse, but they are also used in many classical texts to describe the movement of the yin yang. Saying that there is nothing in the world that does not bob and sink, gives the idea that everything follows the cycles of life which are just the natural rhythm of the qi. The rhythm is within the qi, as the yin yang. So we start by bobbing around when we are young and sinking when we are old! And we can see the same thing with the seasons of the year, with the daily rhythms and the seasons of life, and of course with disease. There is always this same kind of movement, but there are cycles within cycles, and we do not bob the same way in the spring when we are 80 years old! It is a nice description of the yin yang movement of qi, to be at the surface or to be in the depths. And this is a movement, it is not a state, because it is qi.

陰陽四時運行序各得其序

*yin yang si shi yun xing xu ge de qi xu*

This first phrase can be translated as yin yang and the four seasons, or the four seasons which are an expression of yin yang. In Chinese it is not defined and it is possible to find both translations. In fact it is impossible to make a definitive translation, because in the Chinese these four characters are so

closely interrelated. The relationship is not strong enough to say that the four seasons are an expression of yin yang, but neither is there the separation which is expressed in the English translation of yin yang and the four seasons. It is always difficult to translate an expression like tian di yin yang (heaven earth yin yang), because all kinds of interplay and inter-relationship may be implied. So the translation is always made according to the context and the translator's sensibility. It is very clear in Zhuangzi that yin yang is very close to heaven earth. Yin yang is all the qi of heaven and earth, and all the exchanges of the qi of heaven and earth. On the other hand, when we are speaking at the level of four, this qi now has various qualities expressing the fundamental pattern of the four seasons.

Yun is to distribute, particularly to distribute influence in all directions. It is the character used in medicine for the distribution and transportation proper to the spleen, but it is widely used in other contexts, for example for all kinds of distribution of influence linked to heaven or to the sage. Xing is to move, to walk or to travel, but it is also behavior and conduct, and implies regular movement. Of course it is also the character that is used in the expression of the five elements or agents. The character is written in a way that suggests the regular alternation of left and right that is obvious in walking. When these two characters are put together, they suggest an even distribution of influence, which goes everywhere and follows a kind of order. The character xu suggests an ordered succession, a sequence, and it is often used for the four seasons. It is a succession of things arranged one after the other, in the proper order. The characters are very well chosen to show that the distribution of yin yang qi throughout the four seasons is an example of proper order and sequence. If you read Zhuangzi chapter 14, you will find other allusions to the harmony of yin yang which is able to make and sustain life. Here Zhuangzi has chosen two characters which are used to express the four seasons, but also for all kinds of qi. He is to harmonize, or to make an harmonious composition. Tiao is to blend according to the right proportions, or to tune an instrument. This means that the qi is in tune with the natural order, in tune with things as they are supposed to be, and therefore able to contribute to, or participate in the harmony of the cosmos. The expression tiao he is also found in medicine and is often used to describe treatment, because treatment is to tune the individual and to harmonize the qi in the meridians.

## ZHUANGZI CHAPTER 6

Coming back to the idea of activity within the human body, we will look at Zhuangzi chapter 6. The context of the chapter is that there is a great sage who became ill, so ill that his whole body was deformed. He describes himself as follows:

'My back sticks out like a hunchback, my vital organs are on top of me. My chin is hidden in my navel and my shoulders are up above my head. My top-knot points to the sky. It must be some dislocation of the yin and yang (yin yang zhi qi you li).'

The character translated here as dislocation (li) should also be seen as a mix-location, everything is in the wrong place. It is an interesting character, because it conveys the idea of stagnant water, suggesting a lack of circulation of qi. Through this lack of circulation, or defective circulation of qi, a kind of miasma develops. If water no longer circulates it becomes putrid. This is interesting, because

at this time in history, water was often used to convey the image of qi. It is through water that the movement of qi is made visible; in the flow of water we are able to see the balance between the yin and yang. The movement of the water may be very rapid, or it may be still. But if the yin yang relationship is good, it will be living water. For instance, in a lake the water is still, but there is a regeneration, a yang movement, from the rivers or springs that feed it and there is no stagnation; everything is in the right place because of the harmony of the yin yang. What has to ascend ascends, what has to descend descends. And it is the same with the body. If the qi are in the right place, in the right movement, they are able to maintain the internal organs in their proper place and in proper relationship to each other. And just as water can tell us about the movement of qi in nature, so the pulses can tell us of the movement of qi within the body.

The image of stagnant water or miasma tells us that yin and yang are no longer in their correct relationship. There is disorder in the yin yang and what should be above is below and what should be below is above. This is very similar to a text at the beginning of Suwen chapter 5 which describes pathology, or a pattern of disease where the yin qi rise creating blockage and swelling in the chest, and the yang qi descend creating diarrhoea with undigested food. This is a very general pattern of dislocation, mis-location of yin yang qi creating disease.

Zhuangzi does not talk about medicine, but this passage gives us a general vision of yin yang, a common view of the body and disease. What happens within the body, even the location of each part of the body, is dependent on the balance of yin yang. This kind of disorder coming from stagnation is always severe; as long as there is circulation there is hope! There may be confusion from erratic circulation, but generally it is worse to be blocked. The principle of life is always related to the movement of yang. Movement, circulation and distribution are all associated with life, because while we are alive we move, when we are dead we stop moving. That is deep within human consciousness. Yin and yang need to be balanced all the time, but we are more still in death than in life, and in these early texts yin is often associated with death, yang with life.

#### ZHUANGZI CHAPTER 4

Here the context is of a man who is sent on a mission by the king to the State of Qi. He is not very happy about it, because it is quite dangerous, and he is feeling very disturbed:

'This morning I received my orders from the king and by evening I am gulping icy water. Do you think I have developed some kind of internal fever (nei re)? I have not even gone to (the State of) Qi to see what the situation is like and already I am suffering from the yin yang.'

It is clear that the qi is disordered because of an emotional state. He was shocked and afraid.

Zhuangzi does not give the same kind of detailed explanation of emotion that we find in the medical texts, this is just a man who does not want to go to Qi. He is so worried and concerned that he has a kind of inner heat developing. To calm this inner heat, this internal fever, he is gulping icy water, but of course it does not work. He calls the situation 'suffering from the yin yang'. This is certainly one of the earliest texts to describe disease as an imbalance of yin yang.

In the same way that we have seen the effect of the qi of heaven and earth in nature, we can see the same thing within the human body. Historically speaking, this is a progression. This man has

changed, something has changed in his balance, and that is called a disorder of yin yang. He says 'I am suffering from the yin yang', or more literally, 'it is damage due to the yin yang' (yin yang zhi hai).

## ZHUANGZI CHAPTER 11

Here again we find the emotions disturbing the balance of the yin yang.

'Are men exceedingly joyful (tai xi)? Then they will damage the yang. Are men exceedingly angry (tai nu)? Then they will damage the yin. When both yin and yang are damaged, the four seasons will not come as they should, heat and cold will fail to achieve their proper harmony, and this in turn will harm the body.'

This text is very interesting, it continues to say that anger and elation have lost their proper balance within this man, so that he is unable to see clearly or make decisions. We can see this kind of effect of the emotions in both medical and non-medical texts. Here we have the basic emotional couple of joy, xi, which we usually translate as elation, and anger, nu. These two emotions are a couple and are usually understood as the yang emotions. This means that a yang outward movement of qi is created by the emotion; with anger the qi rises, with elation and joy there is an outward diffusion of qi, a yang movement in both cases. But within these two yang movements of the emotions, there is also yin and yang; in the same way that within the yang seasons of the spring and summer there is also a yin and a yang time. The spring may be considered yang as it is giving the start, the impulse, and the summer more yin as it is the full achievement of the yang movement. It develops the yang in such a way that everything will ripen. This kind of imagery is typical of this time.

In this case we understand joy or elation as the more yin expression within the couple. It is an excess of the yin side of the yang emotion and will damage the yang. Anger, which is true yang, will damage the yin. An excess of yang damages the yin, and excess of yin damages the yang. Maybe it would have been clearer to choose an emotion which is more obviously yin, like sadness, but it is usually joy and anger that are used to illustrate a yin yang couple. This is also found within the medical texts, but generally with more explanation.

We know that human beings disrupt the inner harmony of their qi most specifically with their emotional states. But here there is not only an internal fever from the emotion, but also the idea that human beings must maintain a much more general order within the yin yang. When both yin and yang are damaged the four seasons will not come as they should. So once again we have this idea that if a human being disturbs the yin yang within himself, the effect is not limited to the individual, because the qi of the human being pervades the qi of heaven and earth, and disturbs the cosmic qi. The qi emanating from the human being blends with the cosmic qi.

Other living beings just follow the natural order spontaneously and instinctively. They do not have self-consciousness, so they do not know that they are following the natural order. But the qi of human beings is able to disturb this harmony, then the order of the four seasons will be disturbed, and heat and cold will not achieve harmony. They will not blend together as they should thus disrupting the succession of the seasons, and this in turn will harm the human body. So it is possible for disorder in the four seasons to arise from the emotions and feelings of human beings, and this

disorder will produce irregular qi, which in turn will harm the body. It could be excessively cold in the summer, un-timely rain and wind and so on. And of course it will be harder and harder to come back to calm and tranquillity which is expressed in the good rhythm of the qi. If we want to balance yin yang qi we must act in such a way that we become calmer and calmer. This idea is found frequently in the Zhuangzi.

So these quotations from the Zhuangzi show us that all the varieties of qi are described in the very early texts as yin yang qi, acting both in nature and within the human body as emotions and feelings with their effects on the internal organs. The yin yang qi are responsible for the proper organization of the body and the proper balance of the emotions, and human beings may disturb this by the imbalance they hold within themselves.

## ZHUANGZI CHAPTER 22

'All is the work of the powerful yang in the world.'

天地之強陽氣也

*tian di zhi qiang yang qi ye*

The text speaks of the yang qi of heaven and earth, tian di. These yang qi are said to be powerful (qiang). In medicine this character qiang appears in the name of Du mai 1, chang qiang. Zhi is a particle which makes the link between heaven and earth and the powerful yang qi. Ye is the final particle. In this chapter, life is seen as developing through the yang, there is life as long as the powerful yang qi are at work. We can see the same idea in Zhuangzi chapter 2, where it says that when you are close to death the heart is full of emotion, due to wrong thinking, and the return of the yang becomes impossible.

Here there is no mention of the yin yang, no mention of the yin, life is seen as movement, vitality and warmth. Yang is understood as the dynamism of life, the power of life. When we are alive we are warm, and when we are dead we are cold. In the same way it is possible to see yin used alone to describe death, burial and decay; and there is often some kind of play of words. Yin is also used in ritual for the name of the little hut which is built for mourning. If, for example, your father were to die, you would live in this kind of hut in order to mourn him. There are many such relationships of the term yin with burials and funerals.

## LÜSHI CHUNQIU BOOK XVII 2

In the Lüshi Chunqiu there is another vision of the yin alone.

'The body (shen) serves to contain (sheng) the heart/mind (xin), and the heart/mind (xin) serves to contain wisdom (zhi). Wisdom is stored deep within (shen cang); thus its true nature cannot be espied. The Hongfan says: Only heaven protects (tian yin) and secures the people below. That which protects (yin) them is that which causes them to flourish (fa). Thus it is said: He leaves not his door yet he knows the world, he looks not out of his window yet knows heaven's dao.'  
(Knowblock and Riegel)

In the phrase: 'only heaven protects and secures the people below', we could translate tian yin as the yin of heaven, but it is also possible to translate it as 'heaven protects':

惟天陰鷺下民

*wei tian yin zhi xia min*

In this case yin is translated as a kind of protection and covering, and therefore 'to offer protection to all under heaven'. The following sentence is even more interesting:

陰之者所以發之也

*yin zhi zhe suo yi fa zhi ye*

It is translated as 'that which protects them (covers or keeps them secret, yin) is that by which they are sent forth, (spread out, emitted, fa)'. If we translate this as 'heaven protects and secures the people below, and that which protects them is what causes them to flourish', it is not obvious that this is actually the yin. All that has been said here is alluding to the yin of heaven.

Another possible translation would be that the yin of heaven is that by which beings are able to appear or manifest themselves. This is the role of the yin as the only possible basis for the yang movement. Any manifestation (fa) must be based in the yin. This idea is seen very clearly in medicine with the liver, and this character fa is linked strongly with the spring, the wood element and the liver function. The yang power of the liver relies entirely on the nourishment of the yin and the blood, as we see so clearly in Suwen chapters 3 and 5. It is always the yin which gives the yang its ability to spread out. The real dynamism, the power of the yang qi comes from the secret nourishment of the yin. It is secret because it often cannot be seen. We see the effect of the liver, but we do not see that it is completely dependent on the nourishment supplied by the yin and the blood of the liver. So this is a good text to root this position of the yin which is no more on the side of death and stillness, the corpse and the burial of the corpse; here it is that which is buried but is also behind everything and working in a secret way for the rejuvenation of the yang.

So in this case the order of presentation of the yin yang, with the yin first and the yang second, is also the natural order, because everything is emerging from the dark, secret place. A tree comes from a seed which has been hidden in the depths of the earth. It is the nourishment below the surface that allows it to spring up and display (fa). The yang is always surging from the yin in one way or another.

Here again we can see the difference between heaven/ earth and yin yang. Heaven and earth are in a kind of hierarchy, though in Chinese thought there is always inter-dependency within hierarchy; but just because things are interdependent, absolutely dependent on one another, it does not mean that there is not also a kind of authority. In Suwen chapter 8 we see this with the presentation of the twelve organs. It says that they are an interdependent unity, but at the same time, the heart comes first with the charge of lord and sovereign, then the lung as prime minister. It is exactly the same with heaven and earth, but not with yin yang; the relationships are of another order. Heaven and earth cannot exist without each other when they are presented as a couple, but heaven always comes first. Heaven always rules and commands, is always the one which gives the impetus, it starts the process, and the earth follows, by receiving, expressing and functioning.

With the yin yang, the yin can be first, because at the level of manifestation, of qi or of form, there always has to be this kind of concentration, nourishment, fertility created by a secret meeting in the depths of the earth, or the depths of the being, which allows germination. This is the reason why the five elements are presented in the Hongfan with water first and fire second; the proper number for water being one and for fire two. We move from the depths to the light. But this does not mean that the yin has a prevalence over the yang, because as we have seen, together they are an expression of the qi; an harmonious blending of qi.

Question: So can we affect the qi around us with our own intent?

Yes. The qi are in a state of perpetual circulation and exchange. We know that we are penetrated by the qi from the exterior, but our qi is also moving out into the external world. Our qi blends with the qi around us. It is part of this cosmic qi. If what we emit is the result of an inner imbalance, this imbalance will be reflected in the qi around us. There are many texts suggesting that. Certainly, in these early texts there was the idea of qi being emitted as a kind of breath, an exhalation, and it is also an ancient idea that what I emit is dependent on what I feel, and what I am. This is not quite the same thing as the more fully developed idea of the yin yang qi and the emotions, but it suggests that if you are in the presence of someone who is violent, you will feel something. It is also suggested that by doing something with our own qi, little by little the whole balance of the yin yang qi of the universe is affected, and at the same time we may disturb the qi by our behavior, our thinking, our emotion and so on. These ideas will culminate with the vision of the so called five element correspondences, in which the whole organization of the vision of life and the universe is seen in terms of the qi passing through every movement and at each level.

At the same time, during the 3rd century BCE, humanity is conferred with the idea of greatness, beginning even with Confucius, but culminating with Xunzi, which gives the human being and human consciousness the central place in the universe. And of course, this also relates to medicine, because we cannot treat and we cannot be treated if we do not understand our position in the universe. If I do the 'dance' suggested in the Lüshi Chunqiu to help the muscles, I may do it spontaneously, because it is cold and it just feels like the natural thing to do, or I may perform the same movement with the consciousness that I am participating in creating more harmony in the universe. And all that is formulated in terms of qi, yin yang and also in terms of the five elements, because all these ideas evolved at the same time. In the Zhuangzi there is an acknowledgment of this kind of interplay when we see that an internal fever is due not to external heat but to an internal emotional state.

## THE MAWANGDUI MANUSCRIPTS

The discovery in the early 1970s of the Mawangdui Manuscripts gave us access to one of the most ancient texts on the systematic presentation of yin and yang as antonyms. This way of presenting yin and yang as two complementary opposites is very important in Chinese classical language and thinking. As we have seen, it comes from very ancient roots where yin and yang are understood as complementary pairs of natural phenomena. The Mawangdui tombs were closed around the middle of the 2nd century BCE, so we know that this text was certainly written before that, but how long before

it is difficult to say. It was probably written at the end of the 3rd century BCE. In this text we can see that it was possible to use yin yang in order to classify any kind of contrasting pairs of realities.

The text begins with heaven and earth, moves through the seasons, and on to all kinds of people and their activities, social, familial, human relationships and so on. Everything is classified by yin yang. There are many levels of interaction. Nothing in itself can be said to be yin or yang, there always has to be a pair of contrasting opposites, where one thing is yin in contrast to another which is yang; but always within the same context.

When we previously looked at the four seasons, the spring was the yang within the yang season, compared to the summer which was yin within the yang season. But if we were classifying according to heat, the heat of the summer is stronger than the heat of the spring. And if we want to compare a warm summer night with a cold winter day, it will depend on what we take as our criteria, whether we are thinking of the light or the temperature. It is always like that. It is never a classification as such that is made by yin and yang, but a way to describe the modality of the relationship between two realities, two things, or two beings; so we are looking at the movement uniting them, and creating a kind of rhythm between them. Yin and yang describe the kind of qi operating behind phenomena. They are the properties of the qi which manifest themselves in concrete beings and things having a form. They always imply change and mutation, there is no substance suggested by yin and yang, but a movement of qi. There is never a permanent state of yin or yang. Night may be yin - but night exists only because there is day. It is only yin in relationship to the day, and may not be yin in relationship to something else. In time and space there is nothing which is definitely yin or yang, because the same phenomenon, the same being, the same situation can present a yin or a yang aspect, depending from which criteria we look at it. There is always a kind of succession of yin and yang qualities, yin and yang being more than a classification; they are a pattern for all relationships, organization and rules for transmutation and transformation within phenomenon.

So let us go through this text from the Mawangdui manuscript; the translation here is based on Yates.

'Heaven is yang and earth is yin.'

This is referring to the prevalent movement of qi making heaven and earth.

'Spring is yang and autumn is yin.  
Summer is yang and winter is yin.  
The day is yang the night is yin.  
Large states are yang small states are yin.  
Important states are yang, unimportant states are yin.'

This relationship between small and large states, geographically speaking, and important and unimportant states, politically speaking, is often presented in the Laozi. Large and important states are always showing off a bit! Yang states are like a rooster. Small and unimportant states try to gain the favour of the great states, and this is often compared to the relationship between the hen and the rooster. It not just a question of size, because it is also possible to be a small but powerful state, for example the Vatican! And it is also possible to have a large but insignificant state. That will also produce a different kind of qi, a different quality.

'To be engaged in business (you shi) is yang, not to be engaged in business (wu shi) is yin. Those who stretch are yang, those who bend are yin.'

To have affairs, or business, is yang, to be in action is yang, to be without action is yin. It is not exactly the doing and not doing of Daoism, this is you shi and wu shi, to have activity or business, and to have no activity or business. To be busy, and not to be busy.

Those who stretch are yang, those who bend are yin, or you may also translate as extending is yang, contracting is yin. The Chinese certainly has more of an idea of extension, and of a kind of folding. It implies movement. And of course it may imply the relationship between someone with authority and someone without authority who is bending or bowing down.

'Masters (zhu) are yang, ministers (chen) or servants are yin. Superiors (shang) are yang, inferiors (xia) are yin.'

In fact the Chinese text just says above and below, but in human society we can translate this as superiors and inferiors; in nature it is simply what is above and what is below, heaven and earth.

'Men (nan) are yang, women (nü) are yin. Fathers are yang, children are yin. Elder brothers are yang, younger brothers are yin.'

This suggests all the attitudes and relationships within society. It is not just a simple classification, the whole relationship between the state and between people is behind these ideas. If I am the younger brother, my behavior will be yin in relation to my elder brother; if not, it is going against the natural order, and so will threaten the harmony and stability of society. There are many ideas based on this kind of thinking, and of course this is seen in many of the interpretations of the Yijing, the Book of Changes.

'Elders (chang) are yang, juniors (shao) are yin.'

Here the elders are seen as yang because they are dominant in society. It may of course be possible to see a situation where elders could be more yin when compared to the more youthful, but that would be more a comparison of their vitality and qi. Here the juniors are yin because they are dominated, which is the normal law of society.

'The noble are yang, the mean are yin;'

The character translated here as 'mean' (jian) can also be translated as common or of no value, as opposed to noble, precious, valuable (gui).

'The broad-minded (da) are yang, the narrow-minded (qiong) are yin.'

Da expresses the idea of far reaching, extending to the distance. In this context it may mean to be far sighted, to have a kind of sharp mind able to penetrate everywhere because it is open, which is a yang movement. The opposite is to be narrow-minded, small minded because of limitation; it suggests being stuck where we are, unable to move forward. This often appears in other texts in the context of the broad-minded sage and the narrow-minded scholar who cannot imagine anything beyond what he

already knows, or where he is at the present time. It is the whole quality of the relationship and the quality of qi which is suggested.

'Marrying a wife and producing a son are yang, having a death in the family is yin.'

The first two are joyful ceremonies, in the flow of life, opposed to the funeral ceremony, for the end of life.

'Controlling others is yang, being controlled by others is yin. Guests (ke) are yang, hosts (zhu) are yin; Military forces are yang, corvée labour is yin.'

As the host, you may be master of the house but you have to obey your guest. The guest is honoured and commands the situation. If you have invited him it is because you want to honour him. And if you did not invite him, but he is still there, it must be because he is stronger! In medicine the guest (ke) may be benevolent, but also may be perverse. The host (zhu) is the master, and in this case the master is yin. Of course, in other situations the master will be yang; as in the case of master and servant, where the master is yang. There are many things here which refer to the social structure, where the yang is in control, though of course this depends on the nature of the text. In some contexts the yin may control the yang from below.

'Speech (yan) is yang, silence (mo) is yin.'

This is not because silence is powerless. It depends on the point of view. Basically it is the same as the clear and the turbid, it is a movement of qi. Here speech is yang, silence is yin, but sometimes silence is in command. This is never a question of an absolute hierarchy. We will see this when we look at the clear yang and the turbid yin within the medical texts. The turbid yin may be the waste, the feces, but it may also be the finest essences. The quality can change but the movement does not change, it is always the same. Silence may be very powerful or it may be lack of a voice. It may also be tranquility as opposed to the activity of speaking.

'Giving (yu) is yang, receiving (shou) is yin

This is one of the most basic attributes of yin yang; heaven as the greatest expression of the yang sending qi to earth, and earth as the greatest expression of yin, receiving the qi. This is also expressed through the sexual union of a couple. The end of the text states some of the most common ideas on yin yang.

## **YIN YANG AND COSMOGENESIS**

It was during the third and second centuries BCE that Chinese cosmology and cosmogenesis were established. So at this time, and not before, yin yang began to represent the first expression of qi in the appearance of phenomenon. Yin and yang take a very important place, sometimes associated with heaven and earth, as that which comes into being when the original unity expresses itself through duality. The concept of the unity, the great one, the wholeness of the universe does not appear before this time. And so in this example yin yang represents the first differentiation of the qi.

This is one of a group of chapters on music, and this particular part is on the origin of music. Music was of great importance at that time, and is seen as expressing all the modulations and variations of the qi.

'The origins of music lie in the distant past; born of measurement. Founded by the great one (tai yi), the great one brought forth the dyadic couple (liang yi), the dyadic couple brought forth yin yang. Yin yang metamorphose and transform, the one rising the other falling, joined together in perfect pattern. Spinning and pulsing, if dispersed they rejoin, the joined disperse again. This is called the invariable principle of nature... The myriad things that emerged were created by the great one and transformed by yin yang.' (Knowblock and Reigel)

Here we see the expression tai yi, the great one, the supreme one, the great unity, oneness, etc, and also the dyadic couple, liang yi, or the two principles. Liang is used to describe a pair, and it is not the same as the character for the number two. It is obvious from the way the character is written that it represents a pair, two making a couple. The character is usually explained by the image of two oxen under the same yoke. This is important because within this system of cosmogenesis, what emerges from the oneness is not exactly two, but a pair, a couple, discriminating and differentiating within the one. A division within the unity is a necessary part of the process. The two are in perfect complement. The expression liang yi is the same as that associated with the Book of Change, the Yijing, for the two principles. It is the idea of two principles, acting in their own way, but at the same time acting as a pattern and model for everything which comes after them; they are a kind of original couple. So it can be translated as original couple, exemplar, dyadic couple etc. And the yin yang appear, or come out from (chu) this couple.

Liang Yi the principal couple, and yin yang both express the idea of models, or patterns, and these patterns are like the principles behind everything that is expressed within the yin and the yang movements of qi. In the Book of Change they represent the continuous line and the broken line. It is through the combination of these two lines that all the diagrams of the book appear, culminating finally in the hexagrams. At that time, everything was seen as being built with yin yang in the same way that the figures of the Yijing were built with the variations of the two lines.

In this text, the two principals emit the yin yang. But is there is a difference between the principle of that which is expressed as the yang movement, visible through the yang qi of the ten thousand beings, and the model of that which is expressed within the yin movement of qi visible through their form? Perhaps the purpose of this text is to bring out this difference. We cannot say that the two principles are not yin yang. But we can distinguish between the principle and the realization; the actual movement of the qi perceptible within a form. What are yin and yang when they are not visible, when there is no form, or where there is no being through which we are able see the yin yang expression of qi? Perhaps then they are the two principles or exemplars (liang yi). So there is the level of principle and the level of the actual working of things.

There is the idea of the great oneness, and also the pattern for its manifestation; the pattern for the effectuation, realization, actualization as the yin yang. It is always the yin yang that is acting within the ten thousand beings. With the yin yang there is potential for every kind of relationship, transformation and transmutation. The yin yang allow all the change and transformation within living

beings; a complete movement, not just of ascending and descending, but of expanding and concentrating, coming together and dispersing, putting in motion and bringing to rest. Yin and yang are always spinning and pulsing in such a way that it is not possible for the yin to be without yang, the yang to be without yin. There is always a complete inter-dependency and enough within the yin to become the yang, and enough within the yang to turn towards the yin movement. If there is a closing there is always the potentiality of an opening, which remains present even in the most closed situation. Within each extension there is the possibility to fold the wings, because by extending there is the potential of contraction. It is not possible to have pure yang or pure yin, even heaven and earth are not pure yang and pure yin, because vapours rise from the earth, and rain falls from heaven; the sun and moon are yang and yin in heaven.

Within the yin there is always the potentiality of the yang, and in the yang the potentiality of the yin, implying all possibility for transformation, alternation, and turning from one situation to the other. That is called the invariable principle of nature, tian chang. Chang is constant, invariable, unchanging. Tian chang is the constancy of the natural order. Tian, heaven, can be translated as nature or natural order, particularly in this context. But the only thing that is constant is the order of the four seasons, pattern for all kinds of change which allow life to continue. What is constant in the order of heaven is the constant alternation and mutation through yin yang. The only thing which does not change is the order of the succession of the four seasons, and all kinds of similar changes which allow life to continue.

In the Laozi, the only constant thing is the dao. And because of this constancy, everything in manifestation is able to change. That which does not change is the pattern, the principle, the order. That which changes is the movement of qi - that which is manifested. The realm of manifestation is the realm of change and transformation. When we are not in the realm of manifestation, we are in the realm of oneness, of the principle, the pattern, the model, which is invariable. Another way to say this is that the two principles (liang yi) are invariable, but when this invariable pattern of yin yang manifests itself within a being, it induces all kinds of change and transformation.

## LÜSHI CHUNQIU BOOK III 2

'Nature (tian) produces (sheng) yin yang. Cold and heat, wet and dry, the transformations (hua) of the four seasons and the metamorphoses (bian) of the myriad things. Each of these can produce benefit (li) or it can cause harm (hai). The sage scrutinizes what is appropriate to the yin and yang and discriminates what is beneficial in the myriad things in order to enhance life (bian sheng). Thus the essence and spirits (vital spirits, jing shen) being secure (an) within the body, the life span is extended (nian shou de chang). This extension (chang) is not a matter of lengthening (xu) a short (duan) life, but of fulfilling an allotted span (qi shu). The task of fulfilling an allotted span entails warding off harmful things.' (Knowblock & Riegel)

Here the sage is able to see what is beneficial or harmful by observing the yin yang within rivers and mountains, or within the body. Then he is able to model his own vital spirits on the pattern of the yin yang in order to enhance his life and fulfil his destiny.

'The dao gives rise to one, one gives rise to two, two gives rise to three, three gives rise to the ten thousand beings. The ten thousand beings lean on the yin and embrace the yang, and the powerful blending of qi makes harmony.'

道生一, 一生二

*dao sheng yi, yi sheng er*

二生三, 三生萬物

*er sheng san, san sheng wan wu*

萬物負陰而抱陽

*wan wu fu yin er bao yang*

沖氣以為和

*chong qi yi wei he*

This very famous text is so difficult to translate. It is often translated as the dao gave birth to the one, the one gave birth to the two, but the two did not come from the one in a kind of succession, it is all a part of the wholeness and is happening constantly, not in the past. The wholeness has no limit, nothing is outside it, so the one must always contain the two. It is within this framework that we have to understand the Chinese organization of life, so we need to look at the text itself.

In the fifth line:

萬物負陰而抱陽

*wan wu fu yin er bao yang*

Bao is to wrap someone in your arms, to embrace, implying that the point of contact is the chest. This embrace of the yang must be contrasted by the yin, so where the upper part of the chest is given for the yang, the lower back is given for the yin. It is to carry on the back, but also to back on to, to lean on; to be sustained, supported, backed up by. In the chest, the sea of qi and the heart are expressions of the yang and the qi, while in the lower back we have the basic strength, the foundation of the kidneys and the support of the yin. Each being is made with the support of and foundation in the yin, and an expression of yang as light which may be within the heart or visible in the face. So the support is at the back, the radiance at the front. Each being is made by these different kinds of yin yang qi merging together, and this is expressed as chong qi.

沖氣以為和

*chong qi yi wei he*

The meaning of chong here is close to the chong of one of the eight extraordinary meridians, chong mai, but this character is made with water on the left of the image of the centre, so it literally means water in the middle of something. The usual meaning is of something with a powerful force, but it also means a powerful pouring out of something, much as we see with chong mai. Water is often

used as a symbol for the qi, and this character is used to describe the qi which exist between heaven and earth. The character chong also means to infuse, tea for example, where there is a pervading of influence. So this character may be used to suggest both yin and yang aspects of the blending in the middle of something, and here it is the blending of the qi between heaven and earth. Between heaven and earth there is no obstacle to the circulation or mingling of yin yang qi.

The character chong is also used with the meaning of emptiness, the median void. It is in the void between heaven and earth that the ten thousand beings arise, they constitute the median space between heaven and earth. The void does not imply that there is nothing, but that everything is in motion and in the right balance; when everything is in its proper movement and in its proper place, this allows harmony. All this mingling and blending of qi (chong qi) makes, constitutes (wei) an harmonious composition (he).

### HUAINANZI CHAPTER 6

Next we can look at a few examples from the Huainanzi, which was published around 140 BCE, beginning with chapter 6.

'Were it within the grasp of one's hand (one's power) to gather (things within) one category from the Supreme Ultimate (tai ji) above, one could immediately produce both fire and water. This is because yin and yang share a common qi and move each other. Perfect yin blasts and chills, perfect yang burns red and hot. The two meet and mingle and achieve harmony, the ten thousand things are born there-from. If all were roosters and there were no hens, what transformation could possibly be brought about? This is called the argument that is not uttered, and the dao that is not spoken.'  
(Translated by Charles le Blanc)

This is another good example of the idea that yin and yang cannot be separated. Fire and water are produced at the same time because they come from the same qi, which is both yin and yang. If there were roosters but no hens, if there was yang but no yin, there could be no transformation. And this is the ultimate mystery of life, or that which cannot be spoken.

### HUAINANZI CHAPTER 3

'When heaven and earth were founded (she), they divided (fen) to make (wei) yin and yang. Yang is born from (sheng yu) yin, yin is born from yang; they are in a state of mutual alternation (xiang cuo).'

(Translated by David Mayor)

This establishes yin and yang as issuing from the very beginning, from what will later be called the original qi. Here the text begins with yang being born from yin.

### HUAINANZI CHAPTER 7

'In ancient times when heaven and earth did not yet exist, there was only image without form. Dark, formless, limitless, infinite; no-one knows its door. Then two spirits merged into life, to regulate heaven and organize earth. Vast and deep, no-one knows where they end. Boundless, no-one knows where they stop and rest. From that, they distinguish into yin and yang, separate and quarter into the eight poles, the hard and soft achieve each other and the ten thousand beings then take form.

...Therefore the vital spirits belong to heaven and the bodily frame belongs to earth. The vital spirits re-enter the gate and the the body frame reverts to the earth.

...(The sage) takes heaven as his father, earth as his mother; yin yang as his guidelines and the four seasons his rules.'

### HUAINANZI CHAPTER 3

'When Heaven and Earth were yet unformed. All was ascending and flying, diving and delving. Thus it was called the Great Inception. The Dao began in the Nebulous Void. The Nebulous Void produced space-time; Space-time produced the primordial qi. A shoreline (divided) the primordial qi. That which was pure and bright spread out to form Heaven; The heavy and turbid congealed to form Earth. It is easy for that which is pure and subtle to converge, but difficult for the heavy and turbid to congeal. Therefore Heaven was completed first, and Earth fixed afterwards. The conjoined essences of Heaven and Earth produced yin and yang. The supersessive essences of yin and yang caused the four seasons. The scattered essences of the four seasons created all things.'

(David Mayor)

'When heaven and earth were yet unformed', not yet shaped, (tian di wei xing); these are the same characters used in Zhuangzi, and suggest that heaven and earth will take form, they will have specific qualities and determinations. But before that, when they were in fact mixed together within the one, all was together ascending and flying, diving and delving:

馮馮翼翼洞洞瀾瀾

*ping ping, yi yi, dong dong, zhu zhu*

'It was amorphous vague, black, blue'. In the Chinese, such characters are used to give a feeling of something, not so much by the meaning of the characters but more an impression from the sound, which is like water in the depths of the earth, dust under galloping horses.

Thus it was called the great inception, the primal beginning. We must always remember that in translating a text like this it is possible to use the present tense. This idea is timeless. So we can say that the dao begins in the nebulous void. The nebulous void produces space and time, or the ability to have a place and a moment of time. Space and time (yu zhou) here are not an abstraction, but more the ability to be in a specific place (the north or the south), or a specific moment of time (a day in spring or in autumn, with its specific quality of qi). It is impossible to translate this in any other way but space and time, but it is not exactly the same as the conceptual notion we have in the West. For the Chinese, the whole of nature comes into this concept of space and time, and that potentiality of space and time produces the primordial qi. It is not yet concrete, it is more the possibility of various divisions of qi making specific places and moments of time. Qi appears, and the shoreline divides the primordial qi, so the qi is no longer in oneness but has a kind of determination. When there is differentiation, division or limits taken by the qi, there will also be yin and yang.

'That which was pure and bright spread out to form Heaven. The heavy and turbid congealed to form Earth.'

Pure and bright is pure yang (qing yang). Heavy and turbid (zhong zhuo) alludes to the yin without naming it. There is a movement of qi which is clear, rising up and spreading out to form heaven, whereas what is heavy and turbid will congeal, concentrate, condense to form earth. This is a kind of

cosmogogenesis, from the first appearance of qi (which will later be called the original qi), there is a division, a limit, called here a shoreline, a determination and a movement of opposition. And through that, through the opposite movements of qi, heaven and earth take form.

'It is easy for that which is pure and subtle to converge but difficult for the heavy and turbid to congeal. Therefore Heaven was completed first and Earth fixed afterwards.'

The ease of heaven is within the yang movement of qi, and the difficulty is within the more compact, the heavy. Sometimes heaven is called easiness, and earth difficulty, because when there is difficulty it is usually because of some kind of knot or contraction. The yang qi soar and rise with ease, so they accumulate to form heaven. It is an accumulation through this easy spreading out. But the earth, the turbid, is more compact. This is a way of showing the difference of stature between heaven and earth. There is a precedence, heaven is first. We see the same thing with the hun and po souls at death, when the hun fly away faster than the po. For the hun it may take just a matter of hours, for the po it may take years to fully disperse.

'The conjoined essences of Heaven and Earth produce yin and yang.'

This is the first appearance in this text of yin and yang, though of course they were already suggested by the double movement of the qi. The clear and bright are of course the yang, and the heavy and turbid the yin; the yin concentrating as a compact mass and the yang diffusing, displaying and spreading qi. We have already seen this pattern of the yin yang movement of qi and the constitution of heaven and earth, when heaven and earth are formed, or brought into being. So the quintessence, the exchange of their attributes is possible, and this is what really allows the appearance of the yin yang qi acting through the production of heaven and earth and through the ten thousand beings. It is the first pattern of movement. Once the exchange occurs between heaven and earth making the yin yang qi, which according to numerology is now at the level of three, then a more distinct yin yang qi is able to appear, as we can see, for example, in the four seasons.

'The quintessential essences of yin and yang become the four seasons.'

This is a way to say that when the yin yang qi exist between heaven and earth the differentiation by four is possible. It is the pattern for all forms and the taking of form.

'The scattered essences of the four seasons create all things.'

Through the four seasons, all kinds of patterns for the blending of yin yang occur. Scattering in all directions, there is the possibility for all manifestations of the yin yang qi in the ten thousand beings. They are the actual taking of form. Fire and water, sun and moon appear as manifestations of yin yang in heaven and earth. The text continues:

'The hot qi of accumulated yang produces fire and the quintessence of the qi of fire becomes the sun (ri). The cold qi of accumulated yin produces water, and the quintessence of the qi of water became the moon (yue).'

This is not so much the manifestation of fire and water on earth, not the fire in the hearth or the water in the rivers, but more the principle of fire and water as an accumulation of yang qi and an accumulation of yin qi. The concentration of yang qi in heaven is the sun, and the accumulation of yin qi gives the principle of water, and that is expressed in heaven as the moon. Sun and moon, yin and yang are the result of the double aspect of the qi, by accumulation and concentration in heaven. What we call essences (jing) are simply the result of this kind of accumulation of qi. The concentration of cold qi is the same movement that makes essences, and in turn is the principle of the qi of water. In heaven that same movement appears as the moon. All the other heavenly bodies, the stars, planets and constellations are the overflowing qi of the essences of the sun and the moon, yin and yang.

‘The overflow of the quintessence of the sun and moon becomes the stars (xing). To heaven belong the sun, moon stars and planets (chen), to earth belong water that flows, dust and soil.’

On earth all visible form is made with water and soil. If we look at all the forms taken by the earth and the waters of the earth, we will see that it is all the effect of the same yin yang qi. Water can flow everywhere, flood everywhere, but it can also be stagnant water or rain coming from heaven. There is the movement of water and the substance of water. Within the earth there is soil and dust. Dust appears when the earth is moved, for example by a galloping horse, and it suggests a kind of yang movement as opposed to the compact clay. Within water and soil we can see the action of yin yang qi creating all the manifestations of nature on earth.

The dao of heaven is called the circle. The dao of earth is called the square. The square governs the obscure (you), the circle governs the bright (ming). The bright emits qi, and for this reason fire is the external brilliance of the sun. The obscure sucks in qi and for this reason water is the internal luminosity of the moon. Emitted qi endows, retained qi is transformed. Thus yang endows and yin is transformed. (David Mayor)

I like the Graham translation of this text. He says: ‘The way of heaven one calls round’, suggesting that with all this movement of qi, the cycles of the seasons and of time, heaven is really a cycle. He continues: ‘the way of earth one calls square’. The same character (fang) is used for square and for territories in the Chinese. ‘It is primary to the square to retreat to the dark, primary to the round to illuminate.’ To illuminate and to expand its qi, for which reason fire and sun cast their image outside. There is a kind of manifestation, an appearance on the outside. To retreat to the dark is to hold qi in, which is why water and moon drive the image within.

The light of a fire expels and emits something, but water takes an image in to itself. The moon reflects the light of the sun. Both water and the moon attract something, capture something, the light or an image. But when you look at fire or the sun it is more a matter of emitting. ‘What expels qi ‘does to’, what holds qi in ‘is transformed by’. Therefore the yang does to, the yin is transformed by.’

This is a very nice translation, because with the yang, as we have seen in this manifestation of the yang as the fire and the sun, there is an emission, a sending forth, something is given and is therefore received by the other, the yin. And because of that, the yin aspect, the water, the moon, is transformed by what is received. For example, water is transformed by what is received. A received image will change the image of the water. The yin will always be what is transformed by something, the yang is what will do to, or act upon something else.

If we look at this phrase, yang shi yin hua. Hua is to transform or to be transformed. Shi is to display, to endow, to bestow, to exhibit. And by doing that, acting by the movement of displaying. So it is also to do to, to act upon. In the first part of Suwen chapter 5 the same ideas are expressed, and applied to the body:

'The unbalanced qi of heaven becoming perturbed (nu) causes wind. The harmonious qi of earth becoming calm (he), causes rain.'

A yang agitation in the qi of heaven is wind, but yin qi has a calm and cooling effect and induces rain. It is interesting that the character nu, which here is translated as perturbed, is the one we translate as anger when related to the human emotions.

'When yin and yang gather together their interaction produces thunder.'

This is found in quite a number of texts, and is not so different from what science has now discovered.

'Aroused they produce thunderclaps; disordered they produce mist. When the yang qi prevails it scatters to make dew, when the yin qi prevails it freezes to make frost and snow. Feathered creatures make up the class of flying things and are subject to yang. Creatures with scales and shells make up the class of creeping and hiding things, and are subject to yin. The sun is the ruler of yang, therefore in spring and summer animals shed their fur. At the summer solstice the stag's antlers drop off. The moon is the fundament of yin. Therefore, when the moon dies, wasps and crabs shrivel up.'

This passage re-establishes yin and yang as the basis of all relationships of the qi. There must be a good relationship of yin and yang with each other, but also a correspondence of what is relevant to the yin and what is relevant to the yang. So at the summer solstice, when the yang is dominant, there is a decline and fall of the antlers of the animals which belong to the earth. Fish obey the phases of the moon, and when the moon is waning, something diminishes in the yin, which is especially felt by animals which have prevalence of yin qi.

'Fire flies upward, water flows downward; thus the flight of birds is aloft, the movement of fish is downward. Things within the same class mutually move each other. Roots and twigs mutually respond to each other. Therefore, when the burning mirror sees the sun, it ignites tinder and produces fire. When the square receptacle sees the moon, it moistens and produces water.'

This is alluding to the condensation of dew at the surface of a mirror during the night.

'When the tiger roars in the valley winds rush, when the dragon arises the bright clouds accumulate. When the unicorns wrangle, the sun and moon are eclipsed. When the leviathan dies, comets appear.'

Here there are a lot of correspondences, so when the tiger roars it generates the wind in the valley, it is a way to see how the yin yang qi act as a basis for any kind of phenomenon and all existing beings. Finally, at the end of this long presentation of yin yang in nature, we come to humanity, as a player in this game, represented here by the rulers.

'The natures of the rulers of men penetrate to heaven on high. Thus if there are punishments and cruelty there will be whirlwinds; if there are wrongful ordinances, there will be plagues of

devouring insects; if there are unjust executions, the land will redden with drought. If commands are not accepted, there will be great excess of rain.'

So the picture is not complete without humanity. We have the yin yang qi of heaven and earth, but we must also include humanity and its activity as part of the balance of yin and yang qi.

'The four seasons are the officers of heaven (nature), the sun and moon are the agents of heaven. The stars and planets mark the appointed times of heaven. Rainbows and comets are the portents of heaven.'

Heaven here is equivalent to nature. This is a long text, but it gives an idea of the complete organization of nature through yin yang; the pattern of yin and yang making the division of qi which is the condition of the shaping of heaven and earth. But it is because there is heaven and earth that there can be a real expression of yin and yang qi in the ten thousand beings. This organization may appear to be artificial and in a way it is, because the Huainanzi was one of the texts used to establish a complete vision of the cosmos in order to legitimize and reinforce social order and imperial power. This was a common practice at the beginning of the Han dynasty, in both philosophical and medical texts.

## **XI CI: THE GREAT COMMENTARY TO THE YIJING**

You may be familiar with this short quotation from the Xi Ci, the great commentary of the Book of Change. As usual it can be translated in many ways:

'One yin one yang that is called the dao.'

一陰一陽之謂道

*yi yin yi yang zhi wei dao*

A translation by Z. D. Sung suggests: 'The successive movement of yin and yang constitutes what is called the course of things.' And another possible translation: 'The alternation of yin and yang is the order of the world.' We see later in the text:

'That which is unfathomable by the yin and yang is called the shen (spirits).'

陰陽不測謂神

*yin yang bu ce zhi wei shen*

And even later in that text the tai ji appears:

'Therefore in the yi (change) there is the tai ji (great ultimate) which produces the two principles.'

易有太極是生兩儀

*yi you tai ji shi sheng liang yi*

'These two principles produce the four images.'

兩儀生四象

*liang yi sheng si xiang*

'The four images produce the eight trigrams.'

四象生八卦

*si xiang sheng ba gua*

With the alternation of the yin yang lines, and through the trigrams and hexagrams, the Yijing is able to show the reality of any kind of phenomena. But they are made of what? They are made of yin yang, the broken (--) and unbroken lines (—) which are the two principles (liang yi). And through this combination of the yin yang lines it is possible to show everything, including all interactions and transformations. This is the application of the Yijing and the hexagrams, and it is explained very well in the Xi Ci.