

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

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[In this .pdf file: YIN YANG IN MEDICAL TEXTS. pp.68-132].



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.'

Yin Yang

[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 appearing throughout Rochat's YIN YANG text have been excluded. Otherwise, everything else is here except for the index. Readers are urged to refer to the originating text for the complete and original content].

YIN YANG IN MEDICAL TEXTS

Our study of the philosophical texts has shown that yin yang represent opposite and complementary qualities of qi. They are the rhythm and harmony within the qi, the condensation and the development, the withdrawing into the depths or the surging to the exterior. We saw that this is seen most clearly in the great rhythms and movements of the qi through the four seasons of the year, with the heat of yang rising up and diffusing from the beginning of the springtime, culminating during the summer, and the cold yin descending, concentrating within from the beginning of autumn and culminating in the winter.

Qi is nothing other than yin yang, and it is through yin yang that we are able to see the manifestation of qi everywhere. The manifestation of qi in the form of space and time is made through the yin yang. We find yin and yang at each level of life, in the body and the mind, in space and time. The yin yang actions of the qi complete each other, with a kind of mutual penetration and harmonious succession. Pathology is nothing other than the weakness of one and the prevalence of the other, and as a result there is a lack of one thing and an excess of something else, of heat or cold, of agitation or inertia, or irregularity in the movement of ascending and descending, or the centrifugal or centripetal movement of the essences and qi.

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. They are always interacting and neither is dominant, the only dominance coming at the proper time, the proper place, to prevail within the harmony. In each aspect of life we see the harmony of the yin yang and this harmony changes according to space and time, as for example within the blood and qi at the depths and at the surface of the body. It is normal to have more yin, more rich blood in the depths and lighter blood circulating at the surface. The balance of yin yang is not the same within each of the meridians, nor is it the same in the upper part of the back as in the centre of the abdomen. But there is always a yin yang harmony. The balance of yin yang is different during the day and the night, the winter and the summer, and that is also perceptible in the pulses. We simply need to understand the kind of yin yang harmony working in each place at each time, for each function, and to understand whether this relationship of yin yang is well balanced or whether it is disorganized.

We usually say that the zang organs are yin, related to the fu organs which are yang. But this is not an absolute definition. It changes at each level of their interaction. We may say that the zang are yin and the fu are yang only when we are discussing the relationship between zang and fu. Yin yang is always a relationship. When we consider the qi in its exchange and composition and reaction within the zang and fu, then we may say that the zang are yin and the fu are yang. But if we look at all the organs of the body, in relation to the exterior of the body, then the zang and fu would be regarded as yin in relationship to the qi at the surface of the body. It is never possible to say that there are two distinct aspects, it is always a relationship. The qi have a yin and a yang movement between these two entities or functions, because there is no differentiation between the location and the function.

There are many ways to see the yin yang relationship within the body, for example the back and the front, the upper and lower parts, and all the general movements of the qi which are alternatively centrifugal and centripetal, rising up and expanding and descending and contracting. That which is calm and quiet, the substantial aspect of life linked with the essences, the liquids, the blood, the ability to nourish and rebuild, to maintain the organism is considered as yin, but always in relationship to the dynamism, the strength of movement, the functional aspect of the qi, the capacity to defend and so on.

In pathology, hypo-activity, inertia and inhibition will reflect the yin, when related and contrasted to the movement of the yang, which is hyper-activity, excess and excitement. To be cold and to have symptoms of emptiness are more likely to be yin, while heat, fever and symptoms of fullness are more yang. Each time there must be this relationship within a couple - even if it is a virtual one - in order to understand the meaning of yin or yang in each individual case. The yin slows down, so when there is prevalence of slowing down and concentration it prevents the normal yang, which is in relationship to this yin, from warming up, diffusing, distributing, circulating and so on. It is always through this kind of relationship that we can understand yin and yang.

These basic yin yang relationships are expressed through the eight principles (ba gang), but yin yang is also the basis of the five elements (wu xing), and of all the aspects of the pulse, because it is the way to look at the qi. And it is such an efficient tool if we understand it well.

We will look at some of the most basic texts of the medical classics to deepen the meaning of yin yang and how it works.

SUWEN CHAPTER 2

This chapter shows us that yin yang is rooted in the four seasons, and the first manifestation of yin yang is found in cold and heat, in the cooling and warming of the weather. It is an expression of the variation of the life giving qi according to the four seasons, and it remains the basic pattern of the yin yang, because it provides all possible variations between extreme cold and extreme heat, which through their transformations and alternations produce life.

In the management of our blood and qi, which includes our mind and our behaviour as well as our body, we have to follow the pattern of the four seasons. We aim to achieve in our lives the same rhythm as nature, which is not necessarily to strictly follow the calendar, but to be in a kind of inner harmony which assures that the yin yang movement of qi is correct; the same movement occurs within the individual as in nature, according to the movements of the four seasons. We see this clearly in the pulses, which change with the four seasons because the whole quality of the qi is also changing.

‘The yin yang of the four seasons is the root (gen) and trunk (ben) of the ten thousand beings. For this reason, the saints, in spring and summer maintain the yang (yang yang); in autumn and winter maintain the yin (yang yin). Following their roots, thus they accompany the ten thousand beings. Immersing themselves and emerging at the gate where they are produced and grow. To go against the roots (gen) is to attack the trunk (ben) and destroy authenticity itself.

The Four seasons of yin yang (yin yang si shi), are the end and the beginning of the ten thousand beings, the trunk (benj) of death and of life. Going against the flow is the catastrophe that destroys life; going with the flow is to prevent illness. This is to obtain the Way.’

According to chapter 2 of the Suwen, it is up to each human being to maintain or to destroy this harmonious composition of qi. When it says that the yin yang of the four seasons is the root and trunk of the ten thousand beings, this is not simply a poetic image, it is the model for the normal, life-giving and beneficial variations of qi. If in any living being this variation of the qi is too far from the norm, too far from the natural order, there will be disease and death. It is by following the roots that the sage accompanies the ten thousand beings, 'emerging at the gate where they are produced and grow'. Within all this movement of life, the sage is the one who is able to maintain the yin yang harmony within himself, by his inner life. To go against the roots is to destroy the trunk and attack authenticity itself. To go against the root is to behave in such a way, consciously or unconsciously, that the yin yang qi are no longer in balance.

So the yin yang expresses itself through the four seasons, and in the following paragraph we see all the detail of the four seasons of the yin yang; the detail of the four qi which are the basis of all the variations of qi, and which are the expression, according to the exact moment of time, of this yin yang balance. The yin yang of the four seasons, and the four seasons of yin yang are not quite the same thing.

Question: We are looking at the human being as a miniature version of the weather, and yin and yang as balancing the organ functions out. But are we also saying that the external pathogenic factors of diseases are affecting that first yin and yang? So it is not in isolation.

Nothing is in isolation. It is always merging in the general qi of the universe, not only the qi of the seasons but also of the surroundings, and of the general circumstances, and all that is penetrating us. So what is important is the reaction that we have.

Question: So eventually the sage can balance the yin and yang irrespective of external influence?

In Suwen chapter 2, it says that we must behave according to the season; but it also says that even if there is a disturbance in the qi outside, the sage is able to maintain balance, to keep the source of life-giving qi, and to avoid the diseases which arise because the seasons are out of balance, for example if it is too hot in November, or too cold in August.

The human being is not simply a place for the qi to play, and that is both good and bad. If there is simply an interplay of qi, if there is nothing opposing the manifestation of the potentiality of qi, there is no problem. Trees may be destroyed if there is a hurricane, but they will grow again. However, within the human being there is consciousness, and the qi are submitted to the human heart, which means that they may become perverse. It depends on the individual behaviour. In nature we may find that qi appears to be out of order, but actually it is not; it is part of a larger order, a larger vision.

There is something which is always heavenly or natural and about which there is no discussion. It is what it is. It has its own reality and is justified by itself.

'The four seasons of yin yang are the end and the beginning of the ten thousand beings' because they are the actual expression of the various qi and its evolution throughout the four seasons of life, from birth to death, and, of course, the trunk of death and of life. Going against the flow is the catastrophe that destroys life, you will not last until the end of the winter. 'Going with the flow is to prevent illness. This is to obtain the Way.'

We can understand this on many levels. Is to obtain the Way just to prevent illness, and to reach the end of your life? Yes, but through that perhaps there is something else. And if we are treating others, if we are concerned with health, we need to have a vision of what it means to be human, we need a vision of life, otherwise it could be dangerous.

Suwen chapter 2 is one of the Da Lun, the Great Treatises. All the chapters of the Suwen are called lun, and some chapters are da lun, which are the particularly important chapters. There are some chapters grouped at the end of the Suwen which are called da lun, and are perhaps written at a later date. They present stems and branches and the Chinese calendar. Otherwise, only two of the Suwen chapters are called da lun, chapter 2 and chapter 5. Chapter 2 deals with the presentation of the four seasons in order to express the very basis of yin yang, the yin yang of the four seasons. Chapter 5 also deals with yin yang, and through yin yang elaborates the pattern of the five elements, which is why it is in the fifth position in the Wang Bi edition of the Suwen.

Chapter 5 is called yin yang ying xiang da lun. Ying is to correspond, to respond, to correlate, to resonate. The character xiang made with the representation of an elephant, is an image, a pattern, a symbol, as we see in the si xiang, the four images associated with the Book of Change. The title tells us that the chapter deals with the correlations of yin yang with all images, patterns, symbols and representations.

In the Chinese way of thinking, whenever we consider a being or phenomenon, we must consider its pattern. For instance, a human being belongs to the pattern, the xiang, of humans. And humans

themselves belong to the image or pattern of moving beings, and so on. So xiang exists at each level, right down to the level of the individual. That pattern is of the human species, but it also shares something of the pattern of the animals. Xiang is used at the specific level but also extends to the general level of the four images (si xiang) of the Book of Change and the 'great image' of the Laozi. Whenever we consider this pattern, whether in a specific living being or at the most general level, there is always a resonance with yin yang. The yin yang are the basis of all appearance, and are even found in these basic models and patterns of life.

Question: What does the word 'trunk' actually mean?

The character ben is the image of a tree, with an extra horizontal stroke. We can translate it as the root or the trunk, but this character ben is often used with the symbolic meaning of the basis, the origin of something, the foundation. If the trunk is removed, all that is built on this foundation will be destroyed. If you cut the root or the base of the trunk, the tree cannot survive. The character used here for root is gen, meaning the deep rooting of something in what is essential and primordial. Ben also has the meaning of origin, not with exactly the same meaning as yuan, but with the idea that what is coming from the origin may be built into something tangible, and by extension that if you cut at this point you destroy the relationship with the origin.

When speaking of a waterway, the character ben has the meaning of source. We usually translate it as source in English because we do not say the root of a river! We could use it as a kind of poetic image, but this is not the case in Chinese, it is simply the source of the river. If you block the source there will be no more river. So it indicates this kind of communication with the origin which allows development but also continued existence.

This character ben is of course a very important one. It is often linked to the yin yang and we can see this same idea at the beginning of Suwen chapter 3.

SUWEN CHAPTER 3

'From ancient times, the communication with heaven, the foundation (ben) of life, has been rooted (ben) in yin yang.'

What is translated here as 'foundation of life' is ben, and what is translated as 'rooted' in yin yang is also ben.

Chapter 3 deals with the life-giving qi coming from heaven (tian) or responding to nature (tian). It is important to understand that communication with heaven does not mean going into a trance! It means that as long as my own life is coming from the qi of heaven (or nature) I am able to maintain a communication and deep relationship with the natural movement of the qi. That is the reason why this communication with heaven is the foundation of life, the foundation of living beings, and this is expressed by the yin yang. It is the way to be alive, and to remain alive by communication with nature or heaven, rooted in the yin yang.

This kind of sentence is very typical within these early chapters of the Suwen, and it is a good example of the kind of sentence that we might learn and repeat, but we always have to go more deeply into the meaning.

'In the space between heaven and earth, inside the six junctions (liu he).'

In the space between heaven and earth the yin yang develop themselves and make exchanges within the six junctions (liu he), which is another way to look at all the exchanges of qi between heaven and earth. The qi of living beings is nothing other than this yin yang qi, exchanged by the six junctions between heaven and earth. Similarly, the qi within the human body is distributed by the six yin yang qualities, which are the basis of the twelve meridians.

'...the qi of living beings, in the nine territories and through the nine orifices (jiu qiao), in five zang (wu zang), (five ways of keeping life), and through twelve rhythms (jie) all communicate with the qi of heaven.'

This is all simply a way to say that the yin yang qi is at the basis of all that exists within the body; the circulation in any area (the nine territories) from the interior and the organs in the depths of the body, to the exterior and the orifices, all the meridians circulating according to the twelve rhythms, are expressions of the harmony of yin yang.

Question: What is meant by the nine territories?

This text deliberately alludes to several things at the same time. The nine territories are like the nine provinces of ancient China, eight around the centre. The image of the nine provinces is a way to divide the great square of the earth into nine areas. The square of the earth may be divided into the four of the four directions, or the nine of the nine territories. In China there are traces of an ancient organization with nine provinces. For instance, in the Book of Documents (Shu Jing), Yu the Great was said to go to inspect the nine provinces of the empire, which shows us that several centuries BCE this was already a meaningful image. It was an organization of the space of the earth by nine. We can also see that in the character for the well (jing). The traditional explanation, rather than the real etymology, from a very famous text of Mencius, is that there is a well in the centre and eight families settled on eight plots of land around the well, which suggests an extended family, or small village. The number nine alludes to this kind of organization around a centre. Eight, suggesting the eight directions, is also a very ancient pattern for the distribution of space and the distribution of influences in the eight directions, for example the eight winds.

With the development of symbolic thought, it became obvious that nine, being three by three, represents the organization of the qi, and the manifestation of all the various types of qi which make up the totality of earth. Nine represents all kinds of qi, but twelve represents the way the qi is distributed, as we can see in the twelve months of the year. This arrangement by twelve is also the design of the building called Ming Tang, the Hall of Enlightenment (often mentioned in later alchemical texts), which also corresponds to the twelve months of the year. Within the human body this is represented by the twelve meridians, though historically, that comes a bit later.

So the nine territories represent the whole organization of qi in space. Within the body there are also nine territories, which are sometimes said to be nine pulses; three for the upper part of the body, three for the middle part, and three for the lower part. The nine pulses are the manifestation by nine of the variation of the yin yang qi within the space of the body. This is a very general pattern. The nine orifices also correspond to the passages and circulation of the yin yang, the lower orifices where the

turbid descends being called the yin, while the upper orifices are more linked with the yang, as they are the places where the clear yang finally arrive.

As for the twelve rhythms (jie), these are the twelve months of the year, the twelve meridians, or the twelve articulations of the body. At the time that this text was completed, this was a very common way of thinking, which did not really exist before the first century BCE.

In Suwen chapter 3 there is a general presentation of the yin yang followed by a more detailed presentation of the yang aspect of the qi, and later, towards the end of the chapter, a presentation of the yin. The yang is linked with the movements of the qi and the yin with the essences, which is one way to look at the yin yang. Basically we understand the yin yang to be the movements of the same qi, but they are also the manifestation of substance. As everything is an expression of qi, substance is a kind of concentration, and so is related to the yin movement of qi, the yin qi.

Substances themselves do not possess the ability to move, to warm, to circulate or to change, so they are closer to the quietness of the yin. The yang is that which is able to transform, to circulate and to warm them. We can also call this couple essences (jing) for the yin and qi for the yang. We saw the same thing with the yin as the 'innermost' in relation to the qi which are at the surface, and in the mutual relationship of the qi between zang and fu. It is the same with essences and qi as with yin and yang, the qualities are the same. And this is why we can speak of yin qi. It is easy for us to understand yang qi, but what is yin qi? This is not so difficult to understand if it is explained from the Chinese perspective. And it avoids a lot of problems.

'The yang qi are like the sun in heaven, when it loses its place life is broken and the beings no longer shine (manifest their splendour). Whether the heavenly influx is regularly distributed depends on the solar radiance. Thus the yang soars upwards and ensures defence at the exterior.'

The yang qi are like the sun in heaven, because the sun in heaven is the possibility to give light and to enlighten, to warm up and to put things in motion. When the sun rises, the body spontaneously begins to move and start the day. The sun is a symbol of the rhythm of yin yang throughout the day, because it rises and sets. This might seem obvious to us, but to the Chinese this is full of meaning. At dawn the yang emerges, and this emerging of yang means that yang is prevalent within the body and mind in all activities and situations, with movement of the muscles, activity of the sense organs and so on. When the sun sets there is a diminishing of this yang aspect of life, which gives calm and quiet and allows the rest of the night. The sun is the model of this movement of qi, which is also the pattern of the cycle of the defensive qi (wei qi). This text gives value to the yang, and the visibility of the sun, but there is a period when the sun is not visible, and the yin will prevail, which we will see later in the chapter with the closing of the pores and a coming to rest.

The text stresses not just this opposition or complementarity of the yin and yang qi at work during the day and night, but the most yang aspect visible in the qi. Later it will look at the utmost yin which is the essences. Here the yang qi is likened to the sun, and the text speaks of the sun between its rising and setting; they are not concerned here with the time where the sun is hidden, they are interested in developing the most powerful image of the yang within the body.

'When it loses its place the life is broken and the beings no longer shine.'

This alludes to the legend of the Emperor Yao and the ten suns. Yao was the perfect emperor, the pattern for all Confucian virtues, but every kind of disaster happened to him! As he was the perfect emperor, there should have been peace in earth and heaven, with joy and blessings coming to him, but instead he experienced every kind of problem. But he was obviously the right person to cope with this situation. He had to deal with scorching heat and devastating floods. A flood is a yin disaster, but he also had to deal with a situation of extreme yang. Legend says that in ancient times there were ten suns in heaven which rose in turn each morning, each sun rising every ten days (corresponding to an old division of time into ten days, a decanate). But one day the ten suns rose together and everything was burnt up. Yao asked for help from the Emperor of Heaven and he sent to earth Yi the Archer, who shot down nine of the ten suns.

This is a very famous example of the kind of catastrophe that can happen when the sun loses its place. Without the sun there can be no life, but it is important that the qi of heaven, the influx from heaven, is distributed regularly. So here the sun is a symbol of the distribution of influences which warm up, wake up, move and so on. And of course all these meanings are found in the character yang, with the image of the sun rising above the horizon, and below a kind of impetus of motion and change.

The yang and the sun are always linked. The sun is the best example of the yang qi warming, moving, waking, putting in motion, and also giving the rhythm which is able to create and maintain life. If the sun were never to set it would be the same as having ten suns in the sky. It would not be possible to live. There would be no rest. If the sun did not appear, and did not give enough warmth, there would be insufficient distribution of the influences from heaven and vegetation would not grow. Of course we also need water, but the sun provides the ability to transform. The sun provides the patterns which we find in the yang qi.

'Thus the yang soars upwards and ensures the defense of the exterior.'

The prime example of yang qi within the human body is the qi of defence, the wei qi; acting like the sun, it warms and moves outward to ensure the defence of the exterior, but adhering to the sun's rhythms, it moves deep within the body for regeneration at sunset, rebuilding its strength within the yin. As we have seen, the yang is always regenerated by and within the yin. There is no way for the yang to surge if not from the yin. If it is out of control, a kind of unleashed strength with no root, it will be lost. For example, liver qi which is so powerful, has to be nourished by the blood, the yin of the liver. If the strength of the liver is not based on the richness of its blood, there will be pathology of the liver. In the same way the two seas of qi are on the ren mai (conception vessel). They could not be on the du mai (governor vessel), as the yang must always surge from the yin. The dampness and darkness of the hidden yin allows the shoot to surge upwards, the yang to emerge.

When the power of the yang is developed at the exterior, it is always necessary for it to be anchored, regenerated and sustained by the yin. And this is an example of the relationship between nutrition and defence, and also the cycles of the defensive qi. If the defensive qi is able to surge and soar outwards and upwards, it is because of its regeneration in the yin, the five zang, the essences and the spirits during the night. If this does not occur, there is no way for the yang power to manifest itself in the morning.

The Huainanzi asks what happens to the sun after setting, suggesting a gestation and renewal. The image in the text is of a tired horse, resting all night long as he has run out of power; he has to be looked after, washed and groomed in the right way. And it is the same thing with the sun. According to these legends, it is taken care of and rested during the night so that it can rise and soar upwards in the morning.

We see this same thing with the wei qi because if the yang is not full of the strength coming from the yin, the defence will not be strong enough, the immunity not ensured. The wei qi are maintained by the essences of food which come from the earth. The power of the yang is totally dependent on that. If I do not eat, my immunity will decline. It is seen most clearly with the wei qi but it is the same with all the yang qi, as we just saw with the yang of the liver. And there are many other examples. The image of the sun and the movement of the sun is the very pattern of the wei qi.

So when this chapter defines the yin, we see that:

'That which gives life to the yin is rooted (ben) in the five tastes (wu wei) and the five residences (wu gong) of the yin are attacked by these five tastes.'

The five residences are the five zang, and the five tastes are the variation of potential within the essences. We know that the zang are full of essences, and by these essences they ensure the renewal of vitality, by rebuilding the form, the substances of the body, the essences, the fluids, the blood, and by releasing the qi. That the five residences of the yin are attacked by the five tastes is just a way to say that if we are unable to sustain the five zang by appropriate diet, unable to nourish the essences, then there is an inability to reproduce the substance of the body and to sustain the movement of the qi. This includes the maintenance of the wei qi during the night, as the wei qi are regenerated through the five zang. As the wei qi provide the best example of yang qi, so the ying, the qi of reconstruction, maintenance and nutrition are given for the yin. The ying qi includes all the nutrients contained within the essences which rebuild the body and which at the same time sustain the strength of the yang.

'Yin is that which treasures (cang) the essences and then there is springing up and development (qi ji). Yang is that which defends on the exterior (wei wai) and then solidity (gu) is the result.'

The character zang is also a verb meaning to treasure (cang), to keep carefully or preciously. The two characters qi ji have a kind of alliteration. The first character qi means to put in motion, to start a movement, like getting up in the morning. The other character (ji) is a kind of rapid movement, relating to the movement of life unfolding without any obstacle. The traditional explanation is that between heaven and earth there are all kinds of movement and activities made by the mouth and the hand. The most usual meaning is to be prompt. The definition of the yin is to treasure the essences, but this is in order to put something into motion and allow it to develop to full speed and strength. If you have the appropriate liquid in the tank, you can start your engine and proceed down the motorway at full speed!

And what is the definition of the yang here? It is to defend on the exterior, which is the opposite of to treasure, to keep inside in the depths. Defending the exterior is a movement outwards in order to be active, and to provide solidity and firmness (gu). This character is often associated with the wei qi and the defence. It is an interesting character because it describes something which is enclosed,

meaning that there is enough strength to store within; the pores are closed and nothing is allowed to go in or out if not under the control of the balanced motion given by the defensive qi. This character gu means well protected, something firm and solid and real, something substantial.

What is interesting here is that the definition of the yin is to treasure the essences, but the effects are yang, to put in motion and to arrive at full speed. It is the yin treasuring the essences that allows the development of this motion. Correlatively the yang is the defence, soaring outside, but the result is in the yin; the assurance of a kind of firmness. We can see the same thing in the relationship between bone and marrow, the marrow benefiting from the richness of the essences of the kidneys enabling the bones to be strong and mobile. Conversely, solid bones are able to keep the marrow inside.

We see the same thing with the fluids of the body. The fluids allow the development of rich essences which support the yang qi, but at the same time the yang qi enable the fluids to stay within the body, by defending the exterior and not allowing them to leak out through perspiration, urinary incontinence and diarrhoea.

Such is the relationship of the yin and yang of nutrition and defense (ying wei), as one example of the general and constant pattern of the yin yang relationship. The same idea is expressed in chapter 5 of the Suwen:

'Yin is inside (nei) but yang guards it (shou).
Yang is outside (wai) but yin sends it (shi)'

陰在內陽之守也

yin zai nei yang zhi shou ye

陽在外陰之使也

yang zai wai yin zhi shi ye

According to its nature yin is inside, but because we cannot separate yin and yang it is the yang which allows the yin to remain inside. If the yang is too strong there may be copious and untimely sweat. It is always the same pattern, which we see even in the function of the acupuncture points. There are points on the yang meridians which are good for the yin because they keep the yang in balance; they help to keep the yin inside by working on the yang. Many of the points which are used to increase fluids are found not on the meridians connected with the yang that renew the essences and liquids, but on those that work in order to balance the yang which will in turn benefit the yin. For example, the mu point of the spleen (Liver 13, zhang men), is on the liver meridian, so how does it nourish and sustain the spleen? By regulating the qi of the liver, and relieving the pressure of the wood on the earth, and so enabling the spleen to keep its richness and to work regularly. There is always this kind of interplay which the acupuncturist uses everyday.

The yang at the exterior is not useful unless it is sent (shi) by the yin. We saw this earlier with the roots sending out the shoots. Here there is an opposition between the character shou, to keep, and shi, to send. The yin is not actually setting in motion, but it is the only possible basis for the movement and strength of the yang. The yang at the exterior may be an unrooted yang, coming from an emptiness of yin, just as there may be an accumulation of yin on the inside, manifesting as a

tumour or an accumulation of fluid. This is pathology. The yin is pushed outside by the yang which is out of control, and the yang is weak and without yin as its basis.

Returning to Chapter 3, after the presentation of the yin yang relationship, there is an example of disorder:

'Where yin cannot dominate yang, the mai (vital circulation, and their quality perceptible at the pulses) flow violently and hastily, a disharmony that leads to madness.'

Here there is not enough yin so the strength of the yang is devastating. It is not an harmonious balance. In this case there will be an acceleration in the circulation, like speeding on the motorway when you are no longer in control of your vehicle. As long as there is enough gas you are okay, but once you run out of gas you will be unable to move. The individual is no longer able to control their behaviour and if this movement becomes too extreme it will have a psychological effect which leads to madness.

'When yang cannot dominate (or balance) yin, the qi of the five zang struggle and there is no longer communication through the nine orifices.'

The five zang struggle because there is disorder and lack of qi. The structure of the sentence suggests that in time of peace, people work together in harmony, but if there is shortage, everyone looks out for himself. It is the same idea for the zang. They no longer cooperate harmoniously. In several ancient texts we find the idea that if there is a lack, a shortage, the qi of each of the zang struggle for themselves which leads to complete disorder, as in a civil war. There is disorder in the zang and an inability to ensure circulation and communication. Because of this lack of circulation, the yin increase and create a kind of blockage. The zang can no longer ensure the communication with their related orifice at the surface of the body, which requires a well regulated exchange of qi.

'This being so, the sage behaves in accordance to yin yang. Muscular movement and vital circulation (jin mai) are composed of a single qi, bone and marrow are consolidated and strengthened, blood and qi (xue qi) go, one following the other, in a concerted movement'.

We cannot simply translate jin as muscles because this is definitely a Western concept. There is not a clear representation of the musculature in Chinese books. It is more that which moves the flesh, the muscular movement, which is a different viewpoint.

When there is a balance of yin yang at every level the balance of life is achieved. The movement and distribution of blood and qi in the flesh and the muscles is perfectly balanced and there will be no cramps or contractions, no weakness. The bone and marrow, blood and qi are consolidated one by the other; there is nothing to disturb their flow.

'From this behaviour results the harmonious balance of the interior with the exterior, the perverse influences cannot cause any harm. The hearing is acute, and sight sharp. The qi are established as they are in themselves (qi li ru gu).'

The qi are established according to their proper nature, their natural endowment. Li is to be established, to be firmly upright. Gu is used in ancient philosophical texts as the cause of something. That which causes you to come into life, causes you to be you; it is your natural endowment. So gu is

used here with the meaning of natural endowment, that which causes things to be. This text is certainly inspired by the philosophical texts and so we can be confident that this is the meaning here. When the sage is able to behave in accordance with the yin yang, everything will be in harmony in the body and the qi will be established according to their natural endowment, or according to the natural order.

'What is essential for yin yang comes down to this: Solidity (gu) depends on whether the yang are well tightened (mi).'

This character mi, used here with the meaning of tightened, is usually seen in the medical texts for the closing of the pores so that there is no loosening or leakage. It is also used for the weave of a fabric which has to be firm and tight; if not it is without form. And that is a description of a 'bad yang'.

'Good yang' means that the fabric remains supple, but tight. The yang are well knit.

It is also absolutely essential that there is harmony. Even the yang cannot assure solidity if it is not attached to the yin. A lack of harmonious composition between the two is like spring without autumn, winter without summer. Which alludes yet another time to the great pattern of the four seasons.

'A lack of harmonious composition between the two would be like spring without autumn, winter without summer. Such is the sacred rule of life.'

We will look at one last paragraph from chapter 3:

'But in the case of yang that is too powerful and cannot be kept tightened, the yin qi are interrupted (jue). If the yin are steady and the yang well tightened, essences and spirits (vital spirits, jing shen) are controlled as they should be (zhi). But if separation and rupture (li jue) between yin and yang occurs, essences and qi (jing qi) are interrupted (jue).'

What we are translating here as 'interrupted' is the character jue, which is used also for the interruption of the meridians. It means that something has stopped to function because it is no longer connected. The character is made with the silk thread radical on the left, and on the right something which suggests a kind of breaking, a dislocation. It is like an interruption in an electrical current causing the lights to go out. Sometimes there may even be a spark, or a short circuit. Here it is used for the essences and qi as well as for the yin qi.

In the case of a 'yang that is too powerful', too strong and too rigid, it is no longer possible to tighten while retaining suppleness, it will just break. The yin qi, the qualities of qi which are able to nourish, to irrigate, to maintain, are interrupted because they are burnt or expended; the yang qi is no longer able to transform them in order to maintain the body. There is a kind of useless dissemination.

The yin has to be steady and calm and quiet. If the yang is too strong, everything is out of order. That may be the reason for the yin to move out of the body, for example; what is supposed to be treasured inside and guarded by the yang is now pushed outside by this yang which is out of balance. The disorder can be seen from one point of view or another depending on the circumstances. Later on in the text there are details of specific symptoms, but this is a very general text. This same movement can be understood at each level, the spleen, the liver, the kidneys, each with its specific patterns of harmony and disharmony. The yin yang relationships are specific in each case.

If the yin is steady (ping, equal and peaceful) and if the yang are able to tighten well (mi), the result is not only at the level of yin yang, hot and cold, or essences and qi, the ultimate result of the harmony of the yin yang is the presence of the spirits, through the quality of the essences, hence the building of the vital spirits (jing shen). The building of what I am as a human being, my vital spirits, depends on the harmony of qi, which is the balance of the yin yang. This balance is like using correct proportions in cooking, where the result is a harmony of taste. When everything is in the proper balance and harmony you can no longer distinguish the individual ingredients. Harmony is always the total result of mutual penetration.

When everything is in balance and harmony, it is a personal harmony, which may be the harmony of my liver and my kidneys, but it is also the harmony of my whole life, which is the expression of the vital spirits. When the vital spirits (jing shen) are controlled as they should be, they are well governed and they govern well (zhi). This character zhi is used for 'treatment', but it also means to keep or to put back in the right order, in the right movement. When the jing shen are controlled as they should be, they also control as they should. This is not just a passive function.

'If separation and rupture occur between yin and yang, essences and qi are interrupted.'

If any kind of imbalance occurs, one no longer dominates the other in the correct way. Here we are no longer talking of essences and spirits, but of the very basic expression of life which is essences and qi. Here they represent the double expression of yin yang, and both are interrupted.

Question: So if someone came to a qi gong class feeling weak, the exercise could be too powerful for them?

Of course. And if you are a qi gong teacher you must know your students and know how to adapt the teaching for them. You cannot just have exercises which are good for this or that, because it depends on the individual. If the student does not build a foundation for the practice they will exhaust their remaining force. It is really dangerous if people are doing these practices without controlling or understanding what they are doing. Some students forget their own common sense. If I am feeling more and more exhausted I should ask myself, not just the teacher, whether that is a good thing. Why would I continue? It does not make sense, and it is very dangerous.

SUWEN CHAPTER 4

'Within the yin there is yin, within the yang there is yang.'

We know that within the yin there is yang and within the yang there is yin. It is not the aim here to discuss that. Here the text is saying that within the yin and within the yang there is variation. The following four sentences shows a division of time, they are known as 'the four moments of time', which is a very old concept. Throughout the day there are four different qualities of time, each with its own kind of behaviour, a balance between activity and rest which is different in each case.

'From dawn to noon it is the yang of heaven (nature), yang within the yang; from noon to dusk it is the yang of heaven, yin within yang. From nightfall to cock's crow it is the yin of heaven, the yin within the yin; from cock's crow to dawn it is the yin of heaven, yang within the yin.'

This is the division of the four times of the night and day, but through this image it is possible to have another view of the four seasons, and through that a way to see the organs and the body itself.

Yang of heaven and yin of heaven refer to day and night. Heaven (tian) also describes the alternation of nature throughout day and night. The full light at noon is the yang within the yang, and the yin within the yang the afternoon, as the light begins to decline. Even if the beginning of the afternoon is very hot and very light, this is no longer the same yang power of expansion. With the same reasoning, the spring is the yang within the yang, the yang within the yang season, and the summer will be the yin aspect within the yang season. The summer develops the impulse given during the spring, and that is not the same thing as to give the impulse itself, which is more yang. From nightfall to cock's crow, the first part of the night, is the most yin, and leads to the second part of the night where the yang is already secretly at work.

'Speaking of the yin yang within human beings, the exterior is yang and the interior is yin. For the yin yang of the body, the back is yang and the belly is yin, for the yin yang of the organs, the zang are yin the fu are yang. The liver, heart, spleen, lung, kidneys, which are the five zang, are yin, while the gallbladder, stomach, large intestine, small intestine, bladder, triple heater, which are the six fu, are yang. Does one want to know what is the yin within the yin and the yang within the yang? Yes! The illnesses of winter are in the yin, the illnesses of summer are in the yang. The illnesses of spring are in the yin, and illnesses of autumn in the yang.'

The illnesses of spring are in the yin because of a deficiency of yang; there may be a persistence of cold, with the winter invading the spring for example.

'Having observed the localization one applies metal and stone needles. The back being yang, the yang within the yang is the heart. The back being yang, the yin within the yang is the lung. The belly being yin, the yin within the yin are the kidneys. The belly being yin, the yang within the yin is the liver. The belly being yin, the extreme yin within the yin is the spleen.'

This is simply an application of these same ideas to the zang, but it is very interesting. Are the heart and the lung at the back of the body? No! But what is called the back here is more the upper part of the trunk. And the belly which is yin is in front, and this is the lower part of the trunk. This is not just the exterior and the interior, the back and the front, but the back as the yang and the upper part, and the abdomen the belly as the yin and the lower part. The organs are not actually in the back or in the front. The heart and the lung are in the yang, as they are above the diaphragm. But within this yang, one is more yang than the other, the heart is the yang within the yang, while the lung is more on the side of the yin. It is possible to play with that idea because it suggests a lot of other things.

We may say that the heart is linked with the blood and the lungs with the qi, but the qi of the lung support the qi of the heart, and blood and qi come together through the common work of the heart and the lung. We must always consider each individual situation. Here we are speaking of location, and each location suggests an aspect of qi. Being in the upper part, the heart and the lung are turned towards the yang. As far as the elements are concerned, fire is the element of the heart and metal the element of the lung. Here fire is yang, metal yin. But we can also see that the lung, even though it is considered to be yin, is also within the yang. The tai yin of the hand (lung meridian) is completely different to the tai yin of the foot (spleen meridian); the main symptoms for the tai yin of hand in the Shanhan Lun being found at the tai yang level.

We must bring all our knowledge of theory and practice to these general texts, but we are also able to experiment and understand because of these texts! It is a kind of feed back loop. We can see the same pattern with the liver and the kidneys which are in the yin, but the liver is the yang within the yin, the surging up from the depths.

Finally there is a fifth position which is the spleen. There are four seasons, four moments of time, and five zang; so something has to be adjusted. Here the spleen is called the extreme yin (zhi yin) within the yin because of this link with the earth (di), as paired with heaven, and its ability to receive and nourish. In other texts the supreme yin may be the kidneys.

The (upper) back is yang and the (lower) belly yin, but that is not the same thing as saying that the back is yang and the front is yin. Here there is also a play on the idea of above and below. The yin yang division in the body may also be made according to right and left, male and female, it depends on the context. There are many different ways to describe these different qualities of qi.

'Such are the correspondences and exchanges between yin and yang, obverse and reverse (biao li), face and interface, interior and exterior (nei wai) cock and hen (male and female). It is thus that the correspondences operate with the yin yang of heaven.'

SUWEN CHAPTER 5

Huangdi (the Yellow Emperor) said:

Yin yang is the way (dao) of heaven and earth (tian di), the laws and principles (gang ji) of the ten thousand beings (wan wu), father and mother of change and transformation (bian hua), root and beginning (ben shi) of life and death, residence (fu) of the enlightenment of the spirits (shen ming). To treat diseases, one has to go to the root (ben). Accumulated (ji), yang is (wei) heaven (tian) accumulated, yin is earth (di).

Yin is quietness (jing), yang is movement (zao). Yang gives rise (sheng), yin makes growth (zhang). Yang puts to death (sha), yin buries (cang). Yang transforms (hua) the qi, yin completes (cheng) the form (xing).

Cold (han) at the utmost, gives rise (sheng) to heat (re), heat at the utmost (ji), gives rise to cold. Cold qi generates (sheng) turbid (zhuo), hot qi generates clear (qing). If below, the clear qi (qing qi) produce (sheng) diarrhoea with undigested food; if above, the turbid qi (zhuo qi) produce distension and swelling.'

It is interesting to look at the Chinese text for the beginning of the chapter:

'Yin yang is the way of heaven and earth,

陰陽者天地之道也

yin yang zhe tian di zhi dao ye

The laws and principles of the ten thousand beings,

萬物之綱紀

wan wu zhi gang ji

'Father and mother of change and transformation,

變化之父母

bian hua zhi fu mu

'The foundation and beginning of life and death,

生 殺 之 本 始

sheng sha zhi ben shi

'Residence of the radiance of the spirits.'

神 明 之 府 也

shen ming zhi fu ye

Chapter five is the great chapter (da lun) which presents the five elements, the five-fold vision of the universe emerging from the yin yang, and it begins with a presentation of the yin yang in these five sentences which are an absolute definition of yin yang.

'The way of heaven and earth' is the natural means by which heaven and earth form and give life to all living beings. The way (dao) here is not to be taken exactly as 'the way' of the Laozi (Dao de jing), but rather as the way things are, the way things go, the process of the natural order. A modern translation may be that yin yang is the natural process of life. We saw this earlier; nothing is formed between heaven and earth if it is not through this qi which is the yin yang. All the nuances and differentiations in the balance and harmony of yin yang make the variety of the ten thousand beings. The very basic laws and principles of these yin yang relationships are found within each of them. So we read in the second sentence that 'the laws and the principles for the ten thousand beings', each one having its own harmony of yin yang, but following the same general rules as we saw for the four seasons, or for the four directions. The two characters gang ji are made with the image of the silk thread on the left side and they both represent a kind of net. This character gang is the main rope to which all the other threads are attached. Ji represents the mesh of all the other threads. So gang ji is both the great principles and all the small details of the law. It may also be understood as something to do with space and time, for in ji there is also the idea of the unfolding of time. It is a phrase which is commonly used to describe the rules presiding over the life at each stage of development.

Because the yin yang qi are the natural process of life, they give and maintain life for all beings; each obeys its own rules, which are nothing other than the rules of yin yang. So within a human being, yin and yang may be seen as everything that is constantly maintaining life, and this constant maintenance of life is bian hua, change and transformation. The balance of yin yang harmony is never a state, it is always a process. It is an evolving process, a changing process, and through transformation life is maintained. We can see this with the essences and qi. The essences allow the release of qi, as the yin sends the yang; the yang is able to warm, transform and assimilate the essences, to protect them and make them useful within, where they are constantly transformed and renewed. They are renewed by the transformation. All these processes of change and transformation within the body happen through the intercourse of yin yang, which we see here with father and mother (fu mu).

The intercourse of the yin yang creates all the details of daily life, following the great rules of the order of the universe. It is because of the yin yang that we are able to live and it is this same natural endowment of yin yang qi which leads to our end. We see this with the beginning of growth in the spring, which is just born to wither and die during the autumn.

The character sha is to cut down a tree, and it is often used to describe the action of the autumn. Autumn is the time to collect and harvest, but also the time to kill, to put to death. It suggests the disappearance of vegetation, so is linked with the passing of time. It is difficult to translate it as death, because that is too direct. In Chinese it suggests the cycle of the seasons, because we may look at the four seasons as cycles of the year, but also at the spring as birth and the return as death. Sheng sha gives this feeling of a cycle. It is the cycle of birth and death but it contains all other possible cycles within it.

The fifth sentence is parallel to the first, and it also embraces the other sentences. It is a definition of the yin yang as the residence of the splendour, the light, coming from the spirits. The splendour of life shines in each being; in the eyes, the skin, the circulation of the blood and the complexion, as well as being seen in the accuracy of the sense organs and the sharpness and enlightenment of the mind. This too is the result of the harmony of yin yang. When yin and yang are blocked or no longer in their proper relationship, the blood and qi cannot give vitality to the pulse, and the vital spirits are not as they should be. The chapter continues:

'To treat diseases, one has to go to the root (ben).'

One has to go to the root, the foundation, the origin. And what is the root? It is the yin yang. In Lingshu chapter 8 (which is called Ben Shen) it is the spirits, but the meaning here is not so different. The problem is that some people divinize the spirits to such an extent that they become unreal. We should not neglect the spirits, especially in this kind of Chinese medical text which is embedded in the Chinese thought of the second century BCE. The vital spirits are all that I am, but the presence of the spirits is dependent on the balance of the yin yang. There may be a dimension of the spirits which is not dependent on me as an individual, I do not create the spirits, they are the natural order of heaven, but I am responsible for what they are within me.

To go to the root is exactly what we do when we make a diagnosis. How do we go to the root? By looking at the yin yang imbalance in one way or another; through the pulses, palpation, the eight principles, the five elements and at the same time something appears to us which we may call the spirits. We see it through the inner disposition, which is the consequence and the cause of this yin yang situation, and is always considered in relationship with the natural endowment. To find the yin yang imbalance is the first stage of treatment, there is no other way. When we do that, and when we get it right, we have the best opportunity to touch something that patients will absorb deep into themselves, to their root, which is nothing other than the vital spirits, and to allow change from that deep place.

The chapter continues by linking a lot of expressions of yin yang within the human being, because it is not only the body but also the mind, with all the movements of yin yang as we may observe them in nature.

'Accumulated, yang is heaven; accumulated, yin is earth.'

This is the normal movement, constitution and maintenance of heaven and earth, and we have already seen this at the beginning of Huainanzi chapter 3, which is the reference for this text. When

something emerges from the chaotic unity of reality, this emerging is due to the possibility of a differentiation. There is a kind of bipolarity of yin yang and the first thing to appear is a double movement in the qi, an expansion and a contraction in such a way that what is able to expand and rise and diffuse is light like a kind of vapour, and that will evaporate to constitute heaven. Heaven will always be enriched by this evaporation and it is seen in the vapours that accumulate to form clouds. The concentration, the contraction, is always more and more dense because what remains is deprived of the lighter elements. A lump of clay will become increasingly more solid as the moisture evaporates in the sun, and that is the concentration of the earth. Within the earth there is always the movement of taking, concentrating, putting together. So there is a movement of diffusion which is called yang, and that is the origin of heaven; and there is a concentration which is called yin, and that is the origin of earth. Heaven is the utmost yang and earth the utmost yin, as we saw in the Zhuangzi, the greatest expression of yin yang in nature.

The character ji is to accumulate. It sounds a bit strange in English or French because although we can understand an accumulation for something dense like the earth, we find it more difficult to conceive of an accumulation which is also a diffusion. We can just about imagine an accumulation of vapours to form clouds, but here we are not talking about clouds, rather of heaven. Accumulation is not necessarily a physical piling up, it is also a repetition of something. When we speak in qi gong for example, of accumulating the qi in the chest, we do not do that by piling up qi on top of qi, that is not possible. The accumulation is the repetition of a movement which gives more and more strength to the qi. We can also accumulate experiences, but where are they accumulated? Maybe in the strength that they provide. They are not accumulated in the visible, they are accumulated in the efficiency.

'Yin is quietness (jing), yang is movement (zao).'

The earth offers stable space, heaven provides changing time and weather. On earth we see the stability of the mountain, the quietness of substance, and in heaven the movement of the clouds and the circulation of the wind. Heaven and earth are visible only in their manifestation. Yin is the quietness of the earth and yang is the movement of heaven.

'Yang gives rise (sheng), yin makes growing (zhang); yang puts to death (sha), yin buries (cang).'

This again refers to the four seasons. The spring gives rise, gives life, followed by the yin part of the yang season, the summer, which is responsible for growth. And here the summer is the yin within the yang. The autumn is yang within the yin season because it is the beginning of the movement of yin, it starts the motion of sha, the putting to death. Then there is the accomplishment of this movement, the yin within the yin, which is the winter. The winter buries, which is the same character (cang) that we use with the meaning 'to treasure' and for the five zang. If the winter is yin without yang, it is inertia, a corpse. But because this is a cycle, the burial of the winter is exactly the same as the burial and the treasuring of the seed of life which gives the foundation for the spring, as the life within the essences is buried and treasured within the five zang in order to germinate.

'Yang transforms (hua) the qi; yin completes, (cheng) the form (xing).'

The yang gives the qi the ability to transform, or we could say that the qi through their yang aspect are able to transform and provide all vital activities; the yin gives substances allowing the accomplishment of form. This is the yin yang complementarity with transformation and the result of transformation which is the form. There is transformation each time a substance changes.

Transformation achieves the quality of the blood, the quality of the fluids, the nutrients, and the form of the body. Through the form of the body, and the changes in the form, it is possible to see transformation at work in the innermost parts of the being, as it says in the Liezi, we see signs of the blossoming as well as the decaying of life, the last transformation being death.

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

We have already seen this in the description of the four seasons. When the yin of the winter 'buries' it is to prepare the surging of the spring. After the yin within the yin (winter) there is the yang within the yang (spring), and after that the yin in the yang (summer) and the yang in the yin (autumn). It is possible to play with this idea, but each time we must adapt the meaning. When we see the pattern of the yin within the yin and the yang within the yang for the winter and spring, it is important to remember that we are dealing with the beginning and accomplishment of a movement. There are other ways to present the four seasons according to the yin yang; the winter can be called great yin and the summer great yang, while the spring is young yang and the autumn young yin. But even in this case, the great yang, which is the maximum expression of yang, is followed by the beginning of yin, as the autumn follows the summer. And the maximum of yin is followed by the yang, as spring follows the winter. In each case there is a reversal. This is the reason why in the Book of Change the changing lines are always the great yin and the great yang.

This kind of reversal is the law of life. If there is no reversal, there is death - a winter with no spring, summer heat with no cooling. When we reach extreme cold, then there has to be a warming up. And it is the opposite with extreme heat. If a fever does not stop we die. If we do not die, the fever will cool down. It is not that the Chinese believe that by adding cold water to cold water we will get hot water! They have never suggested that. That is not the point. The point is that there is no choice within the logic of life. There is always this same reversal, and we have to understand that. As it says in Laozi chapter 40, reversal is the movement of the dao.

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

Let us take the example of evaporation. With cold, the turbid remains with the mud of the earth, with heat there is an evaporation which is the clear rising up. We can also apply the same logic within the body, where the yin yang balance of cold and heat allows everything to be in the right place with the appropriate movement of the rising of the clear and the sinking of the turbid, as we see with the body fluids.

'If below, the clear qi (qing qi) produce (sheng) diarrhea with undigested food; if above, the turbid qi (zhuo qi) produce distension and swelling. If the clear qi sink and produce diarrhoea with undigested food, and if the turbid qi rise and produce distension and swelling, this is due to contrary movements of the yin yang, and this is opposition to the natural movement of life.'

Here the clear qi refers to the nutrients coming from the digestive process, but if they are not assimilated and correctly distributed, there will be essences in the lower abdomen and intestines, which are lost with the elimination process. This is called diarrhoea with undigested food. It is a deep disturbance, and is an example of the clear, which should be diffused by a yang movement, being in a contrary movement of descending and concentration. In the opposite situation, the turbid qi rises up in a kind of counter-current of qi ascending from the middle heater, causing congestion and blockage in the chest, which in turn may produce distension, swelling, phlegm and oedema. This is the opposite of the normal descending movement of the turbid.

Now we have one of the best definitions of disease that I know in the Chinese texts:

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

Disease is defined as something that is contrary to the natural order in the activity of yin yang. And we can see these yin yang activities at every level, for example in the distribution of qi and essences through the digestion. At the root of all disease there is a contrary activity of yin yang, which is in opposition to the natural movement of life. This is certainly the most accurate and general definition of disease that we find in Chinese texts. There is no disease which escapes this definition. Of course we have to find exactly what the imbalance is, and that is diagnosis. These ideas are also seen in the mis-location of the yin yang in Zhuangzi chapter 6. The translation above is expanded to give the meaning. The Chinese text is much simpler:

此陰陽反作病之逆從

ci yin yang fan zuo bing zhi ni cong

The activities (zuo) contrary (fan) to the rule of life, or the natural order represented by the yin yang. Bing is disease. Ni is opposition, rebellion, counterflow. Cong is to follow the flow, to go in the right direction, to comply with or to obey. One way to understand this is that the activities opposed to the natural movement make the ni and cong, which imply all the movements which are against the norm and create disease. We can also understand it in another way, that the disease is an opposition to the proper movement of life. But the understanding of the sentence is clear. Disease is an activity contrary to the natural movement of the yin yang, which makes it an opposition to the movement of life.

'Clear yang makes heaven, turbid yin makes earth; ascending the earth qi makes clouds (yun), descending the heaven qi makes rain (yu); rain comes from earth qi, clouds come from heaven qi.'

There is no separation between heaven and earth. No rupture between yin and yang. Even if the clear yang is heaven and the turbid yin is earth, there is enough yang inside the yin of the earth for something to rise up, and there is enough yin within the yang of heaven to make the concentration of vapours which allows the rain to fall. Our reality is the connection between the qi of heaven and earth, within the six junctions (liu he) for example. So it is not the idea that heaven is on one side and

earth on the other, yang on one side and yin on the other, there is always an interpenetration and succession.

Rain comes from heaven and permeates the earth to induce fertility, but this water falling from above comes from the evaporation of the dampness of earth and the clouds which evaporate from earth because of the warmth of the sun in heaven. When something rises up from earth, it is by the effect of the yang of heaven.

There is always this kind of mutual stimulation and that reflects the nature of water, which is one of the best examples of the change and transformation of yin yang qi. Water becomes ice and vapour without losing its quality. This same pattern is seen within the human body through the functions of the organs and the circulation of the meridians and the qi; there is always this kind of circulation of the yin yang between what is above and what is below, between what is yin and what is yang, what is inside and what is outside, between what is qi and what is essences. At each level we see this yin yang interplay, and it is only through this interplay that reality may be sustained.

There follows a presentation of examples of this in the human body:

'So the clear yang appears (chu) at the upper orifices (shang qiao), and the turbid yin appears at the lower orifices (xia qiao). The clear yang spreads up (fa) to the texture of the skin (cou li), and the turbid yin goes to the five zang. The clear yang gives fullness to the four limbs and the turbid yin returns (gui) to the six fu.'

The first couple gives the balance between ascending and descending. The clear yang rises up to the head and to the upper orifices and diffuses there. So what is this clear yang? Of course it is yang qi but this yang qi is relying on the essences. Pure and rich liquids also ascend to the upper orifices. The turbid yin appears in the lower orifices, and is more concentrated, the substances are heavier and more compact, as with the urine and stools, as opposed to the clear and subtle vapours which rise up. The descending movement takes all that is the residue of good digestion to the lower orifices.

In the following example, the clear yang spreads up to the texture of the skin, and the turbid yin goes to the five zang. This is a slightly different way to look at it with the centrifugal and centripetal movements, exterior and interior. The interior is the five zang, and the five zang treasure the essences, which represent the yin. Here the turbid is not the residue of transformation and digestion, but all that is led by the movement of concentration and descending to the depths; the centripetal movement. In this case it is not the waste but the essences.

For example, the essences of the five tastes go to the five zang, as opposed to the clear yang qi which are led by the movement of diffusion towards the exterior, spreading at the level of the skin. This is another facet of the complimentary movement of yin yang.

The final couple is another example of a clear yang giving fullness to the four limbs and motion and movement to the muscles, while the turbid yin returns all the substances processed through the digestive tract to the six fu.

This is a triple example of complementarity of yin and yang. In each case the clear and turbid signify the basic moving upwards and outwards for the yang, and moving downwards and inwards for the yin. And each application has a different meaning. The turbid yin may be the waste or the essences, and the two are opposed in their nature but not in their movement.

'Water (shui) is yin and fire (huo) is yang. Yang makes the qi, yin makes the taste (wei).'

Here yin yang is expressed within the human body as water and fire, and through water and fire as the qi and the tastes. This is similar to the qi and the essences, but when we speak of the tastes, we refer to the various qualities of the essences, and this is important for the continuation of the text, which goes on to deal with diagnosis and therapy in terms of the tastes. It may also be an allusion to the qi of heaven entering by the nose and the tastes of earth entering by the mouth.

'The tastes belong (gui) to the body form (xing), the form belongs to the qi, the qi belongs to the essences (jing), the essences belong to the transformation (hua).'

Through this yin yang movement, all the ways to nourish the form by the tastes and the essences become possible, and the form provides an operative area for the qi. The qi depend on the essences to be renewed, so the essences are nothing other than fuel offered in an unceasing transformation. There follows another distinction between the yin yang of the tastes and the qi.

'Being yin the tastes appear (chu) at the lower orifices, being yang the qi appear (chu) at the upper orifices.'

Here again there is an ascending and descending movement proper to yin and yang, and to all the couples following their pattern, essences and qi, tastes and qi. We also have to consider the variation within the yin and variation within the yang, as we saw in chapter 4. There is yin which is more or less yin, and yang which is more or less yang. There are qi which are more or less powerfully yang, and tastes which are more or less powerfully yin.

'When dense (concentrated, hou) the tastes are yin, when diffuse (dilute, bo) the tastes are yang inside the yin, when dense (concentrated, hou) the qi are yang, and when diffuse (dilute, bo) the qi are yin inside the yang.'

Dense here means a concentration of either yin or yang, and dilute or diffuse means that it is not so strongly yin or yang. It is not enough just to speak of qi and tastes or qi and essences, we must also look at the various qualities within each of them. The general pattern of four, following the four seasons, is enough to suggest all the possible variations. We never see qi without tastes or tastes without qi. Qi and tastes (qi wei) are always together, because the tastes cannot move or act by themselves. They are just a kind of raw material.

'Spreading up and diffusing (fa san) the pungent (xin) and sweet (gan) tastes are yang; Sending up and down (yang xie), the sour (suan) and the bitter (ku) are yin.'

This is presented as a way to understand how the body is affected by the substances it takes in. And of course it forms the basis of dietary and herbal therapy, from which all the explanations of the actual preparation and effect of remedies is elaborated.

'Injury by cold in winter, leads in spring to warm disease (wen bing). Injury by wind in spring leads in summer to diarrhoea with undigested food (sun xie). Injury by heat in summer leads in autumn to intermittent fever (jie nüe). Injury by dampness in autumn leads in winter to coughing (ke sou).'

This is another four-fold expression of the contrary activity of the yin yang, but in this case it is seen not in the physical structure of the body, but in the effect of time. Here there is also the idea that cold becomes heat and heat becomes cold; yin becomes yang and yang yin. For example, in the first line injury by cold in winter leads in spring to warm diseases. This is an injury due to the yin, which is the cold of winter, and the result is a fever. In the following line, injury by wind in spring, the spring is yang and the wind is yang, and the result of that repeated yang leads in summer to diarrhoea with undigested food, which is a yin disease.

The pattern is not quite so clear with the other couples. Heat is yang and the summer is the yin within the yang, and this leads not to warm disease but to intermittent fever, alternation of cold and heat. Dampness is yin and autumn yang within the yin, and in winter there will be coughing which is a kind of irregular qi, an inner agitation in the lung. But with the double yang there will be yin, a double yin and there will be yang; otherwise there is death. Each time there is a disorganization of the physiology, there is the same pattern in the yin yang.

The chapter goes on to give detailed descriptions of the five elements and the five zang, which we will look at more closely when we study the five elements in the medical texts. At the middle of the chapter we find this:

'Heaven and earth are above and below (shang xia) for the ten thousand beings, yin and yang are male and female for the blood and qi (xue qi). Left and right are ways and passes for the yin yang, water and fire are signs and evidence (zheng zhao) for the yin yang. Yin yang is the power and beginning (neng shi) for the ten thousand beings. Thus it is said that yin is inside (nei) but yang guards it (shou), yang is outside (wai) but yin sends it (shi).'

Heaven is above and earth below, which is the premise for many other things. The Xi Ci, the Great Commentary on the Yijing starts with the phrase 'heaven is above and earth is below', and many other texts begin in the same way because it creates a framework for reality, and within that framework we can be certain of a specific reaction. Qi - which is yin yang - is always circulating and interacting between heaven and earth. As we saw previously, the rain coming from heaven may be said to originate on earth, because without the earth there is no rain. The clouds which are in heaven are of the earth, but also of heaven. It is one shared cycle.

Through this hierarchy, which cannot be changed, everything is reversible at the level of yin yang but not at the level of heaven and earth, where the hierarchy is constant. Heaven is at the top, earth at the bottom, and that is unchangeable. Heaven is in control and earth is obedient with no possible reversal. Without that there would not even be chaos, there would be nothing. Within the framework of heaven and earth, there is a yin yang movement, and that is always reversible according to the laws of return. It is the same within a human being, everything changes, but we can never change the position of what corresponds to heaven and earth. We cannot have our chest below our navel, or the po in command of the hun.

It is very easy to be confused about this, especially when we are working with qi. Certain things cannot change. They are just part of reality as it is. There is no point in speculating what it might be like to have my chest below my feet because this possibility just does not exist. It is not that it is forbidden, it is just not possible.

We must be careful because we live in a time of virtual reality and each time we watch TV, listen to the radio or read a newspaper, there is a kind of enlarging of that virtuality. Virtuality is actually invading our minds and changing the structure of our reality. Everything is possible because it is virtually possible. In virtual reality I may put heaven below and earth above. Why not? But it is not reality.

For many people it is more and more easy to be confused. In qi gong it is very important to remain very strict about that, because in this too there is a lot of the 'virtual' - something between imagination, sensitivity, reality, which is not so clear cut. It is the same with disease and symptoms. But the thing is just to be aware. And the texts can help us with this clarity.

Question: What do you say when physicists compare modern physics with Chinese classical thought? Each time there is an accurate description of reality, there is something that goes beyond that moment of time or the prevailing culture even if its expression is linked to that time and the language of the culture. In this case, what the modern scientists are seeing in reality is certainly not the same thing that the ancient Chinese saw. But they are both looking at the same thing and certainly with some deep accuracy. The best of each approach has something in common, but which cannot be assimilated as the same thing.

'Yin and yang are male and female for blood and qi. Left and right are ways and passes for yin yang.'

We know that there is a different yin yang balance in the body of a man and in the body of a woman. The man is lead by the qi and the yang, the woman by the yin and the blood. It induces differences in the movement of the psychology as well as the physiology and at the level of the organs. It is of course yin yang which is at the basis of this differentiation, and this is perceptible for instance through the extraordinary meridians, which are also a way to organize the yin and yang through the blood and qi.

Left and right refer to all the descending yin and ascending yang movements, and all the organization of blood and qi within the human body, with some differences for male and female. The left and right are not exactly the same for male and female, because blood and qi are not managed in quite the same way, and in a woman's body the descending and concentrating movement of the yin is prevalent, attracting and conducting the blood to concentrate in the uterus. In men the ascending and diffusing movement is prevalent, conducting the blood to move upwards and outwards to the skin of the face to fertilize the skin and allow the growth of the beard.

Because of this general difference, there is also a difference between left and right, so we may tend to needle on one side rather than the other. There is not the same result or the same effect on the general organization, because the physiology is different. In certain schools the points of the yin and yang qiao mai Kidney 6 (shao hai) and Bladder 62 (shen mai) will be used on the left or the right according to male and female, day and night. That is the result of this kind of thinking.

'Water and fire are signs and evidence for the yin yang.'

Fire and water are seen as the first expression of yin yang because they have no real form. Water may take any form, but it keeps none. Fire has no form. As it says in Huainanzi chapter 1, they are an

intermediary between having a form and not having a form. From this point of view they are the first and the most complete expression of the yin yang. That which has a form cannot express the yin or the yang as well as something that does not have a form. Nevertheless, water and fire have perceptible qualities that show as clearly as possible the qualities of the yin or the yang. So through water and fire we may have the most accurate image of the yin and yang, and a way to detect signs of yin yang everywhere, including in the body. When we look at fire we have a hint of what we mean by the yang; considering water we are able to understand something of the yin. When we look at the human body and all the characteristics of the pulse, or the symptoms, behind that there is also a hint of the meaning of yin and yang.

'Yin yang is the power and the beginning for the ten thousand beings.'

It is the power of life, but it is also the origin of all illness and the destruction of life. There follows in the text an example of the yang prevailing without the yin coming to balance it, and the yin prevailing over the yang. They both lead to death, when the imbalance reaches a point of no return, no reversal. The subsequent question is how to regulate them, and the answer given is:

'If one knows the seven decreasing and the eight increasing (qi sun ba yi) one is able to regulate (tiao) both.'

Seven and eight is a way to balance the yin yang, which here includes sexuality. It is a matter of balancing the yin yang in each aspect of life with 'the seven decreasing and eight increasing' which is a general name for several recipes or situations.

'Acting without this knowledge leads to a premature decline (zao shuai). At 40 the yin qi are reduced by half and activity (qi ju) declines (shuai). At 50 the body is heavy (ti zhong) ears and eyes are no more acute and clever (cong ming). At 60 the yin is impotent (including sexual impotence, yin wei) and the qi are in a great decline, the nine orifices (jiu qiao) no longer function well (bu li), the lower part being empty (xu) and the upper part full (shi). Nasal mucous and tears (ti qi) come out.'

Everything begins with the decline of the yin. The essences which provide the strength of the kidneys are declining, and through that, activity is reduced. The body is heavy at 50 not only because there is less qi but because of the decline of the yin, the qi are reduced. Little by little we see all the effects of this lack of vitality. At 60 there is a perverse fullness of fluids in the upper body, and without qi to retain them, they leak out. This is just another way of saying that the yang is based in the yin. The yang is always dependent on the yin, but the yin is destroyed and disturbed by the yang. Without the yang the yin cannot continue to function fully, without the yin the yang is powerless.

Finally, close to the end of the chapter, we see another example of the similarity of the yin yang in the human body and in nature:

'Considering the yin yang in its relationship with heaven and earth, sweat (han) is yang, its name coming from the rain (yu) of heaven and earth. Qi are yang, their name coming from the rapid wind (ji feng) of heaven and earth. Qi are in the image (xiang) of thunder (lei). Rebellious (ni), the qi are like yang.'

This is a very common presentation, yin and yang within the body are likened to yin yang as expressed in nature. When there is an allusion to the wind or the east, it is clear that it is not simply a poetic comparison but a kind of scientific evaluation. We know one by means of the other. Sweat is a liquid derived from the body fluids, but it comes out of the body under the action of the yang qi, as the rain falls on the earth due to an impulse coming from heaven. Both sweat and rain restore balance in the temperature, either of the body or in the weather.

The relationship between qi and wind is a very ancient one and the yang aspect of the qi as opposed to the yin aspect of the sweat is reinforced by the rapidity of the wind. This yang aspect of the qi is also related to the sudden violence of thunder. Thunder is a manifestation of anger in heaven, as an overheating and over-ascending movement of the qi is a sign of anger in the human being. Very often such qi is called rebellious; moving too strongly with the yang it is going against the movement of life.

SUWEN CHAPTER 25

Finally, let us look at the text of Suwen chapter 25, which sums this up very well:

'The human being receives life (sheng) from earth, but depends for his/her destiny (xuan ming) on heaven. The joint qi (he qi) of heaven and earth have a name (ming) which is humanity.'

The human being is able to respond (ying) to the four seasons which is to have heaven and earth as father and mother. The 'perfect man' in the unity of the qi of heaven and earth, knows (zhi) the ten thousand beings, thus he is called child of heaven (tian zi).

'Heaven has yin and yang, man has twelve rhythms (jie); heaven has cold and heat, the human being has emptiness and fullness (xu shi).'

The yin yang qi of heaven are expressed in human beings as the twelve meridians. They show their power with the coming of the yang and their decline with the coming of the yin, and that may be seen as emptiness and fullness.

'To be able to model (jing) the transformation of the yin yang of heaven and earth, is not to leave the rhythm of the four seasons. And to know the reasons (li) of the twelve rhythms is the knowledge (zhi) that the sage cannot miss.'

To be able to model or keep the yin yang as the norm is the way of the sage, it is the way to avoid any error or any fault.

'...When the human is alive his/her form is never separated from the yin yang.'

All that occurs within human life and within the human body is made according to the yin yang.

