

Title Page:

A Brief History of Qi
Zhang Yu Huan and Ken Rose

A Brief History of Qi

Zhang Yu Huan and Ken Rose

ISBN # 0-912111-63-1

© 2001 Zhang Yu Huan and Ken Rose

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Zhang, Yu Huan, 1973-

A brief history of qi / Yu Huan Zhang and Rose Ken.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-912111-63-1 (alk.)

1. Qi (Chinese philosophy) 2. Philosophy, Taoist. I. Rose, Ken, 1952- II. Title.

B127.C49 Z435 2003

299'.514--dc21

2001006164

Paradigm Publications

44 Linden Street

Brookline, Massachusetts 02445

All rights reserved No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

Cover design by Laura Shaw Designs

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iv
<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>Foreword</i>	vi
<i>Chapter 1 . . . The Literary Traditions of Qì</i>	1
Section 1: Etymologies—The Roots of Qì	3
Section 2: Definitions	9
Section 3: Passages from Ancient Texts	11
Section 4: Selections from Modern Writers	13
Section 5: Concepts in Other Cultures that Correlate with Qì	15
<i>Chapter 2 . . . The Qì of the Philosophers</i>	23
Section 1: The Role of Qì in Ancient Cosmology and Ontology	25
Section 2: Qì in the Explanations of Natural Phenomena and as the Basis of Social Structures	27
Section 3: Qì and Dào	41
Section 4: The Qì of Kong Zi, Meng Zi, and the Confucian School	47
Section 5: The Influence of Qì in Western Philosophy:	52
<i>Chapter 3 . . . Qì in the Arts</i>	59
Section 1: The Momentum of Qì —Yì Qì Hē Chéng	60
Section 2: The Dance of Qì	63
Section 3: Qì in the Education and Training of Artists: The Basis of Aesthetic Standards	68
Section 4: The Charm of Qì	70
Section 5: Understanding Qì: Perception and Appreciation of Art	76
<i>Chapter 4 . . . Qì in Medicine</i>	83
Section 1: The Concept of Qì in Medicine	85
Section 2: The Differentiation of Qì in Anatomy and Physiology	87
Section 3: The Role of Qì in Diagnostics and Therapeutics	90
Section 4: Nourishing and Treating Qì for Health and Longevity	94
Section 5: Theoretical Tools to Identify and Use Qì in TCM	102
<i>Chapter 5 . . . Qì Gōng</i>	117
Section 1: Ancient Roots and Practices	119
Section 2: The Aims of Qì Gōng Practitioners	122
Section 3: Qì Gōng and the Ancient Search for the Internal Elixir	125
Section 4: The Real and the Fake	139
<i>Chapter 6 . . . Qì in the Martial Arts</i>	141
Section 1: The Power of Qì	143
Section 2: Qì and Gōng Fū	145
Section 3: The External and the Internal	146
Section 4: Masters and Secrets	149
Section 5: <i>Tài Jí Quán</i> , Qì, and Their Contemporary Relevance	154
<i>Chapter 7 . . . Qì in Daily Life</i>	161
Section 1: Qì in Modern Chinese Language	162
Section 2: Familiar Experiences and Expressions of Qì	167
Section 3: Qì and the Chinese World View	172
Section 4: The Future of Qì	176
<i>The Ten Heavenly Stems and Twelve Earthly Branches</i>	181
<i>The Twenty-Four Seasonal Divisions</i>	182
<i>A Concise Chronology of Chinese History</i>	183
<i>Bibliography</i>	184
<i>Index</i>	185

Acknowledgements

A book about ancient Chinese cultural ideas and artifacts is almost bound to be the result of a collaborative effort. The amount of information that it takes to construct an adequate context for understanding something as fundamental as *qi* can be overwhelming. And once the material is amassed, there is still the even more daunting challenge of coming to understand it. We have been fortunate to have the help of a large number of people in our efforts to meet this challenge. We could not possibly name them all, but there are some who have been uncommonly generous with their time and attention.

Thanks to Nigel Wiseman for reading a relatively early version of the manuscript and offering his comments and encouragement and to Guo Hong Yue for a thoughtful assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. In countless conversations in and out of classes and clinics we have chewed over the ideas that fill the following pages with students, teachers, friends, and loyal adversaries in debate. This is part of the process whereby knowledge can become excellent. Our publishers, Bob Felt and Martha Fielding, honor us with their continued support and cooperation. Without them, this book simply would not have come into being.

Martin Inn has been a steadfast guide on the path of personal understanding and cultivation of *qi* for over thirty years. Students always struggle with the question of how will it ever be possible to repay the gift received from a great teacher. Martin's comment that this is the book he always wanted to write was therefore especially gratifying. Even today it is possible to recognize some of the most basic ideas and sensibilities that appear in the following pages in Martin's *tái jī* class.

Thanks to Tom Kepler for the invitation to visit the Santa Fe Institute and for his thought-provoking discussion that helped us understand ways that the ancient Chinese concept of *qi* might find its way into the vanguard of modern scientific research.

We want to thank Prof. Jiang Yong Guang and the library of the Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine for access to their research archives. Likewise we want thank Prof. Zhu Jian Ping and the library of the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine for access to their collections and for his guidance and support.

The names mentioned here are just a handful of the people who have helped and encouraged us over the years that we've been working on this book. Despite the help and guidance received, the journey towards understanding *qi* is necessarily a personal one. In the end the questionable decision to write a book about ideas that are hard to grasp and harder still to express was ours alone, as are the necessary omissions and errors that our work, despite our best efforts, no doubt still contains. One of the reasons we present a book like this is, of course, to pass on the received traditions on the subject of *qi*. But another one we acknowledge is to invite the scrutiny of readers in the hopes that they can find and point out our errors.

Zhang Yu Huan and Ken Rose
Chengdu and Berkeley
2001

Preface

THE QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING ancient Chinese traditions and mysteries has been a continuous theme among Chinese writers throughout recorded history. Thus there has come down to those of us in the current age a rich legacy of literary records that share this theme and bear witness to this enduring quest. Chief among the topics discussed in such works of literature are questions related to *qì*. To the Chinese mind in ages past, *qì* was a kind of substantial force on which everything depends for sustenance and survival; and it was used as a term in a wide range of discussions on subjects from anatomy to astronomy, and of course medicine. There is *qì* everywhere.

Those familiar with the Chinese literature on the subject will recognize in the current volume, this *Brief History of Qì*, a work that can find an appropriate place in this long literary tradition. Despite the fact that it appears in English, it reflects a deep understanding of the conventions of the Chinese language and Chinese thought. Its rich dependence on classical texts as sources of illustrative material on the manifold aspects of *qì* is evidence of the authors' grasp of the importance of the contextual understanding of this curious Chinese notion, at once simple and complex.

Such a book is frankly rare in the foreign literature on this subject, as non-Chinese scholars and writers have often overlooked the subtleties as well as the grand scheme of traditional Chinese learning. We can see in the pages that follow that the authors have accepted their responsibility for the faithful transmission of Chinese ideas sincerely and have sought to execute it with great devotion. Perhaps it is their personal relationship that lends the authors the immediacy and precision of their insights into how difficult Chinese concepts and words can be rendered into English terms, which appear to this reader to closely convey the sense of the originals. Whatever its origins, we can be grateful for the authors' penetrating appraisal of the roots and branches of this central theme of Chinese literature and life: *qì*.

Today we stand on the threshold of a new age of scientific synthesis. The treasures of ancient Chinese thought and culture now find their way into the vocabularies and, more importantly, into the theoretical speculation of researchers in a wide range of fields from economics to cosmology to artificial intelligence and life. A growing science of complexity now begins to weave an interconnecting network of theoretical models that can be used to explore and explain a wide spectrum of natural systems.

Lo and behold, the ancient Chinese possessed their own scheme of systematic complexities and correspondences. And, as the authors have faithfully pointed out in the following pages, it all depends on *qì*.

Zhu Jian Ping
China Institute for History of Medicine & Medical Literature
China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine
Beijing, China
July 5, 2001

Foreword

DISCUSSION OF THE SAGES WITH ONE SINGLE QÌ

ACCORDING TO WRITTEN RECORDS, Chinese civilization has a history of more than five thousand years. In fact, it should be more than eight thousand years according to recent studies by Chinese scholars. Until today, study and research of ancient civilization and philosophy remain in a more or less chaotic state. Modern people who attempt to trace their origins to the ancients often display their ignorance and more resemble than understand barbarians who wore animal skins and drank blood and who danced when the sun rose and sang when the moon appeared. They can differentiate neither gods from ghosts nor truth from illusion. Even the most renowned experts cannot pull themselves out of confusion. Laborious sowing and planting often produces no fruitful harvest.

Ancient philosophy used humble perspectives to explain phenomena. In time some explanations became clear. Some faded away; some were completely abandoned. The theory of one single qì comes from the Yin and Zhou periods. It was first raised by Yin Yun of the Warring States period. He was first to assert that qì is the basis of material existence. Qì is *yuán qì* [original qì]. In Lao Zi's book it is called *dào*. In *Lu's Spring and Autumn Annals*, it is called *tài yī* [great oneness] or *yuán bāo* [original bud]. It is called *tài jí* [ultimate limit] in the *Book of Changes*. In other words, these terms, *tài yī*, *tài jí*, and *dào* are all synonymous. They refer to the *yuán qì* before the separation of heaven and earth. This qì is the material that permeates everything. It "covers heaven and carries the earth, extends in all four directions, and gives rise to the eight extremities. It is so high that it cannot be measured. It folds heaven and earth within it and is possessed of no shape." Qì is also a worldview that asserts the whole world came from nothing to something, from chaos to order. From this perspective the *Huai Nan Zi* derived the model of existence of the world: "The *dào* begins with emptiness. Extensive emptiness gives birth to the world. The world gives birth to qì. Qì gives birth to heaven and earth. The endowment of the essence of heaven and earth yields yīn and yáng. The concentration of this essence becomes the four seasons. The distribution of essence becomes ten thousand things."

This has become the basic structure of the Chinese worldview for thousands of years. "Heaven and earth mingle their qì. The pairing of things gives birth by itself." (Wang Chong). This idea of the *dào* of heaven is the nature of the theory of one single qì. All Chinese philosophers follow it. This idea of qì is so deep and wide; it binds all Chinese philosophy and culture. This idea covers all of heaven and earth, mankind, nature, the four seasons, emptiness and reality, animals, plants, water and fire, spirits and gods. Who knows how many wise sages and gods have whiled away their days in contemplation of this view of the world. Whole schools of thought, the Daoists and Buddhists, have been absorbed by it. No matter god, sage, wise man, or philosopher, they all obey this idea wholeheartedly and give themselves over to seek its *dào*. From ancient times until today, there is no great opposition to this main theory, even though there has been some variation in the method of practice. Nor does it matter if one is a follower of materialism or idealism. Thus in it we behold the understanding of the divine of the ancient philosophers.

These ancient philosophers believed that the birth, existence, transformation, and disappearance of everything in the world happen under the influence of *qì*. The birth and death of heaven, earth, wind, clouds, thunder, rain, mountains, water, forests, woods, animals, insects, flowers—all are caused by *qì*. The birth, aging, sickness and death of human beings, the persistence of time and the whims of fate, the prosperity and misfortunes of the country, disasters and blessings—all cannot be explained without *qì*. “The birth of ten thousand things all take order from *yuán qì*.” “When heaven and earth mingle their *qì*, ten thousand things are born. Heaven covers from above, the earth limits from below; and *qì* steams up from below; *qì* falls down from above. Ten thousand things are born in between.” (Wang Chong).

Thus the understanding of the existence of the whole world comes from the transformation of *qì*. Therefore, the importance and mysteries of *qì* have been well established. In Wang Fu’s *Qian Fu Lun*, he says:

“The function of dào and its virtue does not exceed qì. Dào is the root of qì. Qì is the beginning of dào. It must have root; thus qì is born. It must have beginning; thus transformation is accomplished. The dào acts on things by reaching the divine to become marvelous. This is its charge to arrive at strength to become great. Heaven uses its movements; the earth uses its stillness. The sun uses its light; the moon uses its brightness. The four seasons and five phases, spirits, gods, and people, the myriad manifestations, the changes of good fortune and misfortune, which of these does not result from qì? The inexplicable idea of the virtue of dào. still cannot surpass the idea of qì. Nevertheless, dào is the root of qì. Qì is the function of dào.”

This relationship between the root and the function of Wang Chong left a dispute as to which comes first for later generations. “The surface of the world has no limit, the end of the world is endless.” The limitless world is the transformation of great *qì*. There cannot be anything else. It is the same for the creation of heaven. “*Yuán qì* is bright and great, thus it is called bright heaven. Bright heaven is *yuán qì*; it manifests brightness. There is nothing else” (Yang Quan: Chan Fu). The *qì* of *yīn* and *yáng* fulfills the great void. There is nothing outside and there is no gap in between. The appearance of heaven and the shape of the earth are all included in this boundary. However, the transformation of the *qì* of heaven and earth circulates without stopping; it has perpetual life. Thus the life of the ten thousand things is born and grows.

The birth and death of life happens under the influence of *qì*; it transforms emptiness. Emptiness transforms into divinity; divinity transforms into *qì*; *qì* transforms into blood, blood transforms into shape; shape transforms into infancy; infancy transforms into childhood; childhood transforms into youth; youth transforms into adulthood; adulthood transforms into old age; old age transforms into death; death then turns back to emptiness; emptiness then transforms back to divinity; divinity then transforms back into *qì*; *qì* then transforms back into things. These transformations are like the chain of rain. It continues without stop. The livelihood and death of the ten thousand things are not issues of self-desire. Even if the ten thousand things have no desire to be born, they must be born. Even if the ten thousand things have no desire to die, they must die. Thus it can be said that birth does not accord to self-desire; death does not accord to self-expectation. Yan Fu says in his *Yuan Qing*, “Subjected to the whole of heaven, earth,

humankind, all things, birds and beasts, insects and words, grass and wood, in order to resolve the principle of connection: it all begins with one qì. And it evolves into ten thousand things.”

Evidently nothing is not transformed from qì, and nothing is not born from qì. It is so great that it has no outside, so small that it has no inside, so high that it has no above, so deep that it has no below. It creates heaven and earth and transforms the ten thousand things. It nourishes life. It implements the great dào. It threads together rationale and virtue. It is the root and function that can interconnect human nature.

Qì is the mother of things; the mother of things is the mother that gives birth and nourishment to all things. Qì includes all things; all appearances are included in it. The qì of the country is called “the counting of qì.” If the country is divided and its ruler has passed away, it is said, “the counting of qì has ended.” The qì of the general is called “integrity of qì.” The qì of man is called the “manner of qì” or the “qualities of qì.” The qì of heaven is called the “weather of qì.” The qì of god is called “immortal qì” or “spiritual qì.” The qì of ghosts is called “bewitching qì” or “evil qì.” The marvel of all things is humanity. Humans are born from qì. They receive qì from nature. They protect the true yuán qì. The body adjusts the qì of yíng and wèi. To be born, one must depend on qì. To live, one must depend on qì. To grow strong, one must rely on qì. Sickness decreases qì. Death depletes qì. If one does not drink for days or eat for weeks, still one may not die; but one will surely die from not breathing qì for less than an hour. It is clear how precious qì is.

Zhang Yu Huan and Ken Rose, distinguished scholars of Oriental medicine and philosophy, have worked more than ten years on the subject of qì. They consulted thousands of classics to gather and compile material on qì. Together they made a thorough inquiry of this idea and wrote *A Brief History of Qì*. This work gives precise explanations of the ontology of qì, the transformations of qì, and the merging and driving force of qì in the fields of ancient Chinese philosophy, literature, art, self-cultivation, medicine, health preservation, and science and technology. It lets Western scholars recognize and understand China. It reveals the apparent chaos and mystery but also the vitality of qì so that people can better recognize the indispensable existence of qì in the universe.

With the publication of *A Brief History of Qì*, we witness a growing understanding of Oriental culture to which these scholars have made long-lasting contribution to bridge East and West. This achievement should be deeply respected and admired. It conforms to the sentiments of Eastern scholars. I use the tip of my pen to wish that Ken and Yu Huan can harvest more fruit in their research of Eastern culture. When they honored me with a copy of their book, I felt delighted to write this brief foreword.

Professor Chu Cheng Yan
Early Autumn of 2000
At Bu Xi Zhai in Cheng Du
Sichuan, People's Republic of China

「氣」之下話先賢（代序）

褚成炎

中華文明史，據典籍所載多逾五季，近年專家細考實身為六千年以上。古所創之文明以及古老的哲學家，相當部份至今仍在混沌迷忘之中。時人索言有似如毛飲血之徒，看太陽即淋，見皎月常歌，是神是怪，真或幻，扞胸搔頭，專門研究家往往也陷入死胡同，苦耕無果。

古哲用樸素的審視觀，闡述事理，經年許久或已朗明，或已淡化，或被棄之。而產生於殷周的「氣一元論」，這我國人文第一個提出氣是物質的存在，氣即元氣，老子書中稱為「道」，《呂氏春秋》稱太元苞，在《易》裡稱太極。說明太元、太極、道是同義語，指天地未分的元氣而言。它既是滲透到萬物中，覆天載地，廓四方，拆八極，高不可測，包裹天地，受無形之物質，又是宇宙從無到有，從混沌到有

序的一種世界觀（概念三重性），爾後《淮南子》推出的道始於虛廓，虛廓生宇宙，宇宙生氣，氣生天地。天地之散精為陰陽，陰陽之專精為四時，四時之散精為萬物（《天文訓》）的宇宙生存模式，成為幾千年來的宇宙生存觀的基本架構。「天地合氣為偶自生」（王充）的天道自然「氣一元論」更為諸哲遵從。使「氣」這一博大精深，緊系中華哲理、文化、涉天地人倫、草木寒暑、虛空實物、昆蟲禽獸、水火

鬼神的宇宙觀，幾千年來不知消磨了多少明哲、仙人、諸子百家、慧道智佛、驚世學者的歲月。神耶、聖耶、哲耶都衷而服其理，身而求其道。古昔而今，實物唯心之學，即或枯槁所視為玄之又玄大道不悖，可與古哲起人、神悟也！

先哲以為宇宙萬事萬物的產生，存在、變化、消失身受「氣」而化之。天地風雲雷雨，水林木、禽獸昆蟲、花鳥，生之亦因氣也。人的生老病死，時乘運

射，國祚興衰，災害禍福無一離乎其「氣」。萬物
自生，皆稟元氣。（王充：「天地合氣，萬物自生，夫
天覆於上，地偃於下，下氣蒸上，上氣下降，萬物自生
其間矣。」對宇宙萬物的生存，視之為氣化所得，這
便奠定了「氣」的重要性和常人不易詮釋的神秘
性了。王符《潜夫論》云：「道德之用，莫大於氣。道者，氣
之根也。氣者，道之始也。必有其根，其氣乃生，必有
其始，變化乃成。是故道之存物也，至神以妙，其為

功也。玉強以天，天之以動，地之靜，日之光，月之明，四時
五行，鬼神人民，德兆丑類，變異吉凶，何非氣然？
人們所見物類現象，內心感受，何非氣然？數千年
來，人們難以明狀的道德，仍感莫大於氣也。且
「道者，氣之根，氣者，道之使。」王氏所言之「根」，使
關係給後人留下孰先孰後之爭議。

「宇之表無極，宙之端無窮。」（張衡《靈憲》）表
無極端無窮的宇宙，是太氣而化，非他物所成。天亦

茲也。元氣皓天，則稱皓天。皓天者，元氣也。皓然而已，無他物也。《楊泉《蠶賦》》陰陽二氣充滿太虛，外無他物，亦無間隙。天之象，地之形，皆其氣圍，外無他物，亦無間隙，而天地之氣化，又是流行不息，變不已的。是故生命萬物化生而成焉。

生命的源起和死之，是在氣的作用下由虛無而化生，虛而化神，神而化氣，氣而化血，血而化形，形而化嬰，嬰而化童，童而化少，少而化壯，壯而化老，老而化死，

死而復化為虛，虛而復化為神，神而復化為氣，氣而復化為物。化化不間，由環無窮。萬物生之，死亦非自欲，萬物非欲生者，不得生；萬物非欲死而不得死，可謂生非所欲，死非所期。《莊子》《齊物論》中云：「通天地人物禽獸，見比蜺，莫不以為一，以求其通會之理，始於一氣，演成萬物，可見之氣是無所不化，無所不生，大無其外，小無其內，高無其上，深無其下，成天地，化萬物，育生靈，運行大道，貫

理德，通人性的根使。

氣是物母，物母者，化育萬物之母體也。

氣是無所不包，萬象盈虛空谷的。國之氣曰「國氣」，國破帝崩之氣數已盡，將帥之氣為「氣節」，人之氣為「氣派」或「氣質」，天之氣為「氣候」，地之氣為「氣場」或「貫氣」，神之氣為「仙氣」或「靈氣」，鬼之氣為「妖氣」或「邪氣」，萬物之靈皆「一也」，生於氣，外得自然之氣，護其真元之氣，身調營衛，之氣。

養依氣，活靠氣，性賴氣，病損氣，死喪氣。
三日不飲，周日不餐，非必死，時無氣息多死亡，可見
氣之珍也！

著名學者，東方醫藥學家，哲學家張大龍先生及其伉儷張宇珠小姐歷時十數載，閱典千萬卷，把中華醫國至今有關「氣」的文獻收集整理，窮通達解，著成《氣之簡史》，使東方學者望「氣」興嘆的古老宇宙學，成為首部補白的專著，大凡氣的

起源、氣的化育，氣在中國古代哲學家文論、藝術修養、醫學養生、科學技術等領域所起到的融合、促進發展、質變之力量，作了科學、正確的論述，闡明氣在人們精神意識形態中的重要性，使西方學者認識并了解中國，揭開了氣看似混沌神秘的面紗，讓人們更好的認識氣存在於宇宙的不可割性。

《天氣的問史》的出版，看到了一位西方學者研究東方文化的高深造詣和溝通東西方文化的不朽貢獻，

其業績將會載入世界史冊，功不末焉，實乃可敬可佩，也使東方學人感慨萬千不可言狀。只有筆端祝願大龍君及其伉儷宇琛小姐研究東方文化碩果豐出，是書付梓，索序於余，理當樂而為之。

壬午年八月十五日騰文閣中照本抄錄

中國四川省綿陽市王世淳并識

Calligraphy by
Wang Shi Chun,
Sichuan PRC.