

## Discussion of yin yang's ascent and descent

This is section six of Bai Yuchan's *Zazhu Zhixuan Pian* (miscellaneous essays guiding toward the mystery).<sup>1</sup>

Heaven employs the Way of *Qián* (乾 ☰) which is light and clear above. Earth employs the Way of *Kūn* (坤 ☷) which is heavy and turbid below. *Yuán* (元) qi circulates endlessly between these two. The higher uses yang, the qi of unified yang beginning to arise from earth just after "the arrival of winter."<sup>2</sup> It continues for 180 days until it reaches heaven. When yang peaks yin is born.

The lower uses yin, which accumulates for 180 days until it reaches earth. When yin reaches an extreme, yang is born.<sup>3</sup>

One ascends, one descends, coming and going without cease. Humans receive the true qi (沖和之氣 *chōng hé zhī qì*)<sup>4</sup> generated between heaven and earth, and humans are from their very origin not separate from heaven and earth. The qi of heaven and earth circulates over a year, while the qi of humans circulates over a day. Yang ascends from 子 *zǐ* at midnight until 巳 *sì* at 11:00 AM, so the time of 子 *zǐ* is the day's equivalent to the winter solstice. Yin descends from 午 *wǔ* at noon until 亥 *hài* at 11:00 PM, so 午 *wǔ* is the day's equivalent to the summer solstice.

In the *Yijing*, the time of 子 *zǐ* at midnight is the hexagram *Fù* "Return":



The time of 午 *wǔ* at noon is the hexagram *Gòu* "Coming to meet":



Reaching the extreme of yin, yang is born; when yang peaks, yin is born. Morning and night come and go in the same way as yin and yang ascend and descend between heaven and earth.

A person should imitate this bellows-like<sup>5</sup> action of heaven and earth, quietly rising, gently descending, a single qi circulating amongst the hundred joints of the body, then upon opening the qi will emerge, while when closing the qi will enter. The qi emerging is like earthly qi ascending upward. Qi entering is like

<sup>1</sup> The text of which can be found here: <http://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=591641>

<sup>2</sup> 冬至 *Dōng zhì* winter solstice, approx December 22 in the northern hemisphere or June 21 in the Southern. This is the point when yin has peaked and yang, in a most subtle hidden way,

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<sup>3</sup> One may recall the first part of the first chapter of *Zhuangzi*, where Peng ascends and flies south for 180 days, then returns over a similar duration.

<sup>4</sup> Which is defined as the "true qi between heaven and earth."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Laozi* 5: 天地之間，其若橐籥乎！ "The space between heaven and earth is like a bellows! Empty and inexhaustible, producing more with each movement."

heavenly qi dropping in descent. If this is done, then one can match the longevity of heaven and earth.

But if you gallop around the realm of dust and flowers, and contend in the arena of true and false, your true qi will be dispersed and wasted, no longer yours: this is not as good as nourishing it in emptiness and quiet, holding to the center.

“The Center” means the place where the qi gathers from heaven, earth and the mysterious female. If a person can hold it with unified thought and not disperse it, then true essence (真精 *zhēn jīng*) will of itself reach a peak, the primal qi will gather of itself, the valley spirit will remain without being forced, the three afflictions (三尸 *sān shī*) will depart of themselves, the nine worms will be destroyed of themselves. This is the path of long life and eternal perception. And know that none other than this true breathing of primal qi (真息元氣 *zhēn xī yuán qì*) is actually the root of essence and life for the body. This deep-set root and firm stem is the path of long life and eternal perception.<sup>6</sup>

A person’s life depends upon the unified primal qi of the great way (稟大道一元之炁 *bǐng dà dào yī yuán zhī qì*). While the fetus remains in the mother’s uterus, it breathes together with the mother. Once born and the cord cut, one point of primal yang will stay within the Dan Tian, the breath coming in and out through the nose and mouth in the head,<sup>7</sup> connecting with heaven, then rising up into *níwǎn* (泥丸 Mud Pellet)<sup>8</sup>, growing into the primal spirit, and descending into the Dantian where it connects to the primal qi.

*Zhuangzi* said: Average people breathe from their throat, sages breathe from their heels.

“Heels” means that deep-set root and firm stem of the Dao. If a person can eliminate random thoughts, naturally settle the true breath, and take one’s body into formlessness to become one with the Dao, then one can remain in the world for many years.

When we see it like this, how can we not respect the Dao within us? How can we not value it?

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<sup>6</sup> ... 深根固蒂乃長生久視之道。 ... *shēn gēn gù dì nǎi cháng shēng jiǔ shì zhī dào*. This comes from *Laozi* 59: *This is called making the root deep and the basis firm, the Way of long life and eternal vision*. Bai Yuchan uses the homophone “stem” instead of “basis” to add another layer of meaning: the indissoluble nexus of nourishment coming from the Dao.

<sup>7</sup> Literally “connecting with the gate of heaven” (通于天門 *tōng yú tiān mén*); the ‘heavenly gate’ referring to the nose, mouth and forehead.

<sup>8</sup> The Yellow Court Classic of the Inner Realms (黃庭內景經 *Huáng Tíng Nèi Jǐng Jīng*, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) describes *níwǎn* (泥丸) as “the brain’s spirit, the root of essence, is termed *níwǎn*. The place where this spirit resides is called the mud pellet palace.”