

Qi is Essential for Chinese Medicine and Daoist Physical and Spiritual Cultivation. Explain Why and How?

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to bring light to the meaning of Daoist cultivation, and what it means to be a Daoist, and Daoist practice both physical and spiritual. Also, what is the relation between Daoism and Qi in terms of Medicinal Chinese practices?

I believe it is important to understand these topics as a westerner myself, as it is a subject rarely taught in the West. Understanding other people's cultures and ways of life has always served as a bridge between the known and unknown, the familiar and unfamiliar, and in many a circumstance, a way to relate to many others of different backgrounds. By bringing light to the subject, it will benefit from admiration. Qi in Chinese Medicine is such an unknown subject in the West but something I believe to be beneficial for everyone. To think differently to the normality, we have a new perspective of ourselves both body and mind, therefore the study of Chinese medicine is such an intriguing subject with interesting foreign ideas.

My motive for this piece is to get a deeper understanding of Qi, I want to explore credible sources and apply them to my work, bring my interpretation to my chosen topic. It is a topic that illudes many and I wish to eradicate the negative thinking towards Chinese medicine and bring a more scientific approach to the matter.

Firstly, I will explore the presence of Qi in Chinese medicine, from a scientific point of view and a universal point of view, being what things does the Qi effect? and explain the complexity of Qi from the internal and external body, this will be explored by using TCM theory and the concept of Yin and Yang. Secondly, I will emphasise the growth of Daoism, including many aspects of the religion such as beliefs, deities, and health to only scratch the surface, which all connect to the Yin and Yang. Then to conclude my article I will write my findings, the connection of Daoism and Qi, how both connect and harmonise with one another to create a healthy body and life in physical form and spirit.

Qi in Chinese Medicine

TCM practices start with the concept of Qi 气, literal translation meaning 'air' but used to mean 'life force' and 'energy flow'. In the simplest of terms, Qi is energy. It embraces every manifestation of energy, Qi energy is a part of everything, both spiritual and physical, such as movement, cold, light, thought, the heart, feet... Qi is universal. In the classics of Chinese medicine, life is described as the congregation of Qi. A happy and healthy human being is a "dynamic but harmonious mixture of all the aspects of Qi that make up who we are." Qi cannot be created or destroyed in any circumstance; it only changes its manifestation. To explain the relationship between different Qi manifestations, Chinese philosophers must turn to the concept of Yin and Yang.

Regarding Qi in Chinese Medicine, we should first understand two important rules of Qi. Firstly, Qi fluctuates constantly in different levels of aggression. When Qi is condensed the energy amasses and becomes a physical shape. When the Qi scatters, more forms of matter subtly grow. Secondly, Qi energy concurrently embodies both the mental-spiritual and the physical.

Both Chinese doctors and philosophers have discovered the correlation between human beings and the universe, this is the human beings Qi, as Qi is the cooperation of “Heaven and Earth.” “A human being results from the Qi of Heaven and Earth is called a human being.” This quotation affirms the relation between a human being and its environment. Qi is considered the material substance of the universe, but also the mental-spiritual substance of the life of a human. The “Classic of Difficulties” exclaims that ‘Qi is the root of a human being.’

There is only one kind of Qi that embodies several forms, but according to Chinese medicine, many different types of Qi are affecting human being’s bodies and minds in different ways depending on the density of Qi, some affect subtle, and some coarse.

Even though theoretically, there is only one type of Qi energy, doctors and philosophers must learn how to distinguish the Qi’s different forms. Dependent on where the Qi is, it changes its form and what its function is in that area.

The term ‘Qi’ in Chinese Medicine is used in ‘two major’ ways. The first representing the ‘refined energy’ created by the internal organs, the Qi in this sense functions to nourish the mind and body. The refined energy will take many different forms depending on the location and its function in the body.

Two very important forms of Qi are the Nutritive Qi (Ying Qi) which exists within the body. It brings nourishment to the body and is a dense form of Qi. The Defensive Qi (Wei Qi) also protects the body but from the body’s exterior and is less dense than the Nutritive Qi. A disorder of either Nutritive or Defensive Qi can give way to different variations of Qi that need different types of medical treatments. But as exclaimed, these two energies of Nutritive and Defensive are the same Qi energy but manifested into different forms. Another example of the Qi energy within the body is the Gathering Qi (Zong Qi), which embodies the chest area and brings nourishment to the lungs and heart. And the Original Qi (Yuan Qi) which is in the ‘Lower Burner’, brings nourishment to the Kidneys.

Qi becomes a physical form when a human has poor circulation for example. An excessive condensation of Qi can occur from this health issue. This means the Qi has become “pathologically dense” and forms lumps or masses. These various forms of aggression of the Qi energy not only affect the physical but also a human's “emotional-mental-spiritual level simultaneously.”

Both the Liver and blood embody the dense material kind of Qi, and in the sense of emotional and non-materialistic type has the embodiment of anger.

Qi indicates how the internal organs function. When speaking of the Liver-Qi, Chinese doctors and philosophers do not only mean the Qi within the liver but how the liver functions with other organs, how the Qi flows smoothly and benefits the liver's job within the body. This encompasses any organs Qi such as Heart-Qi, Stomach-Qi, Lung-Qi, and so on.

TCM: TCM theory consists of five-element which are the following, wood, earth, fire, metal, and water. The human body is divided into these five systems, and all have their own specific needs of treatment which is “inferred by analysing those natural materials.” To explain the body’s physiology the movement and change between the elements are used.

The Cultivation of Daoism

The Dao represents what cannot be whole because “it is the whole and all of its parts.”

Daoist cultivation practices consist of -

- Stillness meditation
- Ritual
- Life nourishment through diet
- Internal alchemical meditation
- Martial arts
- Qigong
- Living harmoniously with the calendar and its seasons

To have an indication of Daoist cultivation is called Xingming Shuangxiu (性命雙修), translating to ‘double life’. Meaning a human's physical health and vitality are working in unison.

Daoist beliefs are spiritually rich and diverse. The basic goal for a Daoist is to be in a “state of health,” having a calming and harmonious spirit as it is seen to reflect the universe.

What is Daoism?

To put it simply, the practice of Daoism is understood as a polytheistic religion as its pantheon has more than one deity. The pantheon consists of three purities, their names are Yu Qing, Tai Qing, and Shang Qing. These three deities represent the Dao in its many aspects. These deities are better known as the ‘Three Pure Pellucid Ones,’ ‘Three Divine Teachers’ and ‘Three Pristine Ones’(三清). From the Daoist book the Dao de Jing (道德经), it was believed that “The Dao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things.” But the thought of how ‘Two produced Three’ has become a popular debate between Daoist scholars. Most agree that the ‘Three Divine Teachers’ are the representation of how the Yin and Yang interact, and its presence of Qi, or life force.

Daoist Beliefs and Practices

Chinese etiquette has a large presence in Daoist society. Daoist's bow to each other to show respect to others. Also, when two people bow to each other it shows mutual respect. When bowing to a shrine it shows a respect for “and alignment with the energies of the shrine.” Many variations of Daoist bow methods are used but “all have the left (auspicious) hand on the outside”.

Daoists have shrines which are Qi nodes or access points between the self-body and the Dao, some even explain these shrines as a gateway to the Dao. Oils and incense are used to show your support to the shrine. The shrine represents many other things other than self-body such as the cosmic body, the flame represents the spirit, and the incense is the breath. Early shrines, instead of using incense oils, would use oil lamps which were used instead of candles. The oil is what is needed for the flame

in the lamp to ignite. Every shrine has a box in which both supporters and pilgrims give contributions to pay for these incense oils and other means of support such as upkeep of the sacred shrine.

Other offerings are placed inside the shrine, aside from money which include incense, flowers, and fruits. These offerings are most popularly given to the Daoist shrines during large Chinese festivals such as the “first and fifteenth of the lunar month” which is the new and full moon.

The Relationship between Qi and Yin and Yang

The Qi energy and the Daoist Yin and Yang, these two forces are the root of Chinese medicine. The Qi is vital energy, the energy in which the Yin and Yang balance. The Yin and Yang are two opposite forces but flow from one another. Like Qi, there is only one Qi yet it changes its density and strength depending on its location.

The dynamics of Qi and Yin and Yang form the stems or ‘roots’ of Chinese medicine, From the dynamics of Qi and Yin Yang, some basic theories and principles are followed, thus the creation of Chinese medicine. The founder of Chinese medicine was named Shen nong, also known as a ‘Divine Husbandman’. It is believed that during Huangdi’s (the Yellow Emperor) ruling, the Huangdi Neijing (The Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic) was written. Huangdi Neijing means the ‘Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor’ or ‘Esoteric Scripture of the Yellow Emperor’. This piece of writing is a ‘Chinese medical text’ which has been used as the ‘fundamental doctrinal source for Chinese medicine for more than two millennia. The work consists of two texts, both containing eighty-one chapters, using a ‘question-and-answer format’ between the legendary Yellow Emperor, and six of his ministers.

What Chinese doctors aim to do is create harmony in the body's system, once there is a disruption in one area it creates a ripple effect and creates tension in other areas be it life or the body itself. The belief of interconnection between everyone and everything is integral for Daoist thought, when one disturbance occurs the flow of harmony becomes stagnant and the system is thrown off balance, aka the Yin and Yangs balance. This rule applies to all systems. It applies to everyone and everything equally, nothing is of higher stature on earth. Systems such as the community, environment family, etc all connect and have a system. Therefore, our physical and verbal actions also connect to creating harmony.

The Yin and Yang are terms used to define “relative opposite qualities or manifestations of Qi.” When the Yin is ‘form’ then Yang is the ‘function’ when Yin is ‘material’, Yang becomes ‘immaterial’ for example.

Yin and Yang have different manifestations of Qi as they are opposites. Yin manifests the material, cold, dark, substantial, solid, and passive. Whilst Yang has the opposite manifestations of Qi, therefore, are light, ascending, hot, dry, aggressive, and active.

With every element of Yin, there is an element of Yang and vice versa. “There is nothing so solid or material (Yin) that does not contain some energetic vibrations (Yang).” In every Yin or Yang characteristic, both elements are present but at different strengths.

The Yin and Yang are in continuous change and adjusts to one another, it melds from one to the other in an “eternal dance of becoming.” When for example the Yin is strong, the Yang will give way for the Yin to flow, even if it brings negativity to the body or spirit. The balance of the Yin and Yang symbol shows this concept cleverly by showing both curves segments which shows a non-stagnant

flow of energy, and the small dots representing what I exclaimed earlier being there is an element of Yang within the Yin and an element of Yin within the Yang. When all the yin and yang forms of Qi are in harmonious balance with each other, it results in contentment, wellbeing, and health. When the Yin Yang is out of balance with each other, and there is too little or too much of a certain aspect of Qi relative to another, it results in illness, suffering, and pain.

TMC theory provides guidance for the patient and practitioner on how to best aid the harmony between the patients' Yin and Yang in any circumstance on how to create a great amount of Qi to assist health and wellbeing. These are what are called the “stems” of TMC theory, which grow from the “root concepts of Qi and Yin and Yang.

TCM theory aids the practitioner and patient by offering many perspectives on the dynamics of Qi, and how it plays with Yin and Yang. These many perspectives for example are like an array of different maps but for the same area of land.

Conclusion

To refrain my article question, ‘Qi is essential for Chinese medicine and Daoist physical and spiritual cultivation. Explain why and how?’

We have established that Qi is ingrained in Chinese medicine and is the cause of both health and illness, therefore by understanding Qi, there is an understanding of how to live a healthier life. When treating a patient through methods of Chinese medicine, a balance of Qi is needed. Daoism strongly emphasises the need for a balance of Yin and Yang to also be healthy both physically and spiritually, similarly to Qi. But Qi is the overall energy of which Yin and Yang are a part. ‘Qi is essential for Chinese medicine and Daoist physical and spiritual cultivation’ as Qi is the energy of the universe, everything correlates back to Qi, therefore in Chinese medicine Qi is so important and has been for hundreds of years as a Qi imbalance will always be the root of a problem.

This topic has a lot more to give as it is such a vast subject (science in traditional Chinese medicine) that can take many to be doctors 4+ years to fully learn and understand its practices which include ‘hands-on clinical training’, theories, the uses of Chinese herbs in medicine, ‘diagnostic skills and acupuncture technique.’

In the last few years, the emergence of Chinese medicine shops has become quite a popularity, yet I know of no one who takes advantage of their herbal medicine. My hope for the future is for people of the west to utilise the skills used in Chinese medicine, I have seen herbal medicine work with my own eyes, and it is wonderful how the concept of Qi can benefit so many people yet is so unheard of let alone understood.

To conclude, there is much to learn, and I am more than willing to read more in-depth sources and teachings for my article question. TCM theory is deserving of its article as it has great complexity connecting with the human being's organs and how they work in unison with one another, that is how it connects with Qi. It is an incredibly detailed and in-depth subject and I hope to see more readings and representation of Qi, and Daoism publicised.

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