

Everyday Qi

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“One has to learn to leave things alone. It’s best to keep unwritten as much as possible. Poetry is just the shadow of the dog. It helps us to know the dog is around, but it’s not the dog. The dog is elsewhere, and constantly on the move.”
- Charles Wright

Qi is the most fundamental concept in Traditional Chinese Medicine, yet one of the most difficult to understand from a conventional scientific perspective. It presents one of the main stumbling blocks to acceptance of TCM in Western medicine, and is often dismissed as part of ancient spiritual folklore. The truth, however, is that the concept of Qi is not only based on everyday observation and experience, but it also has correlations in modern science.

Much of the basis for TCM emerged during the Later Zhou Dynasty (770-256 B.C.) when science and medicine began to seek natural causes for events and illness rather than the will of ancestors or the wrath of demons. Observation of the natural world became paramount, formalized in the Naturalist School writings of Zou Yan (350-270 B.C.) with a focus on how living beings behave and transform rather than on static elemental properties of things. The Chinese language is well suited to this experiential focus. Being composed of pictographs rather than letters, each character evokes a flexible impression rather than a limited definition. Each character can also be a noun, verb, or other part of speech with different meanings depending on context. Westerners are given only a few possible English definitions for Chinese pictographs whose full meaning rests in the nuances of imagery.

The classical (pre-Communist) pictograph for Qi is a composite of two images: an image of rice grains (commonly translated as “rice” or “kernel”) enfolded in an image of curling clouds (commonly translated as “air”). Together the composite is typically translated as “air/gas”, “manner/airs”, and “spirit/morale”. In medicine, translations include “psychophysical stuff”, “energy-matter”, and “life stuff” among others. We achieve a deeper understanding by considering the images directly. Rice grains are substantive. As plant seeds they represent both the starting place and end product of a being’s expression. They hold the potential for growth and transformation, and are the substrate of those processes. Curling clouds are ephemeral and ethereal. Their transforming movement suggests the continuous process of expression. Along their path forms may be discerned, but never held in place or defined. Together, rice enfolded in clouds suggests substance enfolded in expression, and expression supported by substance. Considered via quantum physics, Qi is both matter and energy, structure and function, form and behavior, particle and wave.

Qi suggests that the behavior of beings is primary to their physical structure (hence the behavioral focus of English translations like “manner” and “psychophysical stuff”). This is seen in everyday life. If one exercises regularly, muscle tone improves and the body produces hormones that reduce stress and improve immunity. If one works in an oppressive environment, stress hormones effect physical changes like peptic ulcers. We are how we behave. There is biological evidence to support a Lamarckian view of the inheritance of behaviorally acquired traits, in contrast to the Darwinian inheritance of spontaneous mutations. (One has to consider the possibility that spontaneous mutations are simply quantum leaps spawned by very strong adaptive, or maladaptive, behavior patterns.) Both types of inheritance occur, but behavior or the ability to behave in a way that enables genuine self-expression is still the essential necessity for healthy living.

The tenets of quantum physics describe the primacy of behavior. The physical state of a particle is not inherently defined. Rather, it exists as a wave function – a probability cloud that describes its behavior. An example of such a probability cloud is the pattern of electron orbitals of a hydrogen atom. A definable electron isn’t detected until a measurement is made, thus collapsing the wave function down to one possibility. The process by which wave functions consisting of multiple possibilities lose that information down to the moment just before collapse is called decoherence. As a quantum system interacts with other quantum systems, becoming entangled, their combined wave functions develop an additive probability, reducing the number of possibilities down to something approaching the determinate dynamics of classical physics. Decoherence, also called dephasing, thus describes the quantum-classical boundary. This is the realm of Qi, which is better understood as a process than a thing. (In this light, Qi “stagnation” may be viewed as the halting of the process/flow of manifestation.)

In living beings, decoherence may also describe the process by which the unmeasurable aspects of our lives, “things” like feeling and intention, progressively reduce down our possibilities until a measurable physical state is formed. The body’s bioelectromagnetic (BEM) field may represent an intermediate phase in this process, and research suggests the acupuncture meridians correspond to areas of condensation in this field. Changes in the BEM are well known to alter the growth and differentiation of embryos; this could apply equally to processes in adults, with one method of change being the insertion of acupuncture needles to create altered charge distribution in the body’s extracellular matrix. Connective tissues are capable of semi-conduction, and represent the one body structure that comes into contact with all others. And because all the body’s systems are entangled on a quantum level, a change in one instantly induces a change in the others.

Decoherence does not generate actual collapse. It describes the reduction of possibilities as quantum systems become increasingly entangled (i.e. as they

come into relationship with each other). The moment of collapse in the laboratory occurs when a measurement is made. In everyday life this equates to some kind of perceptive contact (visual, auditory, touch, smell, taste). In the laboratory setting what we find depends on what we're looking for. When the double slit experiment is designed to find a wave pattern we find a wave; when it's set up to detect a single photon that's the perceived reality. The measuring device and the scientist cannot be removed from the outcome of the experiment. This must be considered when discussing evidence-based medicine. And it also brings up interesting questions about how we interact with each other in everyday life.

Consider an average veterinary workday. Your first client after lunch is a newcomer; she booked the appointment last week - the beginning of your relationship/entanglement. As you read through the previous hospital's chart notes you begin to develop an impression of both the client's level of care and the patient's health status, further dephasing your respective wave functions. From the chart notes you see an exciting opportunity to try a highly successful herbal formula you learned about at a recent meeting; an intention forms causing further dephasing. You also see she often rejects recommended treatments; an assumption forms which may adversely reduce possible outcomes. As you approach the exam room, you can hear the client cooing to her dog; this auditory contact gives you your first real "measure" of the newcomer. Once you open the door and make eye contact, and shake her hand while petting the puppy, you have finally collapsed each others' wave functions, but only with respect to what each of you is measuring at that moment. She may be sizing you up for your confident appearance or your level of experience, missing other aspects of you that could be beneficial. And what you know about her level of care, or even your excitement about the new formula, could collapse your treatment plan's wave function prematurely.

The question of intent becomes important here. Our intentions flavor our behavior, giving the same act (e.g. inserting a needle at GV20) a variety of different outcomes depending on how our relationship with our patient is dephasing. Our biases, assumptions, habits, and hopes all come into play. If clients hold a strong assumption that their decision will be judged, their expectation of judgment will strongly alter their probability wave; if they entangle with a judgmental doctor both will have their expectations met. How we feel about ourselves and others is the starting point of intention. If we feel free to discover and express ourselves, we will encourage that in others. If we feel restricted by old habits and paradigms, it will take an investment of energy to shift those well-worn patterns. If we feel our patients with an open mind, we are more likely to find the best available fit for their treatment. If we feel with prejudice, we limit everyone's options. In quantum decoherence, feeling really does matter (as a verb and a noun). It is sometimes easy to forget, especially for ourselves, but we must always ask the question "How do you feel?" The answer to that simple question, and the subsequent choices we make, affect everything about how we Qi.

So as we Qi – as we come into relationship with others (entangle) and create our physical reality (dephase) – what should our intention be? How shall we guide our actions in a way that allows for optimum health – in a way that allows our respective waveforms to collapse without bias? We cannot create intention for others, only for ourselves. And we cannot create an intention for a specific outcome (an expectation of what the collapsed waveform should look like); this is neither realistic nor respectful. Even the intent that our needle insertion not hurt may not be appropriate. (If it does hurt, it tells us something we needed to know.)

The steps toward a healthy way of living are described in Chinese medicine by the character De. It is a composite of three pictographs: *step + ten eyes saw no concealment + heart*. The pictograph for *heart* is also translated as *mind, awareness, feelings, center, or middle* depending on context. De is translated as *innate power or inner nature*; it is action derived from our genuine feeling (noun), and by genuinely feeling (verb). (Feeling needs to be distinguished from emotion here. The character for emotion is a *feeling that bites the heart*. The emotions in Chinese medicine describe the heart's suffering when true feeling has been denied. Anger, for example, whose character means *a slave's heart*, occurs when our need to freely express our true feeling has been denied. The character for feeling, Qing, indicates something that transforms our awareness into new growth, and includes the pictograph for alchemical transformation that also appears in Jing, our ability to physically transform nutrients into new growth.) It is our innate dynamic feeling of ourselves that guides us to our most vital and beautiful self-expression. That same feeling generates the ability to empathically feel with others, as well as to create healthy boundaries.

Perhaps, then, the best intention we can have is to be genuine. If we genuinely step from our innate feeling (where *ten eyes see no concealment*), and appreciate that in others, we promote healthful living. Being genuine ensures that our daily practice is free of expectation, observant of the real condition of our patients, honest with our clients, and respectful to ourselves. Then the Qi we create will both reflect and nurture healthy living.

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