



Between Heaven and Earth: Selected Translations from the Classics

TRANSLATED BY HEINER FRUEHAUF

The qi of earth ascends, the qi of heaven descends. In this fashion, yin and yang grind against each other, and heaven and earth merge in undulating embrace. If this setting is vibrated by thunder, excited by wind and rain, moved by the flow of the four seasons, and fondled by the germinating light of sun and moon, the world's myriad processes of transformation become aroused.

[from *Book of Rites (Li Ji)*, fl. 2nd century B.C.E.]



The round shape of our head emulates heaven. The square shape of our feet emulates earth. Heaven has the four seasons, the five planetary movements, the nine divisions, and the 366 days. Human beings follow suit by having four limbs, five organ systems, nine orifices, and 366 joints. In heaven are wind and rain and cold and summer heat, while human temperament is distinguished by taking and giving and joy and anger. Our gallbladder, moreover, functions like clouds, the lung like mist, the liver like wind, the kidney like rain, and the spleen like thunder. All of these are manifestations of our union with heaven and earth.

[from *The Huainan Masters (Huainanzi)*: “Teachings On Jing and Shen” (Jing Shen Xun), fl. 120 B.C.E.]



The Yellow Emperor said: “Since ancient times the connection to heaven has been the foundation of all life. Yin and yang of heaven (moon and sun) are the original source of life. Everything that is situated between heaven and earth and enveloped by the six directions—the nine regions of the earth or the nine orifices of the human body, or the five organ systems, or the twelve major joints—is connected to the qi of heaven. The yin and yang of heaven engender the five evolutive phases on earth, which correspond to the three yin qi and the three yang qi of heaven. If we ignore this vital connection between heaven, earth, and human beings, we risk to be harmed by pathological influences. This is the main principle of health and longevity.

Due to our vital connection to heaven, our mind becomes calm when the sky is clear and blue. If we go along with the changes that heaven brings, our yang qi will be stable and firm. Even if there are pathological influences present, they will not be able to cause harm. This is the beneficial result of following the energetic rhythm of the seasons. Therefore the sage cultivates the unity of jing and shen, imbibes heavenly qi, and is intimately connected to the secrets of the universe. If we go against this vital connection, the nine orifices will become blocked on the inside, the muscle layer will become clogged on the outside, and the protective effect of our wei qi will become disbanded. This would truly be a case of bringing harm to ourselves and weakening our own qi.

[from *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine (Huangdi Neijing)*, *Simple Questions (Suwen)*: “Discourse On How Human Life Force is Connected to Heaven” (Shengqi Tongtian Lun), fl. 100 B.C.E.]



Shaoshi said: “Human beings are joined with heaven and earth, and they are intricately connected with the cycles of sun and moon. When the moon is full the ocean’s tide rises in the West, and likewise a human being’s blood qi accumulates, the flesh and muscles become full, the hair becomes luxurious, the pores close tightly, and the skin’s protective fat layer is abundant. If one encounters pathological wind influences at this time, they cannot enter the body very deeply. At the time of the new moon, however, the ocean’s tide rises in the East, and likewise a human being’s qi and blood are in a state of depletion, the protective qi departs leaving the physical body behind unprotected, the flesh and muscles decrease in volume, the skin becomes wrinkled, the pores become loose, the hair becomes brittle, the veins in the skin layer become thin, and the protective fat layer becomes sparse. If one encounters pathological wind influences at this time, they can enter deeply and cause acute and serious distress.

[from *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine (Huangdi Neijing)*, “Magical Secrets (Lingshu): The Dew of the Year” (*Sui Lu Lun*), fl. 100 B.C.E.]



Human beings are generated by the earth underneath while receiving their generating impulse from heaven above. Heaven and earth blend their qi, and the result is called humankind. For the person who lives in harmony with the seasons, heaven and earth are truly like father and mother. The person who understands the workings of the material world is a true child of heaven. Heaven has yin and yang (moon and sun and their twelve joints in the sky), while human beings have twelve major joints. Heaven has cold and summer heat, while humans have deficiency and excess.

The person who masters the transformative processes that are initiated by yin and yang and that take place between heaven and earth will not suffer from the impact of the four seasons. The person who understands the mysteries of the twelve seasonal joints knows with scientific certainty and cannot be fooled. The person who knows how to interpret the changes of the eight seasonal winds can correctly utilize the overcoming cycle of the five evolutive phases. The person who knows the principles behind deficiency and excess truly stands out.

[from *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine (Huangdi Neijing)*, “Simple Questions (Suwen): Discourse On How to Treasure Life and Achieve Radiant Health” (*Baoming Quanxing Lun*), fl. 100 B.C.E.]



Heaven’s way is the way of the sage—to flow with the moment, to not be restrained by social conventions, and not to be led off his path by the opinions of other human beings. Heaven is his father, earth is his mother, yin and yang are his guiding posts, and the four seasonal dates are his landmark.

Heaven is pure because of its tranquility, earth is at peace because of its stillness— everything alive that goes against this principle perishes, and everything that masters and abides by it lives. What is silent becomes the abode of the illuminating spirit of the universe. Emptiness is where the Dao dwells. It is common for people to seek to live this truth on the outside without holding it on the inside, or to grasp it on the inside but then not live by it on the outside. This is very much like the relationship between the root and the branches of a tree. If you approach matters from the root, there is not a single one of the 1,000 branches and the 10,000 leaves that will not follow along. Our spirit (jingshen) is thus inspired by heaven, while our physical form is given to us by earth.

[from *The Huainan Masters (Huainanzi)*: “Teachings On Jing and Shen” (*Jing Shen Xun*), fl. 120 B.C.E.]



Human beings are generated by the process of heaven and earth blending their qi. Therefore, we are made of qi and can never be without it. Just like fish are enveloped by water and incessantly move their fins to swim in it, human beings are enveloped by the universe and incessantly move their nostrils to breathe in it. Human beings, therefore, always have to rely on this all-encompassing and all-transforming qi. Therefore the ancient saying: “Eat, and the physical body will be satisfied. Move, and all transformative processes will be in harmony.”

Life generally sees us speeding and toiling, which causes our qi to drive like a galloping horse. In an overtaxed state like this much goes out and only little comes in. If no replenishment comes in from outside, then our insides become increasingly depleted and the hour of death advances. Only developed practitioners observe the path of heaven, master the heavenly flow, stay calm and centered by embracing shen, bring every breath down to the navel, and thus live long lives in harmony with heaven and earth.

Since human life is situated between heaven and earth, it can be said, therefore, that our physical form may be most visible, but it is our qi that is everything and lasts forever.

[from Chen Jiru, *Shallow Comments on the Art of Nourishing Life (Yangsheng Fuyu)*, Ming Dynasty (15th century). [from the Daoist classic, *Contemplations by the Huainan Masters (Huainanzi)*, fl.110 B.C.E.]

