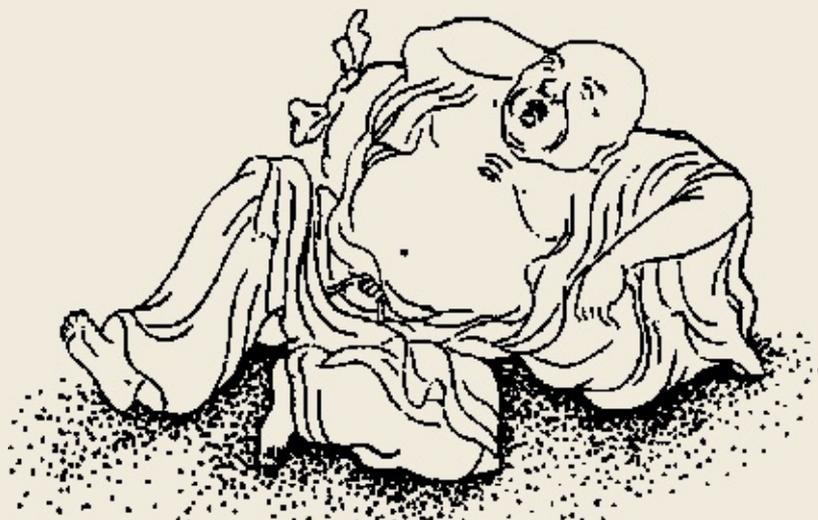


## ABSTRACT

In Chinese Medicine, the silent and constant flow of the energies indicates the health of the body-mind. One of the variants of the energy flow arises from the relationship between the fundamental notion of void (represented by more than one sinogram) and two anatomical spaces **mingmen** and **tanzhog**, whose existence is suggested by **Zhuang Zi** in **Qiwulum** he second chapter of his work. The present paper studies the terms of that relationship from the description of the siesta of **Nan Guo Zi Qi** who moves energies in his harmonious breathing. Since the Chinese admit breath and its dynamisms as a fundamental reality, the void will never lack so harmonically balanced energies that are imperceptible... once again the void.

## 1- ZHUANG ZI'S QIWULUN



### Nan Guo Zi Qi

We know that both in Classical Greek culture and in Ancient China, medicine was a part of philosophy from which the practitioners obtained many of their theoretical foundations. Thus, the wise thinkers when addressing the nature included the study of the human body both in health and disease interweaving the different elements of the universe in their conceptions.

It is common that classical Chinese texts, whether philosophical, literary, historical or technical, approach issues directly linked to the human body and its functions -medicine in any case- or that after being interpreted, notions applicable to medical subjects can be obtained from them.

In order to do so and in this particular case, comes to my assistance **Zhuang Zi**, whose work reflects the close relationship that thinkers of the time had with the conception of nature and therefore with men. Numerous are the statements, sometimes symbolic some other times metaphorical and also direct ones, result of observations on natural phenomena or geographical details linked to morpho-physiological characteristic of men or its emotional-moral modalities, which allow their concepts to be applied to Chinese medicine contents.

From the inner chapters, reputed as authentic, I would like to distinguish here **Qiwulun**, the second, that allows me to study the concept of *void* (which was also conceived by Greeks who were, approximately, contemporary of **Zhuang Zi**) void needed for the energetic dynamisms of the body and, thus, explaining the functionality of the **mingmen** and **tanzhong** spaces.

**Zhuangzi** translations show his sensibility before the subtlety of sense in language and the beauty of this language as well, and on behalf of our logic, surely not like his, his texts cannot be enclosed

in a fixed frame, therefore translations of the title of this chapter from **Zhuang Zi** into our language differ according to the translators. Thus, in this redaction we will use different versions as appropriate for the understanding of the text, we find all translations useful since, without ignoring the different senses of **Qiwulun**, we reflect on which of them, in every given moment, helps us in our work. To the characteristics of the Chinese language the characteristics of the author, philosopher and poet are added.

**Qi** has the sense of equal, from the same rank, to make equal, to reach an agreement...**Wu** means object, everything perceived as real. **Lun** •is dissertation, gathering texts to compare them, meditate upon them and develop them. In this way, according to one version the chapter is called “*everything returns to the same*” due to its proximity to **Lao Zi II** which affirms that everything goes back to the sameness when it reaches the unity from where everything proceeds.

## 2. VOID

When describing the nap of his character **Nan Guo Zi Qi**, **Zhuang Zi** suggests the existence of **mingmen** and **tanzhong** through the Taoist notion that the formless can acquired form through the movements of breaths in those functional areas without organicity which process a high charge of energy.

**Nan Guo Zi Qi** was napping in an almost ecstatic state; his disciple **Yen Cheng Zi Yu**, watching the scene, was restless because he did not recognize the one who had been napping the day before, surely it was his Master but not in his habitual state, familiar to **Yen. Zi Qi** with his back (**yang**) against a footstool attached to the ground (**yin**) and his abdomen-chest (**yin**) receiving light and heat from the sun (**yang**) breathed placidly, exhaling a mild blow that proved he was alive.

There is a space between these two organic referents (back/chest-abdomen) through which subtle breaths and energies can flow. To exhale a mild breath is expressed by the ideogram **xu** which, when prived of his right side (**kou** mouth) is read **xu** as well but with the meaning of *void*. This sinogram is one of those ones used in medical texts to express void in the sense of a space of circulation: we can see on the upper side of the character an uncultivated surface, naked, that favours the passage of the wind, the circulation of breaths between heaven and earth; the lower part shows small sprouts coming from the ground surface which are really tiny because the lack of obstacles is important.

The silent and undisturbed regular breaths represented by **Zi Qi** breathing which when circulating make use of the void of the organism so as conceive life, creating it through its movement and keeping it alive as well. Another ideogram to express void is **chong** that has, on the left hand side, the semantic element of water that talks about the passage of the fluid par excellence, constituent basis of life. And on the right hand side, appears **zhong**, square target which indicates that the fluid is captured rightly and with strength, an arrow that reaches the target. And lastly the void **kong** •phonetically very sonorous, as if resounding in an empty hollow, void, the one from the blue vault where the universal breaths move and which **Tao Te King** equals to a never exhausted bellow.

Nowadays, among us, *void* is synonym to nearly nothing; very little says the notion of void to a western spirit and when it does, it is in a negative sense.

To the Chinese if something is empty is because what was there before is not there any longer or because the place is filled with something imperceptible, or that being emptied out awaits being treaded or filled up again. Naturally, it is very difficult in our language to find another suggestive term capable of substituting the word void, especially when talking about more abstract significances.

The *void* means *inane* (empty, unoccupied) as Lucretius named the emptiness “*namque est in rebus inane*” (“because inside the things exists the void”): “So, there is an impalpable space, imperceptible, unoccupied, not rendered, and *virgin*. But, in reality, is the container empty?”

Let us remember that Democritus imagined the void to be that which allows the movement between atoms, and their rest as well.

In order to create a harmonious, balanced current the **yinyang** breaths should flow without a single squeak in the empty space for that matter determined. This completed flowing is health, that is to say, it is not an absence but a serene, regular trade of energies in the organism. He who is healthy perceives no symptoms, but when disharmony-disease appears, becomes aware of the imbalance.

A very simple explanation of the presence and role of the void is given by the flight of a kite which by stopping the wind with its sail creates, on the opposite side, a void that drives the kite upwards.

A number of functional roles in our daily life presuppose the void, concept which makes me understand blood circulation: each systole drives a contents in a container which once emptied, awaits (diastole); the pleural space (virtual) uses the void, created by its negative pressure to cooperate in both blood and lymph return; appetite occurs when by evacuating the rectum, stomach has room for more, and so many other activities of our physiology.

China gives special resonance to the generational void, fertile ground for grandfather-grandson relationship. The void between father and son is scarce, particularly during the youth of both of them, they are very close; the void existing between grandfather and grandchild is much bigger. Whatever is said between grandfather and grandson resonates differently, creative void that allows dynamisms. The Greek thinkers participate of this concept. Let us remember Heraclitus who spoke about opposites that become the other due to their mutual convertibility: awake/asleep for instance and young/old. The latter does not seem to be reconvertible even though Heraclitus mentions it because he shares the idea that the grandson is the continuation of the family lineage and therefore, the first grandson was named after his grandfather.

We clearly see that vacuity is, in no way, absence or something that does not exist but quite the opposite, even though sometimes we cannot perceive the content. Let us remember, as an example, that the ball in very popular games does not contain anything, it is empty despite having the effectiveness of the vacuity: it is never completely depleted.

Let us see the fruitful Greek conception of the idea of atoms and void which postulated quite advanced theories for the time, approximately coeval with the writings of **Zhuang Zi**. The West took over twenty centuries, from V century B.C. until XVII A.D., to accept the atomic theories of Leucippus and his disciple Democritus. Both philosophers try to explain reality based on a different way of conceiving *Being* and *Not Being*. What *is* is corporeal, and this affirms the identity between *being* and corporeity and Democritus considers perfectly possible the plurality of the *being* with identical characteristics to the one, that is to say the atomists conceived the existence of one sole original matter dispersed in infinite particles separated (by the void) particles-atoms which group together or separate randomly through mechanic forces, not in mixture but in a contiguity relation. Because what separates the tiny units of this being so distributed in atoms is the *void* which coexists with matter. The void *is not*, because it is not corporeal, but at the same time it does not fail to exist.

The void is a *not-being* related to the *being* that atoms are and, since void there is, it enjoys the same rights as the plenty. Movement was a normal fact and what made the movement possible was the void and through that, it was already explained why the objects move as well as why they do not move. It is a constant process which originates multitude of different worlds because atoms are infinite in number and therefore there is not any reason for them to form a single world.

Democritus had come to conclude that, conventionally we say colour, sweetness, clarity but actually, there are just atoms and void. By Democritus time, the idea of the man as a microcosmos has been accepted not in the Chinese sense of man as the reflection of the environment but as anthropocentrism when cosmology and its variations (wind, light, heat, night, rain, seasons) are taken so as to explain their influences on health.

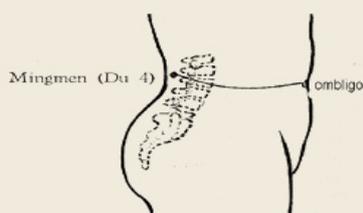
In Fragment 9, Democritus states that “we really do not know anything true but only the changes produced according to the disposition of the body and what is introduced into it or offers resistance to it”. Thought that is shareable with any other eastern equivalent.

In China the void, a notion most cultivated by Taoists, lies in the center, in the most intimate core, in the place where vital forces raise and are harmonically processed, that is to say the center as the origin, therefore the void, the empty space which is nothing other than energy. The idea of empty space is shared, in its abstraction, between Greeks and Chinese even when for Chinese it is wider and more dynamic than the Greek mechanistic approach, useful for their purposes.

We know that Chinese thinking works upon complementarities, so in order to speak about *void*, its **yinyang** opposite *plenitude*, has to be considered. Pairs of antonyms do not establish a dualistic disjunctive way of thinking but a ternary one because the breath circulates bonding together both terms. The creative relation is the third member. That is why we write **yinyang** and not **yin/yang**, the slash (western) suggests an excluding opposition.

Talking about this and without leaving **Qiwulun**, **Yancheng** the disciple asks the Master who is already awake, how he could turn his body into a dry trunk (**yin**) and his mind into dead ashes (**yang**) and the answer says that it is possible in the loss of the individual Self in benefit of the universal Self. **Ziqi**, due to ecstasy, manages to penetrate the void that is nothing else other than a metaphor of **Dao**.

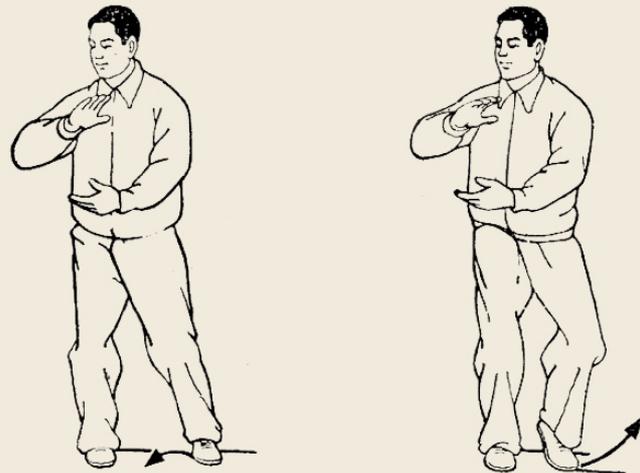
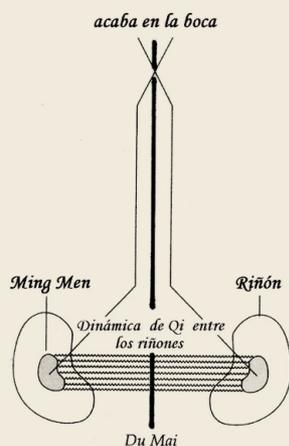
### 3. MINGMEN and TANZHONG



Here we talk about two spaces inside the thoracic – abdominal cavity that process breaths: **mingmen** “the gate of life or the gate of fate”, between both kidneys at the second lumbar vertebrae level, residence of the original energy **yanqi** capable to generate a new being; and **tanzhong** “center of the chest” that takes a position which is equivalent to the former but in the upper part of the esplanic cavity between the two lungs.

In the constant search of the **yinyang** harmony, needed for function, **mingmen** work (there is no organ) is ascribed only to the right kidney **yang**, hormonal, and not to the left kidney **yin**, urinary. In **mingmen** resides **yan** the source, the origin of every human being and that is the reason why it is a region where energies, quite mobile, get transformed, evolve: *door of life*, that is to say that life and its activities depend on **mingmen** and on the dynamic of **qi** (energies), both in the kidney area. **Dumai 4** is the acupuncture point **mingmen**.

**Qu Lifang**'s illustration below, explains the vibratory field between kidneys, where the energetic axe linking **mingmen** with **tanzhong** is clearly shown.



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The constant interrelationship between theory and practice is manifested, for instance in the **Tai Ji Quan** positions, in the exercise of holding the ball of energy which covers the area round the navel up to the thorax on the sternum zone.

Access to **tanzhong** “in the middle of chest” is gained through the acupuncture point **renmai 17**, important place of energy interchange and resonance of the heart between 2nd. 3rd and 4th intercostal spaces as well, area covered by three points of acupuncture: RM 17, 18 and 19 which, from the center of the sternum relate with the major arterial, venous and lymphatic vessels. Through **tanzhong** passes **zongqi**, the ancestral energy that mediates between the genetic lineage we come from and the singular being each one of us is; this energy is also known as thoracic energy because it is stored in the center of the thorax, center that is no other than **tanzhong**. Here we are facing the zones where **yanqi** and **zongqi** are processed, initial biological energies, fundamental ones.

**Tanzhong** also known as **shanzhong**, center or sea of upper energy, also conveys the meaning of container with fat-**tan** - fat that smells. **Shan** means “ram smell”. Usually, **tan** the fat, whether in cholesterol form or in lymph form, as well as the membranous tissues (peritoneum, aponeurosis, pleurae) tend to have a strong and particular odour. The mediastinum is an important crossroad of organic elements, membranes and lymphatics.

In **Suwen 8** it is explained that “The liver system is the Office of the General, planning is its product. The gall bladder is the office of the Fair Correctors (judges) who issue decisions. **Shanzhong** is the Minister counselor who rules the office and the transmission of the messages of happiness sent to the monarch”.

These two spaces –without organicity but indispensable- are symmetric, **tanzhong** between the two lungs and **mingmen** between both kidneys, only functional, with a large mobile energetic charge, one in the thorax and the other in the abdomen; just like the parallelism between the two places which stand out when contemplating the description of **Zi Qi** nap told by **Zhuang Zi** in his **Qiwulun**, for which “*The leveling which makes things equivalent*” is at this point of our work, the proper translation.

**Mingmen** is the conception of an abstract function ruled by the element fire and without a corresponding organ. It is a “presence” justified by its action, without a precise organicity and without equivalence

in the anatomical or physiological concepts of Western medicine. Here, in this place resides **yuan**, principle, source, energetic origin of the human being in the conception from which a new being arises from chaos. **Yuan** means original, firstly, raw, like a water spring sprouting in the mountains. **Ming** means order, destiny, and the order that configures the life of man, the one who designs the destiny of each and all energies. **Men** is gate, door. In reality, **mingmen** is the archaic remembrance of the anterior heaven in the posterior one and this memory is topographically equivalent to the navel that is the place from where the fetus absorbs the breath which nourishes his body.

**Chongmai** to reach, to attain, crossroad- is a meridian born in the small pelvis together with other two meridians **dumai** and **renmai** jointly described with an image of vegetal nature: a trunk and three branches which together, administer **weiqi**, the defensive energy protecting abdomen, thorax, back. Furthermore, **chongmai** as vertical axis is adjoined to **daimai** that transversally fastens to it, leaving both attached to the spinal column. Thus we have four extraordinary meridians running through the trunk and the head. Let us remember that this area of the small pelvis which reunites the four extra meridians is the one that is mentioned in the **Zhuangzi** as a space of free flow of energies represented in the nap of **Nan Guo Zi Qi**.

**Tanzhong**, *center of the chest* (in the center of the chest) is symmetric to **mingmen gate of life** (in the center of the abdomen). This is clearly related to the Taoist concept of void that is what allows energetic flows and interchanges and so, when heaven and earth transfer their most delicate essences for a new being to arise, there is a new biological reality in the established development. For Embryology – science that provides the scheme for the functioning of life- the conception is the beginning where biologically, the body is accompanied by the simultaneous development of a psychic movement; no Chinese will ever come up with the idea of separating the soul from the body, or the man from the universe or the adult being from his-her intrauterine life. Naturally, without complications, the body is the self, the own self.

Let us remember the description in China of chaos-cosmos through the existence of two heavens which show the models of the universe. **Mingmen** belongs to the anterior heaven (previous) the one before origin-conception, where statically lie all the cosmic matters or essential innate energies (heaven, earth, water, fire) later used in the conception. Out of this, arises the notion that the relationship between kidney and **mingmen** is that of water with fire, opposites but complementary elements, mutually needing and interinfluencing each other and are the origin of **yinyang** (water and fire) Strength and vital capacity depend on the two kidneys, the place where wisdom, willpower and reproductive function seat.

**Mingmen** is a region, a place between both kidneys where the principle of conservation and preservation of **jing** vital essence and of **qi** inborn energy, are found.

The combination of both of them composes a firm embryological organizer where heart (fire) and kidneys (water) constitute an axis around which revolves the genesis of the individual; in this genesis participate **mingmen** and **yuanqi** the original subtle energy both mental, due to being linked to heart and hereditary as well through the kidneys. Traditionally, kidneys constitute the meeting point of authentic **yin yang**, or what is the same of water and fire (archetypical) previous to conception.

**Mingmen** is not an organ but a field of strength for life, the place where resides the hereditary charge that will ensure the development of the individual from conception to death; it is the seat of the original breaths (**yuanqi**) where primeval **yin yang** conjugate and the one that materializes itself for treatment in **dumai** 4.

From **Qiwulun** we rescue the description of the universal movement of the energies that explains the dynamisms in the two spaces of the body we are talking about here. Even though is that second chapter in the **Zhuang Zi** the one which inspires this work, in the third one called **Yangshengzhu** “*Nurturing the Vital Principle*”, the notion of void is anatomically mentioned: **Ding** the cook, slaughters an ox utilizing the interstices (the void) that exist between the components of the animal. If there were not interstice between parts, whichever they may be, there would not be movement.

The world of the Chinese thinking, whether it be technical, literary, philosophical, provides useful concepts to different branches of knowledge, among them Medicine; the process is very fertile because it preserves, nowadays, the possibility of the existence of valid interpretation of ancient texts so as to apply them to modern reflection. This can be helpful in understanding important concepts involved in our work.

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