

Vertical and Horizontal Integration: The Dynamic Flow of *Qi* at the Level of Humanity

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Introduction

In Chinese cosmology, there is a coming together of above and below and the inside and the outside—thus the level of humanity is often referred to as the Middle Kingdom.¹ This process of vertical and horizontal integration corresponds to the dynamic flow of *qi* and is one aspect in the evolution of consciousness.² In the natural state, these aspects of *yin* and *yang* make contact and integrate in a dynamic process of transformation and growth. The individual that exists at the level of humanity is thus the dynamic integration of these two pivotal aspects of being.

The vertical and horizontal axes are reflected in many aspects of Chinese medicine. At one level, the vertical axis of integration is mirrored by the three *dantian*—the Heavenly *qi* of the upper *dantian* meets the Earthly *qi* of the lower *dantian* in the middle *dantian*.³ The expansion outward from (and return to) this central core is representative of horizontal integration. These axes are also seen in the pulses, the dynamic flow of *qi* (ascending-descending, entering-exiting), the Fire element, the extraordinary vessels and *fu*, and the concepts of pre- and post-heaven. In this article I would like to explore the ideas and interrelation of vertical and horizontal integration, some of their correspondences within Chinese medicine, and the ways in which they relate to experiential awareness and the evolution of consciousness.

Experiential Awareness and the Art of Humanity

¹ This is reflected in China's name: *Zhong Guo* (literally, "Middle Kingdom").

² A more macro view leads us to a *yin-yang* dynamic of space and time. Within the space-time dynamic, the vertical and horizontal axes are a subdivision of space: "The subdividing of space vertically and horizontally is a *yin-yang* division of *yin*" (Morris W., 2009; personal communication). Similarly, each of the vertical and horizontal axes can be subdivided into *yin* (Earth/Below and Inside) and *yang* (Heaven/Above and Outside).

³ In the Daoist tradition, this axis is also referred to the *taiji* pole, which passes through the center of the body from *Huiyin* REN-1 to *Baihui* DU-20, connecting the three *dantian*. This is also sometimes referred to as the *zhong mai* (Central Meridian) or as a branch of the *chong mai* (Penetrating vessel).

If the level of humanity is seen as a coming together of above and below (Heaven and Earth, *shen* (Spirit) and *jing* (Essence/Body)) and the inside and the outside, then it can be seen that these two axes create pivots upon which each individual being experiences and practices the art of humanity.⁴ The connection between above and below (vertical integration) is the means by which the spirit is incarnated in a body (and the means by which one maintains a connection to the source throughout life), while the connection between the inside and the outside (horizontal integration) is the means by which the incarnated spirit experiences everything that is present at the level of humanity.

From one perspective, the evolution of consciousness is the process by which the great oneness separates into the polarity of *yin* and *yang* (Earth and Heaven), and from this interaction of *yin* and *yang* all of creation comes into being.⁵ As the 10,000 things are created, each integrates body and spirit within oneself (vertical integration), and thereafter is able to connect the inside and the outside by connecting with all else that is present at the level of humanity (horizontal integration). Through this process, eventually there occurs the dissolution of boundaries and a return to oneness to start the process over again.⁶

⁴ This concept is also reflected in the Gospel of Thomas (Logion 22): “Jesus said to them, ‘When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor the female female...then will you enter [the Kingdom]’”. This may be interpreted as meaning that it is through the dynamic integration of the yin and yang aspects of being (which, in one form, is represented by the vertical and horizontal axes) that one enters the Kingdom of Heaven. Heaven, in this model, corresponds to the state of experiential awareness: “Pre-heaven is the essence stored in the Kidneys/Lower Dantian (the essence that allows one to experience), and post-heaven is the essence that derives from digesting that which we consume/experience. Heaven lies between these two; therefore heaven is the moment of experiential awareness” (Richardson T., 2008, p. 22). Thus, experientially, Heaven may be seen as the pivot/integration/transcendence between the various yin-yang aspects of being.

⁵ This view of Daoist cosmology is reflected in Chapter 42 of the Dao De Ching: “Dao gives birth to one, one gives birth to two, two gives birth to three, three gives birth to the ten thousand things.”

⁶ This process of the evolution of consciousness is also mirrored by the diurnal unfoldment of the extraordinary vessels as seen through the *ying qi* cycle. See (Richardson T., 2009).

The concepts of vertical and horizontal integration are exemplified through examination of the character etymology of the word “king/emperor” (*wáng*).⁷ This character is three horizontal lines connected by one central vertical line. One horizontal line (一) is the number “one” and also represents Heaven. Two horizontal lines (二) is the number “two” and represents Heaven and Earth. Three horizontal lines (三) is the number “three” and represents the trinity of Heaven, Earth and Humanity. The character “Emperor/King” (王) is composed of these three horizontal lines connected by a vertical line, as the Emperor is the one who connects Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. This is also seen within the microcosm of the human body, wherein the Heart (at the level of the middle *dantian*) is the “emperor,” connecting the three *dantian* and the inside and the outside.⁸ Each individual being thus has the capacity to become an emperor through the processes of vertical and horizontal integration.⁹

By extension, it may be said that vertical integration corresponds to pre-heaven, while horizontal integration corresponds to post-heaven. Pre-heaven, in a broad sense, relates to the individual’s connection to Source, to the deep, constitutional aspects of being, the place that one comes from, and the place one returns to when they need to center and ground within self.¹⁰ Post-heaven, on

⁷ This discussion is drawn from: (Harbaugh R., 1998).

⁸ Heavenly *qi* enters the upper *dantian*, Earthly *qi* enters the lower *dantian*, and these two meet at the middle *dantian*, which corresponds to the *qi* of the level of humanity, the meeting of Heaven and Earth within the human body. This unified *qi* then is able to flow out through the arms to connect with everything else present at the level of humanity (as humans we wave to each other, shake and hold hands, hug and embrace, and touch—all means of sharing *qi* and connecting with others at the level of humanity). Thus, in *qigong* practice, *Baihui* DU-20 is the point that exchanges *qi* with Heaven, *Yongquan* KID-1 receives and exchanges *qi* with Earth, and *Laogong* P-8 (in the center of the palm) is the point that exchanges *qi* with others at the level of humanity.

⁹ This is also reflected above (Endnote 4) in the discussion of experiential awareness and entering the “Kingdom of Heaven”. In this sense, to become an emperor may be synonymous with entering the Kingdom of Heaven and the state of experiential awareness.

¹⁰ These characteristics of pre-heaven are also reflected by the extraordinary vessels, which, within the channel system, correspond relatively more to pre-heaven and the source. As stated by Larre and Rochat de la Vallée (1997, p. 11): “...when extraordinary circumstances exist outside...there is a return to a more ancient and deeper regulation of life.” This quote is referring to the important role of the extraordinary vessels during the extraordinary

the other hand, is that which is experienced at the horizontal level, connecting with everything else in one's environment. Thus post-heaven is often associated with the digestive system and *wei qi*, the means of processing, interacting with, and integrating that which is experienced at the human level of reality.

This can be expanded to relate to the process of the evolution of consciousness—from the source or lower *dantian* (pre-heaven), the *qi* expands outward, leading to creation, manifestation, and integration within oneself, the creation of the meridians, *zangfu*, and the sense organs. From this movement of expansion from the source outwards, the primary meridians, *zangfu*, and sense organs are then the means by which one experiences the exterior world (post-heaven), which, in experiencing it, also guides it back to pre-heaven to be integrated and processed (thus producing *qi* and essence, replenishing the source, impacting/transforming one at the deepest level, and starting the cycle again).

The Dynamic Flow of *Qi*

The axes of vertical and horizontal integration are likely very similar to what has been referred to in the classics as the “ascending and descending of *qi*” (vertical) and “entering and exiting of *qi*” (horizontal).¹¹ In Chapter 68 of the *Su Wen* (Simple Questions) it is stated: “If there is no ascending/descending, there is no birth, growth, maturation and decline. If there is no entering/exiting, there is no birth, growth, transformation, receiving and storage. If the Qi Mechanism functions well there is room for birth and transformation; if the Qi Mechanism is

moments of life. Thus, the extraordinary vessels (which correspond to pre-heaven) are also what one returns to in order to center and ground within self during extraordinary times.

¹¹ The collective ascending-descending and entering-exiting of *qi* is also what has been translated by some as the “Qi Mechanism.” In this section, excepting direct citations, I will refer to this as the “dynamic flow of *qi*” to emphasize the fluidity of this process. This process has also been referred to as the “qi dynamic” elsewhere.

disrupted, there is fragmentation and no birth or transformation” (as cited in: Maciocia G., 2005. P. 78).¹²

It is through harmony in this process of the ascending-descending, entering-exiting of *qi* that one is able to achieve a state of health, happiness, and freedom—this is synonymous with the natural state, the state of experiential awareness. As seen in the quotation above, without vertical integration (ascending/descending) and horizontal integration (entering/exiting), life is not possible. Life itself is the process of connecting above and below and the inside and the outside; without this continuous exchange it is not possible for one to continue at this level of existence.¹³ Vertical integration allows for maturation and decline, as it is the connection to Source and related to our path and fundamental purpose here on Earth; horizontal integration is what allows for transformation, receiving, and storage, as it relates to post-heaven, digestion and the connection to everything else at the level of humanity. It is experiencing and interacting with that which is around and inside oneself that allows an individual to transform.

These processes and axes are reflected at every level throughout the body, from the macro to the micro. “The ascending-descending and entering-exiting of Qi influences the formation of Qi and Blood at every stage and in every organ. The very production of Qi and Blood relies on the

¹² As this passage is central to the discussion, it is worthwhile to look at another translation: “Thus, if there is no going out and coming in, there will be no process of birth, growth, robustness, senility and death; if there is no ascent and descent, there will be no process of generating, growth, blooming, yielding fruit or crop and finally storing. So, in all visible things, they are having the energies of going out, coming in, ascent and descent. Therefore the existence of growth and transformation depends upon the existence of the visible things. If the visible body disappeared, the growth and transformation will be extinguished. So, none of the visible things are without the energies of going out, coming in, ascent and descent, only there are the differences in extent and the earlier or later in time” (Wang, B., 1997. P. 336). It is interesting to note that this translation states that all “visible things” (which are the 10,000 things present at the level of humanity) have this dynamic flow of *qi* occurring, and, further, that all growth/generation and transformation depends on the visible things.

¹³ This is also seen in open and complex systems theory, where it is acknowledged that no-one and no-thing exists in isolation, that at every level of every entity in existence there is continuous exchange between each individual and everything else in one’s environment.

delicate, harmonious balance of ascending-descending and entering-exiting of Qi in every organ...” (Maciocia G., 2005. P. 78). The dynamic flow of *qi* also relates to the ability to sense (and therefore experience) clearly, as stated by Zhou Xue Hai in ‘Notes on Reading Medical Books’: “The faculties of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and thinking all depend on the smooth ascending/descending and entering/exiting of Qi; if Qi is obstructed, those faculties are not normal” (as cited in: Maciocia G., 2005. P. 78).

The Fire Element

We can also see the processes of vertical and horizontal integration represented by the Fire element. Fire is what transforms and connects across boundaries, and is therefore the element responsible for the connection and transformation across both the vertical and horizontal pivots. This may be seen in the properties of Fire—not only does it flare upward (vertically), but it also expands outward (horizontally). Looking at it from this perspective, we can readily find support in the literature for the two different forms of fire—vertical, as represented by the Emperor Fire, and horizontal, as represented by the Ministerial Fire.

There are two pairs of *zangfu* organs associated with the Fire element—the Heart-Small Intestine and the Pericardium-San Jiao. The Heart is well known to be the Emperor, as it connects Heaven, Earth, and Humanity, as seen above. Similarly, the Small Intestine is the “middle” connection in the digestive system, connecting the Stomach above with the Large Intestine below, and may therefore be seen as the “emperor” within the digestive system. Thus it is the Emperor Fire of the Heart and Small Intestine that regulates vertical integration, the connection between above and below at both micro and macro levels.

On the other hand, the Pericardium (*xinbao*) and San Jiao are referred to as the Ministers, and are the *zangfu* that connect the emperor with its subjects and the rest of the kingdom (horizontal integration). The Pericardium (*xinbao*) is the wrapping of the Heart, a barrier that simultaneously connects the Heart to (and separates it from) the rest of the “kingdom” (ie the other *zangfu* and the exterior). Similarly, the San Jiao is often depicted as the three body cavities—the boundaries that simultaneously connect and separate the *zangfu* from the rest of the body and the exterior. Thus the Ministerial Fire, as the Pericardium (*xinbao*) and San Jiao, relates relatively more to horizontal integration—connecting one with everything else present at the level of humanity.

When it is in balance, the Emperor Fire stays in the heart—maintaining the vertical connection within self, between heaven, earth, and humanity—while it is the Ministerial Fire that goes out to connect. It is the Ministerial Fire that descends from the Heart to the Kidneys, and is associated with the Kidney Yang and *mingmen*. Thus both the Pericardium-San Jiao and Kidney Yang/*mingmen* are all referred to as the Ministerial Fire, and relate to the desire for intimacy and connection with everything else present at the level of humanity.¹⁴ In the pulse, all of these aspects have been said to correspond to the right proximal position according to various systems; this position is also sometimes associated with the reproductive and circulatory systems, both of which may also be seen primarily as aspects of the Ministerial Fire.¹⁵

¹⁴ Interestingly, *mingmen* is often translated as “Gate of Life.” It is only through this horizontal connection of the Ministerial Fire that one can be born, transform, and live. Further, there is an interesting parallel in the term “Gate”, as a gate is a boundary that opens and closes, and it is only through this form of exchange across boundaries opening and closing that life occurs. Similarly, the Pericardium and San Jiao, when in balance, open and close at the appropriate times, thus regulating what (or who) is allowed into our selves and our hearts.

¹⁵ The drive to reproduce is the desire to connect intimately with another, to become “one” with another, and thus is a fundamental aspect of horizontal integration. Reproduction itself is the birthing of a new being at the

Further Pulse Correspondences

Continuing, we can see that the vertical and horizontal axes are well reflected in several aspects of the pulse. While each of the pulse positions (*cun*, *guan*, and *chi*) on each side has its own organ correspondences, each side as a whole is often used to represent certain systemic patterns relating to the fundamental polarity of *yin* and *yang* as it manifests throughout the body. If we apply this to the ideas of vertical and horizontal integration, it becomes clear that the left-hand pulse corresponds to the vertical axis, while the right-hand pulse corresponds to the horizontal axis.

In general, the left-hand pulse (HE-LIV-KID) is said to correspond to the *yin* aspects of being (including blood, essence, *yuan qi*, and pre-heaven) and the right-hand pulse (LU-SP-KID/PC) to the *yang* aspects of being (*qi*, digestion, *wei qi*, post-heaven).¹⁶ If the left pulse corresponds to pre-heaven, then it can also correspond to vertical integration, as seen above. This is reinforced by the fact that the Liver connects the Fire of the Heart with the Water of the Kidneys in the generating cycle, creating the axis of vertical integration within the *zangfu* organs.¹⁷ Similarly, the LU-SP-KID/PC axis corresponds to post-heaven, the production of *wei qi*, and the digestive system; all of these aspects are representative of the horizontal axis.

horizontal/human level of reality. Likewise, the circulatory system is the means of communication and connection between the Emperor (Heart) and the rest of the kingdom.

¹⁶ The perspective of the left pulse corresponding to pre-heaven and the right pulse to post-heaven comes from Neoclassical Pulse Diagnosis as an interpretation from the Shen-Hammer system of pulse diagnosis (Morris W. Personal communication). The vertical and horizontal axes are also represented within the Neoclassical system in the Compass Model.

¹⁷ “The wood element is located between water and fire along the *sheng* cycle. A function of the wood element is to regulate the smooth flow of *qi* between fire and water just as the *chongqi* must harmonize the dual poles of heaven and earth. Physiologically, the liver and gallbladder that regulate *qi* are located in the middle heater, and the *jing* stored in the kidneys and the *shen* stored in the heart are located in the lower and upper heater, respectively... It is the liver’s virtue of benevolence (*ren*) that allows *shen* and *jing* to interact in an unconstrained manner” (Jarrett, L., 2004. P. 236-7).

Continuing the above discussion on the Fire element in regards to the pulse, it is clear that both aspects of the Fire element are well placed to reflect their associations. The left distal position belongs to the Heart and Small intestine, and thus corresponds to the Emperor Fire—and again, the left pulse and the Emperor Fire both correspond to vertical integration. The right proximal position, as seen above, is said to relate to Kidney *yang-mingmen*, Pericardium-San Jiao, or circulatory-reproductive systems, all of which also fall under the category of Ministerial Fire—and it is the right pulse and the Ministerial Fire that correspond to horizontal integration. Thus the right proximal position, the Ministerial Fire, is the root of post-heaven, of the digestive processes as well as *wei qi*, and therefore the root of (as well as the impetus towards) horizontal integration. And the left distal position, the Emperor Fire, is the fruition of each individual connecting Heaven and Earth, of vertical integration and the connection with self and to Source.

Dynamic Balance

Qi is dynamic; in the natural state *qi* is constantly flowing throughout one's being. *Qi* is never static unless it is pathological; experiential awareness is simply the art of experiencing the dynamic flow of *qi*. Vertical integration is a process of *qi* coming in and integrating within oneself, and horizontal integration is that of the exchange and unification between the inside and the outside. Dynamic balance between vertical and horizontal integration allows for continuous cycles of growth, connection to source, and the evolution of consciousness—as they balance, each can continually grow, and as they evolve so does the individual.

When speaking of horizontal integration, vertical integration is already presupposed. The horizontal integration depends on, and always refers back to, vertical integration. It is similar to discussing post-heaven—whenever one discusses post-heaven, it automatically refers back to pre-heaven, as post-heaven cannot exist without pre-heaven and is dependent on a continuous integration with pre-heaven. Pre-heaven is the blueprint, just as vertical integration is the foundation. It is only by having the vertical integration of *jing* and *shen*, Body and Spirit, that one can then experience horizontal connection and integration.

As the vertical connection grows stronger, one eventually needs to extend out and connect with others at the level of humanity. As the horizontal connection grows, the vertical connection may diminish and thus one needs to come back to center and strengthen it. If the vertical connection diminishes, one may be more easily affected by everything else in one's environment. This balancing between vertical and horizontal is similar to balancing between masculine and feminine, Body and Spirit, and *yin* and *yang*—in order for both to grow there must be a dynamic balance between them, that they might continuously generate and transform each other. By returning to the vertical connection and dynamically integrating the vertical and horizontal axes, one enters a state of experiential awareness and can freely experience the level of humanity.

Conclusion

Like the spiral of DNA, the vertical and horizontal axes compose two aspects or polarities of being that are intimately intertwined and present everywhere throughout the body. They are a means to examine different aspects of the integration of above and below and the inside and the outside; but at the core they are simply two vectors of the double helix, spiraling around each

other infinitely and eternally. One cannot be separate from the other; creating these differentiations merely provides a convenient model to examine the oneness from different perspectives.

Vertical integration allows one to be firmly rooted in the essence, that awareness may grow and one may experience more at the horizontal level. As one becomes more whole and integrated within oneself (connected to heaven and yet rooted in earth) one is able to be open to and connect with everything and everyone else. This can occur in degrees and cycles at both micro and macro levels; it is a process of learning to stay true to oneself while simultaneously experiencing the external and internal environments. This allows one to connect with others externally while staying centered within, and thus attain greater degrees of experiential awareness of both the internal and external worlds. Thus, although the axes are each representative of a polarity or pivot (Heaven-Earth, Interior-Exterior), they themselves form a *yin-yang* (vertical-horizontal) polarity that corresponds to the dynamic flow of *qi*. And, as with all polarities, the key to growth, freedom, and happiness is dynamic balance.

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