Qi

Critical Terms for Chinese Religious Studies[1]

Attempts to describe *qi* in English-language literature have inevitably been thin, focussing primarily on the ways in which it speaks to perceived mind-body dualism in Anglophone culture. The following discussion touches upon the broad diversity of epistemes in which *qi* has been entangled, and a few ways in which it has acted as a touch-stone for comparing Chinese culture with Western modernity. It then considers three different ways for approaching *qi* as a topic – rather than attempting to define *qi* itself as a critical term, or attempting to define it, I experiment with three different modes of reading about and thinking with *qi*. Beginning with paleography, I introduce an uncommon narrative about *qi* and fire. I then discuss genealogical/period-based approach versus one of epistemological comparison. Finally, the paper takes a departure from textual based studies to consider an informal discussion of the constraints of individualist notions of subject formation, and how *qi* plays an important role in informing intersubjectivity, mourning rites and social continuity. The paper then concludes by suggesting two terms as useful for thinking about *qi*: coherence, and consubstantiality.

Preamble: The flood-like discourses on *qi*

Qi (氣,气,盵,昛,曔, 炁,気,餼) is referred to as a fundamental universal substance in Chinese cosmology and physiology, and has played a critical role in the domains of philosophy, self-cultivation, and ritual practice as well as natural sciences such as medicine, alchemy, astronomy and astrology. It is related to the breath, to vital energy, to primordial cosmic substance, to food, to the stars, and more. Its implications are so wide that it appears in compound terms in practices as diverse as military strategy, literary writing, calligraphy, painting, music and the art of conversation. While not all of these uses depend on equivalent conceptualization of *qi* as a formal entity, the use of the term implies some level, albeit to varying extents, of conceptual or associative parity that travels with the term, and influences the understanding and application of these terms. Qi has been the subject of fundamental philosophical exposition in the pre-modern and modern era, and the focus of multiple monographs and edited volumes in Chinese and Japanese in the modern period.[2] *Qi* became first bound up statecraft and dynastic legitimacy during the early formation of the Chinese empire just before the Han Dynasty, when the five agents (*wuxing* 五行) were described as five *qi* in *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋.[3] This came at the

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2 Besides the popular books which fill the shelves of self-help sections of East Asian bookstores, a number of scholarly volumes have also been produced, of which the following are simply some which contain 氣 in the title, from the landmark edited volume which marks the chronological development of *qi* within different fields of study Onozawa Seiichi 小野沢精一, et al. 1978, to Sakade Yoshinobu's oeuvre, spanning Daoism, medical culture and *yangsheng*, including Sakade Yoshinobu 坂出祥伸 1993;Sakade Yoshinobu 2007; Sakade Yoshinobu 坂出 祥伸 and Sumiyo Umekawa 梅川 純代 2003, to the phenomenological reading of East Asian bodily practice by philosopher, and an inter-disciplinary scholarly conference in Taibei which focussed often on the practical experiences of *qi* by pracittioners, Zhongyang yanjiu yuan minzu suo 中央研究院民族學研究所 (ed.), 2000. The history of qigong, and its political transformations over the years are well-covered by Palmer 2007; Goossaert and Palmer 2011; Chen 2003.

Many more which address the history and theory of qi over time focus on other disciplinary terms for which qi is a foundational basis: medicine, alchemy, yangsheng 養生 cultivation, themes discussed below.

3 呂氏春秋 2.138-40, *Yingtong* 應同. On the role of this passage in statecraft, Twitchett and Loewe (eds) 1986, pp. 96-97; Graham 1989, pp. 329-30.

beginning of a gradual process of combination of *qi*, *yinyang* and the five phase which only became consolidated in its most complex form in the *Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 towards the end of the Western Han Dynasty.[4] but it is not limited to such formulations and takes many diverse and subtle forms. Modern dictionaries give up to 103 different definitions of the single term alone, yet compound forms beginning with the term 氣 number over 230 (e.g *qixiang* 氣象, *qi*-image, a term which refers to weather patterns), and this does not begin to address the variety of compounds where modifiers prefix the term (e.g. *shenqi* 蜃氣, or mirage).[5] Such diversity beggars any comprehensive attempt to encompass in appropriate detail the ranges of meanings, world-framings and practical applications that *qi* pertains to. This awareness should be kept in mind when discussions about *qi* gravitate towards certain loci as if they are the centres of conceptual gravity, so that we can reflect on, and better articulate *why* these genres of writing and conversation tend to dominate the conversation.

Qi circulated not only across material but discursive domains, and through it the relative merits of different positions were and are compared, aligned and/or contested in different communities and preferred styles of practice.[6] *Qi* participates in both the inner workings of subjective consciousness and selfhood while at the same time forming the foundational substance of the material universe, as well as its manifest forms. Whether enumerated and calculated through numerology (*shushu* 數術) for divination, whether observed in the heavens as auspicious cloud shapes (*yun qi* 雲氣), as weather typologies that also invaded the body as pathogens (*liuqi* 六氣), as martial spirit in individuals or armies, or as colour on the body's surface or as pain, whether tasted as the cooling or heating quality of materia medica, or pulsed in the channels (*mai* 脈), felt as proprioceptive textures of inner sensation that flow through the body (*xingqi* 行氣), or mentally apprehended through reasoned debate about the emergence of the universe, meditative insight into the foundational substance of one's own being or through divine revelation as 10-foot high flaming characters in the cavernous emptiness of absolute being, *qi* was and is "materialized" through extremely different practices, and comes to mean many different "things." By "things" here I mean material substances or objects, by "materialised" I mean the technical practices, processes of engagement, and intellectual frameworks as by which the material world comes into the attention and working culture of human actors.[7]

Amble:

Such diversity should inflect modern attempts to coordinate *qi* with Western critical theory or even laboratory science, but rarely does. Such scholarship focusses almost entirely on embodied *qi* as a medium of mind-body practice to confound Western subject-object dualism, an oriental form of phenomenology, as an exoticised form of Asian mesmerism, or as an avenue to legitimize traditional Chinese knowledge through modern science.[8] These studies approach the

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[4] The pre-eminent study about the gradual process of bringing the three principles together is Harper 1999. Also see Lo 2013.

5 The list of definitions from the Hanyu da cidian chuban she 漢語大詞典出版社 (ed.), 2007

[6] For a more recent example, consider Song Yingxing's 宋應星 (1587-1666) reflections on *qi* formed a foundational premise on *Tiangong kai wu* 天工開物, as discussed in Schäfer 2011, pp. 50-89.

[7] Approaching the "thingness" or "substantiveness" of things via materiality studies, trades on the ways in which materials impinge into and affect human cultures. A useful clutch of papers on this theme is Latour 2007a; Bloor 1999; Latour and Callon 1992. Note the critique of materiality studies for focussing solely on the human culture side in Ingold 2011. This approach to materiality in knowledge and culture formation should be distinguished from the economic analysis of material culture studies, e.g. Appadurai 1988, as *qi* has never been a 'commodity.'

[8] On phenomenology, Yasuo Yuasa 1993, 1987; Ots 1994; Cai Biming 蔡璧名 2011. Ann Harrington 2008, reduces *qi* to a facet within American counter-cultural orientalism in a Western trajectory of mind-body medicine, or a circus performance of . One might also include in this the countless scientific studies of *qigong* in China, documented by Palmer 2007, and those in Taiwan, led prominently and controversially by a president of National

topic as if *qi* were a singular, unitary cultural phenomenon, focusing on the body, individual experience, and applications in medicine, spiritual healing and *yangsheng*. Within China and abroad, *qi* has formed an important point of difference-making between Chinese civilisation and Western-origin science, whether through the rise of Chinese medicine or *qigong*, or polemics of such practices as backward. These approaches form an important part of the history of *qi* within transnational engagement and reflection, but are only a part of the longer history of *qi* in China itself.

The plasticity of *qi* as a term and concept has also meant that it came to be applied in compound forms of East Asian translations of modern concepts all but entirely divorced from pre-modern notions. *Dianqi* 電氣 (electricity), *yangqi* 氧氣 (oxygen) and others are used for modern scientific concepts that are incommensurable with traditional notions of *qi*. These compounds are fossilized slices of transitional moments of the adoption and adaptation of Western science, and their histories reveal how scientists built conceptual bridges between European and East Asian ideas about the natural word at a particular moment in time.[9] Meanwhile, other translators from this period formed serious polemics of traditional notions of *qi*, such as Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854-1921), who argued in his translation of William Jevon's *Primer of Logic* that concepts like *qi*, heart-mind (*xin* 心), heaven (*tian* 天), Way (*dao* 道) and others were incoherent and confused.[10] While pre-modern notions of *qi* are not equivalent to its use as a loanword in new compounds as those above, the negotiation of meanings of the character testify to its role in shifting cosmologies and intellectual praxes in the emerging nation-state.

These examples are, however, views which focus on Chinese encounters with Western modernity, and narrow down the diversity of *qi*'s role within Chinese longer history. A similar effect is produced by the equivalence sometimes made between *qi* and the Greek *pneuma* and/or the Sanskrit *prāṇa*. All three concepts are related to wind, to the breath, to an animating life force, and at least in Chinese and Indian medicine, were considered to flow through the body in channels. While it has become Sinological habit to translate *qi* as the Greek *pneuma*, leaving tacit the inherent cultural comparisons, others have argued that the outplays of these terms in each region are quite distinct and should not be elided.[11] Even more problematic is the comparison of *qi* with *mana*, the Oceanian term that articulates the power inherent in objects, people, actions and things, a term that has its own history in anthropology and indigenous activism.[12] While interesting for cross-cultural comparison, these broad attempts at global comparison serve to denude the landscape of Chinese religions themselves, blinding readers to the local varieties that are important for critical study. It is high time for a refreshed critical study of *qi*.

It should be pointed out at this point that the argument in this paper, that Chinese discourses on *qi* in do not always reference the same "thing," does not dependent on a 'view from outside.' China was not a monolithic unchanging culture, and even ideas as fundamental as

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Taiwan University, Li Sicen 李嗣涔. For a useful critique of holism as a regionally and politically mediated term in which notions like *qi* play a role, Scheid 2016.

[9] See e.g. Ingo Schäfer's 2001 discussion of the apologist Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865 –1898), and Shen Guowei 2001. On translation more broadly in this period Liu 1995. For methodological reflections on Chinese agency in the recent history of East Asian science (but not about *qi* specifically), a useful clutch of recent papers is Fa-ti Fan 2007; Anderson 2012; Benjamin A. Elman 2007; Shen 2007; Fu 2007.

[10] E.g. Y Yan Fu 嚴復 1909 (1931), p. 30; Jevons 1870. See discussion in Kurtz 2011, p. 189.

[11] See survey of the three notions in Libbrecht 1990, as well as references to Needham's inconsistent arguments for flat equivalency. There is likely a Jesuit heritage to this translation which could be traced, but I have not done so as yet.

[12] After a heyday in in structuralist anthropology and comparative religious studies, it was the focus of a post-colonial backlash because of its purported reductive essentialism, and is now invoked as an important term within Oceanian cultural identity movements, and also within new age spirituality. Durkheim 1915, pp. 217, 222-23; Mauss 1972, pp. 109-11 Levi-Strauss 1987 (1950), pp. 55, 63 For a survey on the history and recent state of the field of Mana, Tomlinson and Tengan 2016.

qi did not remain static. Such an approach is not critical in the sense of pejorative, but rather in Helen Verran's sense of "critique," forgoing the use of a single, authoritative, external and universalised perspective to evaluate a topic, but rather, focussing on "disconcerting" juxtapositions and contrasts internal to different positions. By situating terms and actors within their local and temporal contexts, we provide thicker, not thinner, description.[13]

But how to tell such a story? I offer narrative approaches for comparison here, which could be more fully fleshed out in a full article.

Homology and Origin Stories: Fire and Paleography 气 氣 炁 乞 槩 餼  昒 暵

A paleographic approach to the story of *qi* would begin by uncovering the earliest examples of character form, quotations, and formal definition in dictionaries. Surviving graphs demonstrate that early forms of the character included three horizontal lines  representing vapors, semantic components for grain 米, fire 火 灬, and food 食, and sound-loans like 既 and 无 (See Appendix I). The early character for misty vapors became used in sound-loans for words meaning variously to beg, to provision guests and horses with grain, and the meaning normally associated with embodied vitality arose around 400 BCE, around which time fire or grain became included in the graph, causing gradual shifts in orthography for the other meanings.

It's unclear whether orthographic variants indicates deliberate conceptual differences, i.e. whether a firey graph for *qi* 炁 or 氖 indicates a different conception of *qi*, but the graphs are a useful starting point for highlighting important arguments relating fire and *qi* over time. One is by Wang Chong 王充 (27-97 BCE) in the Lunheng 論衡, who argues that the efficacy of southern *wu* incantations is because as southerners they possess more fiery *qi*, not because they are possessed of spiritual power. While he does not discuss orthography, this position about firey *qi* forms an important part of his sceptical materialist argument.[14] The notion of Southern *qi*-magic 氣禁 is widely testified to in Mawangdui manuscripts, the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 and elsewhere. According to Zhu Yueli 朱越利, Ge Hong statistically favoured 炁 over 氣 when writing about breath magic. [15]

Zhu Yueli's larger argument claims that the two graphs 炁 and 氣 were used in some texts in the Daoist Canon to represent different types of *qi*. While the meanings were not consistent over time and genre, his main point is that the choice of orthography was used to distinguish between two types of *qi*. Zhu finds 14 different instances of where texts statistically privilege one or another form when describing different kinds of *qi,* each of which deserve discussion. One thing that stands out however, is that the distinctions are not equivalent—Ge Hong's use of 炁 in the *Baopuzi*, favors 炁 for incantational powers and 氣 for forces in the body or the natural world. Later *neidan* 內丹 authors deliberately used 炁 for Perfected *qi* 真炁 (also primordial *qi* 元炁), a substance associated with primordial cosmogenesis, in order to distinguish it from post-heaven *qi* 後天氣, the more common *qi* that animates the material, manifest world and the movements of the stars, seasons and five agents.[16]

These *neidan* distinctions are paralleled in Jin-Yuan medical writings, although the orthography is not carried over so far as I have looked into it. Zhu Zhenheng 朱震亨 (Danxi 丹溪, 1281-1358) placed great emphasis on Ministerial Fire 相火 (related to the right kidney, also known as in some texts as the gate of life 命門) as a generative force produced in the absolute

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[13] On critique and the role of disconcertment Verran 2014. On situating knowledge, Haraway 1988. A useful short essay on epistemological relativism is McGonigle 2017.

[14] Harper 1998, pp. 163-83.

[15] Zhu Yueli 朱越利 1982.

[16] *Changsheng zhiyao pian* 長生指要篇 DZ 1099, 4a, 7b; 谷神篇 DZ 0252, 1.2a, 3a.

void 虛無.[17] He contrasted Ministerial Fire with Sovereign Fire 君火, which he associated with the heart and the manifest, material body. These distinctions parallel the development in *neidan* mentioned above, distinguishing cosmogenetic versus material, manifest *qi*, as well as related distinctions between of 性 and 命, of the material and the potential, and pre-heaven and post-heaven *qi*, even though the import of his text is not soteriological.

Up to this point I have left as implicit the more common associations of *qi* with water, as I assume it is well-known to the readership at this workshop, but would need to be spelled out for broader audiences.[18] It flows, whether in channels, through the limbs, or as heavenly deities dissolved into vapour that are inhaled into the body. The appearance in the Han Dynasty of channels mapped onto the body was coeval with the intensification of imperial trade and communication networks by waterways. *Qi* is one of the fundamental cosmic substances generated during early stages in the formation of the universe, as in the Guodian text 太一生水. It is the substance within which the pure and turbid are components of the universe gradually settle, producing graded layers of existence ranging from turbid 濁 to clear 清, in the manner that mud settles to the bottom of a glass of water. Writers traded on this metaphor of clear and turbid *qi* in discourses as diverse as moral cultivation (e.g. Zhu Xi), medical pathology and transcendence. What we learn from the excursus beginning in paleography is that to identify *qi* as simply a water-like substance would be an oversimplification. Paleography affords an inspiration and starting point for such considerations.

Genealogies vs. Fields of *qi*

Another approach might simply be to describe the types and varieties of *qi* as they have been described over time. The landmark volume *Ki no shisō* 気の思想 offers one model for outlining the breadth of varieties of *qi*. A simple review of the table of contents (see Appendix II) indicates the breadth of topics and periodization of issues, and even this is not exhaustive, and much of the study of the Six Dynasties Daoism and the history of science and of medicine, at least, has progressed since that volume. Such a framework might lead readers to consider that *qi* changed over time, whereas in fact, it emerged as fundamental in new discursive topics while earlier ones remained active in specific knowledge and practice communities.

The more interesting question then, is not periodicity or exhaustive description (if such were even possible), but how the uses distinguished or blurred the lines between different communities of practice and ways of knowing.[19] While this extends well beyond the study of religion *per se* to the history of knowledge more generally, it is useful for the history of religion because it offers a locus for examining how religion became distinguished as a mode or field of practice, even in the absence of formal conceptualisation of the notion of religion.[20] Studying

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[17] See e.g his chapter on ministerial fire 相火 in Zhu Zhengheng 朱震亨 1347. *Gezhi yulun* 格致餘論 [*Words Bequeathed by the Ancients on the Perfection of Knowledge through the Investigation of Things*].
Zhu's work consolidated and should be considered in concert with the previous three Jin-Yuan medical masters, Liu Wansu 劉完素 (style name Shouzhen 守真 ca.1120-1200), Zhang Congzheng 張從正 (style name Zihe 子和, 1156-1228), Li Gao 李杲 (style name Dongyuan 東垣, 1180-1251). For a brief introduction to his work, Simonis 2015. On the complex lineages by which *neidan* thought enters his work, de Vries 2014. Thanks to Allen Tsaur and Leslie de Vries for in-depth discussion on this point. Zhu Zhengheng 朱震亨, *Gezhi yulun*.

[18] E.g. Allan 1997.

[19] On the relationships between nuances of terms and communities of practice, Fleck 1935 (1981); Latour 2007b; Lave and Wenger 1991.

[20] Campany 2003; Campany 2012. Campany argued against the spatial metaphor of terrain and hard-sided boundaries which could be "influenced" or flowed into by other discourses negated the agency of local actors for a focus on practices. I concur wholeheartedly, and this perspective is fundamental to my writings on practice. I also propose here that "field" (in the sense of a magnetic field, rather than terrain) functions well as a metaphor for specific foundational terms like *qi*, and can be used in a way consistent with Campany's critique. Different nuances of a term either repel or attract other semantic clusters (basic Saussurean semiotics), according to the way a

these differences, as in the example of firey *qi* above, can reveal how analogues to sacred/mundane, physical/soteriological were mapped out. The differences in how practitioners work with *qi* mark what they do as simply mundane breathwork for health, or something that approaches the divine. This difference locates practitioners as insiders or outsiders, and speaks to grades of dividing the world that are analogous, though not equal to, notions of secular vs. religious, mundane vs sacred. The basic practices could be almost identical – such as keeping awareness of the navel – it all depends on how it is framed. As Clarke Hudson once put it, "One man's *neidan* is merely *qigong* to another."[21] While this difference is prominent in *neidan*, the basic distinction between bodily health and spiritual cultivation goes back to the earliest mentions of *yangsheng qi* exercises in the *Zhuangzi*, *Guanzi*, and other Warring States texts.[22] It informs hierarchies of practice into the Six Dynasties, such as the difference between curing disease, nourishing life and transcendence, as seen in the both the *Baopuzi* and the *Shennong bencao jing*.[23]

Other mappings and relations can also be usefully traced out, for example between divination, portents divination, spiritual cultivation and medicine, by examining meteorological notions of *qi*, such as the six *qi*.[24]

Living in The Sea of Qi

These philological transitions of nuance reveal different epistemological framings in the past, but there is also something powerful and pervasive which touches on every day experience and concepts and acts as a background for interpersonal relations and subject formation. *Qi* as substance is shared between people, and yet it also becomes part of them, becomes internalised to them. It coheres people. When you walk into a busy restaurant or seminar room, and experience the atmosphere there, this is also 氣氛. This shared space is something everyone is a part of, and takes part in.

In a recent discussion with Peng Rong-Bang 彭榮邦, we explored the notion from phenomenological psychology that this experience is not simply something that we 'take in' from outside, but something we participate in. Between the people we relate to, and with whom we form relationships, there is a shared space between people is a context wherein one finds expression and being in one particular means. When grieving the loss of a loved one, the experience of loss is that of one's own self, the loss of the part of you that is formed into being in relationship with that person, and which can no longer "be". His analysis of the function of mourning rituals is the translation of that "other" into mobile material objects, the ashes, the ancestral plaque, ritual objects which trigger the memory of that relationship, in which one's own self can come into being. Thus the selfhood that came into being in relationship can continue to be maintained through material practices that sustain that sense of being. The legacy of the deceased thus is more than material goods, social or financial power that is passed on, it is a subjective formation of self. The goods and rituals of funeral carry the vibrancy of the "being" of the deceased, and allow the individual to continue to "be" themselves in relationship.

The complex work that phenomenology has to do to achieve an understanding of this kind of "intersubjectivity" is shortcut by the concept of qi, which does not presuppose separation of individuals. The material interpenetration of qi between the bodies and beings of people, and the slippage between the material substance which can be felt, with attention, and one's experience of self, one's expression of being, makes for an entirely different conception of

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community uses it (see prior note). Differing nuances may be picked up and used in concert by any agents, potentially mutually conflicting ones, even in the same utterance (Swidler 2001),
giving rise to mixed discourses, new compound notions and conceptual blends that are not determined by an institution or "-ism."

[21] Personal communication, 2007.

[22] Stanley-Baker 2019.

[23] Stanley-Baker 2013, pp. 154-6, 273.

[24] Loewe 2011, Kory 2019, Kuriyama 1994.

social space. Qi is the fundamental substrate through which and assumption behind and the context within which rituals take place. It enables social coherence, the undefined, uncalculated, mutual sharing of sociality. It does more than "leave a mark" i.e. an impression, on one, it is the substance of which one is formed.
Much of this interpenetration, this flow of qi between people, between things, is what ritual is designed to manage – to create the right qi to flow to the right people, and to prevent bad qi flowing to the wrong place.

Conclusion: Two ways of thinking about stickiness

The polysemy of *qi*, its ability to take on various meanings and play a vital role in multiple epistemologies, gives it the ability to create coherence, or connection, across these different knowledge regimes. While different epistemologies understand, and interact with *qi* differently, those knowledge systems are nevertheless related through *qi*. This being said, it also through the qualifications of *qi*, the various linguistic modifications of the term, that set up hierarchy, or differing levels of power and authority between those systems.

Unlike for Yan Fu, who rejected *qi* as a critical term, the *logical coherence* is not pertinent or useful for this discussion. Rather, it is the degrees and ways which *qi* allows different schemata to *cohere with eachother*.[25] *Qi* is neither singular nor multiple. The common use of the graph traverses these material and intellectual domains, making "contiguous" the "things" or "thingness" to which the term(s) refer. They are related, connected, their differences are elided at times, or invoked with great seriousness at others.

I suggest that *qi* is a particularly *coherent* concept, not because of regular identical usages, because of its "stickiness," the ways in which it brings together diverse practice regimes, conceptualisations, real-life aspirations of health and self-transformation, and embodied experience under a common or related vocabulary. *Qi* plays a fundamental role in the Chinese intellectual repertoire of ways to think about, deal with, and experience human existence in the material (and immaterial) world. Its cohering function is a vital part of the fabric of Chinese cultural cohesiveness (unity is too strong a word, as harmony would be also). Even while they may disagree about the qualities and importance of different kinds of *qi*, it is widely agreed that it, whatever it is, *qi* is a fundamental component of the universe. This is a feature of the *consubstantiality* of the varieties of *qi*.

Consubstantiality is useful here, not only because it expresses the common presence of multivariate *qi* across objects and epistemes, but also because of its role in the history of religion. First coined in Latin as *consubstantialis* by Tertullian (155-240 CE) when translating the Greek *homoousious*, it refers to the common essence or being of the Holy Trinity, and was ratified into use by Constantine in the Nicene Creed in 325.[26] It has since been taken up within anthropology as an alternative expression of human relations outside of kinship networks, as well as in literary studies and semiotic theory.[27] Without diving too deep into semiotics here, suffice it to say that the materiality of *qi*, its very thingness, allows it to penetrate and permeate across domains intellectual and material, forming a fundamental glue across multiple genealogies of Chinese thought, while at the same point providing opportunities for actors in these genealogies to distinguish themselves through discussions of practice and definition. Rather than attempting to define *qi* itself, it is better for historians to observe how it has been defined, the ways it moves, and actors with it.

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[25] See the parallel argument about *yangsheng* 養生, the collective arts of health and well-being in Dear 2019
[26] Beatrice 2002
[27] Pitt-Rivers 1974; Black 1993; Dousset 2005.

Appendix I: Early palaeography of Qi.

Cloudy Vapours[28]

Fig. 1 Oracle Bone version of 气

Early forms of the character that portray wisps of cloudy vapour develop from three horizontal lines in oracle bones to later versions with stylization,  and  , in bronze inscriptions.[29] By the time Xu Shen 許慎 (30-124 CE) compiled the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, he argued that this form referred to cloud *qi*, that is, clouds, mist and fog. Most paleographers agree with Xu, although not all.[30] However, this graph, in its later stylized forms, also became used as a sound loan for a word meaning to request (乞求), or to receive commands.[31] All agree that the discrete form 乞 only appeared in the Han, when it was used to represent the word to request.

Grain, Fire and Food

Fig. 2 氣 in Mawangdui ms.

The well-known form used in the received tradition uses a grain radical 氣 below the vapors, like that in Fig. 2 from Mawangdui (*terminus post quem* 168 BCE).[32] Originally it meant "to provision with food," and had extended meanings of sacrifice.[33] Xu Shen argues that it was a verb, meaning to provision horses and guests with hay and grain, which emerged as a sound-loan from 气. Its extended meanings are to sacrifice, as well as sacrificial offerings.

> 氣：饋客芻米也。从米气聲。《春秋傳》曰：「齊人來氣諸侯。」
> Qi: It means to give hay and grain to your guests. This is a sound-loan combining 米 and the sound for 气. The *Chunqiu* [*zuo*]zhuan states: "When people from [the state of] Qi come, then *qi* the marquises and dukes."[34]

Fig. 3 餼

Most philologists argue that this graph 氣 was then borrowed (假借) to write down a different word, the subject of this paper – that substance with a range of meanings encompassing breath, vitality, air and the universal substrate underlying manifest reality. Zhang Yujin and others argue that as the graph 氣 became established usage for referring to this concept, a new character was developed to differentiate the earlier concept of provisioning and sacrifice, namely 餼, by adding the component for food and eating 食 as seen in Fig. 3.[35]

Fig. 4 槩 with 米

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28 A number of people contributed to a discussion about this topic, including Leo Lok, Rodo Pfister and Misha Tadd. I would particularly like to thank Ash Henson from Outlier Chinese who guided me through a number of sources for this discussion.

29 Graphs from 战国古文字典, with thanks to Misha Tadd for sharing this reference.

30 Ji Xusheng 季旭昇 finds this tale unlikely, but unable to provide a better alternative, agrees that this narrative will have to suffice for the present (季旭昇 2014, p. 58)

31 季旭昇 2014, p. 5; 白於藍 in 《字源》 p26. Also see Huang Dekuan 黃德寬, who nuances this argument further, arguing that this form was used to refer to various time markers and stages of completion, (until 迄, already/thus 既, completely 訖). 黃德寬《古文字譜系疏證》 p3218.

32 Include Brief note on Mawangdui, referencing excavation report, print and transcriptions of MS, and Harper 1998.

33 Fig 2. from 陈建贡《简牍帛书字典》. Thanks to Misha Tadd for sharing this image.

34 Ref Xu Shen.

35 Zhang Yujin 張玉金 in 《字源》 p648.

Fig. 3 is from from Shuowen jiezi， http://xiaoxue.iis.sinica.edu.tw/char?fontcode=27.993C, accessed 20/05/2019. All images from Chen Zhaorong 陳昭容 and Zhuang Deming 莊德明, 'Xiaoxue tang Zhuanchao guwenzi ziliaoku'are based on facsimiles in 徐在國：《傳抄古文字編》〈綫裝書局，2006 年〉.

Fig. 5 槩 with 火

Fig. 6 槩 with 火

A variation from Fig. 3 饋 can be seen in Fig. 4, 槩 and 5 and 6 溉, which all refer to provisioning and sacrifice. Fig. 4 槩 combines 既 (as a sound component) and 米 (as as a semantic component).[36] Fig. 5 溉 is produced by replacing the grain component 米 with fire 火, as argued by Bai Yujian 白於藍. Chen Zhaorong 陳昭容 et al. make the same implicit argument for fig. 6.[37] This use of fire makes sense both as a miscopy of 米, which is orthographically very close to 火, but also as a semantic slippage, because offerings of food are often cooked.

Fig. 7 炁

Fig. 8 炁

The modifications of fig. 5 and 6 are further reduced in fig. 7 and 8, removing 艮 to leave (the sound form) 无 and (the semantic form) 火, forming the predecessor of the kaishu 炁 (where fire is represented by 灬).[38] When the character 炁 appears in received texts, it is frequently interchangeable with 氣, and refers to embodied vitality. This is the form which, Zhu Yueli argues, appears mostly in Daoist texts, and in some cases is deliberately used to distinguish one kind of *qi* from another.

Fig. 9 氖

As we have seen above, in some forms of the graph for "provisioning/sacrifice" the grain radical was replaced by fire. However, fire was used to create variants of the form for cloudy vapors 氣 as well. Figs. 9 and 10 replace the grain radical 米 with fire 火, combined with 气 to give 氖.[39]

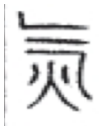

Fig 10. 氖 in *Xingqi ming* 行氣銘

The graph in fig. 10 is significant because it occurs in an inscription predating the Mawangdui texts by perhaps 200 years. The *Xingqi ming* 行氣銘 (ca 380 BCE), is short, thirty-six character inscription carved on the twelve sides of a jade knob, and is the earliest extant document recording *qi* cultivation in the body.[40] The knob was ornamental, probably affixed to the end of a staff, and testifies to a role beyond simple communication, signifying that the text and material object possessed high symbolic value. The text advocates the deep circulation of *qi* within the body, holding it there and collecting it until once more rises, and then cycling it downward once again. It is clearly cognate to the self-cultivation literature—both the purely physical, health-oriented exercise, as well as more philosophically oriented spiritual cultivation—that was in circulation at the time, a topic

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36 Fig. 4 includes images from Shuowen jiezi from http://xiaoxue.iis.sinica.edu.tw/char?fontcode=27.E5FE, accessed 20/05/2019.

37 Fig 5. Is from 白於藍 in 《字源》 p26.,
Fig. 6 is from Chen Zhaorong 陳昭容 and Zhuang Deming 莊德明, http://xiaoxue.iis.sinica.edu.tw/chuanchao?kaiOrder=1713 accessed May 20, 2019.

38 Fig. 7 is from 杜從古：《集篆古文韻海》，《宛委別藏》選集影舊抄本三冊，1935 年商務印書館依故宮博物院藏本影印, 4.9, as hosted in Chen Zhaorong 陳昭容 and Zhuang Deming 莊德明, http://xiaoxue.iis.sinica.edu.tw/chuanchao?kaiOrder=1713 accessed May 20, 2019.

39 Fig 9 is from 海博物館藏戰國楚竹書(1)性情論,vol 上， in 上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書(一)　上海古籍出版社 2001 年版,hosted at Chen Zhaorong 陳昭容 and Zhuang Deming 莊德明, http://xiaoxue.iis.sinica.edu.tw/chuanchao?kaiOrder=1713 accessed May 20, 2019.
Fig. 10 Li Ling 李零 2006,p. 270. Also see 战国古文字典 1200.

40 Once possessed by the collector Li Mugong 李木公 from Hefei, the jade knob is currently housed in Tianjin Museum. Dating the piece as mid-sixth century, Needham and Wang 1956, p. 143 follow Wilhelm 1948. Guo Moruo 郭沫若 1972 puts it at 380 BCE, and Chen Banghuai 陈邦怀 1982, pp. 344, n. 3 argues for a late Warring States dating.

that was discussed in multiple contemporary texts, such as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Guanzi* 管子.[41]

In sum, this form with vapours and grain 氣 that is now uniformly used went through a number of transitions between at least the fourth and second century BCE, before it became established usage. The graph 气 originally meant clouds and vapours, but over time became used via sound loan to represent the term for request. This word for request eventually became written as the orthographically similar 乞. The graph 氣 originally meant to provision or sacrifice (by the sound-loan of 气), but its usage changed to represent vapour and embodied vitality, (another sound loan), which led to the development of a new form, 餼, for the earlier meaning of provisioning. This latter character also takes variants as 槩 and 熂, the latter of which is very close to 炁. This last character, 炁, referred to the concept of embodied vitality and vapor, and was in paralleled by another variant, 氣. These latter two forms use fire as part of their semantic component, and may reflect firey conceptions of *qi* as we shall see below.

Among the images above, the *Xingqi ming* stands out, as a text explicitly dedicated to the cultivation of *qi*. The aesthetics and deliberateness of the design makes it is tempting to assume, as Zhu Yueli does, that the fire component was used to differentiate a discrete kind of *qi*. However, as we can see through figs 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, the use of the fire component in *qi* forms was not unique, and there are no grounds for claiming to be exclusive to Daoist conceptions.[42]

The question of whether variant forms may refer to different nuances of the term raises an important point regarding received texts and manuscripts. However, these are largely concealed because our access to the technical, philosophical and political literature of the period is mainly through the standardized graphs used in the received tradition, concealing much early variation. It is not argued by palaeographers that early writers went to pains to point out conceptual differences through graphemic variance, simply because regionality had more impact on form, and there was so much variation. There was no state-driven standardization to exert downward force on constraining meaning and form, and I do not want to claim that there was for pre-Qin writing. However, after the standardization of writing into clerical and then Kaishu scripts, it seems that for an author to choose a variant script in order to make a point about meaning would have been *more* deliberate and impactful on readers than prior to the Qin, because norms of writing became so widespread.

Later fiery forms which combine the same wisps with the radical for sun 日 appear as 昒 in the Liang Dynasty *Yupian* 玉篇, which describes the character as an alternate for 氣.[43] The Song Dynasty *Jiyun* refers to another variant 暳 as the *qi* of the sun.[44]

While there are a number of other variants, the primary distinguishing characteristic between them appears to be the radical which accompanies the three wisps of vapor. All of the dictionaries argue that 炁 is simply an alternate writing of 氣, and that they are used as alternates indiscriminately. The *Yupian* argues that this form appears predominantly in Daoist texts, but that the meaning is the same as 氣. Thus Zhu Yueli's argument, relying on close reading of the passages, is an improvmennt, making the qualified claim that while the *Yupian* is correct in most

41 On the context of this text in the Warring states discourses on health and spiritual cultivation, Stanley-Baker 2019, pp. 11-12; Rickett 1998, Vol. 2, p. 19; Harper 1998, pp. 125-26; Roth 1999, pp. 161-3; Kohn 2008, pp. 14-15. For a thoroughgoing critical assessment of these arguments Yang 2018, pp. 118-122.

42 Zhu Yueli 朱越利 1982, p. 57.

43 Gu Yewang 顧野王 Liang Dynasty. *Yupian* 玉篇

44

cases in the Daoist canon, a select few texts do deliberately use the two forms to express different, hierarchical notions of *qi*.

Appendix II: A summary of 気の思想

1) Foundational Theories about the Relationship between Life and *Qi*,
   i) Oracle bone inscriptions;
   ii) Warring States masters literature on moral, spiritual and physical self-cultivation including *Mengzi*, *Guanzi*, *Xunzi*, as well as political natural philosophy and *Lüshi chunqiu Yijing* commentarial literature
   iii) Qin/Han writings including cosmology and natural science of *Huainanzi*, military strategists and political philosophy of huanglao 黃老 writings, and omenology and statecraft in Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179-104 BCE).
   iv) Eastern Han theories of qi, based on notions of primordial *qi* 元氣 and philological debates about textual authority.
2) Interconnections between Buddhist, Daoist and Ruist Ideas about *Qi*
   i) *Qi* in the Six Dynasties, comparing: Ruist with Buddhist notions; "Religious with Philosophical" Daoism; and medicine, with a focus on aetiology.
   ii) Sui/Tang and Five Dynasties notions, with a focus on Ruist, Buddhist and Daoist conceptions
3) Principle *li* 理 and *Qi* 氣 in Song-Qing philosophy
   i) *Qi* in the formation of Dao Studies 道學
   ii) Zhu Xi's on *qi* and *li*.
   iii-iv) Ming and Qing philosophical developmnets
4) The changing concepts regarding *qi* in the Self-Strengthening movement in the late Qing Dynasty and early Mingguo period.

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