

A MANIFOLD WILL

In Chinese medicine, the will (*zhi* 志) is first perceived as one of the five spiritual powers (*wu shen* 五神)¹. Linked to the kidneys, the will is the involvement of the water *qi* in the building and functioning of awareness and of the mind.

But the Chinese medical texts also speak of the five wills (*wu zhi* 五志) and present them, for instance in *Suwen* ch.5, as anger, elation, obsessive thinking, grief and fear. Are these five wills different from what is usually called « emotions » ? What is the relationship with the will of the kidneys ?

By careful reading of the Chinese classical texts, philosophical as well as medical, it is possible to explain the meaning and the use of will (*zhi* 志).

1. Expression of the kidneys in the mind

In these classical texts, will is the determination of the mind, it bends the mindset in a certain direction and controls its activity. The will aims at a goal, whether personal ambition or noble ideal. By means of the will, one is disposed to do or not to do something, inclined to like or dislike something. The will is a deep and strong aspiration of the whole being.

If what one aspires to is aligned with what is beneficial for life, the will serves the development and achievement of the being. If what one aspires to is opposed to the natural order, the will turns its power against life, exhausting vitality with the passions and debasing it with inappropriate desires.

If what we aspire to is in keeping with to our original nature, the will is a constant reminder of what is right and drives us toward the fulfilment of our destiny. Thus we keep the way of harmony. But if the will consists of inclinations generated by the passions coming from the desires of the senses and from selfish purposes, it prompts us to deviate, to turn out of our way, through desires that multiply and ever increase, since they cannot nourish life.

For the will, the relationship with the origin is crucial. Like the thrust sending the sap from the root up to the top of the tree and to the tip of the furthest leaves in order to allow its growth, the will rooted in the original nature drives everything within us to its blooming expansion.

The relationship with the fulfilment of destiny is also crucial. To live according to the way Heaven or Nature made us, is what is called destiny. The perfect will moves us toward the fulfilment of heavenly or natural endowment in every day life as well as in the course of a whole life.

¹ The five spirits are : the spirits (*shen*) linked to the heart, the *Hun* linked to the liver, the *Po* linked to the lung, the intent (*yi*) linked to the spleen and the will (*zhi*) linked to the kidneys.

This explains the association made, in medicine, between the will and the kidneys, representative of the water element. Water is linked to the origin and beginnings of life, as are the kidneys within a being, the constant relationship with the origin, the root of Pre-Heaven. They are also the solid basis for the interplay of yin and yang in all the organs ; as long as the yin and the yang of the kidneys are strong and balanced, the organs can function fully and well. They ensure the continuous flowing of life and maintain the identity within each human being - which is to remain faithful to one's original endowment and to live one's original potentiality in one's personal life. That is to accomplish one's destiny, to build and renew the Post-Heaven on the model of the Pre-Heaven.

The spirit linked to an organ may be used to represent the functioning of this organ, without implying a more mental or spiritual level of the activity.

For instance, in the Suwen ch.62, the spirits (*shen*) represent the functioning of the heart and the will (*zhi*) of the kidneys. It is then possible to speak of excess and deficiency of the « spirits » and of the « will ». But spirits and will are not taken in this context as the mind or part of the mind ; they are taken as the usual functioning of the heart or of the kidneys. In that case, the symptoms mentioned correspond to a dysfunction of the organs and not to a dysfunction of the mind.

2. Orientation of the heart-mind

The ideal that one chooses to have in one's heart-mind determines one's mental and physical life.

An ideal starts with an idea, a feeling, an emotion, a thought ... which is what one tolerates, accepts or keeps in one's mind. As is said in Lingshu ch.8 :

« When intent (*yi* 意) becomes permanent, we speak of will (*zhi* 志). »

What is in one's mind cannot be dissociated from what is in the body; what is in the heart is also in the flesh. The will is not an idea, a purpose present only in the thought, it also impacts on the blood and qi (*xue qi* 血氣) and their functions in the body. The blood flows from the heart and pervades even the most remote or tiniest parts of the body, from the innermost part of the organs to the tip of the hair. The heart pulses the blood regularly and is present wherever the blood is. So, emotions and passions, propensities and reflections, as well as ability to perceive and to know are present in the blood and therefore inform the limbs and the organs, the conscious and unconscious activities and reactions of the body.

The heart shows its double aspect : it is one of the five zang representative of the fire element and in charge of mastering the blood circulation (*xue mai* 血脈) and it is the great master of the five zang, their merging into a unity - the mind, which is awareness and discernment, cleverness and affective life.

On a fundamental level, the mind is the result of the merging of the spiritual expressions of the five zang, each with its proper movement and specificity. The will is the contribution of the kidneys in the making of the mind.

The spirits (*shen* 神) of the heart are the light, the spiritual brightness (*shen ming* 神明) allowing a clear and accurate awareness. It behoves the heart to recognize what fits with the natural movement of life, to keep it, to cultivate it and to transform the intent (*yi*) into a

suitable will. In a way, the will is the unflinching strength which enables one to keep the orientation initiated by the intent.

If a heart is filled with desires and passions, these desires and passions mould the mind, alter the awareness that is in the heart, the blood, the organs and the body. The general direction of life, the big decisions as well as the everyday responses to a situation are determined by the will firmly set in the heart-mind.

The will guides the qi which are the movements and force behind these attitudes.

“By tastes one guides (*xing* 行) the qi, by the qi makes intent (*zhi* 志) solid, by intend fixes speech.” (Chunqiu zhuozhuan, Duke Zhao, 9th year, Transl. A. Graham, Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking, p.72)

“The will (*zhi* 志) is commander over the qi (*qi zhi shi* 氣之師) while the qi is that which fills the body (*ti zhi chong* 體之充). Where the will arrives there the qi halts. Hence it is said, ‘take hold of your will and do not abuse your qi.’” (Mencius II A, transl. D.C.Lau, Chinese University Press)

Lingshu, ch.27, says that when the perception of a pain due to cold is felt in the mind, the awareness focuses on where the pain is, which is enough sometimes to direct the qi towards that spot and to dissipate the pain through a warming effect.

The same idea is found in physical exercises (Taiji, qigong) : the qi are guided not only by the body movements but also by the image and thought formed in the mind. Even more in the daoist practices in which the qi are guided internally by the mind only.

The « art of the heart » is to empty one’s heart of desires and passions, of tendencies which are not recognized as inherent to the original nature, in order to let the spiritual brightness develop and make the mind balanced and harmonious. The communication between what masters life - the heart –and what is the interface with the origin – the kidneys - is essential. In modern Chinese, the expression formed with the spirits of the heart and the will of the kidneys *shen zhi* (神志) means the mind, consciousness, the ability to know and to reflect on what is known.

3. The five wills

The will of the kidneys, seen as one of the five spirits (*wu shen* 五神), is the orientation in the mind directing all the qi. At its best, it is the natural propensity, recognized, accepted and cultivated of each human being.

According to the theory of the five elements, life is analysed through five movements of the qi, five modes to act and react. Each of these five qi, which are the representatives of the five elements, has its own natural propensity.

For instance, the wood qi, which are the liver qi in a human being, spring naturally and forcefully upward and outward, giving impetus to the circulation and allowing them to proceed without hindrance to the end of their paths ; they project physically and mentally.

They give the impulse to go forward, to make plans and to have courage. When these qi are not counterbalanced by the others, it is anger.

It is thus possible to say that anger is the will of the liver. It is the expression of the nature of the wood or liver qi.

The same can be said of the other organs. Usually, elation is associated with the heart, obsessive thinking with the spleen, grief (or sadness) with the lung and fear with the kidneys. They are the five wills (*wu zhi* 五志). When they merge harmoniously, the mindset is well balanced. When one is in excess, the emotion disturbs the well-ordered movements of the qi.

Where does the difference lie between the seven emotions and the five wills, considering that the five wills are five of the seven emotions ?

Most probably, the expression « five wills » indicates, with the number five, the basic organization of all the exchanges and interplays of the qi. The mindset cannot exist and function without them. Failing to respect their natural pattern transforms the five wills into five emotions, because the lack of the spiritual brightness makes the mind unaware of the correct will, leading to disorder and damage.

The expression « seven emotions (*qi qing* 七情) » insists, with the number seven, on the danger of potential disorder induced by passions.

4. Seasonal wills

The authentic Man does not waver from his determination ; he remains firmly in his ideal of virtue and uses all the means to attain it. However, he changes and adapts according to the situation, not only in his body but also in his mind. He bends his will without being unfaithful to his nature.

Such a variableness is often found as one the main features of the Sage. For example, in Zhuangzi, ch.6 :

“[The True Man (*zhen ren* 真人)] ... his mind (*xin* 心) forgets; his face is calm; his forehead is broad. He is chilly like autumn, balmy like spring, and his joy and anger (*xi nu* 喜怒) prevail through the four seasons. He goes along with what is right for things and no one knows his limit.” (transl. B.Watson, The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu, p.78)

To remain steadfast, unshakable does not mean not to change; on the contrary, it allows full and real appreciation of the circumstances in order to adapt exactly to them. It is the foundation of opportunism, the art of acting and feeling according to the quality of the moment, the qi, the season etc.

Suwen ch.2 presents the four seasons, showing for each of them the appropriate inner disposition, the accurate tendency of the sensitivity, the suitable will.

Thus, during the spring, « one exerts the will (*shi zhi* 使志) for life : Letting live, not killing; Giving, not taking away; Rewarding, not punishing.”

In summer, “ one exerts the will, but without violence, assisting the brilliance of beauty and strength which thus fulfil their promise. One must assist the flow of *qi* which likes to go to the exterior.”

During the autumn, “one exerts the will peacefully and calmly, to soften the repressive effects of autumn .”

In winter, « one exerts the will as if buried, as if hidden, and taking care only of oneself, as if fixed on oneself, in possession of oneself.”

To be too severe during the spring – or at any moment of time analogous to the spring qi – goes against the natural order of life, inside as well as outside oneself. But not to be strict in autumn is also to go against the natural movement of life. An individual life always evolves amid changing circumstances, amid varying qi.

It is to be like the water of the river. From its source, the river never changes its destination ... or its mind : it heads to the sea. Yet no river goes straight ; it reaches its goal after many turns and curves. The water never departs from its nature which is to descend, to flow downward. For this reason, the river always reaches the sea through hills and plains, changing its course according to what the surrounding terrain demands. The turns and curves do not oppose its objective, they help to achieve it.

To fulfill one's destiny, one has to maintain the purpose coming from one's original nature, and never abandon the determinations of this original nature. But each situation, each moment of one's life, each part of one's body requires a specific orientation, a desire which has to participate to the accomplishment of the whole.

In order to start a business, it is necessary to have an idea and an ideal, to want to do something in a given way. In the process of developing, departments and divisions are constituted, different and complementary ones, each with its own purpose. Each of them is correct if it works in keeping with its own purpose and in that regard participates to the harmonious progress of the whole. At each level, strategy and tactics can change, depending on changing circumstances and opportunities, but without being opposed to the original goal and aspiration of the business, without altering the spirit behind the enterprise.

Thus, the Lingshu ch.8 accurately says : « When the persevering will changes, we speak of thought (*si* 思). »

In a human being, the will is one, the unique impulse coming from the origin – the kidneys, going through the heart-mind to become a firm will able to give the right orientation to the whole being, in his wishes, desires and activities. Such a will guides the qi and is the basis for the thought. It has many expressions such as the natural propensity of the five zang or all the variations according the seasons, circumstances, ages But all these expressions of the will may participate in the better fulfilling the destiny of this being, only if his heart is oriented toward Heaven and then receives the spiritual light.