

COMMITTEE VI
Eastern Approaches to Knowledge and
Values: With an Emphasis on "Qi"

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Discussant Paper on Shuji Suzuki's Paper

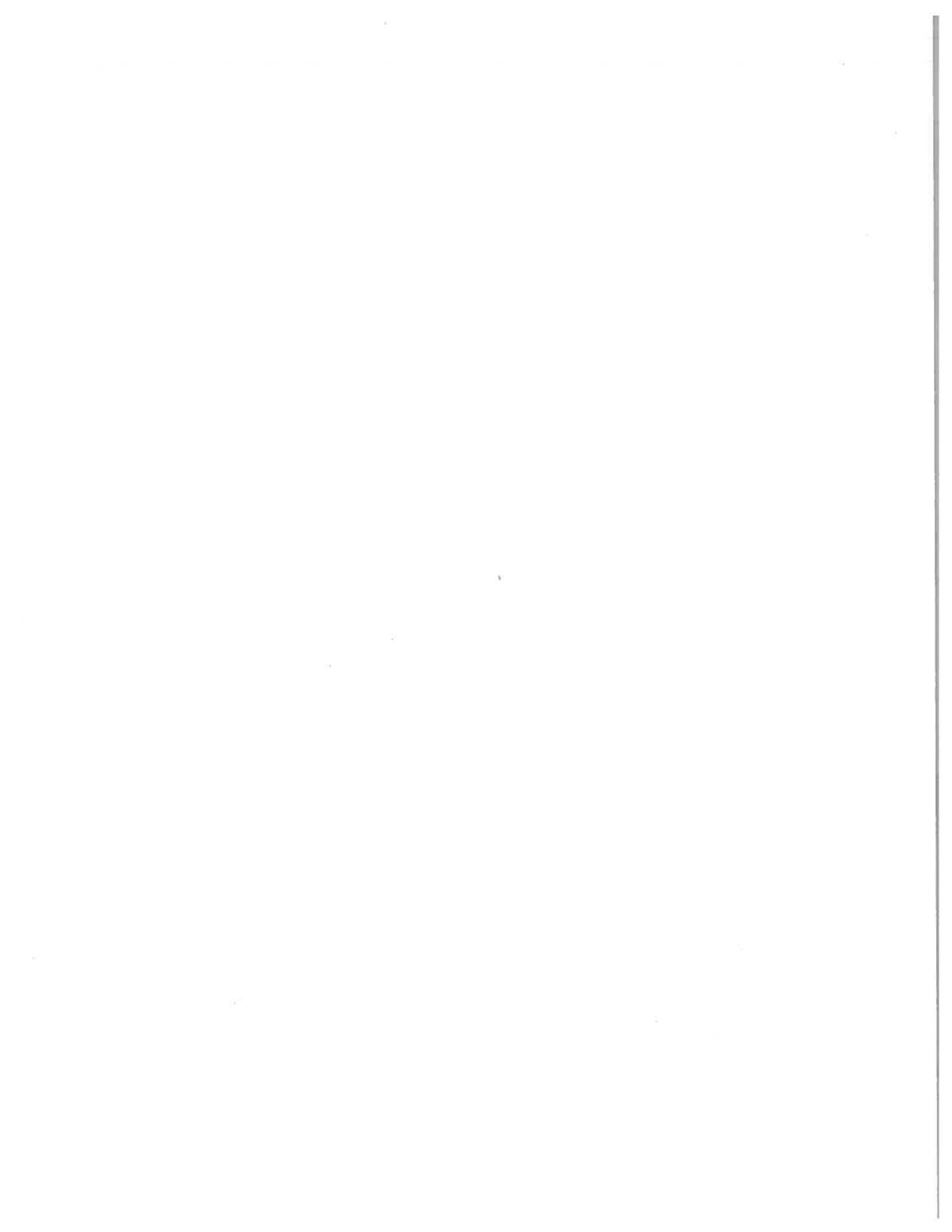
CHI'I (QI) AND WU LI IN CHINA

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WISDOM FROM THE "QI" THOUGHT

— THOUGHTS ON "CH'I (QI) AND WU LI IN CHINA"

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What, from the point of view of physics, is the precious, preeminent wisdom in the "Qi" thought so long cherished by the Chinese people? Professor Shuji Suzuki has put forward his own creative view. Epistemologically speaking, 'man' is referred to as 'matter', so, man and matter are regarded as equal things. Professor Shuji Suzuki asserts that whether matter is useful or not, if only it exists, it will have meaning. To recognize its existence and its meaning would help us found a world of harmony in which all things could exist free and unrestrained.

In numerous books written by scholars of ancient China, "matter" ("Wu", 物) has been regarded as a material as well as a spiritual and psychological noumenon. In the Pre-Qin period (770-221 B.C.), the scholars gave emphasis to "matter", using this category to explain the very origin of all creation in the universe. That is "Qi" thought.

"Qi" thought first appeared in « Guan-tzu 管子 » (Guan Zhong ?-647 B.C., a famous prime minister of the kingdom Qi 齐国 in the Spring and Autumn period 770-475 B.C.). In « Shu Yan Pian 枢言篇 », he says that if there is "Qi", there is life. Life is maintained by "Qi". In « Xin Shu Xia Pian 心术下篇 », he affirms that "Qi" is what fills the body. It's the essence of life. The essence originates from the motion and variation of "Qi". In « Nei Ye Pian 内业篇 », he claims that Heaven gives the essence to a man at birth, and Earth gives him the form, and thus together, a man is created. In this respect, Professor Shuji Suzuki has covered significant ground.

The precious wisdom, then, of "Qi" is like a piece of rockbound jade, not easily penetrated. It is not only because of the restrictiveness of the times, but also because of the existence and even the conflicts of different schools. Most of the books have been written archaically and abstrusely, occasionally with obscurity and excess bias.

For instance, in Li-xue(or Li-hsüeh)理学 of the Song and Ming dynasties which Professor Shuji Suzuki mentioned in his paper, "Li" has been regarded as the ultimate origin from which all things in the universe are created. "Li" does not refer to natural physical things, but to moral principles of a backward time. It's the distorting summary of natural and social knowledge at that time. Chu-tzu 朱子 is the representative of Li-xue scholars 理学家 who believe

that in nature, society, life and history, everything real, beautiful, right and bright conforms with Tian Li 天理 (Heavenly principles — feudal ethics as propounded by the Song Confucianists). Here, Tian Li is "Li" 理. They believe that everything bad, false, dark belongs to human desire that must be quenched. Therefore, it is necessary to "keep Tian Li and to exterminate human desire". In addition, "Li varies and changes all things by Qi". It does it "by learning the nature of things to promote one's intellectual capacity" ^(格物致知) and "by learning the nature of things to get a thorough understanding of "Li" ^(格物穷理)". Thus, "Wu" 物 returns to "Li". This can be graphically expressed as follows, "Li" → "Qi" → "Wu" → "Li" (理 → 气 → 物 → 理) Here are the virtues and at the same time the defects of the philosophical and logical system of "Li".

In a word, the merits of "Qi" thought lie in the fact that "Qi" places stress on considering the universe as a whole, on combining the description of ethics and the universe, on self-examination, seeking unity of knowledge and self-cultivation. The weaknesses lie in the superficial understanding of the physical universe, in undervaluing theoretical arguments and experiments, devaluing the individual. Knowing the hows but not the whys might give expression to a deep understanding of the unity and harmony of the universe, but at the same time give

way to one-sidedness and obscurity.

The "Qi" thought of the Orient is the wisdom which derives from all past scientific achievements. In « Zhou Yi 周易 », « Lao-tzu 老子 », « Chuang-tzu 莊子 » and the philosophy of the Song and Ming dynasties, we can find a dialectical thinking of wholeness and harmony. All schools of "Qi" thought believe that "Qi" is an active substance with a flowing, developing, agglomerating and creating character. In modern words, "Qi" is a kind of vital force and information.

Chang Zai (A.D. 1020-1077) of the Song dynasty, discussing "Qi", expounded "motion and stillness", "Li and God", "transformation and variation", "gathering and dispersion", "sensation and reaction", "one and two" etc., and thus greatly developed the dialectical idea, primarily expressed in « Zhou Yi ». He claimed that "Qi" originally had no form, but when the two opposites of "Qi", Yin-Yang (the Negative-Positive) get in touch with each other, a form is created. Where forms, there are opposites. Where opposites, there are contrary actions. Where contrary, there is conflict, with conflict leading to reconciliation. (Chang Zai, Selected Works 性理大全 p. 10, p. 170-200). Chang clearly thought that the origin of the movement of all things is the unity of opposites, i.e.,

the unity of Yin-Yang in "Qi" itself. Without "two" there is no "one". Without unity, there is no function of opposites. In « Henan Cheng Shi Cui Yan v. 3 河南程氏粹言卷三 », we read, "There is "two" everywhere in the world. "One" and "two" must be regarded as equal. This is the essence of life." Chu Xi 朱熹, of the Song dynasty particularly developed this idea of "two" in his words "One thing has two parts". He even considered that "One divides into two" is a continuous unlimited process. While Fang Yi-zhi 方以智 developed the idea of "one". In « Dong Xi Jun, Shan Zhen Pian 东西均·三征篇 », Fang pointed out that "All things in the world, in ancient or modern times, have two parts, and the two parts will finally become one, getting together." He put forward the argument that "Two combine into one". Wang Fu-zhi (王夫之) of the Ming dynasty further promoted these two arguments: "One divides into two" and "two combine into one", linking them together.

It has been proved by modern science that without differences a rich and colourful system full of life cannot be formed. Difference is the origin of order. And order is essential for making a structure of vitality. Any difference that improves order is an active force that promotes the development of things. As the world develops, it becomes more capable of holding differences. So, to seek common ground, one must respect differences. Only

by respecting differences can one find common ground. Co-operation, harmonization, coordination will bring benefits to all sides. No recognition, no accomodation, no tolerance of differences , all this will unevitably bring harm and damage for all sides, and finally injure oneself. This is just what human history has repeatedly proved.

I am very glad that the purpose of The International Conference on the Unity of the Science coincides with the wisdom that I've just tried to expound.