

Discovering a Relationship to *Ch'i/Ki/ Prana* while Working in Asia

在亚洲工作期间发现与“气”的关系

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I am very grateful to Shaun McNiff for contributing this article. I have been evolving my own personal relationship with *ch'i* since graduate school some 45 years ago, and after teaching in many countries in Asia: mainland China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, India and South Korea over the past eight years. I found his article intriguing, confirming, and stimulating, and given my own experiences personally and professionally, I wanted to discuss these concepts and expand on several others. I deeply appreciate Shaun's approach to this theme, as we must acknowledge a transcultural context where it might allow us access to the symbolic more readily than merely what we in the West hold within our culture.

Where I want to expand the discussion is to include the body, and not simply as concept or energy, as energy is already held in the body, but a felt experience. Early on in my career, I was drawn to martial arts, achieving a brown belt in Aikido, and also practicing Tai Chi, eventually moving to an advanced level called *tuishou*, meaning Push-hands. I grew to know *ch'i/ki/qi/prana* through the experience in my body and this informed my work as a somatically-based expressive arts therapist. Feeling the circular imagistic energy of these martial arts, I felt my body and soul change with the practices.

My experience in these Asian countries has helped me know more deeply *ch'i/ki/qi/prana* as an experience in the daily life of the people I met. In teaching, the energy in the room becomes somatic and emotional in ways not as clearly noticed in western cultures. This somatic experience opens participants to the symbolic in a kinesthetic way. I feel all is held closely to the kinesthetic symbolic experience. The script in Chinese writing is pictographic, where each image tells a story. The pictograph for listen, for example, is a story about listening with ears, mind, and heart. Since multiple dialects are spoken in China, each written character has many meanings and often a spiritual one. Similarly, in India, I sponsored a workshop at a retreat center called Swarga, a word that means Heaven, and it was indeed heavenly there. I often sense the power of *ch'i* when teaching in these countries, as the students and professionals engage fully with the art materials and are so respectful of the trainer it makes our relationship circular and highly reciprocal. This is not to say that there are no challenges in the discussions, but the energy is different than what I have experienced in western settings.

In addition to expressive arts theory, the foundation of my approach is laden with Jungian theory and practice. In his work, Jung developed the concept of the Self, informed by the Tao, and symbolized by the mandala. Jung felt that creativity was the

function of this life energy that he called the self/Self which was informed by his embrace of *ch'i/ki/qi/prana*. The Self is an experienced energy, not merely conceptually, but as felt sense experience. It is our essence, and it guides us like DNA to regulate, navigate, and know.

During my eight years in Asia I have seen and felt expressive arts grow and thrive, as it has shown a deep resonance with Asian traditions of *ch'i/ki/qi/prana* as bodily experience. This resonance allows us to live our images, which is what the German poet Rilke urged us to do many years ago. I agree with Shaun that the embodied power of *ch'i* opens Asia to expressive arts in a deep, indigenous way, as it is so great a part of the tapestry of their lives and spiritually.

About the author

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