'Grain qi overcomes yuan qi'

The implications of the quote

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If grain qi overcomes yuan qi (Primal qi), the person will be fat and die young; if yuan qi overcomes grain qi, the person will be slim and live long. The art of nourishing life is to reduce the grain qi so that illness does not arise.[1]

THE QUOTE IS found in Yang Quan's *Wù Lǐ Lùn* (Discourse on the Principles of Things).[2] It signifies that if the nourishment in food exceeds what the body's biochemical dynamics can accept, then this easily injures the *yuan* qi and makes the body shape fat. This is averse to health. When the amount of nutrition is appropriate, the body is fit and slim and the person remains without illness.

At the same time, this argument shows that the basic conditions and requirements for biological survival involve metabolism—in traditional Chinese medicine terms *shēng jiàng chū rù* (升降出入): ascending, descending, entering and exiting—the ability for qi, blood and fluids to rise, fall, move deeper into the body and move out towards the surface.

When a person's absorption of energy from food is excessive over the long term, this excessive energy is transformed within the body into fat stores, which then obstruct and block the qi mechanism. This influences the activity of the whole organism.

Su Wen chapter 43 says "when food and drink double, the Stomach and Intestines are injured."[3] Again, in chapter three it says "the change resulting from rich foods will lead to a large carbuncle on the foot."[4]

Similarly, the *Wú Yī Huì Jiǎng* (Collection of Papers by Physicians from Wu) says "When ascent and descent are not as they should be, there will be damage to the Spleen and Stomach. This will cause loss in the normal regulation of food intake and excretion."[5]

People who overeat and are fat definitely do not feel healthy; indeed, it is often at the root of problems such as diabetes, gallstones, hypertension, cerebrovascular accidents and hardening of the arteries. Statistics show that the death rate for obese people is 25-50 per cent higher than slimmer people of the same age. The death rate from circulatory and renal diseases is 62 per cent higher in fat people.

The maintenance of the biological activity in the human body's *zang-fu* organs, *jing*-essence and qi relies on the unbroken support of the five flavours from food and drink in making basic nutritional substances. "The growth of yin is based in the five flavours" is the classic quote. However, un-moderated consumption of food and drink can damage the *zang-fu* organs, dissipate qi and blood, and make people sick. "The five organs in yin can be injured by the five flavours." So, food is a two-edged sword.

Thus, the prime nourishing life strategy for aged patients is moderation, and the proper amount of food and drink in balance with their own degree of activity.

1. "穀气胜元气，其人肥而不寿；元气胜穀气，其人瘦而寿。养生之术，常使穀气少，则病不生矣。"*Gǔ qì shèng yuán qì, qī rén féi ér bú shòu, yuán qì shèng gǔ qì, qī rén shòu ér shòu. Yáng shēng zhī shù, cháng shǐ gǔ qì shǎo, zé bìng bù shēng yǐ*. This statement has been fundamental in the defence of fasting (避穀 *bì gǔ*) in China for more than 2000 years.
2. 杨泉《物理论》 Yang Quan was a cosmologist from the Three Kingdoms period, and also the author of the *Tài Xuán Jīng* (太玄經 Canon of Great Mystery). He said that all the universe is one single original qi.
3. 飲食自倍，腸胃乃傷 *Yǐn shí zì bèi, cháng wèi nǎi shāng*.
4. 高梁之變，足生大疔 *Gāo liáng zhī biàn, zǔ shēng dà dīng*.
5. 吳醫彙講 *Wú Yī Huì Jiǎng* (Collection of Papers by Physicians from Wu). The first medical "journal" in China, it is made up of a collection of articles from a variety of physicians in the Jiangnan area from 1792-1801. It was in this collection that Ye Tian-Shi's *Wēn Rè Lùn* (Discussion of Warm Heat) first appeared. See the excellent series in *The Lantern* vol 3 issues 1, 2 and 3 entitled "The Discourse on Warm-Heat Disease by Ye Tian-Shi" by Charles Chace and Daniella Van Wart.