

The 黃帝內經 *Huángdì Nèijīng* was written around two thousand years ago in ancient China as the first official document which would found the concepts of health, disease and cure on logical interpretation of the observable world instead of superstition. It is deeply rooted in the daoistic worldview, and as such simultaneously timelessly modern and traditional.

Discussing and interpreting the phenomena of nature, it is the single most important fundament for understanding and practicing chinese medicine until today.

Although the book comes as a recorded discussion between the famous emperor Huang Di and his doctors, it is high likely that it is more a compilation of the collected knowledge of several authors, who have chosen the emperor as the central character to imply the profundity of their text.

The following five chapters seek to convey a glimpse into the style of thinking and teaching of the *Huángdì Nèijīng*.

1. *Basic questions - Chapter 1 - Discourse on the Heavenly Truth of Ancient Antiquity*

The principles of life cultivation

2. *Basic Questions - Chapter 2 - The Great Treatise on Yin Yang Correspondence in Phenomena*

Explanation of the application of yin-yang theory in TCM

3. *How to understand the sentence "When blood is despoliated, there is no sweat; when sweat is despoliated, there is no blood".*

About the relationship between blood and sweat

4. *Basic Questions - Chapter 74 - Great Treatise on the Essential of Ultimate Truth*

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5. *How to understand the sentence "To treat disease, it is necessary to seek the root".*

About the differentiation between origin and manifestation of a disease and between counteracting and coacting treating method.

1. Huángdì Nèijīng - Basic questions

Chapter 1 - Discourse on the Heavenly Truth of Ancient Antiquity

The principles of life cultivation

In Chapter 1 of Huang Di Nei Jing, Basic Questions: Discourse on the Heavenly Truth of Ancient Antiquity, the Yellow Emperor and the medical doctor Qi Bo have a discussion about the supposition that long ago, people would live more than one hundred years old while remaining strong and healthy. However, during their era people's lifespan were much shorter (around fifty years).

Qi Bo lays out, that this difference is due to the flawed lifestyle of their contemporaries, while their ancestors lived in a more intentional and conscious way.

He explains how people of their own era waste their energy through ignorant behavior, while their ancestors knew which activities they should engage in, and which they should avoid; they knew about the right quality of thinking and acting and how to counterbalance the influences of their environment to preserve their Jing, Life-Essence.

The chapter refers several times to the kidneys or to the Jing, (*Kidney-Essence*). It describes, how in men and women, the Qi in the kidneys develops and how it is preserved or wasted. It states that those who follow an ignorant lifestyle die early because they are wasting their Kidney-Essence through irregular behavior, by not doing their deeds at the right time or place and are following their lust without proper control. Wise men live a calm and regular lifestyle and know about the right proportions and therefore live a long and healthy life.

For attaining longevity, the chapter explains the worth of the following behaviors.

Exercising and moving

Qi Bo explains, that the daily work should be done in a committed, regular, moderate manner and overworking should be avoided. This may also be applied to the method in which exercise should be performed. In our modern times, because many people have desk jobs, sport has become the only physical exercise. The authors of the Nei Jing would have also probably agreed, that for such desk workers, physical training is beneficial and should be done in that way. That is, it should be regular, challenging but also with respect for the limitations of one's body.

Diet

Food intake should be moderate and regular. Qi Bo mentions his contemporaries as poor examples, because of their propensity of following their cravings and desires and for consuming too much alcohol. The ancestors, on the contrary, were content with the ordinary and would not be controlled by their desires for exciting taste and intoxication.

Sexuality

Sexual activity should neither be avoided nor acted out excessively. One should not waste energy and should not have intercourse while being intoxicated.

Taoism teaches exercises of how to conserve and to cultivate life energy, which also include sexual practice. However, this is not mentioned in the text here.

Guarding Against Evil Qi

One should guard oneself against pathogenic factors. Helpful for this is staying calm and receptive. "When internal energies are able to circulate smoothly and freely, and the energy of

the mind is not scattered, but is focused and concentrated, illness and disease can be avoided.”¹

Mental purification

Qi Bo describes the characteristics of the ancestors as moderate, balanced, self-possessed and intentional. Furthermore, he describes them as peaceful, fearless and full of virtue. These noble qualities indicate that he talks about people who spend a lot of time purifying their mind through meditation and study.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) connects the five emotions to the Zang-Fu-Organs. If these emotions are balanced, like it is described in the characteristics of the ancestors, Qi and blood can flow with ease and the mind is at rest. This keeps the energy expended to a minimum and saves Kidney-Essence.

Following the DAO

Later in the text, Huang Di adds, that he has heard of rumors of true men, accomplished men, sages and exemplary men who lived in ancient times and had a deep knowledge about the DAO. Based on such wisdom and a noble mindset they lived in harmony with laws of Yin and Yang, the five elements and the five seasons of the year. They knew how to read and to adapt to the phenomena in nature, like astrological signs and phases of sun and moon.

Huang Di Nei Jing, Basic Questions, Chapter 5: *“Hence, the sages acted on the basis of 'no intervention'. They enjoyed their ability to be peaceful and tranquil. Hence their lifespan has no limit and will end only with heaven and earth. This is a result of the way how the sages ordered their body.”*²

When one reflects about the idea in Traditional Chinese Medicine, that man is not solely a reflection of, but is also interwoven in heaven and earth, and in the movements of Yin and Yang; it is only logical that there is such a thing as a right time and place for everything and that one can be in harmony or disharmony with ones environment. For example, it seems obvious for us to wear a coat in winter. However TCM also tells us, that because of it's Yin-character, winter is also the time for contemplation and quiescence. By following this advice, we follow the DAO of winter, by strengthening our Yin and saving our Yang.

Huang Di Nei Jing, Basic Questions, Chapter 5: *“If one knows these principles, one remains strong. If one does not know these principles, one turns old.”*²

1 Maoshing Ni, The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine, Page 2

2 Paul Unschuld, Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: an annotated translation of Huang Di's Inner Classic — Basic Questions, University of California Press, Page 114-115

2. Huángdì Nèijīng - Basic Questions

Chapter 2 - The Great Treatise on Yin Yang Correspondence in Phenomena

Explanation of the application of yin-yang theory in TCM

Huang Di Nei Jing, Basic Questions, Chapter 5: “*Yin and Yang are the great outlines of everything.*”¹

Chapter 5 of the Basic Questions in Huang Di Nei Jing is called “The Great Treatise on Yin Yang Correspondence in Phenomena” and talks in detail about the resulting expressions of Yin-Yang-Theory in the human body. The system presented is so fundamental for practicing Traditional Chinese Medicine that it is usually taught to beginners within the first hours of their studies.

In this chapter, Yin and Yang are represented as the essential principle, not only of Traditional Chinese Medicine, but that of the whole universe. Moving in their argumentation from the whole down to the details, Huang Di and Qi Bo first talk about the appearances of Yin and Yang between heaven and earth and of other great opposing forces like fire and water. They continue to talk about the emergence of taste, temperature and climatic Qi until they reach the topic of the five cardinal directions (with the center as the fifth direction). Then the associated climatic qualities, organs, emotions, functions and tissues in the body are viewed. Concluding out of this, they discuss the application of this knowledge for Yang Shen (Life cultivation, as discussed in the previous paragraph), for understanding the pathomechanism of disease and how to rebalance Yin and Yang for restoring health.

To translate Yin and Yang into western concepts is difficult, because objects and situations are viewed in a dualistic way, where something is either on or off, living or dead, existing or not existing. Yin and Yang describe duality without separating the poles. Yin and Yang are inseparable and depend on each other. A coin, for example, has two sides, of which one lies upward (the Yang side) and one downward (the Yin side). The qualities of Yin and Yang are intrinsic like these two sides are intrinsic to the coin; they are inherent in the nature of existence. However, the example of the coin is not helpful in every way, because Yin or Yang might become excessive or deficient. In the former example, this would be impossible, because there is always the same percentage of the coin facing downward and upward. That is why the classic picture to describe Yin Yang is one of a hill; The Yang-Side faces toward the sun, while the Yin-Side then lies in the shadow. Depending on the time of day, the hill might be totally illuminated (for instance at noon), and therefore in a complete Yang-State, or it may be totally covered in darkness (as at midnight), which would be a complete Yin-State.

In the differentiation of inside and outside, the internal is Yin and the superficial is Yang. From this, the conclusion comes: “*Yin resides in the interior and is the reserve for Yang. Yang is residing in the exterior and is the manifestation of Yin.*”²

Hence, Yin and Yang are opposing each other, even consuming each other, but are also nourishing and building the foundation of each other. This in mind, one can follow the explanations of Qi Bo, how one organ generates the other by following its nature. So, for example, the Yang principle of 'growth' may manifest itself in the heaven as wind, on the earth as wood and in the body as the liver and sinews. These representatives, of the same principle, have impact on each other, while they will also impact the representatives of the direct and indirect connected principles. Therefore, for example, it is said, that the former principle is the mother of the latter. In this case, this would be the full-grown Yang, which manifests in the heaven as heat, on the earth as fire and in the body as the heart and vessels.

While the heaven is Yang, it can also be divided into its Yin side and its Yang side. There is no such thing as absolute Yin or absolute Yang, for you can always divide a Yin, into another Yin- and Yang-part as you can divide every Yang into another Yin and Yang.

Because Yin and Yang nourish and consume each other, there is always a process where one side becomes stronger and stronger until it peaks, while its counterforce is becoming weaker until its almost obliterated. This is when the forces begin to become unstable and the stronger one starts to diminish. From this point on, the weaker opposite force begins to consume it's counterpart more and more until it becomes even, then stronger and then peaks as well.

Hence, there are four main states of Yin and Yang. After Yin peaks, which is called Yin within Yin, it begins to grow Yang inside, which is Yang within Yin. When Yang is at its maximum, it is Yang within Yang. Now Yin begins to grow, which is Yin within Yang. Out of this rule, one can deduce the harmonious change of energetic qualities and its pathology in case of a disease.

1 Wang Ying, Zhu Wenpei, Yang Zi, Zhang Qiying, Chen Yi, Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic, Selected Readings, International Education College Zhejiang Chinese Medical, University, Page 1

2 Zhanwen Liu, Liang Liu, Essentials of Chinese Medicine, Springer Verlag London Limited, Page 14

3. How to understand the sentence “**When blood is despoliated, there is no sweat; when sweat is despoliated, there is no blood**”.

About the relationship between blood and sweat

Blood and sweat share the same origin, which is called the Post-Heaven Essence. The word essence, or in the original language 'Jing', is used for three different, related substances and needs to be explained at this point. Pre-Heaven Essence is distributed to the new life through the unification of the energies of the father and the mother at procreation. This energy therefore is given and cannot be changed in its amount. Its function is to merge with the Post-Heaven Essence, which builds a third kind, namely Kidney Essence. Kidney Essence controls growth, reproduction and development.

Post-Heaven Essence is a refinement, which stomach and spleen generate out of the consumed food and liquids. Post-Heaven Essence joins Pre-Heaven Essence to build Kidney Essence and it plays a vital role in the development of body fluids, blood and Qi.

Body fluids, blood and Qi are very closely related. Like Yin and Yang are inseparable, Qi needs body fluids and blood to build its material foundation for moving in the body. Without Qi, body fluids and blood would not move and therefore would not fulfill their function. Emperor Huang Di asks Doctor Qi Bo in Chapter 5 of the Spiritual Pivot about the character and the origin of Ying and Wei, which are the two aspects of Qi. Qi Bo explains, that after the stomach and spleen have generated Post-Heaven Essence, it moves to the lungs, where it becomes Ying, (the quality of Qi which circles internally and through the channels and the meridians), and Wei (the quality of Qi, which flows freely through the body and protects the body surface from evil influences). When the pores of the skin (cou li) open because of an attack or an internal reason, Wei Qi flows out. Because the Qi is carried by the fluids, with the Wei Qi comes sweat.

The construction of blood also starts with the Post-Heaven Essence moving upwards to the lungs, but from here it is moved forward to the heart where it runs through its final transformation.

Body fluids are fluid parts of the Post-Heaven Essence, which are refined through the bladder and kidneys. The relationship between blood and fluids is similar to the one between Ying Qi and Wei Qi. Blood flows inside the vessels, the body fluids circle outside. Parts of the blood may leave the vessels and become body fluids; body fluids may enter the vessel and join blood. “*Within the structure of the human body the fluids continually enter the blood vessels by means of minute collateral vessels. Thus, body fluids are a basic component of blood. At the same time, through the confluence of fluids both from outside and from within the vessels they adjust the thickness and the volume of the blood.*”¹

Hence, in case of strong excitement of Wei Qi, which leads to strong sweating, there is a loss of body fluids, which results in the amount of blood also diminishing. On the other hand, blood deficiency diminishes body fluids, which could come out as sweat. Therefore blood deficiency leads to diminished sweating. If however, a disease forces the body to sweat although the blood is already weak, or if during a disease with sweating there is strong blood loss, the deficiency get's doubled. This is a life-threatening situation.

4. Huángdì Nèijīng - Basic Questions

Chapter 74 - Great Treatise on the Essential of Ultimate Truth

About the Pathogeneses related to the five zang and six fu organs

1 “Symptoms of tremors and shaking of the limbs, dizziness, and vertigo are usually caused by wind and associated with the liver.”¹

This is the case of Liver-Wind, which stirs the interior. Liver-Wind may arise through extreme heat, Liver-Yin-Deficiency and Liver-Blood-Deficiency.² Extreme heat, attacking the body from the outside and burning the liver meridian, is only seen in complications of infectious diseases like measles and encephalitis and is obligatory to be treated by western medicine in Germany. Long lasting Liver-Yin-Deficiency is often accompanied by Kidney-Yin-Deficiency and leads to an excess of Liver-Yang, which is unbound and starts to rise. This uprising of Liver-Yang also generates wind; wind by uprising Liver-Yang appears suddenly and is associated with strong neurological symptoms. Liver-Blood is also a part of Liver-Yin. Through malnutrition, blood loss or loss of body fluids, Liver-Blood may become so deficient, that it cannot sufficiently nourish the tendons and fill the blood vessels. This leads to muscle tics and lightheadedness, accompanied by weakness and paleness.

2 “Various kinds of cold syndrome with contraction and pulling in are related to the kidney.”³

Contraction through coldness needs to be differentiated from stiffness that occurred because of injury of the tendons through Liver-Blood-Deficiency or Blood-Stasis after a trauma. Also, heat can lead to contraction. However, coldness tends to stagnate and shrink, Qi and fluids flow slower and the tendons tighten up. This may lead to the patient wanting to curl up in a fetal position, trying to protect the remaining body warmth, which is a serious condition. In gynecology we often find the case of coldness in the uterus, which leads to cramps and restricted blood flow. Coldness is either an excess of Yin or a deficiency of Yang. Working together with the spleen and heart, the kidneys are the most important provider of Yang. If Kidney-Yang is weak, we observe the typical contractions together with cold sensations, a deep and thin pulse, loose or watery stools and a pale tongue with a white coating. A Yin-Excess may occur in form of an invading cold pathogen, but would not be related to the kidneys.

3 “Various kinds of qi syndrome with wheezing, chest congestion and shortness of breath are related to the lung.”³

Paul Unschuld translates this sentence slightly different: “All [diseases with] dammed up qi [resulting in chest] pressure, without exception they are associated with the lung.”⁴

The lungs collect the heavenly Qi, descends Qi and disperses Qi and body fluids. If the lungs are attacked by an external pathogen or are deficient or in excess, these functions become distorted. Hence, the rhythmic expansion and deflation becomes disharmonious and we may observe the typical symptoms of a respiratory disease.

4 “Various kinds of dampness syndrome with swelling and fullness are related to the spleen.”³

The spleen is in charge of transforming grains and beverages into Post-Heaven-Essence and moving the body fluids. Another function of the spleen is to raise the Qi of the organs, so they keep their position against the force of gravity. If Spleen-Qi or -Yang becomes weak, one can observe edema, bloating, soft stool, soft muscle tissue and abdominal distention.

5, 6 “Symptoms of disorientation, confusion, convulsion and seizures, pain and itching are usually due to fire and related to the heart.”¹

Maoshing Ni puts sentences five and six together. In the footnotes of Unschuld's translation one can see, that this makes sense, because several editions of the Huang Di Nei Jing use the words fire and heart inconsistently and interchange them.

The heart houses the mind 'Shen', which indicates the wholeness of emotional, mental and spiritual processes in the human psyche. If the heart is in imbalance, the various functions of the mind may get affected. The quoted neurological symptoms are all because of heat, which might be false heat in a Heart-Yin-Deficiency or true heat in a blazing Heart-Fire. They come with palpitations, anxiety, nervousness and sleep disturbances. If the heat is accompanied with phlegm, there may be severe neurological and psychotic symptoms. The heart also governs the blood and blood vessels. If its function of moving the blood through the vessels gets disturbed, the brain cannot be sufficiently nourished and dizziness, poor memory or syncope's might appear. However, also the nourishment of the skin depends on blood flow. This is why Heart-Blood-Deficiency might lead to a dry and itchy skin. If the deficiency is very severe, it might lead into a Blood-Stagnation, which causes pain, heat and swelling and can appear everywhere, depending on the rest of the body constitution.

7 “Various kinds of Jue Syndrom, hardness obstruction and draining are related to the lower Jiao.”³

厥 Jue, literally means to faint. In this context, it is probably meant as countermovement of Qi in the lower abdomen, leading to deregulation of passing stools and urine. The lower Abdomen, which is called lower Jiao in TCM, is governed by the energy of the kidneys. Therefore, one can think in this context of Kidney-Yin- or -Yang-Deficiency.

8 “Various kinds of paralysis, wheezing and vomiting are related to the upper Jiao.”³

The upper Jiao houses the lungs and the heart. The lungs descend and disperse Qi and body fluids through the body. The function of the limbs depends on the provision with these substances, otherwise they cannot move. The same applies to the heart, which provides the blood flow to the limbs. Wheezing is internally caused by Lung-Qi-Deficiency or by an external attack of pathogenic factors on the lungs. Vomiting, is of course, often caused by disharmonies in the middle Jiao, housing the stomach, spleen, liver and gallbladder. However, Ling Shu, Chapter 5 says, that the upper orifice of the stomach is the origin of the upper Jiao. Also, if the fundamental important descending action of the lung is disturbed, the descending action of the stomach will also be impaired, (e.g. as one can see when hard coughing leads to vomiting).

9 “Various kinds of locked jaw, teeth chattering and shivering, as though one has lost collection of one's spirit, are related to fire.”³

These neurological symptoms can be explained the same way as the visual disturbances and convulsions under quote 8 and are related to Heart-Fire.

10 “Various kinds of clonic convulsions and stiff neck are related to dampness.”³

Dampness may invade the body from the outside or may develop internally because of a weak spleen, kidney or bladder Qi. Dampness is heavy, sticky and slows the functions of the channels, organs and tissues it affects. In channels and joints it causes stagnation, ache and swelling and is called Bi-Syndrome.

Dampness injures Yang, so that its moving and warming properties may not come to effect. Dampness can also injure the Yang of the spleen, disturbing its transforming and upholding properties, therefore causing even more dampness to build up inside the body. Wind, heat and cold can easily combine with dampness and complicate the situation. This also applies for phlegm, a form of concentrated dampness. Phlegm mostly affects the head and the Zang-Organs, due to their hollow properties. When phlegm affects the heart and the mind, especially in combination with wind and fire, it can lead to tetanic convulsions.

11 “Various kinds of counter-flow and upward rushing are related to fire.”³

Fire is an extreme form of heat and has the tendency to move upwards. It affects the heart, liver, stomach, intestines and kidneys. In the heart it leads to mental disturbances; in the liver it can blaze toward the head, causing red eyes, flushed face and irritability. In the stomach it leads to sharp pain and vomiting of blood. The whole digestive system may produce ulcers because of fire. Bleeding may appear, because fire tends to push blood out of the vessels. Kidney-Fire leads to more mental disturbances, due to a long lasting Kidney-Yin-Deficiency.

12 “Various kinds of distention and abdominal increase are related to heat.”³

Every organ may be affected by heat. In the case of fullness and distention in the abdomen, to diagnose heat, there have to be symptoms like hot palms and feet, red eyes, red tongue, mental agitation and a full and tense pulse. If none of these symptoms is found, the therapist should also consider Qi-Stasis, coldness and dampness as a cause.

13 “Various kinds of agitation, mania and behavioral excess are related to fire.”⁵

“The nature of fire ... is to rise to the head, to dry fluids, to injure blood and Yin, to deplete Qi and to affect the mind.”² As discussed in previous quotes, mental symptoms are often caused by heat and fire in the heart, liver or kidney. Full-Heat as an excess of Yang needs to be differentiated from Empty-Heat, which is a Yin-Deficiency. Both will show heat symptoms, but in a Yang-Excess the patient shows signs of fullness, like bloating, red eyes or flushed face and a full pulse, while the Yin-Deficient-Patient will show signs of weakness and depletion, like pale and thin complexion, missing tongue coating and a thin pulse.

14 “Various kinds of sudden stiffness with inability to stretch are related to wind.”³

Wind can develop from the interior and then is defined as abnormal movement of Yang-Qi, or it can invade the body from outside, which is most likely in spring and autumn. Wind's nature is moving, suddenly changing and cannot be seized. Internal Wind may develop out of weakness of blood, Yin-Deficiency, uprising Liver-Yang and extreme Heat. Invading Wind may unify with other pathogenic factors and then may appear as Wind-Cold, Wind-Heat, Wind-Dampness or it may even stimulate and conglomerate with internal wind. Wind causes symptoms like muscle tics, tremors, convulsion, paralysis, itching or stiffness. Coming from outside it affects the skin, lungs and upper parts of the body first.

To treat internal wind one must treat its cause (as mentioned previously). In the case of external wind, it is most important to open up the surface and to support the Wei-Qi in expelling the pathogen.

15 “Various kinds of diseases with sound and drumlike sound when the affiliated area is struck are related to heat.”³

“Fang Yaozhong: “ Accompanied by sounds includes coughing, panting, retching, breaking a wind, abdominal sounds, etc.”⁴ The circumstances, which are described to explain quote 11 and 12,

also apply here.

16 “Various kinds of diseases with ulceration and swellings, pain, aches, and fright are related to fire.”³

The circumstances, which are described to explain quotes 5, 6, 11 and 13 also apply here.

17 “All types of contortions and [all diseases of] watery fluids being turbid, without exception they are associated with heat.”⁶

When the Liver-Yang, which is associated with heat, becomes excessive, the tendons become tense. When the Liver-Yin, Liver-Blood and the body fluids become deficient, the tendons become hard, dry and rigid.

If fluids like urine, tears, nasal discharge and vaginal secretion, which usually are clear, become turbid and yellow, this indicates a clear sign of Heat-Dampness.

18 “Various kinds of watery fluid diseases with thin, clear, cold liquid are related to cold.”³

As quote 2 says: “All Cold syndromes are marked by contraction-tautness, and they all belong to the kidney.”⁵ If Kidney-Yang is deficient, it will not produce enough heat to warm the body, and most likely Spleen-Yang will also suffer. With Spleen-Yang-Deficiency comes diminished transformation and movement of fluids, which then become overabundant and lead to pale urine, watery-loose stools, clear-watery vaginal discharges, and clear, white nasal discharge. Spleen-Yang-Deficiency also leads to Spleen-Qi-Deficiency. If there is not enough Qi, the lungs ability to protect is diminished and pathogens like cold, makes attacks from the exterior even easier.

19 “Various kinds of retching and vomiting of acid, and sudden urgent diarrhea, are related to heat.”³

This is Stomach-Heat and Heat-Dampness in the large intestine, which can develop because of consumption of too much acrid, greasy food. In the stomach, this leads to vomiting and sour regurgitation and in the intestines to sudden diarrhea with foul-smelling stools. Stomach-Heat may also arise, because of Liver-Qi-Stagnation, with the liver attacking the stomach.

1 Maoshing Ni, The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine, A new translation of the Neijing Suwen with commentary, Shambala Publications, Pages 280-286

2 Giovanni Maciocca, The Foundations of Chinese Medicine, Churchill Livingstone, Pages 221, 301

3 Wang Ying, Zhu Wenpei, Yang Zi, Zhang Qiyong, Chen Yi, Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic, Selected Readings, International Education College Zhejiang Chinese Medical, University, Pages 39-40

4 Paul Unschuld, Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: an annotated translation of Huang Di's Inner Classic — Basic Questions, University of California Press, Pages 626-630

5 Zhanwen Liu, Liang Liu, Essentials of Chinese Medicine, Springer Verlag London Limited, Page 160

5. How to understand the sentence **“To treat disease, it is necessary to seek the root”.**

The meaning of **counteracting method (also known as routine method)** and **coacting method (also known as contrary method).**

Huang Di Nei Jing, Chapter 5: *“Treatment of disease should be based upon the root.”*¹

TCM differs between the root, Ben and the twig, Biao of a disease. Like a tree roots at a certain place and stretches toward the sun in a manner which, depending on its nature and the qualities of its environment, the cause of a disease and its manifestation through symptoms, form an interchanging unity.

It is possible to treat either the root of the disease, (which means its origin), its manifestations, or both. As the quote indicates, it is usually considered wisest to treat the root, based on the presumption, that eliminating the root will eliminate the manifestations. The root is defined by an initial event, the body constitution or by the diseases mechanism of development. But it is not necessarily only seen as the cause of a symptom. E.g., if a disease is old, it may have caused another imbalance. The first disease, is the root, the following is the manifestation. Or if the energetic condition in the body changes, e.g. because of a climate change, the manifestation may remain, while the root changes, or vice versa. So, the complex of Ben and Biao may be constantly moving and therefore should be continuously observed.

If a disease is not life threatening, it is best to treat the root. Long lasting deficiency syndromes, could cause mild symptoms or could be simple attacks of pathogenic factors. If exogenous wind-cold has led to a situation of Taiyang-Disease, with headache, stiff neck, aversion to cold and a slightly higher temperature, it is enough to expel the exterior factor and the patient will recover. Or if a patient has a long lasting Spleen-Yang-Deficiency with edema, weakness and tiredness, diarrhea and diminished blood flow during menstruation, it should be enough warm the spleen and nourish its Yang.

However, e.g. in a severe case of dampness and heat attacking the large intestine with painful, thin diarrhea, the patient may lose his body fluids so fast, that the diarrhea must be stopped first. This would be an example of treating the manifestation of the disease first. However, the body may not be able to expel the pathogenic factor completely by itself. Therefore, after relieving the most severe symptoms the treatment should continue on the root until full recovery. If the patient is old, or deficient and the body is not able to defeat even a slight attack of any exogenous pathogen, then the deficiency is the root. However, in case of an attack there is no time to treat the root. The manifestation must be treated first, which requires expelling the pathogen as rapidly as possible. A very classic treatment of the manifestation is after a traumatic accident. Stopping bleeding, adjusting broken bones, cleaning and closing wounds is treating the manifestation.

Some diseases demand simultaneous treatment of Ben and Biao. This, for example, accounts for many treatments of cancer, where there are underlying roots like deficiency of Zheng-Qi, and Yin- and Yang-Deficiency, leading to manifestations of phlegm, Qi- and Blood-Stasis and Heat. Because of the consuming character of some cancer-types, there is no time to lose and therefore the manifestations need to be soothed down. However, there is no solution without healing the root issue, which is constantly leading to these manifestations.

“The simultaneous treatment of root and appearance does not mean lacking priority or regarding both as equally important. Sometimes the emphasis is on eradicating the root without neglecting the appearance, and sometimes it is on resolving the appearance without neglecting the root. The relative emphasis is determined by the actual circumstances of the illness and the relative importance or severity of the abnormalities. Thus the application of the principle is flexible and adaptable.”²

Counteracting and Coacting method

“To oppose a disease is a normal treatment; to conform to it is a treatment contrary to normal.”³

This quote out of the 74th chapter of the Nei Jing means, that there are two ways to treat an imbalance, of which one is considered normal and one special. The normal method is to use herbs with characteristics that counterbalance the disharmony we perceive in the body. Normally, for example, heat is cooled, coldness is warmed, deficiency is tonified, fullness is dispersed and dryness is lubricated. This comes down to the dynamics of Yin and Yang, which are supposed to be balanced. If there is Yin-Deficiency, Yin is tonified with cool and lubricating herbs, if there is Yang-Excess, Yang is dispersed with bitter, cold herbs. If there is Yang-Deficiency, Yang is tonified with sweet, hot herbs, if there is Yin-Excess, Yin is dispersed with warm, bland, drying herbs.

Sometimes, the manifestation of diseases is complicated and does not seem to fit its root. This is because the pathomechanism is more complicated and produces symptoms, which seem to contradict its own nature.

For example, in Spleen- and Stomach-Qi-Deficiency, the bowel functions may become so insufficient, that symptoms of obstruction and abdominal fullness appear; to disperse the fullness by counteracting it would be a mistake. Instead the Qi-Deficiency needs to be warmed and tonified. This is coacting method, because the herbs share the same qualities as the manifestations of the disease. In different example, in case of an extreme Yang-Deficiency, the patient might from time to time not get cold, as it would be normal, but could get very hot. This can happen because the overabundant Yin inside the body forces the remaining Yang to the surface, where it appears as hot flushes and restlessness. Cooling down the heat would be a severe mistake, because here the root of the heat outside is the overabundant coldness inside. Instead, by coacting, one should give hot and tonifying herbs.

“Yellow Emperor asked: How to apply the coacting method?

Qi-Bo replied: A hot disease may be treated by hot herbs. A cold disease may be treated by cold herbs. A blocked disease may be treated by tonification. A flowing disease may be treated by promoting the flowing. ... By this method, it may appear that herbs with same properties as the manifestations of the disease are being used in the beginning, but then, the real nature of the disease is shown, which is in fact opposite to the herbs.”¹

1 Wang Ying, Zhu Wenpei, Yang Zi, Zhang Qiying, Chen Yi, Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic, Selected Readings, International Education College Zhejiang Chinese Medical, University, Pages 2 and 86

2 Zhanwen Liu, Liang Liu, Essentials of Chinese Medicine, Springer Verlag London Limited, Page 325

3 Paul Unschuld, Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: an annotated translation of Huang Di's Inner Classic — Basic Questions, University of California Press, Page 635

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Date: 20th of September, 2016

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