

Learning from the East: Shared Treasures

by Vicki Martin

Part one of 'Learning from the East' focussed on cyclical flows of energy, in particular relating Yin/Yang and the Five Elements to the vasomotoric cycle and techniques used in biodynamic massage. Part two sees us journey into perhaps more esoteric aspects - however this depth of exploration also leads into a more embodied understanding of Eastern approaches which has both parallels with and immediate practical relevance to our work as biodynamic massage therapists. This article is necessarily long due to its often complex concepts, but I have broken it up into numbered sections for ease of reading.

A turning point in my acupuncture training came when a particular patient was interviewed in front of the class. What stuck me most was that throughout he was not 'in himself' at any level, and that I wanted somehow to respond to that, yet nobody else picked this up and the class discussion was more along the lines of whether he was a warmth-seeking Fire CF or a sympathy-seeking Earth etc. – as is typical to the Five Element style. The nature of one's conscious state and its embodied expression just didn't seem to be considered in the way I wanted it to be. Five Element practitioners do pay great attention to what they call the client's 'spirit', but this is directed more towards the presence of sparkle in the client's eye and how resilient they are to the challenges of life; whether they are 'in good spirits', to use a common phrase.

Some of the difficulties arise for cultural and historic reasons. One book notes the tendency of the Chinese towards a sociology of the self rather than a psychology of the individual [1]. Another highlights the likely intentional removal of aspects liable to empower the fulfilment of individual destiny when the so-called TCM style of acupuncture was put together, a project initiated by Chairman Mao in a desperate attempt to restore ailing health service provision in the 1970's following the Cultural Revolution [2]. TCM has been widely exported to the West and is used alongside Western medicine in China today, yet in spite of its name it is not in fact truly 'traditional'. A TCM practitioner once described it to me as 'a

bastardisation of traditional Chinese medicine' – albeit one that provides a therapeutically useful model. That said, there is no 'one' traditional Chinese medicine. China is a large place and the means of transmission was for a long time largely oral; many idiosyncratic styles have resulted. The Five Element style holds more scope for a humanistic approach due to its emphasis on emotions, amply illustrated by case vignettes in modern texts [2-4] – but it doesn't always pay that much attention to the body.

Amidst such uninspiring gloom, let me whet your appetite with the words of two American acupuncturists who combine Five Element and TCM styles:

What is it that we want? To fully experience our aliveness ... we want to live the lives of our bodies and want our bodies to permit us to fully live our lives. Chinese medicine is a beginning. [4]

It is likely not irrelevant that they acknowledge the contribution of somatic therapist Stanley Keleman to their work. Their description of the experience of an acupuncture treatment is also refreshing:

My arms and legs are flooded by tiny rivulets of current ... what I'm feeling is simply more of myself. It's strange, in the sense of odd and unfamiliar, but as a sensation not unpleasant. In fact, the edges of my mouth are cradling a silly smile. The skin is stretched less tightly over my bony frame as my pores relax. I sense movement as I lie quiet, aware of

impulse within my mind at rest. Thoughts tumble into consciousness, roll over, and shuffle off. With my eyes closed, and perception directed inward, simultaneous layers of activity play like instruments in concert with each other. I am the composer and the composed, the musician and the listener, the instrument and its player. [4]

1: The Three Treasures

Our first key to understanding our conscious experience of life lies with the Taoist Three Treasures – Jing (Essences), Qi and Shen (Spirits) – so called because they are the key factors which enable us to come into being and which we must therefore take care of if we are to live our life to its full potential. Key to this process is an examination of Chinese characters, in particular drawing from the interpretations of Claude Larre (now deceased) and Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallee (who lectures in the UK each year).

Jing (Essences)

The character Jing has two parts. On the left is a bursting or exploding grain of cereal or rice – a change that could be taking place either within the earth (germination) or inside the stomach (digestion). On the right is the colour of life; green, or any colour giving the impression that life is circulating well [5].

One book [4] suggests that the terms soma and psyche are those which come closest to conveying the meaning of the Chinese concepts Jing and Shen, a definition of Jing compatible with books on the internal martial arts and Taoist meditation in

which Jing may be understood as something approximating to our physicality [6, 7]. However, such an understanding is a bit different from the usual medical one.

Jing is also likened to DNA [4]; the character is used to denote semen or ovum [8] and the fusion of parental Essences is what takes place at conception [9]. This is how we come to have what is known as Pre-Heaven Essence [10] or constitutional Essence [11], the key, unique aspect of ourselves which is inherited from our parents. Post-Heaven Essence or acquired Essence is gained after birth, refined and extracted from food and fluids, yet incorporated to give a final composition modeled on our Pre-Heaven Essence [5] and thus adding to our total store.

Within the medical context, Jing has roles relating to growth, reproduction and development. It forms the basis of our constitutional strength [10], ideally manifesting as a robust, naturally strong physique and the ability to work hard with good stamina but then recover quickly and easily [12]. Jing is compared to a battery that runs out quickly or slowly depending on its initial capacity and how severely you make demands on it. Pregnancy, excessive sexual activity, poor diet, working or playing too hard, insufficient sleep, long term drug use or too much alcohol all deplete Jing [12]. This leads to early ageing e.g. grey hair, loose teeth, weak bones, reduced physical strength, stamina, sex drive and fertility, deteriorating mental function. Many of the listed causative factors for Jing depletion result from a person being out of touch with natural rhythms of activity and rest.

The above descriptions miss any contribution of Jing to our way of being. Elisabeth describes Essences as *'the raw material of life, that which supports the expression of life ... that which comes first and is expressed through the body, allowing the expression of Qi and the presence of the spirits'* [13]. This, together with

her frequent description of Essences guiding the *'releasing of Qi'*, makes me think me not only of a template for physiological processes but also a participation in the generation of impulses towards action or expression. Indeed, we talk of someone acting in a way *'true to their essence'* (or otherwise).

The Kidneys are said to store the Jing [10]. In fact, all the Yin organs store Essences, but the quality of energy associated with the Kidneys provides the force necessary to retain them in place.

Qi

The character for Qi has the same bursting grain of rice or cereal found in Jing, to which is added the depiction of an exhalation or a releasing. There can be no such emanation without it coming from something; Jing and Qi are not the same, but they are inseparable. If Essences provide a pattern or template, Qi provides both the substance from which can be created something (a body) and the tools and fuel which enable these materials to be appropriately coordinated. The generation of Qi with which to nourish, maintain, warm and animate this creation over the continuity of time also requires the continuous presence of Essences. [5].

Qi is such an all-pervasive notion that it is difficult to define. Qi includes all Yin and Yang [9]. Qi is life's animating force and its substance; life is defined by Qi, even though it is impossible to grasp, measure, quantify, see or isolate. Matter is Qi taking shape. Mountains forming, forests growing, rivers streaming and creatures proliferating are all manifestations of Qi – as, in the human being, are all functions of the body and mind [4]. The notion of Qi is central to the practices of Chinese art, calligraphy, philosophy, medicine and music, and is a solid and irreplaceable part of the modern Chinese language within terms and expressions such as balloon (Qi Qiu, literally 'Qi ball'), "You're welcome"

(Bu Yong Ke Qi, literally 'don't use a guest's airs' i.e. 'don't be polite'), atmosphere (Da Qi), complexion (Qi Se), sparkling wine (Qi Jiu), weather (Tian Qi), morale (Shi Qi) and many more. Walk down the streets of any Chinese city and you will see the character for Qi [8].

The following sentence is more useful to me than any of the various translations of Qi, such as energy, material force, matter, ether, matter-energy, vital force, life force, vital power, moving power [10] or breaths [14]:

Whenever we find [someone] ... who knows through bodily consciousness that he or she is a product of the universe, and has a feeling of something on the move, he needs a word for expressing this, and the word is Qi. [15]

Shen (Spirit)

Perhaps confusingly, the term Shen can be applied both to the specific aspect of Spirit which resides in the void of the Heart (as in part one) and as a collective name for the Five Spirits – the Heart Shen, Hun, Po, Yi and Zhi. Heart Shen however has a controlling influence over the other four, so if Heart Shen is disturbed then the others will be also.

Aspects of consciousness, thought, memory and sleep are ascribed to Shen. If our Shen is deficient, disturbed or obstructed (the three 'pathologies' of Shen, which represent not a problem



with Shen itself but instead with our relationship to it) we are less able to function in these respects [10].

神

On the left of the character is the image of something extending down to us from Heaven. To say just that however hides a crucial piece of understanding; the character for Heaven, 'Tian', can legitimately also be translated as nature [16] or as heaven/sky [17], conveying a sense of the ever-changing manifestations which guide life. A book exploring ancient Chinese characters from a strongly Christian viewpoint interprets the character Shen as God [18]. There may be interesting parallels to be made here, but Taoism is just an approach to life based on an individual's place in nature. As such, it is compatible with many other religions rather than being in opposition to them [19].

The right side of the character is interpreted to mean something which is 'beyond understanding in terms of yin and yang' [20] i.e. beyond polarity; right or wrong, good or bad etc. Elisabeth uses this to introduce the discrimination associated with Shen [13], granting the capacity to spontaneously live

our lives in a natural (or Heavenly) way, thus avoiding extremes – such as those which might unnecessarily deplete our Jing. Shen does not however judge things as right or wrong, good or bad but instead sees things just as they are.

I have come to think of Heart Shen as simply granting us consciousness and therefore being central to all aspects of experience (thought, feeling etc.). When our Qi is balanced, our situation is calm and our Heart is a void which supports the harmonious presence of Shen then our perceptions are as a reflection on a still pond and our Heart/Mind becomes a mirror for reality. There is then harmony between the Five Spirits, we respond to events appropriately and quite naturally live our lives in a spontaneous manner that maintains health.

The void of the Heart is really the ability to take responsibility for all things, and to do that indefinitely. It is also the way to adapt all one's vitality to the rhythm of the universe, to the four seasons and to the exchanges in the environment and surroundings [5].

Some styles of acupuncture do not treat the Heart as it is considered to be at another level from the other Officials [21]; you do not attempt to rectify the Emperor.

What is the nature of our relationship with Heart Shen? At conception, our parents' respective contributions of Jing join with a contribution of Qi to initiate the creation of a body. Continued development and animation however depends on the arrival of Shen. Whether or not this happens hinges on the attractiveness of this initial welcoming structure (which comprises Qi and Essences); Shen come to us a bit like birds to a tree. If they are attracted to come then a human being develops, but if not there is a natural abortion. Once present, they must remain in order to provide the means for the continuing orient-

ation of life [5]. Clearly if you have Essences which the Shen find particularly pleasing, then you have a bit of an advantage, but other than that it is to some extent your responsibility to maintain your tree as well as possible so that the birds find it pleasant to stay there.

The Spirits in man are considered complex in that they create within us the potential not to follow the guidance offered by Shen. For Elisabeth this does not mean that we inherently have 'free will', rather that when it occurs there is a blockage present which leads us to build our life around the satisfaction of our sense organs (a reliance on things external to ourselves) rather than in a way which maintains the stability of the interior. Key to this notion is the fact that the Heart Shen, which have a degree of overall control over the other Spirits, are not uniquely 'mine' [13]. The idea of these free Shen all around us coming and going yet being such a linchpin in our lives fits with notions of a collective consciousness – although, in the commentary accompanying his translation of the inspiring meditation text 'The Secret of the Golden Flower', Thomas Cleary is fiercely rejecting of many of Jung's theories because of multiple misunderstandings in an earlier translation (by Wilhelm) which was a key influence on Jung [22].

The legacy of traditional medicine lingers within modern Chinese anatomical terminology, in which nerves are referred to as 'Shen Jing' – literally 'spirit lines' or 'lines which conduct Shen' (Jing here being a different character from the one denoting Essences) [2, 3].

Too much heart

This expression is used by the delightful Ch'an Buddhist monk, Tsung-Tsai, in one of my favourite books, 'Bones of the Master' [23] (the move of Ch'an to Japan led to the better-known Zen). It is a biographical account of his return trip (with the author) to China, from



All photographs by the author

which he had 40 years previously made a dramatic escape from the Communist Red Army. Overwhelmed by emotion he sits through an entire night in meditation, unable to sleep because he has 'too much heart.' Strong emotions disturb the Shen, meaning that we cannot function (including sleep) normally. Buddhist meditation techniques aim to empty the Heart/Mind and thus calm and settle the Shen.

Emotions which specifically target the Heart in terms of their damaging effects include sadness and those for which characters were not illustrated in part one; joy and shock or fright.

Sadness, 'Bei' is represented by a character which combines 'Xin', the Heart/Mind, with 'Fei', implying negation, illustrating a suppression of the Heart. Sadness makes the Qi 'disappear' and injures both the Heart and the Lungs [3]. It is thus felt strongly in the chest.



There are two characters for joy, the emotion which is described as loosening the Qi; 'Xi' (which can also be translated as elation) and 'Le'. The imagery of Xi describes singing and the making of music; the feeling we have when we enjoy ourselves and have a good time [3]. Too much elation (such as getting the giggles) can result in excessive looseness, akin to vigorously shaking the tree which contains our Shen so that some of the birds are disturbed and fly away [24].



In the imagery of Le the music-making is of a more serious nature, with ceremonial drums which are used to make contact with the Spirits. There is a sense of joyous harmony and unity within a person [3] or how the citizens might feel when the Emperor is fulfilling his role well and everything is peaceful and in order [24]. Le is the normal state of a healthy person whose conduct is in accord with the natural discrimination afforded by Shen (see also panel, above). The pathology of Le is 'Bu Le' or a lack of joy and not an excess [3]; Le is not



Joy

Joy is connected with life ('Sheng') in the Nei Jing because it is the reason why the 'men of antiquity' were able to reach 100 years without a decline in their activities. Such a situation is contrasted with the 'men of today', who start to decline at 50 because they are unable to conduct their lives in a way which appropriately regulates activity and rest and thus goes against the proper feeling of joy at being alive. Through their excesses, they exhaust their Jing, disperse their authenticity and are unable to retain their fullness [24]. The way in which such descriptions are worded seems somewhat austere or even judgemental, which may make them seem to be in opposition to biodynamic theory, but fundamentally the message is just the same. It strikes me from this description that the degree to which you are enjoying your massage practice must therefore be a good reflection of how well you are responding to the vasomotoric cycles within the treatment room.

Laughter is a natural manifestation of joy and elation in the Heart, although in Chinese there is also 'cold laughter', which is faked in

order to keep face or to cover one's inability to cope with a situation – without the Fire of the Heart. In the Book of Rites it is suggested that the quality of inner nature conveyed by a three month old baby's smile and laughter when taken into his father's arms is what enables the father to name his child appropriately [24].

A 12th or 13th century text questions why when someone else tickles you, you laugh, but when you do it to yourself you do not. The answer is that when you do it to yourself you create a light excitation and warmth in your Blood and Qi but you are always yourself. If someone does it to you in a situation where the relationship is clear then it is also like this, so there is no laughter – such as in massage. However, if the nature of the relationship between you and the other person causes not only a lightness and excitation but also a disturbance in your Heart then this disturbance manifests as laughing (perhaps giggling would be a better word) [24]. When a client's Heart is disturbed this means their Shen is unsettled and they will not be truly present.

one of the Seven Emotions. Medical texts however advise against too much elation in response to your feeling of joy at being alive!

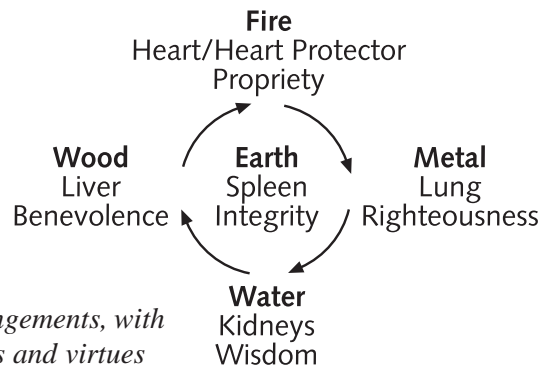
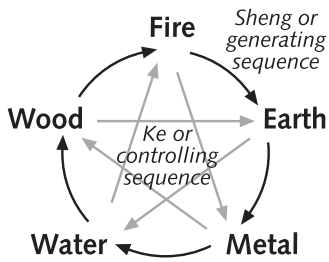
The character for shock or fright, another 'Jing', combines i) a ram's horns, ii) the head, mane, legs and tail of a horse, and iii) a hand holding a rod. A ram excels at standing motionless, whereas the horse is a more nervy animal. The rod signifies authority. The whole conveys the sense of a person trying hard to be self-possessed yet shaking and trembling on the inside [3]. The emotion of shock/fright makes the Qi become 'disordered' and injures the Heart and the Kidneys.



JingShen

It is the combination of Jing and Shen (Shen here being the Five Spirits), referred to as JingShen, which makes me a fully alive and unique human being. We talk of someone having good JingShen, and when this is the case then they have a free and spontaneous personality and a sparkle in their eyes, and their body is healthy with Qi and Blood circulating well and the face carrying a pink complexion.

In JingShen we find another continuing legacy from traditional Chinese medicine; words which in English start 'psycho-' begin in modern Chinese with 'JingShen'. For example, mental illness is JingShen Bing and psychiatry is JingShen Bing Xue. [3].



The Five Elements in their two arrangements, with reminders of Yin Official resonances and virtues

I particularly like an illustration in which the conductor of an orchestra, if he is full of JingShen, can inspire the orchestra to play well and the audience to respond *'so that they are seized by a common spirit and elation in their minds ... the Essences have been activated ... and the feeling you have is nearly physical. You feel the music with your body, mind and spirit'* [15]. JingShen is of course mediated by Qi, nicely rounding off our introduction to the Three Treasures.

We often think of biodynamic massage as working with energy (Qi), and of course it does, but I propose that the deeper level of what we are really aiming to do is to activate the JingShen. The Five Spirits are not to do so much with your Qi *pe se*, but what you do with it. It is JingShen which Five Element practitioners assess when they talk of 'spirit' [3]. What I was noticing in the patient interviewed in front of class presumably just involved different aspects of JingShen. Understanding my viewpoint requires finding out more about the Five Spirits.

From here onwards, when I say Shen I mean Heart Shen (other than in the specific context of the expression JingShen), and when I say the Five Spirits I mean the Five Spirits!

2: The Five Spirits

The fact that the consciousness-giving Shen resides in the Heart fits with the virtue of Fire being propriety – spontaneously doing things at the right time and in the right place. Given that the remaining four Spirits relate to the Liver, Lung,

Spleen and Kidneys, can we to some extent predict their functions from what we already know of the Officials and the Five Elements?

The spiritual aspect of the Liver might be expected to have an ascending and expansive movement, and a relationship with planning and the birth of new things. This points towards a role related to mental activity that leads to something.

Metal sits opposite Wood when the Five Elements are positioned with Earth centrally. If the spiritual aspect of the Liver involves the psyche, might the Lung have something to do with soma?

Earth in the centre of the Five Elements is associated with the virtue of integrity. Within the TCM framework, the Spleen enables transformation and transportation. When Spleen Qi is weak, mental capacity can turn as if to cotton wool – so there is clearly some relationship to thought here. It must however be different from the forwards-going thought associated with the Liver. Making connections seems to be a key concept.

The Kidneys are associated with Jing, which makes us uniquely who we are and governs aspects of reproduction, development and ageing. We might anticipate that the spiritual aspect of the Kidneys has to do with the expression of inner nature, and perhaps to include a longer term aspect.

We shall see that whilst these predictions are basically correct, the relationship between the Five Spirits themselves cannot be understood within the framework of the Five Elements.

Hun and Po

The character for Hun (pronounced with a vowel sound as in 'wood') depicts clouds and the recognisable image of a ghost [3]. Clouds arise as a result of an upwards movement from the earth, under the inspiration of the sun. Hun, associated with the Liver, masters an aspect of thinking that can go a long way – imagination and rational thought, both of which take something and develop it. Hun is also associated with phenomena like astral travel and dreams [13]. In Ling Shu Chapter 8 (part of the Nei Jing) the Hun is said to follow the Shen in its comings and goings [20]. The Hun is rooted in the Blood, as is Shen; this association of Hun and Shen should ensure that the activities of the Hun are also rooted in reality. In Chinese medicine, the Blood returns to the Liver at night; if we are Blood deficient (which in Chinese medicine includes but extends beyond the Western concept of anaemia) then Hun is less well rooted and we have many dreams. Dreams can have diagnostic significance in Chinese medicine [10].

The ghost also appears in Po (which rhymes with 'no'), accompanied by the character representing white which is linked with the Metal element, the westerly direction of the setting sun and the colour of bones. These associations suggest something that will eventually fall to earth and decompose; the body. Po associates with the Essences which decay after death but, being of a Yin nature, it needs the (relatively Yang) Qi of the Lung in order to hold it in place during life [13]. Po looks after all unconscious processes maintaining physical health [13] (which of course includes peristalsis).

'Gui', the character shared by Hun and Po, shows the somewhat fancy dress style head and body of a ghost, with a trailing shape that might represent movement (dust being drawn up as the ghost moves over the ground) or a hook, the latter having a connotation with danger. The earthly connection is

said to indicate that Hun and Po are, unlike Shen, ‘ours’ – they stay with us during the passage of our life and, if we are wise, we cultivate them in a helpful direction [13].

The Po can be compared with a spirited horse; the expression ‘Po Li’ describes someone with the ability to participate fully in activities [3], living in the here and now. Horses are also jumpy animals which readily startle, shy and flinch; reflexes are useful when they protect us from harmful physical or psychic threats, but we can also become overly reactive – and, from the biodynamic perspective, there can be startle remnants under certain circumstances. This all leads to a connection with armouring (conveniently, given the link with Metal!).

Po tends to get a bad press, creating desires and cravings, and being responsible for the emotions – all the raw, nasty and ‘unspiritual’ experiences which eventually lead us to our death [25]. It should therefore be controlled; to beneficially develop our Po means to eat and drink appropriately, ensure that we have sufficient time for rest and recuperation and not to allow our cravings for food, sex etc. control us [13]. This can seem rather like a suppression of Po by Hun.

Surely, in health, the influence of Shen on Po should enable us to naturally come to a dynamic balance so that, overall, we do not use food, drink, sex etc. to fill holes elsewhere

in our lives. A more positive way of viewing the link with emotions would be that Po also gives us the ability to feel our emotions as physical experiences so that we are aware of them and can respond to whatever it was that provoked them in the first place. Whilst Po may make us over-reactive, this is surely preferable to numbness; if we are truly able to act in a way which is true to ourselves – the full expression of our JingShen through the coordinated activity of all Five Spirits and facilitated by a body in which Qi and Blood are circulating properly – then eventually we do not find so much need to protect ourselves as frequently. If we are overwhelmed, then we should be naturally drawn to take time to recover afterwards, so that startle remnants or armouring do not become so much of an issue.

Our bodily consciousness (Po and Shen) also forms a major key to undoing such restrictions (or as Elisabeth might call them, ‘blockages’ – stagnation of Qi and/or Blood). I now find it hard to read Levine’s ‘Waking the Tiger’ on recovery from trauma [26] without making connections to Shen and Po. This is entirely my speculation, but if Po has a kind of memory then it would likely be for the feelings (physical and emotional) rather than the storyline of what happened, since a story fits more with the rational mind and thus with Hun. In a traumatic situation, there is much disturbance in our Heart/Mind. Shen flies away

to a greater or lesser extent, and Hun will tend to follow. Po however is body-bound and cannot escape (though its’ awareness may be dulled by the absence of Shen). After a period of time, a certain level of calmness is restored in the Heart/Mind so that Shen returns. Cultivating Po so that we start once more to be able to feel ourselves, the feelings associated with the event may re-emerge but not necessarily the storyline, because the part of us which remembers that kind of detail (Hun) was not present at the time. Of course if the event was not so bad then we are more likely to also recall the details because Shen and Hun were not so unsettled when it happened.

If Po is the bad guy, Hun is mostly seen as the spiritual goodie! The free movement of the Hun can nevertheless become overly apparent; we may become lost in our thoughts or daydreams and oblivious to events around us, we may constantly imagine disasters, or we may rationalise erroneously resulting in poor decisions. Beneficial activities for the Hun include cultivating our emotions (by which I presume is meant coming to a more helpful understanding of disturbing situations, so that we are less likely to react to them), engaging in a degree of mental discipline and acquiring useful knowledge. As Zen monk Takuan Soho states in an essay written to a swordmaster, theory and practice are like two wheels of the cart; you do not go far with only one or the other [32]. The same applies to Hun and Po. Elisabeth compares this duo with the ends of the horizontal pole used by a tightrope walker; they need to be balanced [13].

Lonny Jarrett describes Hun and Po as like a Jack-in-the-Box, the Po representing the box which contains and restrains the free activity of the Hun. If the Hun is the imagination, the Po is the belief structure; the degree to which the Po opens the box determines how much the Hun is able to ‘think outside the box’. Some control is nevertheless required in order to anchor the Hun in the realm of bodily existence [33]. Thus, we can have beliefs which are usefully



The Internal Arts

Physical activities designed to improve the alertness of the senses, awareness of the body and the ability to move in a coordinated way will develop the Po [3].

The internal martial arts, so called because they involve the internal development of Qi and its engagement in fighting applications (rather than the physical power of the external martial arts), have this potential [3]. Lowenthal's charming memoir of Tai Chi Chuan teacher Cheng Man-Ching includes the assertion that, as happens in biodynamic massage, newcomers may complain that the practice which was expected to make them more relaxed seems instead to make them more tense – they are mostly not, they are just feeling their tensions more [27]. Both Lowenthal's book and those of Daniel Santos [28, 29] include descriptions of gently performed two-man martial exercises and the resulting psychological dynamics – an effective way of working with patterns of relating in a truly embodied and predominantly non-verbal way.

Chi Kung (literally 'Qi work') doesn't involve the learning of long, complex forms (as in Tai Chi) and so allows you to more quickly focus on the internal principles. A regular practice of standing Chi Kung leads to the ability to open yourself up, feel yourself inside and become genuinely comfortable in your body [30, 31]. It is a bit like meditation, but obviously

has a key difference from seated meditation in that Qi is required to circulate strongly through your limbs in order to maintain your posture [29]. A good teacher will supervise your practice in a way that is right for your Qi rather than just on the basis of a predetermined 'correct position'; I have never felt as good as at the end of a two day standing workshop with Chris Ray Chappell, who is a particular advocate of standing.

I have far less experience of moving Chi Kung, but on a recent workshop on the seven movement 'Dragon and Tiger' set I was struck by the way its energy flows are reminiscent of embodied vasomotoric cycles (torso to limbs and head, out of the body, and back again). Not surprisingly, Dragon and Tiger has a reputation for working with emotional issues as well as physical problems; it has been used in China for the treatment of cancer. The simpler 'Heaven and Earth' set has strong links with the 'up the back and down the front' aspect of the vasomotoric cycle, known as the 'small heavenly circulation' or 'microcosmic orbit'. Both forms were brought to the West (along with others) by Bruce Frantzis (see www.energyarts.com for authorised instructors) and are for me at least much more profound and useful yet also far less unhelpfully provocative than the rather repetitive up/down, in/out Chi Kung movements commonly taught.



TOP: A (relatively challenging) standing Chi Kung posture.

ABOVE: movement from Dragon and Tiger Chi Kung. Courtesy of Real Taoism (www.realtaoism.com)

rooted in bodily experience ("if I don't get enough sleep then I will not function properly"), but we can also have beliefs related to an embodied memory of our reactions to previous circumstances ("I will never be able to speak in public"). Sometimes notions of what is right or wrong are based more on emotional reactions; rationalisation then becomes an attempt to justify the need for self-defence. The identification of such reaction patterns and associated beliefs is a key orientation for body-oriented therapies such as Hakomi [34].

Relevant to all this is the inner-dissolving practice described by martial artist Bruce Frantzis [6, 30, 31], which


involves sequentially maintaining awareness on areas of the body which feel somewhat frozen, a bit like ice. Maintaining this awareness brings a transition from ice to water to gas, a model I find relevant to my biodynamic massage practice. When extended into the tradition of Taoist alchemy, Frantzis's techniques lead to the potential to return yourself to the state *'before anybody even bothered to condition you.'* [35]

When story and feeling come together, inside have soul. (Tsung-Tsai in [23])

The 'earthly spirit' aspects of Hun and Po lead them to be referred to as souls

in English translations. Hun is referred to as the spiritual or ethereal soul and is frequently likened to Western notions of the soul because it ascends after death. In China there is the tradition of calling to the Hun after a person dies, to try to get it to return; if it doesn't then the person is really dead! The Po is known as the animal or corporeal soul. It descends to earth and decomposes along with the Essences. If someone dies suddenly or violently at a stage in life when they have strong Essences, their Po can linger and cause problems for visitors to a graveyard, sapping Qi in an attempt to continue life (I believe this is known as a hungry ghost) [13].

Yi and Zhi

At the base of the character  Yi (also written as ‘I’ and pronounced ‘ee’) is Xin, the Heart/Mind. Above is the sound of the human voice, and on top a note from a musical instrument. This indicates a personal feeling, or the beginning of an intention or idea, which might lead one to express a sound consistent with the quality of resonance generated (Aaah! or Hmmph! perhaps). Yi comes before words or thinking [13].

My understanding of this is best illustrated by an example. Out on a walk, my visual field includes a bird flying through the sky. If I actually look at that bird, and follow it with my eyes, that is my Yi operating; the bird is being maintained in my Heart/Mind and I have a focus to my experience. There is formed in me a certain impression, which may cause me to develop some line of thought (Hun) or to feel some particular feeling (Po) – or I may just forget the bird and move my focus to something else.

Yi is required for us to do things with intention, to keep our mind on something. Tai Chi Master TT Laing interprets the middle part of Yi as the sun and the top part as ‘Li’, which means ‘to establish; he gives Yi the meaning of establishing brightness of mind, a Heart/Mind that is clear and focussed [36]. The ability to generate a resonance within the Heart/Mind connects Yi to the ability to think clearly and study [3]. Yi is fundamental to the Buddhist practice of mindfulness. In the martial arts there is the instruction ‘no Yi, no Qi’; if you are not focussed on what you are doing then you will not move your Qi as strongly and your practice will not be as effective. Ask a client just to ‘move’ and they may not be particularly affected by it; ask them to pay attention to what they are doing and things are rather different! These functions relate to ‘making connections’ and to the activities of the Spleen in transporting Qi around the body. Put your attention in your hands and you will

extend Qi there; concentration really is concentration!

Earth CFs sometimes describe the experience of ‘merging’ in which one melts into another person so that there is no longer the experience of being two separate people [3]; this is a problem of Yi due to weak Spleen Qi and leads to issues with the emotion associated with Earth, sympathy. For a therapist, merging is likely to lead to inappropriate levels of involvement with clients, a loss of Qi and feelings of being drained after sessions. In Zero Balancing, merging is prevented by maintaining your focus on the point of contact between one’s hands and the client (at interface) [37] but in biodynamic massage the usual approach might be more to remain with an embodied experience of being ‘in oneself’. This could be referred to as paying attention but also as having a purpose or intention, the usual translations of Yi. Others include thought, consciousness, or consciousness of potentials [9].

Zhi (pronounced like the French ‘je’) is associated with the Kidneys. The character also includes Xin, the Heart/Mind, but above is what can be interpreted as a foot [21], something able to stand upright and firm [3] or the stem of a plant starting to rise from the soil, indicating the persistent development of an interest or anything which develops in one direction [13]. These interpretations suggest respectively action, inner strength and correctness, and growth or development.

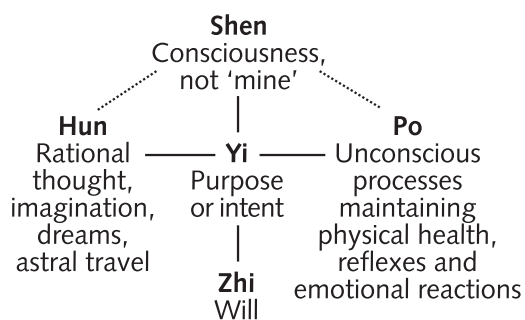
Zhi is translated as will; it has to do with the ability to take something forward in a particular direction [13]. As such it can potentially encompass almost all purposefully made activities. In Ling Shu Chapter 8 of the Nei Jing, the relationship between Yi and Zhi is translated by Elisabeth as ‘*if the Yi is going to last, then you have to have Zhi*’. Zhi could then be what leads me to keep my attention on the bird for a sustained duration [13]. One book simply defines Zhi as

‘actively expressed thoughts’ [21].

However Zhi is not just an impulse to take immediate action. Zhi is the orientation on which activities are built, a longer term motivation which causes me to do the things I do. In part one I mentioned the five emotions, inner tensions or wills – these are all aspects of Zhi expressed through the five Yin Officials, taking me right the way around a vasomotoric cycle. It might be that the sight of the bird causes me to think about birdwatching and as a result, at a later date, to go and buy a pair of binoculars. Zhi thus gives me an overall direction for my activities and an inner strength to push things through to completion [9]. This might be described as willpower (though not in the sense of sheer grit and determination!).

Zhi is not necessarily to do with a fixed goal either. Zhi for a wind vane would be to faithfully communicate the direction of the wind, not always to point due east! [13]. So it might be that when I get to the high street I decide to buy a book on birds rather than the binoculars – or I might notice a poster about birdwatching courses and opt to go on that instead.

Ideally, Zhi is rooted in the depth of the Kidneys and in our Jing. It explains how we move towards what might be described as our personal destiny without carrying too much conscious processing [3]. Zhi is described as ‘the will which can’t be willed’ [9], implying a motivation which works separately from our conscious volition. When I get to go on my birdwatching course, it may feel like this is exactly what I am meant to be doing, and eventually I go on to become an authority on birds which feels like exactly what I was made to do, and all this is well and good. But I may also find that birdwatching does not suit me at all. This whole escapade may have been because somebody I met does it and I want to get to know them better, or maybe I read somewhere that birdwatching is



good for stress; whatever the reason, birdwatching was not for me. If I go on such abortive ventures a lot, I will perhaps come to deplete my Jing and age rapidly, with an associated deterioration in my health. Taoist texts suggest we should minimise the will – though, a little confusingly, some translators use the word purpose instead of will, which confuses things with Yi; sometimes you have to see the original characters to know the exact meaning [38].

It strikes me that to say the unsuccessful birdwatching scenarios are necessarily not rooted in my Jing may not be the only possible interpretation. The person I wanted to get to know may be of the opposite sex and beneath it all I may be attracted to them (the drive to reproduce is very much associated with Jing [3]). Reducing my stress levels might enable me to live a more enjoyable life than the one I am now leading, which is undoubtedly a good and very healthy thing to be drawn to do. If my stress levels are really dire then it is also true to say that Zhi has a survival function [3]. Any drive to do something is likely to have beneath it, no matter how well concealed, an aspect reflecting either my biological needs (to survive and to reproduce) or my unique individual nature, both of which are associated with Jing. The contorted route I am taking may then indicate more that there is some problem going on with the coordinated functioning of my Five Spirits; that I am not what you might call very ‘joined up’. I put my efforts into many different projects and may appear to be ‘driven’ in a slightly crazy way.

It is definitely the case, however, that ideally Zhi leads me to do things that are satisfying to me, so that I come to have a feeling of joy throughout my life. That is wisdom, the virtue of Water. Minimising the will then means that I am spontaneously drawn towards what is best for me so that I live my life efficiently; going back to the simpler definition of Zhi as ‘actively expressed thoughts’, it may well mean that overall I actually end up doing less.

People with a weak will tend to be lacking in movement physically and mentally; they may even be cold and shivery and lie curled up in bed. People with an overly strong will tend to be restless, active and overly determined, at extreme being hyperactive, hot and moving relentlessly towards outcomes [3]. Excessive thinking and strong anger which cannot be stopped damages the will [39], but joy facilitates its spread through the body. An attack on the will can result in the uncontrolled flow of tears and mucus, representing a loss of Essences [39]; you get the sense from Chinese medicine that crying is not a good thing to do!

Integration

The vertical axis of Zhi, Yi and Shen is very important – not surprisingly because it is that by which I am drawn to lead my life as well as that which enables me to actually do things in a focussed, conscious and timely fashion. Acupuncturist Daniel Santos describes a motivational aspect of healing which nurtures this fundamental axis of life [28, 29]. Some acupuncture texts suggest that because of the importance of the Kidneys and Spleen, you only need to treat these Officials in order to effect a cure [21]; of course the Kidneys support the Zhi and the Spleen the Yi.

Hun and Po could be seen to form a horizontal axis interacting with this vertical one in either a helpful or unhelpful manner. We need both imaginative and rational capacities (Hun) to first envisage our dreams and then to gain the necessary knowledge and organise events so

that they come to fruition. We also need Po to create for us a healthy body that is physically able to do what we want it to do and has within it the capacity for both sensitivity and self-preservation. Thus, ideally Hun and Po do not ‘get in the way’ – however if Hun races off into fantastical ventures which we are physically unable to perform, if Po’s lack of sensitivity leads us into danger or its overly defensive reactions cause us to abort our projects prematurely, we will overly exert our will and deplete our Jing, with consequences on our longevity. Interestingly, the history of Taoism suggests that over the centuries trends have changed in respect of whether one should first cultivate one’s mind or one’s body [40], a debate which continues in therapies today.

This scheme is not exactly equivalent to the notions of vertical impulses and horizontal functioning in biodynamic theory [41], as might be expected since it is considering Spirit and not Qi, but it is generally compatible with it.

3: Implications

The question arises as to what is ‘me’ in all this. In fact, there is no equivalent of the verb ‘to be’ in classical Chinese [17].

Shen, the aspect of the Five Spirits which has some overall control, is not ‘mine’, yet it gives ‘me’ consciousness. The better my relationship with Shen, the more beneficially self-aware I can be, with a calmer state of mind.

Hun and Po grow with ‘me’ but they are largely based on my life experiences; what I know and how my upbringing causes me to react to my surroundings may well be a part of ‘me’ but not necessarily my fundamentally unique nature. From what I can tell, Taoism maintains that we start off with a clean slate in respect of Hun and Po, however whether you agree will depend on your viewpoint with respect to reincarnation.

The relationship between Yi and Zhi forms a key part of my life. It is based upon a connection to Jing,



however it is not totally clear in medical books whether Jing governs merely physical characteristics or extends to psychological ones. The notion of a personal destiny is open to interpretation; nobody can know for sure whether they have achieved their destiny but if you come to a place where what you are doing feels right and it seems that you have arrived there in a way which could almost have been predetermined then you may come to believe this conclusion [42]. It could be that all I am is the result of my life as it has unfolded to date and that Zhi merely reflects the continual springing up of my life and the basic force behind the need to reproduce and survive. However, Taoism's notion of individual nature [43] leads me to believe that there must be some unique aspect which comes from Jing. There is therefore scope for both nature and nurture as influences on personality.

Can we pick apart this experience of 'me' in other ways? Taoism talks of merging with the Tao and moving through life in a spontaneous fashion in which one almost 'forgets oneself', yet also includes disciplines such as the internal martial arts and healing, during the study of which one very much needs to 'apply oneself'. It seems a paradox. Confucius (whose philosophies still have quite a hold on Chinese society today, for example in the concept of filial piety [44]) described various rites which should be adhered to in order to follow the

Tao, which also seems contradictory to any form of spontaneity. Although it appears to have got a little out of hand, his 'way' was intended to describe the provision of various structures which would facilitate the expression of Tao through the individual; as an example, if we are bereaved then to flow normally would involve the expression of grief and the structure of a funeral is intended to facilitate this. So it is in Chinese medicine. Whilst there is the possibility of flowing spontaneously and so coming to a natural and healthy balance, if you are very much not in balance then you also have to do something in order to restore it. At the same time you cannot force the birds (Shen) back into the tree, they just have to come. Somewhere in this mix lies a kind of freedom, even if it is not – as Elisabeth described – exactly 'free will'.

*"I am free! I cling no more!
Liberation is mine!"
The greatest clinging
Is to cling like this. [45]*

In 'The Secret of the Golden Flower' [22], Cleary discusses the meaning of 'turning the light around'. Taoism aims to refine the conscious spirit (the intellect, the mindset of feelings, thoughts, attitudes and conditioning) to the original spirit (the 'formless essence of awareness'; unconditioned, transcending culture and history). 'Turning the light around' means to restore direct contact with the essence and source of awareness (which I understand as the axis of Zhi, Yi and Shen), so that one is free from being tied to thoughts and conditioned feelings (Hun and Po not 'getting in the way' but instead assisting). Ch'an Buddhism refers to the primal original spirit as the host or master, and the conditioned, conscious spirit as the guest or servant; the two should not be confused, but very often they are! Thus, what I 'am' may not be what I should (or perhaps could) be.

It is ironic that the TCM style of acupuncture, criticised for being restricted in the way it deals with

what might be termed 'personal freedom', has a treatment style in which patients are left for a period of time with needles inserted to balance the Qi; they are then quite likely to drift off into something like an 'alpha state' in which they 'forget themselves'. In Five Element acupuncture, seen as the more humanistic style, needles are usually inserted and adjusted until a particular sensation (De Qi) is felt, and then taken out; this more interactional style requires patients to 'apply themselves' in order to remain in contact with and respond to the therapist. Both situations have their parallels in biodynamic massage, in which sometimes we interact with the client quite directly, and at other times we recognise the healing effect of allowing someone to drift into a state of timeless connectedness with the world.

Working with the Three Treasures

Therapist and Chi Kung teacher Graham Kennedy proposes that therapies can be classified on a spectrum between internal and external in the same way as the martial arts. Purely internal arts, such as the biodynamic craniosacral therapy he practises, do not work with the physical structure but with Qi [46]. In spite of its name, biodynamic massage is not internal but is more of an internal-external style, though obviously different techniques will have different classifications; aura work is clearly internal.

In the internal martial arts, there is a natural progression from working at a physical level of Jing through Qi and eventually to Shen [7], perhaps explaining why those who enter these activities to fight may eventually be drawn towards more spiritual aspects [47]. The same happens in therapies. One's practice tends to get increasingly internal over time. Graham suggests that the more internally you work, the more client led and non-prescriptive you become, and the more emphasis becomes placed on your own personal internal development as an essential part of your practice [46].

Working with the Five Spirits

Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallee and Claude Larre published an article [16] written for acupuncturists but which could equally apply to biodynamic massage therapists. It offers translations of, and commentary on, extracts from the 2,000 year old Nei Jing. The following is a summary of some relevant points.

The Nei Jing emphasises that healing is not merely mechanical – for the acupuncturist it is not just the placing of the needles and for us it is not just the methodical application of techniques. The most important thing is the relationship between the practitioner, the Spirits and the patient, and this relationship begins with the practitioner. Your own Spirits and Qi must be in order so that you can lead an effective session without interfering with the patient's freedom.

Re-establishing balance always depends on the Spirits. Even if someone is injured and there appears only to be pain and bleeding, there is always an associated emotional response – a disorder in the flow of Qi and a disturbance of the Spirits. The Spirits are not damaged themselves, but they are affected; with intact Spirits, healing will be faster. Life is conducted by the Spirits – not just sometimes, but all the time.

The Spirits move because the surroundings of the treatment room are conducive to a calm atmosphere, the right signal is given by the treatment, and the practitioner has within him a well-rooted and upright direction of his own life. If the Spirits of the patient become well integrated by all this then the outcome will be amazing and will hold for a long time.

Those who are good at speaking of Heaven must have experienced it in man; in order to work with things like the vasomotoric cycle you must have experienced them in yourself. The use of the word Heaven here is of course just referring to the natural flow of things.

Those who are good at speaking of antiquity must have made the

junction with the present: it is no good reviving things from your experience and knowledge database if you are not fully in touch with the client in the here and now; you may misjudge the situation and make the wrong move, say the wrong thing or simply make your approach at the wrong moment.

Those who are good at speaking of man must be satisfied with themselves: it is difficult to help someone else if you do not have a good relationship with yourself, as you are. You must not be blocked in yourself by the desire to be other than as you are, or by the desire to help or to heal; of course desiring not to desire these things doesn't help either, because that also creates a blockage of your Qi. The best thing is to accept the situation, to do the best you can do and to just let go – otherwise you are not in a real relationship with the patient. You cannot force the Spirits to do what you want them to do – the birds must choose the trees, not the other way around. Be natural and spontaneous. Be with the patient in the fullness of your self, so that you are able to look at him directly and make authentic contact; you are sufficient in yourself, as you are.

When things are like this, one can follow the Dao [Tao] without confusion or distress and reach the summit of essential rules/numbers: this relates to being accurately able to apply the theory (the rules/numbers) behind your practice. There is a lot more theory in acupuncture than in biodynamic massage, but we still have to have an accurate understanding of our techniques, the vasomotoric cycle, character structures etc. Unless you are present then you will not apply the theories correctly. Making your own spirits powerful is the key.

In this way you will be the best tree for the patient – or perhaps like the outer branches of his tree, so that you are in an intimate relationship with him and in touch with the real situation. To do this, look internally. Keep your Essences and Qi inside rather than engaging in an exchange

with the exterior. Unless you can do this, your own Spirits will not be in good order. Healers who are really gifted can bring about healing without much diagnosis because they have an authenticity that connects with that of the patient. Healing is not nursing or mothering in the sense of these functions representing a one-way street of giving from provider to receiver.

Make an examination at the physical level and at the level of Zhi and Yi to estimate the illness; if someone comes for a massage because someone else has sent him but he doesn't particularly want to be touched, then it may be better not to treat him. If someone doesn't want to get better, or has thoughts of suicide, then they are obviously very far removed from the natural state of joy. Ideally, at the end of the treatment, the patient should leave with a better sense of focus and direction in their life.

If one believes in Gui Shen, there is no possibility of expressing the virtue: Gui Shen refers to earthly spirits – ones that are external to oneself. While someone believes that all his problems are due to someone or something external to themselves, then their own Spirits cannot be rectified. He sees himself as being at the mercy of the other agency; his own Spirits are not governing his own life.

While you are touching the patient, be *'as if looking into a great abyss'*; this conveys that you should be without fear, calm and fully aware so that you do not fall! You must be totally present; this is a heightened state of awareness which is still very grounded. Acupuncturists are instructed to hold the needle *'as if holding a tiger'*. The tiger here represents an image of the vital power – but this is also a great image for massage too. You are touching an awesome, living, breathing, responsive being and you should neither hold on too firmly so that he retaliates nor too loosely so that he escapes your grasp. This is a kind of firm strength.

Summary

We come to the end of a long, complex and sometimes contorted explanation which hopefully includes many interesting things but eventually comes to a conclusion that is very simple in concept, even if it is much harder to put into practice.

All you really have to do to beneficially affect a client at the level of the Spirits is to be in the fullness of yourself in the present moment, and to do what comes naturally to you. This is not to negate the importance of knowledge about your subject, which is clearly essential, but the treatment room is not the best place to start worrying about what you don't know!

Acupuncturist Lonny Jarrett [33] writes that, even after eighteen years in practice, he still occasionally gets 'charlatan attacks' when he feels that he has merely hypnotised himself into believing that his system of medicine is real or that he is capable of applying its principles. Yet his definition of mastery is not concerned with what he knows or doesn't know, it is related to his own internal alignment and its effects on patients. When everything goes well – as it seems to do for a lot of the time – then he forgets that he is actually practising Chinese medicine. All therapeutic interventions flow as natural expressions of self rather than from conscious theory. He just listens carefully, never resorts to figuring things out, and consequently does what is right.

*We went outside. ... When the cat saw us, it rolled over on its back, opening its jaws in a lazy yawn.
"Ch'an cat," Tsung-Tsai said. "Very smart." [23].*



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