

After for more than 20 years of lecturing TCM in the West, practitioners and students have often asked me about some difficult and knotty questions concerning TCM theory and acupuncture.

Due to insufficient information on TCM theory and some misunderstanding in translations, many issues of acupuncture and TCM theory remain unclear.

In this series of columns, I will explain 81 difficult questions by using the classical texts of TCM and acupuncture to answer these questions to enhance the level of TCM theory of those who desire to explore the treasure of wisdom of Traditional Chinese Medicine.



Question: What is the role of Heart-Emperor and Gallbladder-Judge concerning Shén and Emotions?

The concept of Heart and Gallbladder in charge of Shén and Qíng (emotion), and how they are explained in western TCM education, still remains somewhat unclear.

However, the question can be clarified with the help of the TCM classics.

The Concept Heart

The zàng that receives the information about everything in the universe, is called Heart, as described in *Líng Shū* chapter 8. In the *Yì Jīng* (The Book of Change), this universal matter is defined as Shén, translated as ‘universal spirits’.

It states that the unpredictable changes of yīn and yáng as universal law is called Shén.

The universal spirit commands the beginning of a new life during the conception of yīn essence and yáng essence, as described in *Líng Shū* 8.

The view of the author is that he disagrees with the existing translation of many modern TCM books. These write that the conception of yīn and yáng essence itself generates the Shén.

Sù Wén chapter 8 writes that the Heart is the emperor of a human being. He is in

charge of governing the spirits of the other zàng and is responding to the universal Shén.’

The Heart is the governor of the five zàng and the six fǔ. When the emperor is in harmony, then the zàng-fǔ will be healthy and peaceful.

If the emperor is in disharmony, all twelve zàng-fǔ will be in danger.

The Heart governs the blood, the blood houses the Shén. When blood is sufficient and flowing smoothly, it ensures that the Shén is peaceful, as described in *Líng Shū* chapter 32.

Actually, it should be Pericardium as ‘physical heart’, according to *Líng Shū* 71 and *Yì Xue Ru Men* of Li Dan of the Míng Dynasty.

From early TCM classics we learn that the Heart is the emperor and its main function is to harmonize the spirits of all zàng-fǔ with respect to the universal Shén.

This is why the Heart meridian has no acupuncture points and cannot be treated physically, according to the *Huáng Dì Nèi Jīng*.

The Concept Gallbladder

Firstly, as written in *Sù Wén* 8, the Gallbladder is an impartial judge who

administers justice and makes decisions. It advises the Heart emperor what is right and what is wrong. The Gallbladder is a clear and clean fǔ. If it is turbid, it will cause injustice and it will make the wrong decisions. This takes place on a conscious and emotional level.

Secondly, the Liver and the Gallbladder have an interior-exterior relationship. Even though, the Liver as commander has strong yáng qì and braveness, and can make strategies, he still needs the Gallbladder to make the right decisions in order to harmonize yáng qì – not too much and not too less. (*Lei Jing* of Zhang Jie Bin, Míng dynasty)

Thirdly, the Gallbladder is in charge of braveness and fear. If the Gallbladder qì strong, one can judge correctly and make the right decisions. The Gallbladder can influence the emotions of the other eleven zàng-fǔ and influence their qì mechanisms, according to *Sù Wén* chapter 9. Gallbladder qì deficiency will cause inner fear. One is not confident and is hesitant to make decisions. Gallbladder qì stagnation causes one to adhere to injustice and to make wrong decisions in an extremely stubborn way.

Summary

The Heart is the emperor, and is in charge of the Shén of human beings. The Heart is directly in contact with the heavenly spirits. Therefore, by practicing meditation, one can open and empty the Heart, and let one's Heart Shén interact with the universal Shén. When this is the case one will receive the heavenly and earthly virtues.

As *Sù Wén* chapter 1 puts it: when one is completely free from greed, ambitions and distracting thoughts, then one can work and live from the heart. The true universal Shén can enter the human being.

As the great TCM practitioner Yan Yong He from Song dynasty in his book *Ji Sheng Fang* states: 'If the Heart Shén is in harmony, the Gallbladder will remain clear, strong and fearless. There is justice and the right decisions are made without hesitation!'

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Used *Huáng Dì Nèi Jīng* Sources:

- *Sù Wén* chapter 1 *Discourse of the True Heaven in High Antiquity* 上古天真论 shànggǔ tiānzhēn lùn.
- *Sù Wén* Chapter 8 *Discourse on the Hidden Canons in the Numinous Orchid Chambers* 灵兰秘典论 líng lán mì diǎn lùn.
- *Sù Wén* chapter 9 *Discourse on the Six Terms and on Phenomena of the Zàng* 六节脏象论 liù jiē zàng xiàng lùn
- *Líng Shū* chapter 8 *Rooted in Spirit* 本神 běn shén.
- *Líng Shū* chapter 32 *Fasting of the Ordinary Man* 平人绝谷 píng rén jué gǔ.
- *Líng Shū* chapter 71 *Evil Visitor* 邪客 xié kè.