

THE EARTH ELEMENT, Chinese Medicine Classics I

An Instructive Discussion (from; Larre & Rochat, 1990: Su Wen, Chapter 4)

SU WEN CHAPTER 4 The Central Region

The central region is the Earth
The illness is in the Spleen and its yu on the spinal column

The yellow aspect of the Earth of the central region

It penetrates and communicates with the Spleen

It opens its orifice at the mouth

It thesaurizes Essences in the Spleen

Thus its disturbance is located at the root of the tongue

Its taste is sweet

Its proper type is earth

Its domestic animal is the ox

Its cereal is millet

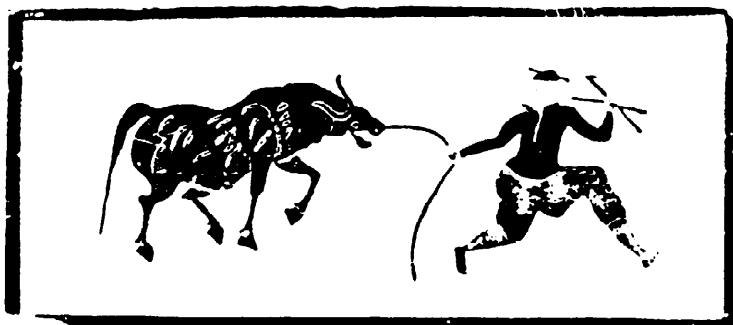
Corresponding to the four seasons in the heights it is the planet Saturn

Consequently the illness is seen in the flesh

Its note is gong

Its number is five

Its odour is aromatic



中
央
為
土

The central region is the Earth

Elisabeth Rochat: Now we can take Chapter 4 of Su Wen, in order to see the first presentation in the Nei Jing of the five zang with some of their correspondences, which I prefer to call resonances or harmonics.

First, the Central Region, or zhong yang. In English we can say North, West, East, South or Central region, and there is no difference, but in Chinese ideograms there is a difference. For the four directions the Chinese use fang, particularly in this text, Chapter 4 and 5 of the Su Wen. It also appears in other books of the same period which are not medical texts but books of rituals, for example, calendars.

Fang means square, which is proper to the Earth. It's proper to the Earth because it's the power, the capacity, and the ability of the Earth to give birth or to make space appear. For this reason a square with four sides is essentially linked with the power of the Earth. In contrast, all the unfolding of time in moments and seasons and so on is concerned with the power of Heaven. So in the spatial sense or meaning, the four directions, fang, are like a slice or a portion of space. There is really something defined and delineated with all these spatial qualities. In the North it is cold, hard and frozen, in the South the sun shines, the birds live, and so on. But when you are in the Centre it's impossible to use the same ideogram because it's not exactly the same process. The ideogram fang cannot designate the central region, and you find instead zhong, the centre (as in tan zhong) and another ideogram with the same meaning of a centre, yang. In Chinese texts it's impossible to designate the five qualities of space by the same ideogram. In Chinese there are only the four fang for the directions, never five, but there is a fifth place, a fifth quality of space which is the Central region.

Claude Larre: I was looking at Wiegner Lesson 60K about yang, it says, "A man in the middle of the space". My feeling is that the first character, zhong, and the other character, yang, are nearly the same character, except that yang is more visible than the zhong. Zhong is middle and nothing more. Yang is the space in the middle which would be occupied by somebody doing something. In some texts we see that the Chinese occupy the central position, and we know that the Chinese consider themselves as the most representative of humanity. So we understand that everything has to be organized from the Centre. The Centre itself can be organized, but somebody has to do the work, and that's the somebody who's in the Centre.

Objectively, if you want to command or exert your influence then you have to pick the right place to act from, the Centre. That is where you have to stay and where you have to display your own activity. For that reason, man is represented in the ideogram yang. We understand now the big difference Elisabeth was alluding to when she was saying that South, North, East and West are just divisions or portions of space which may have some particular qualities, and the Breaths pertaining to each of those four directions are physically different. But the Centre is distinct because the Centre has all the properties of the four directions, and in harmonizing them it is using them and making everything and everybody servants of itself through its command. So we see that zhong yang is not a section of space, it's a place, or even more than a place it's a region - because the Centre is not necessarily a point - the Centre might be a big place, or everything might be the Centre.



**Zhong,
the Centre**

Take, for example, international politics. We may say that in the 16th, 17th, or 18th century, France was the Centre of Europe, then England came along and took that position from France. Later on it's no longer Europe that is so important, the United States took the power. So it's true that to be the Centre has nothing to do with geography, but to be the Centre is to have the power, because you are placed where you can exert that power. The Chinese are not a silly people - they just want to say that being a man you have to occupy the Centre in order to make things move between Heaven and Earth.

Elisabeth Rochat: In the central region is the Earth, tu. You know that the English word 'earth' translates two Chinese words, tu and di. The difference is that in this case, tu, we only have the idea of humus, or soil, with vegetation growing up from it. This ideogram tu is used to designate one of the five Elements or Phases, the Element Earth. Di has the same idea, but it is also an extension of this power - the idea of the ability to be like a mother. Di is Earth as in a couple with Heaven. Heaven is the seed of life and Earth develops this seed and give shape and form to this knot of life and Breaths.

Here in this text it is the first, more simple tu which is involved - the Earth as in one of the five Elements, Earth like the soil, a place where men sow and afterwards harvest. If we have a look at old Chinese texts and classical Chinese commentaries when the five Elements or Phases are explained and

expounded, the properties of Earth are to receive seeds and afterwards to give harvests. Again we find this two-fold movement of receiving and giving which is exactly the description of the Earth Element in all commentaries.

For example, in commentaries on the Book of History we find the Earth in fifth position. The first position is Water, second is Fire, third for Wood, fourth for Metal, and in the fifth and ultimate position is Earth. The properties of Earth are to receive and give. The Earth can receive all kinds of seeds and give forth all kinds of produce, fruits, cereals and so on, and, of course, all kinds of Tastes, but especially the sweet taste. In the same text just after the enumeration of the Five Elements we have a presentation of the five Tastes. It is the Earth which receives seeds and produces harvests and by that gives comfort in the sweet taste. Sweet is the taste which is able to sum up all the other Tastes.

Claude Larre: If I may add a comment, we usually just have a feeling about taste but we have no description of how they act physiologically speaking. So when Elisabeth says that sweet is at the Centre, and is proper to this condition of Earth, at the same time she is obliged to say why. She said that the effect of sweetness is to recollect, because to recollect is to make things come to the Centre. But it's more a description of how the taste is working than just a description of the feeling you get. This is always a question with Tastes, they are more to be looked at as motions of life than as a feeling we get from eating this or that. There is a distinction between the impression given on the tongue and the true effect of the taste which we get from the edible things which are more or less slowly assimilated into ourselves. This effect is a subtle movement inside our own life-motion. It's always much safer not to consume those five Tastes for the impression we get from them but for their effect - for the differentiation of the movement they have when they are added to our own personal life- motion. Centre, recollect, diffuse, sweet, Earth, all these in themselves are the same. We need a lot of English words, and the Chinese have lots of words too, but essentially, when we go to the actual, the intimate effect, there is one word which is Earth.

Elisabeth Rochat: In the Shu Ji, Book of History, one of the five classics of Chinese literature, the presentation of the five Elements is this order: Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, Earth. The Earth appears through the crossing of the vertical movement from the Water to the Fire with the horizontal movement from the Wood to the Metal. It is the result and the dynamism of the process. A good classical commentary is as follows:

Water and Fire are the solid and liquid foods that the one hundred families look for or seek. Metal and Wood are that by which the one hundred families prosper or can be activated or stimulated. And the Earth is that by which the ten thousand beings have that which is necessary to life, to live.

We can again see this double movement of life, it's the origin of life. We see we have the vital double impulse revealing itself, and taking its vertical position in life with this rising to Heaven in order to attract Heavenly influx. It's always the same, always with the two-fold aspect. The first

movement of life is the springing up, and the second is the activity, the doing of necessary things, between Wood and Metal.

If we take the directions East and West we have dong xi, and dong xi is a common expression in Chinese to designate all kinds of things. If we put the seasons Spring and Autumn together we have chun qiu, and chun qiu in the Chinese is also an old way to designate all kinds of activity. During Winter it's too cold and during Summer it's too hot so these two seasons, Spring and Autumn are periods of activity, for example, making war.

The fifth position is like a Centre and this is Earth. It is that by which the ten thousand beings, or all living beings, have everything they need to live - everything to ensure maintenance and to give life in each moment. In the text it's two Chinese ideograms, one is the ideogram for life, to give birth, to be alive and so on, and the other is the more concrete and material aspect of this maintenance, nourishment and so on. We can see the place of Earth here.

Claude Larre: My own feeling is that there is a very common construction in the sentence. First they state "to be", and to be you need Fire and Water, which is North and South. But to be is to be doing something, acting is really exerting some virtue. This is made from the origin of life, it is made between Spring and Autumn, Wood, and Metal. Spring and Wood are for the vegetation, for the rising movement of plants, and Autumn and Metal are for destruction, the beginning of destruction, war and all that. So, the dual activity is necessarily contained in this rising in the Spring, and receding or falling in Autumn, it couldn't be otherwise. So, after stating what is on the first vertical line, completed by what is on the second horizontal line, at the crossing of those two there is a place to be, and to be active. And this is called Earth. So Earth comes at the end, and at the crossing.

Elisabeth Rochat: You can see from this that Earth is the position which can make both the unity and the diversity. It depends on the point of view. Every living thing returns to the Earth, but, of course, every living being also takes both life and form from that Earth, and for this reason there is a connection with all the varieties of Breath and space and time and so on, in the zang and the Tastes.

The Centre, five, Earth, Spleen, the fifth season, which is not exactly a season, all can make the unity of life at this level. And among the seasons, among the spaces, among the Tastes, among everything, universally Earth is also the power through which diversity of shape, of form, of everything can be maintained.

俞 病
在 在
脊 脾

*The illness is in the Spleen
and its yu on the spinal column*

It's quite strange this kind of connection between that which we have just talked about and this illness in the Spleen and the yu point. It's because this part of the body, the spinal column, is also a kind of Centre, with an axis where all returns to, and from where all things spread out. You can see that the spinal column is the central part of the body, and it's to the spinal column that all the ribs and muscles and also the viscera are attached.

中央
黄色

The yellow aspect of the Earth of the central region

Elisabeth Rochat: When we reach the yellow aspect of the Earth we are at the end of Su Wen Chapter 4, at the place where each of the four directions and the central region are enumerated, with all the proper associations or harmonics of each one. Huang se is translated as the yellow aspect of the Earth. There is no ideogram for Earth in the Chinese text, but the colour yellow in Chinese, huang, is the special colour of the soil in certain parts of China, especially near the great sinuosity and meandering of the Huang He which is the Yellow River. For this reason we sometimes translate not only by "yellow" but with the resonance that this colour has in the Chinese mind. Yellow is the colour of the Earth, the natural colour of the soil.

Claude Larre: It means that yellow is not yellow! Yellow is the colour of the Earth, so it is very clear that it is the Earthy colour which is very akin to what you call yellow.

Elisabeth Rochat: We know that this yellow colour is only the manifested aspect of the fertility of the soil, of the Earth, just as the red colour is not the colour red but the colour of something else, like a fire or something burning. All the time we have to change our own cultural associations to put things into the spirit of the Chinese mind.

Claude Larre: The problem is that the colours that we know are all more or less artificial colours, they are permutations, and they are a product. But what the Chinese are thinking of is the colour of greenery, or the colour of the sky, or the colour of the clouds, or the colour of soil, or the colour of fire, or the colour of water, And if there is no life the colour of the water turns to black. But the black is not what we think of as black, it's more natural - we are in another world where the colour is linked with its efficacy, and to the natural elements. So we have to change our minds in order to recover the knowledge we had formerly.

入
通
於
脾

It penetrates and communicates with the Spleen

Elisabeth Rochat: Why is this explanation of the yellow colour needed? Because without it we cannot understand the rest of the text.

How can the yellow colour of the Centre or central region penetrate and communicate with the Spleen if we haven't first revised our idea of what yellow is and what the central region is, so that we can understand that the central region is this special function and permutation of Breaths, and also that this yellow aspect is only the visible manifestation of that quality which is the proper quality of the Earth: fertility and stability ?

At the same time as the stability there is this capacity for reception, permutation and transformation, and it is this which is the manifestation at the level of the universe of this kind of virtue which can penetrate and communicate with the Spleen, because the Spleen in the human body is exactly the same thing working at the level of the zang.

This aspect of the virtue of the universe, of Heaven and Earth and so on, is in resonance, in harmony, and in assonance with all kinds of things or activities in each being which have the same function and quality.

In the human body the five zang represent the deeper level, the level of these five qualities of universal life. The Spleen, of course, is in resonance with the yellow aspect of the Earth, the central region. Because the text begins with the Yellow aspect, the first part of this quotation, I think, particularly concerns what is akin with the Essences and qualities of the Earth. Then five lines before the end of the quotation, we have the mention of the four seasons in the heights. I think that the end of the quotation is more akin to the Heavenly aspects of the harmonics and resonance.

開
竅
於
口

It opens its orifice at the mouth

By the mouth all kinds of Tastes penetrate the body, and what are Tastes or cereals or any food but the form or shape of Earthly Breaths?

Claude Larre: All these grains and all that comes forth from the ground under the pressure of Heaven are the materialization of the Earthly Breaths. There is no difference for a Chinese mind between what we call Earthly Breaths and what we see when we look at grains of wheat or rice. We eat them and

from that we derive qi, which we incorporate into ourselves and use to make our own Breath for our own activity.

The difficulty is not in translation, the difficulty is in having our mind alert and open enough to understand from where the Chinese are drawing all sorts of their statements about qi. Why five? Why six? etc. What we have been talking about for two and a half hours was just a preparation for our minds to go deep enough to rejoin the Chinese working on the Breath of the universe and trying to incorporate it through this special mechanism of Spleen and Stomach.

Elisabeth Rochat: We'll see in other chapters, such as Ling Shu Chapter 17, the relationships between the Spleen and its proper orifice, the mouth. But here the focal point is just that we have one of the special qualities of the five aspects of the movement of life, the yellow aspect, penetrating inside the body to reach the deepest level, the zang. And the zang in harmony with this yellow aspect is the Spleen. After that statement we have the explanation, and the communication between the intimate inside and the exterior in the shape of the orifice.

This opening at the mouth is specially linked with Earth, and the sweet taste of the Earth, and the assimilation, penetration and digestion of the Breaths of Earth in the shape of nutriment and food. Afterwards we come once again to the most intimate aspect of the thesaurization of Essences in the zang, in this case the Spleen.

藏
精
於
脾

It thesaurizes the Essences in the Spleen

"It thesaurizes" means that it stores actively, because storing is nothing if it is not done actively. Thesaurization is the very stable, quiet and unceasing activity of storing the Essences; that is the function of all the zang. All the Essences which are akin with this aspect of life - yellow, central, Earth and so on, are thesaurized by the Spleen. In English or French we must make a choice of saying "by" or "in" the Spleen. In Chinese we have a single character but the meaning is between the two English words. 'In' the Spleen is too static, 'by' the Spleen is all right - but perhaps the Spleen is not well enough located. Both are good and bad.

Claude Larre: I am sure that since they are talking of the twelve charges, or officials they are talking of some activities, but activities have to have a place. It's a question of Heaven and Earth. The activity is more related to the Heavenly flux, but the Heavenly flux has to fall somewhere in order to be effective. So when Elisabeth was talking about this question of grammar or translation, should we

say 'by' or 'and' or 'in' or 'inside', it's true that the only important thing is the active connection between the Essences and the Spleen, and there is no active connection if there is no place for that. But place itself is not just a place, place is the yin aspect of this yang activity. Or maybe the reverse? It is impossible to tell where the knot of life is made. We may make some sort of exploration of what happens, but there is never a point when we can say it is this and truly not that. We are exploring something which is written and we are sent back to our own experience. If we have been treating people using Stomach and Spleen according to what we have been taught and what they are, we know more than people who have only been reading the text. But the text itself sends you back to the effect of life which you know yourself, and by the treatment you have been giving people. There lies the explanation. It's always best to be sent back to life.

Elisabeth Rochat: The yang is an active function and at the same time a dwelling place for Essences. This is said in the text, but behind the Essences we have Spirits or higher entities ie. shen, hun and po or yi and zhi. In the case of the Spleen it is yi, but we'll see that later in other chapters of the Su Wen and Ling Shu.

故
病
在
舌
本

Thus its disturbance is located at the root of the tongue

Because of the connection between Spleen and the root of the tongue, it is the place where certain diseases connected with trouble in the thesaurization of the Essences by the Spleen can appear. The root of the tongue is just at the level where the external manifestation of the power of the internal thesaurization of the Essences by the Spleen takes place. This is the meaning of the sentence. It does not mean all diseases caused by the Spleen are at the root of the tongue. Of course, in the case of diseases of the Spleen we can also have some disturbance of taste.

其
味
甘

Its taste is sweet

If we look at the etymological interpretation of sweet in Wieger lesson 73B, we can see that the ideogram for sweet is very simple - it is just a hand and a mouth. So the etymological explanation of sweet is any kind of thing which can be held in the mouth and gives satisfaction.

Sweet is one of the five Tastes and its place is in the Centre. It is the summing up of all kinds of taste which are able to give satisfaction because they are a good balance or in good harmonization, without poisons for the body. Sometimes poisons have a very good taste, but perhaps if you are really 'authentic' or if you have a good feeling of what you are, you can feel the poison. I personally can not!

其
類
土

Its proper type is Earth

Five is Earth, tu. The ideogram is not the ideogram of the Element or agent as in the five Phases or Elements. In this case, Earth is a type of species lei, like man belongs to the human species. It's the species of mouth, Spleen, of Essences stored in the Spleen, of sweet, and so on. Of all these aspects Earth is a great type, a fundamental pattern of distribution of all things over the Earth within five categories.

其
畜
牛

Its domestic animal is the ox

This fits in with all the things we have said - that the ox is working the Earth all the time, and oxen have a colour which is similar to the yellow aspect of the Earth. For the Chinese mind the ox is not red or green, it's yellow. Also the association is a very old Chinese idea. I'll read a quotation from the Records of History, which is a great Chinese book written one hundred years BC:

The ox is in fact the one who labours and works, who plants and sows in order to make things exist. He labours, plants and sows the ten thousand kinds of creatures in order to make things exist.

We have the same explanation of the qualities of Earth in other texts and we can see in the Chinese mind how these kinds of harmonics have exactly the same real active qualities, and we can use a

similar vocabulary. The ox isn't the one who plants and sows, but he's the one who works in order that this can take place. But the Chinese text says that the ox plants and sows. This is because the ox works in the same way that the Earth works, or the Spleen and so on; and the ox is like the slave girl, very docile, very stable and even tempered. It's not like a race horse, and it's not like a mole sleeping under the Earth, it's between the two. This good tempered aspect is also a quality of Earth and Spleen and Stomach and so on, Spleen and Stomach are not too hot and not too cold, not too dry and not too humid.

其
穀
稷

Its cereal is millet

Its cereal is millet, ji, panicked and non-glutinous. One thing that is important is that this name ji is also the name of the Chinese god of agriculture Hou ji, Prince Millet. He's the deity of the harvest, of cereals and agriculture, and there is a famous poem about him and his marvellous birth in the Book of Odes, which has a good English translation by Arthur Waley. And, of course, this millet is yellow!

I think we can read the rest of the quotation from Su Wen Chapter 4 quite quickly because the main points are also found in the next chapter.

上
為
鎮
星
其
應
四
時

*Corresponding to the four seasons
in the heights it is the planet Saturn*

Its virtue in Heaven is seen in the influence of Heaven on time and movement, moment and season. But how can Heaven manifest its proper essences in the shape of five planets? One way is the form of this manifested aspect such as the colour of each of the planets: Mars is rather red, Venus rather shiny, and so on. It is the planet Saturn that manifests the kind of virtue akin to the Spleen and Stomach. An ideogram for planet could be xing, which is the same ideogram which on Earth designates the wu xing, or five Phases. It has exactly the same qualities. In order to explain this strange, bizarre sentence to an occidental mind, with this planet corresponding to the four seasons in

the heights, we need to see that it is the expression of the vitality of Heaven expressed in five different qualities, just as we can see yin and yang in Heaven in the shape of the sun and moon. So in Heaven there is also a possibility of dividing the unity into five aspects, five qualities of Breaths, or virtues, and you can see therefore that there are five planets. On the other hand, if the Earthly power organizes space, the Heavenly power creates time.

之 是
在 以
肉 知
也 病

*Consequently the illness
is seen in the flesh*

Flesh gives the shape of the body, and it is the power of the Earth that can give form to ideas and shape to the disease which is proper to the body. Flesh is not just this mass-giving shape, but also a place where all kinds of circulation can take place. Flesh is penetrated by ravines and valleys and all kinds of pathways, and this is the kind of circulation by which we find the shape again. The cohesion of man is given more by the void allowing circulation and relationships rather than by compact density.

其
音
宮

Its note is the note gong

The note gong is used as a basis for all the other notes. It is the first note of the pentatonic scale, and the first note is a basic note.

其
數
五

Its number is five

We saw this quality of five to be the crossing of flux coming from the four directions into a Centre between Heaven and Earth, or yin and yang. This is five, and this is the Spleen acting like a revolving

platform. We shall see later this function of the Spleen and Stomach in the raising and lowering, ascending and descending movement of all things, and the distribution of Breaths and separating of clear and unclear and so on.

其
臭
香

Its odour is aromatic

Aromatic, xiang, is perhaps like sweet in being an harmonious composition of Breaths. It is one of the five kinds of dividing odours - an odour which gives satisfaction, but a satisfaction that comes from this feeling of something balanced and well harmonized with a good composition, compenetration and permutation of Breaths. It is the same in the odours as in Tastes.

Claude Larre: It seems that sweet and aromatic are the same thing, but diffusing in different ways. When you are in the country in August and everything is smelling in an aromatic way it is because the atmosphere is full of the odours of the crops or the plants under the sun, but if you were not there to experience that, the taste would still be there inside each grain or each plant. So, for myself, I feel that they first say something about the taste and then they go forward from the innermost to the most outward effect which is the odour.

SUMMARY

Claude Larre: Yesterday we started with drawings and explanations of the two ideograms pi and wei, trying to see them in their interplay and marking how pi and wei join together in order to make some sort of vital Centre. We have also been observing that life, being a compenetration of influxes, is always at the meeting point, in the median, where Heaven and Earth make connection. And since life is a gift, life has to be received, and its central place, seen in an individual, is in the Spleen and Stomach. In every living being (and by living being we are not talking only of animals, it's also true of plants and it's true of the universe itself) there must always be the same analogical structure repeating itself everywhere. So be it in me, in you, in human kind, in the animal kingdom, or in the universe, there is always a meeting point, or a place where this secret meeting of life takes place, and there is no room for intellectual explanation except by coming back to the division of the roles of Heaven and Earth. But actually what exists, what is making us, hic et nunc, is not to be seen and not to be described. We are just observing the contours of it, and by seeing how somebody in good health is, we try to understand how this silent process works. At the same time if something goes wrong, then we start observing something and hearing some different sounds. So it is always easier to describe something which is going astray than to describe the normal condition of life.

As for the relation of pi being a zang, and wei being a fu we may use different dialectics. The prime dialectic, I don't say the easiest, but the most obvious, is yin yang. Then we may consider using another set of dialectical principles, the five Elements or Phases, which are essentially the same as yin yang, but yin yang seen as the beating of life, the rising of the yang, the sliding of the yang and the coming up of the yin. We may see all that as life beating between yin and yang. Or we may see how a particular being tries to organize itself, and then this yin yang system does not give enough light for our understanding. We have to pass on to a more elaborate vision, which is to enter the question of how the so-called five Elements or five Phases are situated one with the other. In this particular case, if we are describing the interplay between pi and wei we have to know which Element we would choose as the reference Element for the interplay of pi and wei. Obviously it's the fifth Element, but why do we say the fifth and not the first, second or third? Is there an order or not?

When we read Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of Su Wen, we see that zhong yang, the central region, is in the third place, and that in this set of five propositions it occupies the Centre. But when we look at Chapter 8 of the Su Wen we see that Spleen and Stomach come at the end of the first series: Heart, Lung, Liver, Gall Bladder, tan zhong, and pi wei. So there is no difference, it's just the presentation which is not the same. In any case our main teaching is that we are trying to explain how there is a Centre for this Breath which is making our own life, which can be distinguished from the life of the universe but at the same time shouldn't be. The highest mystery in our own personal life is that we feel so strongly that we are in opposition to, or distinct from everything which is not our own self, and at the same time we are called back to the nature of our life which is just an expression of the universe. But there is no contradiction in that because every contradiction is just a part of life's movement and is not so easily solved by our mind's understanding of things.

Now, to say something a little more about this question of the Centre. Yesterday I was saying that the Heart might be taken as a Centre because everything is ruled by the Heart. But the Heart is more than a Centre, it is at the same time the sovereign of life. In another context, the Centre is occupied by something which is not the Heart, but which maintains life through the absorption of whatever might be used for that. I need some device to absorb the qi of the universe and to make my own qi from that qi, and that device is the combination of pi and wei, Spleen and Stomach.

If I put two Chinese characters together making a dual expression, I may see them in opposition, in likeness or in compenetration. In Zhuang Zi Chapter 2 gan dan, Liver and Gall Bladder are shown to be so close that they almost seem the same, but they are also so different, that they could be said to be as different as Beijing and Hong Kong. Zhuang Zi Chapter 2 was written in the fourth century BC, so it seems that the concept of being close and being opposed, being one unit, is really something that the Chinese mind had at an early time, before the Su Wen or any medical text was known to be written. So, three, or four or five centuries before Christ, the Chinese were able to see, and tell us clearly and without error or clumsiness, how what are opposite may also compenetrate and become the living factor of life.

What, then, is really the function of pi wei, Spleen and Stomach? It's that when life has been given, life has to be fed and renewed, and we need some nutritional elements. But to take them from the universe we need some selector, or selective device, related to our own Essences, some sort of

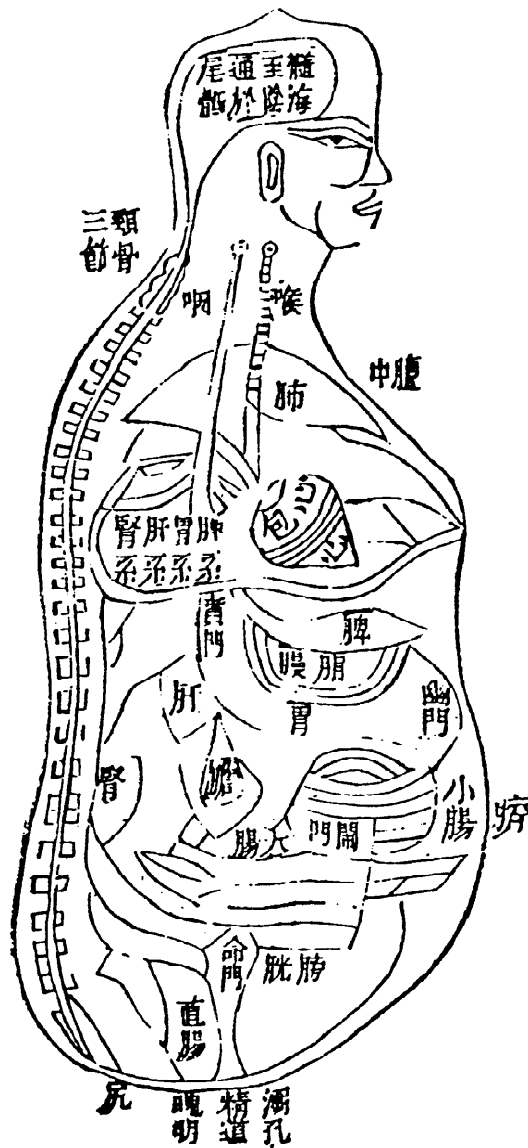
capacity in ourselves to choose what is convenient and necessary and to discard what is not. One may say that the Small Intestines, or even the Large Intestines are there for that. In a way they are, but in a very auxiliary way. The highest power to make the selection from the qi of the universe and to present it to oneself is in the charge of the Spleen, with the association of all the others, because nothing works independently. The ordinary presentation of life is the association of the zang with the fu, so what sort of fu has to be in association with the Spleen in order to make this selection of what is really similar to and necessary for our own Essences? It is the Stomach, and it will be seen now through the teaching of Elisabeth, how that is understood, not in the generalities of yesterday, but in the practicalities of the text which give the description of the subtle physiology, and how the meridians are working together. And we will see how when something goes wrong we need to intervene to try to restore some kind of equilibrium in order that this selection process will go on - to prevent the Stomach reflecting its own disorder in the highest activities of man's life.

Most of us have friends who have died from cancer, and we know how they can have pain in the stomach and how they are disturbed in their mind. So we know the connection between the disorder in the Spleen and Stomach and the disorder in the governing or meditative power which is a Centre for the mind. So if the Stomach and Spleen are not doing what they are supposed to do there will be the same disorder on a higher level as there is on a more physical and physiological level. There will be suffering and premature death, and at the same time there will have been a sort of loss of taste for life, something will go astray because the unity of life is lost.

So, we are just here to see how the Chinese have seen life and how they've been able, in this complexity of life, to make the distinction between so many working places or so many agents, and to ascribe to each of them specific behaviour, to observe all those exchanges of energy and try to give an explanation for all disorders.

新 改 正 內 景 之 圖

舊圖有精道循脊背過肛門且無子宮命門之象皆誤也今改正之



心系七節七節之傍中有小心以腎系十四推下由下而上亦七節

The Internal Organs from Yi Zong Pi Tu, compiled about 1575 AD. (Larre & Rochat, 1990)