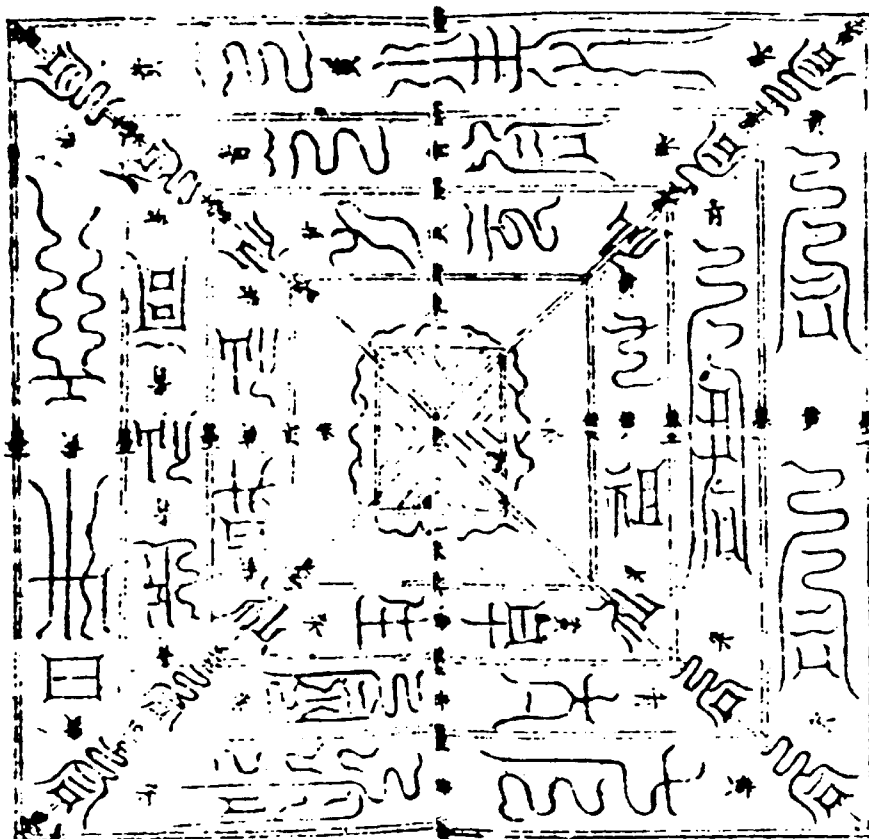


THE EARTH ELEMENT IN TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

AN INTRODUCTION



The Daoist Yellow Book Talisman related to Earth
(Larre & Rochat, 1990)

Elisabeth Rochat: If we were to say that Stomach and Spleen act as a Centre, then we have said absolutely everything. But the important thing is to understand what the effect of this role of being a Centre is, and what sort of processes are implied in this English word. We will begin with the ideograms and through them and their analysis we can have the first idea of Spleen and Stomach in the Chinese language.

Claude Larre: When Elisabeth was talking of 'Centre', she could be talking of the same function as the Heart, because the Heart is the centre of life, but this is not at the same level. The Chinese say the Centre of life is the Stomach and Spleen, or they say that the Centre of life is the Heart. Or they say that the principle of life is the Kidneys, or they say that the extension of life is the Liver. All these terms, similar or dissimilar, are true at the same time but not from the same point of view.

AN INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

FROM THE NEI JING JING YI

(from: Larre & Rochat, 1990)

THE SPLEEN: YIN ORGAN OF THE EARTH ELEMENT

The Spleen is located in the middle of the abdomen; its meridian has a connecting, *luo*, and an internal/ external, *biao li*, relation with the Stomach. The part of the body with which it is linked is the flesh; its orifice/ opening is at the mouth.

Its functions are to master transportation and transformation, *yun hua*, to transmit and diffuse the *jing wei* which supply nutrition, to raise the clear, *qing*, and lower the unclear, *zhuo*. It is the source of the transformations that produce the Blood and its channelling; the five *zang* and the six *fu*, the four limbs and the one hundred bones rely on its nutrition.

Its essential physiological functions are to enrich the *qi*, Breaths, to preside over the Blood, *tong xue*, to master the flesh and the four limbs, to transform phlegm, *tan*, and transform dampness.

Because of this the Spleen and Stomach were called by the ancients: the Root/ Rooting of Posterior Heaven, *hou tian zhi ben*.

1. The Spleen masters transportation and transformation

The Spleen's function of transporting and transforming, *yun hua*, has two aspects: on the one hand the transportation and transformation of the *jing wei* drawn from the liquids and cereals, and on the other hand the transport and transformation of liquids and of dampness, *shui shi*.

The digestion of the liquids and cereals is the function of the Stomach; but the absorption of the *jing wei* from the liquids and cereals and their diffusion relies on the Spleen.

Spleen and Stomach each have their own area of activity in digestion as well as in the process of absorption and diffusion of the body fluids, *jin ye*. The Spleen meridian, the *tai yin* of the foot, is a *mai*, energy pathway, that crosses through the Stomach, has a dependent/ belonging, *shu* relationship with the Spleen and a connecting, *luo*, relationship with the upper mouth of the oesophagus; in this way it can absorb the *jin ye* drawn from the liquids and cereals and transmit them to the three *yin* meridians.

The Stomach is the granary, the storehouse for the absorption and nutrition of the five *zang* and the six *fu*. The Stomach meridian, the *yang ming* of the foot, is the *biao*, external, of the Spleen meridian, *tai yin*; the Spleen meridian is the *li*, internal, of the Stomach, *yang ming*. These two meridians have a *biao li*, internal/ external, relationship and they are very closely and intimately linked.

Thus, the *jin ye*, after being absorbed by the Spleen meridian, pass to the *yang ming* meridian through the free circulation maintained between them and are thus transmitted to the three *yang* meridians.

To summarize, the five *zang* and the six *fu*, even the four limbs and the one hundred bones, the layers of the skin, the muscles, the flesh... all the parts of the body must receive the influence of the Spleen meridian so that they can be nourished.

In this way the Spleen masters the process of the transport and transformation of the jing wei from the liquids and cereals; and it is why, later on in medicine (that is to say after the Nei Jing), it was given the name: Root/ Rooting of Posterior Heaven.

Regarding the digestion, transmission and diffusion of the jin ye, Spleen and Stomach, while each having their specific action, nonetheless work together and mutually influence each other.

The Spleen, being the yin of the element Earth, tu, is damp in nature and masters elevation/ raising. The Stomach, being the yang of the element Earth, is dry in nature and masters lowering.

The dryness of the Stomach and the dampness of the Spleen act reciprocally and thus the food is well digested.

The nature of the Stomach is to govern lowering and thus the liquids and cereals can continue their descent. The nature of the Spleen is to govern raising and thus the jin ye can rely on it for transportation above.

Dryness and dampness, raising and lowering are opposites which complete each other. Thus the collaboration of the Spleen and Stomach brings about the perfect accomplishment of the whole process of transport and transformation of the liquids and cereals.

The Spleen does not merely transmit and circulate the jin ye from the Stomach to each part of the body to nourish the whole organism; it also transports and transforms the qi, Breaths, of the waters, shui, and the dampness, shi, of the whole body; it helps in the circulation and elimination of fluids, so maintaining the right balance in the body's liquid metabolism.

If the Spleen is empty, xu, it no longer has the strength needed for transporting, the liquids and dampness stagnate and this causes different kinds of oedema, fu zhong, congestion due to phlegm etc.

The Spleen's lack of strength in ensuring transportation is not the sole cause of the arrest and stagnation of liquids and dampness; but any stagnation of liquids and dampness has, on the other hand, a repercussion on the functions of the Spleen. It is commonly said that dampness hinders the Spleen - Earth. So, in Su Wen Chapter 23:

The Spleen fears dampness, shi.

Digestion, absorption of nutrients, diffusion and distribution of the jin ye, are all the functions of the Spleen and Stomach; but the Small Intestine, Large Intestine, Triple Heater and Bladder also have close connections with digestion, transportation of the jin and even the general liquid metabolism.

In the process of digestion, of absorption, of diffusion and evacuation, Spleen, Stomach, Small Intestine, Large Intestine, Triple Heater and Bladder have each their specific role; but if one performs its task badly, that has repercussions on the whole process of digestion, absorption and even evacuation.

2. The Spleen masters the flesh, its splendour is in the lips

The solid and liquid foods pass through the transportation and transformation, yun hua, as well as the absorption of the Spleen, so as to nourish the flesh. When this nutrition is carried out with sufficient strength, then the flesh is full and thriving.

If the Spleen is ill, this leads to a hampering of the proper functioning of digestion and absorption; the flesh loses what nourishes it and consequently it gradually gets thinner. So it is said in Su Wen Chapter 44,

The Spleen masters, zhu, the flesh, ji rou, of the body.

The fact that the Spleen masters the flesh is reflected in the lips. When the nutrition is not properly supplied, either because the Spleen is empty or ill for a long time, then this is shown in the colour and moistness of the lips and the mouth: they are yellow, dried up and dull. So, in Su Wen Chapter 10:

The reunion, he, of the Spleen is in the flesh. Its splendour, rong, is in the lips.

And Su Wen Chapter 9:

Its flourishing aspect, hua, is at the four corners of the lips; the power of its fullness, chong, is in the flesh.

Because of the links that exist between the Spleen on the one hand and the lips and mouth on the other, one can, by observing the aspects they present in their colour and moisture, deduce physiological and pathological changes that affect the Spleen and so prognose the evolution of the illness.

3. The Spleen masters the four limbs

For their activity the four limbs rely on the yang Breaths that come from the transformation of the solid and liquid foods. So, in Su Wen Chapter 30:

The four limbs are the root of all the yang.

If the four limbs are the root of all the yang, how can the Spleen master the four limbs?

Su Wen Chapter 29 says:

*When the Spleen is ill, the four limbs are out of use. How is this?
Qi Bo replied: The four limbs receive their Breaths, qi, from the Stomach, but these Breaths could not reach the meridians without the necessary support of the Spleen.*

The upper and lower limbs rely, for their activation, on the yang Breaths that come from digestion; these Breaths certainly have their source in the transformation of solid and liquid food which occurs in the middle of the Stomach, but it is thanks to the transmission of the Spleen that the four limbs (and the meridians that run through them) can receive them. Thus the four limbs are indeed the root of all the yang, but they are dependent on that which is under the mastery of the Spleen, tai yin, Earth.

4. The Spleen presides over the Blood

Not only does the Spleen ensure the functions of transporting and transforming, of diffusing the nourishing jing wei, of irrigating and nourishing the whole body, but it also has the function of containing the Blood. The Nan Jing Difficulty 42 says:

The Spleen masters and envelopes, zhu guo, the Blood, warms, wen, the five zang.

Thus when the Breaths of the Spleen are vigorous and thriving they can envelope and protect the Blood, maintain the normality and regularity of the Blood circulation and ensure that it does not overflow, or leave its channels. If the functions of the Spleen are not well assured, this containing quality is lost and then the Blood overflows outside of the mai and all sorts of haemorrhages can be observed.

THE STOMACH: YANG ORGAN OF THE EARTH ELEMENT

The Stomach is located under the diaphragm; above it is linked to the oesophagus, below it communicates with the Small Intestine. Its meridian has a connecting, luo, relation with the Spleen.

The two doors and three cavities of the Stomach

The upper mouth of the Stomach is called ben men, door of precipitous rushing. The lower mouth of the Stomach is called you men, door of obscure depths. The region of ben men is called upper cavity, shang wan, and the region of you men is called lower cavity, xia wan. Between the upper and lower cavities is the middle cavity, zhong wan. These three parts together are called the cavities of the Stomach, wei wan.

The Stomach from the Zhong Yi Ji Qu Li Lun

The principal role of the Stomach is to receive the solid and liquid food and to initiate the process of digestion. To indicate that the Stomach masters the reception and introduction, shou na, the rotting (fermentation) and cooking, fu shu, of the liquids and cereals it is said that:

The Stomach is the Sea of liquids and cereals.

The liquids and cereals that enter the Stomach pass through the first phase of digestion - the rotting and cooking - ensured by the Breaths of the Stomach; then the Small Intestine continues the process of digestion and absorption.

If the diet is not well regulated, either from eating too little or too much, eating irregularly, or if one eats inappropriately hot or cold food, all this has repercussions on the normal functions of the Stomach and that causes nausea, vomiting, hiccoughs, difficulties in digestion, stomach pains... and other symptoms of counter-current rising or of loss of harmony in the Breaths of the Stomach.

In traditional Chinese medicine the Breaths of the Stomach are particularly important:

When one has the Breaths of the Stomach one lives. If one no longer has the Breaths of the Stomach, one dies. When one has the Breaths of the Stomach, then one has the mechanics for life.

One must therefore be particularly vigilant, watch over the functions of the Stomach and pay close attention to them. One of the essential points in the therapeutic precepts of traditional Chinese medicine is to avoid at all costs taking long-term medicines that ruin the Breaths of the Stomach.

SPLEEN/ STOMACH DISHARMONIES

PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF DISEASE

1. [Of] the Six Perverse Influences, liu yin

Dampness, shi, especially on the Spleen

Dryness, zao, especially on the Stomach

Cold, han, especially on the yang of the Spleen and Stomach

2. [Of] the Seven Emotions, qi qing

Overwhelming grief, you, Lung-Spleen relation

Meditative thought becoming preoccupation, si

Anger, nu, mastery of Liver-Wood over Spleen-Earth

3. Other Causes:

- Diet - upset, excessive, insufficient, alcohol, too much cold food ...
- Tiredness - excessive tiredness, undermining the Original Breaths
- Phlegm and liquids, tan yin, which cause blockages
- Breaths of waters, shui qi: swellings, oedema
- Parasites, especially coming from diet
- Stagnation of unclear, linked here to dampness and setting off jaundice

PRINCIPAL SYMPTOMS IN SPLEEN/ STOMACH DISORDERS:

- Abnormal taste in the mouth
- Dry mouth, kou ke
- One can eat and digest, but is easily hungry, cao za, clamouring Stomach
- One eats a lot but becomes thin
- Hiccoughs and vomiting, e ni ou tu
- Burps, yi qi, putrid eructations, ai fu, acid regurgitation, tan suan
- Pains in the cavities of the Stomach, wei wan tong
- Pains in the abdomen, fu tong
- Diarrhoea, fu xie, and constipation, bian mi
- Alteration in tongue coating
- Jaundice, huang dan
- Bloating, gu zhang
- Toothache, swelling of the gums
- Phlegm and liquids, tan yin

- Leukorrhoea, dai xia
- Collapse of the Central Breaths, leading especially to prolapse of organs
- Haemorrhage and purpura

PRINCIPLE SPLEEN PATTERNS

1. Emptiness of the Breaths of the Spleen, pi qi xu
2. Emptiness of Spleen yang, pi yang xu
3. The Central Breaths fall and collapse, zhong qi xia xian
4. The Spleen no longer presides over Blood, pi bu tong xue
5. Cold and damp hamper the Spleen, han shi kun pi
6. Damp and heat injure the Spleen and Stomach, shi re shang pi
7. Emptiness and cold of the Spleen and Stomach, pi wei xu han
8. Oedema through emptiness of the Spleen, pi xu shui zhong

PRINCIPLE STOMACH PATTERNS

1. Emptiness of the Breaths of the Stomach, wei qi xu
2. Insufficient Stomach yin, wei yin bu zu
3. Emptiness and cold of the Stomach, wei xu han
4. Cold in the Stomach, wei han
5. Heat in the Stomach, wei re
6. Blockage of food in the cavities of the Stomach, shi zhi wei wan
7. Stagnation of Blood in the Stomach, wei xue yu, or
Stagnation of Blood injures the network of communications, xue yu shang luo

SELECTED QUOTATIONS FROM THE NEI JING

Su Wen Chapter 4

The central region, zhong yang, is the Earth, tu

The illness is in the Spleen and its yu on the spinal column, ji ...

The yellow aspect, huang se, of the Earth of the central region

It penetrates, ru, and communicates, tong, with the Spleen, pi

It opens its orifice at the mouth, kou

It thesaurizes, cang, Essences, jing, in the Spleen

Thus its disturbance is located at the root of the tongue, she ben

Its taste is sweet, gan

Its proper type is earth, tu

Its domestic animal is the ox, niu

Its cereal is millet, ji

Corresponding to the four seasons in the heights it is the planet Saturn, consequently the illness is seen in the flesh, rou

Its note is gong, (first on the pentatonic scale)

Its number is five, wu

Its odour is aromatic, xiang

Su Wen Chapter 5

The central region, zhong yang, produces dampness, shi

Dampness produces, sheng, Earth, tu

Earth produces the sweet, gan

Sweet produces the Spleen, pi

Spleen produces the flesh, rou

Flesh produces the Lung

The Spleen is master, zhu, of the mouth

That which in Heaven makes dampness

On Earth, di, makes the earth, tu

In the body makes the flesh

In the thesaurizations, cang, makes the Spleen

In the coloured aspects makes yellow, huang

In the notes, yin, makes the note gong

In the noises, sheng, makes singing, ge

In movements reacting to change, bian dong, makes eructations

In the orifices, qiao, makes the mouth

In the Tastes, wei, makes the sweet

In the instances of will, zhi, makes meditative thought, si

Meditative thought injures the Spleen

That which victoriously balances out, sheng, meditative thought is anger, nu

Dampness injures the flesh

That which victoriously balances out dampness is wind, feng

Sweet injures the flesh

That which victoriously balances out sweet is acid, suan.....

The Blood produces, sheng, the Spleen

Su Wen Chapter 8

Spleen and Stomach are in charge of the storehouses and granaries, cang lin; the five tastes, wu wei, stem from them.

Su Wen Chapter 9

Spleen, Stomach, Large Intestine, Small Intestine, Triple Heater, Bladder: these are the root, ben, of the storehouses and granaries, cang lin, the dwelling place of nutrition, ying. Its name is utensil, qi.

There is possibility for transformation giving residues and dregs, zao po, for the transmission of the Tastes as well as the entries and exits, ru chu.

Its flourishing, hua, aspect is in the four whites of the lips, the power of its fullness, chong, is in the flesh; its taste is sweet, its colour yellow. Its category is extreme yin, zhi yin, and it is in free communication, tong, with the Breaths of the Earth, tu qi.

Su Wen Chapter 11

The Stomach is the Sea of liquids and cereals, the great gushing source of the six fu. The five Tastes enter the mouth and are stored in the Stomach to maintain, yang, the Breaths of the five zang.

Su Wen Chapter 18

The normal Breaths of the well-balanced man (those that follow the norm of life) are received, lin, from the Stomach. The Stomach is the normal Breaths of the well-balanced man. When a man no longer has the Breaths of the Stomach, wei qi, then it is called counter-current, ni, and this counter current is death.

...The great Luo of the Stomach is called xu li. It crosses through the diaphragm and takes a connecting, Luo, relation with the Lung. It comes out under the left breast. Its movement beats under the clothes.

They are the Ancestral Breaths of the mai, mai zong qi. When it overflows in fullness, whether there is panting, or whether it is frequent and interrupted: the illnesses are at the centre, zhong.

When it is knotted and transversal, there are accumulations, ji. If it is interrupted, jue, and no longer arrives, it is death. If under the breast its movement is echoed in the clothes (but too strongly): it is the Ancestral Breaths, zong qi, that flow out, xie.

Su Wen Chapter 19

The five zang receive, lin, the Breaths distributed from the Stomach. The Stomach is the root, ben, of the five zang.

Su Wen Chapter 22

The Spleen masters the long Summer. The tai yin and yang ming of the foot master the treatment. Its days are wu and ji (5th and 6th Heavenly Stems).

What affects the Spleen is dampness, shi, it is then urgent to eat bitter, ku, things to dry it out, zao....

The illnesses are in the Spleen: one is cured in Autumn. If one is not cured in Autumn, it intensifies in the Spring. If one does not die in Spring, it remains steady in Summer; one recovers in long Summer, chang xia.

One should neither eat warm foods, nor eat too much nor remain on damp ground, nor wear soaking wet clothes.

The Spleen aspires to loosening, huan, temperance. One must quickly eat sweet things, gan, to loosen it (soften it). One uses bitter, ku, to disperse and sweet to tonify ...

When the Spleen is ill, the body is heavy, shen zhong. One is easily hungry, shan ji, the flesh is flaccid, rou wei, the feet cannot receive (and walk correctly); when one walks one easily gets cramps, chi, one has pains in the lower part of the leg.

In the case of emptiness the abdomen is congested, fu man, and the intestines gurgle, chang ming, one has diarrhoea, sun xie, where food has not been digested: one takes (needles) the meridians concerned, tai yin and yang ming, as well as shao yin, bled ...

The colour of the Spleen is yellow. It suits it to eat salty foods; large beans, da dou, pork, chestnuts, bean leaves (or peas). All that is salty.

The Spleen is the messenger, shi; the Stomach is the market, shi.

Ling Shu Chapter 17

When the Breaths of the Spleen are in free communication with the mouth, the Spleen is in harmony and the mouth can distinguish the five cereals, wu gu.

Ling Shu Chapter 33

The Stomach is the Sea of liquids and cereals, shui gu. Its points of action at a distance, shu, are above at the Road of the Breaths, qi jie, Stomach 30, and below at, san li, Stomach 36. ... Excess of the Sea of liquids and cereals: the abdomen is congested. Insufficiency of the Sea of liquids and cereals: one is hungry but when one eats one cannot accept the food.

Ling Shu Chapter 43

When the Breaths of the Spleen rise in power, sheng, one dreams of singing and music, ge yue, that the body is heavy and can no longer move....

When the weakening Breaths, jue qi (introduction of perverse energies by counter-current following on a deficiency of normal Breaths) are the hosts of the Spleen, in dreaming one sees mounds and hills and great marshes; one dreams that the house is ruined by wind and rain ...When the weakening Breaths are the hosts of the Stomach, one dreams of drinking and eating.

SPLEEN AND STOMACH, PI WEI*(from: Larre & Rochat, 1992b)*

Spleen and Stomach, Pi Wei

Pi wei zhe cang lin zhi guan
wu wei chu yan

The Spleen and Stomach are responsible for the storehouses and granaries. The five tastes stem from them.

Preliminary Discussion

Claude Larre: For the first time in the series there is now a combination of two zang. One is spleen and the other is stomach. There is something common in the two characters for spleen and stomach which is extraordinarily important to note. Both characters have the radical for flesh or part of the body, but in pi it is on the left side, and in wei it is underneath. It might have some meaning that the radical is not placed in the same position for both of them, but I will leave the interpretation of this to Elisabeth. Guan we know is the function, or the charge. Cang and lin are two sorts of storage. One is storage to preserve, to collect and then to preserve what has been collected and to store what has been accepted from Heaven. The other is a granary for distribution. So we have two characters which are very close to one another, with the sense of receiving in order to be able to distribute. Quite obviously

what is produced by this collection and distribution is very important, and collection for distribution is what we call the five tastes or flavours, the wei.

Elisabeth Rochat: For the first time we find ourselves faced with a unique charge which is attributed to two viscera. But we must not be astonished by this because spleen and stomach continually work together. Spleen and stomach make up the middle heater, representing the junction of Heaven and Earth in man, and commanding the movements of raising and lowering. The spleen is the zang which is most directed towards the fu since it's through the spleen that everything drawn from food must pass before circulating in the body. As for the stomach, it has a particularly noble and elevated place because it is also a sea, the sea of liquids and cereals. In others words it is a sea for everything that is absolutely essential for the continuation of life. So the spleen and stomach form an ensemble which is indispensable, and which cannot be broken apart. The liver and gallbladder were intimately linked, but nevertheless they each had a particular charge, while the spleen and stomach together fulfil the same charge of being storehouse and granary. They receive and then store the grains or food, but if you put grain into a granary you don't just leave it there, it is stored so that it can be got out when it is needed. For example, we store in the autumn so that we can live through the winter.

Claude Larre: It works both ways. What you need to sow in the field you take from the granary in spring, but what you harvest in the autumn you keep there during winter. As long as there is no production it's necessary to have reserves. This is true not only for grain but for any storage of life.

Elisabeth Rochat: If you want to differentiate between the two ideograms you can put cang, the first character, on the side of the stomach for reception and storage. One name for stomach is tai cang, meaning big storehouse. The spleen's function, on the other hand, is distribution and dispatching. The term often used with the spleen is yun, which is the distribution in all directions from the spleen of the essences and interstitial fluids and so on. This is more the granary, lin, function. It's from the storehouses and granaries that everything which is needed to build up blood and qi, body fluids and flesh and so on, will come, and when the stomach receives correctly and the transformations are well made, and the essences necessary for life are extracted from the food, then the result of all this is what is called the five wei, the five tastes. The number 5 here is interesting because it represents the totality of life. It is the totality and the diversity of everything that will reconstitute my life. In the character wei we have the radical for mouth on the left and an ear of corn on the right. When you say 'taste' you think of the taste that you might have in your mouth, but this taste is only the exterior manifestation of the interior or intimate nature of what one is eating at the time.

Just as colour is the exterior aspect of the intimate or essential nature of something, which is why Heaven is seen as blue, Earth as yellow and trees and vegetation as green, so taste is not just the impression that you have in the mouth. It is that which forms the basis of the impression that gives you the taste. It's the quality of the essences that constitute the food, and these essences are drawn out from the work done by the stomach and spleen. After extraction the essences go to the place with which they have an affinity. So if I eat something that has an acid, sour taste, it means that the

materials that are full of life which constitute this food have some kind of relationship with the same movement that is found in the spring and wood. It's the same quality of qi that have created the liver in me which have also made the muscular force, the tendons, in the body. So when I eat food it is completely broken up by the work of the middle heater in ripening and rotting, and a state of subtlety is arrived at which is called jing wei. Jing is the essences and wei indicates something which is very fine and subtle, so refined that it has great power of penetration. It's the necessary route between what is not me and what is me. Everything that you eat will become your skin, your qi and everything else.

Claude Larre: Maybe I could add two remarks. One is that when you are refueling your car in the petrol station you ask for high grade or low grade. The high grade is like the jing wei and the low grade is like the wu wei. The five tastes, wu wei, are not the ultimate product, even though they may be alright. A representation of the best condition in which to be assimilated is not easily expressed by the five tastes, it is better to go further and say jing wei. Second, when you are refueling your car if some part of the fuel spills out onto the car it will smell for quite a while. It's disseminated everywhere and it's not easily moved by the air. This is the subtlety of high grade essences. It's the same in relations between people. You resent people because you feel or smell them too much, psychologically speaking. This is some sort of emanation too. You call it psychology but psychology is an empty word. It's that something goes from me to you and back again, and that something has to be very subtle. This is the sort of subtlety they are alluding to when they talk of this conversion of the five tastes to the jing wei. There is no end to the subtlety of exchanges, and no end to the taking into yourself of the environment. But you cannot take things in which are not prepared for you, and to receive properly you have to prepare yourself.

Elisabeth Rochat: Once this level of jing wei is reached there is in these essences everything that is composed of the vitality of what I have eaten. Then there will again be a separation made in the jing wei and expressed in the form of the five tastes. So the acid, sour taste will invigorate the liver, and the same for the other four zang. You can see how diet can be very important, and constitutes a treatment in itself. There are very precise indications on this in the Su wen. So, the stomach receives all the foods that are constituted of the wei and by the work of the stomach and spleen these same tastes will reconstitute my being.

A Brief Discussion: Functions of Spleen and Stomach

(from: Larre & Rochat, 1990)

Elisabeth Rochat: We've seen that the Spleen and Stomach are essential in all physiological functions of man, and therefore that the Spleen and Stomach will often have a very essential role in physiology, pathology and symptomatology. A quotation from a very famous twelfth century book, the Treatise on the Spleen and Stomach says:

*That which offers the yin and the Essences is Spleen and Stomach,
and this is in harmonious conjunction with their Breaths. The Breaths*

from the cereals rise up and its circulation follows the movement of Spring and Summer, the movement where yang is rising for life. And it is in this way that man reaches longevity. And on the contrary if there is disharmony between Spleen and Stomach there will be the loss or inability to grasp the Essences so that all the thesaurizations will be impoverished, and this will give a premature death.

We've seen that the two ideograms which summed up the characteristics of Spleen were yun hua, transportation or distribution, and transformation. Therefore they are concerned with all the progression of digestion and assimilation. But this word transformation is not only used for digestion and assimilation and the digestive process, but also for all kinds of adaptations, when you have a change in your life, for example, or the adaptation to a new kind of food. It's the idea of making use of all the elements that are at your disposal.

Claude Larre: The highest meaning of hua is seen in the Lie Zi Chapter 1, where hua is the creative transforming power.

Elisabeth Rochat: This function of transporting and transforming is seen in two aspects. The first aspect is the specific action of the Spleen, helped by the Stomach, on the jing wei, the subtle Essences, and this is the same for the distribution of the five Tastes through the body to each of the zang.

Another aspect of this function of transforming and transporting is on the specific action on the liquids and dampness or humidity in the body. Contemporary Chinese books talk about its action on the metabolism of liquids and all the different functions that help this metabolism of liquids and good circulation. In this case the Spleen is seen as joined together with the activities of the Lung and the Kidneys. You know the pathology that comes from this, when the Spleen is no longer able to metabolize and circulate liquids freely. If the Spleen is attacked you have the characteristic symptoms of a bloated, swollen abdomen, diarrhoea and tiredness, or you can even have emaciation, and every different illness to do with the retention of water. If there are phenomena of overheating then you can get the formation of tan, phlegm. All this depends on the location of the stagnation. Stagnation at the level of the skin and flesh gives oedema, but if it takes place in the intestines you have diarrhoea.

The second great function of the Spleen is to participate in the production of Blood, and especially to have a particular effect on it, which is to retain and contain it. In other words, the Spleen is holding Blood in its form so that there is no erratic circulation, and it doesn't overflow out of the containing channels which are the mai. The quality of Blood partly depends on the juices that come from the Spleen, and the presence of the Spleen's function of Earth throughout the body at the level of the Blood gives it this ability to hold it in its correct form. Equally the connection between the Breaths and the Blood will come into play here, because we've said many times that the Spleen is the source of renewal for the Breaths, and the Blood can only move when it is animated by the Breaths. So in all these cases the Spleen maintains the Blood. The Chinese term gives the idea of presiding over the Blood like a chairman. For this reason, in practice if you are treating the Blood you also treat the Breaths. Many symptoms of haemorrhage can be linked with the Spleen, though obviously you have

to take each case on its own. For example, one cause of irregularities in a woman's period is linked with the Spleen.

A third function is governing the four limbs. All external activities of movement are just a result of this function to transport, transform, to distribute nutrition and liquid elements and to be like a chairman for the Blood.

The Breaths of the Spleen also master ascending movement and that is in a complementary relation with the Breaths of the Stomach which circulate with a descending movement. This is essentially the exchange of Heaven and Earth, the ascending movement is the ascending of what is clear, pure and full of vitality, and the descending movement is the going down of what is unclear, impure and finally to be ejected. If these ascending and descending movements are disturbed, the clear yang Breaths can no longer be diffused and spread out, and Essences coming from Posterior Heaven can no longer return to the zang to be thesaurized. This ascending movement of the clear is also all the movement of circulation out to the extremities of the limbs, the skin and the hair on the skin, i.e. out to the exterior. And the upward movement, the ascending of the clear, participates in the good maintenance and functioning of, for example, the orifices of the face, and the quality of Essences of the brain. We saw that the Stomach masters the descending movement, and with the Intestines governs all the doors and passages between the Stomach and Intestines and out to the exterior.

The Spleen likes dryness and fears dampness, and the Stomach likes humidity and fears dryness. We saw that this was because too much dampness blocks the movement of the yang of the Spleen, and too much dryness makes masceration and fermentation inside the Stomach impossible. As always we have this dual relationship between Stomach and Spleen in the well balanced humidity level within the organism.

Another special aspect is that the Spleen masters communication between the Heart and Kidneys, and that it is part of its function to be a turning point, a pivot. Sometimes it is thanks to the Spleen that communication between the Heart and the Kidneys is not lost, and it is sometimes to do with a blockage in the Spleen that communication between Heart and Kidneys is not properly adjusted.

Lastly, with the Breaths of the Stomach we saw their importance and how they have three main levels. One is simply the functioning of the Stomach, called the Breaths of the Stomach. The second is the level of the Spleen and Stomach functioning together which can also be called the Breaths of the Stomach maintaining a good balance between dampness and dryness, ascending and descending etc. The third level or meaning exists in quite a restricted sense, it is the role of the Stomach in governing whether you do or do not have an appetite.

The coating on the tongue gives indications for all the different zang, but it is particularly linked with the Stomach. The Stomach is also linked with all the aspects that the pulse presents, and with the aspects that the complexion gives, so you can see the different functions of the Stomach linked with the main diagnostic methods. The Nei Jing insists on the presence of the Stomach in the examination of the pulse, and you will know the importance of the Stomach in the coating on the tongue. Behind the complexion that you have will be the play between the Blood and the Breaths, and therefore here too the presence of the Stomach is felt.