

# THE SPLEEN, PI

## YIN ORGAN OF THE EARTH ELEMENT

脾胃脾  
處居胃  
于正中屬  
古中土  
田田俱  
赤字從  
偏亦田  
石中字



遺篇刺法論曰脾爲  
諫議之官知周出焉

The Spleen, from the Ling Shu Su Wen Jie Yao  
(Larre & Rochat, 1990)

## THE IDEOGRAM FOR THE SPLEEN, PI



**Pi, Spleen**

*Elisabeth Rochat:* The ideogram for the Spleen has two parts - one is the radical, the flesh, which indicates that the ideogram designates part of the body, and the other is the graphic part which is etymologically an ancient drinking vessel, provided with a handle on the left side. This kind of vessel was used every day, for common activities, as opposed to another kind of vessel, zun, which was used uniquely for sacrifices. These two ideograms, which originally designated the vessel that was commonly used and the special vessel for sacrifices, give the meaning of ordinary, vulgar for the first common vessel, and honourable for the second vessel used for sacrifices.

In classical Chinese the ideogram pi has the meaning of ordinary or vulgar, just like this first vessel. We can see that the Spleen is really like a servant who works every day, all day and even on Sunday, and we'll see that too, with some of the correspondences with the Earth Element, and Spleen. For example, the ox, associated with the Earth Element, is an animal which works every day during all the year in order to cultivate the earth. We also see that the Spleen, as a kind of servant of the vitality, has a very common and ordinary task - but it is a task that is necessary for life. We see in a quotation from the Nei Jing that among the zang the Spleen is the nearest to the fu, which have to do with transportation, transformation and all these common, ordinary and quite vulgar tasks for the maintenance of vitality.

If we have another look at the ideogram with the same main graphic part (the phonetic) and we just change the radical to that of clothes instead of flesh, we have the ideogram with the meaning of to aid, to benefit, to be here in order to help somebody in his task. If we add the radical of woman we have the meaning of servant, slave girl, who in ancient times was in charge of grinding up the grain in the palace of the lords. If we just add the radical of human activity, we have an ideogram with the meaning of to enable, to cause, to act so that we do something. If you add the radical of disease ( this is a slight transformation in the graphics, but the meaning is the same) this becomes a kind of disease, bi, that you all know well: the type of blockage in circulation due to an exterior perverse attack of cold, humidity and wind. We also have some other kinds of ideograms with this radical, or with this phonetic and other radicals such as liquid or cereal or stalk giving the meaning of different kinds of rice or wheat or some kind of cereals.

So to summarize, we have the idea of something in the body which is always at work, like a slave girl, doing very obscure work, to help something very deeply, in order to bring forth something necessary, and to enable something to happen. I think that these are the main significations just from the ideograms.

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## COMMENTARY FROM THE CLASSICS *(from: Larre & Rochat, 1990)*

### Su Wen Chapter 23

*Elisabeth Rochat:* We will now see some complementary information on the Spleen from the Nei Jing. Su Wen Chapter 23 presents the special function of each zang and fu in relation to the five Tastes, the five Breaths, the five emotions and so on. It discusses the places where the five Tastes enter, acid enters the Liver, sweet enters the Spleen and so on, and from the pathological point of view the place where the Breaths of the five zang become ill. The Spleen, for example, makes regurgitations, and in this case especially acid regurgitations. The explanation of this is that the Spleen helps the Stomach to make a good circulation of bodily liquids, but when the Breaths of the Spleen are weak and ill they can no longer water and humidify the zang, and therefore bodily liquids cannot be distributed in the four directions or to the four zang, so they move in a counter-current to the mouth and the pharynx, and you have this kind of regurgitation. Most of the time these regurgitations are acid because it is a movement of Wood against Earth, Gall Bladder and Liver against Spleen and Stomach.

The Spleen fears dampness because it is rooted in soil and dampness, and for that reason likes dryness, although not too dry. Spleen fears the extreme dampness because, as we saw, dampness provokes a loosening of the circulation and this loosening implies some blockage in circulation. You know that dampness oppresses or embarrasses the circulation of the Breaths of the Spleen. In this case the Spleen can no longer fulfill its task to transport, to distribute and to transform. At the level of the flesh dampness makes flaccidity and oedema and so on.

On the other hand, the Stomach fears dryness because of its own nature, Stomach needs humidity, dampness, and liquids in order to make its fermentation, maceration and transformation.

In another part of Su Wen Chapter 23 it says that Spleen is or makes saliva. In the same context Kidneys are or make spittle. I think the difference between saliva and spittle is that spit is to go outside the body, but saliva is to remain in the mouth to allow good functioning of the tongue and the mouth, to begin the digestion and all that process, and to allow the tongue to move and speak.

Afterwards we have some sentences that you already know:

*Spleen thesaurizes yi, Spleen masters the flesh*

In this way, in the relationship between Spleen and flesh we can see that the deepness and density of the Earth is an exact analogy with the thickness and density of the flesh. Finally in relation to the mai or mo, the network and current of animation, or the pulses - the same word in Chinese, because the pulses are just a specific place where we can appreciate the quality of the current of animation - you know that each zang has a specific quality of the mai and the pulse of the Spleen is intermittent. Commentaries say that it is intermittent because this is a sign that you are passing from one season to

another, that it's a sign of the succession of Breaths, or the twenty four different climatic periods of the year. The meaning of intermittent is just a little pause in order to pass on to another quality of Breaths. With this notion of succession or intermittence we have the idea of harmonization and well-tempered things. If the successions or passages are well done, all is well tempered and harmonized - there's an harmonious composition.

Let me just recall Ling Shu Chapter 8. It talks of the mastering of Spleen over the yi, the purpose, and of all pathological aspects of that, when the Spleen is seized by melancholia and affliction. When we are unable to get rid of this oppression and trouble, the yi, the purpose, is injured, and when the yi is injured you can guess it will be the contrary of having an harmonious composition, the text says all is in disorder, perturbation and disturbance.

*Claude Larre:* One major teaching in Lao Zi is that the saintly kings of old had no fixed mind themselves but were complying with the changes of mind of their people. We know at the same time that the Heart has to be empty. If the Heart is empty and if the will is constant, it does not mean that the mind will not be subjected to so many images or ideas, and will not have the ability to change in order to adapt to any different circumstances.

So there is a difference between being able to adapt to circumstances and getting into disorder with your purpose. They are not the same thing. They look as if they are the same thing because everything looks like changing. It's not that everything is changing, but that you have the ability to change if it is necessary in order to adapt yourself to certain conditions. We know that this is really an excellent thing and something that the Chinese can do very easily. But how is it possible that they are always on the verge of change ? In fact you see that they are not changing so much, and that they are still the dominating power, so life has been understood by them as something to which you have to adapt because it is always in constant change. When Ling Shu Chapter 8 stresses that under the influence of oppression and sorrow, purpose is no longer stable, it does not mean that previously it was fixed in stability, it means that the condition of determination has to be there even if you change every moment. You change because you want to change. It is not the same thing as not being able to keep your own will, purpose, or the like. So diseases are when those changes are made outside your will, or outside your purpose. This point is very clear in the Chinese philosophy of life but not so clear with us, because when somebody changes we say, "Ah, you changed". And all the critics of the person ask, "Why did you change?"

*Elisabeth Rochat:* At the same time as this deep disorder in the interior functioning of the body happens, because the Spleen can no longer be the turntable and place for all permutations and harmonization, the four limbs cannot move, the hair on the skin gets brittle, you have signs of premature death and you die during the Spring. This is because Spring is the period during the year when the natural impulse is to go far away and to rise up powerfully and so on, and if inside your intimate reaction, action and functioning you are oppressed and blocked at the level of the Spleen, it's impossible for you to have this kind of rising up during the Spring. You have something similar at the end of Ling Shu Chapter 8 in this quotation:

*Spleen thesaurizes ying, (ying as in nutritive, rebuilding power) and ying is the dwelling place of the yi.*

This is quite important because between nutrition, ying, and what we call yi, there is a mutual connection of effect. It needs some support in order to manifest itself as efficient, and ying cannot be efficient if it is not inhabited by one of the five highest entities of life.

*When the Breaths of the Spleen are empty or on the way to becoming empty, the four limbs cannot be used.*

*Claude Larre:* It's not only that you can't use them, they don't want to be used. You never know where your consciousness is in your body. It's too easy to say I have in the heart of my Heart the purpose to live. The trouble is that we have four limbs, and those four limbs want to live, but they accept to live in obedience to and at the service of all the body. Yet it might be that there is a limb which doesn't want to give service and there is a revolt in the organization. So it seems to be a very Westernized point of view to say that everything is under the Heart or the Lungs, for example, they are all servants in turn and maybe one of them is lord at a certain time. Of course, all that is under the supervision, authority and sovereignty of the big three, Heart, Lung and Liver. But it would be good to represent life not only in the headquarters but everywhere, as in a country. Maybe the government is the governing agent but there are many citizens, and some of them may group themselves together and may revolt against the central authority. It could be the same in an individual. It might be that the limbs don't want to move because they can't. So it might be safer to be very strict with the translation and say that the four limbs don't want to.

*Elisabeth Rochat:* In the light of this text, in connection with the ying, nutritive power, and yi, we can see that the four limbs are no longer used because they are not nourished, irrigated or watered by the Spleen, and also because the yi can no longer rise and give the idea of moving these limbs to the Spirits. It's exactly like the Empire - if the central government is weak, the maintenance, the army, the soldiers and all kinds of transportation cannot arrive at the borders or frontiers, and the orders from the government don't arrive either. Worst still, perhaps they are not even very well organized at the Centre of government, because the government no longer knows where it is going and there is no correct or well-formulated order. We have this situation in every state at some time during history. Everything becomes mixed and confused because of this central weakness.

*Claude Larre:* This expression "four limbs" is seen everywhere in the text, it means hands and feet, but it also means all external activity, in contrast to all the nutrition and internal activities. So when they say the four limbs won't move it doesn't only mean that the hands and feet are no longer usable, it means that everything manifesting externally is ceasing to function. This is the problem with schizophrenia or anorexia and things like that, when there is some sort of slow immobilization and you cannot reach the mind of the person, and at the same time you see that there is no external activity. If you cannot get to the mind of the person and at the same time you see no external activity, maybe the fact is that the yi is no longer functioning. So if you talk to the person, because there is no

yi there is no place for purpose and no way for them to understand what you are saying. There is no reason for a disruption in the organization externally, unless internally something is so much in disorder that it is no longer functioning. We are not supposed to separate the external motion from the inner organization because we know that the external motion is just the manifestation of the condition of the inner structure, where the zang, the yi, the zhi, the Spirits and all of that are making life.

*Elisabeth Rochat:* At the same time as the four limbs are out of use or order, the five zang are no longer peaceful. We can see that if the five zang are peaceful, there are good relationships between them, and on the contrary, if the relationships are bad and there is no regularization between the zang, it's because the Spleen's Breaths are empty. When Spleen's Breaths are full, (i.e. when the fullness is not a good fullness but a perversion, such as a blockage or obstruction) the Stomach is swollen and all the transmissions that can take place in the lower part of the abdomen are blocked. This could be seen in micturation, in stools or in menstruation for women.

## Ling Shu Chapter 29

In Ling Shu Chapter 29 we have quite an interesting quotation which says that the Spleen is very active in the defence of the organism.

*The Spleen, its mastership is defence.*

The explanation of this sentence in the classical commentaries is that because the Spleen has mastery over distribution and transformation it is able to distribute Essences from the jing wei to any part of the body and especially to the five zang, and the four limbs, which as Father Larre has said, means any part of the body with exterior activity. By this work, the Spleen makes the power and strength of man's defence particularly against attacks coming from the exterior.

## Su Wen Chapter 52

Another description appears in Su Wen Chapter 52:

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

You see that the Chinese play very easily with words, homophones and so on, shi and shi. We also see this messenger character, shi, when studying the Heart and the Heart as Master. It means a messenger and an agent by which something can be done. A commentator says, a messenger is a man or person who goes far away and who makes things known - like an ambassador. The Spleen masters transportation, distribution and transformation of liquids and cereals to nourish and maintain all parts of the body. In this way the Spleen is messenger because it can circulate the Breaths of cereals in order to maintain every part of the body and the zang.

The Stomach is like a market because it receives the five cereals and helps with the transmission of the Breaths of the Spleen to nourish the five zang. It is like a market, a place of commerce or a fairground, where merchants bring things and sell them, and other people leave the market with the things they've sold. It's a place for exchange, for transformation or transportation. It's also the place

where all things can be gathered to be exchanged or to participate in the maintenance of life for each family, each person and so on. And to be a market has a resemblance to being a sea.

## 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.*

*Elisabeth Rochat:* The meaning is that through the Breaths of the Spleen, through their good state and harmonization, we are able to recognize what food we have in our mouth, and we can distinguish and know the five cereals. In this chapter of the Ling Shu it is by the activity and action of the Breaths of the Heart that you can distinguish the five Tastes. It's exactly as if the Tastes were the inner structure of food, and you need the Breaths of the Heart to penetrate to the interior of another thing. But through the Spleen and the Breaths of the Spleen you can recognize what kind of food you have in your mouth. This is not exactly the same thing. Of course you know that one of the most important symptoms of the Spleen is lack of taste or disturbance in the taste, but I think that this is more the immediate taste not so much this ability of the Heart to penetrate to the intimate structure of another thing. And in the context of this chapter the Spleen is said to distinguish the five cereals, the Heart the five Tastes.

## Ling Shu Chapter 43

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

*When the weakening 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.*

*Elisabeth Rochat:* Ling Shu Chapter 43 has to do with the meaning of dreams. It is very easy to see that this kind of joyful singing is the proper expression of the Spleen and the Earth and the central region, and that when we have the rising power of the Breaths of the Spleen we have the expression of this kind of sound when dreaming. At the same time you dream that the body is heavy and can no longer move because there is too great an abundance of the Spleen's Breaths in the flesh.

The weakening Breaths refers to the introduction of perverse energies by counter-current, following a deficiency of normal Breaths. This second part is quite interesting. Why do we see mounds and hills and great marshes? It's because the Spleen is the dwelling place of the yin, nutritive power, and the Spleen is like a utensil and must have flesh to shape the body, so when these kinds of Breaths are empty or too weak you have an emptiness on the Earth, and as a result an overflowing of Water. You just see the eroded part of the Earth in the form of mounds and hills and you dream at the same time of hills and mounds and great marshes. Marshes are exactly like Water invading Earth or soil. And the humidity and dampness are too strong like the Water in the reverse ke cycle. We saw yesterday that Spleen can also be considered as the image of the Earth, or like a house where

everything in the body can be as if at home. So we dream that the house is ruined by wind and rain. Wind and Water are the two most important internal agents of perturbation for the Spleen. And for the Stomach:

*When the weakening Breaths are the hosts of the Stomach one dreams of drinking and eating.*

There is no need for commentary.

*Claude Larre:* The question is why do they attach so much importance to dreams? Usually we forget them because they are not real life. But for a Chinese expert life is equally real during dreams as during the time when you are not dreaming, and dreams must have their bearing or their point.

I remember when I was in Japan I happened to go and visit a temple and there was a special place for the rectification of dreams. The monks would go to the dispensary and be given herbs to correct the imbalance shown in their dreams. As far as I can understand it the imaginary power has a free release during the time we are lying in bed, but free as it might be it has to follow one direction or another. It has to follow a source of dreams, and those dreams, even if they are free, are more or less under the control of the five zang, because the hun and the zang are so intimately connected that the zang would give the hun one direction or another.

*Question:* When you say rectification of dreams do you mean an explanation?

*Claude Larre:* No, no. I said it was a dispensary. When you go to a dispensary it is to be cured. It doesn't mean that every morning everybody goes and corrects their dreams, but it was a Buddhist temple, and we know that Buddhists have a much more refined understanding of how to use psychology than anyone else. Before there were Buddhist monks in China the Chinese had dreams and perhaps they were interpreting dreams, but they didn't have an institution for it, it was left for everybody to do. But since the arrival of the Buddhists, Chinese spiritual life has become much more organized. The reason the Chinese government does not like the Buddhists or the Daoists is just because they are dealing with the conscience and with intellectual power. I don't talk of Christians because the Christian doesn't usually care about those details. The Chinese government doesn't like the Christians because of their connection with the powers outside China, not because they are harmful for the country, but they look very closely at the Daoists and the Buddhists.

## **Su Wen Chapter 22**

*When the Spleen is ill, the body is heavy. One is easily hungry, the flesh is flaccid (without power, impotent), the feet cannot receive and walk properly; when one walks one easily gets cramps. One has pain in the lower part of the leg. In case of emptiness the abdomen is congested and the intestines gurgle, one has diarrhoea where food has not been digested, one takes (needles) the meridians concerned, tai yin and yang ming as well as shao yin, bled.*

*Elisabeth Rochat:* This is just in order to point out the connection between Spleen and Stomach and Kidneys, which is quite exceptional to this presentation of Su Wen Chapter 22 - it's not only tai yin and yang ming that are needed, but shao yin of the foot, the meridian of the Kidneys. For the symptoms there is no problem in interpretation, but it is very important to see the connection between the Kidneys and the Water of the Kidneys, and the Spleen and the dampness of the Spleen - just as the origin of the power of nutrition and defence, of Breaths and Blood and the power and strength of origin are in the Kidneys and by the Kidneys and through the Kidneys. The renewal of nutrition and defence, Blood and Breaths, and so on is made through the activity of the Spleen and Stomach - and that is the reason why in order to restore the free communication of Breaths in the meridians you treat with these three meridians, tai yin and yang ming, but also shao yin. Sometimes commentaries indicate points such as Spleen-5 to disperse the fullness of the Spleen, or Stomach-41, the tonification point of the Stomach, and Kidney-7, the tonification point for Kidneys. The treatment is done on the lower parts of the body because you are trying to disperse the congestion which is in the lower part of the trunk. All this was just to see that the connection between the Spleen and Kidneys is sometimes very important in treatment.

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## SU WEN CHAPTER 29

### Biao li relationship of Spleen and Stomach

*Elisabeth Rochat:* Now we can look at a very important chapter, Su Wen Chapter 29. The title of the chapter is Tai Yin Yang Ming, and the chapter deals with Spleen and Stomach and the relationship between them.

*Huang Di said, tai yin and yang ming have a biao li relationship*

...this is not an internal external relationship, a biao li relationship is a movement which allows the connections between internal and external, and that's not exactly the same.

*Claude Larre:* The biao li is the go-between. By internal you mean the part of you which is so much your heaven-self that you have no access to it, and external means the nice physical appearance we all have and everything connected with it, a house, a garden, the world and all that. Something to be seen and to be used. It doesn't mean that there is an inner space and an outer space. The answer is to dismiss the question of space and say that everything which is described in space has something to do with external, and everything which has nothing to do in itself with space is called internal. But since there is no internal except for the external, and no external except for the internal, there must be some connection between the one and the other. The connection is just that what cannot be seen becomes visible not by itself but by means of the external, and the foundation of the external lies in the invisible. This is the reason why they have biao and li, since biao is to manifest and li is to be such that the manifestation will be different. For each li there is biao, and for each biao there must be a fundamental li. And the biao li is the to and fro for the nei and wai (inner and outer).

With this sort of explanation we can understand that something very similar in Heaven and Earth and yin and yang is used for nei wai and biao li. Then Heaven Earth is the ultimate reality which is coming out unceasingly from the chaos. When I say coming out it doesn't mean that it's not in the chaos, but it might be seen outside the chaos while still being in the chaos. All the phenomena of life cannot exist and are not intelligible except through the yin yang device. The Chinese were keen enough on the subject to make two for one and one for two, they had one, the chaos, and inside the chaos they had this distraction between Heaven and Earth, but for the movement of Heaven towards Earth and the obedience of Earth towards Heaven they had to find an expression, and the expression they found is yin yang. Not that Earth is purely yin and Heaven purely yang, but by appropriation the closest to Heaven is yang and the closest to Earth is yin. In order that everything is on the move it is necessary that the virtue of Heaven has an aspect of yin, so the virtue of Heaven is yin and yang, but the initiative for the productivity is on the yang side and the effectiveness of this productivity relies upon the yin aspect of Heavenly virtue.

*Elisabeth Rochat:* When you say that tai yin and yang ming are in a biao li relationship the meaning is that inside the Earth Element there exists a two-fold possibility of going to the exterior or going to the interior. This is in a normal state and also in a pathological state, because perverse Breaths can follow the way of orthodox Breaths. But why do these two meridians and two viscera which represent the same Element produce such different illnesses?

**Qi Bo answers:**

*Yin and yang have different locations, they are by turns, one after the other, empty and full, one after the other going against the current and going with the current. Their source is not the same, and this is why their illnesses have different names.*

This is quite difficult to understand, but the meaning is very rich. The first differentiation is between yin and yang and by this we can see that Spleen and Stomach are like yin and yang beating together. For this reason they share a common charge in Su Wen Chapter 8. There is a prototype of the division and the beating in the dialectics of yin yang. Because they are so close, they are also very different and must be differentiated very carefully, as Father Larre said earlier in relation to Liver and Gall Bladder, they are so close and yet so far apart.

So what is the meaning of these different sites or locations? One is yin and has its mastering in the lower part, one is yang and has its mastering in the upper part. That is completely different to this movement of ascending and descending, but we'll see that in a little while. The dialectics and the assonance between the two, yin and yang, Spleen and Stomach, are the basic principle of their activity. Also, they share in the totality of life in the organism or in the harmonization of the intimate Breaths of my body with the external cosmos. This is because this kind of movement from empty to full and so on, one after the other, with or against the current, can also deal with the succession of seasons according to a lot of commentaries. During two seasons, Spring and Summer, yang is ascending, and during the other two seasons, Autumn and Winter, yin is ascending and yang

descending. In the body, Spleen and Stomach are really the prototype of this succession, this alternating, and this complementary ascending and descending of yin and yang.

We saw in Chapter 11 that from the work of the Spleen and Stomach the zang and fu can obtain all that they need to live and remain in activity. Therefore, the twelve meridians need the Breaths of the Stomach and the activity of the Stomach and Spleen to circulate, to exist, to be and to remain rich in Breaths and Blood. Blood needs the Essences of Spleen in order to be produced, renewed and rebuilt. We will see later in Su Wen Chapter 21 how we need the Breaths of the Stomach, through liquid and solid alimentation, to restore in us our animation.

For this reason, Spleen and Stomach, yin and yang, animation, maintenance, building and so on are the basis of the constitution and rebuilding of the twelve meridians. And this double movement is also manifested through the twelve meridians with their twelve centripetal and centrifugal movements. It's also the movement of clear and unclear, of what is very dense and rich and animated by a yin movement to be concentrated in the interior, to be centripetal, or being animated by a Heavenly movement, in the image of yang, to be centrifugal. For example, centripetal vitality could be Essences joining zang, and the centrifugal vitality could be the clear yang, going out to the four limbs in order to make defence and animation and so on. But there are a lot of possible examples.

Some commentaries say the Spleen has a special mastery of yin meridians with their centrifugal movement, and that Stomach has a special mastering of yang meridians with their centripetal current. But why are these yin meridians animated by a centrifugal movement proper to the yang? For example, in the bodily liquids the yang part, the jin, is animated by a centrifugal movement. The explanation is exactly the same as in the case of the Spleen mastering ascending and the Stomach mastering descending movement. It is very simple. If you want to be in relationships, you have to be between yin and yang and between Heaven and Earth, and between all the terms of dual expression of a couple. Each thing keeps within its own nature something of the other half of the couple. For example, there is enough yin in the power of Heaven to make rain descend, and there is enough yang in the bosom of the Earth to make humidity and dampness rise up and form the clouds. The only way for Heaven and Earth to be in connection is for the influx of Heaven to descend and the influx of Earth to ascend - and if not it is impossible to have life. If Spleen and Stomach or yin and yang, or any dual expression of a couple or something in a dialectic relationship, are in the pattern of the model of Heaven and Earth we always have the repetition of the same movement. For this reason the Stomach masters descending movement and the Spleen masters ascending movement and a yin meridian can manifest yin power to have contact with yang by a centrifugal movement.

*Claude Larre:* This is clearly stated in Lao Zi Chapter 2 when it says that what is on high and what is low turn towards one another - so this is really more than a medical statement - we know that if it is in Lao Zi it is central to the Chinese view of reality.

*Elisabeth Rochat:* In this paragraph we have the mastery of Spleen and Stomach over the four seasons and the three yin and yang currents. This is through the four limbs which are also under the mastery or sovereignty of the Spleen and Stomach and the Earth Element and which are, in the human

body, in the shape and manner of the four seasons of the year. This is an idea which is written about in the commentaries on the chapter and in many other texts, because this same division into four is an expression of the differentiation of Breaths. In time there are four seasons of the year and in the human body there is the animation of yin and yang in the four limbs. There is also the idea that Spleen and Stomach are like yin and yang and Heaven and Earth in a great complementary relationship.

**And the Emperor said:** *I would like to know these differences that you say exist between the illnesses of Spleen and Stomach.*

**Qi Bo said:** *The yang is the Breath of Heaven and it commands the exterior, and the yin is the Breath of Earth and it commands the interior. And thus the Dao or the normal way of yang is fullness, and the Dao or the normal way of yin is emptiness.*

What is the meaning of that? It's very simple, it's a question of pathological aggression. Yang masters the exterior, yang makes defence and the movement of defence against, particularly, perversity coming from the exterior. For this reason the way of yang is to be full of power and strength to resist external aggression, but if you yield to this aggression you will have a perverse fullness in the exterior. This is invasion of perverse Breaths leading to perverse fullness. On the other hand the power of yin is emptiness, but it can also be full of Essences, Breaths and vitality. The perversion of that is weakness and internal deficiency.

*For this reason when you are attacked by robber winds, the perversities which profit by this emptiness - for example if there is a deficiency in the defence of the body - then it's the yang that receives them; when the solid and liquid foods are disturbed or if activity and rest are not given adequate time then it's the yin that receives this attack.*

You can see that the yang receives attack from external agents of disease, and the yin receives internal agents of disease in the form of disturbance in alimentation. Fatigue and exhaustion also affect the yin. When the yang receives an attack it enters the six fu, and when the yin receives an attack it enters the five zang. When it enters the six fu, the body becomes warm or hot, and you can't remain lying down quietly because the perversion is on the biao, in a movement towards the exterior. If there is some kind of rising to the top, there is dyspnoea - problems with breathing. When it enters the five zang, there is dilation, congestion and swelling, because it is a movement towards the interior, li. There are blockages and obstructions, and when it descends towards the lower part of the trunk it gives diarrhoea with undigested food. If it lasts a long time then there are different kinds of flowing out such as dysentery. That is a complete disturbance in the ways of the clear and unclear inside the body.

**The Emperor said:**

*When the Spleen is ill the four limbs are out of use, why is this?*

**And Qi Bo replied:**

*The four limbs receive the Breaths of the Stomach*

The ideogram for receive is lin, the same ideogram which is the active part of the distribution and reception of something and this idea of receiving something is exactly the same as the idea of receiving grains from granaries to nourish the people. The four limbs receive Breaths from the Stomach in the same way that a part of the Empire receives a public distribution of grains.

*But the Breaths of the Stomach cannot reach the meridians without the support of the Spleen which is absolutely necessary to it.*

We see that the Stomach is yang, in the image of the Breaths of Heaven, but after the yang movement of the Stomach we need the movement and distribution of the Spleen in order that the Breaths of the Stomach can go deep in to the body and out to the four limbs or to the zang and fu. The Breaths of the Stomach can descend by their own movement and can be transmitted to the Intestines and so on, but it's necessary that the Spleen intervenes and that there is interplay between the Spleen and Stomach.

*Then there can be distribution and reception.....*

...which is the same ideogram, lin. It means distribution from a Centre, from the Stomach and Spleen, and reception by the four limbs.

*When the Spleen is ill the Stomach is unable to make the jin ye circulate. The four limbs no longer receive the Breaths from the liquids and cereals. The Breaths decrease day by day and the pathways of the mai no longer function. The muscles and the bones and the flesh are all without breath to give them life. This is why they are out of use.*

Why is this important for the four limbs? Because the four limbs are the place for the twelve meridians and the activity of yang Breaths, and through and by the yang Breaths all the exterior activity of the body is possible. You know that the important five Element points are located from the extremities to the first articulation so it is important that this region is well irrigated and well maintained in order to be able to support needling.

If a man doesn't eat and no longer has enough Breaths of the Stomach, or if his Spleen is injured and cannot distribute influx and nutrition to muscles, bones and flesh, out to the extremities of the four limbs, then there is no activity in this man. Also it will be quite impossible to needle him, particularly at the extremities of the limbs because there is no circulation and no passage through the mai.

**Then the Emperor takes up another question:**

*The Spleen doesn't govern a season, can you explain this to me?*

**Qi Bo replies:**

*The Spleen is the Earth, tu, it governs the central region, and continually through the four seasons it allows the development of the four zang.*

This is quite important. It's not only through the Breaths of the Stomach that the four or five zang can remain alive and function. The Spleen masters the four seasons and all these qualities of Breaths which form time and moments, and by virtue of this Spleen can give force to the four other zang. The Spleen governs eighteen days in each season or rather Spleen is entrusted with eighteen days in each season, it does not command one single season. The Spleen ensures a good passage from one quality of Breaths to another quality of Breaths, from one season to another and one zang to another. By itself, Spleen has no ability to master one season, its particular virtue is to master the time of passages and transmissions. For this reason the Spleen masters eighteen days in each season, and these days are between two seasons. There is no contradiction with the fact that in other texts in the Nei Jing or in other presentations Spleen masters the so-called long Summer, because long Summer - the end or the prolongation of the Summer - is the time in the year during which yang seasons become yin seasons, and this is essentially a time for passage. It's a time and a space where the movement of yin and yang is reversed. At the beginning of Autumn the Breaths of Heaven rise up and leave Earth and the Breaths of Earth concentrate and descend: it's the beginning of the separation of Heaven and Earth. And you can find the opposite movement in Springtime. In both cases the Earth Element, Spleen and Stomach, masters this time of change, transformation, permutation and passage.

The Earth Element contains all the possibility for exchange that we can see between Heaven and Earth. For this reason, inside the quality and virtue of the Earth Element we have ascending and descending movement, we have the occupation of the head as well as the foot. This Earth Element is omnipresent in the seasons, in each moment of time where one quality of Breaths has to pass to another quality of Breaths, and in all parts of space where transformations, permutations and passages have to take place. This is the reason why Spleen and Stomach are joined in a very important interplay, because in the body they are the exact image of the interplay of Heaven and Earth; ascending and descending, diffusing and concentrating, and all the separations between clear and unclear.

You may see with other quotations from the Nei Jing how Spleen and Stomach are necessary for the renewal of the zang and fu, yin and yang, meridians, Spirits, Essences, Blood and Breaths. And for this reason if Earth or Spleen is in the central position it means that it has no one special place, but all places which are pivots between two qualities of Breaths.

At the end of the chapter the Emperor asks:

*The Spleen and Stomach are connected by the tissues and membranes that attach them together. It is through this that there can be the circulation of jin ye.*

It's necessary that this close connection between Spleen and Stomach is manifest in the membranes that attach them together. That is the density of relationships in Earth, that they are so closely related that there is actually a physical connection, and it gives them mastery over all the circulations which take place through these tissues or membranes. The Emperor asks if the circulation of bodily liquids is actually passed by this kind of tissue or membrane into all parts of the body and especially into the trunk and between the viscera.

**Qi Bo replies:**

*The tai yin of the foot is the third yin, its mai passes through the Stomach and takes a dependent relationship with the Spleen, and a luo connecting relation with the throat. And so it is that the tai yin is that which makes the Breaths circulate to the three yin and the yang ming is the biao, the movement to the exterior, the sea of the five zang and six fu. It's also that which makes the Breaths circulate to the three yang.*

This is a recollection of what we said before about the responsibility of the Stomach and Spleen for the three yang meridians and the three yin meridians, or the twelve meridians, and the Breaths of the Stomach being the Sea of the five zang and the six fu and for all meridians and Breaths of meridians. In that interplay between Stomach and Spleen, Spleen has the responsibility for circulation and the sensation of circulation and function of yin meridians, and the Stomach the same for the yang meridians.

*The zang and the fu each of them, receive Breaths through the yang ming, so it is the Stomach that makes the jin ye circulate.*

We just saw that for the circulation of bodily liquids Stomach needs the help of the Spleen in order to have the yin movement and the yang movement acting together to irrigate and water all the body.