

Applying the Model to the San Jiao

Introduction and Overview

An entirely appropriate test of the model is to evaluate its explanatory value when applied to the Zang Fu generally, and in particular, to one of the more abstruse concepts in traditional Chinese medicine - the San Jiao Fu. The San Jiao has been variously translated as Triple Burner, Triple Heater, and Three Heater, none of which are entirely adequate renderings of the TCM concept.

This first paper, San Jiao I, introduces and sets the parameters for the more detailed discussions found in papers San Jiao II & III.

San Jiao I begins with a detailed summary of the role of the San Jiao from a pre-eminent contemporary source for translations and commentaries on the TCM classics (Larre and Rochat, 1992a). Further details on the nature and characteristics of the San Jiao, including related Meridians, points and some relevant classical quotes, may be found in various papers on the 'TCM Theory' web page, as well as other papers in this series.

Classical references and commentaries are necessary to establish a measure of parallel imagery or equivalence of view in juxtapositional discussions. This is referred to in the discussion on methodology in the Introductory paper on the model. It involves establishing the same, or similar, intellectual territory for each paradigm.

In essence, this means distilling the functions of the San Jiao from the teachings of traditional Chinese medicine, both classical and contemporary, and applying to these teachings appropriate WMB correlations in physiology, anatomy, neurology, etc. Such correlations are outlined here and developed further in subsequent papers.

San Jiao I

The three heaters through their reunion make the unity. They govern the Way of the spirits, shen dao, which come and go in the 5 zang and 6 fu ...

They know how to distribute life in the form of qi, they are connected to the origin, they make the blood and maintain life through the spirits.

(Sun Simiao, in Larre and Rochat, 1992a)

Introduction and Background

Discussions in TCM texts and journals in the west which deal with the functional relationship, or juxtaposition, of the Small Intestine and San Jiao Fu (where they exist) tend to dwell upon fluid metabolism, and the functions of the Lower Jiao (Kaptchuk, 1983; Maciocia, 1989; Wiseman et al., 1985). This is hardly surprising, as both yang Organs of the Fire Element are inexorably linked with fluids.

However such discussions are somewhat perfunctory, and there is considerable room for more detailed exploration into the nature of their relationship, and their juxtaposition in the Fire Element itself.

Certainly both are yang expressions of the Heart, and therefore in some measure also of the Shen. There is a broad similarity in their Meridian pathways on the upper limb and face, and they obviously share the concordances of the Fire Element.

But the Small Intestine is externally related to the Heart, whereas the San Jiao is externally related to the Pericardium. The Small Intestine rules separation of the pure from the turbid, and has a significant role in the movement and transformation of Fluids (Kaptchuk, 1983; Maciocia, 1989; Davis, 1993b, 1994a,b, 1995).

The San Jiao may be thought of as the functional relationship (or overall unity), which exists between the various Organs that regulate water metabolism - Lungs, Spleen, Stomach, Kidneys, Small Intestine, Large Intestine and Urinary Bladder (Kaptchuk, 1983; Davis, 1993b; Wiseman et al., 1985).

However the Pericardium, as the Heart Master or Heart Protector, is considered to be only a particular expression of Heart energy. It is not considered a Zang in its own right (Larre and Rochat, 1992a) because it is simply an aspect of the Heart, whereas the San Jiao is almost always considered to be a Fu (Larre and Rochat, 1992a). For this reason it is usual to talk of 5 Zang and 6 Fu, except when discussing the Meridians, where 6 Zang and 6 Fu are referred to.

Hence the Heart may be thought of as having two externally related Fu.

Complicating matters is the fact that both the San Jiao and the Pericardium are shrouded in a certain amount of ambiguity, and there is on-going (and historical) debate about the nature of their functional roles (Kaptchuk, 1983; Maciocia, 1989; Larre and Rochat, 1992a). This is particularly true of the San Jiao.

Whilst this and following papers make some observations about the San Jiao/ Pericardium relationship, the main purpose is to analyse the San Jiao, and explore the nature of the Small Intestine/ San Jiao relationship, using the knowledge and perceptions of western medical bioscience. It thereby provides the opportunity to investigate the San Jiao in some detail from a WMB perspective. Such investigation is inevitably wrought upon the anvil of classical quotes and commentaries.

The analytical framework pervading this work is an integrated TCM/ WMB notion of 'Depth'. This notion of Depth has been introduced formally in the series of papers on the model (West meets East I, web page). It is integrated into the concept of a WMB homeostatic control hierarchy, which has also been established as part of the analytical machinery.

When the notion of Depth and the concept of an homeostatic hierarchy are combined, a conceptual three dimensional matrix of the human body is created which establishes the general analytical parameters of the model. This has become the basis for conceptually integrating WMB and TCM into one encompassing whole. It is presented more formally in the previous papers and is applied in the analysis here.

These San Jiao papers provide analytical focus for the previous development work on the model. They draw together and consolidate that work, and demonstrate its applicability to this aspect of TCM theory.

It is appropriate to consider in some detail the role of the San Jiao in TCM theory. The following derives from the excellent commentary and translation work of Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée and Claude Larre (1992a).

Summary of the Role of the San Jiao

(from E. Rochat de la Vallée and M. Macé, in Larre and Rochat, 1992a, pp. 94-97)

"San jiao, the triple heater, is one of the most difficult concepts to grasp in Chinese medicine, not only because as an entity it has no equivalent in Western medicine, but also because in China itself it has not been clearly and plainly defined."

"In fact the triple heater can be presented as much as a concrete and localised organ, such as the pipes for evacuating urine or the cavities of the stomach, as it can as very general functions for the animation and irrigation of the whole body. The triple heater appears in the texts of the Nei jing as one of the 6 fu with the stomach, the two intestines, the bladder and the gallbladder. With the exception of the gallbladder (Su wen 11), they form the set of fu for transmission and transformation, chuan hua zhi fu, in charge of digestion, assimilation and elimination."

"Although several texts in the Nei jing give glimpses of the regions that are under the authority of each of the heaters, it is the Nan jing 31 that clarifies their positions. The upper heater encompasses the chest, the middle heater the stomach cavity and the lower heater the area of evacuation below. The heart and lungs are associated with the upper heater, the spleen and stomach with the middle heater and the kidneys, intestines and bladder with the lower heater. The liver, along with the gallbladder, is usually linked to the lower heater, although certain interpretations place it with the functions of the middle heater."

"The triple heater is sometimes specifically linked to the kidneys (Ling shu 2 and 47) forming one of the two fu corresponding to the zang of the kidneys (with the bladder). It is certainly through this link with the kidneys that it fulfils (Su wen 8) the charge of opening passages and irrigating, allowing the proper management of liquids in the body. The link with the transformation of liquids is constantly confirmed in its pathology, as its relationship with water, in all its forms, is emphasised by the traditional titles attributed to each of the three heaters (Ling shu 18):

"Wu, mist, humid vapours, for the upper heater; Ou, maceration, for the middle heater; Du, canal, conduit for the lower heater."

"The triple heater plays a role in all stages of digestion and assimilation. It regulates the body fluids and their distribution. The fire inherent in its character was seen to play an increasingly important role in the activity of each of its three parts. In the Ming dynasty, (eg. in the Yixue shengshuan of Yu Tuan), it was considered that the triple heater was the fire that circulated in the median (sic) to develop all life, the minister fire, the element to which the triple heater is linked."

"Nan jing 66 presents the triple heater as the agent of distribution of original qi and gives it the title of yuan, origin. It is through the same theory that the Nan jing 62 gives the triple heater as responsible for the power of the yuan, source points on the yang meridians."

"One can then easily link to the three levels of the triple heater the three fundamental qi of life that constantly regenerate man:

the ancestral qi, zong qi, in the upper heater

the nutritive qi, ying qi, in the middle heater

the defensive qi, wei qi, in the lower heater"

"The defensive qi are related to the lower heater even though for their distribution in the body, the defensive qi leave through the distributive movement proper to the lung, the sea of qi in the chest, in the upper heater. This mixing of fire and water that is characteristic of the triple heater recalls the joining of yin yang at the origin of a being's life."

"Thus, the relationship of the triple heater with the origin of life in man developed in parallel with the concept of ming men and reflections on the origin of all the organic constituents of life in man through water and the original fire, the authentic yin and yang, dependent on the kidneys and ming men."

手少陽三焦府



Figure 1
The Triple Heater
from the Ling Shu
Su Wen Jie Yao
 (Larre and Rochat,
 1992a)

"Its double fire-water polarity makes it the representative of the origin of life, which diversifies and persists at the heart of transformations. The triple heater was increasingly linked with the notion of transformation through the work of the qi, qi hua. Wang Shuhe put the triple heater in a biao li relationship with ming men (Mai jing), while it is more usually coupled with the xin bao luo (Nan jing 25, Ling shu 10). But in either case, the couple represents the functions of minister fire, xiang huo, in the body. In the Tang dynasty, Sun Simiao emphasised

its ability to unify all the elements of the body (Qianjin fang). The triple heater gathers together all the zang and fu and allows them to function in unity."

"This unity is fully expressed in the texts of the Song dynasty (Zhongzangjing of the pseudo Hua tuo) or the Yuan dynasty (Dongyuan shishu of Li Gao) where the three heaters incorporate all the functions and circulations of the body, and extend from the top of the head to the heart (upper heater), from the heart to the navel (middle heater), and from the navel to the feet (lower heater)."

"They are then truly considered as the triple origin in man, the final development and theorisation of what was begun in the Nan jing through their double fire-water polarity (Nan jing 31) and link with the original qi (Nan jing 8, 62 and 66). Function conclusively supplanted localization or purely anatomical definition: they have a name but not a form (Nan jing 25, 38). The qi circulate everywhere, the unified qi of the body with its different functions and varied intensity. These qi drive the liquids and the vital nourishing elements, allowing the transformations through which the qi and essences are renewed and by which the organs function. The union of qi and water, at work in these vital mechanisms, is well represented by the triple heater (Ling shu 36, Nan jing 31 etc.). This does not limit it from being the simple reunion of the organs located in each of the levels, but in a more far-reaching way it represents the synergy of all the zang fu, renewing and properly circulating qi and liquids without stagnation or shortage."

Following on from this explanatory commentary, it seems appropriate to further consider the conceptual identity of the San Jiao as it is presented and discussed in various classical sources and subsequent commentaries.

This classical review begins with chapter eight of the Su Wen, and is followed by application of this image (or concept), to the hard scientific world of western medical science. Figure 1 is a classical illustration of the San Jiao dating from several centuries before Christ. Further classical references and commentaries are discussed in the other west-meets-east papers on the San Jiao.

San Jiao: Image in the Su Wen, Chapter Eight

The ideogram San (figure 2) means three or triple. Three is the number of Man. Between Heaven and Earth is the world in which living things (particularly mankind) dwells. It is in a perpetual state of flux, where Man personifies the influx and blending of Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang. All exchanges, all transformations of life, take place at the level of three (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).



Figure 2 San

Three is also the special number of qi, because everything which is exchanged between Heaven and Earth is qi (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).

The ideogram Jiao (figure 3) has a fire radical underneath it, like small flames under a pot.

This gives the idea of a pot simmering to combine its ingredients, as in a blended soup. The historical derivation of the ideogram (the upper part of the ideogram) is that of a bird without a tail. It is a bird being subjected to the action of fire, such as a roast chicken. When the vegetation radical is added on top of the character, the ideogram means bananas, because they are all linked together in a tight bunch (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).



Figure 3 Jiao

When the fire radical is replaced with the one for silk thread, it means a lot of filaments such as in textiles or vegetable pulp. With a water radical added, the idea becomes that of anchoring a boat - linking it to earth or land (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).

All these ideas are concerned with joining or attachment, or a connection or cord which is the main cord in a net. Rochat (1992a) suggests that the symbol here is one which "gives the fundamental structure of life in society, in order to maintain and keep ... life well."

Hence, "the meaning of Jiao is that all the elements of the body are really well linked together and converge on the same stem. And at the same time there is this kind of fire which provides the necessary warmth to be alive and transform qi ..." (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).

The ideas of converging on the same stem, and being well linked together, are of key importance here. Of course, combining these two characters gives us San Jiao.

It is significant that there is no flesh or body-part radical in these characters (Larre and Rochat, 1992d). So the San Jiao has no form. It has functional expression but no distinct place where that function is located (Larre and Rochat, 1992d). It is a go-between which irrigates the whole body, distributes Yuan Qi, and acts as a representative of the Fire of Ming Men (Larre and Rochat, 1992d). Its essential action is on Qi but the functions of Qi and fluids are never independent (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).

Consider the full passage referring to the San Jiao in chapter eight of the Su Wen. The Chinese characters and Pin Yin romanising are illustrated in figure 4.

Figure 4
San Jiao functions in Su Wen chapter
eight (Larre and Rochat, 1992d)
San jiao zhe jue du zhi guan
shui dao chu yan

Various commentators/ translators have rendered this passage as follows:

"The San Jiao is the Official in charge of Irrigation: the place from which fluid pathways emerge." Clavey (1995)

"The triple burner is the Official of the Bursting Water Dam; it is where the water Channel arises." Kaptchuk (1983)

"The triple heater is responsible for the opening up of passages and irrigation. The waterways (routing of water) stem from it." Larre and Rochat (1992a)

"The triple heater is responsible for the opening up of passages and irrigation. The regulation of fluids stems from it." Larre and Rochat (1992d)

"The triple burning space is the irrigation official who builds waterways." Lu (1990)

"The Triple Burner is the official in charge of irrigation and it controls the water passages." Maciocia (1989)

"The Triple Burner is like the water-gate of a dam which serves to maintain the levels." OIRF (1979)

"The burning spaces are like the officials who plan the construction of ditches and sluices, and they create waterways." Veith (1972)

"The triple burner holds the office of the sluices; it manifests as the waterways." Wiseman, Ellis and Zmiewski (1985)

Further detail is provided on two important phrases in this passage.

Jue Du

Both these characters contain the water radical. Jue means to make a determination of how things flow, such as controlling the flow of rivers. Du is an extension of Jue. It is a small irrigation channel in a field. The ground is made fertile by hollowing out the earth and making a pathway for circulation between river and field (Larre and Rochat, 1992a)

Jue Du

The network of small channels comprises the whole system of irrigation, drainage and evacuation. So these characters together refer to irrigating, channelling and controlling the circulation of fluids.

Shui Dao

Shui Dao refers to the conduction of all rivers in an organism. In ancient China, if you controlled the four great river systems, you controlled the empire (Larre and Rochat, 1992d).

Shui Dao

There is clear unanimity amongst the above quoted commentators, as one might reasonably expect.

Waterways, irrigation, sluices and water passages are recurring terms. So while the San Jiao is a Fu of the Fire Element, it clearly embraces waterways and body fluids too. Indeed it is 'this mixing of fire and water which is characteristic of the triple heater' (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).

Thus it has a double Fire-Water polarity which 'recalls the joining of Yin Yang at the origin of a being's life' and reflects 'the origin of all the organic constituents of life in man through water and the original fire, the authentic yin and yang', and is 'dependent on the kidneys and ming men' (Larre and Rochat, 1992a)

The San Jiao also deals with functional unity. It 'incorporates all the functions and circulations of the body', and distributes yuan qi. It ensures harmonious circulation throughout the body (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).

So as well as 'being the simple reunion of the organs located in each of the levels' (i.e. the 3 Jiao), ... ' in a more far-reaching way it represents the synergy of all the zang fu, renewing and properly circulating qi and liquids without stagnation or shortage' (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).

But is there really no functional correlate identifiable in western medical bioscience ?

West meets East

It was due to the need to embrace this dual Fire/ Water polarity, as well as encompass the notions of unity, circulation and distribution (à la the Su Wen) within an east-west synthesis, which led to the view that western medical bioscience did in fact have a workable correlate to the San Jiao Fu - as suggested in previous articles (Davis, 1994a,b, 1995).

This correlate is roughly equivalent to the WMB concept of the internal environment of the body (extracellular fluid compartment), to which has been added physiological fluids of the gastrointestinal and urinary tracts, plus those mechanisms of fluid control physiology (much of it in the central nervous system) which establish, maintain and actively vary aspects of the internal environment of the body.

Much of what follows in this series of San Jiao papers presents the case for this view.

Certainly it fits well into the conceptual framework of the model, (indeed this current analysis depends on the model), and it appears to provide quite good juxtapositional expression for various related classical quotes and commentaries.

Overview of WMB Correlation: Setting the Parameters

The central tenet of these papers is that the appropriate WMB correlate for the San Jiao is (should be), based upon the notion of the internal environment of the body, or extracellular fluid compartment. It is thought to include all extracellular fluids, but primarily encompasses interstitial fluids, blood and lymph. Other extracellular fluids such as cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), synovial fluid, peritoneal secretions and pleural secretions, are quantitatively and physiologically of lesser significance, certainly within the bounds of this paper, but should be included in this view of the San Jiao.

The second component of this correlate is made up of fluids which are secreted into, and then reabsorbed from, the gastrointestinal and urinary systems in the ordinary course of daily existence. Obviously such fluids participate in normal on-going physiological activity, even though space (lumina) which is strictly external to the body is utilised in the process (refer to Depth level B as discussed in papers on the model, and Table 1 here). [This basically refers to fluids that are secreted into external controlled workspaces (lumina), and then reabsorbed into the body].

These fluids effectively remain under the body's physiological control, and so are properly regarded as participating in the San Jiao. They are, and remain, part of the working fluids of the body. Such fluids are particular examples of fluid distribution to important anatomical regions and organs of the body (i.e. the gastrointestinal tract and urinary system).

The third component encompassed by this WMB correlate is extremely important from an *in vivo*, functional, point of view. It consists of neural and hormonal control mechanisms of fluid homeostasis and distribution generally, but particularly those of the vascular system. This component includes the (TCM) Blood Vessels, which distribute/ collect fluids (i.e. blood), throughout the body. In its broadest sense, this third component encompasses the other two components.

Figure 5 illustrates these ideas. It is based on the notion of a homeostatic hierarchy. The San Jiao Meridian is thought to be largely housed in the brain stem and diencephalon (Tier 2).

(Three diagrams in the paper, San Jiao II, add considerable detail to this conceptual overview: Figure 4, Western Medical Bioscience and the Zang Fu; Table 3, San Jiao Orb:

Homeostatic Control Hierarchy; and Figure 5, San Jiao Orb: Upper, Middle and Lower Jiao Relationships.)

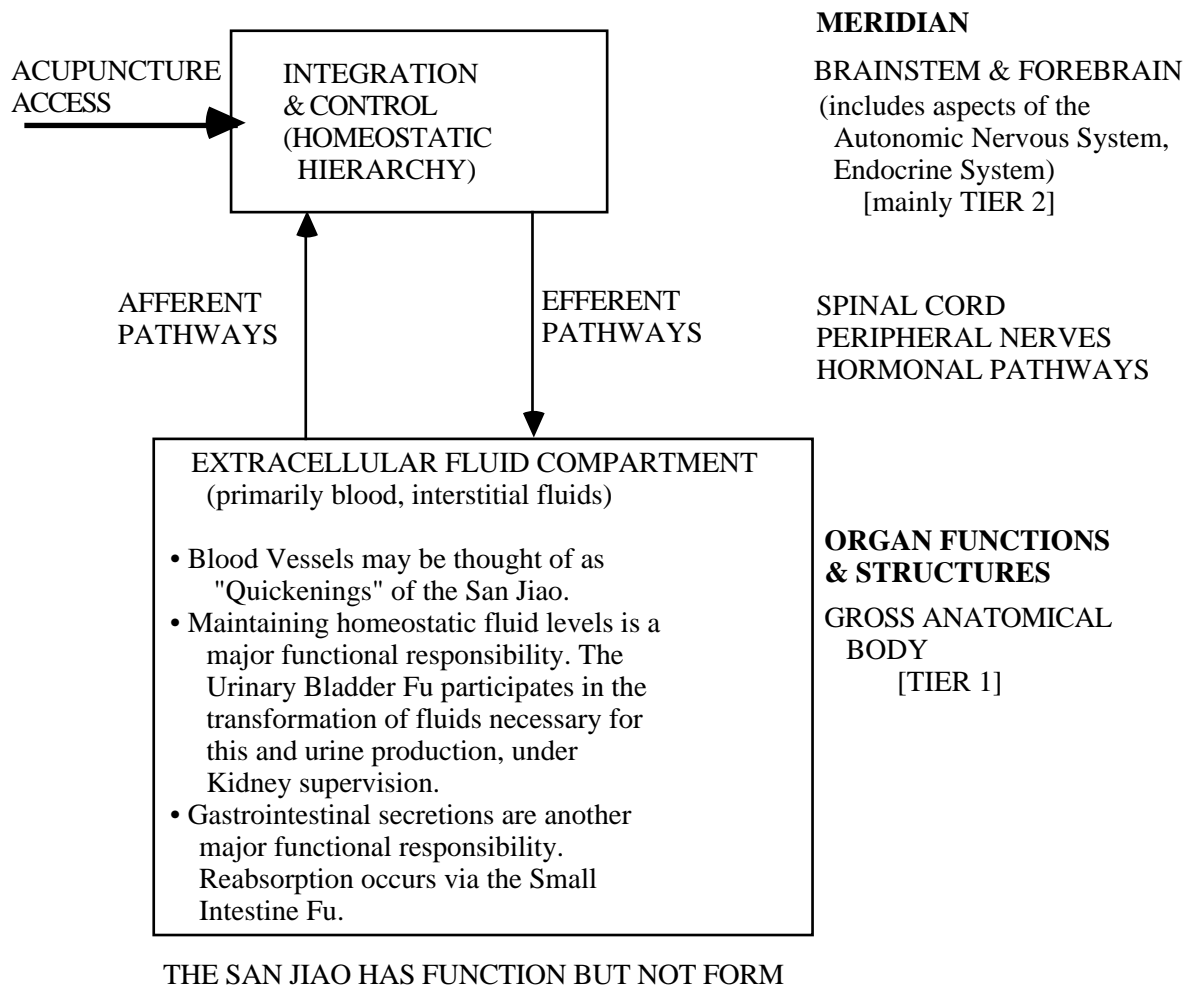


Figure 5 San Jiao Orb: A Conceptual Homeostatic View

When considering the gross anatomical body, whether the San Jiao should refer only to the trunk or not depends upon the nature of the issue being considered. It is a matter of perspective. At times the San Jiao appears to be focused on the trunk, such as when the images of the individual Jiaos are referred to - mist, maceration, and drainage, while at other times and perhaps more comprehensively, the whole body is the relevant level of focus.

Refer to the following quotes from Hua Tuo and Zhang Jiebin (Larre and Rochat, 1992a).

The triple heater, its upper limit and its extreme point below, make it similar to the six reunions or junctions, liu he, of the universe, and there is nothing that it does not envelop or surround.

The triple heater, although it is the fu of all the drainage and irrigation of the middle, is also that which gathers together and protects all the yang.

(Zhang Jiebin, in Larre and Rochat, 1992a)

Table 1 Overview of the Integrated Notion of Depth

(Focus is mainly on the Gross Anatomical Body - Tier One)

	DEPTH A	DEPTH B	DEPTH C	DEPTH D
Depth Level	External	Strictly External, but subject to direct physiological control	Half External, Half Internal	Internal
Depth Image	Completely External	External Controlled Workspaces; entrance to, exit from	Conduit of Communication, Distribution, Circulation, Irrigation, Unity	Completely Internal
TCM Organ (functional focus of)		Stomach Small Intestine Large Intestine Urinary Bladder	San Jiao Gall Bladder	Heart Kidney Lung Spleen Pericardium Liver
WMB Correlation	Everything external: air, water, soil, clothes, etc.	Lumina of: gastrointestinal tract respiratory system urinary system female reproductive tract	Internal Environment. Extracellular Fluid Compartment	Intracellular Compartment. Individual Identity is Established.

The triple heater - the qi of the triple origin of man. When the triple heater ensures free communication, then there is free communication internally and externally, left and right, above and below. The whole body is irrigated, harmonised internally and regulated externally, nourished by the left, and maintained by the right, directed from above, propagated from below. There is nothing greater! (**Hua Tuo**, in Larre and Rochat, 1992a)

It is also important (essential), that there be relatively free movement of water between extracellular fluids and intracellular fluids (Depth C supporting Depth D in Table 1). In this way the San Jiao is thought to directly support the TCM Kidney and Heart Orbs, as well as the

Liver, Pericardium, Spleen, Lung and five other Fu. It is in this context that the notions of circulation, distribution, and unity may be seen.

Table 1 gives an introduction and overview of an important analytical tool used throughout these San Jiao papers. (It is presented in greater detail in the papers on the model). In this integrated notion of Depth, the functional focus of each Zang Fu is related to a particular level of Depth in the gross anatomical body (tier one of the model), and each level of Depth is correlated with a particular functional/ anatomical focus of western medical bioscience.

Note that the Lung, Spleen, Pericardium and Liver Zang have been placed midway between Depth levels C and D. It is thought that while the function of these Organs is focused mainly in Depth level D, each also contributes in some measure to Depth level C. This is an issue for considerable future analyses.

This paper and San Jiao II are particularly concerned with Depth level C, Half External/ Half Internal. Table 2 lists the various components thought to participate in this approach to WMB/ San Jiao correlation, and so is an elaboration of the column, Depth C, in Table 1.

The idea of 'static' and 'dynamic' qualities of the San Jiao is developed further in the paper San Jiao II. It is a distinction which differentiates between function (dynamic) and anatomical definition (static) but includes them both.

An important corollary of this analysis is that it allows the San Jiao/ Small Intestine relationship to be placed in the context of a Fire Element Continuum. Figure 6 illustrates this. The Fire Element encompasses the WMB notion of the cardiovascular system (all aspects), but as well as this, it includes the rest of the fluids of the extracellular fluid compartment, plus physiological fluids of the gastrointestinal tract and urinary system.

Figure 6 indicates that the San Jiao may be regarded as the more significant of the two Fu of the Fire Element. Even though the Shen meets and interacts directly with its immediate External (Yin) environment via the Small Intestine Fu (this is where nutrients are finally digested and absorbed), it is the activity of the San Jiao Fu which establishes communication through circulation and distribution throughout the body (together with the Heart). In this way it helps establish unity.

Table 2 San Jiao: Parameters of WMB Correlation

Depth C: Half External/Half Internal

The 'Static' San Jiao

1. Extracellular Fluids: especially interstitial fluids, blood, lymph
2. Hormonal Control of Fluid Levels/ Compartments:
 - longer term - volume regulation via the kidney
 - intermediate term - renin/ angiotensin, vascular relaxation,
 - transcapillary volume shift
3. Body Cavities: anatomical entities

The 'Dynamic' San Jiao

4. Physiological Fluids: of gastrointestinal tract and urinary system
5. Blood Vessels: distribution/ collection of blood
6. Neural Control of Fluid Distribution:
 - short term - baroreceptor (neural) regulation,
 - homeostatic control hierarchy
7. Functional Divisions of the Body: upper, middle and lower Jiao.

Clearly the San Jiao is a 'hinge' Organ between External and Internal - half External/ half Internal (refer to Table 1). It deals with the carriage of nutrients, oxygen, hormones etc. to cells, and the removal from them of metabolic wastes, carbon dioxide etc. It unifies by acting as a conduit of humoral communication.

Further, the San Jiao provides the essential link between the Small Intestine and Urinary Bladder Fu, as it is these Organs which provide the final input to, and primary outlet from, the extra-cellular fluid compartment. In doing so it also provides the essential connection between the Heart and Kidney orbs (refer to figure 5 in paper San Jiao II).

In this way the San Jiao is properly identified as a Fu. It provides the physical circumstances for the flow of Qi and fluids between all the other Zang Fu, and between inlet and outlet. Fluids and substances actually move through it, hence it has the character of a Yang Organ.

And to 'have a name but no shape', and be 'located separately from the other Zangfu and inside the body' (Kaptchuk, 1983), can be seen to be quite reasonable and illustrative characterisations.

Hence the image of converging on the same stem, and being well linked together (Larre and Rochat, 1992a) is amply demonstrated. Clearly it is body fluids which provide the linked stem. The notion of unity which derives from this is well deserved.

In subsequent papers, San Jiao II & III, there is considerable further development of the ideas presented here.

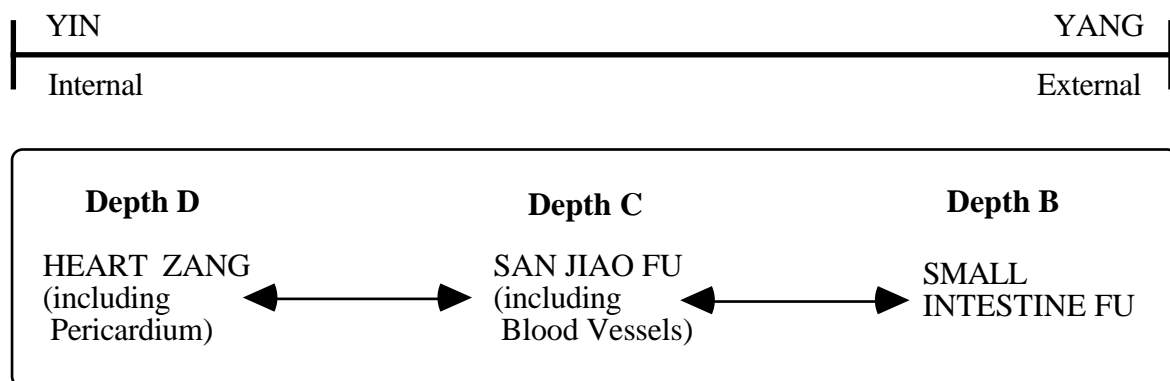


Figure 6 Fire Element Continuum

Conclusion and Implications

It is thought the model established in previous papers provides considerable insight into the juxtaposition of traditional Chinese medicine and western medical bioscience, and in so doing makes the broad scope of TCM theory more available to the unfamiliar western mind.

In setting out on the task of this research it was considered essential that the teachings of TCM were granted the respect that ought to be due to a medicine which has treated the ill and infirm of a large proportion of the world's population for some twenty five centuries and possibly more.

This meant respecting both the knowledge base and practices of this medicine as well as the language in which it is understood, discussed and taught as a living and evolving contemporary tradition.

Indeed it was considered that only by beginning with the TCM teachings and then seeking WMB ideas and understanding which gave adequate expression to them would proper integration (and mutual comprehension) of these medicines occur. In the course of this process it soon became apparent that their language and concepts were so completely different that any model developed could not be logically proven.

It meant that such a model must have its foundations established in equivalence of ideas, or parallel and common images. It needed to occupy very similar intellectual territory for both medicines, and credence would really only be gained when the validity of the model was broadly accepted in both professional realms.

By confining this research to three of the major (and unique) theoretical concepts of TCM - the Zang Fu, the Jing Luo and the Wu Xing - it has been kept within manageable proportions, but was still thought to contain sufficient of the TCM teachings to warrant the title, 'A Model of Juxtaposition, Explanation and Integration: relating Western Medical Biociences and Traditional Chinese Medicine' (refer to the paper on the model on this web page), and provide a framework around which much theoretical and clinical research could be undertaken.

Once an adequate model was thought to have been developed, an important verification process was to apply it (ie. the framework it established) to the teachings of TCM, to see if the explanations it offered contained a measure of validity for east-west integration and synthesis.

Up to now it has been applied generally to the Yang Organs, and in particular the Small Intestine Fu, with some elucidatory value (Davis, 1993b, 1994a,b, 1995), but perhaps its most important application to date has been in this analysis of the San Jiao.

This is an area of TCM theory which has largely defied adequate explanation as to its juxtaposition with WMB. Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée makes this point in the quotation in San Jiao I (Larre and Rochat, 1992a). And yet the analysis of the San Jiao provided in these papers appears to offer detailed and comprehensive explanation of much of the TCM teachings, and includes a preliminary explanation of pulse diagnosis.

This would seem to give the model a significant degree of credence, although it remains for the TCM profession and others to evaluate it.

If the model and its associated analyses stand up to scrutiny, then it lays the foundation for a much more detailed investigation of TCM theory and the way it and WMB relate to each other. It also creates an adequate framework for clinic based research.

Certainly each of the Zang Fu should be able to receive detailed investigation from the stance of the model, as should many other concepts and ideas of TCM.

Clearly such scrutiny should incorporate the TCM approach to understanding variation from normal Organ function - Zang Fu Disharmonies and Syndromes, as the clinical focus and acuity of TCM is considered by this writer to be one of its greatest strengths. Detailed investigation of acupuncture point functions within the homeostatic hierarchy would also be an interesting area to pursue.

Another possibility for research may be to investigate whether TCM theory is able to be directly applied to the homeostatic hierarchy, in order to facilitate WMB understanding of functional relationships in the hindbrain, midbrain, and forebrain.

Does the Jing Luo provide a framework which may help deepen understanding of functional and behavioural neural anatomy?

In all, it is hoped the reader finds some interest in the ideas presented in this series of papers.

It is also hoped that the integration of knowledge and medical practice which may ensue from this research will be of some benefit to those who need it most, our patients.