

Managing the Internal Economy

Life is based on transactions. Embodied spirits live by exchanging both physical and experiential influences with the environment. Individuals ingest food and drink as physical inputs and sense data as experiential inputs, which are both grasped internally to digest them. This is the process that generates post-natal *qi*, allowing the embodied spirit to survive as an individual. Indeed, the core physical functions of the *zangfu* associated with the first three primary channels (sequence following *Lingshu*, chap. 10) clearly demonstrate that embodied spirits live through transacting with the environment:

They constantly exchange air, which is the immediate foundation of life – lung

They seek to ingest food and drink, usually several times per day – stomach

They support *yuan* (source) *qi* (in generating post-natal *jing*) by holding and forming the byproducts of previously processed inputs and releasing them to the exterior – large intestine

Arm *taiyin* (lung) supports the embodied spirit's presence and capacity to release, as the minister facilitates the emperor (pericardium/heart) in releasing its emotional struggles. *Yangming* conducts the interactions that elicit *yang qi*. The embodied spirit reacts to physical and experiential inputs by grasping, holding, and internalizing them into itself, then emptying. Both the stomach and large intestine express these movements, yet they are also polar opposites:

The stomach grasps physical and experiential influences from the environment, internalizes and reacts to them initiating the digestion process, then empties to the interior – to the small intestine, which re-processes input in separating the pure from the impure.

The large intestine holds and forms material it has received from the interior, and empties to the exterior.

The large intestine and stomach primary channels of arm and leg *yangming* embody several important features of individual human life. The main trajectory of the stomach channel begins at the point that Brightens the Eyes (U. B. 1), traverses the face to convey *qi* to and thus open the upper portals to receive sense data; it ends at the Head Meeting (St. 8), which signifies that those inputs lead to the individual's understanding of experience that accumulates. The physical inputs of food and drink descend from the Great Reception (St. 5), and are internalized and processed under the influence of a **branch** of the stomach's primary channel.

This theme of accentuating experiential inputs over physical ones is reinforced by the relative placement of the *yangming* channels in this sequence. Ancient Chinese medical

thinkers certainly understood that food and drink physically enter the mouth, esophagus, and stomach to initiate the individual's digestion, before the product of that process is held and formed in the large intestine to be released back to the environment. Yet, the large intestine appears first in this well-known sequence.

When the large intestine empties, the stomach fills. This truism of Chinese medicine expresses both their order in this sequence and an important principle of vital function. The embodied spirit must release/expel previously processed material in order to receive new inputs. Relative to physical inputs, the "meridian time-clock" suggests that a well-formed bowel movement readies the individual to receive a substantial breakfast.

In addition to the day-long cycle of processing physical inputs, this sequence delineates the momentary process of digesting experiential inputs. The constant flow of sensory inputs, augmented by internally generated thoughts and feelings, combine to present a special challenge for the embodied spirit. The overwhelming prospect of having to digest all that material (the next channel – spleen) induces the embodied spirit to facilitate that process by unconsciously projecting previously formed interpretations onto the circumstances and events of life.

These metaphorical "postures" are contained in the distinct channels, which convey the individual's point of view and project it onto his or her experience. Each individual's emotional reactions are heavily influenced by his or her unconsciously projected interpretations; and those emotional reactions necessarily contain some embedded conflicts because other people and the world don't conform to a particular individual's point of view. Yet, the embodied spirit must clear the present field of awareness, so it has two paths for releasing unresolved experiential inputs:

- to the outside, which diffuses their charge.
- to the interior, where they are embedded into physical humors, and stored for later disposition.

The *daimai* (belt vessel) exhibits the individual's constitutional capacity to suspend unresolved inputs, which can physically accumulate within an individual's expanding girth. Since physical material settles downward under the influence of gravity, the inclusion of the spleen's front-*mu* point – its accumulation point – as the highest point in the *daimai* trajectory is a strong reminder. The embodied spirit uses "extra" physical humors, which are generated through digesting food and drink the individual has ingested beyond satisfying his or her physical needs, to suspend unresolved spiritual/emotional conflicts.

Ingesting excessive amounts of food, and especially comfort foods, exhibits a strategy by the embodied spirit to displace unresolved spiritual and emotional conflicts from

conscious awareness into physical digestion. Many “comfort foods” present a great challenge to digest, so they console the individual’s personality by distracting the embodied spirit’s focus away from those emotional struggles. This strategy’s short-term effectiveness is guaranteed when digesting the person’s choice of comfort food generates the humors to contain the embodied spirit’s unresolved conflicts.

While the *daimai* provides the constitutional basis for the individual’s capacity to suspend and contain unresolved conflict, the embodied spirit contains much of those physical humors in the *luo* vessels and divergent channels. Unresolved physical humors, and the spiritual/emotional conflicts they contain, accumulate until the embodied spirit can no longer suspend them while also generating sufficient *qi* to continue the vital processes of life. Sometimes this material festers to generate (chronic) fire toxins, which develop an inflammatory terrain as the basis for the individual’s future pathology.

The process of suspending and accumulating unresolved inputs leads to progressive and degenerative diseases. Symptoms and signs of such ailments indicate that the embodied spirit has become overwhelmed, and is thus no longer able to maintain those stagnations in “dormancy.” Dormancy is established when the embodied spirit can conduct sufficient post-natal *qi* overtop of the individual’s accumulated stagnations to assure a-symptomatic vital function. While functional in the short-term, this strategy of “stuffing” unresolved pathogenic factors eventually fails.

Most people reactively understand the symptoms and signs of disease as simple afflictions and want them to stop. On the other hand, the embodied spirit uses those symptoms and signs to express its need for change to the individual’s conscious awareness. While this body of theory is somewhat philosophical, it suggests at least two vitally important practical implications:

1. Evaluating the amounts of *qi* and blood (as in modern TCM), without regard to their flow, is based on incoherent theory.

Excesses accumulate from the embodied spirit’s reluctance in adequately releasing previously processed inputs. Personalities fail to recognize the accumulation of incipient pathogenic stagnations, because they don’t distinguish between releasing to the outside and releasing to the inside. Embodied spirits imbed unresolved conflicts into physical humors, which often accumulate while the individual also generates sufficient *qi* and blood to maintain normal function. They may render the incipient pathologies dormant (i.e. beyond conscious awareness), but that strategy eventually breaks down, and stagnations emerge to block vital function.

Deficiencies arise when an insufficient amount of *qi* or blood comes out to support the interactions the individual’s personality demands. It has an insufficient external supply, generally because vital resources are being consumed internally – to suspend unresolved

conflicts or struggle to maintain them in dormancy. The personality perceives a deficiency when the embodied spirit has re-deployed a noticeably large portion of its resources to maintaining the dormancy of incipient pathologies.

Identifying excesses and deficiencies is only the first step in clinical differentiation. The next step clarifies the nature and location of blocks to:

- releasing to the exterior for “excesses”
- resolving entanglements draining resources to the interior for “deficiencies”

Excesses and deficiencies can't be balanced into resolution. While such treatment strategies sometimes make symptoms and signs go away temporarily, by allowing the embodied spirit to re-establish dormancy, **resolution requires transformation.**

2. The embodied spirit is charged with maintaining its ongoing exchange with the environment, and that responsibility cannot be abdicated or replaced.

Most passive health care treatments are popular because they successfully implement the personality's urge to control the expression of pathology, rather than stimulating the messy work of expelling accumulated stagnations. They manipulate the embodied spirit's vital process, and confuse its will by disrupting the individual's intrinsic impulse to support the internal environment and sustain life.

This reactive approach to disease is no more effective in restoring the vitality of the internal economy than 1960's style welfare was for the external economy. They both provide only temporary support at the cost of fostering long-term dependence. Ultimately, such attempts to control the manifestations of disease are maintained at the expense of the individual's vitality. Incisive healing work stimulates the embodied spirit to engage previously accumulated stagnations to either:

- expel/release them, which liberates the embodied spirit
- re-process them, allowing the embodied spirit to store the remaining residue in a dormant state more easily.

Profound healings arise from fundamental transformations of life process. Individuals must be willing to shift from their compulsive accumulation of previously suspended material to begin expelling faster than they accumulate it. While that change from “accumulation mode” to “dump mode” is simple, it isn't easy! Indeed, the individual maintains this “simple” transformation only by releasing his or her attachment to some fundamental aspect of point of view. Individuals repeatedly project their unique personal perspective onto events and circumstances of life to create their emotional/spiritual stagnations.

Profound healing requires that the personality change in some fundamental way to allow the embodied spirit to express its truth. The best treatments emerge from practitioners identifying with their patients' embodied spirits, rather than their personalities. Personalities most often simply want symptom suppression, but "shooting the messenger" in that way keeps embodied spirits from having the opportunity to finish their previously unresolved process.