

Classical Chinese Medicine Principles examined:

Spirit & Mind

The Chinese have many words that pertain to Spirit and Mind; traditionally in the Western world there are various terms which have lost their specificity of meaning. (The analogy is sometimes made that the Eskimos have 100 words for snow; i.e. of different kinds). This makes translating these terms especially difficult.

Basic terms:

Xīn 心 Heart, mind, intelligence, soul

In Chinese medicine what we transliterate as 'Heart' is actually more accurately translated as 'heart-mind'. The Xin or Heart-Mind is also said to be the primary residence of Shen.

Shén 神 Spirit, god, supernatural being

Shen can mean the universal spirit or the individual spirit.

Líng 靈 Spirit, soul, spiritual world

Ling conveys the idea of the spirit that is apprehended by its affects on the mundane. Yin in relation to Shen.

Qì 氣 Air, gas, steam, vapor, spirit

Jīng 精 Refined, picked, choice, perfect, excellent, meticulous, fine, precise, smart, clever and capable, skilled, conversant, proficient, energy, spirit, essence, extract, sperm, semen, seed, goblin, demon

Shen is understood also as encompassing Five Shens. The specific Shen resides in the heart. The other four of the Five Shens are:

Hún 魂 Soul, spirit [spiritual-soul]

Pò 魄 Vigor, body, dark part of moon [animal-soul]

Zhì 志 Purpose, will, determination, ambition

Yì 意 Meaning, idea, wish, desire, intentions, expectation, hint, trace, suggestion

It is interesting to compare these terms with entries from a Latin dictionary to realize that they represent a common understood schema from the ancient world.

Spirit n. (life) anima f.: (intelligence) mens f.: (soul) animus m.: (vivacity) spiritus m., vigor m., vis f.; (character) ingenium n.; (intention) vol-untas f.;....

Collins Gem Latin Dictionary publisher: Harper Collins.

Five main emotions are called the Five Zhi (same Zhi as the specific Zhi above). So any discussion of the Spirit and Mind in Chinese medicine needs to also take account of the Five Emotions as well.

Nù 怒 Anger, in a rage, furious

Xī 喜 happy, pleased, like, be fond of, happiness, happy event, pregnancy.
 Yōu 憂 worry, anxiety (Oxford*, Zhong Wen) sad, grieved, grief, melancholy
 (Oxford CD version!) grieved, anxious, in mourning, melancholy (Wieger)
 Sī 思 think, consider, think of, long for, train of thought.
 Bēi 悲 grieve, be sad, sympathize (Wieger) sad, sorrowful, melancholy. (Oxford)
 kǒng 恐 fear, dread, terrify, intimidate.

Grouping these various concepts under their main relations will give us the following table. This has not exhausted the various terms, but if these terms are taken in their most general meaning most other terms are subsumed under them.

Residence	Five Shen	Allied Terms	Five Zhi
Heart (Xin-Heart/Mind)	Shen-Soul	Ling-Spirits	Xi-Joy or Elation
Liver	Hun [Spiritual-Soul]		Nu-Anger
Spleen	Yi-intent/thought		You-Concern or Si-Thought
Lung	Po-Vigour [Corporeal-Soul]	Qi-Breaths	Bei-Grief or Sorrow
Kidney	Zhi-Will	Jing-Essence	Kong-Fear

Comparing Mind and Spirit in Classical Chinese Medicine and modern practice.

Heiner Fruehauf in his article CHINESE MEDICINE IN CRISIS: SCIENCE, POLITICS, AND THE MAKING OF “TCM” gives the following contrast between CCM principles on the left and TCM principles on the right.

While it is true that TCM developed in the cultural context of dialectical materialism. And thus modern TCM by and large reflects a materialist world view and thus is more aligned with modern Western science. Individual practice in the West may not reflect this extreme position. Giovanni Macciocia uses the term ‘mind’ and ‘universal mind’ for the two aspects of Shen, and clearly this implies a belief more in conformity with CCM than modern TCM, or of mind in a Western scientific and materialist philosophy.

CCM	‘TCM’
Body—mind—spirit medicine	Body—(mind) medicine

Let us examine the implications of this construct.

Firstly from the point of view of the meaning of terms.

Modern TCM developed within the cultural context of dialectical materialism and thus reflects a materialist world view more in common with Western science. Shen is transliterated as ‘consciousness’ and so can be seen as an emergent property in conformity with Western scientific understanding. In other words Spirit is not a pre-existing of, or potentially independent of physical form. The word spirit is not included on the right presumably because spirit as consciousness is not separate from the concept of ‘mind’.

In contrast in CCM spirit was seen as a real thing, independent of, and existing prior to the physical form. Spirit was seen to some extent as hierarchically more important than physical form. When spirit is considered to be a real thing and not just an emergent property it is clearly considered to be of greater importance than physical form.

In the history of Western thought mind was thought of as an aspect of our spirit. After the so called Cartesian division ‘mind’ became seen as distinct from ‘spirit’ and the province of science rather than religion.

Mind similarly implies the more materialist understanding on the right side as an emergent property of the organism. Whereas on the left the more traditional view of mind as the more apprehendable aspect of our spirit is clearly suggested.

The various concepts that Fruehauf discusses can not be entirely separated and the definition of Shen as consciousness reflects a tendency to the left side of the principles shown below.

CCM	‘TCM’
Communicates through symbols which contain and correlate multiple layers of meaning Preserves the lunar element of complexity and “obscuring” mystery that defies exacting definition (<i>wuwei</i> maxim: “do not define categorically”)	Communicates through words and terms which refer to narrowly defined contents Demystifies and demythologizes the traditional record by “illuminating” aspects of lunar ambivalence, and by creating “clear and simple” textbook definitions (<i>youwei</i> maxim: “define as firmly and precisely as possible”)

Secondly in terms of relations.

TCM clearly has a important role for mind in terms of causes of disease (i.e. the seven internal causes). However, TCM as well as reflecting a more materialist orientation also reflects a cultural tendency to somatization. In the West we have helped to defuse much of the stigma around mental illness by the use of the medical model, e.g. Depression is seen as an illness. TCM has served the same process in Eastern culture by an orientation

that explains emotions as the symptom of organ dysfunction. Modern TCM could be seen as still being somewhat ahead of Western medicine in a greater recognition of the importance of the mind and mind-body interactions, but still a tendency to see this as an emergent property, and most influenced by somato-psychic influences than the other way round.

The construct on the left reflects a more unitary view of these three spheres. In the 1970s there was movement that coined the term 'body-mind' to refer to the inter-relation of these two areas. The work of William Reich, Alexander Lowen and Ken Dytchwald all contributed to this. Indeed a term BodyMind was coined to emphasize that this is not just the mind affecting the body and body affecting the mind, but also that separating these two is actually not possible.

The understanding of mind body interactions has increased considerably since the 1970s but still the practice of medicine in the West does not on the whole reflect this understanding. It is still usual for mind and body to be treated separately, and their interaction to be an afterthought. Physical medicine still tends to ignore the mind as a cause of disease and often still misses the effect of physical disease on the mind.

Edward Bach in 'Heal Thyself' talks of the cause of all disease lying in a person not following their true spiritual path in life. This would be a basic statement of the origin of disease from the point of view of CCM.

In Chapter 8 of the Su Wen the Heart is given primary importance among the organs; just as we saw when we examining the basic terms in the introduction..

Claude Larre

The Heart holds the office of Lord and Sovereign. The radiance of the Spirits [shen] stems from it.

Henry Lu

The Heart is the monarch from whom the spirits are derived.

Maoshing Ni

The heart is the sovereign of all organs and wisdom and represents the consciousness of ones being. It is responsible for intelligence wisdom and spiritual transformation.

This appears to be complemented by Chapter 8 of the Ling Shu that primarily focuses on the spiritual causes of disease.

Claude Larre

When the Heart falls prey to apprehension [chu] and anxiety [ti], to worry [si] and pre-occupation [lu], The spirits are attacked.

Van Nghi

Fear [chu] *[/missing term?]* reflection [si] and pre-occupation [lu] harm the shen (mind) and the disturbed shen then engenders panic and loss of the notion of "Me";

Henry Lu

Fright [chu], nervousness [ti], thought [si] and contemplation [lu], are harmful to the spirit, because the heart is in store of the spirit.

When the sprits are attacked, under the effects of fear and fright, ones loses possession of oneself,

When the spirit is impaired, fear may run wild.

We could thus expand on Fruehauf’s principles in the following manner.

CCM	TCM
Body—mind—spirit medicine	Body—(mind) medicine
Spirit as pre-existing and not dependent on physical form	Mind as emergent property
Mind as most apprehend able part of spirit	(Shen) Spirit as consciousness, part of mind
Body-Mind-Spirit as ultimately inseparable aspects of our being.	Mind and Body as separate fields of study and medical practice and only secondly the effect of the mind on the body and the body on the mind.
The origin of disease is in the spiritual realm	The origin of disease is predominantly in the physical realm
Greater importance on emotional causes of disease	More emphasis on physical causes of disease and the effect of these physical diseases on the mind.

To see the importance of mind and spirit in CCM we would only need to quote the first line of Chapter 8 of the Ling Shu. Ben Shen ‘Rooted in Spirit’

Chapter 8 Ben Shen - The Spirit as the Basis of needling
 The laws of needling dictate that needling should be, first and foremost based upon the spirit.

Henry Lu

The write of the systematic classic saw fit to move this to the first chapter of his whole work. But of course there are numerous other references that support the importance of spirit and mind in health and healing.

It is certainly arguable that the school of acupuncture most well known in the West that has most taken these principles as the basis of practice is the Five Element school of J.R.Worsley.

We could thus also look at another of Fruehauf’s statements in this context.

CCM	‘TCM’
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Physician is intermediary to the sacred, cultivating the dual roles of the shaman (master of intuited knowledge) and the sage (master of scholarly knowledge), connecting above and below, inside and outside, energy and matter	Physician is skilled technician who rectifies imbalances between bodily humors and calibrates the structural composition of the body (eliminate viruses, etc.)
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Clearly Five Element acupuncture as taught by J.RWorsely aspires to the principles on the left..

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