Tending the Wind – Chapter 11
Chinese Medicine – Part 3
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The philosophy behind the development of Chinese medicine is just as intriguing as its language. There emerged no single system of thought informing concepts of health and healing, but rather a synthesis of four different systems: Yīn-Yáng theory, Five-Phase theory, Daoist philosophy, and Confucian philosophy. All four had roots in earlier times, but found formal expression during the Later Zhōu Dynasty (770-256 B.C.) among what are known as the "Hundred Schools of Thought." This was a time of intense warfare and social upheaval, resulting in the development of scores of philosophical systems – each one attempting to provide an understanding of reality and a guide for living.

What we know of these schools of thought, and their early roots (often difficult to trace), has been gleaned from what little remained after the book burnings of the Qín Dynasty (221-207 B.C.) when "subversive" prose and poetry were destroyed, and dissenting scholars were killed, exiled, imprisoned, or forced to labor on public works projects. The subsequent Early Hàn Dynasty (206 B.C.-8 A.D.) renewed interest in scholarly works, bringing together many different philosophies in an effort known as the Hàn Synthesis. This open-minded blending of ideas is evident in the Hàn era medical text *Huángdì Nèijīng* (*The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic*) – the first complete treatise on Chinese medical theory and practice, and the foundation of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Yīn and Yáng

The character for yīn literally means the shady side of a hill; its yáng counterpart is the sunny side. Rather than being opposing forces (though many teachings describe them as such), yīn and yáng simply describe the relative qualities of things as complementary polarities. Yīn descriptions include terms like cold, inner, lower, passive, dark, dense, feminine, right side, and the directions west (early yīn) and north (full yīn). Yáng counterparts are hot, outer, upper, active, light, rarified, masculine, left side, and the directions east (early yáng) and south (full yáng). The yīn and yáng aspects of reality aid each others' emergence and expression. This emergence is cyclical, as shown in the well known circular tàijí symbol depicting yīn descending to its fullness on the right and yáng ascending to its fullness on the left. (This orientation is the most appropriate for learning Chinese philosophy and medicine; reversed and rotated versions also exist in the literature.) Within the fullness of yīn is the seed of yáng; within the fullness of yáng is the seed of yīn. Both are contained in the wholeness of all things.

Wǔ Xíng (Five Phases)

Also called Five Elements, the term "phase" is more appropriate since the character for xíng is a composite of the pictographs for *step/left step* and *stop/right step* indicating processional motion. In this case, each of the five phases represents a stage of manifestation along the yīn-yáng cycle. Rather than describing the innate composition and static properties of things as do the Greek elements, the wǔ xíng suggest how things behave in the process of co-creative expression. They are a dynamic metaphor for being. Water and Fire correspond to yīn and yáng at their extremes. Metal and Wood are the intermediate phases, yáng moving toward yīn and yīn moving toward yáng respectively. Earth represents both the central focus of transformation, and the last moments of each phase before the next. As applied to the seasons, for example, Water represents winter, Fire summer, Metal fall, Wood spring, and Earth both late summer and the last few weeks of all the other seasons. For centuries, the wǔ xíng have also been applied to social activities, politics, architecture, and medicine, since the metaphors of the macrocosm apply equally well to the microcosm. Both landscapes behave similarly.

The yīn-yáng and wǔ xíng concepts were part of what has been labeled the Naturalist School whose ideas were formalized by Zōu Yǎn (350-270 B.C.), often credited with being the father of Chinese science. During the Later Zhōu, science and medicine began

to seek natural reasons for events and illness rather than the will of ancestors or the wrath of demons. Observance of the natural patterns of a dynamic universe became paramount.

Daoist Philosophy

The three Daoist sages are said to be Huáng Dì (one of three legendary original kings of the 3rd millennium B.C.), Lǎozǐ (604-531 B.C. if legend is correct), and Zhuāngzǐ (370-286 B.C.) who are credited with the origins of the philosophy. The three Daoist classics are the *Yì Jīng* (*Book of Changes*, whose current form dates back to the Early Zhōu Dynasy, 1121-771 B.C., though earlier forms date back to 2000 B.C. at least), *Dào Dé Jīng* (*Book of the Way and the Power*, written sometime before 300 B.C.), and *Zhuāngzǐ* (written around 300 B.C. and named for its author). The *Dào Dé Jīng*, also called the *Lǎozǐ*, is the cornerstone of Daoist philosophy. Much debate exists as to the exact date of this work, and whether Lǎozǐ was a real person or a convenient name for several Daoist authors. Legend states he was a keeper of archives for the Zhōu Dynasty, and composed the roughly 5,000 characters of the *Dào Dé Jīng* on bamboo slips as he was leaving for the West. [Daoist philosophy (dàojiā) must be distinguished from Daoist religion (dàojiào) which did not emerge until the Later Hàn Dynasty (25-220 A.D.) when Lǎozǐ was deified and the philosophy was fused with aspects of existing immortality cults, messianic cults, local folk religions, Confucianism, and also Buddhist religion which had recently arrived from India via the Silk Road.]*

In contrast to the rigid ceremonial and hierarchical social order of the Early Zhōu, Daoist philosophy espoused behavior in accordance with naturally spontaneous self-becoming (zìrán: *naturally so*, *self-so-ing*, *self-deriving*) in harmony with one's surroundings and unhindered by attachment to fixed concepts or expectations (the source of frustration and conflict). All things and processes, including the Dào itself, emulate zìrán.

Dào is a combination of two composite pictographs "step + stop" and "river/hair + face" and is commonly translated as *way*, *doctrine*, *method* or *path*, but in Daoist philosophy alludes to the continuously shifting expression of all that exists…the Way. (Dào is also the act of *way-making*, as Chinese characters can serve as different parts of speech depending on context.) Things and events may seem like discrete items which can be defined and categorized, but in fact are only momentary pauses in the ever-changing expression of an ultimately un-namable and un-definable mystery. A tree is not finally a definable singular object, nor does it have an ideal form; it is one perceptible expression of the tree's un-namable self within a particular context. The tree and every other being in that forest co-create that context. It would take a different form (focused expression) within a different context (field of expression). For this reason, to give the Dào itself a fixed name and definition in the end isn't possible because it, too, is always changing. To function in the world we make distinctions, but those names must not create false limits; the act of putting something into a category is an act of control which limits potential expression. Proper naming thus presents rather than defines.

Dé (step + ten eyes saw no concealment + heart/mind) is translated as *virtue*, *inner nature,* or *inner power*, and alludes to the ability to act from the heart's truth without obstruction. Dào and dé go hand in hand, our path and the steps we take which both follow and create that path. If those steps come from the heart/mind without interference, they will be spontaneous and natural – they will follow the Way. A related concept is wúwèi, literally "not-doing" but a better translation is "effortless doing" since action requires no force when there is no obstruction. (The pictograph for "not" is a person dancing.) There is no originating first step and no final last step; the Dào has no beginning and no end. It is simply the ongoing process of expression and experience – a dance of being. "Right" behavior follows the natural expression of one's inner truth, not an artificial cultural norm.

Confucian Philosophy

Confucius is the Latin name for Kǒng Fūzǐ (551-479 B.C.) who became a teacher after his political career dwindled. He is said to have edited and/or assembled the Five

Classics, which became required reading for any educated person and those seeking government positions: *Yì Jīng* (often called a Confucian rather than a Daoist classic since he is credited with the interpretive commentaries called *Wings*), *Shī Jīng* (*Classic of Poetry*), *Shū Jīng* (*Classic of History*), *Lǐ Jì* (*Classic of Rites*), and *Chūn Qīu* (*Spring and Autumn Annals*). Confucianism was adopted as the Hàn Dynasty's official state doctrine, which it would remain through many dynasties to come until the 20th century. It became such an integral part of Chinese life that Confucius was gradually deified over the centuries, and was honored with the same religious sacrifices and ceremonies accorded to other deities.

Confucius desired a return to the social and political order of the Early Zhōu, before the chaos, ruthlessness, and treachery of his time. Behavior should be in accordance with the needs of a defined social hierarchy, with observance of proper and virtuous conduct as defined by the ancients, adherence to traditional customs, ancestor worship, and strict attention to the correct performance of ritual. (Ancestor worship was based on the belief that prosperity and health were guaranteed by one's ancestors to those descendents who observed the proper burial and sacrificial customs. A similar form of reciprocity applied to the relationships between living members of different social levels; failure on either side resulted in misfortune. Thus neglect of, or improper performance of rites and ceremonies demonstrated moral and social anarchy.) Education in all these matters was considered essential.

The ruler must be a moral, highly educated man, leading by example and benevolent intervention. It should then follow that his subjects would obey the rules of propriety and avoid wrongdoing from a sense of shame, rather than simply obey laws from a desire to avoid punishment. All must act within their station and perform the expected duties and rituals. Within the family, children must be subservient to parents, wives subservient to husbands, with the father deserving filial piety in all situations. Women were (and still are) at the bottom of the list, expected to serve the needs of all the men in their lives with willingness and quiet resignation, and continue the male family line. (Said one Chinese scholar, "Women always have been fighting for a way out of the Confucian shadows.") And in Confucian philosophy, humans are considered superior to every other life form.

All this is in contrast to the perspective of the Daoist philosopher, who did not see himself as above or below other beings, who revered the feminine as equal, who viewed parenthood as having the experience of raising children without assuming any enduring expectation or authority over them, and who viewed the ideal ruler as acting so unobtrusively and naturally as to hardly be noticed. (A lesser ruler expects recognition with songs and praises.) The Daoist also valued personal transformation (experience) over talking about things (education); not only can talking about something obscure truly experiencing it, but institutionalized responses to experience prevent authentic feeling and eliminate the many possibilities presented by a situation.

Achieving Synthesis

Naturalist, Daoist, and Confucian philosophy all make their appearance in the concepts of Chinese medicine. This may seem odd, especially given the differences between Daoist and Confucian philosophy. Chinese culture, however, has a long history of retaining and blending ideas rather than discarding them altogether. In Chinese medicine, this presents some interesting juxtapositions. Are organs to be understood and treated according to their own unique inner natures, or as members of an orderly society with defined roles and duties? Both approaches exist in TCM, and the student must be able to distinguish and select among them. (This author has chosen an approach based primarily on Naturalist and Daoist philosophy, examining the inner nature of things and their co-creative interactions.) The various influences will be evident as Chinese medical theory is explored in the coming chapters.

*The word Daoism thus has different meanings depending on whether one if referring to the pre-Hàn or post-Hàn version. When someone states that a particular idea or principle is Daoist, the listener has to

decipher whether it stems from pure Daoist philosophy, or whether it has the added flavor of Confucian philosophy or the trappings of religious practice. Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism would eventually become known as the "Three Ways" of China, various blends of which emerged and dominated over the centuries.