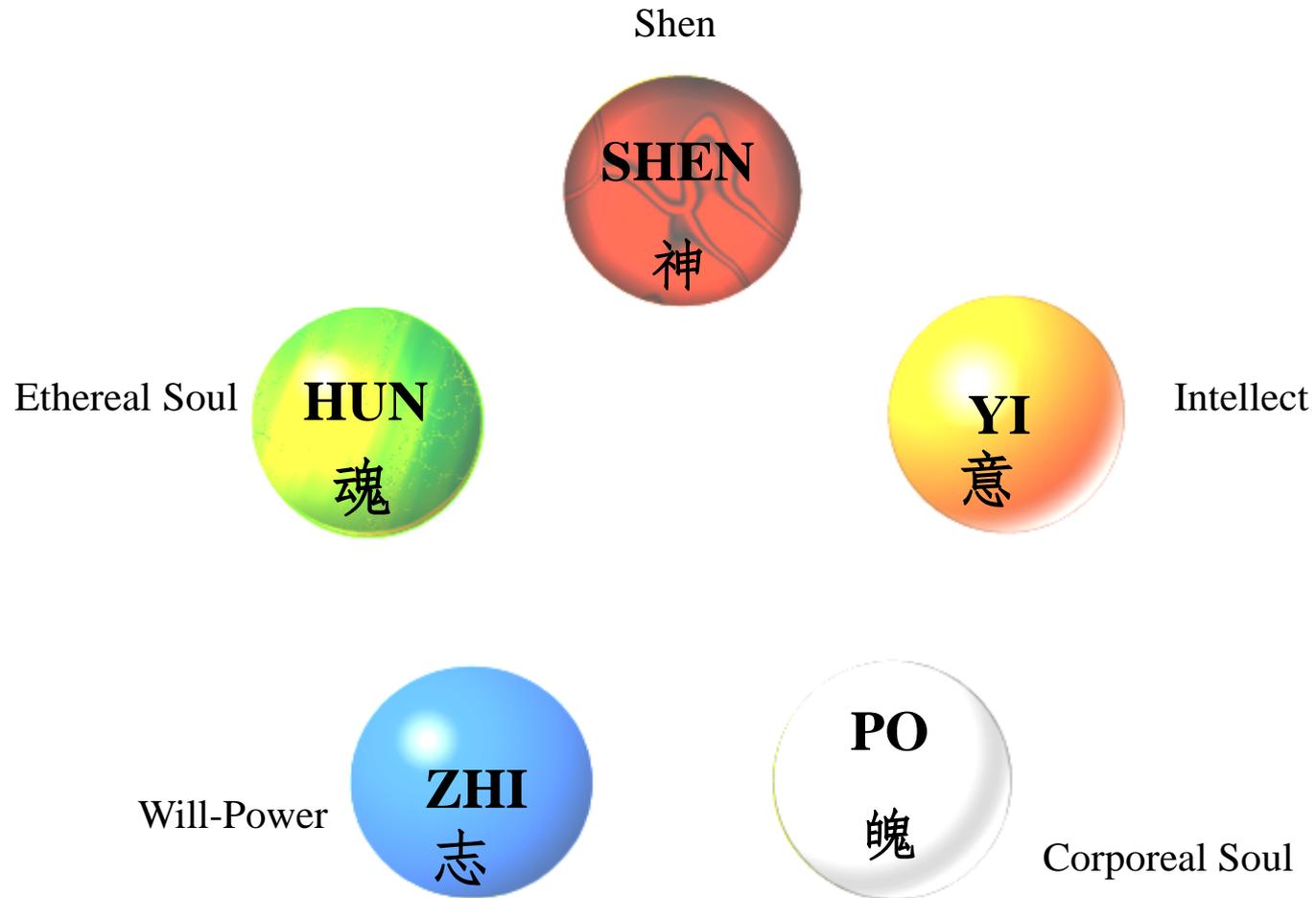


THE 12 INTERNAL ORGANS AND THE PSYCHE



These aspects of the psyche are connected to the relevant internal organ, i.e. Heart, Liver, Lungs, Spleen and Kidneys. We must now turn our attention to describing the influence of all 12 Internal Organs on the psyche by drawing primarily on the “Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine” as a source.



Chapter 8 of the “Su Wen” contains the core of the theory of the Internal Organs seen as the “officials” of a government. It states:

“The Heart is the official functioning as the Monarch¹: the Spirit [Shen Ming 神明] originates from it.

The Lungs are the official functioning as Prime Minister: they are in charge of government [治 节].

The Liver is the official functioning as general: planning originates from it.

The Gall-Bladder is the official functioning as Minister of Justice: decision-making originates from it.

The Pericardium is the official functioning as envoy: joy and happiness originate from it.”

1. It uses the word “jun” [君] which means “monarch” but is also the Confucian ideal gentleman.

*The Spleen and Stomach are the official in charge of granaries:
the five flavours originate from them.*

*The Large Intestine is in charge of transportation: change and
transformation originate from it.*

*The Small Intestine is the official in charge of reception: transformation
originates from it.*

The Kidneys are the official in charge of power: skill originates from them.

The Triple Burner is the official responsible for dredging of channels: regulation of water passages originates from it.

The Bladder is the official in charge of reservoirs: fluids storage originates from it and they [fluids] are excreted through transformation by Qi.”



The same passage continues with a typically Confucian view of the Internal Organs as the government of a State that is governed according to the Confucian principles of ethics:

“These 12 organs should not lose balance. If the Monarch is wise, the subordinates will be peaceful. Abidance by the rules of nourishment of life [yang sheng] will avoid any suffering all through life. Using this [rule], the country will be prosperous. If the Monarch is not wise, all the 12 organs will be in danger and unable to function well, inevitably resulting in severe damage to the body. Using such a way to nourishing life [yang sheng] disasters will ensue. Using such a way to govern a country, it will be in great danger. Be on guard and heighten vigilance!”

This passage presents a typical Confucian (but also Legalist) view of the body:

the body is like a country



the Internal Organs are like the officials in charge of government



the Heart is like the Monarch



According to Confucian political ethics, if the ruler behaved ethically, there was harmony in the country: vice versa, if the ruler behaved unethically, there would be chaos. This was called *Tian Ming* [天命], the Mandate of Heaven. In the above analogy between the body and a country, “nourishing life” according to the principles of Chinese medicine ensures health; not following them ensures danger. Similarly, in a country;

good government ensures harmony



and bad government, chaos.



“Nourishing life” (*yang sheng*) here refers to a lifestyle that fosters the preservation and cultivation of our Qi and Jing through a balanced diet, exercise, breathing exercises and sexual restraint. Daoist influence.

Chapter 23 of the “Su Wen” identifies the mental-spiritual aspects of the five Yin organs clearly:

“The housing of the Five Yin Organs is as follows: the Heart houses the Shen, the Lungs house the Po, the Liver houses the Hun, the Spleen houses the Yi, the Kidneys house the Zhi.”



A passage in chapter 9 of the “Simple Questions” adds some more information to the functions of the Internal Organs.

It describes the function of each organ, the place it manifests (e.g. Heart on the complexion) and the tissue it influences.

In the following translation of this passage, I will omit these last two aspects to concentrate on the functions of the organs which are again compared to officials of a government.

Chapter 9 of the “Simple Questions” says:

“The Heart is the root of life and it houses the Shen.

The Lungs are the root of Qi and they house the Po.

The Kidneys are the root of sealed closure and storage; they house the Jing.

The Liver is the root of stopping extremes (balancing and regulating) and they house the Hun.

The Spleen, Stomach, Large Intestine, Small Intestine, Triple Burner and Bladder are the root of granary and they house the Nutritive Qi (Ying Qi).

These organs are called containers because they store food, transform waste and manage transformation and excretion of the flavours. All the 11 organs mentioned above depend on the decisions of the Gall-Bladder.”

This passage is interesting for two reasons. First, it incongruously classifies the Spleen as a Yang (*Fu*) organ;

secondly, it introduces the idea of the Gall-Bladder as a quite important organ on whose “decisions” all the other organs depend.

This is an idea that does not recur frequently but that is used clinically by some doctors.