

CONFUCIAN INFLUENCE ON THE “HEART” OF CHINESE MEDICINE

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In my opinion, Confucianism had a huge influence in the development of the ideas about the Heart and Mind in Chinese medicine.

The first influence derives from the metaphor of the imperial administrative and political structure with a god-like emperor, ministers and provincial governors. The Chinese medicine concept of the Heart as “ruler” [*jun zhu* 君主] is very much a Confucian concept. The very word *jun* is rich in Confucian meaning. *Jun* is both “monarch” or “ruler” but also the “accomplished person” who is endowed with *ren*, *yi*, *zhi* and *li*.

There is another connection between the Heart as ruler and the actual emperor. The emperor was endowed with a god-like nature and had the Mandate of Heaven (*Tian Ming* 天命). Not by chance, the Heart is the only organ that has the same god-like nature. This is evident from the character for *Shen*.

It could be argued that a Confucian human-body cosmology is based on the Heart being at the top a the imperial ruler, while a Daoist human-body cosmology is based more on the Kidneys below, the source of *Jing* and the basis for Daoist *Qi Gong*.

The Confucian view of the Heart as the ruler and the most important organ derives also from Meng Zi's (372-289 BC) views on the Heart-Mind. Please note that the word *Xin* for Heart in Confucian philosophy stands also for "Mind".

Zhuang Zi (Daoist philosopher) disagreed with the idea of the Heart being the ruler. He insists that the Heart, being only one of the organs, is no more “me” than any other organ.

We suppose that it could control the others, but in fact the various members are interdependent and “*take turns as each other’s ruler and subjects*”. According to him, the true ruler is not the Heart but the Dao.



The Confucian (and especially Meng Zi's) discussion of Heart and Mind dating back to the 4th century BC is pivotal in the development of Chinese philosophy and Chinese medicine. The Confucians did nothing less than “discover” the Heart and Mind and made it an essential part of our human nature.

Meng Zi introduced his own version of this philosophy producing a moral version of the Heart and Qi. According to Meng Zi, the unique feature of the make-up of a human being is his Heart and so, when we speak of human nature, we should have the Heart in mind primarily. In other words the Heart is our human nature.

The term “*Shen*” is frequently used in the Nei Ye but in a different sense than the one in which we use it. In the Nei Ye, “*Shen*” refers more to perception and comprehension of reality and the basis for higher forms of awareness. According to the Nei Ye, the practitioner must attract *Shen* and take it into his/her quietened Heart-Mind.

The Nei Ye expresses this process in terms of *De* 德. The Confucians also often used this term and gave it an ethical interpretation which it certainly does not have in the Nei Ye. *De* is basically the process by which we follow the *Dao*. Indeed, some sinologists say that *De* should be interpreted as a cognate of *de* 得 which means “to get”. In the Nei Ye, therefore, *De* could be defined as the acquisitional agency, for it is not just what we attract and receive, but that whereby we attract and receive *Dao*, *Qi*, *Jing* and *Shen*.

Moreover, the Nei Ye (unlike the *Dao De Jing*) states that one’s *De* is something that one must work on every day; the practitioner must work to build up his/her *De* by practice. Also, in the Nei Ye context, *De* is “power” or “potency”.

There are many connections between the Daoism of the Nei Ye and Confucianism, especially that of Meng Zi. As we have seen, the Meng Zi's concept of flood-like Qi can only be understood in the light of the teachings of the Nei Ye. Moreover, we can identify three basic statements that are common to the teachings of the Nei Ye and those of Meng Zi:

- 1) One is born with a Heart-Mind that is inherently as it should be
- 2) Our Heart-Mind becomes confused by our thoughts and emotions
- 3) By returning our Heart-Mind to its original state, we allow a natural harmony to take place.

When one reads in the Nei Ye that “*the mind's inner reality is benefited by rest and quiet*” it is strikingly similar to the teachings of Meng Zi. Either Meng Zi had personal connection with the Nei Ye community or he encountered a proponent of it at the Ji Xia academy in the state of Qi.