

REFLECTIONS ON THE TRIPLE HEATER

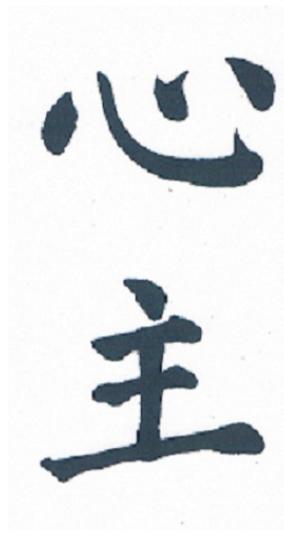
The triple warmer is where the mysterious qi of the living spirit resides. The person who accepts life as a gift is between heaven and earth. Therefore the principle of life and existence also exists. From *Kaitai Hatsumou* (“Anatomical Elucidations”) by K. Mitsutane, 1813¹

This is one of the many quotations from the Japanese classics found in the wonderful “Hara Diagnosis: Reflections on the Sea”. The Triple Heater is a function which the authors refer to again and again in their exploration of the branch of science where the East Asian medical tradition excels – the science of Qi/Ki. The Science of Ki examines how form (matter, “stuff”, the world of phenomena) comes into being, the relationship between form and Ki, how we are born, live and die – and why. And all of these functions are linked with the Triple Heater.

To follow the thread of the subject we have to start with the Heart, then the Heart Protector, before we can come to the Triple Heater and how it helps us understand our humanity.

Our Western perception of our heart is mainly channelled into the emotional realm. The meditative, spacious and reflective quality of the Heart as it is understood in the East is less accessible, but we can find some common ground in the metaphor of *light*. Sunny, glowing, radiant, luminous, all are words that express the inner joy of the heart and its outward show through images of light, and if we widen the concept we have words like brilliant, enlightened and illuminated. The Heart's essential nature is light, is space, is non-substantial (the character for Heart in Chinese is the only one that does not contain the radical that means “flesh”). The Heart, as dwelling place of the Shen, houses our own individual spark of the light of universal consciousness, the *shen ming*, the radiance of the spirit.

If we look now at the Heart Protector, we see almost a double of the Heart, in a more active form. The Heart itself, a manifestation of “space” and “light”, resides in us but without the attributes of “flesh” has no power to act though our physical body. The Heart Protector does: the character for the Heart Protector, *xin zhu*, contains the radicals for Heart, *xin*, and another radical, *zhu*, which means “governor” or “lord” and is depicted by a lampstand with candle which spreads light². So the Heart Protector acts, governs, by spreading the light of the Shen through our bodies.



1 *Hara Diagnosis: Reflections on the Sea* by Matsumoto and Birch, Paradigm Publications 1988, p.115

2 *Heart Master Triple Heater* by Larre and Rochat de la Vallee Monkey Press 1992 p.3

The Heart Protector has a link with the physical body via the *bao*, a lovely word meaning “intimate envelopes” or “wrappings”. The Pericardium itself is a manifestation of *bao*, as the silky yet strong membranous envelope that wraps the Heart. It protects, yet also must have a capacity to spread, to distribute, as the name of the Heart Protector function embodied in the Chinese characters tells us that it is the “lord who spreads light”. The *bao*, the intimate envelopes by means of which the Heart is protected, are also the means of rooting the Shen's light into the body and spreading it.

How does the Heart Protector spread the light of the Shen which resides in the Heart? How does the light of our awareness manifest in and govern this living, pulsating, feeling body? How can events in our environment change our perceptions? How can a thought or emotion alter our breathing, our hormone secretions, our muscular tension and our circulation? What is the profound connection between our consciousness and our body?

Traditional physiology tells us that this happens via reflexes in the nervous system, but it is becoming increasingly evidenced in modern physiology that the connective tissue which pervades the whole body plays an even more fundamental and significant role. The connective tissue is shown to conduct electrical and magnetic signals which can pass with lightning speed between every body part. And while this is happening in the world of science, students of the Chinese and Japanese classics are selecting references in the texts that show us that the Science of Ki was there before us.

The Heart Protector and Triple Heater are the functions with “a name but no form” because the connective tissue or fascia goes everywhere in the body – wrapping muscles, bones, organs and blood vessels, linking them together with pearly sheets of crystalline semi-conductor material. The light of the Shen as it shines into the dense material of the body needs pathways along which to travel to reach every part, and the liquid crystal nature of the connective tissue provides these pathways; the deep fascia belonging to the Heart Protector, the more superficial fascia relating to the Triple Heater. The all-pervading connective tissue provides much of the mechanics of connection and feedback between our consciousness and our bodies – the “circling of the way of shen”³.

It is true that when we equate the Shen with light we do not address the central issue of the question “What is consciousness?” We may never rationally know the answer to this question. However, modern science has established that the heart organ is the source of an electro-magnetic field which pervades the body and extends around it, how far has yet to be measured, as instruments sensitive enough have not yet been invented. And light is an electromagnetic radiation. Of course this does not address our own experience of light, nor indeed our own experience of Shen, but it is certain that the connective tissue can convey electro-magnetic signals throughout the body – what other signals besides has yet to be discovered.

This illustration from the Ling Shu shows an interesting view of the Triple Heater and the understanding of its link with the connective tissue.

3 Taoist sage Sun Si Mo, 7th century, Matsumoto and Birch, op.cit., p.115

手少陽三焦府



The triple heater from the Lingshu suwen jieyao

Here we see the divisions between the Three Burning Spaces represented fairly diagrammatically, as straight lines outlining the abdominal membranes, the diaphragm and the horizontal musculature of the throat. These divisions would be already understood even in naming the Triple Heater.

An interesting addition is the inclusion of the superficial fascia, the layer of connective tissue which runs just under the skin, the “bag” which keeps the inside of us in and the outside out.

“The Triple Burner is a large bag supporting the organism from outside and holding it inside” (*Ting Chin's 1736 commentary on the Nan Jing*).

We may be familiar with the concept of the skin as a “border” which separates us from the rest of the universe, and we will know that this is the domain of the Metal Phase. The Triple Heater's connection with the surface of our bodies via the superficial fascia is a different one. It takes our consciousness from our deepest core out to the surface to adapt our experience of ourselves to our environment, both physically and on the feeling level. Awareness, Shen, is always involved when we are dealing with the Fire Phase, and whereas Metal simply means that we are born a separate individual, the Triple Heater implies a consciousness of that separateness and the ability to bring our awareness to our surface, to the interface between self and other, self and the environment.

Another interesting element in the illustration is the Triple Heater's connection with Ming Men at the level of the Kidneys. Ming Men is the pilot light of our system, the gateway to the Source Ki, to the origin of all our Yang energy for action and accomplishment, and the Triple Heater is traditionally the avenue of the Source Ki (the Yang aspect of the Essence), delivering it to all the meridians⁴. The Triple Heater is even identified as Ming Men by some authorities⁵. Ming Men is

4 *Shiatsu Theory and Practice*, Beresford-Cooke, Elsevier 2011, p.252

5 Li Shi Zhen, from Matsumoto and Birch, op.cit. p. 125

sometimes translated as The Gate of Life, but a more complete translation is Gate of Destiny⁶. Our destiny is partly determined by how, where, into what race and to whom we are born – and this is the connection to our Essence. Our destiny also depends upon our own actions throughout our lives, what we do with the circumstances of our birth and lineage – and this is our connection to our Source Ki, which is distributed by the Triple Heater, which is also messenger of the Shen.

In this way the Triple Heater connects the Three Treasures, Shen, Ki and Essence. These Three Treasures are the three Vital Substances which have an existence greater than the individual – our vehicles for connecting with the wider universe outside our experience of the physical body.

There are many other functions of the Triple Heater, on a more physical level, beyond the scope of this short article to cover; but all necessarily involve consciousness. This is the fascination of the Triple Heater, that in studying it we cannot ignore our own involvement in our own health and our own destiny. From the Shen and Essence, the primary Yin and Yang through which we come into being, to the Ki which animates us, the Triple Heater is involved at the deepest level with our humanity.

Carola Beresford-Cooke has been studying, practising and teaching shiatsu since 1978. She is a founder member of the Shiatsu College and author of *Shiatsu Theory and Practice*.

6 Larre and Rochat de la Vallee ,op.cit. p. 29