



An axis of efficacy

The range of meaning in the *Ling Shu* chapter one

by **Charles Chace and Dan Bensky**

In this first of a two-part article, the authors analyse the first section of chapter one of the *Ling Shu* as the foundation for understanding approaches to needling. The authors begin their discussion by first orienting the book within the *Nei Jing* and outlining the structure of the text. This is followed by translations and commentaries of the text itself. Preceding the translation is an interesting in-depth examination of the concept of *ji* 機 and its central relevance for understanding the *Ling Shu*.

ANY SERIOUS EFFORT TO understand the approaches to needling described in the *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic, 3rd–2nd century BCE), demands a close examination of the first chapter of one of its component texts, the *Ling Shu* (Divine Pivot).¹ A book devoted largely to the practicalities of acupuncture practice, the first chapter of the *Ling Shu* outlines the fundamental principles of needling that are developed and

The *Ling Shu* Précis

from chapter one of the *Ling Shu*

Please tell me of the way [of needling].
The essentials of the small needle are easy to explain but difficult to engage.

The crude attend to the form, the superior attend to the spirit.

Spirit oh spirit! There is a guest at the door.

Without observing the disease, how can one know its origin?

The subtleties of needling lie in its speed.

The crude attend to the junctures and the superior attend to the dynamic.

The movement in the dynamic is not separate from its empty spaces;

The dynamic within this empty space is clear, still and subtle.

Its coming cannot be met and its going cannot be pursued.

Those who understand the way of the dynamic, will not impede it and thus it manifests.

Not understanding the way of the dynamic, one detains it and thus it fails to show itself.

To understand its goings and comings, emphasise its periodicity.

The crude are in the dark about this; sublime! Only practitioners have it.

Going away from it is contrary, promoting its arrival is going with the flow.

If one clearly understands the contrary and normal [flow of qi], then you can act correctly and without doubt or question.

By meeting it and taking it away, how could one not achieve depletion [of the qi]?

By pursuing and assisting it, how could one not achieve repletion [of the qi]?

Whether meeting it or following it, by means of one's attention, one harmonises it.

This is all there is to say with regard to the way of needling.

applied in different contexts throughout the text. Following an introductory preamble that establishes the chapter as part of the *Huang Di* lineage of medical texts,² this first chapter presents a short passage that stands by itself as an introductory overview of the most basic principles of needling. It is the foundation of all further discussion on needling within the chapter and arguably within the entire *Nei Jing*. This paper is an analysis of the first section of chapter one of the *Ling Shu* and an assessment of its ramifications for understanding the needle techniques presented in that book. To make sense of how the passage in question relates to the rest of the treatise, it is helpful to understand something about the structure and organisation of the *Nei Jing*.

Ancestral texts

The two books of the *Nei Jing*, the *Su Wen* (Basic Questions) and the *Ling Shu* (Divine Pivot) are by no means a homogenous or consistent text. They constitute an anthology of many independent writings by many different authors that may or may not have any relation to one another. Each chapter may contain multiple subsections that constitute complete texts in their own right. For instance, the first two thirds of *Ling Shu* chapter one, referred to here as *Ling Shu-1.1*, constitute a discrete text known variously as the *Jiu Zhen* (Nine Needles), the *Xiao Zhen* (Small Needles) or simply the *Zhen* (Needles). This text is considered an “ancestral text” in that it most likely predates other texts in the *Nei Jing* that are effectively commentaries on it.³ These later texts, known as “descendent texts,” include but are not limited to the last section of the first chapter of the *Ling Shu*, referred to here as *Ling Shu-1.3*, or first section of the 54th chapter of the *Su Wen*, referred to here as *Su Wen-54.1*

Different descendent texts frequently posit different interpretations of an ancestral text.⁴ For instance, the line *xu er ji ze shi*^a in *Ling Shu-1.1* is interpreted in *Ling Shu-1.3* as “When one slowly inserts and quickly removes the needle this will make the qi replete.”⁵ *Su Wen-54.1* interprets the

line differently. “When one slowly removes the needle and quickly presses the point [to prevent bleeding], this will make the qi replete.”⁶

Other writings within the *Nei Jing* are also effectively commentaries on the *Jiu Zhen* (Nine Needles). Descendent texts may appear in close proximity to their ancestral texts as does *Ling Shu-1.3*, or they may be scattered in apparent random throughout the *Nei Jing* as is the case with *Su Wen-54.1*. This raises a relevant point regarding the dating to the various texts within the *Nei Jing*. It is commonly believed that the *Ling Shu* postdates the *Su Wen* but in fact neither one, as a whole, is earlier or later than the other. *Su Wen-54.1* is clearly a descendent of *Ling Shu-1.3*, and *Ling Shu-3*, a distinct text in its own right known as the *Explanation of the Small Needles*^b is also a descendent of *Ling Shu-1.3*.⁷ From all of this it is evident that even at the time of its compilation there were multiple lines of interpretation associated with the *Nei Jing*.

It is debatable whether this initial passage in the **first chapter of the *Ling Shu*** can be considered an independent text in its own right. Nevertheless, it is unquestionably a succinct *précis* of the core concepts that are subsequently developed later in *Ling Shu-1* and throughout the *Ling Shu*. However one chooses to label this passage, hereafter referred to as the *Ling Shu Précis*, it is worthy of critical examination. Its content bears directly on our fundamental understanding of what it means to perform acupuncture and the interpretation of this passage inevitably influences one's reading of the rest of the *Ling Shu*.

The most common interpretations of the *Ling Shu Précis*, although plausible, coherent and informative, are not entirely satisfactory. A number of intriguing statements that form the core of the passage are either reduced to triviality by these standard interpretations or ignored entirely. We will examine this *précis* in detail and consider its possible range of meaning. In the process, we will demonstrate that the text contains at least two intertwined interpretive threads or layers, one of which has been largely

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It stresses the importance of one's awareness of the 'spaces' or intervals of stillness within the ji. From this perspective, one's attention to the relationship between the correct and pathogenic qi is the tip of an iceberg, a relatively minor aspect of a much larger scope of awareness that is essential to effective needling.

overlooked in the commentary literature. The basis for this neglected interpretive thread is the text's use of the concept *ji* (機). We will examine this concept in some detail and consider its ramifications for our understanding of the passage and the chapter as a whole.

A pivotal concept

The interpretation of the *Ling Shu Précis* hinges on the word *ji* (機) and what it means that “the superior attend to *ji*”.^c Most commentators take “*ji*” in *Ling Shu-1* to mean the “qi mechanism” or “qi dynamic.”^d This, of course, begs the question of what precisely a qi mechanism or dynamic is and how it pertains to the rest of this passage. The *Ling Shu* suggests two interpretations, one narrow, and one broad.

1) *Ling Shu-3* is among the most comprehensive and least ambiguous commentaries on *Ling Shu-1*, and it exemplifies the most common reading of *ji* (機). The qi mechanism is the interactive relationship between the correct and pathogenic qi. In practical terms, it is our awareness of and interaction with that dynamic that determines whether one will administer tonification or drainage techniques. This interpretation will be discussed in greater detail below. For the present it is sufficient to say that this straightforward explanation allows the *Ling Shu Précis* to be read as a basic discussion of excess and deficiency, correct and pathogenic qi, and tonification and drainage. That said, if one reads the text with an open mind, this simple equivalency leads to many questions. In this it is similar to another common interpretation that *ji* is a simple reference to the channel qi.^e

2) The *Ling Shu Précis* itself describes the qi mechanism as an expression of the pacing of the qi, its goings and comings.^f It stresses the importance of one's awareness of the “spaces” or intervals of stillness within the *ji*. From this perspective, one's attention to the relationship between the

correct and pathogenic qi is the tip of an iceberg, a relatively minor aspect of a much larger scope of awareness that is essential to effective needling.

The trigger of activity

The word *ji* (機) is an ancient term for the firing mechanism of a crossbow,^g and by extension, it is the crux or hinge of a thing. This root meaning of *ji* is especially apt when the word is used in the early acupuncture literature, which often makes use of archery imagery. For instance *Ling Shu-1* counsels that at the moment the qi arrives, one must “withdraw [the needle] like [loosing an arrow] from a bowstring.”^{h,10} *Ji* exerts its influence by virtue of its position at the beginning of things. For this reason, *ji* may be the trigger or cause of a disease as in *Su Wen-74*, which states: “Carefully examine the appropriateness of the [seasonal] qi, and do not lose [sight] of the trigger [*ji*] of disease.”^{8,11}

Ji also refers to the articulations (*guan ji* 關節) and may refer specifically to the acupuncture hole Circular Jump (*Huantiao* GB-30). *Su Wen-60* states: “What cleaves close to the hip is the *ji*.”^{h,12} The hip is, of course, a major hinge or pivot point in the body but it is also the initiator of movement through the lower extremities, harkening back to a more fundamental meaning of the word.

Incipience

Ji is cognate with “incipience” (*ji* 幾), the “heavenly mechanism” (*tian ji* 天機), the “divine mechanism” (*shen ji* 神機). The Classic of Change¹ uses the word incipience (*ji* 幾) to denote an initial tendency toward change that is more minute than and precedes active transformation.^{j,13} According to the Great Commentary in the Classic of Change: “The Changes are the means by which the sages search the profound and examine incipience. Only by the profound can one penetrate to the purpose under the

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Errata: In Vol. 5:3 (Sept. 08) of *The Lantern*, an end-note was missing from the article ‘Cooling blood and relieving toxicity’ by Greta Young Jie De, stating that the case studies located on pages 26-27 were sourced from *Shaanxi Zhong Yi* 1995 Vol 16: (4) by Lin Liu Ru of Guangxi Liu Zhou Shi Zhong Yi Yuan (545000).

c. *shang shou ji* 上守機
d. *qi ji* 氣機
e. *wang lai* 往來

f. *qu ru xuan jue* 去如弦絕

g. *jin hou qi yi, wu shi bing ji* 謹候氣宜, 無失病機

h. 俠靚為機

i. *Yi Jing* 易经 9-7th centuries BCE.

j. *hua* 化

heaven; only by incipience can one perfect the tasks under heaven.”^{k,14}

The Great Commentary also states:

The Master said: “Ah, to know the incipience, how divine!” The gentleman in dealing with his betters does not flatter, in dealing with his inferiors is not rude, for does he not know incipience? Incipience is the most minute aspect of movement and the first appearance of good fortune, the gentleman sees incipience and inaugurates; he does not wait until the ending of the day.^{l,15}

The expression of natural endowment

One’s *ji* (機) is linked, at least to some extent, to one’s relationship with the world at large. In the *Zhuang Zi*, *tian ji*^m is a natural endowment or disposition, and a capacity to be in accord with the universe. “Those whose desires are deep-seated will have a shallow natural endowment”ⁿ.¹⁶ In the *Huai Nan Zi* “the divine mechanism is hidden and closed. Its marks and imprints lack all trace, and it is the subtlety behind human ingenuity.”^p.¹⁷

Where *shen* and *ji* appear together in the *Nei Jing* it is often a general term for the life force, but *Su Wen-70* understands them as separate though inextricably related things.

“*Qi Bo said: The root at the centre is called the spirit dynamic. When the spirit leaves then the dynamic ceases.*”^{q,18}

The wellspring at the centre of things

Ji lies not only at the beginning of actions but at their centre (*shu ji* 樞機) insofar as it is the crux of a thing. This use of the word appears in *Ling Shu-69.1* which states: “the tongue is the key to speech.”^{r,19} and *Ling Shu-75.5* which states: “the penis and testicles are

the hinge of the body centre”^{s,20} *Ji* may also denote a specific situation or state of affairs (*ji shi* 機勢), and by extension it denotes the opportunity inherent in a situation or disposition. Similarly, *ji* may be both an indicator of change and a source of change within something. According to the Great Learning in the Han dynasty Record of Rites:

From the benevolent example of one family an entire state becomes benevolent, and from its courtesies an entire state becomes courteous, while from the ambition and perverseness of one man, an entire State may be led into rebellious disorder; its dynamic is such as this.^{t,21}

The *Zhuang Zi* expresses a similar sentiment. “The ten thousand things all come out from the wellsprings and all re-enter the wellsprings.”^{u,22}

This translation by Victor Mair highlights the aspect of *ji* that lies at the source and is the “wellspring” of things.

Just as *ji* is situated at the centre of events, Isabelle Robinet notes that: “Physiologically, *ji* is located in the centre of the body which is in turn related to *yi* intention and to the Spleen, or it can be identified with the interval between breathing in and out, corresponding with the ‘closing and opening of the world in the instant that preceded the movement of breath.’”

In this it is evident that even in its most material manifestations *ji* is associated with the empty spaces or intervals between phases of activity. Robinet also notes that *ji* is synonymous with the heart-mind (*xin* 心) and the spirit or spirit (*shen* 神). This association is central to the interpretation of the *Ling Shu Précis* where they are linked by the parallelism of its sentence structure. According to Robinet, those involved in internal cultivation aim at uniting their human *ji* with heavenly *ji*.²³

An axis of quiescence

As a hinge or pivot, *ji* refers to a point of stillness around which effective intervention

k. 夫易，聖人之所以極深，而研幾也，唯深也，故能通天下之志，唯幾也，故能成天下之務。

l. 子曰：“知幾其神乎！君子上交不諂，下交不瀆，其知幾乎，幾者動之微，吉之先見者也，君子見幾而作，不俟終日。

m. 天機

n. 其者欲深者其天機淺。

o. *Huai Nan Zi* 淮南子 (79-8 BCE)

p. 神機陰閉，剗削無跡，人巧之妙也。

q. 岐伯曰：根于中者，命曰神機，神去則機息

r. 舌者，音聲之機。

s. 莖垂者，身中之機。

t. 一家仁，一國興仁，一家讓，一國興讓，一人貪戾，一國作亂，其機如此。

u. 萬物皆出於機，皆入於機。



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It was clearly acknowledged that the needle itself is the pivot or axis of healing. The task of the acupuncturist is to make maximal use of this pivot or ji.

turns. It is equated with the “unbounded infinite,”^v and the “great ultimate.”^w It is “the wondrous movement that unites movement and quiescence, the true spring that moves spontaneously by itself^x and without intention^y and acts without action and interference.”^{z, 24} In light of this, it is worth mentioning that the book we are discussing is entitled the *Divine Pivot*. At least by the Tang dynasty when the text was given this title, it was clearly acknowledged that the needle itself is the pivot or axis of healing. The task of the acupuncturist is to make maximal use of this pivot or *ji*.

Synthesising these layers of meaning, Robinet describes *ji* as the “spring of the world, its activating force ... the extreme degree of quiescence and purity which is on the verge of changing into movement.”²⁵ The wealth of meanings associated with *ji* in the early literature of China suggests that whatever it is that the superior practitioner must attend to, it both includes and transcends the relatively mundane relationship between the correct and pathogenic qi, the state of qi in the channels. *Ji* is a reflection of the overall health or disposition of the patient; it determines whatever opportunities that might be available for improving the situation, it is closely associated with the spirit^{aa} and according to Robinet, it subsequently came to be associated with source qi in the sense of a primordial breath.^{ab, 26}

From the discussion above it is apparent that no single English word does justice to *ji*'s full scope of its meaning. For the present, however, we have provisionally translated *ji* as “dynamic” to amplify its fundamental characteristic as the impetus of effective action, movement and transformation. That said, it is most productive to keep its full range of meanings in mind when contemplating the *Ling Shu Précis*. When approached from this perspective the focus of this passage shifts significantly. One's engagement with *ji* is clearly the overall topic of the passage. It is through the *ji* that

v. *wu ji* 無極
w. *tai ji* 太極
x. *zi ran* 自然
y. *wu xin* 無心
z. *wu wei* 無為
aa. *shen* 神
ab. *yuan qi* 元氣

one harmonises the excesses or deficiencies in the states of the correct^{ac} and pathogenic^{ad} qi, and it frames the way in which one approaches tonification and drainage.

What follows is a translation of the *Ling Shu Précis* accompanied by an overview of representative commentaries including those appearing within the descendent texts of the *Nei Jing* itself.

This essay will illustrate how the concept of *ji* as described above establishes a coherent train of meaning throughout entire passage that both complements and deepens the import of the established commentaries. It is not so much an alternative interpretation of the material as a subtle but significant shift in emphasis. We have omitted the introductory paragraphs to *Ling Shu-1.1* that do not bear directly on the content of the chapter and numbered the lines for easy reference.

The Ling Shu Précis Translation and commentaries

請言其道。小針之要，易陳而難入。[1]

**Please tell me of the way [of needling].
The essentials of the small²⁷ needle are
easy to explain but difficult to engage.**

What are the essentials of needling? They are apparently easy enough to describe, a simple idea that is difficult to implement. According to *Ling Shu-3.1*, “what is referred to as easy to explain, means that it is easy to talk about,”^{ac} and “difficult to engage means difficult to apply to people.”^{af, 28} Whatever this means, it is unlikely that it is a mere needle technique. As Ma Shi articulates in his *Commenting on the Evidence and Explicating the Details in the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic Divine Pivot*, mere needle techniques are an expression of “the crude attending to the form.”²⁹

粗守形，上守神。[2]

**The crude attend to the form, the
superior attend to the spirit.**

The word *shou* 守 means to guard or protect, and by extension, to attend to. Its use here

ac. *zheng* 正

ad. *xie* 邪

ae. 所謂易陳者，易言也。

af. 難入者，難著于人也。

suggests that the physician must not just protect the integrity of the form and the spirit, but must also attend to and somehow engage it.

The crude and superior

The distinction between the crude and the superior is central to the structure of the passage. Appearing again in line six, the crude and the superior frames two sets of related ideas, and the parallelism it creates links the notions of form (*xing* 形) to the junctures (*guan* 關), and the spirit (*shen* 神) to the dynamic (*ji* 機). It will become apparent that the essentials of needling transcend the mechanics of its forms.

According to *Ling Shu-3.1*, “That the crude attend to the form means that they attend to the methods of needling.”^{ag, 30} Zhang Zhi-Cong’s *Collected Commentaries on the Ling Shu* (1670) interprets form not in terms of needle technique but as the corporeal body of the patient. He explains that: “When needling, the crude attend to the skin, vessels, flesh, sinew, and bone.”^{ah,31}

Shen as qi and blood

Most commentators and the descendent texts within the *Nei Jing* itself interpret spirit in terms of the qi and blood or the correct qi.^{ai} *Ling Shu-3.1* states “That the superior attend to the spirit means that they attend to a patient’s surplus or insufficiency of qi and blood, and this enables them to tonify or drain.”^{aj, 32} It goes on to explain that, at least in this context, “the spirit is correct qi.”^{ak, 33} Where *Ling Shu-3.1* identifies the spirit as the correct qi,³⁴ *Ling Shu-18* links the spirit to the blood. “The blood is the spirit qi.”^{al,35} This is confirmed in *Su Wen-26* which says: “Blood and qi make up a

person’s spirit, and must be carefully nourished.”^{am}

The descendent texts within the *Ling Shu* inform us that needle techniques are useless without an appreciation of the state of the qi and blood. Yet, if we take *Ling Shu-3*, and *Ling Shu-18* seriously, then spirit in this context is nothing more than the qi and blood itself, or more specifically, the overall state of excess or deficiency of the qi and blood. From this perspective, the message of line two is that one must attend to the state of qi and blood rather than the physical form or the mechanics of needle technique.

Shen and the focus of one’s mind

The rather circumscribed interpretation of spirit propounded in *Ling Shu-3.1* and *Ling Shu-18* is by no means definitive. The following lines from later in *Ling Shu-1.1* itself clearly adopt a broader understanding of the spirit. “The spirit resides in an autumn hair.”^{an,36} Autumn hairs or down are extremely fine, so this means that the spirit resides in paying attention to the smallest details. In another interpretation, the term “autumn hair” is also thought to refer to focusing on the tip of the needle. The successive lines in *Ling Shu-1.1* clarify the role of the practitioner’s spirit at least to the extent that one must be highly focused and concentrated. “Those who would examine disease must calm their minds when gazing upon a patient, looking neither left nor right.”^{ao,37} This focused and concentrated state allows the practitioner to comprehend the spirit within the patient and make a diagnostic assessment. According to Zhang Zhi-Cong, “If when needling, one attains it [spirit] in the heart-mind, then when the spirit connects to those who are sick, one will know whether

the patient will survive or perish.”^{ap, 38}

The spirit here includes, but clearly transcends, a simple awareness of the state of a patient’s qi and blood. It is the way in which one is aware of the patient’s condition.

Line two can then be summarised as meaning that while the inferior practitioner attends to the external mechanics of his/her needle technique, the superior practitioner quite literally attends to the spirit within themselves as well as that of the patient. It will become apparent in the lines below that spirit in this sense is intimately related to one’s appreciation of and interaction with the *ji*-dynamic that will be introduced in line eight.

Shen as a knack or capacity for efficacy

Finally, *shen* may refer to something or someone with a remarkable capacity for efficacy. Its defining characteristic is that it is somehow more than simply an expression of consummate skill. One story in Fan Ye’s *Histories of the Latter Han*^{aq} illustrates this use of the word specifically as it relates to acupuncture. When Emperor He called upon the physician Guo Yu^{ar} to describe his approach to needling, Guo explained:

As for doctors talking about intention, the interstices and pores have extremely subtle divisions, so to follow the qi requires skill. When inserting needles and the stone [probes] between them, being a hair off means failure. The knack exists in the connection between the heart-mind and hand. It can be understood, but it cannot be spoken of.^{as,39}

The language of this passage bears

a 方刺之時，得之于心，則神屬於病者，而知病之存亡矣。

aq. 范曄 (398-455), *Hou Han-Shu* 後漢書。

ar. Emperor He 和帝 (fl. 89-105), Physician Guo Yu 郭玉。

as. 醫之為言意也，腠理至微，隨氣用巧，針石之間，毫芒即乖。神存於心手之際，可得解而不可得言也。

ag. 粗守形者，守刺法也。

ah. 粗守形者，守皮脈肉筋骨之刺。

ai. *zheng qi* 正氣

aj. 上守神者，守人之血氣有餘不足，可補瀉也。

ak. 神者神者正氣也。

al. 血者，神氣也。

am. 血氣者人之神，不可不謹養。

an. 神在秋毫。

ao. 審視病者，靜志觀病人，無左右視也。



The knack for needling that is so difficult to talk of hinges on the quality of one's attention and one's capacity to utilise it when needling.

some remarkable similarities to that used in the *Ling Shu*, and it makes a crucial point regarding the nature of needling. *Shen* here resides in the subtle relationship between the mind and the hand, which both includes and transcends mere skill and technique. It is a “knack” insofar as it is particular skill that can be learned but is often innate or intuitive. That is why “it can be understood but not spoken of.” In line [2], the crude attend to the forms of needle technique but the superior go beyond this to make use of a subtle knack that is necessarily grounded in technique.

This understanding of *shen* amplifies the shadings of the word discussed above. The knack for needling that is so difficult to talk of hinges on the quality of one's attention and one's capacity to utilise it when needling. This is something one must ultimately discover and develop for oneself.

神乎神.客在門.[3]

Spirit oh spirit, there is a guest at the door.

Most commentaries read this line as a statement regarding the correct and pathogenic qi. *Ling Shu-3* contains three statements to this effect.

“The ‘spirit and guest’ is the conjoining of the correct and pathogenic qi.”^{at}

“The ‘spirit’ is the correct qi. The ‘guest’ is the pathogenic qi.”^{au}

“At the door’ means that the pathogenic [qi] travels along the exits and entries of the correct qi.”^{av, 40}

Ling Shu-32 corroborates this interpretation of spirit, emphasising its physiological basis.

“Therefore, the spirit, is the essence qi of the water and grains.”^{aw, 41} Ma Shi adopts a similar perspective, defining the “door” as an afflicted channel. “An affliction by pathogenic qi is at times like the periodic coming and going of a guest, so it is called by the name ‘guest’. The guest at the door is the pathogenic guest [qi] at the gate of each channel.”^{ax}

at. 神客者, 正邪共會也。

au. 神者, 正氣也, 客者, 邪氣也。

av. 在門者, 邪循正氣之所出入也。

aw. 故神者, 水谷之精氣。

ax. 邪氣之所感, 有時如客之往來有期, 名之曰客, 客在門者, 邪客于各經之門戶也。

Yet, *Su Wen-26* uses the phrase “Spirit oh spirit,” in quite a different context that again suggests it is something more and perhaps more subtle than simply the correct qi.

Spirit oh spirit! Although my ears cannot hear it, if my eyes are keen, the heart-mind open and the will luminous, then I will be the only one to be conscious of it. The mouth cannot speak of it, and many look at it, but I alone perceive it. Although it is appropriately obscure, it is clear to me alone, like the wind blowing the clouds. For this reason it is called the spirit.^{ay, 42}

As mentioned above, *ji* and *shen* are nearly synonymous in many contexts. Central to the appreciation of both is a state of open awareness—a presence—that is itself spirit. It is this state of awareness that is emphasised in line three.

Where line two contrasts a spirit of attention with a preoccupation with external forms, line three may be understood as emphasising the importance of a certain quality of attention in assessing states of health and disease.

未睹其疾, 惡知其原.[4]

Without observing the disease, how can you know its origin?

In interpreting this line, *Ling Shu-3.1* emphasises the importance of examining the state of correct and pathogenic qi within the channels prior to treatment. “Without observing the disease means that one must first know about the pathogenic and correct and in which channels there is disease ... how can one know its origins, means that one must first know how to identify the location of the diseased channels.”^{az, 43}

Following this interpretive thread through these first four lines we learn that one must assess the state of the qi and blood prior to actually needling. This is fine as far as it goes, however, we have already established that there is another layer of meaning embedded in this rather self-evident message. The preceding lines of the *Ling Shu Précis* first clarify that not only must one observe a

ay. 神乎神, 耳不聞, 目明心開, 而志先, 慧然獨悟, 口弗能言, 俱視獨見, 適若昏, 昭然獨明, 若風吹雲, 故曰神。
az. 未睹其疾者, 先知邪正何經之疾也.... 惡知其原者, 先知何經之病所取之處也。

disease to identify its cause, one must do so in a very particular way; with concentration, focus and attention to the spirit. Later in *Ling Shu-1.1* we are informed that the “the spirit resides in an autumn hair,”⁴⁴ suggesting that the focus, concentration, or spirit one brings to the diagnostic process must be maintained through the needling process. As already mentioned, “autumn hair” may be understood as both the quality of one’s attention in needling and as the needle itself. This makes perfect sense in that the process of diagnosis and treatment are inextricably intertwined. One’s attention to what is happening around the needle in the course of treatment becomes a means by which one assesses the state of the qi and blood in the channels. Only once we have grasped this can we turn our attention to the mechanics of needle technique.

■ The second half of this article will appear in the next issue of *The Lantern!*

Endnotes

- We are grateful to professors Matthias and Antje Richter, Stephen Birch, Diane Sommers, Sharon Weizenbaum and Craig Mitchell for their helpful comments, questions and criticisms in the course of preparing this manuscript.
- Joseph Keegan identifies the Huang Di lineage of medical texts as an “assemblage of a group of texts composed, exchanged and transmitted among a group which perceives itself to have some common interests and identity.” Most of the other texts in this tradition have since been lost but they included one fifth of the medical texts recorded in the *Han Shu* 漢書 (History of the Han, 1st century) bibliography. Despite its identification with the Huang Di lineage, the *Nei Jing* itself refers to few of these texts. Joseph Keegan, pp. 21-29.
- This collection of texts was not titled the *Ling Shu* until the Tang, *ibid*, pp. 208-209.
- ibid*, pp. 170-219.
- The edition used for references to the *Ling Shu* is *Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi* 黃帝內經靈樞校釋.
- The edition used for references to the *Su Wen* is *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen Jiao Shi* 黃帝內經素問校釋, v2, p. 674.
- Keegan, pp. 208-209.
- Zhang Deng-Ben and Wu Chang-Chun, p. 277.
- Axel Schuessler, p. 93.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, 1.1.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen Jiao Shi*, v2, p. 1155.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen Jiao Shi*, v2, p. 745.
- Translation by Zhang Dai-Nan and Edmund Ryden. Zhang Dai-Nan, p. 207. Unless otherwise noted, all references to classic texts are keyed to the *ICS Concordance Series*. This concordance series is based on a database of all Chinese classical texts and ancient writings, and is produced at the Institute of Chinese Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong. See the bibliography for a table of titles with characters. *Zhou Yi Zhu Zi Suo Yin*, 66/79/22.
- ibid*, p. 207. *Zhou Yi Zhu Zi Suo Yin*, 66/79/22.
- ibid*, *Zhou Yi Zhu Zi Suo Yin*, 66/83/13-14.
- ibid*, *Zhou Yi Zhu Zi Suo Yin*, 6/16/3.
- Huai Nan Zi Zhu Zi Suo Yin*, 11/101/25.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen Jiao Shi*, v2, p.1008.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, v2, p.259.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, v2, p.332.
- Li Ji Zhu Zi Suo Yin*, 43.2/165/25.
- Victor Mair, p. 173. *Zhuang Zi Suo Yin*, 18/49/17. A similar passage also appears in the *Lie Zi*. *Lie Zi Zhu Zi Suo Yin*: 1/3/1.
- Isabelle Robinet (2008), pp.536-37.
- ibid*.
- Robinet (1995). pp.105-120. See also Qing Xi-Tai, pp.305-308.
- Xiao 小 (small) is generally understood to mean 微 (fine).
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, v1, p66.
- Ma Shi 馬蒔 (1586). *Ling Shu Zhu Zheng Fa Wei* 黃帝內經靈樞注証發微.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, v1, p67.
- Zhang Zhi-Cong 張志聰 (1670). *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen Ji Zhu* 黃帝內經素問集註 (*Collected Commentaries on the Ling Shu*), in Cao Deng-Zhang (1988), ed. *Zhong Guo Yi Xue Da Cheng* 中國醫學大成, vol. 1. Shanghai; *Shang Hai Ke Xue Ji Shu Chu Ban She* 上海科學技術出版社, p. 3.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*: v1, p. 67.
- ibid*.
- ibid*.
- ibid*.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, v1, p11.
- ibid*.
- Alternately, this may be read as “one will know whether the disease will persist or resolve.” Zhang Zhi-Cong 張志聰 (1670). *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen Ji Zhu* 黃帝內經素問集註 (*Collected Commentaries on the Ling Shu*), in Cao Deng-Zhang 曹燾章 (1988), ed. *Zhong Guo Yi Xue Da Cheng* 中國醫學大成, vol. 2. Shanghai; *Shang Hai Ke Xue Ji Shu Chu Ban She* 上海科學技術出版社, p. 5.
- Hou Han Shu Ji Zhu Shi Zong He Yin De* 後漢書及注釋綜合引得 (1966), Taipei: Chinese Materials and Research Aids Service Centre/Harvard Yenching Institute: 112 下/5b-6b.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, v1, p67.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, v1, p. 509.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen Jiao Shi*, v1, pp 364-65.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, v1, p67.
- Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu Jiao Shi*, v1, p11.

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