Facing the Demon-Winds of Self: 
Gallbladder in the Treatment of Depression

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Preface

In attempt to answer the questions of this treatise, I relied upon English translations of primary sources, English-language secondary sources and commentary. As I do not know the Chinese language, either ancient or modern, I was solely reliant upon those scholars who did. This work represents my interpretation of scholarly work done on the Chinese medical Gallbladder itself as it is situated within the theoretical framework of Chinese medicine. I am fully aware that if I were able to read ancient or, even, modern Chinese, my questions and their answers might change accordingly. My suspicion is that there is a rich field of inquiry on the Gallbladder in Chinese, and other languages for that matter, that are inaccessible to me given my language limitations. The focus of this treatise is on exploring the multi-dimensional and often un-examined understandings of Gallbladder, thereby showing how effective it can be in treating mental-emotional afflictions. I argue that Gallbladder, and the formula Wen Dan Tang, in particular, is especially useful in treating a Western psychological understanding of depression. However, I am not a psychologist; I am not qualified to diagnose, treat or make qualitative statements regarding the state of depression, psychology in general or its history. What I present here is a layperson’s understanding of common psychological terms, concepts, diagnoses and treatments filtered through the works of secondary sources and clinical experience.
Introduction

The Question

Traditional Chinese medical (TCM) education understands the Gallbladder as an extraordinary organ; it is the *yang* pair with the *yin* Liver in an internal/external relationship; it is paired with the *Triple Burner* in its meridian *shaoyang* relationship and related to the Heart as its clock-opposite, connected to it by a divergent meridian (Maciocia, 2005, Schnyer & Allen, 2001). Gallbladder belongs to the Wood Element, which encompasses the movement of Wind, the season of spring, and the emotion anger. The *Nei Jing* states that all eleven organs rest on the Gallbladder’s rightful function, indicating that this organ is crucial for maintaining the health of the human body (Ni, 1995). Despite its classical importance, this organ does not factor prominently in the broader scope of TCM education. When it does it is most often in terms of treating musculoskeletal pain. To a lesser extent, the Gallbladder is included in pattern differentials for insomnia (i.e. Heart and Gallbladder *qi* deficiency) but rarely, if ever, is this pattern explored any further than a paragraph in a textbook.

More esoterically, Gallbladder is implicated in treating a host of mental and emotional disorders with a frequency that is startling given the minimal education on Gallbladder the typical TCM student receives. One would think that, given the implications, there would be a greater number of solid, theoretical explanations as to *why* it is so often used. Alas, there is little discussion on the subject and when the topic of Gallbladder comes up in the TCM classroom, few have something to offer.

Why is Gallbladder used in treating cases of mental and emotional imbalances and how does it do that? Why is *Wen Dan Tang*, ‘Warm the Gallbladder Decoction’, one
of the most often prescribed TCM formulas for treating a Gallbladder-mediated depression as it is understood in the Western psychological model (Schnyer & Allen, 2001)? These are the questions that drive this treatise. It is my hope that by doing a more nuanced study of the classical and esoteric roots of Gallbladder, we will find why Gallbladder can be so effective at facing those demon-Winds of self.

A Word about Translation

Andrew Ellis, Nigel Wiseman, and Ken Boss in their introduction to (1991) *Fundamentals of Chinese acupuncture* highlight the limitations to translating Chinese medical thinking in a culture bound by the English language and Western concepts. They warn that stuffing Chinese medical observations, diagnoses and treatments into Western medical concepts potentially leads the Western practitioner to erroneous conclusions. This is true as well for mental and emotional disorders: There may not be a true Chinese medical equivalent to the Western ‘depression’, at least not in the way we conceptualize an autonomous self. An additional complication is that the way the Chinese understood psyche and spirit was all but excluded from Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), marginalizing the ideas of po, hun, and shen as superstitious and thus suspect and difficult to translate (Ellis et al, 1991).

Though exploring the concepts of po, hun, etc., is outside the scope of this treatise, it is important to recognize that these concepts do exist within the greater Chinese medical literature. By including the possibility that these ‘superstitious’ elements, even as general concepts connected to their respective organs, are healing tools, we do our best to situate our Chinese medical understanding within a classical, cultural
context. This is truly crucial for understanding what was meant then and what is meant now in Chinese medicine to the extent that we do not irrevocably misinterpret and thus misuse ancient Chinese medical concepts. Situating Chinese medical concepts within an historical and cultural context, even minimally, can guard against misinterpretation and misuse, which is one way to ensure the best possible use of Chinese medicine in a modern context. As Ellis, Wiseman and Boss say in their book, “Historical questions cannot be ignored if clinical performance is to be preserved.” (Ellis, et al, 1991, p. vi).

What are considered superstitions are some of the very things that can potentially apply to our Western model of the psyche. The concepts of po, hun, shen, etc. indicate that a Chinese medical organ network has a psycho-emotional, even spiritual, function in addition to its physiological function. This idea of a psycho-emotional function is imperative in understanding the connection between the functional Chinese organs and modern mental health.

No Chinese medical concept can be isolated from its historical and cultural context; indeed, I would argue, no medical concept, whether Chinese, Indian, German, American, French, etc. can be separated from their relevant historical context. For Chinese medicine, in particular, no Chinese medical concept can be isolated from another; Chinese medical concepts all belong within a holistic frame and do not lend themselves readily to objective and isolated tests of veracity and measurability (Ellis et al, 1991). Chinese medicine is a relational medicine first and foremost. With that said, Chinese medical concepts can and must evolve over time, situating themselves within new historical and cultural contexts, and thus adapting to what is needed for that time. This is how ancient Chinese medicine can become relevant and useful in a modern day
era. Knowing the historical roots can birth flexible and modern branches, grounded in traditional concepts yet expanding into an effective modern practice.

There is no separation between body and mind/psyche in Chinese medicine. Both concepts are implicated in each of the Five Elements, in the full on expansion of Wood, for example, or the intense contraction of Metal, etc. The classical Chinese were not describing a mechanistic idea of how the body and/or mind works but rather they described aspects of what it looks like to be a living human being using qualitative, not quantitative, analogies. These concepts are not technical terms but rather the medicine is a language of symbols and images, relationships and movements. According to Ellis, Wiseman and Boss, even anatomical terms have meaning only in relationship to the greater concept of the elemental movement to which they belong. They give the example of sinew as meaning not only tendon but encompassing the images of Liver and wood; sinew has meaning in relation to the muscles or flesh, which reflects back its meaning in relation to sinew, earth and liver, etc. (Ellis et al, 1991, p. viii). In Chinese medicine, the part contains the whole and the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

Relational Medicine

A highly symbolic and relational medicine, Chinese medical words and concepts are stand-ins for complex natural phenomenon. The medicine cannot be viewed as a linear projection of cause and effect as its efficacy is not mechanistic; rather, all terms, concepts and trajectories of the presenting illness and relevant remedy only have meaning within a relational context (Kaptchuk, 2000). Chinese medicine, having been heavily influenced by Taoism and Confucianism (Maciocia, 2009), must be understood (and thus
properly applied) within the mental framework that every organ, meridian, malady, and thus therapy has its meaning in relation to the others. This relational and holistic view is the paradigm within which traditional and classical Chinese medical theories work: *Yin/yang* theory, Five-Element (phases) theory, internal organ theory and meridian theory are the foundational concepts of both classical and traditional Chinese medicine. These concepts, most likely initially independent but united during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) via the text the *Inner Classic* (Ju-Yi & Robertson, 2008), make up the substance and movement of the human body. They are interdependent, supporting and informing one another to create the basis for, and movement of, the physiological human being (Ju-Yi & Robertson, 2008).

Theory holds that everything in the universe has at its base the interplay of *yin* and *yang*, including the human body and mind. The physiology and pathology of the body comes from the internal organs while the meridians are the network or uniting mesh connecting organ to organ, organ to body, body to the external world. Through the meridians, the external world has access to the body, leading to either health or pathology, depending on the context (Ju-Yi & Robertson, 2008). The meridians are further categorized in their placement in the body, the directional movement of *qi* and to which organs they belong while the organs maintain their own functional integrity. For example, *taiyang* is about opening outward and connects to Bladder and Small Intestine, *shaoyang*, connected to Gallbladder and Triple Burner, is the pivot straddling the interior and exterior and *yangming*, connected to Stomach and Large Intestine, closes and goes inward, etc. These levels of *qi* movement only work in relationship with each other as you cannot have something that can go “in” without the ability of it going “out.”
Likewise with the internal organs: The Spleen maintains its physiology and functional integrity only in relationship to the Stomach, the Lungs, etc. A Chinese medical organ is seen within a state of comparing and contrasting; but only in relationship does it exist (Kaptchuck, 2000).

Because Chinese medicine is a relational medicine, a concept such as “Spleen”, “Kidney” or “Gallbladder,” whether speaking of organ or meridian, in isolation, have no meaning or relevance. In the context of psychology, the idea of an individual self as a separate entity that feels, thinks, and has agency independent of the rest of society did not exist in the ancient Chinese world. A separate self that has agency is a modern Western concept (Macicocia, 2009, Dharmananda, 2005). In ancient China, the concept of self was only possible in relation to others, one’s place in society and, by extension, the natural world. However, that does not mean that ancient Chinese principles cannot be applied to the maladies of modern day (Dharmananda, 2005). Even Ellis, Wiseman and Boss allow for the applicability of Chinese medicine in our modern day, so long as we understand the cultural and historical situation of our medical concepts (Ellis et al, 1991).

For the case of depression as understood by Western psychology, Chinese medicine still applies. What it requires, however, is larger interpretation of ancient Chinese medical concepts, for example seeing the physiological qi flow sequence as representing the development of a healthy individual psyche (Yuen, 2002). A medicine that employs symbols as its language is a medicine that lends itself well to the principles of Western psychology, a Western medical discipline that could be considered highly symbolic itself.

For this treatise, it is important to understand the concept of Gallbladder within this relational-framework first, looking as closely as we can to what the ancient Chinese
thinkers knew to be “Gallbladder.” This means placing Gallbladder meridian and organ within the appropriate category of yin or yang and all that that means; situating Gallbladder within the Five Element cycles; how it is influenced by pathogenic factors (Cold, Heat, Damp, Wind, Phlegm, Fire, etc.) and understanding its relationship to the Heart and the external world. Working through these relationships as theory and the classics allow, perhaps we will find firm ground upon which to stand in reinterpreting and applying Gallbladder to our modern Western conception of self, thus making Gallbladder even more relevant for today.

Looking at the nature of Gallbladder within these relationships will allow us to gain a deeper understanding as to why, in Traditional Chinese Medicine, Gallbladder meridian is so frequently used in treating not only musculoskeletal pain, and diseases of the sensory organs but also psycho-emotional disorders, especially the disorder of depression. Additionally, in exploring the nature of Gallbladder, we will gain a better understanding as to why the formula Wen Dan Tang or ‘Warm the Gallbladder Decoction’ is such an effective and often used formula for cases of depression, as using this formula is not intuitive for the average Chinese medical practitioner, given the current education on Gallbladder in the modern American Traditional Chinese medical education.

References


Chapter 1
The Nature of Gallbladder

Throughout the standard Traditional Chinese medical (TCM) education, there are clues linking Gallbladder to mental-emotional health, particularly in the treatment of depression: As stated in the introduction, Wen Dan Tang is one of the most often prescribed formulas for treating depression; Gallbladder is indicated in a common and often recalcitrant pattern of chronic insomnia, to name but a few examples. Usually in TCM education, the emphasis on Gallbladder is on its use for the treatment of musculoskeletal disorders – sciatica, troubles with gait, walking, migraine headaches. But what of the other, more hidden uses of Gallbladder? We can clearly see how Gallbladder effectively treats Piriformis Syndrome but what is this curious organ’s connection to mental-emotional health and wellbeing?

In order to begin answering the question, ‘what is Gallbladder’, looking at the classics is a necessary first step. The most accessible classic is the Huang di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine). It is the most accessible not only because of its multiple translations into English but also because it is the first introduction many TCM students have to the classics and is a text we return to year after year, mining it for more insight into the theories and practices of our medicine. Perhaps, then, the Nei Jing is the most foundational text the TCM student has in Chinese medicine as it is taught in the United States.
Despite, or perhaps because of, its historical weight, very few sentences in the *Nei Jing* are devoted to the explanation and use of Gallbladder in the greater scheme of Chinese medical practices. What is said about this organ, however, is potent and rather esoteric in its meanings. *Su Wen* chapter nine of the *Nei Jing* states, “The zang and fu organs I have described are all dependent on the functions of the gallbladder and its decision-making” (Ni, 1995, p. 41), placing great importance upon the Gallbladder in the health of the entire human body. The chapter goes on to say that, “The gallbladder corresponds to spring, initiation, and decisiveness. When the gallbladder qi is properly ascended and dispersed, the other eleven organs can easily function in health and prosperity” (Ni, 1995, p. 41). In chapter eleven of the *Su Wen*, the Gallbladder is said to be of earthly *qi*, sharing that category with the Brain, Marrow, Bones, Blood Vessels, and Uterus, or, namely, the extraordinary *fu* organs. What makes them extraordinary is their ability to be simultaneously hollow thoroughfares and yet able to store essences, or those vital substances of the human body. This is in contrast to the Small Intestine, Large Intestine, Stomach, Triple Burner, and Bladder, which, so says the text, can only move and circulate, thereby making them in nature of heavenly *qi* (Ni, 1995). In *Su Wen* chapter eight, the text says that the Gallbladder is the judge as it has the power of discernment; however, the text then goes on to say that the “king’s job”, which is presumably the Heart, is to make the decision and that all organs’ normal functioning depends upon the clarity of the spirit (Ni, 1995, p. 34). These statements point to the connection between the Gallbladder, Heart and the health and clarity of the spirit, upon which rests the health of the living, functional human body.
The *Nei Jing*’s final comments on the Gallbladder specifically have to do with its illness; it is in this passage that the connection between Gallbladder and bile is articulated. The Emperor asks Qi Bo what the cause of a bitter taste in the mouth is, a taste that is relieved by puncturing the point *yanglingquan* (GB34); Qi Bo replies that this bitter taste is due to Heat in the Gallbladder, which suppresses the Gallbladder’s functions thereby allowing bile to be excreted upward instead of in its normal distribution. Additional signs that the Gallbladder is suppressed is that the patient will be indecisive and worry a great deal. Qi Bo then gives the treatment prescription and cites a discussion on Gallbladder Heat and bitter taste in an older text called *The interaction of the twelve yin-yang officials* [*yin yang shi er guan xian shi*] (Ni, 1995). The statement does give a clear indication that the essences of Gallbladder, i.e. bile, is hindered by Heat and a lack of Gallbladder *qi*.

In modern TCM education, one of the foundation scholastic texts, (1987) *Chinese acupuncture and moxibustion*, affectionately known as the “CAM” book, gives a somewhat sterile and clinical explanation of Gallbladder. It states that the organ’s main function is to “…store bile and continuously excrete it…” thereby facilitating in the process of digestion (Xinnong, 1987, p. 38). The understanding from this text is that Gallbladder *qi* is supposed to descend (a difference from the *Nei Jing*’s understanding of the *qi* ascending and dispersing), it is responsible for the free and smooth flow of *qi* in its pairing with the Liver, and, with the Liver, has a “relation” to emotional changes (Xinnong, 1987, p. 38). The symptoms exhibited due to presumably a lack of ‘emotional change’ are fear, palpitations, insomnia and dream-disturbed sleep. At the tail end of the paragraph dedicated to Gallbladder, mention is made that the Gallbladder is not like the
other five *fu* due to the fact that it can store, not just move, a bodily substance, in this case bile. This ability to simultaneously store and move bile makes the Gallbladder one of the “‘extra fu organs’” (Xinnong, 1987, p. 38). We see a connection between Gallbladder and emotions, but as it is mediated through the Liver. Little explanation is given on this connection, however. What is interesting here is that it is a lack of change in an emotional state that gives rise to various symptoms, including symptoms that affect the Heart (palpitations, insomnia, etc.). A healthy body and mind, then, arises from fluid and dynamic states of emotion. If the movement of emotions becomes stuck or frozen, then health suffers.

Peter Deadman in his practical work (2007) *A manual of acupuncture* begins his discourse on the Gallbladder by noting the extensive surfaces the Gallbladder channel covers from head to toe, criss-crossing as it traverses the lateral ends of the human body. Deadman agrees with CAM that the primary functions of Gallbladder are to store and secrete bile but he also adds that Gallbladder is about courage, decision-making and judgment. Through its relationship to the Liver, Gallbladder can treat the eyes and the ears if assaulted by an exterior Wind-Heat or Wind-Cold attack; it can treat unilateral headaches and is responsible for, in its role as keeper of the ministerial Fire, siphoning excess stagnant Fire away from the Liver so as to preserve the *yin* of the body. Because the smooth flow of body fluids depends on the smooth flow of *qi*, Gallbladder is used in treatment of Phlegm disorders, can clear Damp-Heat, clear pathogenic factors stuck in the *shaoyang* layer, and can treat what Deadman calls “disorders of the spirit and ethereal soul (hun)” (Deadman, 2007, p. 421). He argues that Gallbladder can treat these kinds of disorders due to three things: (1) the Gallbladder rules judgment, decisiveness and
courage; (2) its divergent channel enters the Heart and (3) as a Wood organ, it is the mother of Fire or the Heart. He goes on to connect Gallbladder with the *dai mai* as well as the sinews and marrow via *hui* Meeting points being located on the Gallbladder channel. However, Deadman does not explain further any of these relationships.

Giovanni Maciocia, in another TCM foundational work, (2005) *The foundations of Chinese medicine*, echoes both CAM and Deadman in that the Gallbladder’s main function is to store and move bile but explores these relationships a bit further. Maciocia links Gallbladder even more closely to Liver’s function, stating that Gallbladder’s patterns are “nearly always very closely related” to those patterns of the Liver (Maciocia, 2005, p. 661). He understands that Gallbladder’s functions are wholly dependent upon Liver’s functions, and most certainly not the other way around, which is a different take on Gallbladder’s relationship to the other eleven organs as stated in the *Nei Jing*. Maciocia links Gallbladder closely with the Spleen via Damp accumulation and the failure of Spleen to perform its transformation and transportation functions properly. From a psycho-emotional perspective, Maciocia agrees with Deadman that Gallbladder rules decisiveness and courage but additionally links the organ to emotions of anger, frustration and “bottled-up” resentment, which can then cause the Liver *qi* to stagnate (Maciocia, 2005). Over time, says Maciocia, this pent up frustration can explode into Liver and Gallbladder Fire, flaring upwards and causing irritability, headaches, bitter taste in the mouth and thirst. Maciocia implicates Gallbladder in the generation of Fire whereas Deadman understands Gallbladder’s role as moving this Fire out and away from the Liver so as to preserve *yin* (Deadman, 1998). I understand this divergence of opinions as having more to do with the differences between Gallbladder channel versus
Gallbladder organ. Gallbladder channel moves whereas Gallbladder organ can store, as mentioned several times already.

On a psychological level, Maciocia goes deeper into what Gallbladder is and what it represents in his book (2009) *The psyche in Chinese medicine*. He reiterates that Gallbladder is in charge of decisiveness and courage, producing the colloquialism of having ‘gall’ or brazen courage. This courage is defined as taking initiative in life, in making decisions and being able to make changes. Comparing it to the Kidneys who rule the will, Gallbladder is the motive force that enables us to turn this will into decisive action. He further connects this courage to the Heart in its capacity to enable the *shen* to carry out these Gallbladder-made decisions, putting them into action. For Maciocia, Gallbladder *qi* ascends (not descends as in CAM) and in its ascending can stimulate the ascending of the Liver *qi* and the Ethereal Soul or the *hun*. This is necessary should the *shen* be inspired by creativity, life-dreams, planning, ideas (Maciocia, 2009), or, in short, the grand vision of one’s life. The Ethereal Soul or *hun* is thought to have movement; without this movement, there is a tendency for depression. For the case of depression, Maciocia understands the Liver *qi* is not ascending properly due to a weak Gallbladder *qi*, which is unable to provide the motive force for ascending the *qi*.

Additionally, Gallbladder raises the *yang qi* to the head and in all the channels; any obstruction in any channel, then, can be treated via the Gallbladder channel. The ability to make a decision after all the information has been analyzed and the courage to take action, moving *yang qi* throughout each channel is what a healthy Gallbladder from a psychological perspective is all about, according to Maciocia.
Gallbladder in Human Psychological Development

To move further into the psychological and emotional perspectives on Gallbladder, Jeffrey Yuen in his (2002) lecture on Gallbladder presents a succinct and classically derived understanding of this extraordinary fu. Yuen explains human psyche development from a Chinese medical perspective, all within the context of the physiological qi flow sequence. He breaks up this psychological development into three phases: (1) self-surviving, (2) interacting with the rest of the world, and (3) differentiation of self. Once the survival of self is established, then the psyche can move beyond self and begin to explore the external world; in interacting with the external world, the psyche begins to perceive the world and the self in a limited way in a process of self-differentiation.

This understanding of psychological development is predicated upon the idea that psychological qi flow, as it moves through the meridians in a clock-like fashion, is true. Recall that qi begins its circulation in the Lung channel (3-5am) and moves through to Large Intestine (5-7am), Stomach (7-9am), Spleen (9-11am), Heart (11am-1pm), Small Intestine (1-3pm), Bladder (3-5pm), Kidney (5-7pm), Triple Burner (7-9pm), Pericardium (9-11pm), Gallbladder (11pm-1am), Liver (1-3am) and then back to Lung again. If we take the sequence of qi flow to be something that represents the way in which a human is not only healthy in body but also in psyche, then this psychological flow is also the way in which we can understand pathology. Yuen groups the primary meridians according to the three phases of this psyche development, with the Lung, Large Intestine, Stomach, Spleen, Heart and Small Intestine as representing the prerequisite activities for the self-survival of human life: Respiration, eating/drinking and sleeping.
The Heart function represents the juncture at which the first phase begins to give way to the second in that as the Heart rules sleep; dreaming becomes a way in which interaction with the world at large begins. Taking this into waking life, the Heart and Small Intestine represent conquest, exploration and discovery of those things outside of self, allowing for all to enter and be assimilated. Moving into Bladder and Kidney, the activities of exploration and discovery turn inward as the human psyche goes deeper into the self, conquering so that a better understanding of self is attained. According to Yuen, inherent in the pursuit of self-understanding of the Bladder and Kidney is the action of making choices that further support the idea of self we are fashioning. Therefore, the decisions and judgments we make are fashioned in such a way that they support the concept of self we have created.

Differentiation of self and the world is the third phase of human psyche development and belongs under the jurisdiction of Triple Burner, Pericardium, Gallbladder, and Liver. The Gallbladder, in particular, is responsible for differentiating the self from the rest of the world. It determines what our limitations will be, serving to provide the way in which we develop a sense of self in a Freudian context (Thurschwell, 2000), and preserve the sanity of the conscious self in a Jungian context (Jacobi, 1973). As this sequence represents a healthy psychological qi flow, differentiation of self and an establishment of ego is a healthy activity. Placing limits on the world and the self within the world leads to some measure of ability to function in relationship to the world around. The whole idea of Heart protection, or the Pericardium, then, according to Yuen, is this idea of self-preservation, a shielding of the self-concept in its current level of development (Yuen 2002).
According to Yuen, challenges to this carefully crafted self are typically met with suspicion or flat denial, an unwillingness to allow for a challenge to the self-concept and the limitations therein for fear of being destroyed (Yuen, 2002). Gallbladder is responsible for siphoning these challenges and confrontations away from the carefully differentiated self (Yuen, 2002) and, if it chooses, expelling them via the exterior. When faced with this confrontation, Gallbladder has a choice: It can either courageously confront the challenge and make the necessary changes to self-understanding by manipulating the limits of self- and world-perception or, the Gallbladder can repel these challenges and experiences as not applicable or acceptable to the self at that moment in time.

If Gallbladder does not or cannot decide how to deal with these confrontations, either due to a deficiency, obstruction, etc., then these experiences and injuries to self get stored away for a later date at which the psyche has enough resources to deal with them. This in effect buys the psyche time, averting a potential psychological break and thus maintaining self-preservation. One is tempted to think that Gallbladder itself stores these experiences, able to hold them in an ‘in-between state’ via its nature as extraordinary fu as well as occupying the place of pivot, or shaoyang. Yet we know from the classics that this cannot be true: Gallbladder, precisely because it is an extraordinary fu, cannot, by definition, hold onto that which is impure. The extraordinary organs are said to retain that which is pure because it is this purity that is the residence of the Essences, which is the base from which spirit can manifest in the human body (Larre & Rochat de la Valle, 2003). Therefore, an exploration of Gallbladder as extraordinary fu as well as an
exploration of how and where Gallbladder ‘stores’ confrontations to the self are keys to our continued understanding the role Gallbladder plays in mental-emotional health.

**Gallbladder as Extraordinary Fu**

As already mentioned, the Gallbladder is considered in the classical texts an extraordinary *fu*, along with the Brain, Uterus, Bones, Marrow, *Mai*, and *Bao*. As an extraordinary *fu*, the Gallbladder is something that is not only able to move via its *yang* properties but is also something that has the ability to store (Larre & de la Valle, 2003). The extraordinary *fu* are just that, extraordinary chiefly because of their ability to simultaneously move that which is stored as well as store the essences. As mentioned before, the Gallbladder does not store just anything. Rather the Gallbladder is said to store what is “pure” and “clear” (Larre & Rochat de la Valle, 2003, p. 134) It is responsible for storing essences, from which the spirits, or the *jing shen*, especially of the Heart, are able to express themselves with peace and a sense of stability (Larre & Rochat de la Valle, 2003). In particular the Gallbladder stores the *ye*, those thick fluids that circulate in and become the marrow of the bones as well as the spinal fluid leading up to the brain (Yuen, 2002). This essence, in addition to being the concrete connection to the marrow, bones, brain and by extension the Kidneys, is what is pure, clear and affords the Gallbladder the correct and determined vision for the rest of the meridians and organs to follow (Larre & Rochat de la Valle, 2003). As an organ that stores the *ye* and is connected to the Kidneys, the Gallbladder has the ability to make the *yin* and the *yang* of the body not only circulate but also communicate. Thus, one interpretation of *Su Wen* chapter nine is that the other eleven organs rely on the Gallbladder in its role of
determining the direction of life via its direct connection to primordial *yin* and *yang* and the Kidneys (Larre & Rochat de la Valle, 2003).

One can also interpret this as the Gallbladder being that essential connection between the eight extraordinary meridians and *fu* or pre-natal *yin* and *yang* to that of the post-natal *qi* and Blood of the twelve primary (Yuen, 2002). This connection is not only essential, but also, so the classical texts would indicate, sets the context within which the rest of the organs, meridians, and the entire body and mind are directed (Larre & Rochat de la Vallee, 2003). Therefore, not only does the Gallbladder carry within its functions the ability to be extraordinary *fu*, but it is the very link between the eight extraordinary meridians and *fu* and the twelve primary meridians and organs (Yuen, 2002). This gives yet another new meaning to the *Su Wen* chapter nine statement that the health of all primary eleven organs/meridians rely on the Gallbladder. Indeed, the Gallbladder can be understood to represent the connection between that which is our heavenly endowment, or *jing*, our divine mandate and what we do with it here on earth. According to one tradition of Chinese medical thought, it is this connection to, and consequent pursuit of, our heavenly mandate as it is stored within our *jing* that determines the health or illness our total being (Jarret, 2004).

Gallbladder is said to store essences, what is pure and clear but what about bile? In the *Ling Shu* chapter two, it is said that these Gallbladder essences are ‘central,’ or *zhong jing* (Larre & Rochat de la Vallee, 2003). Interpretations apply to both the connection between Gallbladder and the marrow, that innermost part of the bone, but also in connection with Gallbladder with the middle *jiao* and digestion. We see Gallbladder in the role of connection between heaven and earth, heavenly *jing* and earthly *qi*. However,
Gallbladder is said to never touch what is unclean, such as Stomach and Large Intestine do via food. Rather, Gallbladder remains clear, pure and stores the bile with which the unclean can be transformed into something usable. But even this bile is not just bile in the biomedical sense of the substance, rather this bile serves to convert outside fluids taken in via the mouth and Stomach into thin and thick fluids that either go to nourish the primary zang-fu or go to ye, the essences that circulate in brain and spine. According to Yuen (2002), the ye becomes part of one’s hormonal system, which is understood to be governed by the Kidneys. This central essence of bile, and, ye, come from the post-natal qi but then gets converted into essence qi. This conversion allows for the spiritual aspects of the zang-fu to be able to express themselves via the health of their essences. This exchange that is governed by the Gallbladder, then, connects the very earthly core of the human being with the essential qi that sustains the spirits (Yuen, 2002).

If we take these connections to be true, the Gallbladder, then, has a special clarity that is at the center of our being (Larre & Rochat de la Vallee, 2003), connecting our pre- and post-natal qi and ensuring the determined direction of our lives. Healthy and strong Gallbladder qi does not waver in its course; it makes the right decision and springs forth with determination and courage, setting the direction for the rest of the body in the process. Perhaps this ability of Gallbladder to set the direction of our lives comes, in part, from the bile’s ability to digest and transform those life experiences that enter our beings from the outside. We can see this in a very physical aspect such as ingesting food into the Stomach and needing bile secretion to break down fats, thereby rendering them useful to the body; likewise, Phlegm in a Chinese medical sense can be like those fat-like or difficult-to-digest life experiences that Gallbladder’s bile enables us to digest, assimilate
or expel depending upon what is needed. Gallbladder, at the center and an integral part of our digestion, the functions of transformation and transportation, is what allows us to take in new experiences and make them our own or reject them as harmful. It breaks things down so that the body and the psyche can benefit from them.

_Gallbladder Meridian_

We can see the importance of the Gallbladder organ as extraordinary _fu_ and its storage of essences, but where injuries to the ego get stored is still not clear. As we shall see, the meridian plays a crucial role in this physiological and psychological response to those things that threaten the self-concept as it is known at any given time. Yuen points out in his lecture that Gallbladder is the very last _yang_ meridian, and, as such, Gallbladder is one of the most important meridians as it represents a pivot for when _yang_ turns back into _yin_ and the cycle starts anew. For Yuen, the Gallbladder meridian is the meridian of confrontation and change; he argues that it is the only meridian that communicates with the Brain in a _yang_ context at the level of _jing_, connecting directly with the _jing_ (Marrow) and the Brain (Yuen, 2002). _Jing_ is the stuff of the life we have already lived, the experiences from our past that reside in the Brain, i.e. our long-term memory (in contrast to _xue_, which is the rolling experiences of our present lives). For Yuen and his spiritual perspective, if the Brain is full and content with the experiences accumulated at the end of life, then reincarnation is no longer necessary (Yuen. 2002). If, however, rebirth is called for, then Gallbladder is responsible for initiating this process, not least of which is in its connection to the _jing_ but also in its role as coursing ministerial Fire (Yuen, 2002). This connection to the Marrow and the Brain is supported by the fact
that, in addition to the *du mai*, points on the Gallbladder channel allow for access to the Marrow and thus the Brain (GB20, GB13, GB15, GB16, GB39, etc.) (Deadman, 1998).

Yuen (2002) understands this zig-zagging as the Gallbladder meridian’s simultaneous ability to connect with as well as siphon away from the Brain those experiences that are troubling or threaten to burn up the *jing* or, in Yuen’s more Buddhist perspective (very broadly speaking), reignite the Fires of reincarnation (Yuen, 2002). Depending upon what one is trying to achieve – a cessation of rebirth in a karmic and cosmic sense or the initiation of reinvention in a psycho-emotional sense, the Gallbladder meridian’s functions as *yang* and connection to *jing* are key.

Yuen’s assertion that Gallbladder is the most important *yang* meridian for rebirth also makes sense on a psychological level as it takes bravery to relinquish *yang* and head into *yin*, a representation of death. Without death you cannot have life just as without winter you cannot have a spring. Gallbladder is that key place of pivoting on the brink of life and death. On an earthly plane, we can see Gallbladder as healthy if it can move its *yang* into the next phase, which is *yin*, confronting death in the promise of rebirth and new *yang*. In effect, then, the *yang* strength and warmth of Gallbladder meridian is the initiation of rebirth, or a new spring for the human being, whether that be in the spiritual context of a reincarnated soul, or in the cycles of the human psyche during one lifetime in the human body.

Going back to Yuen’s understanding of Gallbladder siphoning away confrontations to the self, where do these experiences go? They cannot be stored within
the organ itself as that space is reserved for what is pure; therefore, there must be some other place that injuries to the ego can be stored for a later date of reconciliation. As mentioned earlier, Gallbladder is the link to the eight extraordinary meridians as well as being an extraordinary fu itself. This is key in not only its place in maintaining yin, yang and the cycles of life, but also in its connection to the yin and yang wei mai and yin and yang qiao mai, and, most importantly for the purpose of this treatise, its connection with the dai mai:

From a psycho-emotional perspective, Yuen understands the yin and yang wei mai as those vessels responsible for orienting our psyche in time (Yuen, 2012). He sees the Liver as the organ that deals with storing time and short-term memory (Yuen, 2012). This is justified in the Liver’s function of storing xue or, what Yuen defines as those experiences that are current, rolling towards and into us (recall that this is in contradistinction to the Brain and Kidneys that store long-term memory). Yin wei mai is the memory of what one has done where yang wei mai is a reflection of what one looked like when doing the things remembered; together, yin and yang wei link the psyche in time. This is accessed through Gallbladder meridian points GB 13 through GB20, which are the trajectory of yang wei mai. These points are considered to be access points to the ‘keepers’ of time. As keepers of time, Yuen argues that these mai not only allow for quick access to good memories but also traumatic memories. He argues that the psyche can resurrect those harmful memories as a way of keeping the self from moving forward. To illustrate this, he gives the example of the patient who develops arthritis due to the ongoing history, or story, of asking what the use of doing enjoyable things is when this traumatic incident happened in the past (Yuen, 2012). Unconsciously, this incident
becomes a good excuse for doing less and uses the *jing* to keep these memories locked in while the *yin* and *yang wei* keep these memories salient in the subconscious. If Yuen is correct, then we can start to see the connection of or the blending of short-term memory into long-term memory: The Liver is the first storage of short-term, or conscious memory, the *yin* and *yang wei* via the Gallbladder meridian is the intermediary or subconscious level while, via the extraordinary nature of these *mai* and Gallbladder, involves *jing* or long-term memory, thereby incorporating the story into the fabric of one’s identity.

If *yin* and *yang wei mai* can be considered the keepers of time, then the *yang* and *yin qiao mai* are the keepers of space; together, both pairs of extraordinary meridians orient the psyche in time and space, telling the story of the differentiated self’s identity as it has in the past and as it is currently manifesting in a specific time and space. The *qiao mai*, according to Yuen, are about one’s current position in the world, or one’s stance in the world. This includes how the psyche stands up to the world and how its stands up to itself in the world (Yuen, 2012). *Yang qiao mai* is about seeing what needs to change in the outside world and embodies rebellion with the flavor of urgency. Yuen sees migraines as a pathology of *yang qiao mai*, the push that something need to be done immediately, no time for sleeping or eating (Yuen, 2012). *Yin qiao mai* is concerned with the inner world and the changes that need to be made on the introspective level, or where the psyche is in the space of the body, self, etc.

Gallbladder is intimately connected with all four of the above extraordinary meridians via point location as well as the fact that Gallbladder, in being *yang* and embodying the psyche-level of self-differentiation in the world, is very much interested
in the way the psyche sees itself in the world. *Yang qiao mai* enters the Brain via BL1 and goes through to GB20, in and then out of the Brain, bringing change, or Wind with it (Yuen, 2012). In the trajectory of these vessels, recall that the *dai mai* ends at GB28, where the *yang qiao mai* picks up at GB29: Using these points and calling upon the psycho-emotional functions of these meridians, according to Yuen, we can treat the patient that has suffered disappointment somewhere in time, where time has become the enemy for the patient due to the patient not getting what they wanted in a previous space in time. This could manifest as the patient transposing and thus striving for in the present what it was they did not get in the past (Yuen, 2012). If Yuen is correct, then needling these points on the Gallbladder meridian, thereby activating Gallbladder as well as *yin* and *yang wei* and *qiao mai*, in effect unlocks the patient from the past trauma, allowing the patient to reformulate their identity in time and space that perhaps more closely matches the present moment. The question becomes how comfortable is the psyche with the way it is in time, and the answer perhaps releases the hold and allows for the experiences of life, for the *xue* and *qi* to flow again to create a new identity, a new story. Again, we can see here the Gallbladder’s role in initiating a new spring, a new re-telling and re-creation of the human psyche.

However, the most important extraordinary meridian that must be addressed is the *dai mai*, and its connection with the Gallbladder and the concept of latency as these pertain to the Western psychological understanding of depression. According to Yuen, the *dai mai* is the place where we put things that we are uncomfortable with; it is the closet in the house that gets stuffed with all those things that we are unable to find a place for or make a decision about (Yuen, 2012). In the body, this closet is the waistline, the
belly, the location of the *dai mai*. Energetically, it is here where all those injuries to self, confrontations to ego that Gallbladder could not deal with in time and place, are stored to be dealt with at a later date. The Gallbladder does not store these things, as said multiple times before, but it siphons them away from the Brain to the *dai mai*, where they are deposited. We can see this on a physical level in the form of undigested food and fluids quickly turning into Damp and Phlegm accumulation, spilling into and over the *dai mai*; manifestations include leukorrhea, mid-section weight gain, puritic genital conditions, etc. (Xinnong, 1987). This Dampness and accumulation can be understood as those confrontations and challenges to the self-concept that have been on hold, including past traumas, and, even, daily stressors. These stored insults inhibit pelvic movement and disrupt physiological *qi* flow. Not only can we start to see Gallbladder’s role in treating mental-emotional health but also why the meridian and organ is so useful in treating musculoskeletal issues as this retention of insults to the self locks up the pelvis, making it impossible to move forward with steady strides in life.

Gallbladder meridian is the master meridian for the *dai mai*, with the master point (GB41) being the key to unlocking the body’s and psyche’s energetically stuffed closet, in addition to local points (GB26, 27, 28). Gallbladder encompasses the lower *jiao* via *dai mai* and primarily deals with the etiological factors of Wind, Cold, Damp, and Heat (Yuen, 2012). The concept of latency, meaning that pathological factors and experiences can be lying dormant in the body for a period of time (Liu, 2005), is important for understanding how we hold onto confrontations to our self-concept, able to store them for a later date. From a psycho-emotional perspective, the psyche uses Dampness to render the fires of confrontation and change less intense, allowing the psyche to remain in what
is known (Y. Farrell, July 15, 2012, personal communication), even if painful, or to remain unaware of what is painful for self-preservation. Thus there is the example of the patient who overeats to hide and bury the pain inside. We can see this tendency in the overweight patient who displays a host of Damp-mediated patterns (Y. Farrell, July 15, 2012, personal communication). As the Gallbladder is the organ to make (or fails to make) a decision and is the meridian that siphons these experiences away and into the dai mai, so it is the very organ and meridian that can bring to light these injuries and digest them so that they are transformed into something that furthers rebirth and new life of the human psyche.

**Gallbladder and Heart**

Before turning to an explanation of how treating Gallbladder is the key in mental-emotional health, especially in cases of depression, an exploration of the Gallbladder-Heart relationship is in order. As mentioned earlier, a divergent of the Gallbladder meridian enters the Heart (Deadman, 1998). This is one explanation as to why the Heart shen is disturbed when the Gallbladder is suffering. Interestingly, the Gallbladder and Heart are clock-opposites in terms of the physiological qi flow described earlier in this chapter. Clock-opposites creates an interesting dynamic between the two organs not only in terms of pathology but also in terms of treatment and therapy.

In Giles Marin’s book (2006) *Five elements six conditions*, he understands the physiological qi flow sequence as a reflection of our daily and hourly needs. Thus Spleen and Stomach time, for Marin, is about binding together and harmonizing so that the Fires of the Heart and Small Intestine can warm us up and make for productivity (Marin, 2006). What he terms the “nighttime loop” consists of the Wood (Gallbladder and Liver)
and Metal (Lung and Large Intestine) times in which mental clarity and emotional maturity is established (Marin, 2007, p. 72). For Marin, this time of night is what “measures our mental health” (Marin, 2006, p. 72). It is interesting that our mental health is determined by the workings of Gallbladder, Liver, Lung and Large Intestine, which are located at the other end of the sequence from Heart, which houses the shen. Gallbladder is at midnight and Heart is at Noon: Gallbladder, paradoxically, is ruler of midnight, nestled within the nadir of contraction or ultimate yin; being the seed of pure yang within yin, strong Gallbladder qi can root an over-expansive Heart Fire. When both meridians are in balance with each other, one can see a harmonious expression of contraction and expansion, the interplay of yin and yang.

This dynamic relationship between Heart and Gallbladder clearly goes beyond symptoms of fright and insomnia: It is also a relationship about Fire and Water, summer and winter, protection and vulnerability, expansion and contraction. Gallbladder tends toward rigidity, and can easily be frozen by Cold in Fear, owing to its Water mother. As Imperial Fire, the Heart wants to expand and know more, it wants to explore. Per Yuen’s lecture (2012), on a psychological level, the Heart and Gallbladder represent a relationship between exploration, conquest and social interaction (Heart and Small Intestine) and self-differentiation, or creating a sense of separateness (Gallbladder) (Yuen, 2002). Differentiation is what keeps us sane but differentiation is also about limitation. To differentiate is to limit one’s boundaries as in “this is me,” or “this is not me.” There can be a rigidity of thought and perspective that arises with extensive differentiation as well, and the tendency of this phase is to not want to be confronted with things that challenge the way in which we have differentiated ourselves, for this
differentiation is the way in which we know ourselves. Therefore Gallbladder, with the addition of its shaoyang counterpart Triple Burner, ministerial Fire compatriot Pericardium and its internal relation Liver, serves to limit our perception and limit our interactions so as not to upset the ideas about self we have created. The opposite to Heart Fire conquest and exploration (11am-1pm) is the preservation of self-identity, or the ‘who I am’ in the world (11pm-1am). When the balance is tipped in one extreme or another, pathology results.

For Gallbladder, pathology occurs when that rigidity is too extreme: This is one reason why Gallbladder is such a powerful meridian and organ for treating sensory organs disease such as failing eyes and ears. When the limits of perception in one’s belief about oneself and the world are too rigid, then one no longer wants to ‘see’ or ‘hear’ the confrontations, producing the physical manifestations of cataracts and hearing loss, for example. Recall that the Gallbladder is responsible for siphoning unwanted experiences away from the Brain: If we look at the basic meridian pathway, we see that it does this first by taking in experiences at the eyes (vision) to the Brain, then moving them up the head, down to the ears (hearing), at the lowest point of the ears, then back up to the head, back down to the occiput and then finally out of the head at its connection with the yang and yin qiao mai (Yuen, 2002, Deadman, 2007).

With Gallbladder pathology, we can see how one’s gait in the world is affected, producing a host of musculoskeletal disorders that inhibit one from physically and literally walking in this world with ease. With this pathology, change becomes the enemy and new experiences that the Heart craves cannot be trusted lest they challenge a well-preserved self. In treatment, however, we can use Heart Fire to melt Cold in the
Gallbladder. Playing into the relationship between Gallbladder and Heart can keep
Gallbladder from becoming too rigid, too frozen, just as Gallbladder can root the Heart.

References


Chapter 2
Western Psychology and Gallbladder in Treatment

This chapter highlights Gallbladder in treatment, as different from an explanation of its functions. As already mentioned, the pathology unique to Gallbladder is also the key to recovering its dynamic state of health. This chapter will also explore, briefly, the Western psychological understanding of depression in relation to those foundational (and now commonplace) concepts of ego, levels of consciousness, and differentiation of the psyche. Academic analysis of the works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung will be referenced as the ground substance of the ways in which we modern Americans think of the psyche, ourselves, and the state of mental health and disease. Though ancient Chinese thought did not have a concept of an individual ‘self’ as we in the West do (Dharmananda, 2005), I argue that the Chinese medical concepts of Gallbladder can apply to our modern day psychological models, including an individualized agency; in fact, this application is necessary if Chinese medicine is going to be relevant to modern American psychological health and wellbeing. Understanding Gallbladder’s psychosomatic role as it can apply to our modern senses is exactly what makes Chinese medicine not only adaptable but relevant for human health today.

Western Psychology

Ubiquitous in Western culture are the ideas of ego, id, libido, personality, the concept that consciousness is composed of various layers, and the notion of person as an individualized agent, a differentiated self. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939CE) and Carl Jung (1875-1961CE) are among the most famous psychologists who introduced these terms
into mainstream language. The terms and the concepts they define have become so embedded in our understanding of ourselves and the world, that it is nearly impossible to conceptualize ourselves outside of them, despite a steady decline in their use as therapeutic models in modern psychology (Kalat, 2005). I am not a psychologist, nor is it my field of inquiry, but we in the west cannot help ourselves from seeing the self as defined by these terms. Thus as Chinese medical practitioners, we must apply our Chinese medical principles in a way so they speak to this very modern Western psychological model.

However many critics he has, both past and present, Freud articulated a radically new idea of the human psyche, and his contributions to mental health simply cannot be underestimated. Keeping in mind that his theories employ metaphor and are not anatomical structures (Thurschwell, 2000), his concept of ego as contrasted with id, libido, etc. has become foundational for the way we understand ourselves and the world around us. Ego, for Freud, was not a bad thing to have developed; indeed, it is the ego that counters the unstructured and potentially destructive ways of the unconscious id (Thurschwell, 2000), making it seem that an ego was necessary if one was to be psychologically healthy. Before he elucidated the concept of narcissism, Freud understood that a person was guided in his or her life by two sets of instincts: (1) an instinct for self-preservation or the ego, and (2) an instinct for pleasure or sexual instincts as characterized by the id and the libido (Thurschwell, 2000). For Freud, when a baby is born, that child is a mass of desires that are unstructured; this motivates the ‘I want’ cry and constitutes the id of the psyche (Thurschwell, 2000). Quickly, however, out of this id-soup, the psyche develops an ego. According to Freud scholar Pamela Thurschwell
(2000), Freud defined ego as “...the individual’s image of himself as a self-conscious being, his sense of himself as separate from the world which surrounds him.” (Thurschwell, 2000, p. 82). The ego is responsible for a person’s sensing and experiencing the world around, filtering the outside world into a subjective reality (Thurschwell, 2000).

A student of Freud, Carl Jung built his own analytical psychology upon Freud’s psychological model but redefined Freud’s terms, introducing a more nuanced understanding of consciousness and the use of symbols and dreams in deciphering the psyche’s unconscious milieu. Jung placed great importance on ‘spirituality’ as a missing component in a human being’s life, a missing part responsible for the modern ailing mind (Jacobi, 1973). For Jung, libido, which is part of the id, encompassed much more than sexuality as it had for Freud: Libido was, more broadly speaking, the continuously moving psychic ‘energy,’ analogous to the energy in physics, that connects and drives all parts of consciousness (Jacobi, 1973). For Jung, libido is far more comprehensive in scope and the concept of movement is crucial in understanding psychological health and disease (Jacobi, 1973). The psyche consists of two spheres, the conscious and the unconscious with the ego reflecting a blend of the two. One sphere may be more active in the ego than the other at any given time, thereby shifting the place from which the individual is operating, i.e. is action X motivated more by the unconscious or conscious sphere? (Jacobi, 1973). Like Freud, Jung sees the ego as wired to adapt to outside reality, defining the concept as, “...a complex of representations which constitutes the centre of my field of consciousness and appears to possess a very high degree of continuity and identity...the subject of consciousness” (Jacobi, 1973, p. 7). Consciousness, which he
defines as “…the function or activity which maintains the relation of psychic contents
with the ego” holds and sustains the ego (Jacobi, 1973, p. 8). All experiences of both the
outer and inner world of a person must pass through the ego if the mind is going to
perceive them at all. Sensations that are not sensed as such by the ego come from the
unconscious whereas sensations made aware to the ego find their place in the conscious
(Jacobi, 1973, p. 8). The ego, then, is a sort of gate keeper of reality, a gate keeper
wearing glasses made of various colored pieces.

The Ego and Transformation

If consciousness begets ego, and ego is the medium through which we understand
the world around us as well as who we are in this world, then perhaps ego can be
understood as a story we tell about ourselves in the world at a given time, which, to use
Jung’s words again, has a “…” very high degree of continuity” (Jacobi, 1973, p. 7).
Differentiation of one’s consciousness plays a considerable part in development of what
Jung terms “the Persona” (Jacobi, 1973, p. 26). The persona is defined as, “the
individual’s general psychic attitude to the outside world … a system of psychic relations
[thinking, intuition, feeling, sensation], by which the individual comes into contact with
his environment” (Jacobi, 1973, p. 27). The persona is the next level projected from the
ego, which acts to cloak or at least partially hide the ego from the outside world (Jacobi,
1973, p. 27). The persona, a part of the ego, is the negotiation between societal
expectations and those ideas of the self. To maintain a healthy persona and develop a
healthy personality, according to Jung, the persona must strike a balance among three
constant factors (1) the ego-ideal or “wish-image,” which Jung argues we all possess, (2)
the outside world’s view of the individual and (3) the physical and psychic limitations to realizing these ideals (Jacobi, 1973, p. 28). Again there is this outside to inside and back again movement to the psychological process Jung is describing. A balancing act of outside expectations and inner-world desires create a complex and dynamic ego-persona state of being, fairly consistent but also subject to modification depending upon what sorts of adaptations to the ego are needed.

Comprised of (developing) the ego, persona, and personality, the self, for Jung, is a state of union between the conscious and the unconscious and is considered the last step on the path to individuation or “self-realization” (Jacobi, 1973, p. 127). Birth of the self, according to Jung, is a transformation in the fullest sense of the word; it is a shift in the psychic center of consciousness, which means the birth of an entirely different understanding and view of life. Jung states that “if the life-mass is to be transformed…a circumambulatio [sic] is necessary, i.e. exclusive concentration on the centre [sic], the place of creative change” (Jacobi, 1973, p. 127-128). Our self is our center of being, known to us by our ego; it is our midpoint, according to Jung, and the place of tension between two worlds, the unconscious and conscious, inner and outer, the place where, “the beginnings of our whole psychic life seem to be inextricably rooted” (Jacobi, 1973, p. 131).

Depression

Psychological pathology and disease comes when this free movement among unconscious to conscious, ego to persona to self, gets either repressed, stifled, or regresses excessively in its movement. The libido is not to be dammed up as this is what
leads to all sorts of mental ills (Jacobi, 1973). Rather, that pivot between worlds, which is the center of creative change, is the key to a healthy self’s ability to straddle all aspects of the psyche, thereby creating an integrative whole. Jung argues that lack of psychic integration is a particular problem of modern Western society; he claims that modern people overemphasize the conscious aspects of living, and either suppress consciously or repress the unconscious, only to suffer continuous threats of its contents bursting through to inundate the mind (Jacobi, 1973, p. 81). If the patient is not ready to deal with the repressed unconscious contents at that time, mental illness and even psychosis could result (Jacobi, 1973).

Freud and Jung claim their theories to be rooted in and verified by clinical experience, (Thurschwell, 2000, Jacobi, 1973). Supposing these theories adequately explain the way in which the psyche does form in a human being, then these psychological concepts can be related to Chinese medical principles of organ networks and qi movements; or, rather, we can reinterpret our classical Chinese medical principles within a Western psychological paradigm, thereby rendering Chinese medicine more relevant and effective for psycho-emotional disorders of today.

Depression is one psycho-emotional ill that is estimated to affect between two to thirty percent of the US population, depending upon the symptom severity (Beers et al, 2006, McPhee & Papadakis, 2009). Despite what analytical psychology may posit, current biomedical understandings of this mood disorder is that there is no known etiology (Beers et al, 2006). Various possible etiologies include the idea of depression as hereditary, or as a result of abnormal neurotransmitter levels in the brain, or that it simply is the fallout from a major life event; however, no postulated etiology is conclusive
(Beers et al, 2006). What we are left with, then, is a large number of people suffering depression with no known cause and few treatment options. Pharmaceuticals and psychotherapy (interpersonal and/or cognitive therapy) are the two primary forms of Western treatment (Kalat, 2005). Antidepressants, the go-to for Western medical clinicians, were recently shown to be no greater than placebo in treating mild-to-moderate depression (Fournier et al, 2010). Talk therapy offers some hope, especially among the mild-to-moderately, and even ‘sub-major’ depressives (Lee et al, 2012); however, little more than half of depressed patients will improve with psychotherapy (Kalat, 2005).

People suffering depression need other treatment options and Chinese medicine, in particular treating the Gallbladder, gives one option. If we can map the twelve primary meridians and eight extraordinary meridians onto the Freudian and Jungian understanding of the psyche, as Jeffrey Yuen (2002) has, then we see the power in Gallbladder for movement out of depression. Recall that Jung understood psychological pathology as resulting from a blocked or dammed-up libido, which is our motive psychic force connecting all parts of consciousness; willfully damming this up either by suppression for self-preservation, or, more dangerously, repression, inhibits the integration of all parts of the human psyche. For the self to be properly differentiated and whole, there must be a constant communication between contents of the unconscious and conscious. Eventually, for Jung, the unconscious will no longer represent something dangerous, the personal unconscious will give way to the collective unconscious, ceasing to intrude into the conscious, thereby rendering the self a balanced and well-adapted individual (Jacobi, 1973). If we can see the self as the shaoyang pivot, that place where exterior and interior
worlds meet; and if we can consider the dai mai as the repository of the personal unconscious, or even subconscious, then we see the Gallbladder as that yang motive force able to unlock and bring to light those troubles to the self. For Chinese medicine, a direct mapping of libido to Gallbladder would be short-sighted, as libido could encompass many organ functions, most especially the Heart; however, with that said, Gallbladder is one aspect of libido, a potent and movement oriented force all the while remaining at the center of our being (Larre & Rochat la de Vallee, 2003). As Jung talks of the self at the center, characterized by the way in which the ego interprets the world and thus the center of transformation (Jacobi, 1973), the Chinese medical Gallbladder in its psycho-emotional functions, then, is the key piece to psychic integration.

Gallbladder essentially ‘un-dams’ the libido in psychological terms, or unblocks the qi in Chinese medical terms. Claude Larre and Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallee in their book (2003) The extraordinary fu, state that, “…the gallbladder is in charge of anger…[anger] is nothing other than the first impetuous movement given to the springing up of life. It is the starting point and the power of momentum” (Larre & Rochat de le Vallee, 2003, p. 151). Here the Wood aspects of spring and the emotion anger come into play, as spring is the re-birth of the earth, the time of new growth and yang orientation. Gallbladder is in charge of anger and represents the violent force of young yang or shaoyang, that motive force that wants to be born, to grow (Larre & Rochat de la Vallee, 2003). It is the force that pushes the petals up through the spring dirt, shaking them free and enabling them to reach for the sun, or noon, or summer, or the Fire Heart. This violent outburst of life owes to the power of Gallbladder qi and its incredible yang functioning. This same process is a metaphor for what can and at times must occur within
the human psyche; it is a metaphor for un-damming the libido, initiating re-birth, re-orientation and seeing the world in a new light. It is self-realization and transformation of the story one tells about oneself.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Gallbladder is associated with courage. Indeed the Chinese character Dan, or ‘Gallbladder,’ itself means courage: The character depicts a man in a dangerous position, at the edge of a cliff. There is hesitation as the decision before the man could be a matter of life and death (Larre & Rochat de la Vallee, 2003). Weak Gallbladder qi manifests as shaking, twitching, indecision, and timidity, which leads to a restless shen or spirit (Larre & Rochat de la Vallee, 2003). Therefore, we must ask, (Gallbladder) courage to do what? As yang, there is action implied in the very function of Gallbladder, but what makes for the call to action?

The answer lies in the courage to change the perceptions of those self-imposed limitations; it is the courage to make one’s self-differentiation malleable; to take action, making daily decisions that reinforce that new self-image. Shifting one’s perception and self-concept is ongoing and ensures that a life can change and an ego can adapt. Healthy Gallbladder embodies the courage to face those challenges and confrontations of the ego, to look into the depths of the self, to go into the dai mai (i.e. the personal unconscious) and face the those injuries to self, or ‘demons-Winds’ that have been hidden and lurking. Facing these things means potential death to the self as it is know at that time. It takes tremendous courage to not only face those things that are ego and thus feel life-threatening but also courage to initiate a new spring, courage and faith that rebirth is possible. It takes courage and faith to swim in the unknown waters of deep psychology and trust that one will re-emerge into a new, albeit different, spring. These fears are
frozen within for the purposes of self-preservation, and yet in that self-preservation the
essences also potentially freeze, immobilizing expression of the spirits and thus leading
to stagnation, distress, and, for many, depression.

If Gallbladder represents the stage of self-differentiation, we see the beginnings of
the self-story, the way in which the psyche, through ego, understands itself in the world.
When the movement of this story is encumbered, i.e. becomes inflexible and/or lacks
evolutionary momentum, then pathology results. What this pathology looks like in terms
of mental and emotional health is the very thing that can expose Gallbladder to be the
cause of obstruction as well as the key to removing it, or dissolving it, as the case may be.

Recent Western psychotherapies have focused on initiating ways in which
patients can see their circumstances in a new light i.e. change the story told about their
circumstances. New therapies such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and
acceptance and commitment treatment are part of a new “third wave psychotherapies”
movement within Western modern psychology (Kahl et al, 2012). These therapies aim to
teach patients how to simply observe thoughts, feelings, etc. as they come, even painful
ones. Cognitive and Interpersonal therapies aim to enable in patients the courage to see
their role in a painful situation and the flexibility to develop new ways of being in and
thinking about that painful spot, i.e. they become willing to change the way they see
themselves and their role in any given situation (Crowe et al, 2012).

Taking what we know of ego, self, personality, consciousness and cognitive
psychotherapies, perhaps one way we can understand depression is that it is one story the
ego tells about the self in the world. According to cognitive therapy, people suffering
depression approach life with certain characteristic assumptions, such as “I am deprived
or defeated” or “The world is full of obstacles” (Kalat, 2005, p. 638). They tend to interpret life situations as evidence of their own disadvantage without thinking of another possible explanation (Kalat, 2005). Depression is a story characterized by anhedonia, sleep troubles, lack of energy and lack of emotional response (Kalat, 2005), at least on the surface. A current psychology textbook defines major depression as “persisting most of each day for at least 2 weeks, usually more, during which the person experiences little interest in anything, little pleasure, and little motivation for any productive activity” (Kalat, 2005, p. 634). What this means for Chinese medicine is that the qi is stagnating either due to a pathological factor, deficiency or blockage of some kind. Gallbladder is the key, then, to unblocking and moving this qi, creating motivation towards expansion (i.e. the Heart) and coursing emotions once again. Gallbladder is in charge of the story ego tells to the self and thus the very place where changing that story is possible.

**Chinese Medical Treatment**

How do we initiate this transformation in our patients? How do we create the context within which our patients can change their life-story? We have multiple ways of doing this as Chinese medical practitioners: Tuina, moxibustion, food therapy, qigong, acupuncture, Chinese herbs, etc. Chinese herbal therapy will be covered in chapter three with an exploration of Wen Dan Tang but here I will focus on acupuncture as therapy:

Acupuncture is one of the quickest ways to initiate change in the human body. Acupuncture points are known as xue or holes in the body’s energetic landscape. Kuriyama (1999) translates xue as something similar to geological caverns; hollow areas in the earth where wind, water, etc. flow into and out of. Xue, then, are portals in the
human body where this kind of in-and-out movement can occur. In antiquity, *xue*, he says, “…conjured a vision of the body in which winds streamed in and out of strategic orifices in the skin, just as winds blew in and out of the caverns of the earth” (Kuriyama, 1999, p.236).

*Xue* as caverns in the energetic landscape of the human body is a powerful concept that we use every day in performing acupuncture. Each time we insert a needle, we initiate change; we bring on a ‘wind’ of change, if you will. It becomes imperative, then, that we practitioners are careful to understand what kind of change we are initiating; it is not enough just to needle, we must know what we are doing and why we are doing it. *Su Wen* chapter 50 admonishes us that “Acupuncture performed without a guiding principle can be dangerous or damaging” (Ni, 1995, p. 184). Qi Bo in *Su Wen* chapter 26 instructs that the clinician must “…concentrate and focus,” taking care to accurately perceive deficiencies, excesses, Blood and *qi* movements (Ni, 1995, p. 102). With that said, needling Gallbladder points, then, changes certain things along the meridian and in the organ itself. As we will learn in chapter three, the herbs of *Wen Dan Tang* serve to unblock and course stagnating Gallbladder *qi*; so too acupuncture points have the power to set the stage for radical movement and change in all aspects of Gallbladder’s function.

As acupuncture points are windy caverns of the energetic body, and Wind predicts, causes and is, essentially, change (Kuriyama, 1999), then needling Gallbladder acupuncture points can, in effect, change a person’s life. Our lives are not only a compilation of experiences but also the expression of the way we have perceived said life experiences, the way in which we have decided what experiences to even have in the first place and then what those experiences mean to us. We are making meaning out of
everything given the limitations we set for ourselves in the process of differentiation. Therefore, since the Gallbladder is not only responsible for differentiation and limitation in order to preserve sanity in this world, as well as the meridian of confrontational change, then activating this very meridian not only moves and challenges those limitations but also the perception of those limitations, the perception of our differentiation in the world and thus has the power to change our entire experience of being. The story we tell about ourselves in the manifestation of *yin* and *yang qiao mai*, which is seated in the Marrow of the Brain is able to be challenged by the Gallbladder meridian via the very connections and exchanges that Jeffrey Yuen is pointing to.

Psycho-emotionally, needling certain points along the Gallbladder meridian, and activating certain extraordinary meridians, such as *yang qiao mai* and *dai mai*, sets the context within which the self-story can be changed. Obviously, it is the patient who must ultimately be willing to change and re-write his or her own story. The patient must face the demon-Winds of self, face their fears in order to move forward. But we practitioners play an important role of not only identifying the story being told but also calling upon those winds of change so that the patient can be unfrozen even for a moment in time, thereby enabling them to see who they are and where they need to go. Needling BL62, the master of the *yang qiao mai*, can be a powerful point in treating difficulty with walking but also a powerful point for illuminating who a person is psycho-emotionally at a particular time; Ki6, master of the *yin qiao mai*, is a great point for ankle pain but also an amazing point for showing the status of the psyche in a particular space in memory; GB20 clears wind but, psycho-emotionally, it siphons threatening experiences away from
the Brain, thereby protecting Marrow, and thus the current state of self, from being consumed (Yuen, 2002).

Self-protection as well as healing comes about when needling Gallbladder points, so long as the movement and the change that will occur is understood. Just as needling GB20 serves to protect the self, needling this same point can alter the idea of self as it is stored in the Marrow (Yuen, 2002). Particular care must be taken when needling points to open the dai mai, for example needling GB41. As the master point, needling GB41 will open the body’s closet of hidden emotional insults, bringing about a great deal of Wind (change) (Yuen, 2002), trapped Cold (fear), and lingering Damp (undigested life-experiences). As stated before, the patient is really the agent in the situation and must be ready for that door to be opened lest the Wind be too great, causing more damage than good (Yuen, 2002, Jacobi, 1973).

As there is no separation between body and mind/psyche, working with the body will affect the mind. Acupuncture is a powerful modality, able to initiate change and support the patient on his or her journey out of contraction and depression and into a new life. But needling is not the only way we can initiate change within; Chinese herbal medicine is an ancient and powerful tool as well, and the topic of the next chapter.

References


Chapter 3
Wen Dan Tang

One of the leading questions of this treatise is why Wen Dan Tang is so often prescribed for patients in cases of depression, as it is understood in the Western medical psychological model. Indeed, as a TCM student, one is puzzled by this use of Wen Dan Tang, especially given its enigmatic name, ‘Warm the Gallbladder Decoction’. Within traditional Chinese herbal therapies, on a rudimentary level, this formula is indicated for Phlegm-Heat obstructing the relationship between Gallbladder and Stomach. In order to use this formula, the TCM student is advised to look for nausea, palpitations, dizziness, and bitter taste in the mouth. As this Phlegm stagnates the Gallbladder channel, Heat is generated and begins to harass the Heart, which most clearly manifests in difficulty sleeping and vivid dreaming. However, little in TCM herbal education is given in terms of explaining why this formula, a Phlegm-Heat countering digestive remedy, is an often-prescribed mental health formula. Rosa Schnyer in her book (2001) Acupuncture in the treatment of depression gives us a clue about the use of Wen Dan Tang in cases of psycho-emotional imbalance: She understands this formula as correcting the relationship between Heart qi and Gallbladder qi, citing Phlegm obstruction as a primary cause for this formula’s use. Still yet, the formula’s relationship to Gallbladder and a disturbed shen is not fully described; therefore, an exploration of this formula and one set of etiological factors that create a Wen Dan Tang pattern becomes necessary for understanding the fullest possible extent of its use, especially with regard to its use in cases of depression.
The earliest record we have of *Wen Dan Tang* as an herbal formulation is debated among scholars: Some cite the original formula as found in the seventh century book, *Thousand Ducat Formulas* [*qian jin yao fang*] by the scholar-physician Sun Simiao (Versluys & Fruehauf, 2004), others cite its initial recording by sixth century physician Yao Seng-Yuan, whose original text was lost only to resurface in the *Arcane Essentials from the Imperial library* (Scheid et al, 2009), and yet others cite multiple works with which to credit *Wen Dan Tang*’s first appearance (Luwen, 1996, Hsiao et al, 2007). However, scholars tend to agree that the formula as we know it today did not appear until the twelfth century in the Song Dynasty’s influential medical book called, *Formula Treatise for Disease Patterns Demonstrating that the Three Causes are Ultimately One* [*san yin ji yi bin zheng fang lun*] (Versluys & Fruehauf, 2004, Scheid et al, 2009). *Wen Dan Tang*’s composition is considered a variation on the representative formula for dissolving Phlegm, *Er Chen Tang* (Scheid et al, 2009, Versluys & Fruehauf, 2004), and in modern day use is comprised of the following herbs: *Ban Xia (zhi)*, *Fu Ling*, *Chen Pi*, *Zhi Gan Cao*, *Sheng Jiang*, *Da Zao*, *Zhu Ru*, and *Zhi shi*.

Part of the formula’s intrigue is in its name: *Wen Dan Tang* or ‘Warm the Gallbladder Decoction’. This name has inspired multiple commentators to suspect mistranslation. Indeed, it has been argued that *Wen Dan Tang* should be translated as ‘Clear the Gallbladder’ decoction and not ‘Warm the Gallbladder’ owing to its make up of cooling herbs. However, according to Heiner Fruehauf, a modern scholar-physician, the original author of this formula understands it to treat deficiency constraint harassing the *shen* after an illness, with a source of Cold in the Gallbladder; Fruehauf quotes whom he calls the “original designer” as saying “‘This formula treats deficiency vexation with
insomnia after great illness, for this is caused by cold of the gallbladder;” Fruehauf goes on to conclude that there can be no doubt that Wen Dan Tang is a formula designed to treat Cold, not Heat, in the Gallbladder, which is more in line with Sun Simiao’s variation on the formula (Versluys & Fruehauf, 2004, p. 341, Hsiao et al, 2007).

To some extent, this conclusion is justified from an herbal property point of view as the base formula of Wen Dan Tang is Er Chen Tang, a neutral-to-warm Phlegm dissolving formula. However, with that said, the formula does have a number of cooling herbs that gives the clinician pause in using it for a Cold condition. Volker Scheid and Dan Bensky in their book (2009) Formulas & Strategies, offers a bit of clarity to this confusion: the Heat in this pattern is an internal Heat causing constraint; this constraint is due to a deficiency but not in terms of a lack of the body’s qi or Blood; rather this deficiency manifests in an invisible sort of way. For example, though the body may feel hot subjectively, there is no heat found objectively; though the patient may feel constraint in the chest and epigastrium, there are no palpable masses that can be felt. Therefore, this constraint and Heat is of a purely subjective nature, and most certainly not a full-type pattern. If not a full true Heat, and if not a body deficiency of qi and Blood, what then is causing this constraint? And why do we need cooling and acrid herbs to effectively treat this ‘deficiency’ Heat constraint?

Analyzing this formula has been the subject of many physicians throughout the centuries. Scheid quotes the Qing Dynasty physician Zhang Lu as citing failure to clear Stomach Heat as the reason why the Gallbladder fails to warm (and thus needs warming) as well as the source of Phlegm production; this Phlegm, Zhang Lu goes on to say, “overflows” into the “tranquil yang organ”, inhibiting the shaoyang qi from expanding
and warming throughout the body (Scheid et al, 2009). The emphasis for Zhang Lu is not so much on Cold in the Gallbladder but a Hot Stomach as the root of the problem, something Andrew Ellis echoes centuries later in his book (2004) *Notes from south mountain*. The ‘tranquil yang’ organ Zhang Lu is referring to is the Gallbladder organ in its function of directing qi and in its ability to make decisions. Gallbladder, when healthy, is to be clear, calm, and impartial, so that it is able to direct qi to all other eleven primary organs, never favoring one over another. Presumably, once the Stomach is cleared of this Heat and Phlegm, then balance can be restored to both Stomach and Gallbladder.

According to the seventeenth century work, *Discussions of Famous Physicians’ Formulas Past and Present* by Luo Mei, it is Gallbladder qi constraint and Heat that is the root of the pattern. Mei describes the Gallbladder as abhorring constraint and cites this constraint along with remaining Heat left over after an illness as the leading factors of deficiency constraint of the shaoyang qi (Scheid et al, 2009). Warming the Gallbladder, then, does not refer to tonifying its yang qi but rather refers to unblocking and releasing the constrained Gallbladder qi. In order to unblock this constrain, Phlegm and residual Heat must be dissolved and cleared, respectively, and then the warmth of Gallbladder qi can once again expand.

In contemporary basic TCM textbooks and articles published on the formula (Luwen, 1994, Schnyer, 2001, Ellis, 2003), the presence of Phlegm, not necessarily Heat, is the key indication for *Wen Dan Tang’s* use. Arnoud Versluys and Heiner Fruehauf in their 2004 compilation *Classical Chinese medicine textbook for formulas* understand Phlegm, particularly invisible Phlegm as the key, defining factor for *Wen Dan Tang’s* use (Versluys & Fruehauf, 2004); As mentioned before, *Wen Dan Tang* is made from the
representative Phlegm-dissolving formula *Er Chen Tang*, modified to treat the
gallbladder and Heat specifically. Versluys and Fruehauf understand the chief pathology
for *Wen Dan Tang*’s use as a weak *shaoyang* or Ministerial Fire. This weak *shaoyang* fire
is not hot enough or strong enough to warm and course the middle *jiao* Earth *qi* (i.e.
stomach and spleen *qi*). This lack of warmth is in effect a relative Cold, a Cold that has
stagnated and obstructed the functions of spleen and stomach. This in effect creates a
local damp-Phlegm retention within the stomach organ, which produces a “mild”
Phlegm-Heat (Versluys & Fruehauf, 2004, p. 340). This Phlegm-Heat then disturbs the
heart and causes insomnia. The treatment, then, according to Versluys and Fruehauf, is
to circulate the gallbladder fire, in particular, and work locally to clear the resultant
Phlegm-Heat in the stomach. Doing these two things will warm, dry and restore the
spleen’s function. The focus of treatment, then, is placed squarely on warming the
gallbladder and its ministerial fire functions, not necessarily on clearing heat.

Mental illnesses of multiple kinds are listed as indications for *Wen Dan Tang*’s use. Versluys and Fruehauf list specific illnesses such as schizophrenia, manic-depressive psychosis, reactive psychosis, involutional psychosis, obsession neurosis, and neurasthenia as indications. They also list neurological and brain disorders such as
dementia, epilepsy, migraines, vertigo, cerebral tinnitus, cerebral arteriosclerosis, and
hypertension as treatable with *Wen Dan Tang*. Even infertility is implicated in treatment
with *Wen Dan Tang* if Phlegm is the primary reason for the condition. This is a
remarkable list of indications, not least of which is the breadth of mental illnesses *Wen Dan Tang* is purported to treat. More so, however, this list essentially connects to, or at
least inspires the idea that Cold in the gallbladder (by virtue of a weak ministerial fire)

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with Phlegm production and Heat generation leads to a myriad of mental illnesses; thus, if treated properly, this formula can be a powerful remedy for said illnesses. For students trained in TCM, gastric symptoms would be among the first on the list of indications, but from this classical perspective, mental disorders rank the highest.

The herbs in this formula, though cooling, are used not so much to drain Heat as there is very little excess Heat present in the pattern, as argued by both Scheid and Versluys. Rather, the formula is meant to unblock constrained qi and facilitate movement of body fluids within the shaoyang network, thereby dissolving Phlegm. The point of the formula is not about draining but about movement, particularly movement of Gallbladder qi. And movement belongs to yang. Versluys and Fruehauf argue that it is probable Cold is involved; Cold halts Gallbladder qi, leading to constraint and resultant Phlegm and Heat. Cold congeals and ceases movement. A constraint of Ministerial Fire or Gallbladder yang qi not only allows for additional relative excess Cold, but also contributes to Phlegm production, stagnant Heat and an eventual weakening of Ministerial Fire. Therefore, ‘warming’ the Gallbladder is the root treatment in the pattern. But how is Cold involved? From where does the Cold come?

**Etiology**

A premier Chinese medical herbalist, Andrew Ellis, in his book, (2003) *Notes from south mountain*, understands the use of Wen Dan Tang along traditional lines. He sees it as an excellent remedy for Gallbladder-Stomach disharmony with Phlegm-Heat giving rise to a constricted chest, nausea, dizziness, bitter taste in the mouth and insomnia. What is interesting, however, about Ellis’s understanding of Wen Dan Tang is the etiology of the pattern it represents. Though there are potentially multiple etiologies
(and thus variations of the formula) (Hsiao, et al., 2007), Ellis understands this formula as originally designed to treat the sequelae of an exterior Wind-Cold attack gone awry. He does not explain the mechanisms by which an exterior Wind-Cold attack has manifested in a Gallbladder-Stomach disharmony but he does explain that the middle jiao’s function was compromised in the aftermath of the Wind-Cold attack. This weak transportation and transformation function of the middle jiao gives rise to an internal production of Phlegm. What he terms “qi-depression” (p. 318), is inherent in this pattern, he argues, which gives rise to Heat. This Heat in turn mixes with the internally produced Phlegm and serves to disturb the Heart and shen, thus we see insomnia, palpitations and vivid dreams in the pattern. Phlegm is the key factor in this pattern and is what enables Wen Dan Tang to treat a multitude of disorders, including mental-emotional disorders such as schizophrenia, mania, depression and fright as discussed above. Internal Phlegm production obstructs and clouds the clear orifices of the head (Ellis, 2003). Therefore for Ellis, in agreement with Scheid and Versluys, Phlegm is the root in the counter-flow of Stomach qi, giving rise to all the upward moving symptoms of nausea as well as shen disturbance.

As we are always working in a relationship-driven and multi-layered medicine, we must take the concepts of “Wind”, “Cold”, “Phlegm,” and “Heat” to mean more than physical wind or the chemical properties of cold and congealed mucus. In this etiology, Ellis is describing for us a clear picture of Cold in the Gallbladder, even though he does not state it as such. How we can go from an exterior Wind-Cold attack to a Gallbladder-Stomach-Phlegm mitigated mental illness such as schizophrenia and/or depression is an important, if not crucial, process to understand. Understanding the exterior Wind-
Cold pathogenesis of the *Wen Dan Tang* pattern, in addition to how it plays into an individual’s constitution, is one key to unlocking why it is so often used, and often effective, at treating a Gallbladder-mediated depression.

*Wind*

In the Shang Dynasty, as far back as the thirteenth century BCE, “Wind” was another term for demons. Demons were those external, invisible, non-corporeal entities that could harm our spiritual and physical beings (Kuriyama, 1999, Yuen, 2002, Dharmananda, 2005). From ancient times to the present, Wind or ‘Wind-spirits’, has been one of the most important etiological factors for Chinese medicine. Indeed, the *NeiJing* states that, “Pathogenic wind is the root of all evil” (Ni, 1995, p. 10). The ancestors of Chinese medical practitioners, the *wu* shamans of the Shang period (approx. 1500BCE-1122BCE) were responsible for propitiation to the god Ti, a near-all powerful deity who could cause a beneficial Wind to blow or, conversely, an Evil-Wind (though, it was also thought that an Evil-Wind could act of its own accord, causing illness in human beings) (Unschuld, 1985). *Wu* shamans were responsible for assuaging the Evil-Wind whether it was from Ti or acting of on its own. The oracle bones, those ancient tools of divination, could give clues as to whether Evil-Wind was involved in cases of illness or draught (Unschuld, 1985).

During the third and second centuries BCE, another idea of Wind as a purely natural, though strongly influential, phenomenon came about running parallel to the concept of Wind as demon (Unschuld, 1985). Owing to the heavy Confucian influence on Chinese medicine and the suspicion within Confucian philosophy of the non-existence of
demons, oracle bones began to be replaced by observations of natural phenomenon as predictive of future events. Not only were military successes predicted by the direction in which the wind blew, but also which emotions would dominate which seasons for the year (Unschuld, 1985). However, even as its natural forces became the primary predictive factor for future events, these movements were still tied to a supernatural power, T’ai-i, the leader of the demon-spirit hierarchy. If the Wind blew from the direction in which T’ai-i was residing, then it was a good thing; if not, then one should prepare for tough times ahead (Unschuld, 1985).

Human beings were unceasingly vulnerable to the erratic behaviors of Wind, and always needed to watch for a Wind strike, which could occur at moment. Aging, physical health as subject to the phases of the moon (i.e. full moon gives strength to the body while a new moon makes the body relatively depleted) and not living in harmony with the seasons all made a human vulnerable to Wind-attack. Indeed, it would appear in the literature that a human could not escape illness from Wind-attack no matter how hard s/he tried (Unschuld, 1985). However, the idea that one could have control over living in accordance with the seasons initiated a paradigmatic shift from the idea of illness as controlled by external demons to one of internal, self-controlled influences, at least partially (Unschuld, 1985). By the second century BCE, the notion that there were not only external influences sculpting human health but that there were also mirroring internal influences harbored within the human body is an important transition in Chinese medical history. The idea of demons exerting influence over our health did not completely die out but a more complex picture of natural phenomenon and the ideas of an internal landscape, the body as having qualities of repletion/fullness or depletion/
emptiness entered Chinese medical consciousness. Such complexity to this day is the milieu within which Chinese medical practitioners practice.

Perhaps more importantly, though, is the development of the idea that Wind represents change. As Shigehsa Kuriyama put it in his seminal work, (1999) *The expressiveness of the body and the divergence of Greek and Chinese medicine*, “The history of wind and the body is the history of the relationship between change and the human being” (Kuriyama, 1999, p. 242). Wind is sudden or stealthy, loud or quiet, a truly mysterious force. It has the power to bring ships home safely or leave them adrift and hopeless for return home. Wind is also about transformation, the ability for one thing to become another, for something hot to become cold, changing fair weather into a destructive storm (Kuriyama, 1999). Likewise, too strong a Wind can cause a once healthy human being to be desperately ill in a matter of days. Not all Winds were considered harmful, however. During the Spring and Autumn eras (722BCE-481BCE), the physician Yi He (sixth century BCE) demoted Wind from the most important etiological factor to simply one of the six (*yin, yang*, wind, rain, darkness, and brightness) (Kuriyama, 1999). Wind could be used for good in human health and that of the larger world; good Winds could cause minor illnesses from which people recovered rather quickly. However, if an illness were serious, then it was most definitely the work of an Evil-Wind (Kuriyama, 1999), which shows that the idea of Wind as being Evil did not die with Wind’s demotion.

The idea of external “demons” exerting influence over our well-being is a rich concept that we can incorporate into our Western understanding of the human psyche. Our Wind or ‘demons’ today are those things that harass our mental tranquility and
include everything from daily stressors that we simply do not have the time to fully deal with to those ego-threatening instances where we are confronted with the need to move or change, in addition to the traditional Chinese medical understanding of the common cold and virus attacks. The whole notion of an attack from the outside is an important one as it represents an assault that is perceived outside of oneself, as coming to attempt harm or to even kill the self as we know it. Therefore, a Wind attack, whether coupled with Cold, Heat, Damp, Fire, Phlegm, etc. is an attack on our core sense of self, and confronts us with the challenge to change the self as we know it. If the self/ego is not prepared for this, i.e. if the Gallbladder is not prepared to make a decision about whether to allow change to the self or to expel this challenge, then the external Wind attack can leave visible damage and, depending upon what other etiological factor(s) came with it, can get lodged within, disrupting the internal qi machinations necessary for a healthy mind and body.

Cold

For this etiology of a Wen Dan Tang pattern, Cold is the accomplice with Wind. According to Zhang Zi-He (1156–1228 CE), a revivalist of Han dynasty-style demonology treatment methods, no matter the season, “…all qi that is not right qi is called cold damage” (Mitchell, Ye, & Wiseman, 1999). Indeed, one of the most influential herbal compendiums in the history of Chinese medicine is the third century CE Shang Han Lun or “On Cold Damage,” on which most herbal formulas used today are based. According to the Shang Han Lun, broadly speaking, Cold damage is any disease that has been externally contracted; narrowly, it means external Wind-Cold attack and all the diseases that arise thereof (Mitchell, Ye, & Wiseman, 1999). Cold is a force that locks
everything in place and stops movement. On a basic level, one of the chief symptoms of an exterior Cold/Wind-Cold attack is lack of sweating due to the Cold constricting the pores of the body (Mitchell, Ye, & Wiseman, 1999). If one is unable to sweat, then one is unable to effectively expel the pathogen from the body’s superficial layers. Warming therapies, either through use of warming herbs, moxibustion or the physical placements of clothing layers and blankets, becomes essential so as not to allow the pathogen to burrow deeper into the body. The patient must sweat the pathogen out in order to stave off further diseases.

In a Five-Element context, Cold is associated with Water and Water rules or is ruled by the emotion of fear. Fear strongly descends the qi and is the emotion that stops movement, constricting qi flow and arresting processes of thinking and feeling, even if but for a millisecond. This descending and contracting causes the Essences, or all the fluids of the body to withdraw downward in attraction to the descending qi; the upper jiao closes off, leaving a swollen and stagnant lower jiao. Claude Larre and Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallee in their work, (2005) *The seven emotions* understand the sequelae of fear as causing, “a swelling up of the cold water from the lower heater [jiao], through the middle heater [jiao], up to the upper heater [jiao] creating a ‘frozen heart’” (Larre & Rochat de la Vallee, 2005, p. 91). Eventually, so it seems, the stagnation in the lower jiao becomes too great and does not so much ascend but rather rises up in excess to freeze the Heart.

This contraction is not only witnessed on an energetic level, but also in the physical. Moshe Feldenkrais, founder of The Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education, talks of the contracted state of the body in response to unexpected loud noises and the
fear of falling in his book (1981) *The elusive obvious*. He states that of all our natural human instincts, “…no other one but fear is found which inhibits motion” (Feldenkrais, 1981, p. 63). In his chapter, “The Body Pattern of Anxiety,” he argues that when there is fear, as in fear of falling, the body’s abdominal muscles contract violently. This causes one to hold in one’s breath and flex one’s head forward. This is an attempt to keep the back of the head away from the ground and create a kinetic energetic context within which the body can spring from quickly to avert more damage, or danger in the case of a loud noise (Feldenkrais, 1981). This state of extreme contraction is meant as a survival mechanism so that, as in the case of someone falling, the extreme flexion would protect the head from hitting the ground and aim the point of impact at an arched spine. An arched spine can evenly distribute the shock of the impact to the bones, tendons and muscles, thereby protecting the vulnerable internal organs from mortal damage (Feldenkrais, 1981). This contraction, then, is life-saving in some circumstances. The problem lies in not recovering or returning into a more expansive state of being. Feldenkrais understands that one must treat what he terms “the somatic nervous pathways” in order the undo and recondition out of a contracted muscular state (Feldenkrais, 1981, p. 63). Psychiatric treatment, then, will not be able to fully treat anxiety disorders precisely because it lacks this physical re-conditioning component in treatment (Feldenkrais, 1981).

Someone who is always in a contracted state of being, whether that be energetically, physically, mentally or emotionally, will suffer not only anxiety disorders from a Western psychological perspective, but, from a Chinese medical perspective, a host of *qi* circulation disruptions, leading to the pathogenesis of Heat, Phlegm, Damp,
more Cold, Blood Stasis, etc. depending upon the chronicity of the contraction (i.e. Cold influence) and the internal landscape of the person having been attacked, either by internal or external factors.

Cold arrests movement, change, and the necessary biological and psychological processes of destruction, reconstruction, reparation and healing. An exterior Wind-Cold attack, then, it not just your garden-variety common cold; rather, a Wind-Cold attack has the potential to shut down the vitality of one’s very being, to cease growth and cause a contraction and withering of the human spirit depending upon which layer it enters and how quickly (Mitchell, Ye, & Wiseman, 1999).

When understood in psychological terms, Cold represents those things that constrict our human growth and potential for movement and transformation. Cold is the fear that comes with the Winds of confrontation to the self and the challenge to enter into the unknown (i.e. change self-perception). The Chinese character for fear (kong) is comprised of a hand holding a tool for knocking, as in a Heart that is beating or knocking in response to fear; another character, ju is often coupled with kong and it depicts the heart and next to the heart are two eyes with a little bird below, meaning the little bird must be on the look out for danger and life-preservation (Larre & Rochat de la Valle, 2005). Cold, in connection to the Kidneys and fear, inspires vigilance least death result. Vigilance can be used as protection of the ego, of the self as it has been defined and differentiated through psychological development.

Winds, in particular, are those outside demons that threaten our ego and our carefully crafted individuation from the rest of the world; they are the quick and active insults to the fiercely defended sense of ego/self that we have constructed over the years.
Cold, a constricting and contracting quality that halts *yang qi* from advancing and moving follows these Winds of change and confrontation. Bringing it back to the pattern of *Wen Dan Tang*, this Wind-Cold attack damages the *yang* ministerial Fire of Gallbladder, which, as explored in Chapter 1, is the pivot upon which all other eleven organs rely as well as our link to the extraordinary meridians and organs. Unable to deal with these outside confrontations to the ego/self, either due to an already present fear (i.e. internal Cold) or due to a lack of time, the body stores the factors inside, waiting for the day in which they can be properly unearthed, examined and then decided upon. Perhaps this is where the Stomach is implicated in the pattern: Stomach and Spleen are responsible for digesting not only food but also all of life experiences that come from the outside. The storing of the Wind-Cold confrontations disrupts the Stomach’s ability to digest, transform and transport these experiences.

In addition to storing them, the body creates Phlegm via the Spleen/Stomach as the Stomach is not able execute its functions properly. This Phlegm is not only a result of the malfunctioning Stomach *qi* but it also functions to dampen down the assault of the Wind-Cold; it is the body’s attempt to hide the insult and the fear and prevent agitating the *shen*. Yvonne Farrell in her teachings on the Eight Extraordinary Vessels sees this Phlegm-Damp as a way for human beings to put out the fires of transformation and remain in what is known (Y. Farrell, personal communication, July 2012). Remaining in the known territory is safe for the self even though the self may not feel exceptionally well, mentally or physically. The fear of the unknown is strong enough to persuade someone not to change, to keep producing Phlegm in order to hide from having to deal with life experiences, confrontations and the ministerial Fire even further. Thus
Gallbladder yang qi becomes weaker, more encumbered and more encapsulated in Cold while the clear orifices become clouded and confused.

This can work for only so long, however, as the Gallbladder must be able to function properly in order for the human body and mind to flourish. Therefore Heat accumulates due to the stagnation and begins to harass the Heart shen. This Heat is like the body’s alarm system going off; the body is telling the Heart shen that there is something not quite right here and it must be dealt with. Typically, this is when the patient presents, driven to treatment either from nausea, chest tightness, palpitations or insomnia. Sometimes patients are well aware of their depression and seek help for that alone. In all cases, the body is telling the Heart shen that there is a problem and it must be addressed if the mind and body are to thrive. Wen Dan Tang’s Heat-clearing herbs allow for the alarms to be shut off temporary so that clarity and peace can initiate the decision that needs to be made. Zhu Ru in particular clears Stomach Heat, can dissolve Phlegm and calms the shen (Versluys & Fruehauf, 2004).

However, again, it is not the Heat that is the root problem so much as the congealed and stagnating Cold and Phlegm. These are the core factors that must be dealt with if healing is to resume. On a psycho-emotional level, once the agitation of not knowing what is causing the discomfort is cleared, the real work begins. Zhi Ban Xia warms, dissolves and dislodges Cold-Phlegm, allowing the Gallbladder yang qi to be free and begin to make a decision about where the Cold came from, and where it needs to go now. Chen pi moves stagnant qi and dissolves Phlegm, and Zhi Shi in particular is excellent to move Gallbladder ministerial Fire, using Gallbladder’s yang qi to break through the dampening Phlegm, which was encumbering its movement in the first place.
Sheng Jiang warms and harmonizes the Stomach, enabling it to digest the initial exterior pathogenic Wind-Cold factors while Fu Ling supports the Spleen and continues to drain out the Damp (Versluys & Fruehauf, 2004) being generated from the dissolving Phlegm. Da Zao and Zhi Gan Cao serve to harmonize these actions and continue to support the Spleen (Versluys & Fruehauf, 2004). Da Zao is especially useful in nourishing the Heart, which has suffered from the stagnating Heat.

To conclude, the power of Wen Dan Tang lies in its ability to clear out the confusion and course the Gallbladder yang qi thereby restoring the proper qi dynamics to body and mind. It creates the context within which the shaoyang qi can re-circulate the body fluids, creating expansion and upward movement, which in practice releases the constraint that Cold and fear have had on the yang qi. One possible etiology to the pattern is an initial exterior Wind-Cold attack, understood energetically as well as a psychologically, constricts Gallbladder yang qi, halting not only psychological growth but also causing obstruction in the middle jiao. Stomach and Spleen are interrupted from digesting life experiences, leaving them to accumulate and build. This leads to Phlegm production via the middle jiao as identified previously. This Phlegm, visible and invisible, not only obstructs the internal workings of Gallbladder warmth, Fire, transformation and movement but also clouds the clear orifices, causes Heat stagnation and makes it difficult to see or want to see our true selves and the root of the pathology. Mental illnesses develop as a result of this disordered thinking and lack of movement. The Cold keeps the Gallbladder qi shackled while the Wind-Cold, those demons of confrontation, shame, and fear, stay hidden and harbored, most often within the dai mai as explored in Chapter one. Wen Dan Tang, then, is not only a good formula to clear
Heat and transform Phlegm for a gastric upset but has the power to treat a myriad of mental illnesses, including depression. For a Gallbladder that is confronted, cold, encumbered and stuck, this is the representative formula.

References


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Association.
Conclusion

It is my hope that this treatise has offered some explanation as to why a healthy Chinese medical Gallbladder is so crucial for initiating mental and emotional wellbeing in addition to its traditional uses in musculoskeletal disorders. Additionally, it is my hope that a more esoteric interpretation of Gallbladder has rendered this important organ network all the more relevant for our modern ills, such as the Western psychological disorder of depression. Mapping Gallbladder onto the human psyche, as understood by influence of Freud, Jung and Yuen, we can see its potent functions in self-differentiation and its role in setting the perception of limitations. Rooted in classical thought, Gallbladder’s power resides in its nature as pure yang, its literal meaning of courage, and its representation as Wood, Wind, anger and spring; Its intrinsic connection to Kidneys, original yin and yang, the Marrow, the Brain as well as it being a platform for many of the extraordinary meridians make Gallbladder truly extraordinary in its therapeutic reach. Having the key and the courage to unlock the body’s dai mai closet, facing those injuries to the ego or demon-Winds of self, healthy Gallbladder embodies bravery, flexibility, decisiveness and adaptation; in this it cleans the body of lingering insults, restores clarity and re-sets one’s life direction once again.

These functions combined enable a human being to truly re-write the story of self and change their experiences and expression of life. Gallbladder enables a total re-orientation to life, Jung’s circumambulatio and resultant ‘self-realization’. This re-writing of the story is the beginning of creating mental-emotional health and the movement out of depression.
As discussed, we have many tools to initiate this movement from acupuncture needles to Chinese herbs, to name only a few examples. Points used and, most importantly, the intention behind their use, as we have seen, can be an incredibly quick way to instigate the winds of change and set the patient on a new trajectory. Chinese herbs, particularly as formulated in *Wen Dan Tang*, are some of the most powerful tools we have: As we have explored in chapter three, each herb not only works in a physiological system but also on a psycho-emotional level as they digest life experiences, warm hidden fears, and mobilize long-held bundles of stagnant thought, thereby initiating within the patient a new spring.

It is no surprise, then, that all other eleven organs’ health rest on the proper functioning on the Gallbladder as stated in *Su Wen* chapter nine. To treat Gallbladder is to change the story, which is to re-orient the self, proclaiming a new direction for all the organs to follow; in effect, to treat Gallbladder is to change a life.
Afterword

As repeatedly emphasized in this work, Chinese medicine is a relational medicine first and foremost. However, I acknowledge that there is no discussion on the positive power of relationships among people or the healing that comes in being in community for alleviating depression. I chose to start with a broad concept of Chinese medicine as a relational medicine and narrow it to an individualized understanding, partly due to limited space and partly because depression (and its treatment) is still largely conceptualized as a highly individualized process, at least in the West. (My suspicion is that this is part of the reason for the widespread diagnosis of depression in our United States society.) Broadly, my goal was to show how effective an ancient relationship-driven and multi-dimensional medicine could be in treating modern day mild-to-moderate depression. That is not to say that community and societal relationships are not important; on the contrary, they are just as crucial, and as such are supported in nothing else by Confucian-influenced Chinese medical concepts. I have no doubt that further study into the societal underpinnings of depression, and the interplay of isolation versus community as it affects incidences of depression, would be a worthy and fruitful inquiry in the future.