



The Liver and Gall Bladder: Selected Readings

TRANSLATED BY HEINER FRUEHAUF

The liver is known as both the wood organ and the wind organ. Because it houses the ministerial fire within, we can say that the structure of the liver is yin while its function is yang. Its nature is firm and resolute, and it is in charge of moving and ascending. The liver relies entirely on kidney water to sustain it, on blood to moisten it, on lung metal's clear nature and descending function to keep it in check, and on the generosity of the middle palace's earth qi to nourish it. In this way, a firm and unrelenting character is being fitted with a soft and harmonious body, resulting in the liver's balancing and free flowing nature.

[from Ye Tianshi, *A Handbook of Clinical Case Histories (Linzheng Zhinan Yian)*, 1746]



The physician who knows how to harmonize the liver knows how to treat the hundred diseases.

[from Zhou Xuehai, *Reflections Upon Reading the Medical Classics (Du yi suibi)*, Qing dynasty]



The nature of wood is to spread. Once food qi enters the stomach, it relies entirely on the spreading and dredging function of liver wood, and it is only because of this influence that the food is transformed. If the liver's pure Yang does not rise, it cannot spread and dredge the grain and fluids, and distention and discomfort in the middle region will be the inevitable result. The liver is associated with wood. Wood qi is characterized by soaring upwards and thriving to be straight. As long as it does not get bogged down, the blood vessels are open and without obstruction. The liver is the organ in charge of storing blood. It also commands the Ministerial Fire (xianghuo). If there is sufficient blood, the Fire will be warm but not fierce, and the blood can smoothly circulate throughout all three burning spaces, reach the pores, and every single place in the body will benefit from its warming and nourishing function.

[from Tang Rongchuan, *A Treatise on Blood Disorders (Xuezheng lun)*, 1884]



Liver and spleen function by assisting each other. Everybody is quick to point out that an excess of liver wood can injure the spleen earth, causing diminished digestion of food. But nobody seems to know that if liver wood is too weak, it cannot circulate the spleen, a situation which will also cause indigestion. The liver connects to the Sea of Qi (Dantian) below, so inside the liver there lodges Ministerial Fire. Therefore, it can utilize the power of this fire to produce earth. The food which enters the spleen and stomach relies on this power to be "cooked." It is for these reasons that we say that the liver and the spleen function by assisting each other.

[from Zhang Xichun, *A Chinese Doctor Integrates Western Knowledge: A Notebook of Medicine (Yixue zhong zhong can xi lu)*, 1924]



The liver is the wood organ and the wind organ. Because the Ministerial Fire lodges inside of it, we can say that its structure is Yin while its function is Yang. Its nature is firm and resolute, and it is in charge of moving and ascending. It relies entirely on kidney Water to sustain it, on blood to moisten it, on lung metal's clear nature and descending function to keep it in check, and on the generosity of the middle palace's earth qi to nourish it. In this way, a firm and unrelenting character is being fitted with a soft and harmonious body, resulting in the liver's balancing and free flowing nature.

[from Ye Tianshi, *A Handbook of Clinical Case Histories (Linzheng zhinan yi'an)*, 1746]



The liver is associated with wood. It stores the blood and is the home of the hun spirits. Among the seven human emotions, only anger is of an intense nature, drying the blood and dissipating the hun spirits. The person who understands the way of nourishing the liver never throws fits of anger.

[from Zhang Huang, *A Compendium of Illustrated Texts (Tushu bian)*, Ming dynasty]



The Classic of Sagely Benefits states: “The transformation of the four seasons begins with the Wood phase. Thus, the process of germinating and nurturing the twelve meridian systems is triggered by the liver. During the first month of pregnancy, a woman's fetus is nourished by her Jueyin liver meridian system.” The liver, therefore, marks the beginning when the spring Yang begins to stir, which is the source of growth for the myriad things. By avoiding outbursts of anger and by fostering this particular Yang, your pre©natal qi will keep generating in the realm of the infinite. The liver is also in charge of color, and if the qi is in harmony, the body will display a healthy glimmer. If the qi is injured, however, the body will appear dry and brittle. Nourishing the liver, therefore, means abstaining from anger, and this is the most important point if you wish to maintain good health.

[from Yu Bian, *Medical Teachings Continued (Xu yishuo)*, 1522]



The eyes are the opening of the liver. When a person sleeps, the blood returns to the liver. From there it is passed on to the eyes which can only see because of this process. Sleep is the phenomenon of the nameless Fire growing dim and then revitalizing, and even though it is impossible not to sleep at all, one should not let it just part like that to induce sleep. If a person suffers from insomnia caused by a cold, deficiency condition of the gall bladder, s/he is always restlessly thinking about something and feels mentally worn out. If there is excess heat in the liver the patient typically sleeps too much, and the mirror of intelligence will gather dust and the root of good health will deteriorate. None of this represents the proper way of nourishing the liver and gall bladder and subduing the sleeping demons. Again, to emphasize the vital points: don't get angry, don't lay down during the day, and always retire your body but not your Shen. Because the essence of sleep is the soul of the body. If you can manage to sleep little, the master mind will be bright and alert, and not only will your Shen qi be flowing free and purely, but you will also not be disturbed by dreams. Every time you crave sleep, blood rushes to the heart and the Original Shen is forced to leave its house, and not only will the clouds cover up the heavenly realm of spirituality, but the Shen itself will become dim and unconscious just as its domicile. The Taoist Qigong master Zhang Sanfeng has once said: “Grasp the dream in the dream, and the enigmatic origin within the enigmatic origin. Since I beheld

the face of the girl, I can smilingly point out the paradise, Penglai, right in front of my eyes.” This is precisely what I mean. The *Neijing*, furthermore, states: “The three months of spring are the period of commencement heaven and earth are born, and the myriad things are flourishing.” Get up early in the morning, walk around in the courtyard, loosen your hair and relax your body. By doing so you will generate mental strength and act in harmony with the qi of spring, thus following the way of nourishing life. If you live contrary to this principle, you will harm your liver, and everybody should know this.

[from Yang Jizhou, *The Great Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion (Zhenjiu dacheng)*, fl.1590]



The gall bladder stores the essential fluids. It is thus called the “chief of staff” and the “store house of essence.” All the organs are of a murky nature, only the gall bladder is clear. All the other bowels are called “bowels in charge of transporting” something or other, and only the gall bladder is not labeled as a transporter, but stands out with this unique epithet. It is an organ, but rather similar to an organ.

[from Cai Luxian, *Chinese Medicine and Chinese Drugs: A Collection (Zhongguo yiyao huihai)*, 1936]

