

Summary of Chapter 10 of the Sù Wèn

Wǔ Zàng Shēng Chéng Piān – The Functions of the Five Viscera to Human Body and Their Mutual Relations

Paragraph 1

Organ	Functions related with	Manifests in	Controlled by
Xīn	Vessel	Complexion	Shèn
Fèi	Skin	Soft hair	Xīn
Gān	Tendon	Nail	Fèi
Pí	Muscle	Lips	Gān
Shèn	Bone	Hair	Pí

Paragraph 2

When excessively taken	It will cause	Remark
Salty food	Stagnation of Xuè, changes color of complexion	Water harms Fire
Bitter food	Dryness of skin, falling of hair	Fire harms Metal
Acrid food	Cramp of tendons, withering of nails	Metal harms Wood
Sour food	Skin becomes tough and thick, lips wrinkle and shrink	Wood harms Earth
Sweet food	Bone pain, falling of hair	Earth harms Water

Note: Unschuld [3: 114] mentions: A problem is encountered here because the statement in Sù Wèn 4 states that sour food can harm the sinews, even though both sour flavor and the sinews are associated with the same agent, wood, is difficult to reconcile with the statement in Sù Wèn 10 informing us that the sinews are harmed by large quantities of acrid food. Why, one may ask, does consumption of sour food not add strength to the sinews given that both constitute one agent?

Why does Sù Wèn 23 emphasize: "The sour flavor proceeds to the sinews; in case of disease in the sinews one must not consume sour flavor in large quantities."

After all, as Sù Wèn 5 states: "Sour flavor generates the liver.", and as Sù Wèn 10 states, "the liver longs for sour flavor", and "the correlate of the liver is the sinews." Similarly, Sù Wèn 23 points out: "Sour flavor enters the liver" and it adds: "The liver rules the sinews." As a last example, Sù Wèn 44 states: "The liver rules the body's muscles and flesh."

That is, while the system of correspondences points out associations among phenomena, its purely metaphorical reasoning allows for a significant degree of ambiguity when it comes to an explanation of interactions occurring among these phenomena.

The reasoning underlying the notion of mutual domination among the five agents is outlined in Sù Wèn 25:

When wood meets metal, it is felled.

When fire meets water, it is extinguished.

When soil meets wood, it is penetrated.



When metal meets fire, it is destroyed.
When water meets soil, it is interrupted in its flow.

Paragraph 3

The five colours for distinguishing the fatal diseases.

The patient will die, when the complexion is:

- Green and black, like colour of a dying plant.
- Yellow like the fruit of unripe citron.
- Black like coal.
- Red like blood in stagnation.
- White like a piece of dry bone.

Paragraph 4

The appearances of vitality of the five viscera.

The patient will live, when the complexion is:

- Green like a bird's green feather (green like jade [4: 42])
- Red like the crown of a rooster.
- Yellow like the belly of a crab.
- White like the lard of a pig.
- Black like the feather of a crow (black like the feathers of a black chicken [4: 43])

The colour of vitality of:	is:
Xīn	cinnebar wrapped in white thin silk
Fèi	something red wrapped in white thin silk
Gān	reddish-black wrapped in white thin silk *
Pí	reddish-yellow wrapped in white thin silk
Shèn	purple wrapped in white thin silk

* Maoshing Ni [4: 43] writes: "The color that produces liver qi is like white silk wrapping a green color.

[4: 43] does not mention Fèi.

Paragraph 5

Zàng	Colour	Taste
Xīn	Red	Bitterness
Fèi	White	Acridness
Gān	Green	Sour
Pí	Yellow	Sweet
Shèn	Black	Salty

**Paragraph 6**

All channels and collaterals converge in the eyes.

All marrows lead to the brain.

All tendons lead to Gān.

All blood lead to Xīn.

All the Qì in respiration lead to Fèi.

[4: 43] The four extremities and the twelve joints are the highways of the channels, marrow, tendons, Xuè, and Qì.

Hún (Soul) is the manifestation in the outside world.

Paragraph 7

Gān stores Xuè.

During the day Xuè circulates throughout the channels and collaterals, because Gān provides Xuè for movement and activities.

At night, when one sleeps), Xuè returns to Gān.

When eyes are nourished with Xuè, they can see.

When feet are nourished with Xuè, they can walk.

When hands are nourished with Xuè, they can grasp.

When fingers are nourished with Xuè, they can carry.

When pathogenic Fēng has an opportunity to invade, because Xuè and Qì are not arriving at the acupoints, it can cause bì/obstruction syndrome and spasms.

There are 12 main joints in the four extremities and 365 small bone joints, excluding the Shū-points in the twelve channels. These are places for Wèi-Qì to stay. They are also places for Xié-Qì to reside.

Use moxa and acupuncture to dispel the Xié-Qì.

Paragraph 8

The five determinations = the pulse conditions of the five Zàng.

To understand the five pulses of the Zàng, one must understand etiology.

Paragraph 9

Symptom	belongs to	disease is in
Headache in upper part of head	Xū lower part, Shí upper part	Zú Shǎoyīn and Tàiyáng channels

If the illness worsens, then transmitted to Shèn (kidney). *



Symptom	belongs to	disease is in
Far-sightedness (presbyopia) with shaking of the head, blurry vision and deafness	Shí lower part, Xū upper part	Zú Shàoyáng and Juéyīn channels

If the illness worsens, then transmitted to Gān. **

Symptom	belongs to	disease is in
Fullness and distention of abdomen, armpit like being propped, feels cold in lower part and feels dizzy in upper part of body	-	Zú Tàiyīn and Yángmíng channels

Symptom	belongs to	disease is in
Cough with rapid breathing, feeling sick in the chest	-	Shǒu Yángmíng and Tàiyīn channels
Pain in the chest, pain along spinal column like tearing	-	Shǒu Tàiyáng and Shǎoyīn channels

Note: Maoshing Ni [4] has another opinion:

* [4: 44] then transmitted to Gān.

** [4: 44] then transmitted to Pí.

Here we followed the Chinese text.

Paragraph 10

Complexion	Pulse	Diagnosis	Disease	Due to
Red	Shuò and Shí Mài	Xié-Qì stagnates in abdomen, hinders the food and drink	Cardiac bì-syndrome	Xīn-Qì being hurt by worryness.
White	Shuò and Fú Mài	Fèi = Xū and Xīn = Shí. Xīn is under Fèi, so it is Xū in upper part and Shí in lower part. When Xīn-Huǒ is overabundant, Shén = distracted to cause fright.	Fèi bì-syndrome	Hán and Rè and the conducting sexual intercourse after being drunk.
Green	Cháng and Hōng Mài, flicks the fingers in the left and right sides	Hán in Gān which causes Xié-Qì to stagnate under the heart propping armpits. (hernia, lumbago, cold feet, headache)	Hepatic bì-syndrome	Hán-Shī (cold-wetness).
Yellow	Xū and Dà Mài	Xié-Qì stagnated in abdomen and patient feels adverseness of vital energy.	Hernia syncope (wood restricts earth)	-
Black	Dà Mài and hard	Xié-Qì stagnates in lower abdomen and external genital organ or external urethral orifice.	Shèn bì-syndrome	Sleeping immediately after a cold bath.

Bì-syndrome: means that the 'machine' is blocked.

Paragraph 11

The patient will survive when:

- yellow face with green eyes
- yellow face with red eyes
- yellow face with white eyes
- yellow face with black eyes

There still is stomach-energy. *

The patient dies when:

- green face with red eyes
- red face with white eyes
- green face with black eyes
- black face with white eyes
- red face with green eyes

Stomach energy has been exhausted. *

* The English translation of Wu [2] mentions Stomach energy, Maoshing Ni [4] mentions 'spleen qi', and the Chinese text of Wu [2] does not mention either of them.

General note: It can be a good idea to read Unschuld [3] section 3.6 *The Significance of the Five-Agents Doctrine in the Su Wen* (page 110) as well.

Bibliography

- [1] Wiseman, N. and Feng, Ye, *A practical dictionary of Chinese Medicine*, paradigm publications, 1998.
- [2] Nelson, Liansheng Wu and Andrew, Qi Wu, *Yellow Empero's Canon Internal Medicine*, China Science & Technology Press, 1999.
- [3] Unschuld, P., *Huang Di Nei Jing, nature, knowledge, imagery in an ancient Chinese medical text*, University of California Press, 2003.
- [4] Maoshing Ni, *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine*, Shambala, 1995.