

TWELVE OFFICIALS AND FIVE ZANG & SIX FU

The basis of 12 Officials theory is found in Chapter 8 of the Nei Jing Su Wen

Chapter 8 refers to 12 zàng 臟 (cáng 藏) rather than the more usual idea of five zàng and six fǔ

Each of the twelve cáng is described as like a government official (官 guan) from which the idea of twelve officials is derived. The character fǔ (府) also contains a similar idea.

肉 flesh: when used as a radical appears like 月

藏 cáng: Hide, conceal, hoard, store up

臟 zàng: internal organs

府 fǔ: government office, building where official documents are consigned, official residence, your home, prefecture

腑 fǔ: bowels, entrails, internal organs

官 guan: government official, officer, organ, - this character is repeated in each section describing the role of each official

Twelve Officials

- Twelve officials (Shí Èr Guǎn) theory differs in some respects from Zang-Fu theory. Scholars such as Unschuld suggest that these differences represent different historic strata
- Chapter 8 of the Su Wen is the basis of Twelve Officials theory
- The concept of Twelve Zang (cang 藏) is clearly different in principle and in certain particulars to the concept of Zang/Fu
- The two theories are reconcilable: for example, the ‘decision making and planning’ of the Liver and Gall Bladder ‘Officials’ can be seen as a pre-requisite to its role of the Liver in promoting ‘freeflow’ of qi
- The Twelve Officials information tends to be subsumed under Zang/Fu theory in modern-TCM texts, but from the Twelve Officials point of view Zang/Fu theory would be subsumed under the Twelve Officials
- Twelve Officials theory is aligned to the idea that Heiner Fruehauf describes as ‘CCM’ view of organs/functions; and to the concept that Porkert describes in his use of the term ‘Orb. The official or orb is a function throughout the organism, and not just a localized function or anatomical entity.

‘CCM’	‘TCM’
Views body as field (traditional <i>zang/xiang</i> theory: <i>zang/fu</i> are primarily viewed as functional systems)	Views body as materiality (influence of modern anatomy: <i>zang/fu</i> are primarily viewed as structural organs)

- In Twelve Officials theory the inter-relational aspect is also strongly emphasized

- One specific difference between ‘Twelve Officials’ and ‘Five Zang Six Fu’ is that the sixth zàng (referred to as Dan Zhongⁱ in Chapter 8 of the Su Wen) is clearly given a distinct role.
- The relative importance of the Yang Officials is greater than the ‘Fu-bowel’ function. In Twelve Officials theory the Yang Organ represents to a certain extent what would be considered to be the Yang aspect of the Yin organ in Zang/Fu theory. In Zang-Fu theory we can see some overlap of these ideas especially in relation to the Stomach and Gall Bladder (i.e. ‘Gall-Bladder deficiency’)
- There is a greater emphasis on mental-emotional in Twelve Officials theory; for example the description of Liver and Gall-Bladder is purely mental in nature. However, these functions all operate on the BodyMindSpirit. The importance given to the heart in twelve officials further reinforces this. Also see Fruehauf’s article ‘All Disease comes from the Heart’.
http://www.classicalchinesemedicine.org/scienceofsymbols/documents/emotions_Fruehauf.pdf
- One metaphor that may help to integrate the two systems is to think of the 12 Officials theory as describing the role of government cabinet ministers, while the Zang-Fu theory is more like the description of a government department.

Su Wen Chapter 8

靈蘭秘典論篇第八 Secret Treatise of the Spiritual Orchid

Comment on Title: the orchid is a feminine symbol

靈蘭秘典論篇第八

黃帝問曰：願聞十二臟之相使，貴賤何如？

岐伯對曰：悉乎哉問也。

請遂言之！

Claude Larre

Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen
Chapter 8
The Secret Treatise of the Spiritual
Orchid

Huang Di asked:
I wish to be instructed in the
relative charges of the twelve zang
[cang] and their relative ranks.

Qi Bo replied:
What a vast question! If you will
allow me, let us go over all of it.

Henry Lu

On the Secret Treatises stored in
the Emperor’s Treasure House of
Books.

The Yellow Emperor asked:
How are the twelve organs using
one another and what are their
respective nobility and humility?

Chi-Po replied:
The question put forward by your
Majesty is rather complete. Please
let me answer in detail.

Maoshing Ni

Chapter 8 The Sacred Teachings

Huang Di asked qi Bo, “Can you
please tell me the functions of the
twelve zangfu viscera and their
meridians?”

Qi Bo replied:
Your question is very precise and I
will try and answer you as
precisely as you asked.

The distinction of Zang and Fu is not mentioned here

Originally Cang 藏 i.e. without the flesh radical; hence ‘official’. Zang 臟 as in Zang/Fu has the flesh radical

藏 cáng, Hide, conceal, hoard, store up, with addition of flesh 肉 (月), becomes 臟 Zàng Internal organs
 府 fǔ, Government office, building where official documents are consigned, official residence, your home, prefecture; with addition of flesh 肉 (月), becomes Fǔ 腑 Bowels, entrails, internal organs

The following character appears in the description of each entities role and reinforces the idea of the term ‘official’.

官 guan, Government official, officer, organ, this character is repeated in each section – see below

心者，君主之官也，神明出焉。

The Heart holds the office of Lord and Sovereign. The radiance of the Spirits [shen] stems from it.

The Heart is the monarch from whom the spirits are derived.

The heart is the sovereign of all organs and wisdom and represents the consciousness of ones being. It is responsible for intelligence wisdom and spiritual transformation.

心 xīn: Heart, mind, intelligence, soul

Mind here does not refer to the mundane mind, but more an aspect of Shen.

官 guan, Government official, officer, organ, this character is repeated in each section.

神 shen: god, deity, spirit, mind, expression, look, supernatural, magical.

Modern Chinese translates this as ‘consciousness.’

Comment: The mental-emotional aspects are also intrinsic to the word we translate as Heart that could more accurately be translated as Heart-Mind.

Also see the last section that also focuses on the overall role of Heart.

In Chapter 8 (coincidence!) of the Ling Shu we can see an example of how these ideas are extended:

Claude Larre	Van Nghi	Henry Lu
When something takes charge of the being we speak of the Heart....	the motivation to serve things is called the Xin (heart);...	Mind [xin] is the element that is responsible for the performance of activities...
When the Heart falls prey to apprehension and anxiety, to worry and pre-occupation, The spirits are attacked. When the sprits are attacked, under the effects of fear and fright, one loses possession of oneself...	Fear [chu] <i>[!missing term?]</i> reflection [si] and pre-occupation [lu] harm the shen (mind) and the disturbed shen then engenders panic and loss of the notion of “Me”;...	Fright [chu], nervousness [ti] , thought [si] and contemplation [lu], are harmful to the spirit, because the heart is in store of the spirit. When the spirit is impaired, fear may run wild....

肺者，相傳之官，治節出焉。

The Lungs hold the office of The Lungs are the ministers from The lung is the advisor. It helps

[Prime] Minister and Chancellor. whom policies are derived.
The regulation of the life-giving
[sic] network stems from it.

the heart in regulating the body's
qi.

肺 *Fei Lungs flesh, 肉(月) and 市 dividing, multiplying)*

相 *Xiang Prime Minister*

傅 *Fu Tutor, teacher, assist; Claude Larre translates this as Chancellor, The Chancellor is the title of the Prime Minister in Germany. There is some overlap here with the Dan Zhong see below*

節 *Jie Knots (as in bamboo), divisions, articulations (can refer to acupuncture points), rhythm.*

Comment: The lungs are known as the 'complementary official'; their role as Prime Minister complements that of the monarch, as does their role as described in Zang Fu theory as controller of qi, complements the heart's role as commander of blood. Lungs are said to command rhythmicity which is innate to the (qi) breaths, the Zong Qi in particular, the pulse, the vessels (mai).

肝者，將軍之官，謀慮出焉。

The Liver holds the office of The Liver is the general from The liver is like a general,
general of the armed forces. whom strategies are derived. courageous and smart.
Assessment of circumstances and
conception of plans stem from it.

肝 *Gān (Kan) Liver; flesh 肉(月) and 干 Shield, offend, attack*

Comment: Defensive (wei qi) and offensive role is referenced in the name of the organ.

In Zang-Fu theory the Liver is said to rule the 'free flowing' of the qi. The role of Liver planning and Gall Bladder decision making can be seen as the pre-requisites to the free flowing.

膽者中正之官，決斷出焉。

The Gall Bladder is responsible for The Gall-Bladder is the impartial The gall-bladder is like a judge for
what is just and exact. justice from whom judgments are its power of discernment.
Determination and decision stem derived.
from it.

Dǎn (Tan) 膽 Gall-bladder; Flesh 肉 (月) and Zhān 詹 Courage, guts, bravery)

Interestingly the dictionary describes the second part of the character as being a phonetic – clearly if so it is coincidentally also a very appropriate in meaning.

Although Liver tends to an excess Yang state and so a deficiency of Yang of Liver is not described as such, the syndrome of Deficiency of Gall Bladder, showing lack of courage, timidity is a place holder for a deficiency of Yang of Wood.

Discrimination as a function of Small Intestine is dependent on the decision making function.

膻中者，臣使之官，喜樂出焉。

TAN [DAN] ZHONG has the The Pericardium is the messenger The pericardium is like the court

charge of resident as well as envoy. from whom joy is derived (this is jester who makes the king laugh,
Elation and joy stem from it. due to the fact that situated in bringing forth joy.
between the breasts, the
pericardium is the sea of energy;
thus it acts as the messenger of the
heart to spread the emotion of
joy.)

Dan Zhong (the name of CV17) is the term used here which does not directly translate as 'pericardium'. The more direct translation as 'Centre of the Chest' does not do justice to the term. It conveys the idea of a dais on which the emperor sits. Hence Porkert's choice of a Latin term is Atrium meaning a central court. Bensky and O'Connor choose 'Platform Middle' that draws upon a related character. Various terms appear in texts that are considered to be largely synonymous.

膻 *dǎn*: 'centre of the chest' - niche or shrine and flesh 肉(月), and *dǎn* (tan) 亶 Sincere, real, true, truth) a Taoist altar.

喜 *Xi*: happy, like, pleased, be fond of

樂 *le*: happy, cheerful, joyful

喜樂 *Xi Le*: the dual term translates as 'Elation/Pleasures and Joy'. The former suggestive of behavior (pleasures) or pathology (elation), the latter of true or inner joy.

Le is the only emotion that is suggested to be significant when it is lacking, 不樂 bu le means 'no joy'.

Comment: This official who is close to the monarch and also the go-between the Emperor and the people could be likened to the Chancellor in the English tradition, as the Secretary of the Monarch. From the word Chancel, literally a grating such as separates the Chancel of the church where only the priest can enter from the congregation.

The term Pericardium is the modern term derived from *Xin Bao* or *Xin Bao Luo*. However, the reference to 'collaterals' suggest the circulation in general and hence the designation of 'Circulation/Sex' in some texts. Heart Master does not suggest mastery over the heart, but rather what the heart has mastery over which also suggest the blood (&) vessels.

Xin Bao represents the go-between the Heart and Kidney (*Shao Yin*).

Clearly modern TCM understanding is a very diminished role for this entity

脾胃者，食廩之官，五味出焉。

The Spleen and Stomach are responsible for the storehouses and granaries.

The five WEI (tastes) stem from them.

The Spleen and Stomach are the officials in charge of food storage and from whom the five flavors are derived.

The stomach and spleen are like warehouses where one stores the food and essences. They digest absorb and extract food and nutrients.

脾 *Pí* Spleen; flesh 肉(月) and 卑 a cooking pot for everyday use, i.e. something mundane (earthly).

胃 *Wèi* Stomach; flesh 肉(月) and 田 field, cultivated

味 *Wei*: Taste refers to the active energy or essence of food not just a passive sensory experience.

Note: there are different characters that are taken as referring to the anatomic stomach.

脘 *Wan* Internal cavity of stomach, Oesophagus

Comment: It is of note here that Stomach and Spleen are dealt with as a combined entity.

Stomach is the 'Yang Ming' or Yang within the Yin, it is a Fu that has characteristics of a Zang, i.e. Fu are said to transit but not store, the stomach as a 'granary' does store.

Note especially the placing of Stomach and Spleen in the centre of the passage and dealt with as a pair - just as the Earth Phase is placed in the centre of the cross shaped representation of the phases. Also the Stomach and Spleen occupy the middle Jiao. Stomach is an "exception to the rule" in a number of ways. The Stomach channel although a yang channel is found on the front of the abdomen. In TCM Stomach is a Fu, but is described as having at least temporary Storage functions like a Zang – it thus has its own Qi and Qi Syndrome (unlike the other Fu organs). Stomach and Spleen channels are thus very close together in their paths in contradistinction to the Bladder and Kidney that are furthest apart

大腸者，傳道之官，變化出焉。

The Large Intestine is responsible for transit. The residue from the trans-formation stems from it.

The Large Intestine is the official of transportation from whom change in the shape of things is derived.

The large intestine is responsible for transportation of all turbidity. All waste products go through this organ.

大 *large*

腸 *Chang* intestine *Flesh* 肉(月) and 易 *Phonetic: Sun appearing, like rays piercing clouds, bright.*

The references of the character are not immediately apparent, but one is reminded of the old joke about 'where the sun doesn't shine'!

傳 *chuan: pass, pass on, spread, hand down, summon, transmit, conduct*

道 *dao: way, path*

小腸者，受盛之官，化物出焉。

The Small Intestine is responsible for receiving and making things thrive.

Transformed [purified] substances stem from it.

The Small Intestine is the receiving official from whom assimilable [purified] substances are derived.

The small intestine receives the food that has been digested by the spleen and stomach and further extracts, absorbs, and distributes throughout the body, all the while separating the pure from the turbid.

小 *Hsiao: small*

腸 *Chang: intestine* *Flesh* 肉(月) and 易 *Phonetic: Sun appearing, like rays piercing clouds, bright.*

化 *Hua: change, turn, transform, melt, dissolve, digest, get rid of, burn up.*

The transformational role of the Small Intestine can be seen as integral to the Zang/Fu system.

Comment: by implication this refers to the process of purification and assimilation. Often expressed as separating pure and impure.

In ancient Egyptian belief the Heart is the seat of the soul and knowledge of good and evil. Traditional

cultures have thus placed the power of discrimination next to the spirit/soul.

腎者，作強之官，伎巧出焉。

The Kidneys are responsible for the creation of power. Skill and ability stem from them.

The Kidneys are the health officials from whom the strength of the body and the healthy movements of the four limbs are derived.

The kidneys store the vitality and mobilize the four extremities. They also aid the memory, willpower, and co-ordination.

腎 Shèn *Kidney, testicle; flesh* 肉(月) *and* 臣 *subject, servant, and* 又 *right hand, indicating repetition. i.e.*

Kidneys are the only organ that is plural in Chinese

Comment: See Bladder below; the anatomic correlate of the Kidney(s) would appear to be gonads and other hormonal functions not the kidneys per se – which seem to be more closely correlated with Bladder.

強 *qiang: strong, powerful, better*

伎 *ji: a person with skill, talent – ruse, trick, a singsong girl*

This and the following term can both be applied to the ‘sea of bone marrow’.

巧 *quan: work to overcome an obstacle – skilful, clever, ingenious, cunning,*

A reference to zhi-will and the power of perseverance.

三焦者，決瀆之官，水道出焉。

The Triple Heater is responsible for the opening up of passages and irrigation.
The regulation of fluids stems from it.

The Triple Burning Space is the irrigation official who builds waterways.

The san jiao, of the three visceral cavities, promotes the transformation and transportation of water and fluids throughout the body.

三 *San three, and Jiāo (Chiao)*

焦 *Burned, scorched, anxious, vexed*

Comment: The close connection of San Jiao and Bladder is suggested here. (Note Bl.39 is lower He Se of San Jiao)

膀胱者，州都之官，津液藏焉，氣化則能出矣。

The Bladder is responsible for regions and cities. It stores the JIN-YE, (Body Fluids).
The transformations of the breaths (QI) then give out their power.

The Bladder is the district official (because it is located distant from other organs) who stores fluids so that they can flow outward when energy transformation takes place.

The bladder is where the water converges, and where after being catalyzed by the qi, it is eliminated.

Note: Bladder is a dual term, possibly the Bladder and Uterus (glossy flesh?) was originally indicated.

膀 *páng, Bladder; Flesh* 肉(月) *and* 旁 *side, (flesh on the side)*

胱 *guāng, Bladder; Flesh* 肉(月) *and* 光 *Light, ray, moonlight, sunshine, smooth, glossy*

One of the prime responsibilities of the provincial government would have been regulation of water, the

prime 'utility' in ancient China. There is also in this a resonance with the Bladder channel that not only is the longest channel, but in relation to Back-Shu points, passes through all the 'provinces' or departments of the body.

Clearly the Bladder role in relation to Qi suggests something more than just the temporary storage of waste fluid. The transformation of qi is in modern texts the Kidney function.

Indeed the anatomic correlate of the Bladder would appear to be the urinary system in general rather than the bladder in particular.

The word Jing meaning a capital (provincial) city appears in Bl.64 Capital Bone and GB.25 Capital Gate. The latter is especially interesting considering the correlation of anatomic bladder and kidney and energetic Bladder and Kidney. There also could be a play on words here as Jing refers to essence.

凡此十二官者，不得相失也。

The twelve offices form an interdependent ensemble that allows of no failing.

The twelve officials must not fail one another.

So these twelve zang and fu organs must work together harmoniously just like the kingdom.

In Twelve Officials theory the principle of interdependence is stressed more strongly than in Zang/Fu theory.

故主明則下安，以此養生則壽，沒世不殆，以爲天下則大昌。

If then the sovereign radiates (virtue), those under him will be at peace; through this the nurturing of life will yield longevity, and that from generation to generation. And the empire will radiate with a great light.

Therefore when the monarch is bright, the officials below him will feel secure, and when this principle is applied to nourish life, one will enjoy longevity without health hazards; when the same principle is applied to rule the world, then the world will be in great prosperity.

“However, the decision-making is the king’s job. If the spirit is clear, all the functions of the other organs will be normal. It is in this way that one’s life is preserved and perpetuated, just as a country becomes prosperous when all its people are fulfilling their duties.

The primary importance of the Heart is re-emphasized.

主不明則十二官危，使道閉塞而不通，形乃大傷，以此養生則殃，以爲天下者，其宗大危，戒之戒之。

恍惚之數，生於毫釐，毫釐之數，起於度量，千之萬之，可以益大，推之大之，其形乃制。

But if the sovereign does not radiate (virtue) the twelve offices will be in danger which will cause the closing and blocking of the ways and finally will stop communication - and the body will

On the other hand, when the monarch is not bright, the twelve officials will all be in danger with the result that the pathways will be blocked up which will greatly harm the physical shape. When

If the spirit is disturbed and unclear, the other organs will not function properly. This creates damage. The pathways and roads along which the qi flows will become blocked and health will

be seriously injured; through this that nurturing of life will sink into disaster. Everything that lives under Heaven will be threatened in its ancestral line with the greatest of dangers.

this principle is applied to nourishment of life, one will suffer from health hazards; and when it is applied to rule the world, it will cause great disaster.

suffer. The citizens of the kingdom will also suffer. These are the relationships of the kingdom

至道在微，變化無窮，孰知其原。
窘乎哉，消者瞿瞿，孰知其要。
閔閔之當，孰者為良。

Take care, I repeat, take good care!
The Supreme way is in the imperceptible; change and transformation without end! Who would then know its origin? Alas! It disappears and one anxiously searches for it; Who would then know the essential? O! The anguish from actual situations! Who will then know how to act properly?
Countless appearances and disappearances, out of which come forth the finest threads; fine threads that multiply until you can weigh and measure them. By the thousand and ten thousand they increase and grow; through development and growth creating the bodily form - by rules governed.

Beware of the danger!
The ultimate principles of nourishing life are very subtle and subject to indefinite change too and they cannot be understood without careful reflection. The principles are so difficult that despite man's great efforts, they still cannot be comprehended that causes a great deal of worry to those who wish to pursue them.
Shapeless and obscure things may generate tiny things, and tiny things may grow and become measurable, and further become enlarged one thousand times or even ten thousand times, and more and more, ad infinitum; and finally, they will form into physical shapes.

Qi Bo Continued (sic):
“The principles of healing and medicine in general are difficult to grasp because many changes occur in illness, and the healing process must adapt to that. It becomes difficult to know the root. The origin of illness can be so small and vague, in fact so elusive, but the illness can become substantial over time.

黃帝曰：善哉，余聞精光之道，大聖之業，而宣明大道，非齊戒擇吉日不敢受也。
黃帝乃擇吉日良兆，而藏靈蘭之室，以傳保焉。

HUANG DI concluded:
The teaching on the brilliant radiance of the essences and the conduct of the great saints has just been expounded. So as to treat the declaration and elucidation of this great teaching with the respect it deserves, after purification and exorcism, an auspicious day will be

The Yellow Emperor said:
That is wonderful. I have heard that to understand the pure and bright principles is the task of the great Sages, and that the great principles that are comprehensive and bright can only be accepted with purity of the heart and great caution on gracious days.

As Qi Bo spoke of the subtlety and difficulty of medicine and healing. Huang Di exclaimed, “Aha! I finally understand the intricacies and the essence of healing. I cannot receive this treasure carelessly.

chosen.

HUANG DI then had the fates consulted. A favourable and auspicious day was chosen, then they proceeded to the chamber of the Spiritual Orchid for the deposit and to ensure the true transmission of this teaching.

Thus the yellow Emperor then selected a gracious day with signs of good fortune to store the secret treatises in the treasure-house of books in order to pass on to posterity.

I must pick the best day and time to receive and store this knowledge. I must put this in my secret chamber and preserve it and pass it down to future generations.

The presentation of this chapter suggests something very special is being conveyed here. The mythology of Five Element acupuncture is that it is derived from oral teachings and thus differs from TCM teachings. Clearly these subtle teachings are hidden in plain sight!

Worsely's list differs in some cases from the above descriptions:

- Heart: 'Supreme Controller'
- Small Intestine: 'Separating Pure and Impure'
- Bladder: 'Storage of Water'
- Kidney: 'Distribution of Water'
- Circulation/Sex: 'Heart Protector'
- Three Heater: 'Heating Engineer'
- Gall Bladder: 'Decision Maker'
- Liver: 'Planning'
- Lung: 'Receiving of Qi'
- Large Intestine: 'Elimination'
- Stomach: 'Rotting and Ripening'
- Spleen/Pancreas: 'Transportation and Transformation'

Hicks, Hicks and Mole follow a system more based upon Claude Larre's translations. It appears that the National Boards questions are also now more in line with the Classical statements than Worsley's teaching.

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¹ Dan Zhong is a hard to translate term as the dictionary translation as the 'a medical term for the centre of the Chest' does not do justice to the meaning. It is interesting that the entity that modern TCM does not ascribe an individual role to has so many terms to refer to it.