

Aggressive Energy and Toxic Heat

Draining Pathogenic Heat (AE) from Yin Organs

Synopsis

A discussion of Pathogenic Heat in general. This discussion also includes the concept of Aggressive Energy as taught by J. R. Worsley. Various contributions to the understanding of heat and fire pathology including Liu Wan Su's law of similar transformation, Li Dong Yuan's Yin Fire theory, and Heart-Fire and Ministerial Fire. The last two terms are also used in discussion of healthy heat and fire such as by Zhu Dan Xi. Zhu Dan Xi's six depressions will be found to have a bearing on this topic also. A modern author Zheng Qinan seems to have tried to reconcile the various ideas about two types of innate fire and pathological heat and fire.

Introduction

Heat is an innate property of living things, and hot and cold are basic properties in traditional science of various cultures including Chinese medicine where they form cardinal principles of Yin/Yang theory, and a pair of the Eight Principal Patterns. They are also counted among the Xie Qi [邪 xié: evil] or pathological substances in Traditional Chinese Medicine. The pathological substances that are also numbered in the external causes of disease are wind, cold, damp, dryness, summer-heat and fire.

Evil Qi [邪 xié] and Heat and Fire

Xie [邪 xié: evil] is in received theory usually a present pathogenic 'substance', in the classics Xie refers to any heterodox, perverse or pathological Qi and not necessarily a pathogenic substance per se. The modern systematization into the external causes of disease, and their interior counterparts had not been formulated. Several chapters of the classics describe heat pathology.

Heat is a particularly damaging pathology and later authors contributed to understanding the causes of heat pathology – notably: Lú Wán-sù (1120-1200), Lǐ Dōng-yuán (1180-1252), and Zhu Zhen-heng 1281-1358. (See related article 'Four Great Masters' for further discussion). Much of this material below is described by Bob Flaws.

Liu Wan-Su (1120-1200AD) developed the theory of similar transformation. The body's host qi is yang, therefore warm. Hence any evil guest qi, either externally invading or internally engendered, will tend to transform into a warm or hot evil similar to the body's host or ruling qi.

Li Dong-Yuan (1180-1252AD), in his work Pi Wei Lun (Treatise on the Spleen and Stomachⁱ), elucidated the mechanism of contradictory conditions first described by Hua Tuo in Zhong Zang Jing (Classic of Internal Viscera) 11 centuries earlier. Li Dong-Yuan (1180-1252) similarly described the various causes of pathogenic Heat in the body that he called Yin Fire (i.e. Fire caused by Yin Conditions e.g. Damp).

Flaws point out that because Heat rises it tends to show in the pulse and tongue and thus will tend to mask the underlying Cold signs.

- Yin Fire theory explains why many patients exhibit Heat symptoms to some extent and this Heat may even maskⁱⁱ underlying Cold/Yang-Deficient conditions.
- “Yin Fire” is not to be confused with Empty Heat. It does share one common mechanism but is a broader, more complicated and inclusive concept.
- “Yin” refers to Yin Cold and Dampness generated mostly by a damaged Spleen.

Over-thinking, worry, over-taxation, overeating, under-eating and eating wrong foods - the Spleen fails to control transportation and transformation. The turbid portion of foods and liquid is not separated from the clear and this becomes damp turbidity. This damp turbidity, because it is yin, percolates down to the lower burner, there to damage the Liver and Kidneys. Because the host qi of the body is yang, damp turbidity often transforms into damp heat.ⁱⁱⁱ Because of dampness damaging Kidney Yang and because the heat of damp heat tends to float upwards, yang loses its root in its lower source and also tends to surge upwards. Thus although there are symptoms of cold (and possibly damp heat below), there are symptoms of heat above, with other symptoms manifesting vacuity weakness of the Spleen.

- According to Li Dong-Yuan, there are five disease mechanisms that can cause of contribute to yin fire.
 - Spleen Qi Vacuity
 - Damp Heat
 - Blood vacuity (i.e. Yin Vacuity)
 - Liver Depression (i.e. Liver invading Spleen and Depressive Heat)
 - Stirring of ministerial fire due to extremes of the five or seven affects.

Zhu Zhen-heng (a.k.a. Dan Xi) 1281-1358 most well known for the Nourishing the Yin school also contributed the idea of six depressions (stagnations). These depressions or stagnations are another major source of pathological heat. This theory also overlaps with the previous ones.

	Qi (Stagnation) Qi moves and transforms blood and body fluids	Will lead to the four yin stagnations
Four Yin Stagnations	Blood (Stasis)	Any of the four yin stagnations can result in Qi Stagnation
	Dampness (Accumulation)	
	Phlegm (Obstruction)	
	Food (Stagnation)	
	Fire (Depressive Heat) Stagnation will tend to transform to heat	See Liu Wan Su and Li Dong Yuan

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We should also note that the idea of ‘depressive heat’ overlaps with the pattern of ‘true heat, false cold’. Although this is said to be unusual syndrome it is not uncommon. Certainly most of our chronic Western patients have some manifestation of heat and fire, e.g. allergies, auto-immune disease, cancer.¹ Interestingly there was an article in Scientific American on cancer titled ‘A Malignant Flame’. This illustrates that the observation of heat and fire as a description of pathology at least as a metaphor is not restricted to Chinese culture.

True Fire and Ministerial Fire

In modern times the understanding of the animal heat and pathological heat and fire has also been describes by Zheng Qinan (1804-1901). He also talked about heat and fire in his work 醫理真傳 Medicine Natural Laws Authentic Transmission. Two short quotes seem like a good synopsis of how he brings together various ideas including the two different ways that ministerial fire is understood in two main branches of acupuncture theory.

真陽二字，	True Yang two characters,
一名相火，	one says Minister Fire,
一名命門火，	one says Ming Men (Life Gate) Fire,
一名龍雷火，	one says dragon thunder Fire,
一名無根火，	one says rootless Fire,
一名陰火，	one says Yin Fire,
一名虛火。	one says Empty Fire.

按君火，	In accord with Imperial Fire,
凡火也；	Ordinary Fire {also};
相火，	Ministerial Fire,
真火也。	True Fire {also}.
凡火即心，	Ordinary Fire means Heart,
真火即腎中之陽。	True Fire means Kidney within it Yang.

Aggressive Energy

The basic principles of Aggressive Energy is described by Hicks, Hicks and Mole:

Aggressive Energy (summary of Five Element theory)

1. Aggressive Energy is a form of unhealthy (Xie) Qi. Its cause can be external or internal and the resulting stagnation usually turns to heat and is the trapped in the yin organs.
2. Aggressive Energy travels between the yin organs connected by the ke cycle^{iv}
3. The presence of Aggressive Energy can cause severe and possibly life-threatening illnesses^v.

¹ The widespread occurrence of heat and fire pathology in many patients makes the decision about the use of moxa somewhat more complicated. However, it is important to recognize that although moxa is heat it is also primarily supportive of the innate Qi which is warm in nature, and which is usually deficient.

4. Aggressive Energy is checked by placing needles (superficially) in the Back-Shu points of the Yin organs. It is present if erythema appears around the needles (but not the “dummy” needles.) The needles are left in place to drain the Aggressive Energy. When the erythema disappears the Aggressive Energy has been cleared.
5. If Aggressive Energy has been present the patient experiences significant improvement in health and the pulses and/or colour, sound, emotion, and odour often change as a result of treatment.

Hicks, Hicks & Mole (235)

The Sù Wèn Chapter 58 and 61 describes the main groups of acupuncture points, it includes among fifty nine points for draining heat the back-shu points of the Yin organs. Su Wen Chapter 51 says:

五臟俞傍五，	Five Zang Shu close by (parallel lines) five,
此十者，	these ten –
以瀉五臟之熱也。	accordingly drain five Zang their heat (or fire) also.

This would seem to indicate that if we consider AE to be evil heat in the Yin organs then de facto clearance of AE was known in classical times even if it was not understood or described in the modern terms. According to Peter Eckman this protocol is not part of modern TCM, but appears to have survived in Taiwan from where it was brought to Europe by Jacques Lavier and Soulie de Morant.

We should note that according to the Ling Shu Chapter 51 these five points are forbidden to needle. This prohibition is not universal throughout the ancient writings, and so we could consider it a caution. Van Nghi stressed this prohibition, Worsley said that because the Back-Shu points have direct access to the organ they should always be used with caution; their use when AE is present would be particularly problematic as potentially driving the AE deeper. One could conjecture that the writers of the Nei Jing recognized the need for caution even if they were not able to explain its most serious consequences. It is also of note that the preferred method of treating these points according to the same chapter is moxa. In relation to AE we would have to think of this as using fire to fight fire. Given the prolonged period that it takes to drain AE via retained needles one wonders if moxa would be as effective in severe cases.

There are other approaches that claim to drain heat the use of gua sha. This practitioner suggests that this is more of a folk remedy for day to day ailments and prevention that is probably effective with heat at a more superficial level. There is a technique of beating a person to produce serious erythema and bruising which this writer feels is best relegated to the dark ages. Evil Heat is considered to be a particularly damaging pathogenic substance. Worsley said that if it progresses through all five legs of the Ke cycle it is fatal. In the Nán Jīng there is a passage that refers to similar ideas in the Nèi Jīng that ‘seven transmissions’ is death.

五十三難
論七傳者死與間臟者生

Fifty Third Difficulty
Dissertation Seven Transmissions – Death together with
Interval Zang - Life

五十三難曰：
經言：
「七傳者死，
間藏者生。」
何謂也？

然：七傳者，
傳其所勝也；
間藏者，
傳其子也。
何以言之？
假令心病傳肺，
肺傳肝，
肝傳脾，
脾傳腎，
腎傳心，
一藏不再傷，
故言七傳者死也。
問藏者，
傳其所生也。
假令心病傳脾，
脾傳肺，
肺傳腎，
腎傳肝，
肝傳心，
是子母相傳，
竟而復始，
如環無端，
故曰生也。

Fifty third difficulty says:
Classics says:
“seven transmissions is death,
interval Zang – it life.”
What is meant by this also?

Answer: seven transmissions –
transmission (to) its place victory also;
interval Zang –
transmission (to) its child also,
how why called?
Suppose say Heart disease transmit (to) Lung,
Lung transmit (to) Liver,
Liver transmit (to) Spleen,
Spleen transmit (to) Kidneys,
Kidneys transmit (to) Heart,
one Zang-Viscera must not be once again injured,
therefore called seven transmissions it death also.
Interval Zang –
transmit it place engendered also.
Suppose say Heart disease transmit Spleen,
Spleen transmit (to) Lung,
Lung transmit (to) Kidney’s,
Kidneys transmit to Liver,
Liver transmit (to) Heart,
correct child mother mutually transmit,
complete and repeat again,
similar to ring without end,
therefore called life also.

Nei Jing Su Wen 65 and Ling Shu 42 elaborate on the progression of disease, and the Systematic Classic Chapter 78 brought these together. This refers to an idea that pathogens tend to travel around the Shēng cycle in the case of Yang organs and across the Kè cycle in the case of Yin organs, representing the destructive rather than healthy expression of this cycle. The pathogen starts in one Element and eventually returns to that Element with five transmissions in between – hence ‘seven transmissions’. J. R. Worsely refereed to this as five legs of the Kè cycle. It is of note that he Kè cycle is also the circuit that describes Wèi Qì circulation in the Ling Shu. Ling Shu 76 says:

其始入於陰，
常從足少陰注於腎，
腎注於心，

This begin (to) enter with regard Yin,
normally follow foot Shao Yin,
kidneys pours with regard heart,

心注於肺，	heart pours with regard lung,
肺注於肝，	lung pours with regard liver,
肝注於脾，	liver pours with regard spleen,
脾復注於腎爲周。	spleen return pours with regard kidneys act as Zhou (circuit).

If the heat pathology is connected to the circulation of Wèi Qì it would seem likely that this could distort the nature of the Wei Qi - this would seem very similar to the concept of auto-immunity in energetic terms. It would also transform the normal checking function of the Ke cycle to a destructive one. In this practitioners experience AE and cancer or auto-immunity must not be considered synonymous however tempting it is to think so.

Concluding discussion

Clinical experience seems to confirm that AE is present in many patients with severe physical conditions and also in emotional conditions even if physical disease is not present. This seems to be in accord with classical and later theories that pertain to heat and fire particularly when present in the Yin organs.

It is possible in theory that the presence or absence of AE may be diagnosed by applying the various principles and concepts described here. However, in the experience of this practitioner AE cannot be diagnosed simply on the presence of pathogenic heat; it appears that its presence in the Yin organs specifically is also a crucial determining factor that makes a definitive diagnosis a little elusive.

Despite the warnings of fatal consequences from untreated or maltreated AE there are many practitioners treating patients who are not utilizing the particular protocol, and yet do not appear to be doing demonstrable harm. It may be easier to drain heat from the Yin organs with the specific protocol, but less direct means may also work (especially in the earlier stages). I would also suggest that the specific protocol is most effective. It seems likely that the most extreme and dogmatic assertions that Worsley made, even if supported in the classics, may have been over-stated. Indeed the most dogmatic statements would violate the principle of self-healing.

AE does appear to be a major block in Five Element system. It is worth noting at this point that AE is not a primary cause of disease – in Five Element terms it is a manifestation that take priority over other treatment and so illustrates that Five Element theory includes ‘root and branch’ principles and recognizes situations where the latter is treated first. Possibly the body’s protective response to AE is to try to prevent the further transmission which also produces a resistance to treatment. However, this practitioner has seen patient’s conditions respond to mainstream treatment (which is often more forceful than five element) even with AE present. This would be consistent with the principles of ‘directive’ and ‘non-directive’ needling that this author has written about elsewhere. I would also suggest that the harm of treating someone with advanced AE without use of this protocol would be hard to spot because depending on severity it would not be immediate and would require a medium and long term follow up. Also a more serious diagnosis is often simply seen as a new disease. At least in one case known to this practitioner more serious disease was subsequently diagnosed and significant AE found in someone who apparently responded well to treatment of a musculo-skeletal problem. Even though we may never know if draining AE several months earlier would have made a substantial

difference to the more serious disease, and certainly cannot know for sure if the previous treatment was actually injurious in any way, it does seem to demonstrate that the previous treatment was at least limited in its potential results.

It remains the clinical experience of this practitioner that it is impossible to be absolutely certain if there is AE or not without checking. Even while questioning the most dogmatic aspect of the theory this practitioner feels that AE is a serious and significant condition and it is preferable to follow the protocol of checking for AE with all patients. In those not presently diagnosed with a severe illness draining AE is at least potentially preventive of serious disease in the future.

Bibliography:

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ⁱ He also founded the “Strengthening the Earth” school of Chinese Medicine.

ⁱⁱ This split of outward appearance and underlying reality is part of the nature of Fire as a Phase. Over-activity of “Fieriness” or pathological Heat signs in the emotional sphere are often a sign of an underlying lack of substantiality in the Fire Phase. Fire similarly manifests in our complexion and our social persona.

ⁱⁱⁱ One metaphor for why Damp commonly gives rise to heat is the analogy of the hayrick that heats up and even combusts because the hay was harvested while too damp.

^{iv} Transmission of disease between yin organs via the ko cycle and the fatal conclusion of this transmission when it completes the cycle is dealt with in the *Ling Shu* and *Nan Jing*. Yang organs transmit via the Sheng cycle but the completion of this cycle is not considered to be terminal.

^v See note above