

## The Cultural Narrative of the Channel System

by Nyssa Tang

One of the basic tenets of Chinese medicine is that the channels of the human body act as a communication system between the environment of the world around us and the internal environment of our organs. It is a self-regulating system of checks and balances that allows our bodies to shift and respond to changes within and around us and helps maintain homeostasis. While this is an elegant theoretical concept, it wasn't until I started studying Applied Channel Theory with Dr. Wang Ju-Yi that this came alive for me in a clinically useful way. In the course of his 50 years of practice, Dr. Wang has established a systematic method of palpating the channel systems as a way of diagnosing disease and forming treatment strategies. By utilizing his techniques, channel physiology became tangible and brought the practice of acupuncture to life for me.

Through my experience with channel palpation, I have begun to see the channels as vessels for storytelling and windows onto our patients' current health status as well as an introduction to their health history. We each carry a unique set of pre-natal or constitutional tendencies that affect how our channels respond to the particular environment we live in and the post-natal habits and lifestyle choices that shape our lives.

A few years ago, I had an experience while teaching in Spain that had a big impact on how I thought about the channels and their role in our personal narratives. During a course we were teaching on Dr. Wang's channel palpation techniques, we were introducing the kinds of palpable changes that can often be found in the heart shao yin channel. These are often very small, thin and subtle nodules limited to the area between HT-7 (神门) and HT-4 (灵道) and are quite rare and difficult to find. It's important to quiet oneself and use special care and patience and one of Dr. Wang's suggestions while palpating the heart channel is to close your eyes and 'place your mind/heart in your finger' while you palpate.

As we started demonstrating the palpation technique on various students, we quickly realized that nearly everyone in the class of 50 had very obvious changes in the heart channel. There were large round nodules (结节), thick *jie luo* (结络) or collateral nodules, and many channel changes in shapes and sizes that we had never encountered. This was a highly unusual occurrence, unusual enough to stop the class and discuss why there

would be such a prevalence of these heart channel changes.

The most interesting possibility was that the participants were all native Spaniards who had grown up in a relatively hot environment and the heat and warmth of that climate had caused their shao yin channels to be more active and responsive. Also, the average lifestyle in Spain involves a culture of late nights and little sleep which would also be a challenge to the shao yin system. Many of the Spaniards we met had very warm and vibrant personalities and were talkative and open. This ability and predilection for connecting with others falls under the scope of the shen, the aspect of our subconscious that allows us to make those connections. Maintaining a healthy and balanced shen again requires an active shao yin channel that can regulate our social interactions, yet another challenge to the Spanish shao yin system.

While these observations were simply conjecture, they do raise some interesting ideas about how our cultural environment has as much of an impact on the health of our channels as our physical environment. The channel system is not only regulating our internal and external 'climates,' but also responding to the culture we live in and the lifestyle we choose to participate in. Besides our own personal health narrative, perhaps our channels also carry a shared narrative with the people amongst whom we live.

I live and practice in New York City, truly an international melting pot of cultures, so it's more difficult to see a common pattern in channel changes as was witnessed in Spain. However, one common denominator would be the culture of stress and there are common patterns that emerge from my patients. For instance, people who are freelancers and don't adhere to a regulated daily schedule often disrupt the physiology of their tai yin channel. The tai yin appreciates a steady rhythm and flow in our routine and when this is disrupted, the channel has more difficulty in its other tasks such as transforming our nutrients and managing internal dampness. In more extreme cases of chronic stress, sometimes manifesting as adrenal fatigue, a patient's essential yin and yang can be damaged and their shao yin channel will exhibit changes that reflect these deficiencies.

These are just a few examples of the endless variety of stories that we can discover when we used Applied Channel Theory in treating our patients. The channel system is vital in helping us, as practitioners, to better understand our patients' disease condition and how to approach their treatment. The changes that we can palpate are like a trail of clues that can explain the disease process and help us unravel the layers of the pathophysiology.

There is so much to be learned within the channels and it is our privilege and responsibility as practitioners to explore these stories so that we can develop our understanding of health and wellness and the world we live in.

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*Mizutani Junji, L.Ac. graduated from the Japan Central Acupuncture College in 1983, and was licensed to practice shiatsu, acupuncture, and moxibustion in Japan. He moved to Toronto in 1984 to further his training at the Kikkawa Shiatsu College and the Shiatsu School of Canada. He also served for three years as the president of the Shiatsu Therapy Association of Ontario. In 1992 he moved to Vancouver where he now has his practice. He is the founder and director of NAJOM.*