

Constitutional Type and the Internal Tradition of Chinese Medicine Part II: The Ever-Present Cause

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Abstract: The author examines the concept of constitutional type as it is present in the Five-element tradition of Chinese medicine. Constitutional type is described as an organizing framework which allows us to assess the quality of destiny present in a patient's being. The Five-elemental types are examined from the standpoint of the quality of individual destiny inherent in each. Healing is seen as a process which leads to the transformation of an habitually occurring imbalanced emotion back to its corresponding virtue. In part one of this article the ontogeny of dao was discussed as it pertains to the human journey from conception to death. Part II discusses the notion of constitutional type as it occurs in the Five-element system and its relevance to the loss of and return to original nature.

CLINICAL PERSPECTIVES

Holding on to the dao of old,
So as to steer in the world of now,
To be able to know the beginning of old,
It is to know the thread of dao.

----Dao De Jing, ch. 14 -(1) PART II of this article will discuss the concept of constitutional type (CT) as it is present in the Five-element system. It will show how CT provides both a framework for assessing the quality of destiny of a human being and guiding him back toward the full self expression which is synonymous with health.

The different stages in the evolution of dao are not to be thought of as occurring at different times. The "paradise time" associated with the primordial dao is not something that happened in the distant past with the present representing paradise lost and the "ten thousand things."(2) All numerologies must be understood to occur simultaneously in each moment (see Part I).

The dao as unity is always present at the heart of each thing, and every moment it also falls from, and then returns to, its original nature. This rhythm is both the heart beat and breath of life. The motion of the dao, moving away from and returning to itself eternally, may be understood to be an ever present cause which lies at the heart of all creation.(3) By centering one's "self," and shutting off the senses, one is able to immediately return to the truth that lies in heaven's heart. Meditating is the symbolic act of closing the seven holes in one's head and returning the primordial influence of dao to one's life.(4)

However, the dao as the primary cause, is not a "cause" in the sense used by "modern" science which views time in a linear fashion. If viewing time linearly, a cause must always precede an effect.(5) However, Chinese medicine proceeds by synthesizing a picture out of all the information present in a given moment. Cause is not seen as a past event but rather as that which ties together and generates every event. Clinically, this "cause" is the patient's constitutional type (CT), which "colors" the spontaneous expression of dao as it unfolds in each individual's life, contributing simultaneously both the nature and nurture of the individual.(6) This cause may be described as each person's reason for being.(7) It is the purpose (zhi) that lies in each human heart, placed there by heaven at conception. Acting in a way that is consistent with one's innermost purpose constitutes the fulfillment of destiny.

Every book, from the first word to the last, has a single theme around which the plot is organized. In a similar fashion, the events of human life are organized around a theme which ties the moment of conception to the moment of death. This is the thread of individual destiny which weaves together the "fabric" of each human life.(8) It is this thread that is at the heart of each individual's constitution. The theme around which one's life unfolds is organized in a way that is both knowable and therapeutically useful to the practitioner of the internal tradition. The concept of CT may allow the practitioner to know the nature of the thread of dao as it is uniquely present in each patient's heart of hearts. This is not to say that the practitioner may know the precise destiny of each individual. That corresponds to the eternal dao which always eludes one's grasp.(9) Rather, CT provides a framework for looking ever onward toward that "light" which burns in each person's depth so long as life exists. We are reminded by Han Fei Tzu (280 B.C.) that "The enlightened ruler holds fast to the beginning in order to understand the wellspring of all beings . . ."(10)

Just as the theme of a book never changes from the first word to the last, so to does constitution remain the same through- out life. Though the theme may never change, the plot may be transformed from one of disharmony to one of harmony. It is this transformation which is the aim of the traditional practitioner. The pristine purity of dao, always present at the patient's core, must be the mark aimed for with the placement of every acupuncture needle and prescription given.

Notes: 1) Chen EM: p.89

2) In the Dao De Jing the "ten thousand things" represents the material universe as it has manifested out of the primordial dao. See DDJ, chapter 42.

3) See Gebser J

4) Chapter 10 of the DDJ discusses the merits of meditation. See Chen EM: 1989, p. 78.

5) Hence, if you ask someone who he is, he will tend to define himself in the present by what has happened to him in the past. He views his life as the effect of some previous

cause. It is precisely this notion of self that Liu I-ming defines as illness when he tells us that, in our spiritual quest we must, "Shed the dust of personal history."

6) Western science tries in vain to separate out the relative contributions of environment and genetics to the process of disease. The Chinese settled this question thousands of years ago by generating various numerologies (most notably the Five-elements and Eight Trigrams) which allowed them to study the energetic basis that underlies the interaction of genetics (Anterior Heaven) and environment (Posterior Heaven) as it occurs in each moment. For a discussion of the holographic paradigm and its relevance to constitutional diagnosis, see Jarrett LS: I.

7) In this sense the term "cause" may be viewed as that "cause" for which one works in life.

8) The point UB-11 is named "Great Shuttle." The characters Jing-luo indicating the meridial system are etymologically related to the warp and woof of a loom. The function of UB-11 may be compared to the shuttle of a loom which weaves back together the fabric of life when it unravels.

9) Note DDJ, ch.14, which tells us that the dao may be looked at but not seen, listened to but not heard, and grabbed yet never caught.

10) Burton, W: 1970, p.16.