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FOREWORD

Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée

This is a book that we would like to have more of its kind. A book that goes deeply into the very substance of Chinese medicine, remaining not only readable but enjoyable. A book that assumes that the reader is capable of a real understanding and wants to go further than the surface in the comprehension of Chinese medicine.

A main feature is that it is not the work of one person or even of a group of people belonging to the same school. That fits well with a certain idea of what is a tradition and its transmission. It is always diversity that gives a dynamic richer than any specific teaching. In this diversity there is finally a kind of organic convergence, which is not made artificially, but appears as intrinsic. This does not prevent the book from offering a lot of comprehensive and detailed information and to provide materials and documents on many topics.

The beginners will not be lost and the seasoned practitioners will be surprised with all they learn and also how they deepen what they already know and practice. Indeed, this book can look like an amalgam. A constellation of seven people, coming from at least three different countries, sharing its authorship. In fact, it is necessary to see beyond appearances.

The chapters discuss different topics of which some are easily related to the usual study of Chinese medicine, and some others give the impression of treating topics not directly related to this medicine. In the ten chapters composing the book, we find studies on Qi and a choice of great concepts from Chinese medicine, consideration on the arrival of Qi during the treatment, study on meridians and points, techniques of puncture (including some Japanese ones), their history and their tools (the needles), herbs and herbal medicine. We find a reflection of Taijiquan, Qigong, Yiquan and Aikido, mainly focusing on their importance for those who wish to practice acupuncture and to cultivate their ability as well as their inner self. There is also a reflection on what it takes to be a true physician, and on research methods, and even an enlightening explanation of the first chapter of the Lingshu, etc.

Even in the chapters that seem devoted to a specific topic, like the meridians or the acupuncture techniques, several approaches are discussed, not in order

to show erudition, but in order to guide on the way of a deeper understanding and a more efficient practice.

This book attends to history and transmission, to the various aspects of the practice of acupuncture and also to its language and the deep meaning of the concepts essential to the understanding of Chinese medicine, since this medicine was elaborated in China and in Chinese. It speaks of the inner state of the practitioner, the quality of his or her mind, and what makes it clear and profound, able to perceive the smallest sign and to penetrate its significance.

It also is concerned with relationship and interaction. It shows how body and mind are inseparable and how life is always the result of interaction within a person, between several persons, as between the authors of the book or as between patient and practitioner or any other human relationship. The interactions that exist between a human being and their surroundings, the social, familial, cultural context as well as the atmospheric conditions and the correlation with the whole cosmos.

Is this book simply several texts by different authors published together ? Absolutely not. Only four chapters are signed by a single name, and even in these cases the others often gave their comments. The other chapters are signed by 2 or 3 authors. Still the book is a book, with its backbone, its purpose. The consistency and cohesion come from inside and the book is not disparate.

All the chapters answer one to the other and weave something between them. Exactly like in the Chinese model where all that exists is built through the continuous intertwining of the yin and yang qi. Reality is more likely to be approached by a movement of weaving and interaction than by the analysis, even a sharp one, of a single mind. Exchanges, in which each maintains one's own identity, with respect for the others and reference to common roots, lead to a composition naturally balanced.

The result is not a cacophony, but a song with several voices. There is a similarity between a canon, as musical canon or song and a canon as a classic book. Several different lines are possible; as long as they do not create a discordant mixture of sounds, unpleasant to the ear, they play together and it is their togetherness which gives the full score. Impossible to say that this line is better than this other, or that this one is good and the other wrong. Each of them has to take its place, its moment, its intensity. The result is a beautiful and meaningful symphony.

This way of thinking is well developed in the East, and the Chinese did not assume that if an approach were right, the other had to be wrong. As the authors point out, it is quite different from the emphasis put in the West on a kind of "objective truth" which is more often a delusion.

As they say:

“Modern Western and scientific thinking has assumed that there is an objective truth out there that exists independently of any observers... Once this truth is established it will replace all other theories. Thinking in ancient China... was not concerned with trying to establish an objective truth. It has tended to see the individual always as part of a larger whole which is irreducible, the apparent parts of which are all interconnected and thus cannot be viewed independently... A natural consequence of these differences can be seen in how mind and body were seen.”

There is no attempt to create an artificial unity, either in the chapters of the book or in the corpus of Chinese medicine. There is a constant attention to search for the meaning, a sense which is always both contextual and universal since every specific situation answers to the cosmic order.

To be able to seek out the significance of any situation implies an inner training, a self-cultivation, essential for anyone pretending to be a practitioner. Meaning, comprehension depends always on a given context. The plasticity of the notions is not because they are vague and imprecise, but because no English word (or word of any Western language) can have the same meaning and the same background as a Chinese character. The Chinese were able to focus and be specific when it was needed; but also to use general, non-specific words, or what appear for us to be like that, when they wanted to allude to a reality which is present, analogously, for instance in a human body, in the cosmos, in the society...

True knowledge is the art of life. To know is to know how to live, following and internalising the great rules of conduct, transmitted by the tradition, which are great and efficient because rooted in the cosmic order of life. So, any movement, action, behaviour becomes meaningful. To have a medical knowledge is to know how to act efficiently, to apply methods and techniques transmitted by lineages and masters and to find the deep meaning in following and internalising a theory which is a reflection of the cosmic order.

The authors do not try to simplify to the point to distort and disfigure the reality of Chinese medicine. Neither they do not make it more complicated; but they respect the intrinsic intricacy of life which transpires in the complexity of the texts and notions. Doing this, they make clear the differences between the Eastern and Western approaches.

There is a fundamental vision that is found in the great classical texts of China and for any great notion there is a bundle of meanings linked together and making sense. None is univocal, but a clear meaning emerges from

their cultural background, from the context and from the association with other notions.

Likewise, the various possible ways in the theory as well as in the practice have a clear meaning and efficient use. Meanwhile, one has to pay attention not to mingle them without caution and the appropriate knowledge.

The basis of Chinese medicine is found in the medical classics as the Huangdi Neijing (Suwen and Lingshu), the Nanjing, the Jiayijing, texts specially investigated by the authors. But the roots are found in the classical texts written mainly before the end of the Han dynasty (circa 220 AD). Their knowledge is required to understand the great notions which are the pillars of the elaboration of the medical theory. These texts present a vision of the universe and the cosmic order, of the meaning of life and more especially of human life, the human mind and its awareness ; they belong to various streams in Chinese thought, different but not excluding others. Again, the bundle of the approaches built the understanding. It is like all the approaches forming a bundle were pointing at a center; this central place must remain empty to welcome the understanding of every one.

The texts of the book are acting the same way. They direct toward an empty place where the reader can put his or her own understanding, an understanding always evolving and changing, page after page, year after year, since it is a book which may be read several times and bring something new or deeper each time.

It is demanding. But without a sincere effort and a serious work, one cannot pretend to be an authentic practitioner of Chinese medicine. It takes time, a personal involvement, a bite of humility, a constant self-cultivation. But it is worth any hour spent to do it.

Finally, a last but not least quality of this book is to uphold that Chinese medicine is a true medicine, wholly able to rely on its own resources and without the need of a Western medicine either to evaluate its capacity or to give it help for diagnosis.

It is one of the targets of the authors :

“to lay a foundation for establishing valid research approaches to acupuncture that attempt to investigate acupuncture more on the basis of the early descriptions of it and their modern practical applications.”

A set of therapeutic techniques can be called a medicine only if it relies on its own corpus of knowledge and theory, has its own means of diagnosis and treatments, and is able to continue to evolve with its own researches.

Chinese medicine is grounded on a corpus of texts and on a variety of techniques and practice, with a transmission and a memory. It has to continue to progress, for example, through the constant and fruitful face to face (encounter) between its own theories and its own practices. The dialogue between both can be one of the foundations of a true research in Chinese medicine, allowing to enlarge its capacity and eventually to integrate some concepts of Western medicine. A medicine unable to evolve is a dead medicine. A medicine depending on something else than its own resources is not a medicine. Now we proclaim high and loud that the classical Chinese medicine that we practice is a wholly authentic medicine.

A dialogue between this classical Chinese medicine and the Western medicine can help to build the medicine for the future. This book is one of the foundations of such an appealing and needed project.

ELISABETH ROCHAT DE LA VALLÉE
Paris, March 2014

PREFACE

Stephen Birch, Miguel Angel Cabrer Mir, Manuel Rodríguez Cuadras

In the field of traditional medicine from East Asia, qi [氣] and their channels in the body, the jingmai [經脈], have played important and unique roles in various health promotion and healing practices. An important use of these concepts can be seen in how they refer to or imply the natural order of things and how they can be used to restore a patient back into this state of natural order.

This edited book will explore how this came about by examining the development of the concepts of qi and jingmai (chapters one and two), the cultivated or 'superior' practitioner (chapter three), how the concepts of qi and jingmai have been exploited in various health systems such as acupuncture (chapters four and five), herbal medicine (chapter six) and self-development methods like taijiquan, qigong and aikido (chapter seven). The concepts 'qi' and 'jingmai' are practical concepts and not just theoretical ideas. Thus in order to do justice to these ideas, we have added a practical section with a number of exercises that can be performed that help develop both an increased sensitivity to qi and an increased ability to use qi and the jingmai (chapter ten). The practical chapter is accompanied by an introduction (chapter nine) to help bridge between the theoretical parts of the book (chapters one to seven) and the practical chapter (ten). Further, since we are writing in the modern period where science has become the important language and method for establishment and acceptance of ideas, we also explore issues involved in valid scientific investigations of concepts like qi and the jingmai (chapter eight).

Fundamentally, like most ideas in classical China, the concepts of qi and jingmai are practical concepts (explored in chapters one and eight). Thus, like concepts used by artisans and practitioners of different arts and disciplines, these cannot only be understood intellectually, there is necessarily a different understanding that comes through experience. We often find people referring to ancient Chinese and traditional East Asian medical (TEAM) concepts like qi as being 'philosophical', as though they refer to nothing but mere ideas and are not grounded in practical or real-world things. We can also find some referring to TEAM concepts like qi as though they had the same kind of status like the 'cell,' or 'atom' or 'liver' things that can be imaged or accessed with our

senses and about which there is considerable consensus as to their existence (ontological status). Many people talk about things like ‘qi’ with the same casualness as they might when they talk about electricity, rain or the metro. The status of the TEAM concept ‘qi’ is neither a philosophical system or referential way of thinking, nor does it refer to things whose existence can be simply taken for granted. More care needs to be taken when we discuss such things since their nature is not captured well by casual ways of thinking such as these. Since these are fundamentally (but as we will see not exclusively) practical concepts grounded in experience and practical actions, it is there that we must look for a better understanding.

When the master pianist explains in words a difficult musical phrase and the methods of its expression to someone untrained in music, it may make no sense at all. To the beginning student his words may also have almost no meaning since their skills are not yet developed enough to grasp the meaning of the explanation. It is only to the more advanced and experienced musician that the language and concepts of the teacher make sense. This understanding is a hard-won thing that comes through years of repetitive practice and study, and even then may not be practically achievable without further practice. This is not only something related to the high arts of the master musician, it is involved in many if not most daily activities. Take for example the work of the carpenter or wood-worker. The fine details of wood working that a master carpenter or furniture-maker explains may not be understood by the beginner, but they make sense to the experienced apprentice or colleague, whether involved in creating things of beauty or function. While these words and explanations can serve as a backdrop for on-going education and practice to guide the developing experience of the beginner apprentice, as concepts they are not reproducible yet in their hands. It is only after more years of study and practice that the same apprentice starts being able to enact such words and explanations.

Thus in order to do justice to difficult and important concepts such as qi and the jingmai, it is not enough to simply read books, these ideas need practical expression and understanding which comes through the minds, hands and hearts of experienced practitioners. To be able to capture the range of meanings and understandings attached to words like 氣 [qi], we should look to the literature and interpret what we find not only on the basis of that and accompanying literature, but through the range of experiences that have come through years of working with qi. There is a well-established tradition in Asia of scholar-practitioners in the field of medicine, that is, practitioners who also spent considerable time reading, researching, interpreting and trying to explain

the literature and concepts of their medicine. Over the centuries we find such scholar-practitioners mostly through their published works. Practitioners such as Sun Simiao, Hua Shuo, Li Shizhen, Yang Jizhou, Xu Dachun each spent years in their studies, investigations and writings. The works of these literate practitioners are not always easy to understand, but they help form the backbone of later practice systems of these medicines.

The authors of the chapters in this book are all practitioners who have turned their hands to scholarly investigations of the literature and practice methods. All of the authors have around 30 or more years of practical experience. Their interests in the literatures of their arts combined with their decades of experience using them have helped cultivate broader understandings of concepts like qi and jingmai.

The East Asian medical and health promoting disciplines of acupuncture, herbal medicine, Taiji quan, qigong, aikido are relatively new in the West. It is really only since the early 1970s that they have been developing in any substantial way. In Asia these disciplines have roots that go back for centuries, and it is here that we find the works of 'scholar-practitioners'. In the West, these different East Asian origin fields and disciplines have started maturing to a stage where it is now possible for scholar-practitioners to have developed and find their voices. Thus we wish to start exposing this scholar-practitioner tradition in the West as well. This book represents the first time that experienced scholar-practitioners have attempted such a book together so that these eminently practical ideas can be interpreted through the eyes and hands of practitioners who have cultivated a deep practical understanding of them.

The fields of investigation are huge, possibly more than anyone can handle. Fortunately though, in recent years, a large body of new scholarship has emerged of the period before and during the developments of medical thinking in Han dynasty China. This scholarship is largely unknown within the TEAM practitioner communities. The authors in this book have drawn from this literature to write these chapters. The authors help bring alive this scholarship for these practitioner communities with practical interpretations and applications. Included is also a chapter exploring for the first time how these practical concepts will need to be investigated in scientific studies. Thus the chapters in this book are mostly written following a broad reading of available scholarship, translations and at times interpretations of original texts. This is done to help reveal more of how the original authors of the time may have thought so that we can better contextualise how those and later authors thought about what they said.

In its scope we believe that this is a far ranging book covering ways of thinking before the medical traditions began to emerge in the Han dynasty,

ways of thinking in the early medical and self-development literatures, how these ideas were applied in later medical and self-development practices, simple practical exercises that employ the earliest principles and finally how to grapple with these histories and methods in the modern scientific context.

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