

Selections from Shan Yutang

*Annotated Excerpts from
the Shanghan Lun
with Suggestions for Acupuncture
and Moxibustion Therapy (1984):
“Shaoyang”*

Translated by Heiner Fruehauf

THE SHAOYANG SYSTEM INCLUDES THE HAND shaoyang channel of the triple warmer and the foot shaoyang channel of the gallbladder. The term shaoyang describes an energetic state where there is only little (shao) yang--the birth of a solitary yang, the turning point where yin turns into yang.

Within the foot shaoyang gallbladder lodges the ministerial fire, and the hand shaoyang triple warmer is the path on which this ministerial fire travels throughout the body. Therefore, shaoyang transformation exhibits the characteristics of ministerial fire. So why is there a ministerial fire qi which exists in addition to the five organ networks? For one, it assists the sovereign fire of the shaoyin system, but then there is also a more natural explanation for its existence. On a universal scale, the ministerial fire qi is located in between Heaven and Earth, and its appearing and disappearing determines the rhythm of day and night; its longness and shortness determines the cyclic interplay between heat and cold. In the morning it blazes in the East and illuminates the West; at noon, it blazes in the South and illuminates the North; at sunset, it blazes in the West and illuminates the East. In spring, it ushers in the wind wood state in cooperation with jueyin; in summer, it enforces the energetic influence of the sovereign fire in cooperation with shaoyin; in late

summer, it unfolds the potential of damp earth in cooperation with taiyin; in autumn, it rings in the affect of dry metal in cooperation with yangming; in winter, it achieves the transformation of cold water in cooperation with taiyang. As long as shaoyang qi roams between heaven and earth, there is no place in the universe where its effects do not reach--truly a wandering fire. This fire will hide underneath the earth in winter, and come back out again in the first month of the lunar year when the stature of the yang generating fire in nature grows splendid, and when it combines with wind qi to shake everything into motion and growth.

If we now shift this discussion of shaoyang to a medical context, we see that the physiology and the pathology of the gallbladder and the triple warmer does exhibit similar features. The gallbladder is called the official of righteousness, which is in charge of decision making, and which is the one among the twelve organ networks that takes the initiative. If the gallbladder qi rises, then the qi of the other eleven networks rises along with it. The triple warmer originates in the kidney network, and thus is a secondary envoy of original qi, which is in charge of drainage and uninhibited energy movement. It is linked to the organs and bowels internally, and to the skin externally. It reaches everywhere--up, down, in, and out, and thus governs the energy transformation within each of the channel networks.

The triple warmer and the gallbladder channels are intimately connected. In unison, they govern the rise and descend of the polar qi dynamic between the water and fire forces of the human body. If we take a close look at Zhang Zhongjing's *Shanghan lun*, therefore, we discover that shaoyang disorders usually affect all six channel systems. In the taiyang chapter, for instance, a host of therapeutic measures are described in great detail, and while the same applies to the yangming chapter, the shaoyang chapter is

very brief. The essential meaning behind this phenomenon is rather deep and gives the reader quite something to chew on.

The terse statements “unpleasant taste in the mouth, dry throat, blurred vision,” and “red eyes and clogged ears” are enough to sufficiently outline the characteristics of shaoyang channel function and shaoyang qi. They are brief, but precise. The shaoyang channels envelop the entire body like a net; they command the organs, bowels, and all meridians, and if they are in a state of disarray, then top and bottom and left and right will all become imbalanced. In other words, shaoyang disease easily afflicts other systems, and the other way round, diseases in other systems most easily influence the shaoyang system. It is for this reason that Zhongjing discussed most manifestations of shaoyang disease outside of the shaoyang chapter.

Shaoyang is “fire qi.” Fire refers to its physical characteristics, and qi refers to its functional effect. If fire transforms into qi, the result is the complaisant energy of shaoyang. For this transformation central qi is required, just as the chapter “Great Treatise on the Essence and the Meaning of the Six Confirmations” (Liu Weizhi Dalun) in the Simple Questions section of the Inner Canon points out: “Shaoyang is governed by fire above; it contains jueyin within.” The organs of shaoyang and jueyin are connected, and their qi communicates. Tang Rongchuan once said: “The foot shaoyang gallbladder channel runs from the gallbladder to the feet, and along the way its connecting vessels link up with the jueyin liver network. The hand shaoyang triple warmer channel runs from the three burning spaces of the body to the hands; along the way it is connected to the jueyin pericardium network. Therefore it is said that within shaoyang there is the energy of jueyin.” The ministerial fire of shaoyang must thus rely on the straightforward tendency of jueyin wind wood. If wood is

depressed and its expanding tendency becomes inhibited, then the ministerial fire can become agitated, and a situation where both wood and fire are depressed ensues; if severe, this depressed fire flares up, following the channel paths all the way into the empty orifices on top, creating the familiar shaoyang symptoms.



Shaoyang represents the birth of yang, and its basic energy is fire. Shaoyang fire is like the initial kindling of a flame, and when it is in a state of disease then it will flare up and make its way into the orifices. It is for this reason that the main shaoyang symptom complex is “bitter mouth, dry throat, and blurred vision.” Shaoyang is the central “door hinge” of the body, which is in charge of moving things, particularly through narrow positions... When treating it by needling, one has to focus exclusively on this hinge function of moving things in and out and to and fro...
Appropriate points:

TB 4 (Yang Chi: Yang Pool)
PC 6 (Nei Guan: Inner Pass)
GB 40 (Qiu Xu: Hill Ruins)
LV 5 (Li Gou: Woodworm Canal)

The triple warmer is the messenger of original qi; inside, it is connected to the organs and bowels, outside it is connected with the skin and body

hair, and there is no place in the entire body that it does not reach. TB 4 is the source point of the shaoyang triple burner channel. It is in charge of regulating the shaoyang “hinge” function, and a particularly important point for shaoyang qi dynamic. The pericardium makes a pair with the triple burner; its channel originates in the heart, goes down through the diaphragm, and connects with the triple burner... Both channels, therefore, run through the chest, the abdominal cavity, and the empty spaces in between the organs and bowels. PC 6 is the connecting point of the pericardium channel, and also has access to the triple burner. Since triple burner disorders are all qi related diseases, PC 6 can regulate qi, relieve stagnation and congestion, and reverse counterflow of qi. By combining the source point TB 4 with the connecting point PC 6, there will be a pronounced effect of opening and maintaining flow in the channels and collaterals, and regulating the inside/outside hinge function of the shaoyang system. At the same time, the liver and gallbladder channels form a root/surface pair, and in the case of disease the shaoyang gallbladder fire will implicate jueyin wind wood. GB 40 is the source point of the shaoyang gallbladder channel, and its function is to clear and drain gallbladder fire and entice the heat downwards. LV 5 is the connecting point of the jueyin liver channel; it courses the liver, regulates qi, and decongests wind wood.