

脾胃論

Li Dong-yuan's Treatise on the Spleen & Stomach

A Translation of the *Pi Wei Lun*



by

Yang Shou-zhong & Li Jian-yong

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Translator's Preface

This book is a translation of Li Dong-yuan's *Pi Wei Lun* (*Treatise on the Spleen and Stomach*). Li Dong-yuan was one of the four great masters (*si da jia*) of the Jin/Yuan Dynasties, the other three being Liu Wan-su, Zhu Dan-xi, and Zhang Zi-he. Li Dong-yuan was the founder of the school of supplementing earth or the *bu tu pai*. The *Pi Wei Lun* is considered Li's final and greatest masterpiece and the publication of this book marks the first time English-reading practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) will have access to this seminal classic.

The well-known Chinese saying that it was not until the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) that Confucianism split into different schools nor until the Jin/Yuan Dynasties (1115-1368 CE) that Chinese medicine began to develop along different lines tells us at least two things. One, this saying implies by their juxtaposition that Song Neoconfucianism played a great role in the development of Jin/Yuan Dynasty medicine in China. Secondly, this saying also implies that the Jin/Yuan Dynasties were a time of particular historical significance in the development of TCM. Just as Song Neoconfucianism resulted in the springing up of new philosophical ideas in Chinese thought, the Jin/Yuan saw the springing up of new ideas within Chinese medicine.

From the Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE) to the Jin/Yuan, there was a consistent line of thought and practice predicated on the *Huang Di Nei Jing* (*The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic*) and the *Shang Han Lun/Jin Gui Yao Lue* (*Treatise on Cold Injury and Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet*). However, by the Jin/Yuan, the practice of medicine in China had become bound by the classics and was often practiced in a formulaic way, classically

validated but unresponsive to the needs of real-life, individual patients. Too often by the time of the Jin/Yuan Dynasties, practitioners were applying the so-called *jing fang* or classical prescriptions in a rote, formulaic way based on disease diagnosis alone. Such practitioners did not modify these sacrosanct classical formulas to fit their patients' signs and symptoms nor did they prescribe on the basis of pattern discrimination. Their practice had become rigid, hidebound, and stilted. This was the medical milieu that the four great masters of the Jin/Yuan erupted into bringing an avalanche of new ideas and fresh perspectives.

It is an interesting fact that this period of ferment and development in Chinese medicine came at a time of great social turmoil and chaos, a dark, sanguine, and destructive time. For this period in Chinese history was a time of wars launched upon wars, of cities levelled to the ground, of the slaughter of thousands upon thousands of innocent people, of racial hostility run amok, and of great cultural works and artifacts burnt in flames or buried in ruins. Living in such an era, people suffered from all sorts of social evils and natural calamities, including the prevalence of disease and various plagues. Although Song Neoconfucianism undoubtedly provided the philosophical framework for the theoretical development of Jin/Yuan medicine, it may very well have been the overwhelming prevalence of disease which prevented the practice of medicine in China from the regression all other aspects of Chinese culture experienced at this time.

Doctors of that day had to face the countless ill and wounded. This provided them with inexhaustible cases to investigate and clinical problems to solve. Presented with many new medical situations unknown in prior Chinese history and related to starvation, poor living conditions, and the chronic mental/emotional stress and anxiety of constant war, the concept of Confucian *ren* or compassion impelled these doctors to discover

and devise new ways to combat diseases that were not previously described in the classics. For instance, in September of 1213, Mongol troops surrounded the Song capital of Bianjing (present day Kaifeng) and, following this, a disastrous epidemic broke out. In a short time, this city alone was littered with the corpses of over one million dead. The founders of the four great schools of Jin/Yuan medicine were all witnesses to numerous disasters of this kind. How could they remain indifferent to the miseries of the people? How could they not search diligently for new ways to treat the sick and relieve their suffering?

Nonetheless, that does not mean that the development of Jin/Yuan medicine was a complete break with the past. Just as a person must stand on the shoulders of a giant to see further than their fellows, so science must stand on the firm foundation laid by prior generations if anything lasting is to be achieved. Thus the rapid developments in medicine of the Han Dynasty paved the way and laid the foundation for the four great masters of the Jin/Yuan, each of whom was well acquainted with and founded their line of reasoning upon the classics.

Li Gao (1180-1251), style named Dong-yuan, was one of the most eminent Chinese medical scholars of this time. He was born into a very wealthy family which owned thousands of *mu* of land and enjoyed the company of none but officials of high rank and distinguished scholars of the day. From his childhood, Li received an excellent education, and, rolling in wealth, he did not need to learn a profession to earn a living. At that time, the practice of medicine, though a respectable profession, stood inferior to official position in the Confucian bureaucracy, and most intellectuals preferred to spend their lives climbing the bureaucratic ladder. However, one year, Li's mother fell ill. Doctors were sent for one after another but not one could help Li's mother even a little. By the time Li's mother died, not a single doctor had managed to give a plausible explanation of the disease from which she had suffered. Painfully regretting his

mother's lamentable death and seeing his own inability to diagnose and treat his mother as a lapse in filial piety, Li determined from that point onward to learn medicine. Money being no object, Li did not hesitate to pay thousands of taels of silver for admission to study directly under Zhang Yuan-su.

Zhang Yuan-su, also known as Zhang Hao-gu, was the teacher of two of the four great Jin/Yuan masters. Zhang was a revolutionary scholar. He advanced and consistently advocated the slogan,

No movements of qi are identical;
Ancient and modern times differ;
Ancient formulas are helpless for modern diseases.

This syllogism was a direct challenge to the dogmatic point of view then prevalent that had hindered for several centuries Chinese medicine's continued development after the Han. In the Song, the establishment of the Medical Corrections Board had been a double-edged sword. On the one hand it had raised the status of doctors and preserved many important medical works which might otherwise have been lost. But, on the other hand, it promoted the establishment of uniform, government-run dispensaries which utilized standard formulas. This then promoted the tendency to simplified, stereotyped treatment, thus hindering the unique spirit of Chinese medicine which is the individualized treatment of every patient. Upon this field, Zhang was the brave and penetrating standard bearer for a campaign to break this ossified inclination and to blaze a new path for the development of Chinese medicine. If the four great masters of the Jin/Yuan raised Chinese medicine to a new summit, Zhang Yuan-su was the cornerstone of that edifice and Li Dong-yuan was his pupil.

However, although Li was a student of Zhang Yuan-su, Li was not content to simply parrot his teacher's teachings. Over the years, Li became a distinguished practitioner in nearly all the

specialties of Chinese medicine, including internal medicine, acupuncture, pathology, pharmacology, gynecology, pediatrics, etc. In fact, he so distinguished himself above and beyond simply being Zhang's disciple that his classmate, Wang Hang-gu, also an outstanding student of Zhang's and one of the few famous scholars of that time, formally acknowledged Li as his master. Within Chinese culture, such an acknowledgement by a classmate who might otherwise claim equal status has profound implications. Wang said,

I have been studying medicine for scores of years...but I am eager to have an excellent teacher for a guide...This desire has been occupying my mind day and night, but I have as yet thought of no suitable candidate except for Mr. Li.

This broadminded and generous act on the part of Wang was spurred by the fact that Li Dong-yuan did not confine himself to repeating the achievements of his master. Rather, Li Gao, styled Dong-yuan, stepped forward and enriched the treasure house of Chinese medicine with his own doctrines.

Up until Li's time, Chinese medical scholars had followed Zhang Zhong-jing's lead in mainly focusing their attentions on external invasions and they successfully and illuminatingly described the interrelationship between humanity and nature. However, few after Zhang Zhong-jing's time broke away from this narrow province to discover new topics of inquiry and investigation. Li Dong-yuan opened up a new field — that of internal damage or *nei shang*. According to him, internal damage is the root, while external invasion is only the branch. If the root is sound, the branch will prosper. Similarly, Li saw that if the interior of the body was healthy, external evils could not invade.

Based on the theory of viscera and bowels established by Zhang Yuan-su, Li developed his theory of the pivotal and primal

importance of the spleen and stomach. Although the *Nei Jing* had pointed out the important functions of these two organs, later fruitful research into external invasions had led Chinese medical scholars away from further attention to these two. Li Dong-yuan, on the other hand, saw the spleen and stomach as the basis of human life's functions. According to Li, one is healthy as long as these two are strong and balanced, but if they become weak, various other organs may become affected. Further, if the spleen and stomach are normal, one will have immunity from external invasion no matter how formidable the evils. Therefore, according to Li, it is of paramount importance to protect the spleen/stomach if people want to stay healthy and to strengthen them once they have become diseased no matter what other viscera or bowels are also affected.

Li Dong-yuan is also credited with another indispensable concept in TCM — that of yin fire. This concept is an extension of yin yang theory. Fire is yang according to basic yin yang theory. However, fire or yang itself can be divided into yin and yang or yang within yin and yang within yang. Li's theory of yin fire is based on many profound theoretical considerations, including Song Neoconfucian cosmological concepts, and is not the same as *nei re* or internal heat as described in the *Nei Jing*. Rather, Li's concept of yin fire is intimately connected with his theories on the spleen and stomach. According to Li, yin fire may be caused by qi vacuity, blood exhaustion, depressed emotions, or cold transforming into heat. Yin fire may exist in the lower burner or the upper burner or in any of the five viscera or six bowels. This concept of yin fire sheds light on the intricacy and subtlety of various life functions and prevents a simplistic view of the sophisticated machine of the human body.

However, Li Dong-yuan was not merely a giant in the realm of theory. He was also an accomplished practitioner. Based on his theories, Li composed numerous, extremely effective formulas which are still in use today. Many of these are found in the *Pi*

Wei Lun. For example, in this book we can find *Qing Shen Yi Qi San*, *San Huang Wan*, *Shen Sheng Fu Qi Tang*, *Sheng Bing Zi*, *Tong You Tang*, *Wei Feng Tang*, *Bi Zhu An Wei San*, *Qing Wei San*, *Sheng Yang Chu Shi Tang*, and many others, all of which were never recorded in the earlier classics and are in frequent use today. When one looks at so many of Li's formulas, they appear perfect. They seem to take everything into consideration. While particularly addressing Li's own theories of the spleen and stomach, yin fire, and the discrimination of external and internal diseases, they also take into account time-honored theories from the past. And, although Li was one of the progenitors of the school of warm supplementation, his formulas not only include sweet, warm medicinals but are also balanced by cool and cold ingredients where appropriate.

Another of the contributions of Li Dong-yuan as recorded in this book is his modification of formulas and prescribing taking into account seasonal variations. As mentioned at the beginning of the preface, Song Neoconfucianism was the philosophical groundwork for Jin/Yuan medicine. In the Song, the theories of *wu yun liu qi* or the five transports and six qi gained prominence. These theories relate to the seasonal fluctuations of heavenly and earthly influences as described by the progression of the heavenly stems and earthly branches. Li was a master of *wu yun liu qi* theory and employed this theory in the writing of his prescriptions. Further, Li placed great importance on the methods of preparing and administering medicines, the most appropriate times, temperatures, etc. and these are all recorded in the *Pi Wei Lun*.

Besides being a renowned practitioner of internal medicine, Li Dong-yuan was also a master of acupuncture/moxibustion. His acupuncture theories and techniques have been highly prized by later generations and are often referred to as Dong-yuan needling in recognition of Li's special contribution to this art. Even such specialized works on acupuncture as the *Zhen Jiu Ju*

Ying by Gao Wu and the *Zhen Jiu Da Cheng* by Yang Ji-zhou of the Ming Dynasty both include special chapters on Dong-yuan needling. The characteristics of Dong-yuan needling are needling in compliance with the relevant principles of internal medicine plus a thorough implementation of Li's own theories and especially his theory of the importance of the spleen and stomach. Of the four great masters of the Jin/Yuan, Li was the most distinguished as an acupuncturist as well as practitioner of internal medicine.

Although in the minds of both Chinese and foreign practitioners of TCM the name of Zhang Zhong-jing is probably more famous, the theories and formulas of Li Dong-yuan are equally if not more important in modern clinical practice. Because of the advances of modern Western medicine, sanitation, and housing reducing the prevalence and morbidity of external invasions and because of the increasing power of diet, lifestyle, and emotional imbalances as disease causing agents, Li Dong-yuan's theories and treatments for internal damage, spleen/stomach problems, and yin fire are all the more important in this day and age. While Chinese practitioners up until only a half century ago still were being called upon to treat acute infectious cases where the patient might be dead upon the morrow, nowadays practitioners of Chinese medicine and especially in materially advanced countries are more and more being called upon to treat chronic functional disorders. These are the very disorders Li Dong-yuan so brilliantly addressed in his age of chaos and turmoil. It is only fitting, therefore, in this modern age of chaos and turmoil that non-Chinese practitioners of TCM gain access to this important milestone in the development of TCM.

In fact, in the People's Republic of China today, there has been a notable resurgence of interest in and emphasis on Li Dong-yuan's theory of the spleen and stomach in the treatment of chronic, recalcitrant diseases. This is evidenced by the publication of such books as the *Pi Wei Ming Li Lun* (*The Theory of the*

Spleen & Stomach Illuminated) by Lu Zheng, TCM Classics Press, Beijing, 1991; the *Pi Wei Xue Shuo Yu Lin Chuang* (*The Theory of the Spleen & Stomach in Clinical [Practice]*) by Wang Shu-lan, People's Health & Hygiene Press, Beijing, 1990; and the *Pi Wei Xue* (*A Study of the Spleen & Stomach*) by Wu Yi-ling *et al.*, Science & Technology Documents Press, Beijing, 1989. The publication of these modern works on the importance of the spleen and stomach in clinical practice is due to the inspiration of Li Dong-yuan on the one hand and the perceived needs of contemporary patients on the other.

Li Dong-yuan left behind him a number of important works in the literature of Chinese medicine. These include the *Nei Wai Shang Bian Huo Lun* (*Treatise on Solving Confusion in Discriminating Internal and External Damages*); *Pi Wei Lun* (*Treatise on the Spleen and Stomach*); *Lan Shi Mi Cang* (*Secret Collection of the Orchid Study*); *Yi Xue Fa Ming* (*Medical Theory Made Clear*); and *Yong Yao Fa Xiang* (*Methods and Approaches to Using Medicinals*). Of these, the *Pi Wei Lun* is Li's undisputed masterpiece and was probably the last work he wrote before his death. Li died at 71 years of age. In one place in the *Pi Wei Lun*, he discusses his own case when he was already 65. This statement tells us that Li Dong-yuan was 65 when this work was in progress. A number of researchers have convincingly argued that he finished it only shortly before he died.

There are two editions currently available of the *Pi Wei Lun* in the People's Republic of China. The *Yi Tong Zheng Mai* is a photolithograph of a Ming Dynasty version published by the People's Health & Hygiene Press in 1957. In 1976, the People's Health & Hygiene Press published an annotated version of the *Pi Wei Lun* with commentaries developed by the Hunan TCM Research Institute. The former edition preserves the book as it appeared in the Ming Dynasty. The latter, which is by far the most common version in China today, is an unreliable edition, even though the editors did give a wealth of enlightening and

instructive annotations on a number of thorny academic problems. Prepared and published during a politically repressive period in modern Chinese history, its editors abandoned faithfulness to the original for political revisionism. Bending to the political environment, they willfully deleted anything they thought improper, including an entire chapter which was deemed politically incorrect. Nonetheless, many of the notes appearing in this edition were useful in rendering the English version contained herein. However, this English version is primarily based on the *Yi Tong Zheng Mai*. In preparing this English version, the only changes made in the original text have been the addition of chapter numbers for the sake of convenient reference and footnotes explaining difficult or obscure passages. We have also rectified some discrepancies between the chapter titles as they appear in the table of contents and as they appear at the head of each chapter.

The terminology and methodology used in this translation is based on Nigel Wiseman and Ken Boss' *Glossary of Chinese Medical Terms and Acupuncture Points*. Formulas are identified by their pinyin names followed by their English translation. Ingredients in these formulas are identified first in latinized pharmacological nomenclature followed by pinyin. The main sources for the identifications of medicinal ingredients used in preparing this work were Bensky and Gamble's *Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica*, Hong-yen Hsu's *Oriental Materia Medica; A Concise Guide*, Stuart and Read's *Chinese Materia Medica*, and the Shanghai Science & Technology Press' *Zhong Yao Da Ci Dian (A Dictionary of Chinese Herbs)*.

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