The Heart and Pericardium

The heart and pericardium (A) are two distinct, but closely related organs. The heart is the emperor, governing the movement of blood and the conduct of the organs, and housing consciousness or spirit. The pericardium is the heart’s intermediary, acting as the portal through which the spirit engages the world.

Two critical principles stated in The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine present the fundamental role of the heart: “The heart is the great governor of the five viscera and the six bowels and is the abode of the spirit.” “The heart governs the blood and vessels of the body.” The heart ensures that the body is nourished and all organs are supplied with blood.

In its role of storing spirit, the heart is the seat of consciousness. It “governs the spirit light” and is the place from which consciousness encounters the world. Spirit refers to clarity of consciousness and the strength of the mental faculties. The role of the pericardium is that of a minister or courier who permits the transmission of information between the heart/spirit and the greater world. “The pericardium holds the office of minister or courier; from it joy and pleasure emanate.” The pericardium is not generally a subject of direct clinical interest unless there are severe alterations of consciousness produced by an obstruction of the pericardium. Clinically these conditions can involve patterns such as phlegm clouding the pericardium or heat entering the pericardium. The channel pathways and acupuncture points associated with the pericardium are frequently used in treating a variety of conditions.

The function of the heart is dependent on the vital substances of the body. Abundant qi and blood ensure a regular heartbeat and a moderate and forceful pulse. Insufficiency of heart qi and blood can produce an irregular beat, lusterless complexion, palpitations, even clinical signs of blood stagnation such as green-blue complexion, especially where heart yang is insufficient. Where heart blood or yin becomes insufficient the ability of the heart to store the spirit properly can be affected, producing insomnia and dream-disturbed sleep.

The yin heart is paired with the yang organ, the small intestine. This relationship is diagnostically and therapeutically relevant since close channel relationships allow heat to flow out of the heart via the small intestine.

The tongue is the sprout of the heart and while clinical signs of the heart’s status are found primarily on the tip of the tongue, the color and quality of the tongue, and the ability to speak clearly all point to the health of the heart. Because the heart governs the other organs and manifests in the tongue, the tongue can be used to investigate the status of all the organs.
Critical Principles

“The heart governs the blood and vessels of the body.”
“All blood is subordinate to the heart.”
“The heart stores the spirit.”
“The heart governs the spirit light.”
“The tongue is the sprout of the heart.”
“The bloom of the heart is in the face.”
“The heart governs speech.”

A The heart and the pericardium.

Fire Phase Correspondences

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<td>Viscus</td>
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<td>Sense organ</td>
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<td>Body fluid</td>
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Yin viscus: heart
Yang bowel: small intestine
Yin viscus: pericardium
Yang bowel: triple warmer
The 12 Channel Divergences (Shi Er Jing Bie 十二经别)
Channel divergences refer to branches of the 12 regular channels. They are distributed inside the body and have no points of their own. They are called divergences because they diverge from the regular pathway to make important internal linkages.

Distribution
The 12 channel divergences separate from the regular channel near the elbows or knees. The internally/externally related pairs merge together and enter the trunk to travel to the viscera and bowels. Together, they emerge from the body at the neck. Finally, they merge with the regular yang channel of the yin yang pair.

The point where the channel divergences separate from the regular channel and where they merge with the regular yang channel are important points for treatment. Called the six joinings (liu he 六合) (A), they are used to treat disorders of the paired channels. With the exception of the triple burner, which runs from the vertex of the head, down the body to the middle burner, the channel divergences run from the extremities to the trunk, face, and head.

The qi flow from one channel divergence to the next is as follows:
BL → KI → GB → LR → ST → SP → SI → HT → TB → PC → LI → LU.

Functions of the Channel Divergences
The channel divergences, which contain only defense qi, supply defense qi to the organs, and act as a secondary line of defense against the invasion of evil. If an evil invades the body and gets past the defense qi in the sinew channels, it passes to the regular channels. From here it may go directly into the organs or it may diverge and enter the channel divergences. By entering the channel divergence, it continues to battle with the defense qi, and thus is further weakened. From the channel divergence the evil may be pushed out of the body or it may enter the organs, but in a more weakened form.

The channel divergences strengthen the connection between yin yang paired organs and yin yang paired channels. They integrate areas of the body that are not covered by the main pathways, thus explaining the functions of certain points. For example, the urinary bladder channel divergence connects with the rectum and anus, reinforcing the BL regular channels’ connection to that area (B).

The channel divergences share the same pathology as the regular channels. Because the channel divergences contain defense qi and the strength of the defense qi waxes and wanes, when disease enters the channel divergences, the symptoms are often intermittent or cyclic and one-sided.
A. The divergent channel meeting points. Lower joining: where the paired channels meet; upper joining: where the divergent channel meets the regular yang channel.

B. The divergent channel pathways of the kidney and urinary bladder.
**Qi-rectifying Medicinals**

To rectify qi is to correct its counterflow or stagnant movement (see p. 132). Counterflow lung qi manifests as cough. Counterflow stomach qi presents with belching, nausea, and vomiting. Because cough-suppressing medicinals are classified with the phlegm-transforming substances, medicinals in this group mainly downbear counterflow stomach qi. Persimmon calyx (shi di) treats hiccough. Its neutral temperature permits use in counterflow stomach qi due to heat or cold.

Qi-moving medicinals focus primarily on the stomach and spleen, or the liver. Signs of qi stagnation include fullness, distension, and pain. Qi-rectifying medicinals frequently have an acrid flavor, which disperses qi. Tangerine peel (chen pi) moves qi in the spleen and stomach. Its acrid and aromatic properties move depressed qi. Its warmth supports the spleen and stomach. Its bitterness dries dampness and phlegm. Cyperus root (xiang fu) enters the liver and gallbladder and moves liver qi. It is used in the treatment of gynecological problems due to liver depression qi stagnation.

**Blood-rectifying Medicinals**

To rectify blood involves staunching bleeding, or quickening, transforming, or breaking static blood (see p. 132). Blood-staunching medicinals may be cool or warm. Sanguisorba root (di yu) is cold, bitter, and sour. It cools the blood, astringes, and stops bleeding. It treats rectal bleeding due to damp heat in the lower burner. Mugwort leaf (ai ye) is bitter, acrid, and warm. When charred, it enters the spleen, liver, and kidney channels and treats gynecological bleeding due to cold. Some of these substances simultaneously quicken blood and stop bleeding. Static blood blocks the vessels and causes blood to extravasate. When the congealed blood is moved, extravasation will stop. Noto-ginseng root (san qi) (B) treats injuries from contusions or falls. It stops bleeding and dissipates stasis to stop pain.

Fixed and stabbing pain is a clear sign of blood stasis. Blood-quickening agents are used where pain is due to blood stasis. In common with qi-rectifying medicinals, many blood-quickening medicinals are acrid, bitter, and warm. Acridity moves and disperses, bitterness frees and opens the channels, and warmth invigorates yang qi, thus supporting movement.

The blood-quickening medicinals vary in the areas on which they act and the strength of their stasis-dispersing effects. Chuanxiong rhizome (ligusticum) (chuan xiong) moves upward, and treats blood stasis in the head and chest. Cyathula root (chuan niu xi) descends and is used for blood stasis in the lower limbs. Salvia root (dan shen) is a mild quickening agent that both quickens and nourishes the blood. It is frequently used for blood stasis in the chest. Carthamus (hong hua) (C) and peach kernel (tao ren) are more forceful stasis-transforming agents often used to treat gynecological conditions.
A Qi-rectifying medicinals either move qi in the middle burner or in the liver or both. Tangerine peel is representative of the middle burner qi-moving substances. It also transforms phlegm and is an important ingredient in the basic phlegm-eliminating prescription Two Matured Ingredients Decoction.

B Notoginseng root is a very special and rather expensive medicinal: it not only moves blood but it also stops bleeding. It is a superior medicinal for the treatment of cases that present with stasis and bleeding at the same time. Because of its price, it is usually not decocted but swallowed as a powder with the decoction.

C Carthamus flower is a typical representative of the blood-quickening medicinal category. It can be applied for most types of blood stasis problems, externally as well as internally.