

Research on the origin of the theory of “heart as monarch” in *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor’s Internal Classic)*

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Author contributions

Ya-Chen Zhao carried out the literature review, design, definition of intellectual content and drafted the original manuscript; Ji-Hao Li was responsible for conceptualization, resources, collected important background information and provided assistance for material acquisition and analysis. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

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Abbreviations

TCM, traditional Chinese medicine.

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Abstract

Scholars have previously attributed the theoretical origin of “the heart is the monarch/ruler” to the monarchical view of politics. However, according to the latest unearthed documents and relevant documents handed down from ancient times, it can be found that the theory of “the heart is the monarch” might derive from the importance of attachment to the “Zhong” ideology in traditional culture, which promoted the concept that the heart as the center of body, should be the ruler and was later evolved as the “monarch”. Similar cognitive views were all mentioned in Confucianism, Taoism, eclectic scholars and other pre-Qin literature, but only in the system of traditional Chinese medicine, they played a significant role in building the heart-centered theory of Zang-Fu. Traditional Chinese medicine is a discipline developed mainly by clinical practice with the fundamental purpose of curing diseases and saving people. Although the philosophy of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) roots in the pre-Qin Dynasty, the development is unique to the other philosophies. With rich cultural connotations and philosophical thoughts, TCM is certainly the key to the treasures of Chinese civilization and deserves more attention and exploration.

Keywords: *Huang Di Nei Jing*; the heart is the monarch; Zhong; the pre-Qin thoughts; traditional Chinese medicine culture

Background

In the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, the five Zang-organs are the center of human life activities, and are ruled by the heart. *Su Wen (Plain Questions)* mentioned, “The heart is the official functioning as ruler. Spirit brilliance originates in it” [1]. *Ling Shu (Miraculous Pivot)* also said, “The heart is the big ruler among the five long-term depots and six short-term repositories. It is the place where the essence spirit resides” [2]. *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor’s Internal Classic)* established an important proposition in traditional Chinese medicine that the heart is described as “monarch” or “ruler” of the five Zang-organs and six Fu-organs, and has been the guiding principle for medical practitioners for generations. The research on the theoretical origin of “heart as monarch or rulers” in *Nei Jing* has always been a topic of debate in academic circle. Current opinions were mainly divided into two aspects. Some scholars believed that “the heart is the monarch/rulers” is a subsequent concept when TCM has been influenced by the monarchical view of politics, which stands for the source of ancient understanding of the “heart”: sovereign, human nature, importance and centrality [3, 4]. Other scholars combined the concepts of “the heart is the monarch/rulers” and “spirit brilliance originates in the heart” and hold that the heart is the monarch because it has the function of mastering the spirit [5], that is to say, the key to the heart being the ruler and the essence of life lies in the heart storing the spirit and the spirit’s effects [6]. Also, some scholars have argued that “spirit brilliance originates in the heart” should be decided by “the heart is the monarch” from the perspective of phylogeny [7]. Overall, existing studies simply attribute the theoretical source of “heart as monarch” to the monarchical view, and mostly confuse it with the function of “spirit brilliance originates in the heart”, not only blurring the uniqueness of the theory of “heart as monarch” but ignoring the deeper connotations of the theory. This article will explore the theoretical origin of “heart as monarch” in the thoughts of scholars in pre-Qin times and excavate traditional culture connected with the theory by combining the existing literature and the latest unearthed literature.

Heart as monarch: a trace of pre-Qin literature

Ancient China has always emphasized the idea of “Zhong” (Figure 1). In terms of etymology, the word “Zhong” appeared very early, and can be seen in oracle bone script and Chinese bronze inscriptions, with the meaning of “inside”, “center”, “harmonious”, “suitable”, etc. *I Ching* stressed the importance of “Zhong”, placing the Middle Way (Middle Way means to do everything morally right with ease) in the highest position. *Tao Te Ching* noted, “The more you use it, the more it produces; the more you talk of it, the less you understand. Hold on to the center” [8]. *Lun Yu (Thus Spoke the Master)* also noted, “Oh, Shun! Heaven lays the divine duty on you. You should follow the right way without deviation” [9]. The ancients believed that the heart residing in the human body, was of irreplaceable importance and could rule the body. Ancient Chinese dictionary *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* also provided an identical description by “Heart, means human heart, in the center of the body. Pictographic character.” Discussions on “centrality of heart” existed in literature of various schools, which could be traced back to 300 BC in the Warring States time. Among the bamboo slips of the Warring States time collected by Tsinghua University is a document of a hundred schools of thought, named by experts as “Heart as the center” (Figure 2). “Heart, center. In the middle of the body is the monarch. Eyes, ears, mouth and limbs is the prime minister. The heart is called the center” [10]. A document from *Guo Dian Chu Jian* of a similar age called *Wu Xing* recorded, “Eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands and feet, enslaved by the heart” [11]. The heart governs the ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands and feet. Shanghai Museum collection of Warring States bamboo slips called *Fan Wu Liu Xing* also mentioned, “The people take the monarch as the most precious, the monarch takes the heart as the most precious, and the heart takes ‘one’ as the most precious” [12]. The three unearthed documents, all belonging to the middle and later period of the Warring States Period, had incisively highlighted the dominant position of “heart”. At that time, the concept

of “the heart is the center” had been very common and absorbed by the hundred schools of thought.



Figure 1 “Zhong” in oracle bone script



Figure 2 Bamboo slips from warring States Period collected by Tsinghua University 8 “Heart as the center”

In addition to the unearthed documents, related discussions were also multiply noted in the handed-down documents. Confucian classics *Xun Zi* wrote, “The eye, ear, nose, mouth, and body each have the capacity to provide sense contact, but their capacities are not interchangeable — these are termed ‘the faculties given us by nature.’ The heart/mind that dwells within the central cavity is used to control the five faculties — it is called ‘the lord provided by nature’” [13]. *Xunzi* believed that the ears, eyes, nose, mouth and body were “the faculties given us by nature” while the heart was “the lord provided by nature”. It is very clear that the heart is in the middle of the body, is the monarch, and can control the five senses. By the time of *Guan Zi*, more emphasis were placed on the centrality of the heart. *Guan Zi*: “The function of the heart in the body is somewhat the same as the sovereign of a state. The nine apertures have their different functions, just like officials of the state have different positions and duties. When the heart is on the right path, all the nine apertures will be in good order too. When the heart is full of wishes and lusts, the ear cannot hear anything correctly, nor can the eye see anything correctly. So, it is said that, if the supervisor, the heart, is not on the right track, the supervisees, the nine apertures, will not perform their duties either” [14]. Also, “If the heart is even-tempered, the ears and eyes will work better and the arms and legs will become sinewy. Thus, it can provide the right residence for the spirit” [15], “Knowing everything of the world well, maintaining undivided attention and preventing it from being upset, not disturbing the organs with external things or disturbing the heart with wishes of the organs can be regarded as mastering Tao in the heart” [15]. Recent studies have reached a broad agreement that these pieces of *Guan Zi* belong to the Huang-di and Lao-zi school or Taoism School of Jixia [16]. It can be said that both

Confucianism and Taoism have the idea that “the heart is the center”. Furthermore, *Lv Shi Chun Qiu* (*The Spring and Autumn Annals of Lv Buwei*), the eclectics literature which embraced the ideas of Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, Ming, Fa, and Yin-Yang, also claimed that ears, eyes, mouth and nose should be under control. Although the book didn’t explicitly assert the dominance of heart over the four orifices, it certainly corroborated the above arguments. “Sages have pondered over things scrupulously and regarded life as the most important and valuable thing in the world. Organs such as the ear, the eye, the nose and the mouth should all facilitate life. Therefore, even though the ear wants to hear something euphonious, the eye wants to see something beautiful, the nose wants to smell something fragrant and the mouth wants to eat something delicious, these wishes should not be fulfilled if they are harmful to life. On the other hand, if something is good for health, it should be done at any rate even though it might be against the wishes of these four organs. From this point of view, the ear, eye, nose and mouth should not do anything according to their own will and their wishes should be supervised and constrained. Officials of any regime are somewhat the same. They should not do anything according to their own will either, and they should be supervised and constrained as well. That is the right method for attaching importance to life” [17].

To sum up, “heart” was attached to importance in the pre-Qin period, and the concept of “heart as the center” was recognized and absorbed by the hundred schools of thought. It appeared early and

was scattered in diverse literature, on the basis of which the idea “the heart governs body” gradually emerged. Some scholars believe that around the 4th century BC, there appeared plenty of literature on the heart dominating the limbs and five organs, reflecting that this concept, in spite of its distinction from previous discussion, was still widely accepted by people at that time [18]. Later, the central position of “heart” was used to be compared to that of “monarch”. It seemed that the metaphor of the body was mostly used for nature in earlier literature, while the metaphor for politics appeared relatively late. Not until the middle and late Warring States period did a large number of relevant literature appear [18]. The metaphor of “heart” as “monarch”, just like the metaphor of “Tian(heaven)” as “monarch”, was another ideological resource of political thinking in the pre-Qin and Han dynasties to argue the rationality of kingship and monarchy, and its value was to provide another theoretical basis for kingship politics, with the purpose of strengthening kingship and serving feudal rule [19]. Combining literature reviews and previous studies, we can find that on the basis of the idea of “an emphasis on Zhong”, the concept of “heart is the center” first appeared, followed by the concept of “heart rules the body”, and finally the concept of “heart” as a metaphor for “monarch” appeared.

In Table 1, we organized the theories about “heart as the center” mentioned in various literature. Although these arguments all emphasized the governing role of heart, there were still differences in specific literature.

Table 1 “Heart as center” in various literature

Name of document	School of thought	Content
<i>Heart as the center</i>	pre-Qin eclectics	Heart, center. In the middle of the body is the monarch. Eyes, ears, mouth and limbs are the prime minister. The heart is called the center.
<i>Huang Di Nei Jing</i>	medical experts	The heart is the official functioning as ruler. Spirit brilliance originates in it. The heart is the big ruler among the five long-term depots and six short-term repositories. It is the place where the essence spirit resides. That which is responsible for all affairs is called the heart. When the heart reflects on something, that is called intention. The location where the intentions are, that is called the mind. If the mind longs for changes, that is called pondering. If pondering results in far reaching plans, that is called consideration. If considerations guide one’s handling of affairs, that is called knowledge
<i>Guo Dian Chu Jian</i>	Confucian school	Eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands and feet enslaved by the heart.
<i>Wu Xing</i>		
<i>Xun Zi</i>	Confucian school	The eye, ear, nose, mouth, and body each have the capacity to provide sense contact, but their capacities are not interchangeable — these are termed ‘the faculties given us by nature.’ The heart/mind that dwells within the central cavity is used to control the five faculties — it is called ‘the lord provided by nature.’
Shanghai Museum	Taoist school	The people take the monarch as the most precious, the monarch takes the heart as the most precious, and the heart takes ‘one’ as the most precious.
<i>Fan Wu Liu Xing</i>		
<i>Guan Zi</i>	Taoist school	The function of the heart in the body is somewhat the same as the sovereign of a state. The nine apertures have their different functions just like officials of the state have different positions and duties. When the heart is on the right path, all the nine apertures will be in good order too. When the heart is full of wishes and lusts, the ear cannot hear anything correctly, nor can the eye see anything correctly. So, it is said that, if the supervisor, the heart, is not on the right track, the supervisees, the nine apertures, will not perform their duties either. If the heart is even-tempered, the ears and eyes will work better and the arms and legs will become sinewy. Thus, it can provide the right residence for the spirit. Knowing everything about the world well, maintaining undivided attention and preventing it from being upset, not disturbing the organs with external things or disturbing the heart with wishes of the organs can be regarded as mastering Tao in the heart.

Table 1 “Heart as center” in various literature (continued)

Name of document	School of thought	Content
<i>The Spring and Autumn of Lv Buwei</i>	Eclectics	Sages have pondered over things scrupulously and regarded life as the most important and valuable thing in the world. Organs such as the ear, the eye, the nose and the mouth should all facilitate life. Therefore, even though the ear wants to hear something euphonious, the eye wants to see something beautiful, the nose wants to smell something fragrant and the mouth wants to eat something delicious, these wishes should not be fulfilled if they are harmful to life. On the other hand, if something is good for health, it should be done at any rate even though it might be against the wishes of these four organs. From this point of view, the ear, eye, nose and mouth should not do anything according to their own will and their wishes should be supervised and constrained. Officials of any regime are somewhat the same. They should not do anything according to their own will either, and they should be supervised and constrained as well. That is the right method for attaching importance to life.

The hundred schools of thought all acknowledged the concept of “the heart as the center”, but most of their discussions only went as far as “the ears, the eyes, the mouth, the nose and the limbs”, or at most to the “nine orifices” in general. There was no other literature like *Huang Di Nei Jing* so that it linked the concept of heart to Zang-Fu organs (TCM classifies the internal organs of the body into two kinds: Zang-viscera, or the heart, liver, spleen, lung and kidney, all of which have the common physiological function of producing and storing essential Qi. The six Fu-viscera, or the gallbladder, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, urinary bladder and San-Jian, which have the common physiological function of receiving, transforming and transporting food and water.), thus forming a unique system of Zang Xiang (“Zang” refers to the internal organs that are stored inside the body and “Xiang” refers to the exterior manifestations of the physiological functions and pathological changes of the internal organs). In this way, another question occurred: how did traditional Chinese medicine develop such unique theoretical knowledge?

Heart as monarch determined by clinical practice and observation

Huang Di Nei Jing consists of *Su Wen* and *Ling Shu*. The original books are in 9 volumes each, with 9 articles in each volume and 81 articles in each part, totaling 162 articles. There has been a controversy about when *Nei Jing* was completed. Most researchers believed that *Nei Jing* was compiled in the middle and late Western Han Dynasty, but its philosophical thoughts could be traced back to the Warring States Period [20]. The ideas of the hundred schools of thought are the source of both Chinese philosophy and the culture in which the theory of the *Nei Jing* took shape. In *Nei Jing*, extensions of each school of thought can be reflected in traditional medical discussions. For example, the starting point for the doctrine of the relationship between “Tian (heaven)” and Man in the *Nei Jing* is basically the same as that advocated by Xunzi [20]. Under the influence of *Guan Zi* of Ji Xia Taoist school, “Tao is manifested by Qi, and Tao is integrated with Qi”, the viewpoint of “all diseases are born in Qi” is formed [21]. The legalists’ “law” to rule things, the Mohist school’s “three standards” as well as the most talked-about theory of Yin and Yang and the five elements are inextricably linked to pre-Qin philosophy. In traditional Chinese medicine, the most important thinking of “Comparative State” also comes from the pre-Qin philosophy. The infiltration of pre-Qin philosophy into medicine is inevitable, and even some medical records of non-medical documents can prove it. For example, *Zuo Zhuan* contains the theory of six exogenous pathogens, the medical system as recorded in the *Zhou Li*. It can be seen that although medical thought has not been formed as a complete system theory in the pre-Qin period, it has also infiltrated and influenced the thoughts of pre-Qin schools.

Against this background, the idea “the heart is the center” permeated medicine, and because of traditional Chinese culture's emphasis on the “Zhong”, it established the unique position of the “heart” in the human body — the heart is the sovereign and can rule

the body. The heart of the monarch was not simply based on the subjective formation of the monarch. Traditional Chinese medicine constructed the Zang-Fu organs in terms of the understanding of “the heart as the center”, and then introduced the concept of “the heart as the monarch”, emphasizing the important position of the heart in the Zang-Fu organs. It can be said that “the mind is monarch” determined that the mind has the function of spirit brilliance.

The concept of “centralizing the mind and unifying the body” was recorded in the literature of the hundred schools of thought. However, different from *Nei Jing*, most of its subsequent development was linked to the power of the monarchy and the imperial power or authority in order to enlighten the monarch and govern the people. Confucianism and Taoism served the regime and often had to conform to the trends of the times in order to appeal to those in power. By constructing “the unity of the heart and the monarch” with the idea “heart as the center”, the doctrine assisted in strengthening the dominator's power and serve the political interests. Although *Huang Di Nei Jing*, as medical literature, was also influenced by political and other social factors, its main purpose was still to heal the sick, save people and cognize the human body. Therefore, although various pre-Qin philosophical thoughts could be seen in *Nei Jing*, most of them retained the traces of TCM developing its own special knowledge from the general understanding of pre-Qin. For example, it is now commonly believed in traditional Chinese medicine that the heart is open to the tongue. But in the *Nei Jing*, in addition to the heart is open to the tongue, there are also records of the heart being open to the ears and the eyes. It once mentioned, “The South; red color. Having entered it communicates with the heart. It opens an orifice in the ears. It stores essence in the heart. Hence the disease [it brings forth] is in the five depots” [1]. “Now, as far as the heart is concerned, it is that of the five depots which concentrates the essence. The eyes are its orifice. Effulgence and complexion show its splendor” [22]. Most scholars agreed that this is because *Nei Jing* did not come from a single author [23], and theories therein varied according to different associations those theory founders made about life activities [24]. From my perspective, this condition not only came from the doctrine of different schools of thought, but in fact proved precisely that the theory of Chinese medicine was formed out of the general understanding of pre-Qin philosophy. As mentioned above, in the pre-Qin period, the heart could rule the ears, eyes, mouth, limbs, etc., but in the process of forming the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, doctors accepted a part of general understanding, and finally constructed the complete theory of “the heart is the monarch/ruler” and “opening the body in the tongue”. “One of the reasons why a medical theory can be taken seriously is that it is effective when combined with practical treatment” [25], so much for the theory that “The heart is the official functioning as ruler. Spirit brilliance originates in it”. Traditional Chinese medicine is a practical discipline, and clinical practice is the best evaluation of theory. Theories that can cure the sick and save lives were retained, while those that are contrary to clinical practice were modified. This was

also the fundamental reason why traditional Chinese medicine and the hundred schools of thought of pre-Qin Dynasty had the same ideological source, but ultimately developed very differently.

In the literature of the pre-Qin dynasties, “heart” was more of a philosophical concept that can refer to human thought, perception, mind, will, spirit, and also played the role of a commander and master. *Huang Di Nei Jing*, a medical text, incorporated to some extent the traditional cultural understanding of the “heart”. However, medicine is a discipline that values practice and is essentially about healing and saving lives. In *Nei Jing*, there is a philosophical conception of the heart as a sovereign, a ruler, and a master of the spirit brilliance, “The fact is: the origin of life is called essence. When two essences clash that is called spirit. That which comes and goes following the spirit, is the *hun* ethereal soul. That which enters and leaves together with the essence, that is called *po* corporal soul. That which is responsible for all affairs, that is called the heart” [2]. It also has a more physiological and pathological significance. Heart governs blood, controls the blood vessels and manifests in the complexion, “The heart is the basis of life; it is [responsible for] changes of the spirit. Its effulgence is in the face. Its fullness [manifests itself] in the blood vessels. It is the major yang in the yang. It communicates with the Qi of summer” [1], “the true [Qi of the] depots penetrates into the heart. The heart stores the Qi of the blood and the vessels” [1], “All sinews are tied to the joints. All blood is tied to the heart” [1]. At the same time, the heart weakens with age, “At the age of sixty, the heart Qi begins to weaken, as if affected by grief. Blood and Qi slow down. Hence one is inclined to lie down” [2]. These are functions that are specific to the heart in traditional Chinese medicine. When sick, these functions of the heart are impaired, presenting with different clinical symptoms. For example, “The heart stores the vessels. The vessels host the spirit. The heart Qi: If depleted, then [the patient] will be grieved. If replete, then he will laugh without end” [2], “When the flavors [consumed] are excessively salty, the Qi of the major bones is fatigued, the muscle [-flesh] is shortened and the Qi of the heart is repressed. When the flavors [consumed] are excessively sweet, the Qi of the heart pants and there is fullness” [1]. If you eat too much salt, your heart will be suppressed. If you eat too much sweets, your heart will be full. In addition to the description of the physiology and pathology, there is also a description of the dietary prognosis of heart disease. “In the case of a heart disease, it is advisable to consume wheat, mutton, apricots and shallots” [2]. Features of the heart are also discussed in some details in the *Nei Jing*, including the possible causes that affect these functions and the symptoms of dysfunction, and further relevant medical explorations in traditional Chinese medicine never stopped there.

In traditional Chinese medicine also recorded the case of anatomy of the heart. *Nan Jing (Classic of Difficult Issues)*, a medical classic of similar age to *Nei Jing*, once mentioned, “The heart weighs twelve ounces. It has seven holes and three hairs. It is supplemented with three *ge* of essence sap. It is responsible for harboring of the spirit” [26]. This was the earliest description of the anatomical structure of heart ever seen in medical literature. Besides, there were also some descriptions of heart function similar to *Nei Jing*. For instance, “The Qi of the heart passes through the tongue; as long as the tongue is at ease, one knows [the differences between] the five flavors” [26], “Hence, the liver stores the *hun*; the lung stores the *po*; the heart stores the spirit; the spleen stores sentiment and wisdom; the kidneys store the essence and the mind” [26]. Comparatively speaking, *Nan Jing* attached more importance to pathologic knowledge than *Nei Jing*, especially the pulse manifestation of the heart, as well as etiological factors and pathogenesis of the heart. “When the Qi of [any of] the five long-term depots turn against [the heart], that is called ‘pain in the heart resulting from receding [Qi].’ When the pain is extreme, and when it is limited to the heart, while the hands and the feet are virid, that is called ‘genuine pain in the heart.’ When the onset of genuine pain in the heart is in the morning, death will occur at night; when the onset is at night, death will occur in the morning” [26]. In this case, *Nan Jing* described a critical illness, genuine pain in the heart, which is the equivalent of a heart attack in modern medicine. Once it strikes,

death can occur within a day. “Consider feeling a [movement in the] vessels [that is associated with a disease in the] heart. External evidence of such [a disease includes] a red face, a dry mouth, and a tendency to laugh. Internal evidence of such [a disease is the presence of] moving Qi above the navel which, if pressed, respond with firmness and pain. The disease, as perceived by the [patient], consists of uneasiness of the heart and of pain in the heart. The center of the palms is hot, and dry vomiting occurs. If this [evidence] is present, the heart is [afflicted]. If it is not present, [the heart] is not [afflicted]” [26]. Here, *Nei Jing* described in detail the range of external symptoms that can occur with heart disease, such as annoyance, and cardiodynia. In clinical practice, if patients are suffering from any of these symptoms, heart-related diseases should be considered. Therefore, we may draw the conclusion that theory of *Nan Jing* tended to be closer to clinical application than *Huang Di Nei Jing*, due to its elaborate demonstrations on pathogenesis and symptoms, as well as treatment.

To the Sui and Tang dynasties, much medical literature had been published. Chao Yuanfang's *Zhubing Yuanhou Lun (Treatise on Causes and Symptoms of Diseases)* was the first monograph to discuss the causes and syndromes of various branches after *Nei Jing*, systematically classifying diseases and syndromes at that time. The book further elaborated the theory of heart on the basis of *Nei Jing*, making the theory of heart more detailed. Most importantly, it was the first book to distinguish between ordinary and genuine heartaches, arguing that some heartaches were triggered by digestive problems rather than heart problems, and genuine heartache required urgent medical attention and even resulted in death in severe cases. *Zhubing Yuanhou Lun* cited more than 30 ancient medical scriptures and documented many arguments from them before the Sui period, thus forming a system for classifying the causes and symptoms of diseases [6]. Therefore, the theory of heart gradually developed and built a relatively mature system. Unfortunately, there were no corresponding treatments recorded concerning the very detailed disease in *Zhubing Yuanhou Lun*, such as formula prescriptions. Thanks to the publication of many remedy books in Tang and Song dynasties, especially the large remedy books such as *Waitai Miyao Fang (Medical Secrets of an official)*, Taiping Shenghui Fang (*Peaceful Holy Benevolent Prescriptions*), they really made up for this deficiency. These remedy books contained many Chinese materia medica and prescriptions for treating heart diseases, including *Polygalae radix* (Yuanzhi), *Ophiopogonis radix* (Maidong), *Poria* (Fuling), *Salvia miltiorrhiza radix* (Danshen), *Rehmanniae radix* (Dihuang), which provided a reference for the treatments of heart diseases in later generations and are still widely used in clinic today. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the principle and prescriptions of the previous generation were mainly collected and assisted in improving the theoretical system of heart. Through practice, doctors at that time analyzed and classified numerous formulas and eventually compiled them into two significant remedy books: *Puji Fang (Prescriptions for Universal Relief)* and *Yizong Jingjian (Golden Mirror of Medicine)*. From the performance of sorting and classification of prescriptions, we can already see the prototypical form of the basic theory textbooks of modern traditional Chinese medicine.

Conclusion

“As a life science, traditional Chinese medicine attaches great importance to practice. It has its own law of development, and the only reference of this law is the practical effect” [27]. Mr. Ge Zhaoguang proposed that the study of intellectual history should use the method of not only “adding” but also “subtracting”. When we see similar words in the literature of the hundred schools of thought, we will often think that this is a common point of communication between different schools. However, if this idea is widespread in the literature of the hundred schools of thought, it may be based on a common understanding of the time in addition to mutual influence. After getting rid of the general understanding, the contents of difference can just touch the unique kernel of various theories. The

concept of "the heart as the center" is acknowledged by all the sages, but most of their discussions only go as far as "the ears, the eyes, the mouth, the nose and the limbs", or at most to the "nine orifices" in general. *Huang Di Nei Jing* generally relates the five internal organs to each other, forming a unique system of hidden signs. The ideological content of the 'heart as monarch' is found in all the surviving texts of the hundred schools of thought, but most of their subsequent developments were linked to the sovereign's power and imperial authority in order to enlighten the ruler and govern the people, except for the *Nei Jing*. Confucianism and Taoism served the regime, and in order to meet the needs of those in power, they often had to conform to the trends of the times, constructing a 'mind-king unity' with the 'mind as center', with the aim of strengthening the power of the king and serving the political cause. Although the *Huang Di Nei Jing*, as a medical text, was also influenced by political and other social factors, its main purpose was still to heal the sick and save people, and to investigate the human body. The philosophical outlook differs from one discipline to another. In addition to the characteristics of thinking, as a practical discipline, TCM must be based on the practice of inquiry into the body. It is thus that a unique theoretical system of Chinese medicine is built up, making the differences between the discourse on the body in Chinese medical literature and other non-medical literature increasingly obvious and forming a unique view of the body in Chinese medicine. Traditional Chinese medicine came from the philosophy of pre-Qin Dynasty and traditional Chinese culture, and formed its own unique theoretical system based on clinical practice in its subsequent development. We can not only explore the cultural thoughts of pre-Qin Dynasty, but also learn the methods of curing diseases and saving people. It is both practical and cultural, and it is this duality that provides space for us to always doubt and explore it. Our exploration of TCM culture is far from enough. Only when we know where we come from can we know where we are going to. Only by recognizing the general understanding in the philosophical view and analyzing the uniqueness of TCM can we "clean up the original source, keep the integrity and innovate" and be capable of inspiring traditional Chinese medicine.

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