

三焦

Mysteries of the *Sān jiāo*

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I was born a blank slate, needing refinement. The interaction of self, *yuán qì* 源气 and the yin channels pushes outward to be shaped by the psychosocial frame of those around me. The *Sān jiāo* disseminates my source to other parts of me and those around me. This mysterious organ has a name but no location.

Over the millennia, various schools of thought have employed the strategy of three burners. This brings a complex history to the idea of the *sān jiāo*. In English, *sān jiāo* is described as the triple burner or triple warmer. Its function changes dependent upon context. *Sān jiāo* may further refer to the channel, a region, the function water transport and transform, or disease processes. I discuss here the potential uses for each.

Sān jiāo (三焦) as the Unknown

Having a name but no place suggests a ubiquitous phenomenon throughout the body, but also intimates a paradoxical state of being which I link conceptually with existential phenomena. That is, the fire yang channel of the *sān jiāo* connects with others and especially through *wài guān* (外关), the outer pass or exterior gate. In addition to the anatomical and physiological field affect of communicating through this vector – we open and close to others. Thus, the post-modern problems of isolation can be accessed through this channel. Of course, all channels may be considered in the domain of the psychosocial. The *Sān jiāo*, however, gains primacy vis-à-vis its placement as a yang channel in the upper body that is fire: a yang expression located within the yang of yang. It is here that we reach out to others.

The three Cinnabar Fields, or *dāntián* 丹田, are located similarly to the *Sān Jiāo*, in the regions of the abdomen, heart, and brain, and having no substance, they are the fields of inner space employed in Daoist cultivation practices. The pulse as an expression of the

heart and circulatory systems has a direct link to spirit and may be used as a tool for guiding practices of consciousness in addition to evaluation of the terrain for the purposes of remediation. The upper *dāntián* is located between the eyebrows, the middle *dāntián* is located at the solar plexus, and the lower *dāntián* below or behind the navel.

The lower cinnabar field is the original *dāntián* and is linked with the gate of destiny *mìng mén* 命门, residing behind the umbilicus. The middle cinnabar field is located at the center of the chest. It is the seat of *qì* 气 or breath. The upper *dāntián* is located in the region of the brain and is the seat of spirit (*shén* 神) [1-4].

Body Fluid Circulation and “*Sān jiāo*”

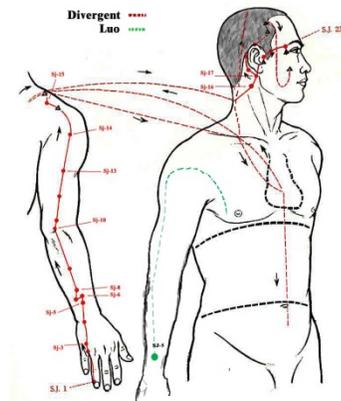
Water metabolism is affected by the lung in the upper, spleen in the middle and the kidneys in the lower. If the pulse is deep in one of these three burners, there is a suggestion of damp accumulation with poor fluid transportation. When the pulse is deep in more than one burner, the *Sān jiāo* is implicated. My favorite formula, if it fits, is *Líng Guì Zhú Gān Tāng* 苓桂术甘汤 (Poria, Cinnamon Twig, Atractylodes macrocephala and Licorice Decoction). This formula is appropriate in the context of qi and yang depletion leading to damp accumulation.

The *Sān Jiāo*” provides a connection between these organs via its presence through the ‘ground substance’ connection pathway between these organs. The status can be evaluated by the presence of what Hammer calls the ‘cotton pulse’. It is often present with a deep pulse. Certain family tradition offshoots of the Menghe-Ding current, such as the Tian-Zeng lineage use the term ‘soggy’ to describe this pulse. For them, the term soggy refers more to a deep or cotton pulse rather than the image that Li Shi-zhen describes which is like a thread floating upon water – where there is no root.

To connection between the *Sān jiāo* and the lymphatic system can be seen in conditions of fluid retention and edema. The lymph system is a circulatory return which drains fluid from tissues and allows distribution of immune cells. Lack of exercise, hypothyroidism and obesity can lead to congested lymph return. More severe lymphatic obstruction can be caused by surgeries, injuries, radiation, tumors and infections, which causes more extreme condition of lymphedema. Dry brushing is an excellent solution to this problem along with circulatory massage, exercise and regular sweating.

The *Sān jiāo* as a Channel

As a channel the triple burner travels along the sagittal plane along the flexor surface of the arm, the shoulder and sides of the neck and cranium. It then travels deep into the heart and the three burners. It is used to treat the tissues located along its trajectory. These include: tissues of the arm, shoulder, neck, cranium, throat ears and eyes, heart and abdomen.



In relationship to the pericardium as an internal-external axis of ministerial fire, it has root within the yuan qi. As such, the mystical correlations in the depths, at the source of being are accessed.

The *Sān jiāo* as an Existential Experience

As the channels linked with ministerial fire and the right proximal pulse position

I will discuss here some conversations I heard in the early 1980s. I do not have sources nor do I recollect with whom I had these conversations. This manner of thought has, however, affected my practice since that time.

The pericardium is known as the *xīn bāo* 心包 or heart wrapping. It is in a yin-yang relationship with the *sān jiāo*. They are both fire channels in the upper body, relating in a sense, to heaven. There, the pericardium operates as yin within yang. Similarly, the *sān jiāo* channel serves yang within yang.

There is a paradox implicit within these thoughts of the, since the *sān jiāo* is a water expression of fire while the *xīn bāo* is fire. Thus, the yang channel becomes yin and the yin channel becomes yang. This connects with the *yuán qì* 原气 expression from within the unity field of the wújí 無極. This wújí can be considered as that which is beyond occurrence. The consequent division of yin and yang may be viewed as water and fire which relates to the nature of the *sān jiāo* and pericardium.

But what of practice? There are several uses of the right proximal pulse position. Here, we explore it using a two-depth pulse method as described in the

Disorders of human experience range between echo-psycho-social phenomena. Transcendent to this is the persons relationship to source. I use the right proximal position for this purpose. It holds within it, the connection to source and primordial yin and yang. As the individual expresses their concerns anywhere from existential dilemma to spiritual crisis to full on unity field consciousness, this position provides insight into the responses. As with all NeoClassical pulse diagnostic methods, assessment may take place in terms of time, space and state. Thus, there are 5 directions of the compass, 1,2,3,5 depths depending on the choice. Here, we use two depths for the purpose of distinguishing the pericardium and *sān jiāo*. Events taking place here are the individual's response to the matters under discussion. They are therefore a response to perceived events. They are not being close to source.

The constitution at the level of five movements *wǔ xíng* 五行. After the division of yin and yang from the source within the wújí 無極, various iterations of two and three emerge, as five. The *The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic* (*Huáng Dì Nèi Jīng*, 黄帝内经) I use the color of the face, the sound of the voice and the life purpose as the most reliable tools for classifying the soul at the level of the *wǔ xíng*.

Agent	Color	Sound	Mission
Fire	Red	Laughter	Connect
Earth	Yellow	Melodic	Care
Metal	White	Whisper	Principles
Water	Black-Blue	Groan	Wisdom
Wood	Green	Shout	Achieve

I assess the constitution, which may require inquiry into past situations so as to decompensate from the current state. I then select the point upon the pericardium or the *sān jiāo* which corresponds to the constitution.

Let's say the person has an existential crisis in the sense of disconnection from self – choose the interior – the pericardium. As they speak of their childhood experiences, they are trying to connect with me, make me laugh and there is a red tone. I use the fire point on the pericardium PC 8 *láo gong* 劳宫 for this.

Each of the points along the channel pathway correlates with a particular agent (*xing*)¹. At the level of source of creation, the divisions of reality into the five-fold nature of being speak to our humanity. It ties to a deep cosmological turn from within the source of being at the unity field level. As one becomes two, so also, two begets three and their relationship is five. Thus, the five agents correlate with being and time in the spin from the deepest source. This provides access to a constitutional presentation according to the intersection of time and space, represented as the five transformations and divisions. Thus, for the fire person, we may use the fire point upon the *Sān jiāo* channel as a form of connection into the source of that person's being.

***Sān jiāo* as an Infectious Disease Model: Damp Heat**

Shī Wēn 湿温 refers to damp heat disease patterns. They are a portion of *Wēn Bing* 温病 theory. As such, it is a synthesis of theories developed in the *Treatise on Cold Damage* (*Shāng Hán Lùn*, 伤寒论) and later, the *Systematic Differentiation of Warm Diseases* (*Wēn Bing Tiáo Biàn*, 温病条辨) [6-9].

Wēn Bing theories have literary origins within the *Huáng Dì Nèi Jīng* 黄帝内经, the *Classic of Difficult Issues* (*Nàn Jīng*, 难经), and the *Shāng Hán Lùn*. *Wēn Bing* theory emerged in the late Ming (1368-1644 CE) and Qing (1644-1912 CE) dynasties. Such developments were in part influenced by emergent diseases that occurred due to deforestation and increasing population growth with urbanization and industrialization [10].

The heat pathogens are considered to be infectious and can easily become latent. *Sān jiāo Shī Wēn* progressions take place from the upper burner down through the middle to

¹ I prefer to use Unshuld's concept of agent for what is often referred to as five transformations or elements. An agent acts in both time and space, thus the notion of agent allows for the paradox between form and function through the divisions of a five-fold nature of reality.

the lower burner: the reverse is also possible. This model has roots in the six stages of *Shāng Hán Lùn* disease progressions.

Shī Wēn treatment frequently employs pungent herbs to dry damp and bitter cold herbs to clear heat. In the lower burner, purging and diuretic strategies are used. Middle burner damp heat affects the transforming and transporting capacity of the spleen. It is related to a ying stage of Wen Bing theory with poor appetite, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. It is also similar to a Tai Yin condition in Shang Han.

Reasons to consider *Shī Wēn* theory:

- Infectious disease
- Damp conditions such as bloating, distension, heavy extremities, borborygmous, sensations as though bandaged, sluggishness, clouded mind, sticky mouth, and poor appetite.
- Heat conditions such as fever, yellow tongue coat, possible delirium, and a rapid pulse.

This model may be used for subclinical manifestations of such disease patterns. It is possible that a slightly rapid soft pulse, a greasy yellow tongue coat, and two or three damp symptoms localized to a burner in terms of area, would be sufficient to give a diagnosis in terms of *sān jiāo* damp heat syndromes.

Lower Burner Damp Heat can be a form of sexually transmitted disease such as vaginitis, or nonspecific urethritis. It can also appear as a Yang Ming Fu condition with the constipation. Its therapy is distinct from Yang Ming Fu in that diuresis and drastic purgation are used along with intestinal purgation using Major Rhubarb Combination (Da Cheng Qi Tang). It may further develop as a result of damp heat percolating downward due to conflagration of qi depletion and stagnation with dampness which transforms into heat.

Middle burner damp heat affects the transforming and transporting capacity of the spleen. It correlates with the ying stage of Wen Bing theory with poor appetite, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. It also correlates with shao yang and tai yin stages of Shang Han.

Dampness causes loose stool. Heat causes constipation. In the presence of damp heat, the symptoms can go either way. There can be a red & white dysenteric diarrhea with tenesmus. Or there can be constipation with accumulation and food stagnation.

During the development of Wen Bing theories, and in particular, *Sān Jiāo Shī Wēn*, trade routes between Japan and China were closed. This resulted in a lack of *sān jiāo* Damp Heat formulas in the Japanese practice of herbal medicine since they were primarily using the formulary of the *Shāng Hán Lùn*. Milder forms of *sān jiāo* Damp Heat can be treated well with the following combinations.

The pulse for the assessment, a process which affects an entire burner will present with relevant pulses on both sides in the same burner. A typical scenario is a pulse that is slippery on the right and left proximal positions for damp heat in the lower burner. With tremendous deficiency, the pulse may be deep, urgent and weak on both sides. Use modifications of *Èr Chén Tāng* 二陈汤 Two Matured Substances Decoction.

- Upper Burner add: *huáng qín* 黄芩 *Radix Scutellariae baicalensis*, *zhī zǐ* 栀子 *Fructus Gardeniae*, *xìng rén* 杏仁 *Semen Armeniacae amarum*, *jié gēng* 桔梗 *Radix Platycodonis*.
- Middle Burner add: *huáng lián* 黄连 *Rhizoma Coptidis*, *huò xiāng* 藿香 *Herba Agastachis*, *hòu pò* 厚朴 *Cortex Magnoliae officinalis*, *yì yǐ rén* 薏苡仁 *Semen Coicis*.
- Lower Burner add: *huái huā* 槐花 *Flos Sophorae*, *huáng bǎi* 黄柏 *Cortex Phellodendri Chinensis*, and *huá shí* 滑石 *Talcum*. The Smilax family *tǔ fú líng* 土茯苓 *Rhizoma Smilacis glabrae* has been used throughout the world as a specific remedy.

For damp heat of all three burners consider *mù xiāng bīng láng wán* 木香槟榔丸, "Aucklandia and Betel Nut".

For both the middle and upper burners, combine *Huò Xiāng Zhèng Qì Sǎn* 藿香正气散 Agastache Qi-Correcting Powder to relieve damp and *Huáng Lián Jiě Dú Tāng* 黄连解毒汤 Coptis Toxin-Resolving Decoction to clear Heat and Damp. *Gān Lù Xiāo Dú Dān* 甘露消毒丹 Sweet Dew Toxin-Removing Elixir may also be used for Upper and Middle burner patterns.

The understanding of *Sān jiāo* theory is not limited to external pathogens but also internal pathogens and depletions. Chronic conditions require supplementation and

nourishing in addition to clearing therapies. Supplementation should reflect the condition of the entire organism, however, if the pulse diagnostics reveal an outstanding quality in both the left and right pulse within a corresponding burner, focus there. For instance, a flat sensation in the distal left and right positions indicates a shock to the system that does not allow Qi to move freely into the upper burner. This might require *Bàn Xià Hòu Pò Tāng* 半夏厚朴汤 Pinellia and Officinal Magnolia Bark Decoction.

Internal triple warmer patterns are differentiated by symptoms common to the organ systems in the burner. A tense pulse in the middle burning as an over-riding feature suggests a formula that embraces the Spleen and Liver spreading likewise from *Bǔ Zhōng Yì Qì Tāng* 补中益气汤 Center-Supplementing and Qi-Boosting Decoction to *Xiāo Yáo Sǎn* 逍遥散 Free Wanderer Powder to *Chái Hú Shū Gān Sǎn* 柴胡疏肝散 Bupleurum Liver-Soothing Powder.

An ultra thin or thready wiry pulse in the Lower Burner may require *Liù Wèi Dì Huáng Wán* 六味地黄丸 Six Ingredients Rehmannia Pill or *Zhī Bǎi Dì Huáng Wán* 知柏地黄丸 Anemarrhena, Phellodendron and Rehmannia Pill.

Differentiation of Damp Heat Syndromes According to the Sān Jiāo

Upper Burner Damp Heat is the early stage of a Damp Evil invasion. In this stage the Damp Evil attacks both the Lungs and the Skin. Dampness also affects the Stomach and Spleen so these Zang Fu map also be affected in this stage. At this stage there is not much heat, mostly dampness. However, if allowed to progress, heat symptoms will appear. There are mucus discharges in the upper body: eyes, nose, ears and throat. There may be cough and headache.

Formula: *Huò Xiāng Zhèng Qì Sǎn* 藿香正气散 Agastache Qi-Correcting Powder

Function: Releases the exterior, transforms Dampness, regulates Qi and harmonizes the Middle Burner.

With middle burner damp heat, the spleen is easily weakened by Dampness impairing Transformation and Transportation. The Stomach's capacity to receive food and water is also affected. The Spleen is also responsible for keeping the muscles and limbs nourishes, so at this stage there may also be muscle tenderness as well as heaviness of the limbs. There may be abdominal discomfort, bloating, gas, indigestion and loss of

appetite. In more extreme conditions there may be vomiting, nausea and diarrhea, possibly with white mucous. Also, there may be heavy limbs and yellow features such as urine that also burns. The pulse is slippery throughout the middle positions.

Principle formula: *Sān Rén Tāng* 三仁汤 Three Kernels Decoction

Function: Remove Heat Evil and Resolve Dampness.

If this stage of Damp-Heat is allowed to progress untreated, the following may occur:

- The disease may progress into Lower Burner Damp Heat Disease.
- The Dampness may dry out and the disease becomes Qi.
The Dampness may cool off and the disease becomes a Cold-Damp disease.

Lower Burner Damp Heat

This is the last stage of the *sān jiāo* Differential Diagnosis. Chiefly, the Large Intestines and Urinary Bladder are affected so there will be problems with elimination. Symptoms of Lower Burner *sān jiāo* stage include diarrhea with a foul odor, burning sensations, vaginal discharges and urinary tract infection-like symptoms with scant dark urine with strong odor. Other symptoms may include dizziness since the damp obstructs the ascension of the pure. There may be abdominal distention.

Formula: *Fú Líng Pí Tāng* 茯苓皮汤 Poria Peel Soup

Pulses of the three burners

1. Assessment of the channel transmissions, in this case the movement from the *sān jiāo* to the Gall Bladder in the entry exit system. Here, the pulse is compared in terms of volume and force – the right proximal position is larger and more forceful than the left middle position: that is, the movement from the the *sān jiāo* to the Gall Bladder along the cycle of diurnal rhythms [11].
2. The *Sān jiāo* and Xin Bao have their roots in the ming men. The *sān jiāo* distributes source qi from the gate of destiny *mìng mén*. This is the right proximal pulse position and its various conditions.
3. Pulses that show collection of interstitial fluid in the extracellular matrix are consistent with low vitality of the *Sān Jiāo*. The cotton and muffled pulses of Hammer are consistent with this observation. Other parts of the Menghe-Ding current will use the term soggy pulse (*rú mài*) 濡脉 or deep pulse (*chén mài*) 沉脉).

The soggy pulse (*rú mài*) 濡脉 is like a thread floating on water according to Li Shi-zhen [12]. In practice, dampness can be present when the pulse is deep, muffled, cotton, soft, cloudy, sluggish arrival or with changing intensity and force which is more correlated with circulation of blood [13]. The pulse may take place at any depth.

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