

Understanding SHEN in Classical Chinese Texts

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Abstract

Keywords

To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.

--- *Auguries of Innocence* by William Blake (1757-1827)

Introduction

In the chapter on *Moving Essence and Changing Qi of Huang Di's Inner Classic • Basic Questions*, it reads that “A patient with SHEN is apt to recover from illness, while a patient losing SHEN has a poor prognosis”. Then what is it meant by SHEN? Actually, SHEN is a half religious and half scientific concept in Chinese culture, and bears many meanings, which are shown differently in different authoritative dictionaries or books. For example, *Dictionary of Commonly Used Characters in Archaic Chinese* explains SHEN as “god or supernatural being; the law in the nature; spirit; magic, superb, excellent”;^[1] *A Concise Dictionary of Chinese Medicine* interprets SHEN as “a collective term for life activities of man in a broad sense” and “thinking and awareness activities in a narrow sense”;^[2] *The Fundamental Theories of Chinese Medicine*, the national textbook of the fifth edition on fundamental theories for higher education of Chinese medicine in China, reads that “SHEN bears 3 meanings in the Chinese medical theory: the first, the transformations, the changes, and the functions of the materials in the nature; the second, all of the activities of man's life; the third, thinking and awareness of man”.^[3] So first, let's start understanding SHEN on the basis of its etymological investigation.

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1. Dictionary of Commonly Used Characters in Archaic Chinese [Z]. Beijing: Commercial Press, 1998: 254.
 2. Li Jingwei, Ou Yongxin, Yu Ying'ao, et al. A Concise Dictionary of Chinese Medicine [Z]. Beijing: China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2001: 775.
 3. Yin Huihe. The Fundamental Theories of Chinese Medicine [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Scientific & Technical Publishers, 1984: 3.

1 Understanding the Original Meaning of SHEN Based on an Etymological Investigation

The character for SHEN 神 has undergone the following evolution process:



Jin Wen^[1]



Xiao Zhuan^[2]



Kai Shu^[3]

The character 神, an associative compound,^[4] is composed of two parts: “示” and “申”. The ancient form of the right part “申” is the image of lightning in the sky, and is actually the ancient writing form of “電” (the upper is the rain radical 雨, the lower is 电 indicating the meaning) ; the ancient Chinese people named lightning as “SHEN 申” for they believed that the lightning was so changeable, unpredictable, invincible, knew no bounds, and therefore mysterious, and was governed by or the embodiment of “SHEN or Gods”. *The Origin of Chinese Characters* explains that “申 refers to 神”. The left part “示” is also an associative compound, and is made up of “二”, the ancient form of “上” (upper, heaven) , and the three falls (“1”), representing the sun, the moon and the stars. The ancient form of “示” was written as “T”, representing the image of a sacrificial altar. The part “示” is a radical in Chinese characters, and the meanings of the characters with “示” are usually related to offering sacrifices to gods or ancestors, or to rites. *The Origin of Chinese Characters* explains “示” as “The heaven hangs down images to show man good or ill luck, following 二. The three falls stand for the sun, the moon and the stars. Observing the images in the sky^[5] to detect the current changes. 示 indicates SHEN’s things. All with 示 part follow such a connotation.” Thus, we can figure out the ancient Chinese people’s mysterious feeling about the future world and their great reverence for the gods.



Jia Gu Wen^[6]



Jin Wen



Xiao Zhuan



Kai Shu

1. Jin Wen 金文 refers to inscriptions on ancient bronze objects of Zhou Dynasty (11th Century – 256 B.C.).
2. Xiao Zhuan 小篆, the lesser seal character, refers to a simplified form of Da Zhuan (an ancient style of calligraphy current in the Zhou Dynasty) adopted 213 B.C. during the Qin Dynasty for the purpose of standardizing the script, which is listed at the first place for all characters in *The Origin of Chinese Characters* (Shuo Wen Jie Zi).
3. Kai Shu 楷书 in Chinese calligraphy refers to the regular script since the end of Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.).
4. Associative compounds (huiyi, 会意), one of the six categories of Chinese characters (六书), are formed by combining two or more elements, each with a meaning of its own, to create a new meaning.
5. 天文 is usually translated into astronomy, but I think here it is better translated into the images in the sky.
6. Jia Gu Wen 甲骨文 refers to inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty (16th -11th century B.C.)

The Origin of Chinese Characters interprets SHEN as “Tian (Heaven) SHEN who induces all things of creation”. Xu Xuan 徐铉 interprets “SHEN 申 as induce 引”, and further explains that “The heaven governs downbearing qi to induce all things of creation”. Here you can also see how difficult to translate or interpret archaic quotations from classical Chinese texts: The SHEN in the compound TIAN SHEN 天神 of this quotation may imply both “lightening” and “god”. Yang Bojun 杨伯峻 explained SHEN in *Zuo’s Spring Autumn Annals* as bearing two specific meanings.^[1] One refers to the spirits of all things on the earth including the heaven, the earth, the mountains, the rivers, and so and so forth, e.g. The people is the governor of SHEN (the spirits). The other refers to the spirits of famous men or of those who had performed exceptionally meritorious services after they died, e.g. In former times, Yao^[2] killed Gun^[3] in the Yushan^[4] mountain, and Gun’s SHEN (Spirit) transformed into a yellow bear, which went into a deep pool of the mountain. *The Book of Changes* states that “The unpredictable changes of Yin-Yang are named SHEN”. Here SHEN refers to the unpredictable, mysterious and wonderful changes.

To sum up, SHEN originally refers to the lightening in the nature, and then was first metaphorized to mean the God who created the world, and then was extended to mean the spirits of the nature, the spirits of dead famous or great men (gods and ghosts), and the unpredictable wonderful changes.

2 Understanding SHEN in Classical Chinese Philosophical Texts

2.1 Gods and Ghosts

As it is shown in the first part, the ancient Chinese people believed that the various changeable and unpredictable phenomena in the nature were the results of SHEN’s (Gods’) actions for they were unable to understand them. Then all of the records on gods and ghosts after that can be generally classified into three categories before Buddhism traveled to China:^[5] the first referred to those who were grateful to somebody and sought ways to return their kindness, e.g. the story of paying a debt of gratitude; the second those who revenged, e.g. Du Bo shot the

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1. Yan Bojun, Xu Ti. *Dictionary of Zuo’s Spring Autumn Annals* [Z]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company: 559.
 2. Yao 尧, was a Chinese ruler, one of the Three Sovereigns (Fu Xi 伏羲, Nu Wa 女娲, and Shen Nong 神农) and the Five Emperors (Huang Di 黄帝, Zhuanxu 颛顼, Di Ku 帝喾, Yao 尧, and Shun 舜), which were mythological rulers and culture heroes of China during the period from c. 2852 BC to 2205 BC, which is the time preceding the Xia Dynasty.
 3. Gun 鯀, was Yu’s father. Yu the Great 大禹, was the legendary founder of the Xia Dynasty (2100-1600 BC), who is best remembered for teaching the people flood control techniques to tame China’s rivers and lakes.
 4. Yushan 羽山 refers to the northwest of the Donghai County, Jiangsu Province of nowadays, (see Page 274 of *Dictionary of Zuo’s Spring Autumn Annals*).
 5. Ren Jiyu. *History of Buddhism in China* (Volume1). Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1985: 11-18.

King Xuan of the Zhou Dynasty who killed him for no reason three years before (From *Records of the Zhou Kingdom of Records of Different Kingdoms*, or *Guo Yu • Zhou Yu*, 国语•周语); the third those spirits of dead people who had been called back by some divining activities. It is thus clear that SHEN in the above three categories is more or less the same as “ghosts”, manifesting in the appearance of personified SHEN.

Chuang Tzu talks 庄子 about “perfect man”, “supernatural (SHEN) man” and “wise man”, which actually refer to ideal men who have achieved Tao and therefore have reached the highest states. In this sense, those supernatural (SHEN) men are still not different from gods, e.g. Lie Yu Kou could fly in the wind. And it even records such supernatural (SHEN) men who “could not rely on the five grains to survive, just inhale the wind and drink the dew, fly in the clouds, drive a flying dragon, and swim beyond the four seas”, which actually are the same as gods. You can see the deep influence of the ancient Chinese people’s original belief on “SHEN” on *Chuang Tzu*. But such an influence had been gradually declining until the later stage of Spring Autumn Period (770-476BC). *Zuo’s Spring Autumn Annals* states in *The 32nd Year of Zhuanggong’s Reign* that “the common people’s will should be followed when a country is going to prosper; while SHEN’s will should be observed when a country is going to decline. SHEN refers to those who are intelligent, honest, upright, concentrated and constant”.

What was Confucius’s attitude about “gods and ghosts”? He said that “(I would like to) keep gods and ghosts at a respectful distance” (From the Chapter *Yong Ye* of *Analects*, 论语.雍也). Gods and ghosts of his time still referred to the spirits of our ancestors, which were mainly supposed to support us and rectify our virtues and behaviors, and therefore stood for a kind of good will. He said that “How popular the virtue (of letting justice prevail) which gods and ghosts performed is” (From the 16th Chapter of *The Doctrine of Mean*, *Zhong Yong*, 中庸)! And then how about his attitude on “SHEN”? In the *Analects*, there is only one place stating SHEN alone in the chapter of *Ba Yi* (八佾) that “(We should) regard our ancestors as being here when offering sacrifices to them, and regard SHEN as being here when offering sacrifices to SHEN. Confucius remarks ‘Offering sacrifices to them (by others) is the same as not offering sacrifices if I do not participate in the ceremony personally’”, which shows that here SHEN is another kind of “being” different from the spirits of our ancestors, i.e. gods, and is of the same importance as the ceremony proper. So Confucius’s attitude about SHEN can be summarized as “to admit SHEN’s existence but do not want to discuss it”.

Most of the philosophers of the later generations interpret SHEN in the sense of gods and ghosts as bending or stretching changes of Qi or Essential Qi. *The Book of Changes* states that “Essential Qi (shen or gods) gathers to form the shape, while wandering ethereal soul or Qi (gui or ghosts) results in changes and transformations. And therefore (you) can know the conditions of gods and ghosts.” (From the section of *Xi Ci Shang*, 系辞上). *Guan Tzu* (管子) states in the chapter of *Nei Ye* (内业) that “Qi generates all things of creation, including the five grains on the earth and the stars in the sky (heaven); and that Qi in between the heaven and the earth is ‘gods and ghosts’; and that one who can guard Qi in the chest is a wise man. That’s why Qi is so termed

as Qi”^[1]. That is to say, even the gods and the ghosts are just Qi! Wang Chong 王充^[2] said that “Gods and ghosts are the names of yin and yang. Yin Qi going against the form to return is named ghosts (gui, 鬼), while Yang Qi resulting in the generation of the form is named gods (shen, 神)” (From the Chapter *On Death* of *Critical Essays or Lun Heng* 论衡·论死). Zhu Xi 朱熹^[3] said that “Gods (shen, 神) are (those being) stretching, while ghosts (gui, 鬼) are (those being) bending”(From the Volume 3 of *Excerpt of Analects of ZHU XI* or *Zhu Zi Yu Lei*, 朱子语类). Wang Fuzhi 王夫之^[4] further explains that “The Qi of the Heaven stretches itself to men and forms and perform its transformations is named gods (shen, 神); while Qi bends and returns instead when man’s life activities terminate is named ghosts (gui, 鬼) (From the Chapter on SHEN’ s Transformations of *Annotations on Zhang Zi ’ s Zheng Meng*, Zhang Zi Zheng Meng Zhu, 张子正蒙注·神化篇).

Anyway, SHEN’s original meaning, i.e. gods and ghosts, has been gradually declining, but never disappears and still runs through Chinese people’s mind, and works as the foundation for all of its other connotations. Interpreting SHEN’s original meaning, i.e. gods and ghosts as bending or stretching changes of Qi or Essential Qi gives rise to SHEN’s second basic meaning: spirit.

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1. The translation here accords with Ong Bendick’s interpretation in his M.A. Thesis: A Study of Pre-Qin “Daoist” Thoughts: From Guodian To Jixia [D]. National University of Singapore, 2004: 69.
 2. Wang Chong 王充 (27–100 AD), was a Chinese philosopher during the Han Dynasty (202B.C.-220 A.D.) who developed a rational, secular, naturalistic, and mechanistic account of the world and of human beings.
 3. Zhu Xi, or Chu Hsi 朱熹 (1130-1200), was a Song Dynasty (960-1279) Confucian scholar who became the leading figure of the School of Principle and the most influential rationalist Neo-Confucian in China. His contribution to Chinese philosophy included his assigning special significance to the *Analects of Confucius*, the *Mencius*, the *Great Learning*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (the Four Books), his emphasis on the investigation of things (*gewu*), and the synthesis of all fundamental Confucian concepts.
 4. Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692), was a Chinese philosopher of the late Ming (1368—1644), early Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. Wang was a follower of Confucius, but he believed that the Neo-Confucian philosophy which dominated China at the time had distorted Confucius's teachings. He therefore wrote his own commentaries on the Confucian classics, and gradually developed his own philosophical system. He wrote on many topics, including metaphysics, epistemology, moral philosophy, poetry, and politics.

2.2 Spirit

The second basic meaning of SHEN is spirit, which is always opposed to form, shape, or body. *Chuang Tzu* makes a clear division between spirit and form, stresses spirit but underestimates form. It states that “The king (of Wei Wu Hou 魏武侯) asked, ‘How do you send your best wishes to me?’ Xu Wugui answered, ‘I send my best wishes to your body and spirit (SHEN)’ ” (From the chapter of *Xu Wugui* 徐无鬼), and that “The essence and the spirit result from Tao, and the form generates from the essence” (From the Chapter of *Zhi Bei You* 知北游 of *Chuang Tzu*, 庄子), which attributes the spirit to the form and finally to Tao. *Chuang Tzu* also puts forwards that the activities of SHEN (spirit) should accord with the Tao of the heaven or the Way of the nature, which is shown in the statement “The Tian (Heaven) will follow when SHEN (spirit) moves” (From the Chapter of *Zai You* 在宥).

Then as regards to the relationship between Heaven (Tian) and SHEN (spirit) as well as the bridge between SHEN in philosophical texts and medical texts, I would like to introduce Dong Zhongshu’s thoughts here. Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒,^[1] an influential scholar of the Han Dynasty, has been well-known for his proposal of the doctrine of Interactions Between Heaven and Man 天人感应, which mainly manifests in two parts: Chinese political philosophy and Chinese natural philosophy. From the standpoint of Chinese political philosophy, his proposal that “monarchical power is authorized by the God (SHEN)” lays down rules for deciding the legitimacy of a monarch as well as providing a set of checks and balances for a reigning monarch for Emperor was then regarded as “the son of the Heaven” and “The Heaven is the monarch of all the Gods, and therefore is the most respected or honored”(From the Chapter of *Jiao Yi* 郊义 of *Chun Qiu Fan Lu* 春秋繁露). Such a proposal legitimated the emperors’ autocratic government of thousands of years since Wu Emperor of the Han Dynasty 汉武帝 in China.

While based on his natural philosophy, *Huang Di’s Inner Classic* came into being^[2] and has functioned as the highest authority on Chinese medicine since then. He said “To unite Heaven and Man into one by the way of analogizing” (From the chapter of *Yin Yang Yi* 阴阳义 of *Chun Qiu Fan Lu*). *Chun Qiu Fan Lu* further states in the chapter of *Ren Fu Tian Shu* (Man Mirroring Heaven, 人副天数) that “The virtue of Heaven is to bestow, the virtue of Earth is to transform, and the virtue of Man is to be righteous. ... The essence of Heaven and Earth is to generate beings, among which Man is the most honored. ... In the universe only Man can be analogized to the Heaven and Earth. Man has 360 joints, analogizing the number of the Heaven;

1. Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, (179-104 B.C.) was a Han Dynasty scholar who is traditionally associated with the promotion of Confucianism as the official ideology of the Chinese imperial state. His thought integrated Yin Yang cosmology into a Confucian ethical framework. He is also considered the originator of the doctrine of Interactions Between Heaven and Man 天人感应.
2. Wei Zhengtong. A History of Chinese Thoughts [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2003: 321-324.

Man's body, bone and flesh analogize the thickness of the Earth. Ears and eyes on the head can listen and look, metaphorizing the sun and the moon; The orifices and vessels of the body are just like rivers and gorges; Happiness, anger, grief and joy of the heart (the gamut of human feeling) are similar to spirits (SHEN Qi). Man's body is so high, thus analogizes the Heaven. ... Therefore, Man's head is round, thus metaphorizing the appearance of the Heaven for the Heaven is also round; hair metaphorizes the stars; the ears and eyes are bright, thus metaphorizing the sun and the moon; the exhalation and inhalation of the mouth and nose metaphorize the qi of the wind; the heart in the chest understands, thus metaphorizing the spirits and the gods; the emptiness or repletion of the organs in the abdomen symbolizes various things; various things is closest to the Earth, therefore the part below the lumbar is the Earth; the images of the Heaven and the Earth are demarcated by the lumbar; the part above the neck is the place of the spirit and dignity, thus showing the dignity of the Heaven; the part below the neck, some rich and thick, some poor and thin, analogizes the soil; the feet are square-shaped, analogizing the shape of the Earth. ... The symbols of the Heaven and Yin-Yang are complete in the body; the body is just like the Heaven, so its numbers accord with the numbers of the heaven; therefore the will of the Heaven (or God's will) makes them interrelate and interact with each other. The Heaven takes its numbers of a year to make a man; therefore, man has 366 small joints to accord with the days of a year, 12 big vessels to accord with the months of a year, 5 zang organs to accord with the five phases, and 4 limbs to accord with the four seasons; opening eyes and closing eyes accord with the days and the nights; hardness and softness accord with the winter and the summer; grief and joy accord with yin and yang; the heart calculates to accord with moral standard or law; the behaviors observe moral principles to accord with the relationship between the Heaven and the Earth. A man was born with all of the above mentioned, among which those countable take numbers of the Heaven and the Earth and those uncountable analogize and metaphorize the Heaven and the Earth. Anyway, man mirrors the Heaven". Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on Interactions between Heaven and Man 天人感应 or Man Mirroring Heaven 人副天数 has been very influential to Chinese medicine. You may refer to the chapters of *Yin-Yang Relating to the Sun & the Moon* 阴阳系日月 and *Pathogens* 邪客 of *Ling Shu* (Miraculous Pivot, 灵枢) and *Acupoints* 气穴 of *Su Wen* (Basic Questions, 素问) of *Huang Di's Inner Classic*. By the way, *Huang Di's Inner Classic* can also be regarded as a philosophical classic, esp. in the fields of interpreting the nature, beings and life with qi, yin-yang and five phases it is second to none although it is a well-known classic on Chinese medicine.^[1] Now let's go back to SHEN in philosophical texts.

Xun Tzu 荀子 also states that "As long as the body forms the spirit will ensue to store the good, the ill, happiness, anger, grief and joy"(From the chapter *On Heaven* or *Tian Lun* 天论), but does not discuss this statement in details. *Huang Di's Inner Classic •Miraculous Pivot* talks about it in details in the chapter *On the Natural Span* or *Tian Nian* 天年:

Huang Di asked Qi Bo, "I would like to know how a man is conceived, how qi builds and makes the foundations (roots), what establishes and makes the parapets (protective screens), what is lost in death, and what is gained in life".

1. Ma Boying. *A History of Medical Culture in China* [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1994: 247.

Qi Bo answered, “The mother makes the foundations (roots), and the father makes the parapets (protective screens). Losing the spirit (SHEN) is death, while gaining the spirit (SHEN) is life” (SHEN).

Huang Di asked, “What is the spirit (SHEN)”?

Qi Bo answered, “When blood and qi are harmonized, when the nutrient qi and protective qi are dredged, when the five zang organs are formed and matured, when the spirit qi (SHEN QI) houses the heart, and when the ethereal soul and corporeal soul are complete, then forms the spirit (SHEN) ^[1]”.

The above quotation shows that the essence, qi, and blood are the substantial basis of SHEN (spirit). *Huang Di's Inner Classic* forwards that “To maintain a wellbeing of body and spirit” (形与神俱) is the very point to preserve, cultivate and promote health, which reads in the first chapter of *Basic Questions* that “The people of the remote antiquity practiced Tao by following the rules of yin-yang, harmonizing themselves with the universe by performing some exercises such as Dao-Yin, ^[2] having a balanced diet, arising and retiring at regular hours, avoiding overstressing their body and mind, therefore they maintained a wellbeing of body and spirit, and lived over one hundred years which was beyond their natural life span”.

As regards to the relationship between body and spirit, there are two famous metaphors in classical philosophical texts. One is the metaphor of candle and fire, in which candle metaphorizes the body and fire the spirit. ^[3] The fire (the spirit) will immediately disappear as long as the candle (the body) burns out and does not exist, which shows that the spirit exists on the body. The other is the metaphor of a sword and its sharpness, which was put forward by Fan Chen 范缜 (450-515). He said, “The body is the substantial foundation of the spirit, and the spirit is the function of the body. ... The relationship between the spirit and its substantial foundation is just like that between the sharpness and the sword; the relationship between the body and its function is just like that between the sword and its sharpness”.

2.3 Marvelous Changes

Marvelous changes, the third meaning of SHEN, can still traced back to *Chuang Tzu*. It describes a kind of superb, excellent skill due to marvelous changes through telling some stories. It reads that in the chapter of *Thorough Understanding of Life* (Da Sheng, 达生) that “Zi Qing (a carpenter's name, 梓庆) cut wood into *Ju*, a musical instrument. The people who saw it were so surprised that they all believed the *Ju* was just like to be made by ghosts and gods” The Chinese idiom 鬼斧神工 comes from this quotation, which means that something is done by gods and ghosts, implying uncanny workmanship which cannot be reached by man. In the same chapter it also states that “ I (Yan Yuan 颜渊, one of Confucius student) crossed a deep river by a ferryboat

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1. Judged from the context (What is the spirit or SHEN), I think here Ren or Man is a mistake, which should be SHEN or spirit.
 2. Dao-Yin 导引, refers to an exercise combining stretching, massaging, breathing, and meditation to cultivate health.
 3. See *Xin Lun • Xing Shen* 新论•形神 by Huan Tan 桓谭 (23 B.C.- 50 A.D.), the first treatise on body and spirit in the history of Chinese philosophy.

before, and the man drove the boat like a god”, where another Chinese idiom 操舟若神 comes from. The Chinese idiom 操舟若神 literally means driving a boat like a god, now is used to indicate superb skill which has gained through long term hard practice and deep understanding of the rules. You see that SHEN here mainly means superb skill due to marvelous changes, which still relates gods and ghosts and spirit.

Besides of *Chuang Tzu*, *Mencius* also states that “What is worth to love is Good (Shan, 善); what you really possess is True (Xin, 信); that you enrich yourself with Good (Shan) is Beauty (Mei, 美); what is both rich and brilliant is Great (Da, 大); what is great and can be set as an example is Holy (Sheng, 圣); what is holy and too wonderful to be known is SHEN (神), where SHEN can be clearly interpreted as “wonderful, marvelous, and unpredictable changes”.

Xun Tzu 荀子 also reads that “All of the stars move and rotate in turn, the sun and the moon shine alternately, the four seasons alternate and advance, yin and yang are in great transformations, and wind and rain are bestowed to all things of creation. All things of creation generate from harmony, and mature from nourishment. The process of creating all of the beings is unseen, what can be seen is the result of such a process, which is the so-called SHEN” (From the chapter *On Heaven* or *Tian Lun* 天论). Here SHEN refers to the marvelous, wonderful changes of the nature.

The Book of Changes shows the evolution from religious belief to philosophical thoughts of the ancient Chinese people in both content and writing form. Therefore SHEN in *The Book of Changes* bears its all major connotations, such as Heaven God, gods and ghosts, spirits, marvelous changes, etc. The famous quotation that “The unpredictable changes of Yin-Yang are named SHEN” has the following three implications:^[1] 1) One clue should be reasoned out in order to know and understand the world for the world is so changeable and complicated; 2) Intrinsic rules lie in the ever-changing phenomena although the changes and transformations of yin and yang are so subtle and difficult to be known. That is the way to know the world when you grasp the essentials; 3) The rhythms of the changes and transformations are sometimes so sudden and swift that people even have no time to respond them, as stated that “Only SHEN is so swift without hurry, arrives without the need of traveling”. Therefore, *The Book of Changes* teaches people to have the awareness of hardness, i.e. “take preventive measures against possible troubles”. It is thus clear that SHEN in *The Book of Changes* can be understood as the rules and laws of the changes and transformations of all things of creation.

SHEN bears many meanings; here I just introduce its three major connotations in classical philosophical texts, which actually all relates to its original meaning. In reality, the three major connotations themselves are not clearly and completely cut from each other, but show an evolving relationship.

1. Li Shunlian. The Connotations of “SHEN” in *The Book of Changes* [J]. *Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences)*. 2003, 23 (5): 66-70.

3 SHEN: From Classical Philosophical Texts to Classical Medical Texts

3.1 Gods and Ghosts and Psychotherapy in Chinese Medicine

Huang Di's Inner Classic • Basic Questions states in the chapter of *Further Discourse on the Five Zang Organs* that “It is not necessary to explain him the medical theory if a patient is superstitious in gods and ghosts; it is not necessary to show him the needling skills if a patient dislikes needling stones; if a patient refuses any treatment, then no matter what the practitioner does, the patient will not get well. This is evidence that healing actually comes from within.”, which shows that *Huang Di's Inner Classic* is not superstitious in gods and ghosts, reflecting its rational or scientific approach.

I agree with the point of view that Chinese medicine is evolved from shaman's practice, which can be shown in the original forms of the Chinese character 医 (medicine or medical practitioner): 醫 and 醫. The character 醫, appearing in *Guan Zi* 管子 and *Guang Ya* 广雅, is composed of 医 (yi, medicine or medical practitioner) and 巫 (wu, shaman or shamans' practice), thus showing the close relationship between them. *The Origin of Chinese Characters* explains 醫 as “the shamans who specialize in treating illnesses. The upper part means bad postures. Their treating behaviors were driven by wine (酉→酒), therefore following the wine part 酉. Wine was applied to treat illnesses. According to the records of *The Book of Rites* there existed medicinal wine in the Zhou Dynasty (11th century-256 B.C.), and the Shaman Peng 巫彭 was one of the first medical practitioners of the remote antiquity.”^[2]

Miraculous Pivot reads in the chapter of *Pathogenic Wind* that

Huang Di said, “The causes of which Your Master has said today, all diseased people can know that themselves. But for those who have not encountered any pathogenic influence or have any worry or fear in the mind but suddenly fall ill; what are the reasons for this? Are those only caused by gods and ghosts?”

Qi Bo answered, “The old pathogenic influences retain inside and do not arise. Under the condition that the mind dislikes and admires something, the blood and qi are disordered inside and the healthy qi and the old pathogenic influences battle together. But the manifestations appear in a very subtle way, which are usually ignored by the patients themselves. That's why those illnesses seem to be caused by gods and ghosts”.

Huang Di asked, “But those illnesses can be cured by *Zhu*, including praying, chanting incantations, holding ceremonies, and shamanism. What is the reason?”

Qi Bo answered, “In former times, shamans knew what overcome various illnesses, and also knew beforehand where those illnesses came from. Therefore, those illnesses can be terminated by *Zhu*, including praying, chanting incantations, holding ceremonies, and shamanism”.

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1. Li Shunlian. The Connotations of “SHEN” in *The Book of Changes* [J]. *Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences)*. 2003, 23 (5): 66-70.
 2. Lan Fengli. Metaphorizing: The Way to Bridge *The Book of Changes* and Chinese Medicine. In Wallner, Schmidtsberger, Wimmer (eds). *Intercultural Philosophy: New Aspects and Methods*, Frankfurt am Main, 2010: 178.

From the above questions and answers we can get two ideas: 1) in the ancient times gods and ghosts had been regarded as causes of some diseases; 2) some diseases could be cured by *Zhu*, including praying, chanting incantations, holding ceremonies, and shamanism. The department of *Zhu You* was one of medical departments in ancient China.^[1]

As regards to the idea that gods and ghosts could cause diseases, Xu Dachun (1693~1771) discussed it in details in the chapter *On Causation of Illnesses by Gods and Ghosts* of *The Origin and Development of Chinese Medicine*. It reads that “If a person’s essence and spirit are complete and strong, then no external pathogens dare invade the person. … There is a viewpoint that some illnesses are caused by gods and ghosts. Ignorant and stupid people believe that gods and ghosts can really cause illnesses; while sensible and reasonable people think illnesses manifest their way of development, certainly have nothing to do with ghosts and gods. In reality both are equally wrong. Ghosts and gods are just like pathogenic wind, cold, summerheat, and dampness. When one’s defensive qi is in deficiency, he is susceptible to be invaded by cold; when one’s nutrient qi is in deficiency, he is susceptible to be invaded by heat; when one’s spirit qi (SHEN QI) is in deficiency, he is susceptible to be invaded by ghosts; because man’s spirit is attributed to yang, when yang is in decline, ghosts will break through at this weak point. … *The Classic of Difficult Issues* states that ‘one whose yang prostrates sees ghosts’. Therefore, there are some acupoints named after ghosts, such as Ghost Bed, Ghost Room.^[2] These acupoints rely on man’s spirit qi (SHEN QI) to replenish it. … Therefore, invigorate yang to treat cold; nourish yin to treat heat; then replenish spirit (SHEN) to treat ghosts. … There are also some illnesses caused by phlegm, anxiety, or fright, which should be treated from their root causes. Therefore, sensible and reasonable people will inevitably make a thorough inquiry into everything, and thus have no doubts but evidences. … Besides, there are some other illnesses resulting from offending ghosts and gods, which can be cured by praying. Moreover, there are many other reasons for ghosts to offend man, such as ghosts who had been done bad deeds when they were still humans, which may relate to the patient himself or his ancestors by an offence through negligence or deep-seated hatred. … Indisputable proves exist for such things, which seems as if the Confucians did not

1. The Imperial Hospitals of the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming Dynasties (1368-1644) classied medicine into 13 departments, which referred to departments of internal medicine for adults, internal medicine for children, gynecology and obstetrics, acupuncture and moxibustion, eye diseases, mouth & teeth diseases, throat diseases, cold attack, bone-setting, cuts by metal weapons, massage, and *Zhu You* (大方脉、小方脉、妇人、疮疡、针灸、眼、口齿、咽喉、伤寒、接骨、金镞、按摩、祝由) in the Ming Dynasty. The Imperial hospital of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) classified medicine into 4 major departments: medicine (including internal medicine and pediatrics, external medicine, ears, eyes, mouth and teeth, and cupping 4 sub-departments), acupuncture, massage, and *Zhu You* (医科、针科、按摩科和咒禁科).
2. *A Complete Book on Acupuncture and Moxibustion* (1439) by Xu Feng of the Ming Dynasty records *Sun Simiao’s Thirteen Ghost Acupoints in Rhyme*, which is also included into national textbooks of nowadays for higher education to train modern acupuncturists in China. See Liang Fanrong. *Science of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*. Beijing: China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2005: 415. The 13 ghost acupoints are supposed to treat mania, depression, mental and psychosomatic diseases.

accept this. But there are many examples recorded in both Confucius classics and historical books, such as Gong Zi Peng Sheng and Bo You. I myself have also witnessed some such cases with my own eyes. Such ghosts cannot be expelled neither by medicinal herbs, needling stones, nor by prayers". Here is worth to quote another statement from *Huang Di's Inner Classic • Basic Questions • On Regulating Meridians* that "Spirit (SHEN) in excess results in continuous laughing; while Spirit (SHEN) in deficiency leads to being grief".

In the chapter on *Moving Essence and Changing Qi* of *Huang Di's Inner Classic • Basic Questions*, it reads that

Huang Di asked, "I have heard that in ancient times, when practitioners treated diseases, they just moved the essence and changed the qi by *Zhu You*, including praying, chanting incantations, holding ceremonies, and shamanism. While nowadays, when practitioners treat diseases, they employ medicinal herbs to treat the interior and use needling stones to treat the exterior, and as a result, some diseases are cured while others are not cured. Why is this?"

Qi Bo answered, "people of the remote antiquity lived among animals, moved and became active to fend off the cold in winter, and stayed in shade places to escape the heat in summer. Internally, their minds were calm and peaceful without any desire or admiration; externally, their bodies were not over-stressed without any suffering. That's a time without any greed or fame or gain, which prevented the pathogens from invading. Therefore, they did not need either medicinal herbs to treat their interior or needling stones to treat their exterior. When they contracted diseases, *Zhu You*, including praying, chanting incantations, holding ceremonies, and shamanism, could move the essence and thus cure diseases. However, people of nowadays are different from those of the remote antiquity. Internally, their minds are affected by worries and sufferings; externally, their bodies harmed by hard work and heavy labor. Besides, they do not follow the rules of the four seasons, oppose the needs against cold and summerheat, therefore, are susceptible to the invasion of pathogenic wind. The pathogens are present from the morning till the evening; internally, they reach the five zang organs, the bones and the marrows; externally, they harm the orifices, the muscles and the skins. Therefore, minor diseases will inevitably develop into serious ones; serious diseases will certainly lead to death. That's why *Zhu You* can not terminate a disease any more".

From the above classical texts, some related points can be summed up as follows: 1) Chinese medicine is not superstitious in gods and ghosts, reflecting its rational or scientific approach; 2) Deficiency or excess of Man's spirit qi (SHEN QI) is one of the major causes of some mental diseases; 3) *Zhou You* had been a kind of medical practice from the remote antiquity until at least Ming Dynasty. But its indications were very different in different times. Since there are medical records in written forms, *Zhu You* was mainly supposed to treat mental diseases; 4) The 13 Ghosts acupoints have been used up till today to treat mania, depression, mental and psychosomatic diseases; 5) Patient's self-confidence in healing his illness is vital for his recovery.

3.2 Body and Spirit

3.3 Marvellous Changes in the Nature

4 Understanding SHEN in Classical Chinese Medical Texts

3.1 SHEN: One of the Three Treasures in Chinese Medicine

Jing (Essence), Qi, and Shen are regarded as the three treasures in Chinese medicine.