

THE TRIDOŠA DOCTRINE AND THE CONSTITUENTS OF CHINESE HUMOROLOGY

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The *tridoša* doctrine recognizes as humours, *vāta* (wind), *pitta* (heat) and *kapha* (water, when water—cold). As fourth comes blood, the vehicle of the above three humours, in effect the three humours incorporated as whole. In Chinese humorology *vāta*—*Chhi*—Air; *pitta*—*Tsin*—*Yang*—Heat; *kapha*—*Ih*—*Yin*—Water—Cold. Blood as such is recognized as the fourth constituent in both the humorological doctrines.

As far as I know Indian cosmology has never been compared with the corresponding Chinese system. Likewise the *tridoša* doctrine has not been correlated with Chinese humorology. A study pertaining to Indian and Chinese cosmologies is being published elsewhere, while here it is proposed to compare the constituents of the Indian *tridoša* doctrine with their counterparts in Chinese medicine. Earlier it has been shown how man was impressed by plant life.¹ Ackerknecht² for instance has explained that “Egyptian physiology rather mirrors Egyptian agriculture, the mind having been directed to crop production.” Accordingly, the cosmology found in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* recognizes three cosmic elements: Water, Heat and Earth, being the essentials required for a good crop. Then with such a cosmology as model, the medicine-man established three factors essential to human life: Air, Heat and Water. These constitute the humours of *tridoša* doctrine with *vāta*, *pitta* and *kapha*.

In the light of what the Egyptians conceived and how the Aryan acquired his humorology we can turn to the Chinese thinker³. Kong discusses, “The basic concepts in Chinese medicine”. Here he devotes a paragraph to “*Chhi*, Blood and Humour”. The factors established are virtually the counterparts of the Indian *tridoša* doctrine. To begin with he mentions “*Chhi*, literally Air, is more than the air in respiration. It also refers to the nutrients in blood and (its) defense capacity”. Next to *Chhi* and Blood comes “The serous humor, *Tsin*. It replenishes the blood and is a *Yang* element”. As the fourth is “The mucous humor, *Ih*, which replenishes the marrow and is a *Yin* element.” He concludes stating “the two humours may refer to the material basis of the humoral control of body function”.

We find the above four entities are best appreciated as the counterparts of the humours of the Indian *tridoša* doctrine. To begin with he states “*Chhi* (is) literally Air”. The present author has explained⁴ that *Chhi*, as inscribed character, mainly

represents blood-vapours and as such is identical with the Arabic word *Ruh*, Spirit or life-essence, which again is defined as vapours arising from warm blood. *Chhi* then is conceived as wind and signifies Life-essence or spirit. But it can be looked upon as a subtle form of matter whence *Chhi*=Air, as Kong interpretes it. Kong recognizes *Chhi* as the first element of the human system while the *tridoṣa* doctrine correspondingly assigns priority to *Vāta*=Wind=Air. As actual humours Kong mentions *Tsin*, and *Ih*, as serous and mucous, as *Yang* and *Yin* elements. *Yang* would suggest heat, and *Yin* cold. In the *tridoṣa* doctrine next to *vāta* comes *pitta*, Heat and in Chinese humorology *Tsin*, *Yang*, has priority over *Ih* as *Yin*. Now comes the concretization or symbolization of "cold". The most common experience of the feeling "cold" is when we drink water. We enjoy water as drink only when we find it to be cold. Thus the concept of cold came to be, symbolized as water. As humour water would be *kapha*, phlegm, in the *tridoṣa* system. Kong correspondingly considers *Ih*=*Yin* element=mucous humour, and phlegm=mucoid substance. Now although the *tridoṣa* system admits as its three constituents. Wind, Heat and Water, really speaking these are looked upon as being contained in the blood. Then Blood as the container of these humours should be recognized as an element in its own right. And many an authority on *tridoṣa* system has recognized Blood as the fourth humour. Thus we find the following correspondence between the Indian and Chinese systems of humorology.

1. *Vāta*=*Chhi*=Air
2. *Pitta*=*Tsin*=*Yang* element=Heat
3. *Kapha*=*Ih*=*Yin* element=Cold=Water
4. Blood common to the Indian and Chinese humorologies.

I have been able to interpret the elements of humorology in the light of modern biochemistry.

Vāta=Air=Oxidation, without heat production.

Kapha=Water=Cold=Reduction.

Pitta=Heat=Oxidation, with production of heat.

Blood=Hydration, assimilation of water.

Dehydration is abnormal to life and does not maintain it. It is not included in humorology either Indian or Chinese. Blood loss correspondingly leads to death. Today physiological processes are taken to their molecular level. I have also reduced oxidation to the radical, "OH", of water, oxidation with the production of Heat to "O", radical reduction to the radical "H", and blood, as whole, as representing Hydration, the water molecule H₂O. The details are discussed in the article published in 1980. Just as Heat and Cold are factors commonly recognized, in reality Oxidation and Reduction are the primary processes in human physiology. And they are found in Chinese humorology as the two humours *Tsin*, as *Yang* and *Ih*, as *Yin*; these two being *Pitta* and *Kapha* of Indian *Tridoṣa* system.

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