

Chinese Medicine practice in Brazil - cultural and scientific exchange

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Abstract

Brazilian acupuncturists have a distinct culture, language and worldview from the foundations of Traditional Chinese Medicine, but they need to understand them in order to comprehend its theory and perform good practices. The purpose of this study is to analyze some concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine, specifically the "Three Treasures" (三宝 *Sānbǎo*) and the Kidney organ (肾 *Shèn*, which houses one of the treasures). This work is an exploratory research, it was used tools of bibliographical revision and research in Chinese dictionaries. At the end of the research, it was found that those concepts are very distinct from western culture and worldview, to understand them it is necessary to study their characters. It was also noted that the *pīnyīn* transliteration system helps to distinguish characters that have the same letters and different tones.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine. Acupuncture. Chinese language. Kidney. Ancestral energy.

Prática da Medicina Chinesa no Brasil – intercâmbio cultural e científico

Resumo

O acupunturista brasileiro possui cultura, língua e visão de mundo distintas das bases da Medicina Tradicional Chinesa, mas esses conhecimentos são necessários para efetuar boas práticas e compreender sua teoria. O propósito deste estudo foi de analisar alguns conceitos da Medicina Tradicional Chinesa, especificamente, os “Três Tesouros” (三宝 *Sānbǎo*) e o Rim (肾 *Shèn*, que abriga um dos tesouros). Este trabalho é uma pesquisa exploratória, utilizou-se ferramentas de revisão bibliográfica e pesquisa em dicionários chineses. Ao final da pesquisa, verificou-se que os conceitos abordados são muito distintos da cultura e visão de mundo ocidental e para compreendê-los é necessário estudar seus caracteres. Percebeu-se também que o sistema de transliteração *pīnyīn* auxilia a distinguir caracteres que têm letras iguais e tons diferentes.

Palavras-chave: Medicina Tradicional Chinesa. Acupuntura. Língua chinesa. Rim. Energia ancestral.

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1 INTRODUCTION

“The East teaches us another form of understanding, broader, higher and deeper - understanding through life.”

Carl Gustav Jung

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is based on a Taoist worldview, in which everything is formed from 气 *Qì*. It is both material and immaterial. TCM is used worldwide as it has good effects on the health of patients and is cheaper, furthermore it has no side effects like allopathic medicines. TCM practices include herbal remedies, Chinese dietetics, the use of suction cups, moxibustion, and most notably acupuncture. The World Health Organization (2013) recognizes its advantages and encourages its practices aimed at expanding access to healthcare for the entire population of the planet.

The problem addressed in this research is that in order to perform good practices, the acupuncture practitioner needs to know a little about the Chinese culture, philosophy and language that underpin his theoretical foundations. However, these knowledges are totally different from the foundations of the western world, where Brazilian acupuncturists are inserted. It is in this context of cultural and scientific exchange about body and health that this research arises in order to address some cultural concepts of Chinese society that form the basis of TCM, specifically the “Three Treasures” (三宝 *Sānbǎo*), which are 精 *Jīng*, 气 *Qì* and 神 *Shén*, as well as the Kidney organ (肾 *Shèn*) for this is the guardian of ancestral energy.

We intend to verify its relations with western culture and the possible benefits of studying Chinese language for better understanding. The method of this research is exploratory. It was made by indirect observation of data collected in bibliographic research of theoretical references already analyzed by the author Maciocia (1996). Linguistic information was also sought from the Chinese etymological dictionary, 起源查字网 *Qǐyuán chá zì wǎng* (2019) and the electronic dictionary Pleco (2019). For this work, the *pīnyīn* transliteration system was used as it is the most up to date romanization of Chinese characters. None of the following previews studies, Maciocia (1996); Breves (2010); Cordeiro and Cordeiro (2014), use *pīnyīn* system with accents, and only Maciocia (1996) addresses to these concepts relating to Western culture. Therefore, this research is very important.

2 THE VITAL SUBSTANCES 氣血 津液

TCM considers the body and mind as the result of certain vital interactions and conceives them as a circle of energy and substances. Body and mind are not separate, as commonly thought in western cultures with the soul *versus* body duality. In recent decades, the West has increasingly understood this. Kahneman, an Israeli American writer, states that “Cognition is embodied; you think with your body, not just with your brain.”² (2012, p. 68, our translation). For TCM, the basis of everything is 气 *Qì*, because all substances are its manifestations in varying degrees of materiality. Body fluids, 津液 *Jīnyè*, are its completely material manifestation, and the mind, 神 *Shén*, a fully immaterial manifestation.

The vital substances are divided into

- 氣 *Qì*
- 血 *Xiè*, Blood
- 精 *Jīng*, Essence
- 津 液 *Jīnyè*, Body Fluids

2.1 气 QÌ AND 神 SHÉN

气 *Qì* is the basis of everything in the universe and its translation is difficult to exact. According to Maciocia (1996), sinologists agree that it can mean matter (not restrictively, because 气 *Qì* can also assume immaterial conditions). Others prefer to translate it as energy if we consider it as a continuum of matter and energy. However, as 阴 *Yīn* and 阳 *Yáng*, it is preferred to use it in its original name, because its concept is older and its philosophical conception is not fully contemplated in the energy concept of the physical theory of quantum mechanics, for modernly energy is conceptualized as the measure of the activity of a system.

The character of the traditional writing of 气 *Qì* has two parts:

气 - the upper part means steam, gas;

米 - the bottom part means raw rice;

氣 - the two parts joined together.

Together the two parts reveal the concept of 氣 *Qì*, for it is not only immaterial, untouchable like steam, like gas, and not just material, like raw rice grain. Its nature can take both forms, its nature is both forms.

气 *Qì* forms everything from its dispersion and aggregation movements. Maciocia quotes some ancient Chinese philosophers to clarify the question:

According to these ancient philosophers, life and death are nothing in themselves but an aggregation and dispersion of Qi. Wang Chong (AD 27-97) said: “Qi produces the human body just as water becomes ice. Just as water turns to ice, Qi coagulates to form the human organism. When the ice melts, it becomes water. When a person dies, they become spirit (Shen) again. This is called spirit; just as melted ice is called water”³ (1996, p. 51, our translation).

When searching the Pleco dictionary (2019) for the character meaning spirit, 神 *Shén*, we find that 神 as a noun means god, deity, divinity, immortal, as well as spirit or mind. Therefore, we realize that everything in the universe is a divine part of the Tao and that part is immortal. With death, this energy returns to the universe and is recycled.

气 *Qì* is the primordial substance of human matter and spirit for Traditional Chinese Medicine and has two primary aspects:

1. 精 *Jīng*, Essence, perfected and produced by the internal organs, which have the function of nourishing the organism and the mind, 神 *Shén*.

2. Also indicates the functional activity of internal systems. It does not indicate an enhanced substance, but the functional complex of any system. Liver 气 *qì* is in fact the complex of liver activity.

2.2 The Essence 精 *Jīng*

The Essence, 精 *Jīng*, is the first aspect that 气 *Qì* assumes in the human body. Maciocia (1996) explains that the character 精 *Jīng* represents the idea of something derived from a process of distillation or refinement, extracted from some harder base. This process implies that the Essence, 精 *Jīng*, “is a very precious substance to be cared for and stored.”⁴ (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 53).

精 *Jīng* in Chinese writing has two parts:

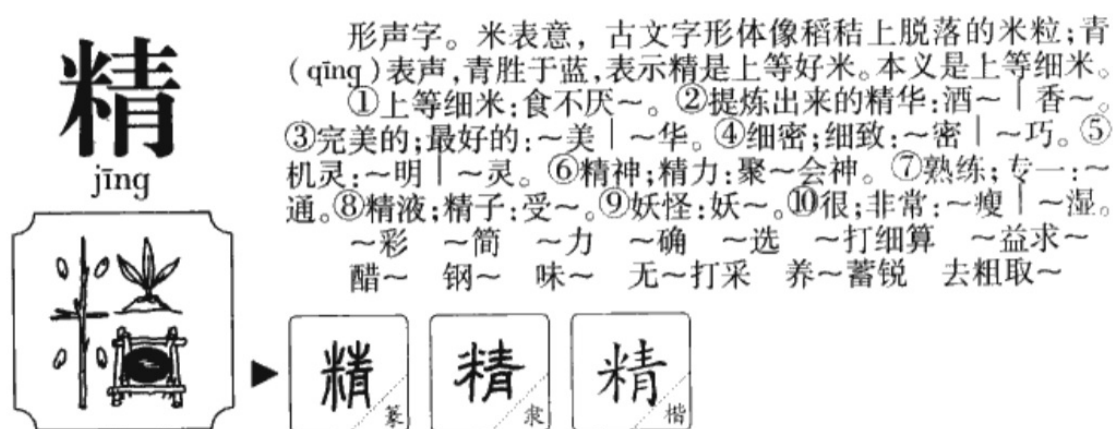
米 - the left part means rice (raw).

青 - the right part means green.

精 - the two parts joined together.

When we search the Chinese etymological dictionary 起源查字网 *Qǐyuán chá zì wǎng*, which offers the origin of the meaning of the characters, we find the following definition:

Figure 1 - Definition of 精 *Jīng*



Source: Etymological Chinese Dictionary 起源查字网 *Qǐyuán chá zì wǎng* ⁵

In the lower left, we can see an image of the drawing description, as we see the rice grains, a germinating seedling and a square of cinnabar, which is mercury sulfide and makes up the meaning of color too.

From the definition found in figure 1, I highlight the beginning:

Pictophonetic character. In ancient writing the part of 米 has its form and structure expressing the meaning of rice (raw), whose grains fall into the straw; The 青 part expresses the phonetic part “Qīng” as well as means green. Green is better than blue, indicating that rice is of superior quality. The original meaning is thin and soft rice (...)

② Essence extracted: from wine ~ / from incense ~. ⁶ (起源查字网 *Qǐyuán chá zì wǎng*, 2019, our translation)

Pictophonetic characters are those that have one element indicating meaning and another element representing the sound. As we deepen our study of the 精 *Jīng* character, from the dictionary definition, we realize that the 米 part only means rice, but the right part,

青, not only evokes the sense of the green color - it also has the function of indicating the sound, which is transliterated to *qīng*, very close to the *jīng* sound.

The Essence, 精 *Jīng*, it can be divided into 3 types:

- Pre-celestial 精 *Jīng*
- Post Celestial 精 *Jīng*
- 精 *Jīng* of Kidney (肾 *Shèn*)

2.2.1 Pre-celestial 精 *Jīng*

Pre-celestial 精 *Jīng* is the ancestral energy. At the moment of conception, the sexual energies of man and woman come together to form it. Maciocia explains that "this essence nourishes the embryo and fetus during pregnancy and is dependent on nutrition derived from the mother's Kidney (shen)"⁷ (1996, p. 53, our translation). As it is only inherited from parents during conception, it is unchangeable in quality and in quantity, but it can be positively affected "with the balance between work and rest, paused sex life and balanced diet"⁸ (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 53, our translation). There is still the direct way to positively influence it through breathing exercises, notably tai chi and qigong (太极拳 *tàijí quán* and 气功 *qìgōng*).

2.2.2 Post celestial 精 *Jīng*

The Post Celestial 精 *Jīng* is a generic term for the essences after birth, as opposed to the ancestral energy that comes from the parents. According to Maciocia, "after birth, the newborn begins to feed, drink and breathe, his Lung (Fei), Stomach (Wei) and Spleen (Pi) begin to function to produce Qi from food, fluid and air"⁹ (1996, p.53, our translation); that is, it represents a complex of refined essences extracted from food, liquids and air.

2.2.3 The Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) Essence (精 *Jīng*)

The Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) Essence (精 *Jīng*) is a specific type of energy and plays a very important role in human physiology. It is of hereditary origin, just like the Pre-celestial 精

Jīng, but unlike this one, that one has an interaction with and is replenished with the Post-Celestial 精 *Jīng*, so it shares both. This Essence

is stored in the Kidney (Shen), but has a natural fluid and circulates throughout the body, particularly in the Eight Extraordinary Vessels. The Kidney (Shen) Essence (Jing) determines growth, reproduction, development, sexual maturation, conception and pregnancy.¹⁰ (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 54).

Maciocia (1996) further clarifies that there are many differences between 气 *Qì* and Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) Essence (精 *Jīng*). For example, the Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) Essence (精 *Jīng*) is like a fluid, resides mostly in the Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) and slowly and gradually changes over the years; In contrast 气 *Qì* is like an energy, resides anywhere and changes rapidly from moment to moment.

3 THE KIDNEY (肾 *SHÈN*)

For TCM there are 5 elements, fire, earth, metal, water and wood in the human body, each element has a system 阴 *Yīn* and another 阳 *Yáng*, an organ and a viscera. The water element corresponds to the Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) and the bladder (膀胱 *Pángguāng*). It is also represented by black color, salty taste, cold weather and is responsible for the ears, bone tissue and fear emotion.

The Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) houses an Essence (精 *Jīng*) that comes from the Pre-celestial 精 *Jīng* (also known as Ancestral Energy), which is of hereditary origin, so it is considered the "Guardian of Ancestral Energy". In addition, it has several important functions in the body. According to Maciocia, they are:

Store Essence (Jing) and govern birth, growth, reproduction and development
Produce marrow, fuel the brain and control bones
Rule the water
Control Qi Reception
Open in the ears
Manifest in hair
Check the two lower holes
Shelter the Willpower¹¹ (1996, p. 124, our translation).

We realize that some of these functions are related to the functions of the Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) Essence (精 *Jīng*).

3.1 The functions of the Kidney (肾 Shèn) Essence (精 Jīng)

There are 4 functions of the Kidney (肾 Shèn) Essence (精 Jīng):

1. Growth, Reproduction and Development - Maciocia states that the Kidney (肾 Shèn) Essence (精 Jīng)

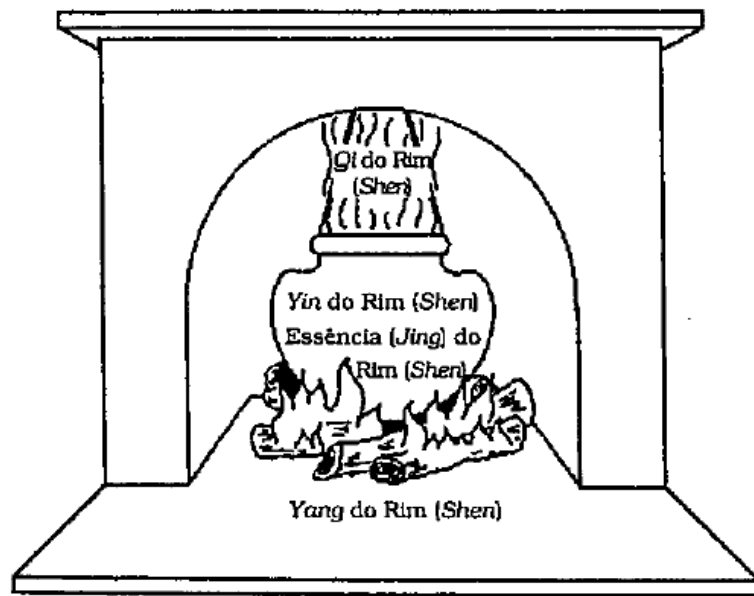
controls bone growth in children, teeth, hair, normal brain development and sexual maturity. After puberty, it controls reproductive function and fertility. It forms the basis for successful conception and pregnancy. The natural decline of Essence (Jing) during life leads to the natural decline of sexual energy and fertility.¹² (1996, p. 54, our translation)

2. Essence (精 Jīng) as the basis of Kidney (肾 Shèn) 气 qì - The energy of the Kidney (肾 Shèn) has several aspects. It has the Essence (精 Jīng, which is fluid and naturally 阴 yīn); it has 气 qì itself; it also has an aspect 阴 yīn and another 阳 yáng. Maciocia explains that

the Kidney (Shen) can be compared to a large cauldron filled with water. The fire under the cauldron is supplied by the Kidney Yang (Shen) and the Gate of Vitality (...), the water contained in the cauldron corresponds to the Kidney Essence (Jing), and the resulting vapor (ie, Qi) corresponds to the Kidney Qi (Shen)¹³. (1996, p. 55, our translation).

Therefore, we understand that there is a close relationship between these various aspects, and we can understand it by looking at Figure 2.

Figure 1 - Relationship between 阴 yīn, 精 Jīng, 阳 yáng and 气 Qì in the Kidney (肾 Shèn)



Source: Maciocia, 1996, p.55

3. The Essence (精 *Jīng*) produces the marrow - the concept of marrow for TCM differs from the concept of western medicine, it does not correspond to the bone marrow. According to TCM the Marrow produces the bone marrow. Maciocia clarifies that the

Essence (Jing) produces the Marrow, which in turn produces the bone marrow and fills the spinal cord and the brain. Thus, “Marrow” is a substance which is the common matrix of bone marrow, brain and spinal cord: it has no equivalent in Western medicine. (...) “The brain is the sea of the Marrow”.¹⁴ (1996, p. 56, our translation)

Therefore, the Essence (精 *Jīng*) is very important for brain health and if impaired can lead to poor memory and concentration.

4. The Essence (精 *Jīng*) as the Basis of Constitutional Force - Finally, according to Maciocia (1996), the Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) Essence (精 *Jīng*) also provides strength and is the root of defensive 气 *Qì*, which protects us from pathogenic external factors. Therefore, if weakened it can make the individual “prone to colds, influenza and other external pathologies” (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 56).

The Kidney (*Shèn* 肾) Essence (精 *Jīng*) is of great importance then for human physiology, controls reproduction, controls development and nourishes the Marrow.

4 METHODOLOGY

This article uses a qualitative approach of exploratory character, since this article aims to study and analyze some philosophical and theoretical concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine. It was made by indirect observation of data collected in bibliographic research.

Qualitative researches use text as empirical material (rather than numbers). The data obtained are interpreted and organized to be transformed into scientific data in order to make the phenomenon visible, enabling “to understand the world and produce knowledge” (FLICK, 2009, p.22). The opinions of researchers and analyzed are all considered. According to Flick (2009) the qualitative research is based on the following factors: the selection of the method and theory, the recognition of the different perspectives that permeate the study and, finally, the reflections and narratives of the researchers who add relevant data to the study.

Marconi and Lakatos (2003) describe some techniques, processes that serve the sciences in achieving their purposes, i.e., practices related to data collection. They have two major divisions: indirect documentation (which includes documentary and bibliographic research) and direct documentation. So based on them, this work was made by indirect observation of data collected in bibliographic research - theoretical references already analyzed by the author Maciocia (1996). Linguistic information was also sought from the Chinese etymological dictionary, the 起源 查 字 网 *Qǐyuán chá zì wǎng* (2019) and the electronic dictionary Pleco (2019). For this work, the *pīnyīn* transliteration system was used as it is the most up to date romanization of Chinese characters. The theoretical references raised allowed a thorough study and analysis of such philosophical and theoretical concepts and verify its relations with Western culture.

5 DATA ANALYSIS

The theoretical references raised in chapters I and II of this work allowed us to make an in-depth study of important philosophical and theoretical concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine, specifically the “Three Treasures” or “Three Jewels” (in Chinese 三宝 *Sānbǎo*), which are 精 *Jīng*, 气 *Qì* and 神 *Shén*, also from the Kidney organ (肾 *Shèn*), which is the guardian of Ancestral Energy. The following are the results and conclusions. As stated in the methodology, personal opinion was considered for data analysis, as it was a comparison of cultural concepts.

Studying the theoretical frameworks already translated into Portuguese provides a very important basis for understanding Chinese philosophy and culture, but it is also important for the acupuncturist to have a minimum knowledge of Chinese language to have access to Chinese dictionaries, especially of etymology and to enrich his understanding of the culture that underlies the language and traditional Chinese medicine itself.

The use of the *pīnyīn* transliteration system greatly assists the differentiation of terms when reading in Chinese characters is not fluent, for example, the characters 神 and 肾 respectively mean Spirit and Kidney. When Maciocia (1996) transliterates them, it does so without the accents of the *pīnyīn* system, so both concepts are both written only as "Shen". When we use the accents, 神 and 肾 are respectively *Shén* and *Shèn*. It helps the Brazilian acupuncturist to read the text accurately, differentiating them clearer.

Maciocia (1996) based on ancient writings of Chinese Medicine, brought many explanations and definitions that clarify these concepts approached. We conclude that they are very different from how the body is understood in Western allopathic medicine and culture. Nonetheless, we conclude that it is possible to draw an analogy with the concepts of matter and energy (of the physical theory of quantum mechanics) and with Western Christian religious concepts (about the creation of the world and about soul/spirit) with the concepts of 气 *Qì* and 神 *Shén*.

Finally, the Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) has other functions for the body in the TCM view and there is an Ancestral Energy (which we receive from our parents) that gives and defines the amount and quality of life we may have. We point out that in studies on Pulsology (which was not within the scope of this work) it is possible to feel at some moments the end of the Ancestral Energy. For this we recommend reading Maciocia, 1996, p. 216 - 220.

6 CONCLUSION

Traditional Chinese medicine has reached many places around the globe because it has good effects on patients' health, is cheaper, has no side effects like allopathic medicine and it is recognized by the World Health Organization.

This research focused on providing answers to the problem that the Chinese philosophy, worldview, and language that underpin TCM theoretical foundations are totally different from those of the Western world, so how could a Brazilian acupuncturist improve

his practice and understand this knowledge? The initial hypothesis was that the study of theoretical references already translated into Portuguese is essential, as well as study the Chinese characters. Thus, we defined and reached the general objective that was analyze some philosophical and theoretical concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine. We use already analyzed theoretical references and Chinese dictionaries to understand the origin of character formation and its explanations. We also understand how the Kidney (肾 *Shèn*) is the guardian of Ancestral Energy, how it is formed and its function of maintaining vitality.

We find that the concepts approached are indeed very distinct from Western culture and worldview. Jung, Swiss, father of Analytical Psychology, states in the book “The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life” that “The East teaches us another form of understanding, broader, higher and deeper - understanding through life.”¹⁵ (2013, p. 24, our translation). By the end of the research we understand that Chinese characters are important for understanding the concepts and that the *pīnyīn* transliteration system helps the non-Chinese reader to distinguish words from characters with similar sounds. Finally, Chinese dictionaries, especially of etymology, enrich the understanding of the culture that underlies the language and TCM and provide the acupuncturist with a reflection and theoretical knowledge that can raise the quality of their practices.

NOTAS

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² In the original: “A cognição é corporificada; você pensa com seu corpo, não apenas com seu cérebro” (KAHNEMAN, 2012, p. 68).

³ In the original: “De acordo com esses filósofos antigos, vida e morte não são nada em si mesmas, mas uma agregação e dispersão do Qi. Wang Chong (27-97 d.C) disse: ‘O Qi produz o corpo humano assim como a água se torna gelo. Assim como a água se transforma em gelo, o Qi coagula-se para formar o organismo humano. Quando o gelo derrete, se torna água. Quando uma pessoa morre, torna-se espírito (Shen) novamente. Isto se chama espírito, assim como gelo derretido se chama água’”. (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 51).

⁴ In the original: “é uma substância muito preciosa para ser cuidada e guardada” (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 53)

⁵ Retrieved from <<http://qi yuan.chaziwang.com/>>. Accessed October 20, 2019.

⁶ : In the original: “形声字。米表意，古文字形体像稻粒上脱落的米粒；青(qīng)表声，青胜于蓝，表示精是上等好米。本义是上等细米。(…) □ 提炼出来的精华：酒~|香~。”.

⁷ In the original: “esta essência nutre o embrião e o feto durante a gravidez, sendo dependente da nutrição derivada do Rim (Shen) da mãe”. (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 53).

⁸ In the original: “com o equilíbrio entre trabalho e descanso, vida sexual pausada e dieta balanceada” (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 53).

⁹ In the original: “após o nascimento, o recém-nascido começa a se alimentar, beber e respirar, seu Pulmão (Fei), Estômago (Wei) e Baço (Pi) começam a funcionar para produzir o Qi a partir dos alimentos, dos líquidos e do ar” (MACIOCIA, 1996, p.53).

¹⁰ In the original: “é estocada no Rim (Shen), mas apresenta um fluido natural além de circular por todo o organismo, particularmente nos Oitos Vasos Extraordinários. A Essência (Jing) do Rim (Shen) determina o crescimento, reprodução, desenvolvimento, maturação sexual, concepção e gravidez.” (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 54).

¹¹ In the original: Armazenar a Essência (Jing) e governar o nascimento, crescimento, reprodução e desenvolvimento; Produzir a Medula, abastecer o cérebro e controlar os ossos; Governar a água; Controlar a Recepção do Qi; Abrir-se nos ouvidos; Manifestar-se no cabelo; Controlar os dois orifícios inferiores; Abrigar a Força de Vontade. (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 124).

¹² In the original: “Controla o crescimento ósseo nas crianças, dentes, cabelo, desenvolvimento cerebral normal e maturidade sexual. Após a puberdade, controla a função reprodutiva e a fertilidade. Forma a base para concepção e a gravidez bem-sucedidas. O declínio natural da Essência (Jing) durante a vida conduz ao declínio natural da energia sexual e da fertilidade” (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 54).

¹³ In the original: “o Rim (Shen) pode ser comparado a um grande caldeirão cheio de água. O fogo sob o caldeirão é fornecido pelo Yang de Rim (Shen) e pelo Portão da Vitalidade (...), a água contida no caldeirão corresponde à Essência (Jing) do Rim (Shen), e o vapor resultante (ou seja, Qi), corresponde ao Qi do Rim (Shen)” (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 55).

¹⁴ In the original: “A Essência (Jing) produz a Medula, a qual, por sua vez, produz a medula óssea e preenche a medula espinhal e o cérebro. Desta maneira, ‘Medula’ é uma substância a qual é a matriz comum da medula óssea, do cérebro e da medula espinhal: não possui equivalentes na medicina ocidental. (...) ‘O cérebro é o mar da Medula’” (MACIOCIA, 1996, p. 56).

¹⁵ In the original: “O Oriente nos ensina outra forma de compreensão, mais ampla, mais alta e profunda - a compreensão mediante a vida” (JUNG, 2013, p. 24).

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