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Mind within the Body The Presence and Importance of Mental Health Within Traditional Tibetan Medicine

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Mind within the Body

The Presence and Importance of Mental Health Within Traditional Tibetan Medicine

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Abstract

The purpose of this Independent Study Project was to identify aspects of mental health within the traditional Tibetan medical system that are both taught in the classroom and carried out in clinical practice, with a primary focus on the importance of maintaining mental health. Throughout the research process, aspects of illness etiology, diagnosis, treatment processes, and influence from Tibetan Buddhism were found to be deeply connected in maintaining mental health within patients of Traditional Tibetan medicine. As well, much emphasis was found on the mind's influence on the physical wellbeing of an individual, suggesting that mental and physical health are not separate entities, but are constantly tied to one another. The researcher conducted a series of interviews within the Men-Tsee-Khang Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute in Dharamsala, India, that also extended to the Tibetan community of Upper Dharamsala, and to a Men-Tsee-Khang branch clinic in Kathmandu, Nepal. Qualitative data from field research was then incorporated into information gained from literary sources, varying from ancient Tibetan medical texts to academic articles.

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Introduction

The Four Tantras, known as the “Four Treasures,” or the *Gyu-zhi* in Tibetan, encapsulate the entirety of the ancient Tibetan medical system within their pages. Having been translated by Lama Vairochana from Sanscrit to Tibetan in the ninth century, they were then incorporated into traditional Tibetan medicine (TTM), laying its foundations to be further passed on from teacher to student until present day.¹ As it is evident in its undying presence in the Tibetan medical world, the rich information laden within this collection of texts encompasses a complete understanding of the connection between the mind and body, and its connection to the world. The aspect of the mind in TTM is deeply rooted in its foundations for understanding and treating all types of illness, regardless of the fact that there is no specific branch dedicated to solely mental health, or what Western medicine would term psychiatry.

One vital factor when considering mental health in TTM is the influence from Tibetan Buddhism. The *Gyu-zhi* originated from the Medicine Buddha, *Sangye Menla*, and its four chapters were subsequently taught by four other Medicine Buddhas who originated from cosmic places within his body.² Buddhist philosophy focuses much on understanding the mind and how it affects the ways in which we feel both mentally and physically. Within Buddhism and TTM, the mind and body are treated as separate entities that are "inseparable," for they both greatly influence each other in a cause and effect relationship. There is no such illness that is considered to be solely mental or solely physical, for with any illness, there are always mental consequences, as there are physical. So, when treating patients, Tibetan physicians are trained in identifying problems arising within the mind regardless of the type of illness or ailment. In this body-mind link, the mind is said to be both the creator and destroyer of health, the "architect of all our sufferings and happiness."³ Thus, the mind is directly involved in every aspect of our wellbeing, and much emphasis is in fact placed on mental health in TTM, as it permeates throughout every aspect of its



The Tibetan Medicine Buddha
Source: <http://www.dawaarts.com/inventory/images/buddha%20medicine%20nob%202.jpg>

¹ Goleman, 1-4, 1997.

² Fenton, 12-13, 1999.

³ Dummer, 36, 2001.

ancient practices.

Balance as a Fundamental Aspect

In order to maintain good physical and mental health, there are a number of influences within one's body and from the outside environment that must be in accordance with each other. As well, there are energies and substances that must be in balance with one another solely within the body itself. When looking at man's relationship to the environment, man is seen as a microcosmic entity and the environment as macrocosmic. The concept of health is thus defined as a balanced relationship between the two, whereas disease represents their disruption, or imbalanced state.⁴

The five elements, earth, water, fire, air, and space, are responsible for connecting human beings with the environment. They are directly related in the relationship between the two because of their imminent presence within composition of both the body-mind and the environment. For example, fire within the body corresponds to bodily heat created by energy, similar to the energy-producing sun in the environment. Within TTM practices, the restoration of balance between the elements both within the human being and its relationship with the environment is one of the primary goals of TTM. From the five elements, the body-mind is further broken down into three physical entities that are directly involved with maintaining mental health, and thus physical health as well.

The Three Humors

These three physical entities, or energies, are referred to as the three humors, wind, bile, and phlegm, which all lead to their corresponding habitual dispositions and convey information about an individual's body type, which can help physicians identify to which types of disorders the patient is more susceptible. Each humor has its own characteristics, with wind being light and cold, bile being hot, and phlegm being cold, vicious, and heavy.⁵ The art of healing here is to again achieve a balance between the three so that they maintain a state of equilibrium. There are a number of causal factors that can disrupt this balance, such as an individual overly increasing his body temperature due to anger or rage. This increase in heat causes a disturbance in bile, which creates overproduction of the humor and disrupts its balance with wind and

⁴ Dummer, 36-37, 2001.

⁵ Kunga, 2015.

phlegm. Tibetan medicine then incorporates the law of similarity and dissimilarity into alleviating this imbalance by treating the illness with its opposite characteristics, such as giving someone with a bile disorder a food such as cucumber, which has soothing, cooling properties.

The three humors are then broken down into five subsections that have specific purposes. Bile is broken down into: digestive bile, color-regulating bile, sense of achievement bile, visual ability bile, and complexion-clearing bile. Wind is broken down into: life-sustaining wind, upward moving wind, pervasive wind, fire associated wind, and downward voiding wind. Phlegm is broken down into: mixing and decomposing phlegm, experiencing and tasting phlegm, connecting phlegm, satisfying phlegm, and supporting phlegm. Although these three humors are known to be physical energies within the body, they are very much connected with mental health as well. For example, the sense of achievement bile promotes pride, intelligence, and self confidence in an individual, the life-sustaining wind is important in maintaining the overall health of an individual, with special emphasis on mental clarity and the relationship between the mental and physical parts of one's being, and the satisfying phlegm helps one in not developing mental attachments or addictions.⁶ Furthermore, when these five humors and their subtypes are balanced with themselves and the five elements, one is able to maintain mental and physical health.

The Mind's Presence in the Etiology of Illness

Finding the Root Cause

When identifying the cause of any illness, TTM takes the approach of not only understanding its symptoms, but more importantly its root cause, the specific reason for why these symptoms are present. This notion of cause and effect can be portrayed by the common Tibetan medical metaphor of a tree growing first from the roots, then extending into a trunk, many branches, leaves, and eventually flowers and fruits. The image of the Medicine Tree on the title page reveals the root cause of illness, which then extends to its many effects and further causal factors, three of which are wind, bile, and phlegm.⁷ In order to understand the influence of the mind in this metaphor, the mind can be presented as the roots of the tree, or the root to the cause of illness.⁸ Within the mind, there is an overarching mental disposition that is explicitly stated to be the root cause of all suffering: ignorance, or *ma-ri-pa*.

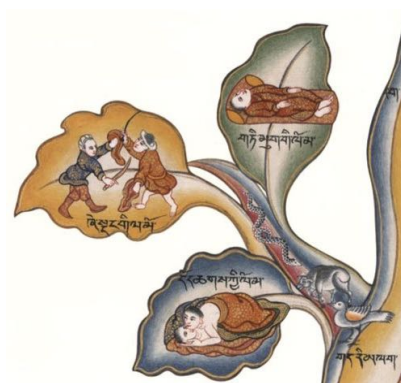
⁶ Dummer, 37-43, 2001.

⁷ Fenton, 13, 1999.

⁸ Yeshi, 2015.

Ignorance, sometimes referred to as one's ego, is the primordial cause of any ailment, whether it be a scratch on the leg or psychosis. From ignorance then stem the three poisons: hatred, also known as aversion, attachment, also known as desire, and delusion, also known as ignorance. If all illnesses can be traced back to the three poisons, and thus ignorance as the initial starting point, then the mental disposition of an individual is clearly engrained in all aspects of one's health. One can also see a direct connection between the mental aspects of these causal factors and more physical emanations of the causes of illness. An individual may have an attachment to unhealthy behavior or diet and an aversion to a healthy lifestyle. This, in turn, gives rise to afflictions within the three humors, the immediate causes of disease, representing the next branch of the tree.

In clinical practice, Tibetan doctors must also keep in mind that the etiology of illness is further broken down into four principle causes that stem from ignorance and the three poisons, which encapsulate more specific factors. These four causes consist of: negative actions in former lives, karmic cause and effect within this life, disturbing factors, and possession by evil spirit entities. The disturbing factors encompass forces brought upon by unhealthy behavior, trauma or stress, diet, season influences, and environment, which directly affect the balance of the three humors.⁹ In terms of an individual's mental health in relation to these four primary causes, ignorance, the three poisons, and decisions carried out from one's mind set all determine their agency. In the visual to the left, the behaviors resulting from the three poisons are depicted on the three leaves of the Medicine Tree, and the three poisons are shown in the animals along the branch. The hog represents ignorance, the snake represents hatred, and the cock represents attachment.¹⁰ Similar to their relevance to the three poisons, one can see a parallel between these four causes and the primary causes of insanity, karma, humoral imbalance, poison, and unseen negative forces, or evil spirit entities.



The three poisons within the Medicine Tree. Fenton, 22, 1999.

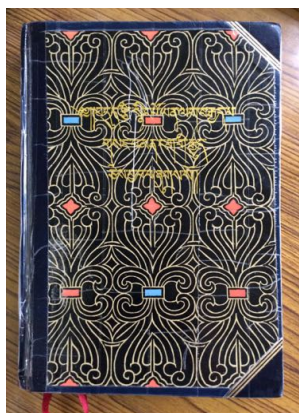
Demonic Possession

Present in both the four principle causes of general illnesses and the four primary causes of insanity, is the possession by evil spirit entities, otherwise known as demons, or *gdon*.

⁹ Dummer, 51, 2001.

¹⁰ Fenton, 22, 1999.

Although it can be rare for Tibetan doctors to see patients suffering from afflictions due to spiritual possession, they are trained in understanding the signs and symptoms that accompany this cause of illness.¹¹ The *Gyu-zhi* has two chapters entirely devoted to the descriptions and effects of the spirit entities, or *gdon*, that may possess the mind and body of someone. Chapter seventy-eight of the Explanatory Tantra, the Third Tantra, provides methods for understanding



Edition of the *Gyu-Zhi*.
Yeshe, 2015.

types of madness that are related to organic imbalances brought about by the three humors. On a more spiritual level, chapter seventy-seven describes in detail the possession of eighteen different elemental spirits that give rise to their corresponding type of madness, which are exhibited by the human through the control over his mind, speech, and behavior.

These eighteen types of madness can be classified as eighteen types of psychosis. Also, the idea of possession by an outside force parallels the symptom of possession in schizophrenia, wherein an individual feels as if he is being controlled by an outside power or force. On a general note, the characteristics of the demons portrayed in their human victims have similar qualities to the symptoms of schizophrenia and psychotic related disorders, especially with their sudden onset and inherent alien nature. To be more precise, an example of the characteristics of three particular demons are listed as follows:

[People possessed by] the demonic effects of the guru, the sage, the respected-elder, and the accomplished emanation all befriend children, go naked, and cannot stay in one place. They have wild hair, unhappy minds, and feel long abandoned.¹²

In the above quotation, taken directly from an English translation of the *Gyu-zhi*, it is evident that the characteristics of these spirits represent the affected individual's distorted perception of reality. Furthermore, the causal factor of illness due to spiritual or demonic possession directly corresponds to one's cognitive functioning, which dictates his behavior. In relation to the primordial cause, ignorance, and its non-physical counterparts, the three poisons, weakness of one's mind creates vulnerability to spiritual possession. The healthiness of the mind then acts as a spiritual immune system warding off negative forces with positive thinking and accurate

¹¹ Yeshe, 2015.

¹² Clifford, 180, 2001.

perceptions of the world. The mental state of a person not only affects one's immunity against demonic forces, but there is a physical level to this immunity as well, which relates back to the three humors.

rLung

The most influential and multifaceted humor of the three is considered to be *rlung*, or the wind humor. Within the world of TTM, it is universally known that the mind and emotions reside within the wind humor and its five subsections.¹³ Cognitive thoughts and their presuming actions are fundamentally involved with the movement and actions of wind, for whenever the mind is stimulated, wind is in motion.¹⁴ Because the mind is involved in all causes of illness, so is the wind energy. Wind is disturbed by many extremes that correlate with emotions, such as excess mental pressure, sadness, talkativeness, crying, and sex. In short, mind disturbances involving emotion and cognition cause the wind in the body to be disturbed. It is crucial to give special attention to wind imbalances because they can also evoke imbalances within the other two humors.¹⁵

Wind imbalance must be carefully monitored and identified in patients of TTM, and there are various symptoms corresponding to wind imbalances that doctors have memorized in clinical practice. These symptoms can be both physical and mental, which expands to the greater notion of the body-mind relationship. Typical symptoms can include nervousness, irritability, restlessness, sadness, fatigue, poor concentration, feelings of pain, muscle tightness, sensitivity to stimuli, insomnia, and dizziness.¹⁶ Dr. Wangmo, a physician at Men-Tsee-Khang Tibetan Medical Institute in Dharamsala, has a patient with a recurrent lung problem that was recently exacerbated by stress brought upon in the April 2015 Himalayan Earth Quake. The patient, concerned about her mother's safety in Tibet, was experiencing symptoms of backaches, dizziness, and trembling, all evoked by mental stress.¹⁷ When connecting mental health to the state of one's wind energy, it is also helpful to consider that symptoms of wind disorder and its variations parallel symptoms of Western depressive disorders.

¹³ Clayton, 27-28, 2007.

¹⁴ Thayae, 2015.

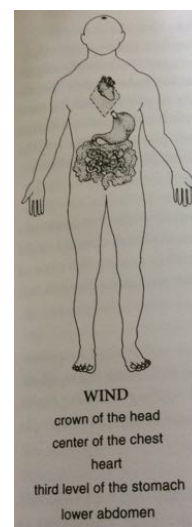
¹⁵ Dummer, 52-53, 2001.

¹⁶ Clayton, 27, 2007.

¹⁷ Wangmo, 2015.

The term depression is not as commonly used in TTM as it is in Western medicine. Although Tibetan doctors are quite aware of depression and its meaning, they do not diagnose patients with depression because the Tibetan community does not often consider depression to be its own illness. Rather, Tibetan doctors use the term wind disorder. A patient may be diagnosed with a general wind disorder, or one that is more specific, such as *sok-lung*. *Sok-lung* is associated with intense neurotic behavior, accompanied by psychological and physiological symptoms of over-sensitivity, anxiety, emotional instability, loss of appetite, insomnia, and dizziness.¹⁸ In diagnosing patients with wind disorders opposed to depression, there is more emphasis on the physical symptoms, connecting the disorder to both the body and mind. To understand the locations of wind itself both within one's conscious mind and physical body, the five subsets of wind should be paid close attention to.

There are different wind disorders that are related with the five subsections of wind, all of which are associated with the mind and its connections to the body. The first of the five is life-wind, which holds one's life-force, and resides in the life-vein, which is directly connected to the heart. Life wind is regarded as the main support of one's consciousness, and is very important to keep in balance because consciousness becomes disturbed when the life-wind circulates in places that it should not. As well, when consciousness becomes disturbed, the life-wind is also disturbed as a result.¹⁹ In TTM, the mind is linked to the heart by the life-wind. Because the heart gives rise to mental clarity and one's self-identity, the life-wind must maintain balance within the body.²⁰ The other wind types, as previously listed, consist of upward-moving wind, which gives one clarity of mindfulness and is associated with bodily strength and energy, and pervasive wind, which flows throughout the whole body and is related with the movement of limbs, thinking processes, and blood circulation. Also, fire-associated wind flows through the organs and aids in digestion, and downward-voiding wind extends down the body in aiding the functions of one's pelvic area organs and thighs.²¹ The functions and locations of each of these types of wind further illustrate the understanding of wind's presence throughout the entire body, and because of its close connection



General locations of the wind energies. Fenton, 15, 1999.

¹⁸ Clifford, 135, 2001.

¹⁹ Dummer, 42-3, 2001.

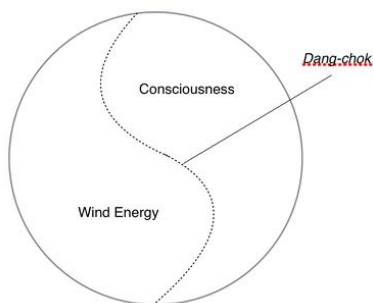
²⁰ Clifford, 133, 2001.

²¹ Dummer, 42, 2001.

to one's mental disposition, it is evident that the mind is located within these physical locations throughout the body as well.

The *Lha*

It is not only wind that is representative of one's mental health in relation to both the body and mind, for the concept of the *lha* is very influential in determining one's health as well. The *lha* actually stems from the Bön religion, but is mentioned in the Second Tantra regarding pulse-reading, as well as in the Subsequent Tantra of TTM.²² It is regarded as the "vital essence of life," the "energy body" that resides between one's physical body and the mind as a shadow of the physical body. It is generally said to be a non-physical spirit that is connected with one's well-being, and is a vital component of health. It protects, nourishes, and gives energy to the



Dang-chok's relationship between consciousness and the physical wind energy. Consciousness works here in also representing the non-physical *lha* body

physical body.²³ Although it is a non-physical entity, TTM doctors are able to identify the *lha's* location within the body by checking a patient's pulse on a specific artery. The *lha* pulse, is felt to determine the life-span of the patient and his overall body-mind health.²⁴

In order for the *lha* to be in good condition, there must be a balance between the physical body and the non-physical *lha* body. The *lha* is connected to the physical body by the *dang-chok*, a physical entity that resides in the heart. The *dang-chok* is regarded as the "pure essence," the nutrients that remain after having traveled through the digestive organs, liver, blood, and bodily tissue. It acts as an immunity agent, and leaves the individual in good health when at its normal state. Although the *dang-chok* resides in the heart, its energy pervades throughout one's body to sustain proper function. When the *dang-chok* is disrupted, thus disrupting the equilibrium between the physical body and the *lha*, there is a potential for the individual to experience a "lost *lha*." A "lost *lha*" can be brought upon by trauma or stress, and creates a division between the *lha* and the physical body. When one loses his *lha*, he can show signs similar to those of depression, such as being emotionally closed off

²² Gonpo, 63, 2008.

²³ Beguin, "Lha and lha ceremony," 2015.

²⁴ Gerke, "Body concepts in Tibetan medicine and the understanding of the 'subtle life essence' (Tib. bla) and its relevance for medical therapy," 2003.

and unhappy.²⁵ A lost *lha* can be very detrimental to a person's mental and physical health, and is important to keep in good harmony with the body. As well, the *lha* is a common concept within Buddhism. In the case of a family member having recently experienced trauma, often times Tibetan families will take the relative to visit a Tibetan lama in order to check the individual's state of *lha*. Doctors may also refer patients to visit a lama to perform practices aimed at restoring the energy balance between the *lha* and the physical body.²⁶

Clinical Diagnosis

In clinical practice, TTM physicians perform a series of exams that are aimed at ascertaining the interruption of balance between the patient's multiple equilibriums. In doing so, the physician considers the individual's specific humoral characteristics, such as which type of humoral disorders he is most susceptible to, as well as the patient's lifestyle and environmental influences. By doing this, the physician is able to identify the nature of the patient's problem, rather than his symptoms alone. Also, each of the exams are able to identify both physical and mental disturbances because they are designed in looking for the cause of the illness through both types of symptoms. There are three principle exams which encompass aspects of seeing, touching, and speaking to the patient.

The first exam is the physical inspection, wherein the physician looks at the patient's tongue and urine sample. Even within this examination, the physician can identify signs of mental unrest. For example, large bubbles in the urine that take a long time to dissipate show signs of mental stress or anxiety. Palpitation is the second exam, which requires that the physician check the patient's pulse. Here the physician can also identify signs of mental unrest by the pace and strength of the pulse, such as a taunt pulse that indicates mental stress.²⁷ The third type of exam is interrogation, wherein the physician asks the patient about his lifestyle habits, family history, and other factors that may affect his health. There is a set of twenty-nine classical questions listed in the ancient text that pertain to the different humoral disorders. For wind disorders, questions that physicians may ask patients pertain to the texture of food eaten, sleep deprivation, and experience of much mental suffering.²⁸

²⁵ Yeshi, 2015.

²⁶ Beguin, "Lha and lha ceremony," 2015.

²⁷ Wangmo, 2015.

²⁸ Dummer, 81-2, 2001.

Interrogation is an extremely important part of TTM diagnosis because it helps to establish a trusting relationship between the patient and doctor. The patient can give the physician valuable information about what may have influenced the cause of the illness. In speaking with the patient, the doctor must establish an environment where the patient can feel comfortable speaking about his life. This is achieved by giving the patient emotional support in soothing words and tone of voice.²⁹ Once trust has been established between the doctor and patient, the doctor can help motivate the patient to take the necessary steps in treating his illness.

Treatment Approaches

Standard Treatment Methods

Similar to the diagnostic process, the treatment that TTM administered to patients is oriented towards alleviating the patient's individual source of the problem, rather than simple symptomatic relief. There are three principal treatment methods: gentle methods, stronger methods, and violent or radical methods. Gentle methods consist of practical advice for modification of diet and lifestyle, the administration of herbal medicine in powder or pill form, and some external therapies including oil massage. Stronger methods include external therapies such as bloodletting, moxibustion, the application of heat pouches on specific points of the body, and acupuncture. For violent or radical methods, which are avoided unless absolutely necessary, surgeries are performed.³⁰ Gentle methods, specifically practical advice and herbal medicine, are the most common forms of treatment.

Many Tibetan doctors believe that practical advice is the most important form of treatment because, like interrogation, it helps to establish a connection between doctor and patient, motivating the patient to change behavioral patterns that may contribute to the cause of the illness. According to Dr. Tenzin Choedhak, prior senior personal physician to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, one should "be careful with diet and behavior, avoid contamination, especially chemicals, [and] attempt to de-stress ideally by changing the mindset, meditation, or spiritual practice."³¹ There are also specific suggestions that pertain to certain disorders, such as those brought about by humoral imbalances. For wind problems, one is advised to eat heavy, greasy, soft, warm basis foods with onion and garlic seasoning, and to not suppress bodily urges such as sweating, the need to urinate, sneeze, and breathe. This important method of therapy relates

²⁹ Gyaltzen, 2015.

³⁰ Clifford, 125, 2001.

³¹ Dummer, 97, 2001.

directly to a patient's mental state of being because it inspires a change in unhealthy behavior and lifestyle that can only result from one's decision-making processes.

Practical advice is not just one sided, for there can be therapeutic benefits for patients to openly vent with physicians to help alleviate stress and sorrow. When a patient is able to speak without reservation, the physician can grasp a better understanding of the history and causes of the illness. In TTM there are no therapists or psychiatrists for people to speak to about mental issues, and one major reason for this may be due to TTM doctors facilitating opportunities for their patients to confide in them about their stresses.³² In this sense, all TTM clinics act as counseling environments.

Not only practical advice helps problems associated with one's mentality, but there are medicinal herbs and external therapies that are very beneficial for helping maintain the health of the body and mind together. Natural herbs used in medicine that are known for treating wind problems related to mental issues consist of: nutmeg, long pepper, black pepper, clove, saffron, and cardamom³³. The external therapy of *hor-me*, for instance, is also very helpful in alleviating wind disorders, promoting mental wellbeing, and increasing circulation throughout the body. *Hor-me* is a moxibustion technique, the application of heat through pouches filled with herbs onto palms of the hands, soles of the feet, and the three vertebrae points that correspond to the locations of wind.³⁴



The Gangkyi Clinic at Men-Tsee-Khang in Dharamsala

Dharmic and Spiritual Treatment

If the standard treatment methods do not provide a patient with relief, it is possible for a physician to refer him to spiritual practices. If the patient is experiencing mental problems that are not subsiding, affecting the mind and body both, then a physician may advise him to more intensely practice the religion that he associates himself with, in the case that he practices a religion. As well, when the physician identifies a problem that is not curable by practical treatment methods, such as a "lost *lha*" or demonic possession, he will refer the patient to a Tibetan lama to carry out specific practices for curing these rare illnesses.

³² Lhundup, 2015.

³³ Clifford, 100, 2001.

³⁴ Yu, "Achieving a healthy state of mind through external therapies," 2013.

Dharmic medicine, or the teachings of the Buddha, can help an individual to heal through spiritual and psychological means aimed at realizing the nature of the mind and controlling negative emotions. This can be practiced by either the patient himself, or can be taught to him by a spiritual master. Dharmic medicine emphasizes an understanding of oneself and how one can live a healthy and compassionate lifestyle through the means of meditation, prayer, recitation of mantra, and moral development.³⁵ A particular benefit of reciting mantras can be a calmed mind from listening to one's own voice while speaking aloud.³⁶ Meditation on specific objects or motives, such as the thought to have compassion for even one's enemy, can also help in calming the mind and developing a better sense of understanding the cause of the illness. In fact, Men-Tsee-Khang is planning to carry out a study for improving mental health in patients suffering from Tuberculosis and Drug-Resistant Tuberculosis through meditation.

Buddhist Influence

Tibetan doctors may not perform Buddhist practices within clinical settings, but Buddhist philosophy pervades throughout the fundamental principles of TTM. Buddhist philosophy is not only engrained in the *Gyu-zhi*, but those studying TTM must actually take two Buddhist vows before going into practice as a physician. As well, those working in pharmacology perform Buddhist rituals on all herbal medicines to give them empowerment.³⁷ The Buddha has been referred to as the "Great Physician" because the purpose of his teachings are to cure suffering of all sentient beings.³⁸ In the attempt to cure a patient's or one's own sufferings, the influence of Buddhist thought in TTM practice can give one a clear perception on the severity and the cause of the illness.

"From Root to Fruit"³⁹

By understanding the cause of an illness, a doctor can, most likely, cure it. Likewise, when one is able to understand the mind, he can change it, and, in changing the mind, one can also change the functions and constitution of the body. Buddhism regards the root cause of

³⁵ Clifford, 28, 2001.

³⁶ Thayae, 2015.

³⁷ Gyaltzen, 2015.

³⁸ Clifford, 23, 2001.

³⁹ Thayae, 2015.

suffering to be incredibly important in understanding the suffering itself, and from there it can be alleviated. When we identify the reason for negative thoughts or wrong perceptions, we can change them and halt the poor feelings and decisions resulting from them. This clearly parallels the notion of finding the root cause of an illness in TTM. In fact, the primordial cause of all disease, ignorance, and its three poisons, are taken directly from Buddhist philosophy.

Furthermore, when one takes the Buddhist Four Noble Truths into consideration when identifying the root cause of an illness, the process of curing a disease is very similar to how one may cease his personal suffering through Buddhist practice. The Truth of Suffering relates to an individual's illness, the Truth of the Origin of Suffering relates to the cause of the illness, the Truth of Cessation relates to the notion of understanding ways to alleviate the illness, and the Truth of the Path that Leads to Cessation relates to the actual cure of the illness.⁴⁰ Modification of behavior in TTM treatment also correlates to Buddhism's idea of bettering one's life through the powers and means of the mind, for all of our behavior and actions that affect our body-mind are the result of the inner workings of our minds.

As a Therapeutic Agent

The idea that one can understand his mind, and thus change it, is a very powerful concept that has aided the Tibetan community in preventing and counteracting mental states that are harmful to one's health. Dr. Tenzin Lhundup, a doctor working in research at Men-Tsee-Khang in Dharamsala, expresses that there are not "high incidences of [solely] mental problems within the Tibetan community."⁴¹ As well, children are not raised with an awareness of doctors who work specifically with the mind's problems, for even lay people can benefit from Buddhist culture in understanding the importance of contentment and positive thinking. When suffering from mental distress, one may think more positively by imagining other individuals in worse conditions, confide in family members to identify the cause of the problem, and sit quietly to calm the mind. Simple Buddhist practices that commonly relax and individual and help to achieve *sem-de*, wellness of the mind, can consist of *kora*, meditation, or incorporating simple quotes from lamas' teachings into daily thoughts and activities.⁴² It is here that we see Buddhism act as its own unique form of psychiatry.

⁴⁰ Tsering, 1-8, 2006.

⁴¹ Lhundup, 2015.

⁴² Yuri, 2015.

A Merge of Medicines

Men-Tsee-Khang

Buddhism, in TTM, as well as in Tibetan culture, is very much incorporated into all aspects of daily life. Day by day, one may have personal motives to act compassionately towards others, not dwell on the past or future, and appreciate what good things with which he is graced. Although these may be quite simple ideas, they are greatly reinforced by a Buddhist community to aid people in living happily. One reason for there being less emphasis on mental illness could also be due to this cultural understanding of the importance of mental contentment. Even simple ideas taken from Buddhist philosophy could provide useful techniques for alleviating mental stress and improving mental health in other types of medicine. The Body, Mind and Life Department (BML) at Men-Tsee-Khang in Dharamsala is doing just this.

Founded in 2013, BML is aimed at understanding and focusing on relieving mental illness and stress through means that greatly differ from those of other medicines. The department has looked at illnesses that are regarded as being primarily mind-related in medicines other than TTM, such as anxiety and depression, but takes a different approach in understanding their nature and potential cures. Simply by glancing at the title, one can see that BML acts to improve *sem-de* in individuals, but in doing so, the body and overall life of an individual must be equally considered. Dr. Sunang, the head of BML, has expressed that that mental illness affects our physical selves just as much as it does our mentality, thus, we see again, that the mind and body cannot be separated when considering illness. The department combines concepts from Buddhist philosophy, ancient Tibetan medical texts, and Tibetan astrology into understanding the relationship between the body-mind and one's life. In order to help relieve mental disturbances within the community, BML offers its insights and knowledge to the public through workshops and courses on mental health. As well, BML has held conferences with doctors from around the globe for the purpose of introducing these healing methods into other medical practices.⁴³

The Research and Development department at Men-Tsee-Khang is also carrying out studies and publishable work for managing mental distress through means of TTM. Specifically, they are creating a publication for the management of depression, which is written for audiences unfamiliar with TTM and Buddhism, that helps them to understand the nature of depression and stress in relation to ignorance, the three poisons, and wind imbalances. It also provides beneficial ways for improving *sem-de* through modification of lifestyle and diet, negative emotions, as well as the use of herbal medicine, and external therapies. With the analysis of non-

⁴³ Sunang, 2015.

TTM disorders such as depression, the Research and Development department is making the understanding of the benefits of TTM more available to other cultures.

Potential Benefits for other Medicines

A specific benefit that TTM can offer different medical practices worldwide is the pace of its healing process. Tibetan doctors regard allopathic medicine to alleviate illnesses within a shorter timeframe than that of TTM, but with such a fast healing process, allopathic medicine may not cure the root cause of the illness by alleviating only the symptoms.⁴⁴ For example, when one visits a TTM clinic because of a headache, the doctor will prescribe medication and advise the patient to take action in alleviating the root cause of the headache, opposed to simply prescribing him a painkiller. By providing the patient with more time to heal by natural means, TTM can help him to change his lifestyle to alleviate the illness and improve overall quality of life. Thus, TTM helps to catalyze the "self-curative powers" of the individual's mind and body.⁴⁵

As well as allowing a patient's body and mind to heal within a realistic and healthy timeframe, TTM is known to have no side effects on patients when administered correctly. The pharmacology of oral and external medicines are composed of completely natural minerals, herbs, and elements that have beneficial powers for the body and mind. Emphasis on consultation within treatment can provide the patient with useful information on adapting to a healthier lifestyle, which places much emphasis on helping to improve mental and physical health in conjunction with one another.

Conclusion

Traditional Tibetan Medicine incorporates ideas and strategies for understanding and curing the human body that not only alleviate the source of an illness, but also work to promote one's overall wellbeing. By understanding that the body and mind are constantly working in unison, resulting from each others' states and dispositions, maintaining good mental health is clearly very important. When one understands the mind's connection to the body within the root causes of illness, the *lha*, and wind energy, it is evident that TTM uses procedures that emphasize a very close analysis of the mind's health. Because of this, and its influence from Buddhist principles based on understanding the mind in order to better one's life, TTM is in and of itself a

⁴⁴ Tsering, 2-3, 2006.

⁴⁵ Dummer, 212, 2001.

type of psychology and psychiatry that also emphasizes the body's health, although it is not labeled as such. Upon asking a Tibetan physician about psychiatry, he or she may state that there is no such practice within TTM. However, the procedures for understanding, diagnosing, and treating all illnesses in TTM can be regarded as psychiatric practices because of this notion of the mind's influence on one's health.

Traditional Tibetan Medicine takes into account psychological, biological, behavioral, environmental, and spiritual factors when looking at illness. In doing so, one could regard TTM as science, art, and philosophy.⁴⁶ It is scientific in that it is strictly organized in a methodological fashion that strives to understand the inner workings of a human being's body and its relationship to the macrocosmic environment. It is artistic in the clinical practices themselves, such as the physician's insight and compassion for establishing a connection with the patient. It is philosophical due to the influence from Buddhist principles for understanding the nature of the body-mind and the ability to change it through both standard and spiritual types of treatment. By understanding the nature and goals of TTM, one can better his mental and physical health in unison. From this accomplishment, he is then able to spread *sem-de* and overall happiness throughout the community, and even the world.

⁴⁶ "Interview," 2007.

Appendix A: Methodology

For the greater portion of the ISP period, I interned at Men-Tsee-Khang Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute in Dharamsala, India. I helped in the Research and Development department and with editing documents such as study proposals and reports. Within the Men-Tsee-Khang community, I was blessed to have met a number of knowledgeable and experienced doctors, and interviewed them in their spare time. As well, I learned much about the mind's presence in Traditional Tibetan Medicine through discussions with Dr. Tenzin Yeshe, Dr. Lhundup, and Dr. Sangmo, with whom I worked in Research and Development. Interviews ranged from being structured by pre-established questions, to casual conversations, and were arranged through the connections and help of Dr. Sonam Yangdon, assistant to the director of Men-Tsee-Khang. One interview, with Dr. Kunga, took place at one of Men-Tsee-Khang's branch clinics in Kathmandu, and was arranged by SIT staff member Nanzeen Zafar. One other interview, with Tenzin Yuri, took place within the SIT program house in Dharamsala.

I then combined the qualitative data that I recorded from interviews with information that I had compiled from literary and online sources. Limitations to my research were that interviews primarily included participants who had trained at Men-Tsee-Khang, and it would have been helpful to speak with doctors practicing Traditional Tibetan Medicine who had learned their practices from other institutes. As well, I was planning to conduct a couple of interviews with Traditional Tibetan and Western medical doctors in Kathmandu for more perspectives on my research topic, but the Himalayan Earthquake prevented me from doing so.

Appendix B: Biographies

Dr. Rigzin Sangmo graduated from Men-Tsee-Khang medical school in 2004, and has been working as head of the Research and Development department ever since. Recently she has been conducting impressive research on testing Tibetan medical treatment methods on patients with Chronic Hepatitis B. She and her family live in a beautiful home on the Men-Tsee-Khang grounds.

Dr. Tenzin Yeshe graduated from Men-Tsee-Khang medical school in 2007, worked as a Tibetan medical physician in a Men-Tsee-Khang branch clinic for seven years, and has recently been working in Research and Development for the past seven years. He was born in South India, and moved to Dharamsala in 1999.

Dr. Tenzin Lhundup has been working at Men-Tsee-Khang for the past years as well, and carries out clinical research in Research and Development. She was born in a Tibetan settlement in South India, and attended medical school at Men-Tsee-Khang. She and her husband are expecting their first child this coming July (!).

Dr. Wangmo studied Tibetan medicine at Men-Tsee-Khang and currently works within the on-site clinic, the Gangkyi Clinic, at Men-Tsee-Khang in Dharamsala.

Lama Dr. Thayae is currently a professor at Men-Tsee-Khang's medical college. He studied Tibetan medicine at Men-Tsee-Khang, and is also a practicing lama in his personal time.

Dr. Pema Gyaltzen also graduated from Men-Tsee-Khang medical school and is currently a professor of Tibetan medicine at the institute's college.

Dr. Sunang studied at Men-Tsee-Khang and has been working as the director of the Body, Mind and Life department since 2013.

Dr. Kunga works at a Men-Tsee-Khang branch clinic in Kathmandu, Nepal as a Tibetan physician. He studied Tibetan medicine at Men-Tsee-Khang and occasionally travels back to the institute in Dharamsala for workshops.

Tenzin Yuri works for SIT in Dharamsala, wherein she manages the Dharamsala program house while students visit for ISP periods. She was born in Dharamsala and lives there full-time with her family. She does personal work when she is not busy tending to SIT students.

Appendix C: Classifications of Demons

Translations from Chapters 77 and 78 of the Explanatory Tantra of the *Gyu-Zhi*

"Elemental Spirits

The Cause: Performing many sins and unvirtuous actions; sitting alone without even a single friend; defiling, harming, and despising the demon's place; going against what is worthy of honor; and being tormented by sorrow; etc. [In short] entering into improper physical and spoken action opposed to law.

The Characteristics: The non-human elemental spirits reside in one's body, speech, and mind and control one's behavior.

The Classes: The eighteen great classes of elemental spirits are called: god demons; anti-god demons; scent-eater demons; serpent-spirit demons; harm-giver demons; pervasive-spirit demons; cannibal-demons; flesh-eater demons; hungry-ghost demons; vampire-ghoul demons; evil-curse spirit demons; mental agitator demons; zombie demons; ancestor spirit demons; guru demons; sage demons; respected-elder demons; and accomplishment-emanation demons.

The Symptoms: These elemental spirits possess one's body, speech, and mind and commit one's acts. One's mind becomes unhappy, and consciousness waves restlessly.

In particular [people possessed by] the demonic effect of the gods speak Sanskrit and sweet words, sleep little, are good natured, and keep very clean.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the anti-gods like meat and wine, look indirectly out of the corners of their eyes, and speak much restless talk. They have great pride and fierce anger.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the scent-eaters are graceful and delight in fragrant smells. They like to sing, dance, and play. They love to wear nice clothes and are attracted towards red ornaments.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the serpent spirits have radiant faces and red bloodshot eyes with straight piercing stares. They desire the whites [curd, milk, and butter] and the reds [meat]. They flick their tongues and sleep face downward.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the harm givers like offering cakes [torma] and fish. They tell secrets and hate doctors and holy people.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the pervasive holiness cry out the name of God and expound on religious scriptures. They beat themselves, abuse others, and like to laugh.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the cannibal demons possess great physical strength, talk roughly, and like meat.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the invisible flesh-eaters are ashamed of themselves- they have low voices and downcast manner. They faint without reason and talk disjointedly; they scratch at the earth and fields.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of ugly evil ghosts quake with fear and have no desire for food.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the vampire ghouls have dark faces, walk slowly, and have swellings on their genitals.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the mental agitators drink much water, speak suddenly then stop, and do not like food.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the zombies speak the straight truth, sleep much, like ornaments, and have shaking bodies.

[People possessed by] the demonic effect of the guru, the sage, the respected-elder, and the accomplished emanation are all consistent in their paths of action and diet. They befriend all children, go naked, and cannot stay in one place. They have wild hair, unhappy minds, and feel long abandoned.

The Cure: The nature of elemental spirits is pacified by recitation of mantra, offering cakes, burnt offering, reading scriptures, meditation, sadhana, service, and accumulation of "tshog."

Madness-Causing Ghosts

Then the rishi Rigpai Yeshe spoke as follows: O great sage, hearken.

The illness which makes consciousness insane is taught in four [parts]: Cause, class, symptom, and cure.

The Cause: Feeble heart power, depression, unhappy mind, anxious over-thinking, and unwholesome diet [are the primary causes which] assist the secondary cause - demons.

Secondarily, the mental confusion causes consciousness to stay in the place of the path of the mind, perverting it so that recollection becomes dim and one becomes insane.

Class: It [madness] is explained in seven classes: madness arising from vital wind; from bile; from phlegm; from a combination of those three [the three humours]; from distressed mind; from poison; from ghosts.

The Symptoms: Arising from wind, the flesh becomes emaciated, one vomits foam, talks and cries much and runs about hither and dither. The eyes are red and cloudy and [the illness] gets worse after taking food.

Arising from bile, one becomes angry and violent, likes the cold, has yellow tears, and sees fire and stars before the eyes.

[Arising from] phlegm, one becomes damp, speaks little, has revulsion to food, sleeps a lot, and has much mucus dripping from the nose and much saliva trickling out of the mouth.

[Arising] from a combination [of the humors], all the symptoms are revealed.

[Arising] from mental distress, one is all the time thinking of one's sadness.

[Arising] from poison, the mind becomes confused, the radiance of the face is greatly diminished, and there is little body vigor.

[Arising] from a demonic force all conduct becomes harmful.

The Cure: There are two methods [of cure]: the general and the particular. First in order to clear the openings where the mind enters, purify by ointment massage [bsku-mnye], by medical bath, by forced vomiting and by letting blood. [Then] use the medicine called "the virtuous medicine butter."⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Clifford, 179-196, 2001.

Appendix D: Twenty-Nine Questions for Interrogation

"3. Interrogatory Diagnosis

There are twenty-nine questions relating to disturbances of the Three Humours:

Questions pertaining to Wind disorders:

1. Texture of foods taken- light or rough.
2. Sleep deprivation.
3. Being exposed to Wind.
4. Going through much suffering.
5. Frequently yawning and trembling, stretching, shivering.
6. Pain in the hip-joints, lumbo-sacral area and all joints, intermitting shooting pains.
7. Involuntary twitching and movement, fidgeting.
8. Reduced feeling and mental instability.
9. Are all symptoms worse when hungry?
10. Do oily and nutritious foods relieve?

Questions pertaining to Bile disorders:

11. Acrid and hot foods, exposure to hot sun. Losing temper and violent behavior.
12. Bitter taste in mouth.
13. Headaches.
14. Excessive body-heat.
15. Shooting pains in upper part of body.
16. All symptoms worse whilst food is being digested.
17. Relieved by cool food and environment.

Questions pertaining to Phlegm disorders:

18. Heavy and oily foods.
19. Lying on damp ground.
20. Uncomfortable fullness in stomach.
21. Digestive difficulty generally.
22. Regurgitation.
23. Food has no taste.
24. Distension - meteorism.
25. Belching.
26. Heaviness of body and mind, lethargy.
27. Body feels chilled, both outside and inside.
28. Discomfort after eating.

Questions pertaining to phlegm disorders

29. Warm food and environment."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Dummer, 82, 2001.

Glossary of Terms

རྒྱུ་མཉམ་པོ།

Gyu-zhi- (The Four Tantras) the ancient Tibetan medical texts that hold the information regarding all aspects of Traditional Tibetan Medicine

མ་རྗེས་པ།

Ignorance- the primordial cause to all suffering and illness

དྲུག་གསུམ་མ།

The Three Poisons- hatred, attachment, and ignorance, which stem from ignorance and create imbalances within the three humors

རྒྱུ་མ།

Humors- bodily manifestations of the five elements, the three principle energies

རྩུང་།

rLung (wind)- one of the three bodily humors with distinct connections to one's mind and emotions

ཁྲི་མ།

Bile- one of the three bodily humors related to digestion and bodily heat

འག་མ།

Phlegm- one of the three bodily humors with many functions

ཡི་མ།

Karma- the Buddhist concept of actions in an individual's past life that influence this life

ལྷ།

Lha- the "vital essence" that resides between the physical body and the mind

འདྲོ་མ།

Gdon- demons, or evil spirits that can possess an individual's mind and give rise to various types of illness and insanity

རྒྱུང་པའི་འདྲོ་མ།

Elemental Spirits- spiritual entities that can possess an individual's mind; the causes of eighteen variations of psychosis

འཕྲུག་མ།

Mantra- a Buddhist Prayer that is recited for an individual's wellbeing and good karma

ལྷ་མ།

Lama- a Buddhist monk of high reincarnation

མཛོད་པར་མཛོད་པ།

Dharma- the doctrine of Buddhist practice.

སྐྱུང་ལྷ།

Sok-lung- an wind energy disorder characterized by anxiety and neurot behavior

མདངས་མཚོ་མ།

Dang-chok- the "pure essence" that connects the *lha* to the wind energy

ཏོར་མ།

Hor-me- a moxibustion technique used for relieving wind imbalances

མེ་མཚན་འདྲེ།

Sem-de- wellbeing of the mind

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Suggestions for Future Research

I highly suggest that future SIT students become involved in the Men-Tsee-Khang community in Dharamsala, whether through interviews, volunteer work, or an internship. Men-Tsee-Khang is carrying out many studies that show the efficacy of its ancient medical treatment practices, and more research on its various treatment methods could be very interesting. Also, while conducting my research at Men-Tsee-Khang, I found that doctors from all over the world attend workshops and conferences that the institute holds in order to introduce Traditional Tibetan Medicine into other types of medicine. In fact, the entire *Gyu-Zhi* is in the process of being translated into English. More research pertaining to the spread of Traditional Tibetan Medicine in other cultures and types of medicine could be fascinating. Upon working for Men-Tsee-Khang in Dharamsala, Sonam Yangdon, personal assistant to the director of the institute, can be reached at director@men-tsee-khang.org. The Research and Development department can also be reached at clinicalresearch@men-tsee-khang.org.



Myself and the Research and Development department (dog included) at Men-Tsee-Khang