

## Chapter Three: Fright Seizures

驚癇第三

(3 essays, 1 method of diagnosing seizures,  
13 formulas, 23 moxibustion methods)

論曰：

- (一) 少小所以有癇病及瘧病者，皆由臟氣不平故也。
- (二) 新生即癇者，是其五臟不收斂，血氣不聚，五脈不流，骨怯不成也，多不全育。
- (三) 其一月四十日以上至期歲而癇者，亦由乳養失理，血氣不和，風邪所中也。
- (四) 病先身熱掣癇、驚啼叫喚，而後發癇，脈浮者為陽癇。病在六腑，外在肌膚，猶易治也。
- (五) 病先身冷、不驚掣、不啼呼、而病發時脈沉者，為陰癇。病在五臟，內在骨髓，極難治也。

### Commentary III.1 ▸ Brenda Hood

*Sù Wèn* (素問) 3 states: 故陽強不能密，陰氣乃絕，陰平陽秘，精神乃治，陰陽離決，精氣乃絕。 My translation of this quote is: "[If] yáng is powerful it cannot be dense (coherent) and yīn will thus end; [if] yīn is smooth and yáng is dense, then *jīngshén* can thereof be treated. [If] yīn and yáng separate, then *jīngshén* will thereof end." This quote reflects the idea that there needs to be organization and coherence between the two polar aspects that make up an organism and that there needs to be a balance with neither of them too strong or in excess nor too weak or deficient. According to the quote, yīn needs to be internally coherent or smooth -- kind of like a sandbox where the sand is all shaken smooth and each grain of sand is in coherent organization with all of the other grains of sand. Yáng, on the other hand, needs to have a certain density or power but one that is not overpowering, in order to make things function properly. The passage in the *Qiān Jīn Fāng* states: "臟氣不平", translated as "visceral qì is not even." This is a variation of the quote from *Sù Wèn* 3 and refers to the idea that in children, who are considered more purely yáng in nature, yáng qì and in this case specifically visceral qì which is yáng in nature, can operate in an unsmooth way, perhaps referring to operating in fits and starts rather than a smooth flow. It is precisely this kind of a pathology that can manifest in seizures and tetany.

### III.1 Essay

#### Line III.1.1 Causes and Forms of Seizures

(1) The reason why seizures and tetany occur in very early childhood is always that visceral qì is not even.<sup>1</sup>

(2) When seizures occur immediately after birth, this means that the baby's five *zàng* organs are failing to contract, the blood and qì are failing to gather, there is no flow in the five vessels, and the bones are timid and incomplete.<sup>2</sup> In the majority of cases, [such babies] will not develop completely.<sup>3</sup>

(3) When the seizures occur between the first month or 40 days and the end of the first full year of life, they can also be caused by disorderly breastfeeding or nurturing, disharmony of blood and qì, or by being struck by wind evil.<sup>4</sup>

(4) In cases where this disease manifests first with generalized heat, tugging and slackening, and frightful wailing and crying, and only afterwards with episodes of seizures, [during which the patient has] a floating pulse, this means *yáng* seizures. [In such cases,] the disease is located in the six *fū* organs and on the outside in the skin, and is still easy to treat.

(5) In cases where this disease manifests first with generalized cold, no frightful tugging, no wailing and crying, and then, when the disease breaks out, with a sunken pulse, this means *yīn* seizures. [In such cases,] the disease is located in the five *zàng* organs and on the inside in the bones and marrow, and is extremely difficult to treat.

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1 See Commentary III.1

2 See Commentary III.2

3 *Quán yù* 全育: In medieval China, a child's inability to mature fully meant most likely that he or she was unable to live to adulthood.

4 The *Sūn Zhēn Rén* edition has here instead: "When the seizures occur between the first month or 40 days and the end of the first full year of life, they are always caused by lack of flow in the five vessels and by failure to complete the patterning of the bones. It can also be caused by lack of breastfeeding and being struck by wind evil."

論曰：

- (六) 病發身軟，時醒者，謂之癇也。身強直，反張如弓，不時醒者，謂之瘳也。
- (七) 諸反張，大人脊下容側手，小兒容三指者，不可復治也。
- (八) 凡脈浮之與沉，以判其病在陰陽表裡耳。其浮沉復有大小、滑澀、虛實、遲駛。諸証各依脈形為治。

### Commentary III.2 > Brenda Hood

The Gallbladder is an interesting but poorly understood organ. In *Líng Shū* 2, it is described as the palace of central essence (*zhōng jīng zhī fǔ* 中精之府); while *Sù Wèn* 25 states that it arrives when Earth gains Wood (*tǔ dé mù ér dá* 土得木而達), a reference to the idea that Earth moves because of the actions of Wood. The Gallbladder is related to timidity (as seen by the fact that when the Gallbladder is cold one is shy and timid) but also to bones. The Gallbladder's relationship to bones is both via the Foot Shàoyáng Gallbladder channel as well as in its function as an organ. All of the yáng channels of the body affect a particular vital substance and the Foot Shàoyáng Gallbladder channel is said to affect the bones. Most commentators imply that the connection is via the joints as demonstrated by the fact that the joints become disordered when the Foot Shàoyáng channel is diseased. Nevertheless, when long term unresolved fright affects the Gallbladder, the bones become soft. The observation in the present quote that "the bones are timid and incomplete" implies that the yáng aspect of Wood has been adversely affected. Wood is the element/phase of generation (obviously important in an infant) as well as the element/phase related to wind, of which seizures and tetany are manifestations.

### III.1 Essay

#### Line III.1.1 Causes and Forms of Seizures, cont.

(6) If the body during outbreaks goes limp and the patient regains consciousness regularly, we call it “seizures.” If the body turns rigid and straight,<sup>5</sup> is arched backwards like a bow, and the patient regains consciousness irregularly, we call it “tetany.”

(7) In all cases of arched-back rigidity, if there is a space large enough to place a hand sideways underneath the spine in adults and three fingers in small children, you will not be able to turn the condition around with treatment.<sup>6</sup>

(8) In all cases, [discern] whether the pulse is floating or sunken to determine whether the disease is located in yīn or yáng and in the exterior or interior. [In addition to] this floating or sunken quality [of the pulse], further [discriminate] whether it is large or small, slippery or rough, vacuous or replete, and slow or rapid. Treat the various patterns in each case in accordance with the form of the pulse.

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5 The *Sūn Zhēn Rén* edition has here: “If the body becomes affected by *kuāng* mania and becomes rigid and straight...”

6 In other words, the outcome will be fatal.

## 《神農本草經》說

- (一) 小兒驚癇有一百二十種，其証候微異於常，便是癇候也。
- (二) 初出腹，血脈不斂，五臟未成，稍將養失宜，即為病也，時不成人。
- (三) 其經變蒸之後有病，餘証並寬，惟中風最暴卒也。
- (四) 小兒四肢不好驚掣，氣息小異，欲作癇，及變蒸日滿不解者，並宜龍膽湯也。
- (八) 凡脈浮之與沉，以判其病在陰陽表裡耳。其浮沉復有大小、滑澀、虛實、遲駛。諸証各依脈形為治。

### Commentary III.3 > Brenda Hood

Fright and fear are very different emotions in Chinese medicine. When one is fearful the qì moves down. Anyone who has ever been in a fearful situation can attest to this when they have involuntarily voided themselves. Fright, on the other hand, results in a scattering of qì, something an infant in the process of accumulating and “drawing in” resources for growth can ill afford.

### III.1 Essay

#### Line III.1.2 Quotation from the *Shén Nóng Běn Cǎo Jīng*<sup>1</sup>

(1) There are 120 types of fright seizures<sup>2</sup> in small children. Their signs and symptoms are only slightly different from a normal state of health, but they are nevertheless the signs of seizures.

(2) When babies first emerge from [the mother's] abdomen, the blood vessels fail to draw in and the five *zàng* organs are not yet matured. [At this point, even] slightly inappropriate care and nurturance immediately causes disease. Frequently, [such babies] will not reach adulthood.

(3) If it is after they have passed through the transformations and steamings that they have this disease, all the other residual signs lessen in severity, and it is only wind strike that leads to the most sudden of deaths.

(4) When small children [suffer from] poor health in the four limbs, with fright tugging, shallow and abnormal breathing, imminent seizures, and steamings and transformations that have lasted beyond the full number of days without resolving, *Lóngdǎn Tāng* is suitable.<sup>3</sup>

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1 The *Shén Nóng Běn Cǎo Jīng* 《神農本草經》 (“Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica”) is an important Hàn dynasty classic that describes 365 medicinal substances by their thermal quality, flavor, and effects on the body, categorizing them into three ranks associated with heaven, humanity, and earth.

2 See Commentary III.3

3 For the formula, see below, pp.51-53.