

Medicine and Military in Traditional China: Space, Boundary, and Cognate Vocabulary

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Abstract: There is a long-standing interrelationship between the military and medical spheres in society. Military actions rely on medical services to tend to casualties, and medical advances often come from the pressure of military campaigns that generate large numbers of patients. That interrelationship is a linear one of simple paired interaction. However, there is a deeper and more subtle relationship that influences military and medical theory. Both disciplines are schools of applied philosophy; real world result is required for the philosophical principles and theoretical approaches to be validated and maintained. Ornate intellectual edifice, which cannot produce a quantifiable result, is unacceptable in both these disciplines. As such there is a cognate type of intellectual discourse that involves observation, supposition, abstraction to principle, manipulation of principle, application, and evaluation of result. This process differs from abstract philosophy wherein the application, efficacy and assessment are often couched in qualitative and unclear parameters, which belie an accurate summation of result. This paper seeks to explore the relationship of the military and medical traditions of China, through a structured comparison of the intellectual framework of these two systems of applied philosophy. By exploring the medical and military conceptualizations of space and boundary, and the cognate vocabulary used in these two traditions, a better understanding of the deep structure of the core rubrics within the systems can be derived. Further, through comparative evaluation of source texts I will examine the parallelisms and dissonances of the views of space, boundary, power, and strategy.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine, Chinese military studies, Medical history, Military history, Linguistic comparative analysis

Introduction

There is complex relationship between the Medical and Military Traditions of China. The obvious connection of medicine being utilized by the military, and military action generating a body of acute and chronic patients, is only one of a blended array of strands of relationship. The simple pairing of these two traditions around the generation and management of patients is a linear one that requires little inquiry but rather observation of the tides of development that coincide with historical events as they influence the traditions. However, there is a deeper and more ornate interrelationship of these two traditions. Military and Medical Thought are applied

philosophy which both require real world result to be validated, unlike abstract philosophy wherein result is hard to quantify. This similarity ties the Military and Medical Traditions to the physical world and drives the development of their intellectual rubrics toward a coherence of cognitive approach. This paper explores the intellectual relationship of the Military and Medical Traditions through a structured analysis of the framework of each, as expressed in conceptions of space and boundary, and cognate vocabulary usage. Through this analysis the core rubrics that evidence a parallelism are derived and their manifestations within the concepts of space, boundary, power, and strategy.

Applied Philosophy vs. Abstract Philosophy

Much of Chinese intellectual history and scholarship revolves around the abstract philosophies of ancient China and their transmutation over time. Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, etc. are composed of abstract discourses of the “good,” and how the pristine state of interaction is lost, or regained. Positing axioms of mind and emotional constants, as well a hierarchical taxonomy of ethical commitment, these abstract traditions argue in associative logical cascades that link degenerative states of lesser envaluation, to a nexus of core ethical debasement, which, if corrected, will result in a regeneration of the correlates, thereby restoring the manifestation of the “good” from its abstract ethos into the world. For example, *The Great Learning* (Daxue 大學) states:

The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. *Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.* (Great Learning I.4 <https://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/conf2.htm>)

Things being investigated, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy. (Great Learning I.5 <https://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/conf2.htm>)

Herein the argument descends until the nexus of ‘investigation of things’ is established, corrected and rebuilt.

Similarly *The Classic of the Way and the Virtue* (Daodejing 道德經) has:

(The decay of manners)

When the Great Dao (Way or Method) ceased to be observed, benevolence and righteousness came into vogue. (Then) appeared wisdom and shrewdness, and there ensued great hypocrisy. When harmony no longer prevailed throughout the six kinships, filial sons found their manifestation; when the states and clans fell into disorder, loyal ministers appeared. (Daodejing 18 道德經十八章 <http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>)

(Returning to the unadulterated influence)

If we could renounce our sageness and discard our wisdom, it would be better for the people a hundredfold. If we could renounce our benevolence and discard our righteousness, the people would again become filial and kindly. If we could renounce our artful contrivances and discard our (scheming for) gain, there would be no thieves nor robbers.

Those three methods (of government)

Thought olden ways in elegance did fail

And made these names their want of worth to veil;

But simple views, and courses plain and true

Would selfish ends and many lusts eschew. (Daodejing 19 道德經十九章 <http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>)

Here again the nexus established of a loss of simplicity and a cascade into depreciation of the pristine nature of society which can be corrected by the shedding of the negative developments and the return to the simple state.

And the Mozi in *On Universal Love* states:

Suppose we try to locate the cause of disorder; we shall find it lies in the want of mutual love. What is called disorder is just the lack of filial piety on the part of the minister and the son towards the emperor and the father; As he loves himself and not his father the son benefits himself to the disadvantage of his father. As he loves himself and not his elder brother, the younger brother benefits himself to the disadvantage of his elder brother. As he loves himself and not his emperor, the minister benefits himself to the disadvantage of his emperor. And these are what is called disorder. When the father shows no affection to the son, when the elder brother shows no affection to the younger brother, and when the emperor shows no affection to the minister, on the other hand, it is also called disorder. When the father loves only himself and not the son, he benefits himself to the disadvantage of the son. When the elder brother loves only himself and not his younger brother, he benefits himself to the disadvantage of the younger brother. When the emperor loves only himself and not his minister, he benefits himself to the disadvantage of his minister, and the reason for all these is want of mutual love.

(*Universal Love Part 1 Book 4 Section 2 Jian Ai Shang Pian 兼愛上篇第二* <http://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-i>)

Suppose everybody in the world loves universally, loving others as one's self. Will there yet be any unfilial individual? When everyone regards his father, elder brother, and emperor as himself, whereto can he direct any unfilial feeling? Will there still be any unaffectionate individual? When everyone regards his younger brother, son, and minister as himself, whereto can he direct any disaffection? Therefore, there will not be any unfilial feeling or disaffection. Will there then be any thieves and robbers? When everyone regards other families as his own family, who will steal? When everyone regards other persons as his own person, who will rob? Therefore, there will not be any thieves or robbers. Will there be mutual disturbance among the houses of the ministers and invasion among the states of the feudal lords? When everyone regards the houses of others as one's own, who

will be disturbing? When everyone regards the states of others as one's own, who will invade? Therefore, there will be neither disturbances among the houses of the ministers nor invasion among the states of the feudal lords. (*Universal Love Part 1 Book 4 Section 4 Jian Ai Shang Pian 兼愛上篇第四*<http://ctext.org/mozi/universal-love-i>)

These systems are unique, but as expressions of the abstract philosophical tradition their intellectual framework shares a base similarity. There is no quantifiable element that can be used as assessment for the intended correction and the recovery of the “good.” Qualitative impressions that the situation “would be better,” or the implication that it is “correct” drive the abstract traditions. If put into practice, as Confucianism was for much of Chinese history, then a failure for the system to produce its miraculous restoration of pristine society is attributed to a failing of man rather than a critique of the system, thereby allowing the intellectual edifice to continue its discourse into ever more ornate layers of edifice.

However, the Military Tradition is different. Although concepts similar to the abstract schools of thought are utilized in the Military Tradition, there is a drive to apply the discourse to real world situations and derive a strategy, which bears fruit when implemented. The value of the discourse is clear and failure cannot easily be attributed and dismissed as a lack in the ethical fiber of the populace. In fact, the flawed nature of man is accepted in the Military Tradition as one thread within the fabric of the current strategy. The Military Tradition must work with *WHAT IS* not *WHAT COULD BE*. Therefore, the general must use the populace or his troops in the state they are in. He may improve that state between encounters, but he cannot think that they will evidence talents or qualities beyond themselves. Rather he must set the stage for them to manifest the breath of qualities, which they already possess. Thus, *The Art of War* (Sunzi Bingfa 孙子兵法) has:

Therefore, in your deliberations, when seeking to determine the military conditions, let them be made the basis of a comparison, in this wise: (1) Which of the two sovereigns is imbued with the Moral law? (2) Which of the two generals has most ability? (3) With whom lie the advantages derived from Heaven and Earth? (4) On which side is discipline most rigorously enforced? (5) Which army is stronger? (6) On which side are officers and men more highly trained? (7) In which army is there the greater constancy both in reward and punishment? By means of these seven considerations I can forecast victory or defeat. The general that hearkens to my counsel and acts upon it, will conquer: let such a one be retained in command! The general that hearkens not to my counsel nor acts upon it, will suffer defeat - let such a one be dismissed. (*The Art of War Sunzi Bing Fa 孙子兵法* <http://ctext.org/art-of-war/laying-plans>)

The Medical Tradition is connected to observable result as clearly as the Military Tradition. Medicine revolves around efficacy, and often posits theory as a type of “back-fill” to explain observed and reproducible result. *The Yellow Thearch's Inner Canon Plain Questions Chapter 13* (Huangdi Neijing Suwen Yi Jing Bian Qi Lun 黃帝內經 素問 移精變氣論) has:

The crux of treatment is to abide by the inspection of the patient's complexion and his pulse condition, and hold

to this as the highest principle. If the source of the disease is comprehended in the wrong sequence, or the doctor fails to gain the cooperation of the patient, then the treatment will not succeed. When one assists a king to rule the country like this, the country will be controlled. In treating, one must treat the old disease first, and then treat the disease that is recently contracted. The one who can treat this way will be seen as a keen physician (Wu 2002).

Both of these traditions must therefore accept the world in its imperfect manifestation and manipulate the phenomena to produce an ameliorated result. The abstract traditions instead reject the imperfect world and instead seek to correct the dissonance on the ideal plane, which can then cascade into phenomenal reality. The applied traditions accept the phenomenal world and posit “imperfect” principles that stand behind it. Both of these approaches are an outgrowth of traditional Chinese culture. Robin McNeal argued in *Conquer and Govern*, that scholarship of early China must widen its curriculum to view Military Texts and theories rightfully as a part of the “Master’s Traditions” and recognized as being a part of the intellectual landscape of the Warring States Period on equal footing with Confucianism, Daoism, and Mohism. Additionally, I would argue the Medical School should be accorded the same status, and that the Military and Medicals Traditions should rightfully be examined as schools of applied philosophy and not just rubrics of technical application.

The Tenets of Application

If we accept the Military and Medical Traditions as both being applied philosophy, they then must naturally share a structure of argumentation and discourse. Within these traditions a six-part discourse structure is evident; observation, supposition, abstraction to principle, manipulation of principle, application, and evaluation of result. *Questions and Replies Between Tang Taizong and Li Weigong* has an example of this discourse structure:

Tang Taizong said: “What was Wu Chi’s strategy like?”

Li Qing said: “Permit me to speak about the general points. Marquis Wu of Wei asked Wu Chi about the strategy to be employed when two armies confront each other. Wu Chi said: ‘Have some of your low-ranking courageous soldiers go forward and attack. When the fronts first clash, have them flee. When they flee, do not punish them, but observe if the enemy advances to take the bait. If they sit as one and arise as one, and do not pursue your fleeing troops, the enemy has good strategists. If all their troops pursue the fleeing forces, some advancing, some halting, in disorder fashion, the enemy is not talented. Attack them without hesitation.’” (Sawyer 2007)

The text then goes on to discuss this strategy as being orthodox or unorthodox, when to apply it, and how to evaluate it. In this quotation, we can see the six-part structure as finding observation in the use of the forces who immediately retreat to bring out a response. Then the actions of the enemy create a *supposition* of the enemy’s organization. The supposition creates an *abstraction to principle* of the state of the enemy vis-à-vis the general’s troops. The principle is then *manipulated* into a choice of strategy. Finally, the strategy is *applied* and its result is *evaluated*.

In the Medical Tradition *The Yellow Thearch's Inner Canon Plain Questions Discourse on the Root of Disease Chapter 75* (Huangdi Neijing Suwen Ben Bing Lun 黃帝內經 素問 本病論) has:

The superior physician holds to the standing situation, then he reasons the disease cause by analogy, analyzing it through pondering deeply, then treats according to the changing conditions. When he inspects the upper part of the channel, he can infer the lower, He cannot hold rigidly to the expectations of the channels in basic theory. (Wu p. 468)

Herein the six part structure is again evidenced. The situation and diagnostic signs are *observed*. Then through his analysis by analogy he forms a *supposition* of the underlying state. This state is *abstracted to principle*, which allows treatment, however the principle must be *manipulated* so he can treat according to the changing conditions. The method is then *applied* and allows him to *evaluate* the result as he inspects the upper to infer the lower. The clinician is also exhorted to adapt to the realities of the situation rather than the abstract principles of theory. These two traditions share an underlying cognitive correlation, utilizing the same logical intellectual cascade as relevant to their structural argumentation to act as applied philosophy.

Space and Boundary

Related to the structural connection is a cognate appreciation of space and boundary within the Military and Medical Traditions. Space seems to be a constant parameter, however the appreciation of space and its import is one dimension of a cognitive structuring of a world view. Variant disciplines conceptualize space and its meaning differently, and may compete for an understanding or interpretation of observed actions. Confucianism relies on a ritual structure for space. Proper relationships must be recognized through proximity; through “inner” and “outer” spacings. Internal merit (zheng 正) allows one to share physical and socio-cognitive space. Attention to ritual allows the preservation of boundary and entrance or exit of the space in question, maintaining it as a manifestation of the abstract ethos of primordial correctness that the Confucian seeks to bring into the world. Therefore the *Confucian Book of Rites* (Liji 禮記) has:

Where any of the spirits of the hills and rivers had been unattended to, it was held to be an act of irreverence, and the irreverent ruler was deprived of a part of his territory. Where there had been neglect of the proper order in the observances of the ancestral temple, it was held to show a want of filial piety and the rank of the unfilial ruler was reduced. Where any ceremony had been altered, or any instrument of music changed, it was held to be an instance of disobedience, and the disobedient ruler was banished. Where the statutory measures and the (fashion of) clothes had been changed, it was held to be rebellion, and the rebellious ruler was taken off. The ruler who had done good service for the people, and shown them an example of virtue, received an addition to his territory and rank. (Book of Rites Royal Regulations Liji Wang Zhi 禮記王制 <http://ctext.org/liji/wang-zhi>)

Although Daoism has a radically different philosophical view of the world, it shares the structure of an abstract approach that Confucianism has, and similarly ritualizes space. Daoist appreciation of space and boundary is

best seen in the ritual structure required to interact with the Daoist Gods. In addition to proper respect for the gods being expressed in ritual form, the shrines of the gods may only be cleaned at certain times with specific rituals. Further, those unfit to approach the gods, such as menstruating women, must not violate the boundary surrounding the god's space, and priests may need to perform ritual step patterns to enter the proper "space" to commune with the gods or draw their power to this realm. The methods vary from Confucianism but the deep structure of ritual bounding of space is the same.

Turning to the Military Tradition, the attention to space and boundary is *NOT* ritually constructed. Landscape or terrain (Di 地) holds a cognitive dimension of both the physical and the philosophical. Denoting a physical set of characteristics, the landscape carries an implication of the potential of integration between the world and human action to bring a desired result. Recognizing the landscape and its implication is one of the skills of the general. Thus the space is defined as physical landscape but also as cognitive mindscape which informs the general of potentials for successful action IF he can act in accord with static unchangeable parameters, in concert with the strands and textures of the attendant factors that cross the boundary of the space at hand (including strategy, manpower, conditioning, weaponry, etc.) Ritual behavior in accord to the landscape does not manifest victory, nor delimit the impact of the other attendant factors. Herein the Military aspect of space and boundary varies greatly from the Confucian, or Daoist. One expression of this aspect of landscape can be seen in *The Art of War* (Sunzi Bingfa 孙子兵法) as:

The natural formation of the country is the soldier's best ally; but a power of estimating the adversary, of controlling the forces of victory, and of shrewdly calculating difficulties, dangers and distances, constitutes the test of a great general. He who knows these things, and in fighting puts his knowledge into practice, will win his battles. He who knows them not, nor practices them, will surely be defeated. (Sunzi Bing Fa Terrain Di Xiang Section 3 孙子兵法地象第三 <http://ctext.org/art-of-war/terrain>)

In the Medical Tradition space and boundary are also not ritual constructs. The body is viewed as an accumulation of qi (氣) which enjoys variant density. The core of the body has a greater density of qi which is termed essence (jing 精). Between the lighter and heavier densities of the substrate forces in the body there are a number of spaces or levels which can be invaded by deleterious forces from the environment or from internal generation. The body is therefore a landscape of sorts which is vertically organized as concentric spaces as opposed to the topographical space model. The term land (di 地) is not used in medicine but "body kingdom" (shen guo 身國) is, implying a similar concept. Topographical or topological markers are utilized to identify "caves" (xue 穴) in the vertically oriented space model of the body landscape which can be stimulated with miniature "spears" (zhen 針) to rid the affected depth space of its noxious influence. The "caves" are translated as "points," while the "spears" are translated as "needles" for acupuncture. From an intellectual standpoint, the cognitive model mirrors the Military Tradition. The Medical Tradition observes the body as a landscape and uses specific diagnostic parameters to determine which landscape is evidencing itself through the physical parameters of the body. Signs such as sweating, the presence of boils, sores, or dark blood vessels on

the skin, discharge, the coating, color or shape of the tongue, and the pulse signature, all serve as indicators of the disturbance to the system and correlate into a pattern (zheng 證). Then the clinician must recognize the landscape and understand the potential to leverage change through the cognitive construct of a mindscape which comports the meaning and implication of the presentation. Success, measured as recovery from disease, is the penultimate measure of the veracity of the understanding of the situation. Ritual behavior is not considered an effective technique to meter the relationship of space and boundary in the Medical Tradition. Thus, the conception of space and boundary in the Medical and Military Traditions can be seen as cognate, growing from their shared relationship of being an applied philosophy within the Chinese context.

Cognate Vocabulary

Classical Chinese had a smaller vocabulary than modern Chinese so a given word would often be utilized across disciplines. Although there are variations to the interpretation of a given word in context, there is cognate relationship that exists as words are used to shape and express the paradigm of a discipline. In the Military and Medical Traditions, cognate vocabulary reveals deep structural relationships. There are many examples, but herein we will explore six terms that are used a juxtaposed dyads in both Military and Medical Traditions ; 虛 xu empty, 實 shi substantial, 形 xing form, 勢 shi potency, 奇 qi unorthodox, and 正 zheng orthodox. Xu and Shi are the first pair. In Military texts, they come to represent manifestations of the troops in regards to landscape denoting a strength correlated to position. In *The Art of War*, the general is advised to strike at the empty and avoid the substantial.

In Medical texts, Xu and Shi represent oppositional states of qi, which manifest at variant depths in the body. *The Yellow Thearch's Inner Canon* (Huangdi Neijing 黃帝內經) advises the clinician to: *fill the empty, and drain the substantial* (Wu 2002). *The Yellow Thearch's 81 Difficulties* (Huangdi Bashiyi Nanjing 黃帝八十一難經) also has: *If empty fill the mother phase. If substantial, drain the child phase* (*The Yellow Thearch's 81 Difficulties Section 69* Huangdi Bashiyi Nanjing 黃帝八十一難經 六十九難 <https://ctext.org/nan-jing>). Here the pairs are used in the same manner as the Military tradition, unlike the use of these terms in abstract approaches. For example in Daoism, Xu insubstantial is often read as “clear” and can indicate a state of elevated consciousness, radically different than the use described above.

The next pair is Xing and Shi. In Military texts, Xing refers to the form of the troops in accord with the landscape and the opposing troops. Shi refers to the potency or potential of the combination of the landscape with the form of the troops with regards to the enemy. In the Medical Tradition, these terms share a similar interpretation. Xing relates to the form of an “organ” termed a “storehouse” (zang 臟) or a “depot” (fu 腑). The form of the organ relates to its ability to maintain its functionality or homeostasis as influenced by internal as well as external parameters that alter the vertically concentric landscape of the body. Shi indicates a potency of the organ to fulfill its function from inside to outside of the body. The Shi potency is an outgrowth of the Xing

or form of the organ. The concepts are direct cognates between the two traditions. It is of note, that the Medical Tradition's understanding of these terms implies a decidedly non-anatomical reading of the terms for organs, but rather accords them to the landscape model more.

The last pair is unorthodox (qi 奇) and orthodox (zheng 正). While in the Confucian tradition orthodox (zheng 正) is often juxtaposed with heterodox (xie 邪) or evil (e 恶), the Military Tradition uses unorthodox (qi 奇) and orthodox (zheng 正) as oppositional poles. The Medical Tradition sits somewhere between the Confucian and Military Traditions. Regarding disease causation factors and body processes, the Medical Tradition uses the terms orthodox (zheng 正) juxtaposed with heterodox (xie 邪). However, when regarding aspects of the structures of the body, such as the organs or meridians, the Medical Tradition uses the terms orthodox (zheng 正) and unorthodox (qi 奇). This variation in terminology reflects the landscape model as applied to the "body kingdom," as opposed to a Confucian bureaucratic model, which was employed to denote the roles of the organs vis-à-vis each other.

The interrelationships of the organs and their spheres of influence are represented in Confucian bureaucratic terminology, naming the organs variously and emperor, minister, envoy, etc. In this sense, the Medical Tradition anthropomorphizes the organs and accepts some elements of abstract philosophy thereby judging the organs for their failings to attend to their roles. However, in the landscape topology of the structures of the body, the body is accepted for its intrinsic structures and then principles are derived from it. This aspect of the Medical Tradition uses the cognate terminology as the Military Tradition thereby using the terms zheng for regular, orthodox structures that have a full complement of analogous structures, while qi denotes an irregular, or unorthodox structure, which does not have all the categorical structures. Most importantly, in the zheng versus xie dichotomy there is an intrinsic hierarchy of value, akin to Confucianism. However, in the zheng versus qi dichotomy there is no variance of value only a variance in the manifestation of the structure, which then implies a differential in the implication of the utilization of the two types. This approach is in keeping with the Military Tradition's use of those terms.

Strategy and Approach

In both the Medical and Military Traditions strategy (fa 法) is of central importance. In the abstract as well as the applied philosophical traditions, Fa is used as a term to denote a principle of implementation. However, in the abstract philosophies, the Fa is an inviolate standard that serves as a measure of the adherence of fallible humanity to ideal principle. In the applied philosophies, Fa represents a strategy or approach, which is based on a perception of the intervening factors that shape the currently manifest situation. The applied Fa strategy must be metered by the reality of the current case, and needs to be adjusted to produce the maximum result. Therefore, it is not the phenomenal world of ethically frail humans who must yield to the Fa, but rather the Fa that must yield to the phenomenal world.

Conclusion

The Military and Medical Traditions should be considered as schools of applied philosophy. Growing out of the ancient Master's Tradition of China, they have evolved into major intellectual edifices of the traditional world. In part due to their applied philosophical nature, in part due to their shared cultural milieu, these two traditions have developed an analogous cognitive framework. They share a core six-part discourse approach, as well as central cognate vocabulary. These correlations point to a shared rubric that underlies these apparently disparate disciplines. Further cross-examination of these traditions can yield a deeper understanding of the internal intellectual constructions that comprise them both.

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