



CHINESE & ASIAN MEDICINE

Minding the Gap: The Case for an Evolved View of the Fire Element (Pt. 1)

A CASE FOR REIMAGINING THE TRIPLE BURNER AND REORGANIZING THE ORGAN AFFILIATIONS OF THE FIRE ELEMENT

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- I have found through my clinical practice, and demonstrate through the content of the curriculum that I developed on manual meridian therapy, that the triple warmer is analogous to areas of brown adipose tissue (BAT), also called “brown fat.”
- The diverse placement of BAT throughout the body suggests the metabolic and neuroendocrine effects that BAT and the triple warmer have on the ANS are quite relevant to homeostasis and autonomic regulation.

When advised to “mind the gap” while waiting for an arriving train at the train station, it is common to take a step back and observe the space in between the platform and the train. From this platform, waiting to be transported to the next destination, we have only the information that we have been given regarding our current experience, often taking for granted that this information is truth.

This trust is granted because there is no knowledge of any landscape other than what is within the realm of our current awareness. The observer can only live the experience that has been constructed for them to appreciate. While at this platform between the present and the future, there exists an opportunity to step back, mind the gap and think about how to approach our destination.

The Wrong Information?

The information that the West has been given regarding the organ pairs of the fire element and

assigned *yin* and *yang* polarities has never resonated with me through years of study of the human body. I have reasoned certain truths that have proven to be fact through research of anatomy and physiology, as well as observations within my clinical practice of visceral and neural manual therapy.

Physically, the pericardium is the tissue system that protects the heart and provides a support for this precious organ through suspension of the heart within the thoracic cavity. These are *yang* qualities, and the heart is, naturally, the pericardium's *yin* pair.

Moreover, the small intestine, as a very *yin* organ, receives the nutrients that we take in through the process of digestion, and is protected and supported by the tissues of the greater omentum, the *yang* lower burner of the triple warmer.¹

Victor Frankl, in his 1946 book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, said that "between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

The Triple Warmer and Brown Adipose Tissue: One in the Same?

I have found through my clinical practice, and demonstrate through the content of the curriculum that I developed on manual meridian therapy, that the triple warmer is analogous to areas of brown adipose tissue (BAT), also called "brown fat." This thermogenic substance is found throughout the body.

The three primary areas of BAT within adult humans are the locations of the main tissue complex of the triple warmer: the greater omentum, as the lower burner; the lesser omentum, being the middle burner; and the thoracic inlet, or supraclavicular area, which serves as the upper burner.

The greater omentum is a protective layer of lymph and BAT that overlays the small intestine. This organ can create adhesion to wall off infection, and clear the area of bacteria and fungal imbalance through acting as part of the immune system.² The Greek physician Galen (128-199 AD), reasoned that the role of the greater omentum was to warm the intestines, as he observed that a gladiator who had an omental resection after a stab injury was unable to feel warm thereafter, always experiencing a sense of cold.³

Other areas of BAT in the human body include: the upper thoracic area, between the shoulders, where the triple warmer prime meridian happens to be located; as well as the area surrounding the kidneys. The area in between the shoulders has much more BAT in infancy, due to the inability of infants to contract their muscles, or shiver, to keep warm.

During times of cold, BAT is activated to create warmth in the body through thermogenesis. And still there are many other minor areas throughout the body where BAT is concentrated.

Perivascular visceral BAT has been found surrounding the aorta, common carotid artery, brachiocephalic artery, epicardial coronary artery and veins, internal mammary artery, intercostal arteries and veins, and within the pericardial mediastinal fat.⁴ These locations give some credence to why classical Asian medical theory may have classified the triple warmer as the *yang* pair to the pericardium.

Other locations of visceral BAT in the body include the periviscus areas of the heart, trachea and major bronchi of the lung hilum, as well as the esophagus, and transverse mesocolon. BAT also

surrounds the pancreas, kidneys, adrenals, liver, and the hilum of the spleen.⁴

Subcutaneous diffuse BAT has been found between the anterior neck muscles, such as the sternocleidomastoid, within the supraclavicular fossa; as well as the subclavian area, the axilla, anterior abdominal wall, and inguinal fossa.⁴

As you can see by the diverse placement of BAT throughout the body - much of which corresponds with the primary and tertiary path of the vagus nerve, as well as the primary meridian and divergent channels of the triple warmer, the metabolic and neuroendocrine effects that BAT and the triple warmer have on the ANS are quite relevant to homeostasis and autonomic regulation.

Editor's Note: Pt. 2 of this article is scheduled to run in the September issue.

References

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