

Ancient Philosophical Correspondences Relating to Biofield

Chinese



Qi (PinYin transliteration, 1979+) **Ch'i** (Wade-Giles transliteration, prior to 1979)
Pronounced "chee" (Lower part of pictogram = fire; upper = steam from cooking rice)

Cosmological

Vital stuff of all things, swings through phases (tides) of yin and yang [3]

Personal

Prior to the Han Dynasty: 'breath', animating fluid [1]

Hylozoistic vapors, the activating fluid, vital energizing fluid [3]

The life force, breath, energy [2]

Emits from the hands, used in healing (wei-qi)

Vital energy [5] Vital energy, life force {6}

Egyptian



Ankh Hieroglyph for 'Life Force'

Cosmological

Shown being handed from the rays of the Sun to Pharaohs and others

Personal

Pottery representations of the ankh carried in hands of healing priest/healers

Pictograms show life force emanating from hands and flows between hands

Greek



Pneuma Spirit, wind, breath, (derives from pneo, meaning breathing) [2]

Cosmological

Cosmos composed of pneuma; rhythmical variations in its tonus [3]

Personal

Vital force in man (Stoic, Epicurean), Breath of life [1]

Ether, corporeal vital energy [4] Breath, life, energy [5]

Hindu



Cosmological

Breath of life that fills the universe; ebbs; flows in cosmological tides [1]

Life force that suffices the universe [5] Transcendental source of life [7]

Personal

Life, breath of life [7] Breath as the essential life force, coincident with but not the same as the air breath, moves with the air breath

Energizes the physical body [5] Breath of life [6] Essential life force [2]

References

[1] Pan Books Dictionary of Philosophy

[2] Chambers 21st Century Dictionary

[3] Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy

[4] Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy

[5] Optima Dictionary of Mind and Spirit

[6] Shambhala Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion

[7] Unwin Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga



A few equivalents for 'Biofield'

<i>Ankh</i>	Ancient Egypt
<i>Animal Magnetism</i>	Mesmer
<i>Arunquiltha</i>	Aborigine (Aus.)
<i>Bioenergy</i>	US/Europe
<i>Biomagnetism</i>	US/Europe
<i>Dunamis</i>	Ancient Middle East
<i>Gana</i>	South American
<i>Ki</i>	Japan
<i>Life Force</i>	General Usage
<i>Mana e</i>	Polynesia
<i>M'gbe</i>	Hiru Pygmy
<i>Mulungu</i>	Ghana
<i>Mumia</i>	Paracelsus
<i>Ntoro</i>	Ashanti
<i>Ntu</i>	Bantu
<i>Okí</i>	Huron
<i>Orenda</i>	Iroquois
<i>Pneuma</i>	Ancient Greece
<i>Prana</i>	India
<i>Qi (ch'i)</i>	China
<i>Subtle Energy</i>	US/Europe
<i>Síla</i>	Inuit
<i>Tane</i>	Hawaii

**Sensations noted when sensing
the biofield between the palms**

<i>"A pulling feeling"</i>	<i>"It prickles"</i>
<i>"Feels like magnetism"</i>	<i>"A cushion"</i>
<i>"There is something stretchy"</i>	<i>"A static-like feeling"</i>
<i>"I feel tingles"</i>	<i>"It feels like electricity"</i>
<i>"Outward pressure"</i>	<i>"Rubbery feeling"</i>
<i>"A spongy feeling"</i>	<i>"Something sticky"</i>
<i>"It's like elastic strings"</i>	<i>"Heat"</i>
<i>"Something pushing"</i>	<i>"Coolness"</i>

Antecedents to Current Practice

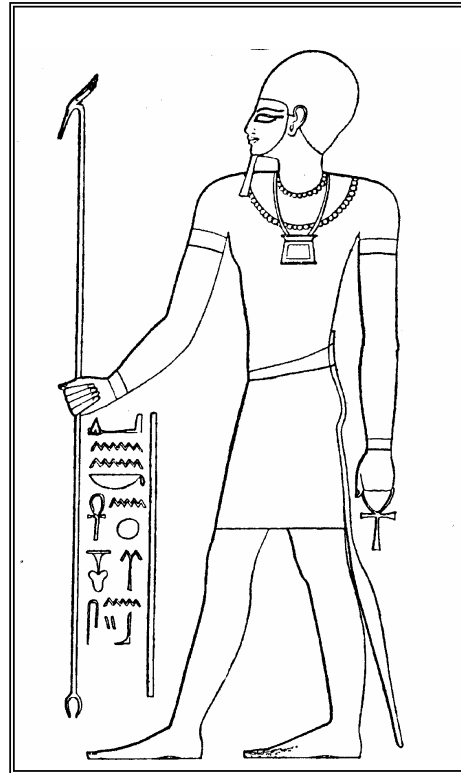
The ability of certain people to heal through proximate or direct touch using the biofield has been known and accepted since the earliest of times. The earliest Eastern term identifying the biofield, “Qi”¹ dates from ca 2500 BC and is still in use to describe aspects of the biofield. The oldest known Western term for the biofield,  transliterated as “Life Force” and pronounced *Ankh*, dates back to at least 2900 BC. There is extensive pictorial evidence showing that therapeutic application of the biofield through proximate touch was the essential activity in the Asclepiums (early Greek “incubation” chambers) and the Per Ankhs  (Houses of the Life Force)ⁱ that were associated with many Egyptian temples.





*Hieroglyph
representing
The Life Force*



*Hieroglyph representing
House of the Life Force*

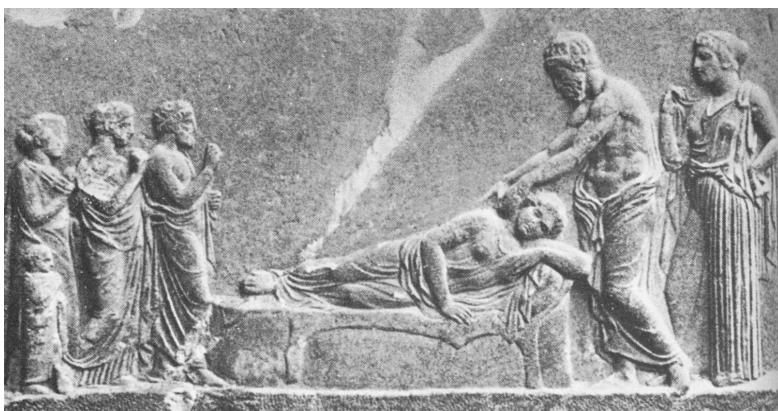


The Egyptian Healer, Imhotep, ca 2700 BC

Imhotep, Grand Vizier to King Zoser and the architect of the step pyramid, was revered as the greatest of all healers. So much so that centuries after his death he was elevated to status of a demi-god. Often mistakenly said to be a physician, the title *physician* was not used with his name while he was alive. Little is known of how he healed, however images that portray him as a healer show him grasping the loop of an  in the manner of Osiris, the Egyptian God of medicine, and the priest-healers. This would appear to signify that he held the power to heal (*the life force*) in his hands. (Physicians were never shown holding an .) The healing temples dedicated to him used the same procedures as used in the Greek Asclepiums.ⁱⁱ

¹ qi is the pinyin (current) transliteration, ch'i is the older Wade-Giles transliteration, they are pronounced the same: *chee*

Biofield Therapeutics in the Greek Asclepieia (Healing Temples) 400 BC — 600 AD



Tablet of Asclepius healing. 4th or 5th century BC.
From the Asclepieion at Piraeus, Museum of Piraeus

Tablet ca 4th century BC. From
the Asclepieion of Amphiaraus
In the Museum of Athens



Sites of the Asclepieia

There is evidence of more than 367 Asclepieia. Not all were in Greece – others were in Italy, France, England, Spain, Egypt, Cyprus, Sicily, Judea, Samaria and Africa.

Historians differ as to the procedures used in the incubation (sleep) chambers. Sigerst states the tablets are depictions of “*Asclepius healing*.”ⁱⁱⁱ Ligorous identifies the upper tablet as “*manipulation of the spine*,”^{iv} the British Museum says it is “*a primitive form of chiropractic adjustment*” however manipulation is not possible the way the procedure is depicted. Ligorous identifies the lower tablet as a “*venesection*,” but no knife or catch basin is present. These interpretations are unlikely as the records indicate that few Asclepieia had physicians in attendance and those held subordinate positions.^v The procedures shown are identical to those used by present day ‘energy healers’ and 100 years ago, the ‘animal magnetizers.’

Alternative Medicine at the Asclepieia

Healing through proximate touch, prayer and ritual were the central activities in the Asclepiums. However, diet, fasting, imagery, cleansing baths, mineral water, herbs, incense, the practice of cheerfulness, massage, and physiotherapy were used as well. The Asclepieia were Alternative Medicine spas with facilities for extended stays, much like today’s health spas, operating alongside the conventional Greco-Roman medical practitioners. Apparently it was a reasonably friendly association as information was often exchanged between the healers in the Asclepieia and conventional physicians. According to Pliny, (*Natural History*, 29.2) Hippocrates went to the Asclepieion at Cos to learn what they knew of herbs.^{vi} The fact that the temples existed for over a thousand years attests to the effectiveness of their methods.

Early Scientific Investigations of Biofield Therapeutics

Prior to the 18th century no attempt was made (in the West) to understand the process as a natural one, as all healing through proximate touch was attributed to magic, pagan influences, or to God acting in concert with or through the healer. Early records show that investigations of healers were by one or another ecclesiastical authority, usually to determine whether the healer was a witch or possessed powers of the devil. When secular authorities did investigate these healers, it was for impersonating royalty, as it was understood that God had given certain kings and queens the power to heal through touch.

Valentine Greatrakes

The earliest recorded medical investigations of the process began in August 1665 when Dr. Thomas Sydenham and other noted physicians investigated and confirmed the ability of Valentine Greatrakes, the famous 'Irish Stroaker,' to eliminate pain, cure the King's evil (scrofula), reduce other swellings and alleviate a wide range of other disorders by lightly stroking his hands either on, or proximate to, the physical body. The following year, the eminent physicist and chemist Sir Robert Boyle (Boyle's Law) observed Greatrakes' healings on some sixty occasions and gave him a testimonial.^{vii} Boyle postulated that, "*perhaps some salubrious streams or spirits*" were induced from Greatrakes' hands into the patient's body. To investigate his postulation, Boyle experimented with the stroking himself. Using Greatrakes' glove turned inside out as a vehicle for the supposed effusions, he was successful in eliminating pain on at least one occasion.^{viii}



Valentine Greatrakes, a deeply religious man, did not consider that his 'gift' was a process of nature; he described his ability to heal as, "**Greatrakes strokes, God heals**".



Franz Anton Mesmer

The first to clearly place the biofield in physics as well as to associate it with electromagnetism was Franz Anton Mesmer, a Viennese physician who established a practice in Paris, France. In 1766, Mesmer postulated that a “fluidium” (field) – which he termed “animal magnetism” differentiating it from “metal magnetism” – existed as a force of nature subject to the laws of physics. His aphorisms associating animal magnetism with influences from the stars were then and now considered ludicrous; however, many of his observations about the nature and characteristics of the biofield were valid.

Most importantly, he unequivocally established that the phenomenon was a natural one, rather than one bestowed by God on select individuals, when he and others successfully taught large groups of ordinary people in the therapeutic procedures he devised.

Class notes from his trainings referred to polarities within the biofield. “*You should likewise oppose one pole to the other, that is to say, if you touch the head, the heart, the stomach, &c. with the right hand you must oppose the left to the hind part. You may easily form the poles by opposing one hand to the other.*”^{ix} Polarities were also evident in the downward passes in front of the body producing “magnetic sleep” as the light trance state was then called, and the upward (opposite) passes that terminated the trance.



Mesmer's work and flamboyant manner infuriated most of the French medical establishment as it threatened their dominant paradigm. Eventually the King's Minister appointed a commission headed by the American scientist Benjamin Franklin to investigate Mesmer's medical claims. The

commission reported they could find no evidence of the fluidium. Failing to understand the medical and psychological worth of the cathartic emotional releases (referred to as 'convulsions') that frequently ensued during Mesmer's process, the committee declined to comment on any medical value of his work, except to offer the opinion that these events could easily be produced by "imagination." The unfounded notion that it is only an effect of imagination – mind affecting matter – or belief in the process, continues to this day in medical circles and is the major reason why there has been little serious investigation of the biofield as a discrete force in physics.

The spread of Mesmerism

Mesmer's work spread rapidly throughout Europe and later in America. By the late 1830's New England had "*hundreds of animal magnetizers*"^x including many who performed "mesmeric anesthesia" for dentists, who had not yet the benefits of chemical anesthesia. About this time the Scotsman, James Easdaile, published "*The Second half-yearly report of the Calcutta Mesmeric Hospital*" detailing his use of Mesmeric anesthesia for major surgical procedures in his hospital. Aside from the complete lack of pain during amputations, removal of scrotal tumors, etc., what was most remarkable was that mortality dropped to 5% from the 50% that was the norm at other surgeries.^{xi} Mesmeric anesthesia was used for surgery in Boston, Buffalo, St. Louis, and Charleston in the US. (In 1989 I personally witnessed a thyroidectomy at the Shanghai Medical Hospital^{xii} where the only anesthesia was the qi from the qi kung master's hands.)

Baron Karl von Reichenbach

About 1850, Karl, Baron von Reichenbach, discoverer of paraffin (1830) and creosote (1833) confirmed polarities in animal magnetism (which he renamed 'odic force') and established its velocity through various substances; the velocity through copper was determined to be about four meters per second.^{xiii}

Doctor John Kearsley Mitchell

From 1847 to 1852, John Kearsley Mitchell, then Professor Emeritus at Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia, conducted a lengthy series of carefully blinded experiments that firmly placed the biofield in physics.^{xiv} Mitchell demonstrated that the strength of the biofield decreased exponentially as the practitioner's hands were moved farther from the patient's body (p. 267 item 14) this is consistent with changes in field strength between components in electrostatic (capacitive) circuits when separated. He confirmed that stroking from the pain site out the extremities (see Greatrakes)

drew out pain (pp 182-3), that downward passes induced mesmeric sleep and upward passes ended the state (p 165). He described the process as 'induction,' analogous to electromagnetic induction (pp .150-151). "*The mesmeric influence is the effect of what the natural philosophers call induction*². As to whether healing was by effort of will – which was a subject of much debate – he concluded, *The will of the operator acts solely on himself; his altered system reacts by proximity on the subject of the experiment, by an unexplained power, analogous to the equally inexplicable induction of the mechanics and the presence of the chemist.*³" (p. 270 item 26). His conclusion echoes the ancient Chinese dictum, "*Qi is the horse, and mind is the rider*" which clearly implies that the biofield is not will, but may be influenced by effort of will. Mitchell confirmed Mesmer's statement that the process was useful with "*affections of a nervous (emotional) character*" (p.271 No. 20).

S. A. Weltmer

By the end of the century, medical mesmerism had spread from coast to coast. For a time the practitioners who had called themselves "Professors of Animal Magnetism" changed the appellation to "Doctors of Magnetism", or "D.M."s to dissociate them selves from the "M.D."s. The most influential school of magnetic healing in the United States was in Nevada, Missouri. Begun ca 1892 as the American School for Magnetic Healing, it became the Weltmer Institute for Suggestive Healing following a Supreme Court decision upholding the Institute's right to postal service previously denied by the local postmaster.



² Elsewhere he describes induction as "*when an excited body (i.e., electrostatic body) without transmission of any known fluid in either direction, disturbs the electrical repose of adjacent bodies.*"

³ "*Presence of the chemist*" refers to the action of a catalyst in a chemical solution.

The Institute's principal text, *The Practice of Suggestive Therapeutics*^{xv}, specifies polarities of the hands and describes the slow passage of the effect; *"The hand with which he "sends" the current is called the "positive" hand and one with which he "receives" the current back again from the patient's body is the "negative" hand. ... The operator will usually feel that at first the maneffluvial current⁴ does not fully penetrate the patient's body, reaching from one hand to the other, but after a greater or less length of time he will feel the complete penetration has been affected. When this occurs the patient often speaks of feeling a heated zone through his body between the operator's hands, he will often experience relief from the painful symptoms simultaneously with the apparent establishment of the "circuit."* (p. 412). *In practice the hands are usually placed with the painful region between them, if possible* (p. 330). *The positive hand is usually placed higher on the body, and when over the spine, at a somewhat higher location than the position of the negative hand on the front of the body* (p. 331).

"Mesmeromania" and the demise of Animal Magnetism

The Weltmer Institute ceased operating in 1926. (In a curious twist of fate, the building that housed the Institute is now a mortuary.) Medical mesmerism or 'magnetic healing' as it was known, became such a threat to allopathic medicine that a major effort was mounted to discredit it. The term: *"Mesmeromania: the insane devotion to mesmerism,"* was a standard medical term until the 1974 edition of Dorland's Medical Dictionary. (Fortunately, DSM-V does not continue the classification with the pejorative: '*Energymania*' although the assumption that we who believe are mildly delusional persists among many.) From then on, interest in medical mesmerism waned under the continuing onslaught of medical disapproval and the legal disenfranchisement of alternative medical practitioners. When it rose again it had lost its identity and its association with physics and acquired Eastern, Theosophical connotations. 'Medical mesmerism' and 'animal magnetism' were replaced by 'charkas' and 'energy' and the emphasis on healing shifted from the specific towards the supportive. The importance of specific hand placements for specific disorders as a therapeutic essential was superseded by a single imperative – the intention to heal. The importance of learning how the process worked in order to give better treatments reverted to a belief that some 'cosmic power' worked through the healer. In a reversal of the usual progress of science, physics gave way to superstition and the ship of science moved backwards, awash in such magical thinking as: *"I just put my hands on their body and the energy knows where to go and what to do"* – Hardly the stuff of science.

⁴ Maneffluvial current. Synonym for "magnetism", "odic force", "animal or human electricity". (p 327-328).

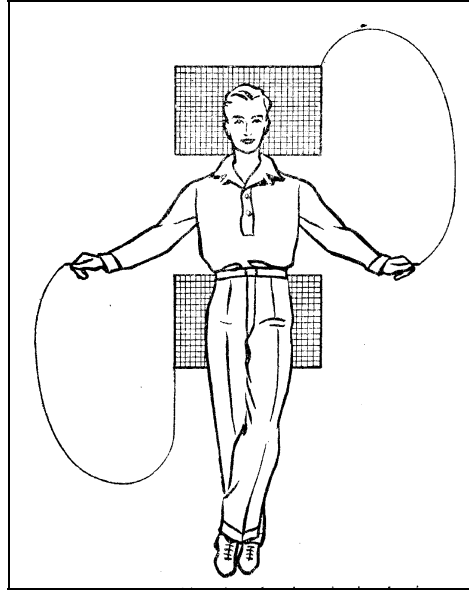
L. E. Eeman

But physics was not entirely lost. In 1947 L. E. Eeman showed the polarity through the arms and through the spine with his as 'Eeman screens' which produce a light mesmeric state trance state.^{xvi} In so doing he unknowingly reaffirmed Reichenbach's discovery that the qi traveled through copper.

The Eeman Relaxation Circuit

The screens were not connected behind the body; the flow of qi from the right hand entered the base of the spine, moved upward and exited at the head, resulted in relaxation and light trance.

Reversing the connections resulted in tension and wakefulness, instead of relaxation



ⁱ Paul Ghalioungui, *The House of Life Per Ankh; Magic and Medical Science in Ancient Egypt*, B. M. Israël, Amstersam, 1973

ⁱⁱ Jamison Hurry, *Imhotep, the Egyptian God of Medicine*, Oxford, 1926

ⁱⁱⁱ Henry Sigerst, *A History of Medicine: Early Greek, Hindu, and Persian Medicine*, Oxford, 1961

^{iv} Kleanthes Ligeros, *How Ancient Healing Governs Modern Therapeutics*, Putnam, 1937

^v Alice Walton, *Asklepios: The Cult of the Greek God of Medicine*, Cornell, Ithaca, 1894

^{vi} James Longrigg, *Greek Medicine from the Heroic to the Hellenistic Age*, London, Duckworth, 1998

^{vii} Flora Masson, *Robert Boyle; A biography*, Constable, London, 1914, p.265.

^{viii} Caoimhghin S. Breathnach, "Robert Boyle's approach to the ministrations of Valentine Greatrakes" *History of Psychiatry* 1999 p. 92

^{ix} M. Caillet de Veauore, *Mesmer's Aphorisms and Instructions*, London, 1785, p5

^x S. Weir Mitchell, *Five Essays by John Kearsley Mitchell, M. D.*, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippencott, p 151

^{xi} *The Second Half-yearly Report from the Caluctta Mesmeric Hospital*, reprinted in the *Zoist*, January 1850, London

^{xii} Lin Houshen, *A Clinical and Laboratory Study of the Effect of Qigong Anaesthesia on Thyroidectomy*, Proceedings of the First World Conference for Academic Exchange of Medical Qigong, Beijing, 1988, pp. 84-85

^{xiii} Karl von Reichenbach, *Psycho-Physiological Researches on the Dynamics of Magnetism, Electricity, Heat, Light, Crystallization and Chemism, in Their Relation to the Vital Force*, New York, Clinton-Hall 1851

^{xiv} *Animal Magnetism* in, *Five Essays by John Kearsley Mitchell, M. D.*, ed. S. Weir Mitchell, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippencott, pp. 143-274

^{xv} E. Weltmer, *The Practice of Suggestive Therapeutics. The Weltmer Institute of Suggestive Therapeutics Company, Nevada, MO. 1913*

^{xvi} L. E. Eeman, *Cooperative Healing*, London, Fredric Muller, 1947.