



Review Article

STUDY ON THE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN *CHAKRA* SYSTEM AND AYURVEDIC MEDICINE

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ABSTRACT

When we mention about “*Chakra, Nadis, or Channels*”, many of us, especially scholars may think that they are related to the theory of Ayurvedic medicine. In fact, they are all basic concepts of *Yoga*. Both Ayurveda and *Yoga* are also important branches of the traditional Indian medicine but the objectives of both of them are different. The former is a medical science to promote physical well-being. The later is a religious system to target on spiritual growth, enlightenment and liberation. Therefore, this paper aims to provide a clear explanation on correlations between *Chakra* System and Ayurvedic medicine. Firstly, the relationship between *Chakra* system versus Ayurvedic medicine is argued based on a direct discourse on the source of *Chakra* System. Next, based on indirect discourse on the 2 major works in Ayurvedic medicine, there is no elaboration on the *Chakra* System. Hence, we can further prove and conclude that *Chakra* System is not a concept of Ayurvedic medicine where both of them are not related to each other. Finally, we urge to other scholars to pay attention to this matter that do not mix up these two different concepts to continue implanting the incorrect concept to the rest of the professionals.

**KEYWORDS:** *Chakra, Nadi, Yoga, Ayurveda.*

INTRODUCTION

Scholars have discovered that there were many correlations between both the *Chakra* System and the Meridian Theory of Traditional Chinese Medicine (T.C.M).<sup>[1-4]</sup> Among these, the most popular ones were: “Acupuncture and the *Chakra* Energy System: Treating the Cause of Disease” by Dr. John R Cross,<sup>[3]</sup> and “Acupuncture and the *Chakras*” by Dr. Michael Greenwood dissertated in the journal of “Medical Acupuncture”.<sup>[4]</sup> They have defined what *Nadi* was according to the *Chakra* System, and introduced the correlations and functions of *Chakra* versus meridians and acupoints in T.C.M. They also talked about how to combine *Chakra* into the application of acupuncture to treat specific diseases.

Nevertheless, both Dr. John R Cross and Dr. Michael Greenwood may made the same mistake that they both classified ‘*Nadi*’ and ‘*Chakra*’, which were the basic concept of *Yoga*, as part of the Ayurvedic medicine. This mistake was broadly found in other dissertations and works of other scholars, as well. Encircling this problem, this paper will expand its dissertation on how modern scholars mixed up the concept of *Yoga* with Ayurvedic medicine by finding the keywords of ‘*Nadi*’ and ‘*Chakra*’ in the 2 major works in Ayurvedic medicine, i.e. “*Charaka Samhita*” and “*Susruta Samhita*”; if the finding is not positive, it

will go further for whether there are similar concepts of them.

***Chakra* System in Kundalini Yoga**

“*Chakra*” is one well-known term as “seven main *Chakras*” on central axis through the whole human body in alternative medicine. It is originated from “Wheel” in Sanskrit language of ancient Indian culture. Literally, it is considered as a concentration of physical, psychological and spiritual energy through the whole body for seven *Charkas* control different kinds of energy.<sup>[5]</sup>

According to the *Chakra* System, ‘*Chakra*’ is a spiritual central organ which absorbs ‘*Prana*’- energy that pervades the universe. The *Prana* energy is being distributed to each corners of the body through channels called ‘*Nadis*’. As a result, life actives can be maintained. In the Hindu philosophy, there have been various discussions on how ‘*Prana*’ energy circulates through *Nadis* in different fields such as Indian medicine, *Yoga* study even Indian martial arts etc. V.S. Apte provides fourteen different meanings for *Prana* including breath or respiration, the breath of life.<sup>[6]</sup> The *Prana* would turn into 5 forms of energy manifestation, in which it would circulated in 72,000 channels through days and nights.<sup>[7]</sup>

In this complicated system, the most important channels are the *Sushumna* (the central column of energy), the *Ida* (the left energy to the right), *Pingala* (the right energy to the left).<sup>[8]</sup> And the *Nadis* play a role in Yoga. As in many yogic practices like *Shatkarmas*, *Mudras* and *Pranayama*, they are intended to open up and unblock the *Nadis*. In *Yoga*, the purpose of practice is to guide *Prana* energy to make *Kundalini* snake to rise through the *Sushumna*. In this way, Yoga would lead human to feel *Moksha* or freedom.

The concept of *Chakra* was first discovered in the religion of Hinduism.<sup>[9]</sup> David Gordon White and Georg Feuerstein found that *Chakra* was mentioned in the supreme energy of *Kundalini shakti*, which refers 'circular, annular' in *Upanishads* among ancient literature of Hindu and Buddhist during the Middle Ages<sup>[10,11]</sup>, which suggests the *Chakra* contain four more kinds of essential energy in human body.

In the *Kundalini Yoga*, '*Kundalini*' carries the meaning of 'snake, serpent'. In the "*Upanishad*" – the largest series of philosophical encyclopedia in ancient India, there are many documentations on various esoteric cultivation methods. Among them, the one that elaborates the awakening of *Kundalini* as the core of cultivation is called "*Yoga-kundalini Upanishad*". In this *Upanishad*, it elaborates the positions of the 6 *Chakras*; each respectively at the perineum which is at the bottom of the spine – '*Muladhara-chakra*', at the genital area – '*Svadhishthana-chakra*', at the navel zone of the abdomen – '*Manipura-chakra*', at the chest – '*Anahata-chakra*', at the throat – '*Vishuddha-chakra*', in between the eye brows – '*Ajna-chakra*'. (Usually, *Chakra* is known for these 6 ones but there is also the 7<sup>th</sup> one called '*Sahasra-chakra*'. There are many different theories according to different sects and schools.) In *Kundalini Yoga*, the universal potential energy resting at the *Muladhara-chakra* located at the bottom of human spine, looks like a three-and-a-half coiled serpent, which is sleeping at all times for a normal human. However, if it is awakened through breathing, *Mantra* recitation and focusing of the mind, it will rise through the minute *Nadi* of *Sushumna*, and further develop the essential physical and mental centers – *Svadhishthana*, *Manipura*, *Anahata*, *Vishuddha* and *Ajna chakras*, sequentially; and finally, causes the practitioner to attain enlightenment.<sup>[12]</sup>

Therefore, we deduce that idea of *Chakra* System formed by these 7 *Chakras* and 3 *Nadis* is the basic concept of *Kundalini Yoga*, which aims to awaken the *Kundalini* across the *Chakras* and *Nadis* in order to bring about spiritual experiences and to materialize

liberation from *Samsara*. This objective is different from Ayurvedic medicine which targets on physical well-being. Moreover, we have discovered that regardless of the early-stage *Yoga Sutra* or later-stage *Yoga-kundalini Upanishad*, the purpose of *Chakra* System is to serve religious needs and not for sketching the structure of a human body as required in the medical science. In order to prove the validity of this view, we analyze the 2 main works of Ayurvedic medicine, i.e. "*Charaka Samhita*" & "*Susruta Samhita*", to find out that whether the terms '*Chakra*' and '*Nadi*' are stated in them, and whether similar concepts of them are documented.

### The Concept of *Chakra* and *Nadi* in Ayurvedic Medicine

First of all, after having examined Gabriel Van Loon's work – "*Charaka Samhita Handbook on Ayurveda*",<sup>[13]</sup> the term '*Chakra*' is not found and the term '*Nadi*' appears many times as '*Nadi-Sveda*', which is a kind of treatment method; and is different from the concept of 'channel' within the human body as we conventionally understand. Furthermore, followed by the examination on Kaviraj kunjalar Bhisagratna's work – "*An English translation for the Susruta Samhita*",<sup>[14]</sup> we discover that '*Nadi*' appears frequently as '*Nadi-Vrana*' and '*Nadi-Sveda*'. *Nadi-Vrana* is actually *Pilon Idal Sinus*, a kind of chronic disease, whereas, *Nadi-Sveda* is, exactly the same as elaborated in "*Charaka Samhita*", a kind of treatment method. This treatment method is to relieve the pain of patient by evaporating the solution of water mixing with herbs from a special equipment, and then, pointing the steam to the affected part of the patient's body through a pipe. Moreover, in "*Susruta Samhita*", the elaboration on '*Chakra*' as an energy vortice in the human body is not found. It usually appears as *Chakravakas* (Brahminy ducks), *Chakra-Taila* (a kind of medicated oil), *Chakradatta* (a text on Hindu medicine) and *Chakra-Marda* (*cassia tora*). The related elaboration on the *Chakra* System, formed by the 3 main *Nadis* and the 7 *Chakras*, is not documented in these 2 major works. In deduction, we can affirm that *Chakra* System is definitely not the concept that of the Ayurvedic medicine.

In Ayurvedic medicine, the relatively closest terms to the concept of '*Nadi*' are '*Dhamani*', '*Sira*', '*Hira*' and '*Snava*' – words which in later medical literature used to denote the 'ducts' of the body. These ducts are the channels for conveying the life (breaths), food, water, blood, muscles, fat, urine, stools, semen, and catamenial blood. Kutumbiah P upholds two principles while defining these terms. The first principle is to define them according to the perspective of modern anatomy. For instance, Sen Gwould likes to have *Siras* as veins, *Dhamanis* as

arteries. Seal Bis convinced that *Siras* are arteries and *Dhamanis* may stand for veins as well as nerves. Bishagratna K translates *Dhamanis* as arteries, nerves and ducts and *Siras* as blood-vessels, in general. The second principle is based on the historical and evolutionary aspect. The words *Sira*, *Dhamani* and *Hira* occur frequently in the *Atharva-Veda*, "Thou *Sira* of the lower part, remain, thou of the upper part, remain, so thou of the middle part, so thou small, so thou big, *Dhamani*."<sup>[15]</sup> Therefore, Kutumbiah P opines that *Sira*, *Dhamani* and so forth are all having the same functions and they are merely ducts with different calibers that the coarse duct is called *Dhamani*, medium one is *Sira* and the finest one is *Snayu*.

As in T.C.M., there are many useful points-acupoints in the human body Ayurvedic medicine opines the same that there are a few useful points – '*Marma*' in the human body. These so-called 'points' are having close relationships with *Dhamanis*, *Siras*, and so forth but they are not completely subordinate to each other. It is complicated. In "*Susruta Samhita*", Volume 3, Chapter 6, it introduces *Marmas* as vital parts of the body in details. Due to the complexity of its content that cannot be explained in a word or two, we omit the explanation of '*Marma*' here.

What this paper would like to tell you is that despite of *Chakra*, the concept of '*Marma*' found in Ayurvedic medicine is even closer to the concept of acupoint in T.C.M. Within a *Chakra*, it may correspond to a few acupoints or *Marmas*. In between them, they are just a matter of either it is zonal or point-to-point in relationship. As for acupoint and *Marma*, they are of point-to-point relationship. Although the quantity and positions between them are different, both of them serve the purpose of medical science to elaborate the structure of a human body. Whereby, the knowledge of the human body found in both T.C.M. and Ayurvedic medicine is more systematic, complete and similar. On the other hand, the concept of *Chakra* is relatively shallow from the perspective of traditional medical science. It is more toward the knowledge of the human body for religious professionals. Therefore, we can deduce that *Chakra* System has no correlation with Ayurvedic medicine at all. We urge to all other scholars to pay close attention to this matter that do not ever mix up these two different concepts.

## CONCLUSION

As discussed in the opening section of this paper, when we mention about "*Chakra Nadis*, or channels", many of us, had made the same conceptual mistake that they classified '*Nadi*' and '*Chakra*', which were the basic concepts of Yoga, as part of the Ayurvedic medicine. Moreover, this same mistake was also

found in the dissertations and works of other scholars especially scholars (like Dr. John R Cross and Dr. Michael Greenwood), in which the basic concept of Yoga – '*Nadi*' and '*Chakra*', was being mixed up with Ayurvedic medicine.

This paper encircles on this problems to further dissertate its conclusion. Firstly, the relationship between *Chakra* System versus Ayurvedic medicine is argued based on a direct discourse on the source of *Chakra* System. According to our finding, regardless of early-stage *Yoga Sutra* or later-stage *Yoga-Kundalini Upanishad*, the introduction of *Chakra* System is merely meant for religious service purpose. Through breathing and meditation, the *Kundalini* within the *Nadis* and *Chakras* can become awaken and lead one to liberation. This purpose is different from the one that of Ayurvedic medicine which is for the well-being of life. As a result, we conclude that *Chakra* System is a concept of *Kundalini Yoga* and it has no relationship with Ayurvedic medicine.

Next, based on indirect discourse on the 2 major works in Ayurvedic medicine, there is no elaboration on the *Chakra* System. Hence, we can further prove and conclude that *Chakra* System is not a concept of Ayurvedic medicine where both of them are not related to each other. Then, we have sorted out some relatively similar terms to '*Nadi*' and '*Chakra*' from the Ayurvedic medicine works so as to explain their concepts in terms of medical science. According to our finding, both Ayurvedic medicine and T.C.M. are having a more systematic and thorough knowledge on the human body and both of them are similar to each other. On the other hand, from the perspective of traditional medical science, the knowledge on the human body provided by the *Chakra* System is relatively shallow and it is more suitable for religious professionals to use to understand the human body.

As a result, we can doubly prove that the concept of *Chakra* System has no relationship with Ayurvedic medicine. At the same time, in order to prevent negative impact to the academic field, we urge to other scholars to pay attention to this matter that do not mix up these two different concepts to continue implanting the incorrect concept to the rest of the professionals.

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