Review Article

Subtle energy system of human body based on energy model of Yoga and Traditional Chinese Medicine

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Abstract

Background: Subtle energy system of human body is explained in two eastern philosophies. In Yoga, it is explained through *Chakra*, *Nāḍī* and *Prāṇa*. The same concept is depicted in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as dantian, meridian and Qi.

Objective: is to understand the subtle energy system of the human body using an energy model based on Yoga and TCM.

Materials and Methods: Traditional texts such as Upanishads, classical Yoga along with TCM texts were studied to provide a fuller understanding of the human body's subtle energy system based on *Chakra*, dantian, *Nāḍī*, meridian, *Prāṇa* and Qi.

Observations and results: Fourteen prominent *Nāḍī* are identified by Upanishads and major Yoga texts. TCM also recognises 14 main meridians. *Nāḍī* connect to higher centres in the head and to the 'gates' of our body. In TCM, meridians originate or terminate from head region, hand and feet which are close to *Nāḍī* points.

Conclusion: *Nāḍī* and meridians are close to three *Chakra* groups or three dantians. *Chakras* and dantians are energy centres. Both share a similar function to move *Prāṇa* or Qi energy through subtle channel of *Nāḍī* or meridian. *Prāṇa* or Qi is the fundamental energy in the human subtle energy system recognised by Yoga and TCM.

Keywords: *Chakra, Dantian, Meridian, Nāḍī, Prāṇa, Qi, TCM, Yoga*

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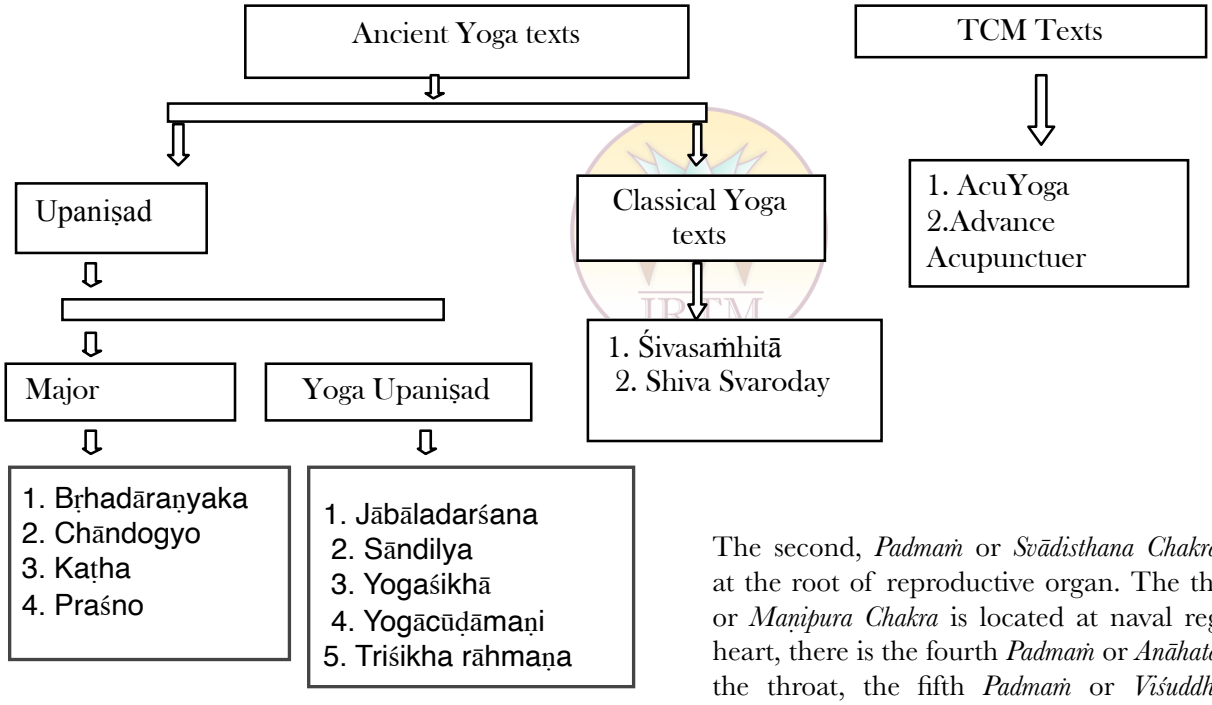
Introduction

Eastern science of philosophy is based on Indian and Chinese science of philosophy. Yoga is the main component in Indian science of philosophy where in Chinese science of philosophy, the main component is Acupuncture. Yoga and Acupuncture have their own potentiality. When we look into the principle of two philosophies, both work on subtle energy level and recognise its importance in health. There are lots of evidence based research on application of both sciences. In Yoga, the observed effects are explained through *Chakra*, *Nāḍī* and *Prāṇa*. The same concept is depicted in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) as dantian, meridian and Qi. The aim of the study is to understand the subtle energy system of the human body using an energy model based on Yoga and TCM.

Materials and Method

For a in-depth understanding of the human body's subtle energy system, in the present study those texts were used where subtle system is explained. For searching the text from the Indian philosophy the key words used were *Prāṇa*, *Nāḍī* and *Chakra*. Considering the yoga texts, all major Upanishad, also Yoga Upanishad and classical Yoga texts had been searched. Searching the text from the TCM, the key words used were dantian, meridian, Qi. To chose and the authenticate TCM texts, help was taken from the expertise in the field of TCM. Following texts were used are mentioned in the following chart below (chart no. 1),

Chart no. 1: Details of literature reviewed



Observations

Subtle energy system according to Yoga

Chakra

Description of *Chakra* can be found in various Upaniṣad and Yoga texts. *Chakra* are subtle energy centres. Pranic energy accumulates in *Chakra*, which are said to store and distribute it to all parts of the body. They are located along the spinal cord. In the subtle human body, there are seven major *Chakra*.

Suṣumnā is between *Idā* and *Pingalā* and has six energy places known to the learned Yogi as six *Chakrā*. [1] Two finger widths above the rectum and two finger widths below the genital organ, there is space of about four fingers area known as *Ādhāraṁ* or *Mulādhāra Chakrā*. [2]

The second, *Padmaṁ* or *Svādisthana Chakra* is situated at the root of reproductive organ. The third, *Padmaṁ* or *Maṇipura Chakra* is located at naval region. In the heart, there is the fourth *Padmaṁ* or *Anāhata Chakra*. At the throat, the fifth *Padmaṁ* or *Viśuddha Chakra* is situated. Between the eyebrows, the two petal *Chakra* is *Ājñāpadmaṁ* or *Ājñā Chakra*. [3] At the crown of the head, is the *Sahasrā Padmaṁ* or thousand petalled lotus *Chakra*. (*Padmaṁ* is as an alternate name of *Chakra*). Shivasamhita is the only one which gives explanations regarding seven *Chakras*. It has also portrayed that there are more *Chakras* in our subtle body. [3]

Nādī

Number of *Nādī*

Upaniṣad and Yoga texts describe innumerable number of *Nāḍī* spread all over the body. Number of *Nāḍī* is different in different Yoga texts.

(a) According to Upaniṣad:

There are 72,000 *Nāḍī* [4] and 101 of them are in heart.[5]

Tanmūlā bahavo naḍyaḥ sthūlasūkṣmāśca nāḍikāḥ |
Dvāsaptatisahasrāaṇi sthūlāḥ sūkṣmāca nāḍyaḥ |
Saṁkhātuṁ naiva śakyante sthūlamūlāḥ pṛthagvidhāḥ |
Yathāśvatthadale sūkṣmāḥ sthūlāśca vitatāstathā |
Tri bra u-1 | 75-76

All the *Nāḍī* are both gross and subtle, and originate from energy centers called *Chakras*. It is very difficult to differentiate each of them as with the leaves of a peepul tree.[6]

(b) According to Yoga Texts

In a bunch there are 72,000 *Nāḍī*.[7] Like a sprout, *Nāḍī* originating from the navel region and extending up to the shoulders are 72,000 in number, and then spread throughout the body. Of the 72,000 *Nāḍī*, 10 are main *Nāḍī* among them, the 3 most important are called *Iḍā*, *Piṅgalā* and *Suṣumnā*.[8] In an another reference, it has been told that the human body has 3,50,000 *Nāḍī*.[9]

There is no general agreement about the number of *Nāḍī* which exist in our body. From above information it is well understood that the figure may be from 100 to 72 000 or it could be even more, upto 3,50,000.

Name of *Nādī*

The next level of knowledge of the *Nāḍī* system concerns their names and locations. The names of fourteen *Nāḍī* are given in various Upanishad and Yoga texts.

(i)According to Upanishad

A. Śāṇḍilyopaniṣad

Depending on *Kundalin*i which is situated in the centre of the spinal cord, there are fourteen principal *Nāḍi*. They are *Iḍā, Piṅgalā, Suṣumnā, Sarasvatī, Vāruṇī, Pūṣā, Hastijihvā, Yaśasvinī, Viśvodarī, Kuhūḥ, Śaṅkhinī, Payasvinī, Alambusā* and *Gāndhārī*.[10]

B. Yogaśikhopaniṣad

The *Śaṅkhini Nāḍi* which originates from pharynx and facing downwards collects nutrients and supply them to head region. The *Chitra Nāḍi* traverses in a zig - zig manner and has the function of formation and release of semen. It is also called *Nāḍi Chakra*.[11]

C. Jābāladarśanapaniṣad

Describes 14 major *Nāḍī*. They are *Suṣumnā, Iḍā, Piṅgalā, Sarasvatī, Pūṣā, Varuṇā, Hastijihvā, Yaśasvinī, Alambuṣā, Kuhu, Viśvodarī, Tapasvinī, Śaṅkhinī* and *Gāndhārī*.. It also mentions another *Nāḍī* called the *Brahma Nāḍī*.[12]

(ii) According to Yoga Text:

Śivasvarodaya describes 10 major *Nāḍī*; of them, *Iḍā Piṅgalā and Suṣumnā* are most important, the other lesser *Nāḍī* are *Gāndhārī, Hastijihvā, Yaśasvinī, Pūṣā, Alambuṣā, Kuhu* and *Śaṅkhinī*.[13]

Shivasamhita names 14 *Nāḍī*, the *Suṣumnā, Iḍā, Piṅgalā, Gāndhārī, Hastijihvikā, Kuhuḥ, Sarasvatī, Pūṣā Śaṁkhinī, Payasvinī, Varuni, Ālambusā, Viśvodarī* and *Yaśasvinī*. Among them *Piṅgalā, Iḍā* and *Suṣumnā,* are the three most important ones. It also describes *Citrā Nāḍī* which is more auspicious and subtler than others.[14]

Location of *Nādī*

Nāḍī originate from lower or middle spiritual center and spread all over the body. Location of *Nāḍī* are described in Yoga texts and Upaniṣad in various ways.

Śāṇḍilyopaniṣad mentions the location of 14 *Nāḍī*. It starts with *Suṣumnā,* which is situated at the back of the anus. It is attached to the spinal column and extends to the *Brahmarandh*ra on the head. *Iḍā* is situated on the left of *Suṣumnā* and on the right of *Suṣumnā* is *Piṅgalā*. *Piṅgalā* goes upwards to the right nostril. To the back and on the side of *Suṣumnā* are situated *Sarasvatī* and *Kuhū* respectively. *Sarasvatī* goes to the upper part of the tongue. Between *Pūṣā* and *Sarasvatī* lies *Payasvinī*. *Payasvinī* goes to right ear. *Pūṣā* moves from behind the *Piṅgalā* extending to the right eye. In the centre of the navel is *Ālambusā*. *Ālambusā* goes upwards and downwards from the root of the anus. In front of *Suṣumnā* there is *Kuhū*, which proceeds as far as the genital organ. Between *Yaśasvinī* and *Kuhū* stands *Vāruṇī*. Above and below *Kuṇḍali*, *Vāruṇī* is situated, which proceeds everywhere. Between *Gāndhārī* and *Sarasvatī*, *Yaśasvinī* is situated. *Yaśasvinī* which is beautiful (or belonging to the moon), goes on to the great toes. *Śaṅkhinī* goes to the left ear. *Gandhārī* goes from the back of *Iḍā* to the left eye. From these fourteen *Nāḍī*, other *Nāḍī* (minor) spring; from them others originate.[15]

Yogācūḍāmaṇi Upaniṣad explains the site of 10 *Nāḍī* as follows. On the left of *Suṣumnā*, *Iḍā* is situated. On the right of *Suṣumnā*, *Piṅgalā* is situated. *Suṣumnā* is situated in the middle. *Gāndhārī* goes to the left ear and *Hastijihvā* goes to the right ear. *Pūṣā* moves to the right ear. *Yaśasvinī* moves to the left ear. *Alambusā* is situated in mouth. *Kuhū* is situated in the root of genital organ and *Śaṅkhinī* is situated at anal region.[16]

Yogaśikhopaniṣad mentions in *Muladhāra* there is *Suṣumnā* of twelve fingers width. *Iḍā, piṅgalā nāḍis* which run on the either side of nose, will follow *Vilambini* and terminates at end of the nose. *Gāndhāri* and *Hastijihvā nāḍis* towards the eyes. *Pūṣā* and *Ālambusā Nāḍis* run towards ears. *Śurā Nāḍi* resides in the center at eyebrow, it is also called *Mahānāḍi. Viśvodarī Nāḍī* consumes four types of food. *Sarasvatī Nāḍī* spreads at the tip of the tongue.[17]

Jābāladarśana Upaniṣad mentions *Iḍā* and *Piṅgalā* are on the left and right side of *Suṣumnā Sarasvatī* and *Kuhuḥ* are to the side of *Suṣumnā. Gāndhārā* and *Hastijihvā* are situated at the back of the *Iḍā. Pūṣā* and *Yaśasvinī* are situated in front and before the *Piṅgalā.* Between the *Kuhuḥ* and *Hastijihvā* is located *Viśvodarī. Varuṇā* is located between *Yaśasvinī* and *Kuhuḥ. Yaśasvinī* is situated between *Pūṣā* and *Sarasvatī. Śaṅkhinī* is situated between *Gāndhāri* and *Sarasvatī. Alambusā* is located at the root of the anus. *Iḍā* goes up to left nostril and *Yaśasvinī* goes to the left big toe.

Pūṣā goes from back of *Piṅgalā* to the left eye. *Payasvinī* goes to right ear. *Sarasvatī* goes to the upper part of the tongue. *Hastijihvā* goes to the toes of left leg. It is said by wise that *Śaṅkhinī Nāḍī* moves to the left ear and *Gāndhāa Nāḍī* to the left eye. In the centre of the navel is *Viśvodarī.*[18]

According to *Śivasvarodaya*

In *Nāḍī*, *Kundalini Shakti* exist, which looks like a snake. From *Kundalini* ten *Nāḍī* move upward and ten *Nadis* moves downwards. On each side of *Kundalini*, two *Nadis* move in oblique directions. Similar to these two, there are 24 *Nadi*. Among them ten are significant for carrying the *Prāṇa*. The *Iḍā* is situated on left side; the *Piṅgalā* is situated on right side and *Suṣumnā* is in the middle. *Gāndhārī* attaches to the left eye. The *Hastijihvāa Nāḍī* connects to the right eye. *Pūṣā Nāḍī* connects to right ear. The *Yaśasvinī* nadi connects to the left ear. The *Alambuṣā* connects to the mouth. *Kuhū* is in the reproductive organ and *Śaṅkhinī* in the anal region. These are the ten opening of the body. The three main *Nāḍī Piṅgalā, Iḍā,* and *Suṣumnā* are situated in the pranic passage.[19] The 14 principle *Nāḍī* of interest for this discussion are: *Suṣumnā, Iḍā, Piṅgalā, Gāndhārī, Hastijihvikā, Kuhuḥ, Sarasvatī, Pūṣā,Śaṁkhinī, Payasvinī, Varuni, Ālambusā, Viśvodarī* and *Yaśasvinī.*

Functions of *Nāḍī*

Nāḍī are spread throughout the body, they transport sensation and control the movement of *Vayu* throughout the body.[20] It is said in Sivasvarodaya that the principle ten *Nāḍī* carry the ten *Prāṇa.*[21]

Prāṇa is the vital force which sustains life and flows through subtle channels in the body. It is also identified as 'vital energy' that makes everything to take place in the universe. *Prāṇa* is a central concept in Ayurveda and was first elaborated in *Prasnaupanisad. Prāṇa* controls everything that exists in the universe. It is said that the greater *Prāṇa* is the cosmic *Prāṇa*, all encompassing energy, which enters our body through breath as individual *Prāṇa*. It takes care of all activities in sustaining life.[22]

Subtle energy system according to Traditional Chinese Medicine

Dantian

In Chinese philosophy and medicine, there are three important energy centres called dantians. Dantians are regions in the central core of the body where Qi energy is stored, refined and dispersed. The lower Dantian (Jin Dantian) is located in the lower abdomen. It is connected with the Qi field of the physical body. The middle Dantian (Qi Dantian) is located in the centre of the chest and connected with the Qi field of the emotional body, surrounding the physical body. The third Dantian (Shen Dantian) is located in the middle of the head, and is associated with the spiritual field of Qi surrounding the physical and emotional bodies. Qi energy flows from these along acupuncture meridians to all bodily organs and tissues.[23]

Number of Meridians

Meridians are considered as interconnected channels for circulation of Qi energy. The number of meridians may be similar to number of *Nāḍī*. The interconnections form endless closed circuits reaching every part of the body. Meridians are divided into groups based on their Yin and Yang properties, and further classified into 6 groups according to location and function: 12 are main or regular, 8 regulatory, 15 collateral, 12 divergent, 12 muscle and 12 cutaneous.[24,25]

Names of Meridians

Twelve regular meridians are Lung Meridian (Taiyin), Large intestine Meridian (Yangming), Pericardium (Jueyin), Sanjaiao (Shaoyang), Heart Meridian (Shaoyin), Small intestine Meridian (Taiyang), Spleen Meridian (Taiyin), Stomach Meridian (Yangming), Liver Meridian (Jueyin), Gall bladder Meridian (Shaoyang), Kidney Meridian (Shaoyin) and Bladder Meridian (Taiying).

The 8 regulatory meridians differ in important respects from the 12 regular meridians; they form the body's master homeostatic or balancing mechanism. The 8 regulatory meridians are grouped in 4 pairs: the Great Regulatory (Yinwei, Yangwei), Great Central (Governor and Conception Vessels), Great Bridge (Yinqiao and Yangqiao), and the Penetrating and Belt Meridians. Collateral meridians arise from each regular meridian and some main meridians. Both the governor and conception vessels have major collateral meridians while the spleen meridian also has a major collateral meridian. Hence, 15 collateral meridians are named based on the regular meridian or organ from which they arise.

The 12 divergent, 12 muscle and 12 cutaneous meridians correspond to 12 regular meridians according to their function.Therefore their names are based on related regular meridians.[25]

Location of Meridian

The paths of the Regular Meridians are as follows:

I. The Lung (LU), Pericardium (PC), and Heart (HT) meridians are Yin meridians of the hand which start from the chest and go down the middle of the arm to different fingertips.
II. The Large Intestine, Sanjiao (Triple Energizer) and Small Intestine meridians are Yang meridians of the hand starting at the fingertips, and going up the lateral aspect of the upper arm to the head and face.
III. Spleen, Liver, and Kidney are Yin meridians of the foot starting from the foot and going up the middle of the lower limb through the abdomen to the chest.
IV. The Stomach, Gallbladder and Bladder meridians are Yang meridians of the foot starting from the head and face and going through the trunk and lower limb to the toe tips. [26]
V. The Great Regulatory Meridians are called Yinwei and Yangwei. Yin indicates that a section of the meridian flows along the front of body, while Yang indicates a section along the back. Yinwei flows from both side of temple and moves down through the front of the body to the toes. Yangwei flows from the toes and then goes up the outside of the legs, ascending through the back, shoulder, neck, and up over the head where it joins with main branch.[27]
VI. The great central meridians flow through the median line of the body. One part of the Governor Vessel (Du Mai) courses from the perineum, runs along the spinal column to the neck, and over the head to the centre of the upper lip. Another part, the Conceptual vessel (Ren Mai) descends from palate to the throat and through the sternum, abdomen and pubic bone to the perineum.[28;29]
VII. The great bridge meridian, Yinqiao courses from above the eyes then travels through the side of throat, chest, abdomen, inside of the legs to the ankles. The Yangqiao flows up from outer back of the legs, hips, then moves over buttocks, ascending the back, neck, and over the head to the forehead
VIII. The penetrating meridian (Chong Mai) originates in the lumber region, moving internally through the reproductive organs and penetrating up the front of the body near the spine, to above the upper lip.
IX. The Belt meridian moves horizontally around the waist, then it drops down moving across the abdomen at a lower level and crosses the back. [30-31]

Qi energy

According to TCM, Qi is the basic substance that constitutes the universe. All objects in this universe are born from the transformation of Qi. Qi is neither abstract nor beyond sensation. It can be perceived through its various forms of existence. Further, Qi is the basic substance that makes up the human body. In a condensed form, Qi gives shape to the organic body; when it is dispersed, the organic body dies. Central to TCM, Qi is divided into two major kinds, Yang Qi and Yin Qi, considered as its masculine and feminine forms. On a cosmic level, they are responsible for the creation of all matter and energy in the universe and its transformations, changing it from one form into another.[32]

Discussion

In the present work, the observations show that classics of Yoga have identified 7 *Chakra*s and TCM identifies 3 dantians as energy centres in the human body. Fourteen prominent *Nādī* are identified by Upaniṣad and major Yoga texts. TCM also recognises 14 main meridians. *Nāḍī* connect to higher centres in the head and to the 'gates' of our body. In TCM, meridians originate or terminate from head region, hand and feet. Both systems recognise subtle energy in human body. It is named as *Prāṇa* in Yoga and as Qi in TCM. An attempt was made to bring a correlation of subtle energy system according to Indian and Chinese concepts.

Comparison between *Chakra* and Dantian

Chakra and dantian are energy centres where *Prāṇa* or Qi energy is stored and transported to various part of the body. Both are related to physical, emotional and higher consciousness. Studying TCM, it is obvious that the number of dantians is different from number of *Chakras*. The lower three *Chakra*s namely *Mulādhāra*, *Svādisthana*, and *Maṇipura* are located between the base of the spine and the navel region. Together they are

called the *Kanda* or bulb. *Kanda* is very similar to lower dantian (Jin Dantian) and related to physical functions. Similarly the three higher *Chakra*, *Vishuddhi*, *Ājñā* and *Sahasrāra* are closely related and form the region of head. This region is related to spiritual and higher dimension of consciousness. The upper dantian (Shin Dantian) is located inside the middle of the head. It collects and emits refined Qi energy which is again related to the transcendental state of consciousness. Between the lower *Chakra*s and higher *Chakra*s stands the *Anāhata Chakra* related to emotion. The middle dantian (Qi Dantian) is located in the centre of the chest and connected with the Qi field of the emotional body. Fig 1shows the comparison. *Chakra* and dantian which share a similar function. Both occupy the subtle body, both are energy centres and are able to move the energy through subtle channels**.** In the practice of Qigong and Yoga, some of the concept are similar to *Chakra* and dantian. The similarity can be found in function of *Chakra* and dantian. [33]

Correlation between *Nāḍī* and Meridian

The subtle body contains seventy two thousand *Nāḍī*. Out of 72,000 *Nāḍī*, the 14 prominent *Nāḍī* identified by major Yoga texts and Upaniṣad have been described above. TCM also recognises 14 main meridians, namely 12 regular meridians and two extraordinary meridians. Two extraordinary meridians are Du meridian (Governor Vessel) and Ren meridian (Conceptual Vessel).

The Upaniṣad and Yoga texts mentions *Nāḍī* to be originating from the *Anāhata Chakra* (chest) and *Mulādhāra Chakra*, they also describe how major *Nāḍī* are connected to nose, eyes, ears, mouth and higher centres in the head, the "opening gates". In TCM, six regular Yin meridians originate or terminate in the chest. The six regular Yang meridians originate or terminate from head region which are nearer to *Nāḍī* points. They all are connected to hands and feet. Two central meridians originate and terminate at the base of spine or head. Therefore, *Nāḍī* and meridians are close to three *Chakra* groups or three dantians. According to this concept, the fourteen *Nāḍī* seems to correspond closely to the regular meridians.

In addition, a few *Nāḍī* individually relate to specific meridian for example *Suṣumnā* and governor vessel. *Suṣumnā*, the most important central *Nāḍī* follows the spine. Most Yoga texts agree with the Upaniṣad that the *Mulādhāra* is its starting point. Its end point is always described as the *Brahman* gate at the top of the head, where *Prāṇa* and *Kundali Shakti* are said to enter and exit. TCM names the governor vessel as a central meridian (the Great Hammer Meridian) starting at the tip of the coccyx just below the *Mulādhāra Chakra*, going up the centre of the back, over the top of the head and terminating in the middle of the upper lip.

All 12 regular meridians are said to be linked to it, as the storage place from where Qi energy is distributed to various organs.

The Governor vessel and *Suṣumnā* are most important regarding spirituality. Tantra Sadhan says that *Kundali Shakti* moves upward from the *Mulādhāra* to *Ājñā Chakra*s along the *Sushumna*. Taoist practitioners also say that circulating light is observed as Qi energy moves from the lower dantian to upper dantian. These aspects suggest that the *Suṣumnā* and Governor Vessel may have close correspondence to each other. The present study finding is similar with Motoyam's some statements (1988) where he also stated the correlation between *Nāḍī* and Meridians.[34]

Correspondence between *Prāṇa* and Qi

In the another conceptual study by Hankey (2006), the association between *Prāṇa* and Qi in the context of function to maintain health has been detailed. From the present observation, it can be stated that *Prāṇa* is the fundamental energy in the human subtle energy system recognised by Indian systems of medicine. Similarly in TCM Qi is considered the most fundamental constituent of the body. *Prāṇa* has major subdivisions, locations and functions. As in *Prana* and *Shakti*, Qi comes in two major kinds, Yang Qi and Yin Qi. *Prāṇa* and Qi are different names for equivalent vital energies circulating in the body to maintain body's balanced functioning.[35]

Conclusion

Nāḍī and meridians are close to three *Chakra* groups or three dantians. *Chakras* and dantians are energy centres. Both share a similar function to move *Prāṇa* or Qi energy through subtle channel of *Nāḍī* or meridian. *Prāṇa* or Qi is the fundamental energy in the human subtle energy system recognised by Yoga and TCM.

Limitation and future scope of the Study

The present study shows the similarities with Yoga and TCM philosophy. Still the number of the *Nāḍī* and meridians concept was not the same in respect of the location of the *Nāḍī* and meridians. On the other hand, both *Yoga* and TCM use specific methods to enliven *Prāṇa* / Qi and promote free flow of energy through the subtle channels in order to restore or improve individual health. Major methods include *Asāna*, *Prāṇāyama* and Meditation in *Yoga*, and Acupuncture, Acupressure and Qigong in TCM. To bring both philosophies' concept in one umbrella, evidence-based research is required in the future with a combination of both techniques.

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