Culture, Embodiment, and the Senses  
*Thursday, 22 September 2005*

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**Reading**  

(Note: Italicized questions set aside by arrow-bullets are broad questions to keep in mind and think about throughout the reading and analysis)

There was a relationship between the Chinese dynasties at a given time and the conception of medicine during that time.

○ *What is the view of the self? How has it changed?*

Kuriyama systematically traces these through the history...

**Wind**

Imagination of winds in history has been overlooked although it is a crucial feature of the senses in embodiment.

Greek: North vs. South winds and the positive/negative qualities attached to them  
Chinese: multiplicity of the winds, empty vs. full

Greek conceptions of superior *race* based could potentially have been based on winds, as the Northern winds were more esteemed, the Southern winds.

Greek: winds carry change but may or may not influence the individual  
Chinese: winds were invasive agents to be feared

The Shang winds were thought to cause sickness, but it was also thought that ancestral curses may cause sickness. Here we can explore concepts of the person — the sense that the individual was able to be affected by ancestors testifies to an extended sense of self. One was not an autonomous individual but could be affected across time and space by an entity that one was attached to through kinship.

Greek *pneuma* — inner breath, vital force — eventually lead to the notion of the soul

○ *What is at stake if the individual can be influenced by external forces (e.g. spirits, winds)? Are we then at their mercy?*

Chinese: individual was vulnerable to outside forces  
Greek: focus was instead on anatomy
The Greek emphasis on **muscularity** illustrates the idea that an individual can change the self through **will/action**, and therefore was less vulnerable. This shift in the notion of **personhood** was a result of the scientific study of the body.

North wind = positive, south wind = negative. Ideas about the positivity/negativity of regions were mapped onto people's characters. Montesquieu made observations of culture in the late 17th century and argued that national character was related to environment – that specific regions had distinctive environmental features that influenced what the people were like. **Environment shapes character.**

Note the time orientation in the concept of *bafeng sishi*, the 8 winds and 4 seasons. Bad winds were supposed to signify time gone awry. This illustrates the idea of how the cosmos and the environment are related to the conception of day-to-day events.

Concepts of the body shift – dialogue/discourse emerges from practice and personal experiences of practitioners and clinicians.

It was a question of **governance** when it came to organs. The Greeks focused on *particular organs*, while the Chinese concentrated more on overall *form*.

- **How is the conception of the body useful and manipulated by those in power – scientists and politicians both?**

The Chinese state codified proper relations in society, e.g. filial piety – what behavior was expected along with the spirit behind it.

**Embodiment is always politicized!**

There's a disconnect in the Western attempt at legitimizing Eastern practices, in its scientific study of alternative methods. We're using a Western understanding and framework for a conceptually different Eastern ideas and methods.

Some questions to consider:
- **How do we recognize the body in particular ways?**
- **How does language predispose understanding?**
- **How do we cross our world view? How do we transcend cultural boundaries, social relations, ethos of the self?**
- **Has the body become mechanized?**