

# THE DAILY SEARCH FOR THE ART IN ACUPUNCTURE FROM A PRACTITIONER'S VIEW

## **Introduction:**

Studying medicine in the early seventies of the last century at the university of Zürich in Switzerland, I was driven by my interest in the interrelationship between the biological and psychological functioning of the human being. Since the study of biology and psychology could not answer my questions as how body and mind interact and influence each other, I hoped to find answers for my search in the study of medicine. There I was taught to think and analyze the world in a scientific, logical and linear way in the tradition of the great Greek philosophers. Science in a very simplified understanding was considered the only rational approach to the understanding of the human being, dissecting the human body into its smallest particles and molecules in order to understand its physiology and functioning – the dead teach the living! Body and mind were considered to be separate entities, as once established in the Greek philosophical tradition, disease was understood in a mechanistic way in the principle of cause and effect.

The sixties and seventies of the last century brought an enormous progress in scientific medicine, everything seemed technically feasible, repairable – man conquered the world, landed on the moon – science seemed to be the one and only solution for all the problems in the world.

The same period brought the first contact with classical Chinese acupuncture: Dr. Ngyeng van Nghi, a Chinese immigrant in France with Vietnamese origin, translated a claimed pre-confucian copy of the Huang Di Nei Jing from

Vietnamese into French, thus bringing a completely new kind of medicine to France. He lectured and practised in Marseille, gathering French and Swiss doctors around him, who started to study the classics of Chinese Medicine. Dr. van Nghi is considered also the saviour of true Classical Chinese Medicine from extinction, bringing „the true, daoist medicine“, as he himself put it, to France, to Europe.

1943 was the founding year of the French society of acupuncture, Germany followed in 1952, Austria in 1954. A disciple of Dr. van Nghi, Dr. Guido Fisch, founded the first Swiss society of acupuncture in 1969. (SGA). But it was the Classical Chinese Medicine of Dr. Van Nghi with his emphasis on acupuncture and the studying of the classics such as the Huang Di Nei Jing, of the Chinese language and writings, that led to the wide spread acceptance of a „Qi-based-acupuncture“ in the French parts of Switzerland. They split from the Swiss association for acupuncture (SGA), founding a new society of acupuncture in 1978 in the French part of Switzerland (AGMA), emphasizing the studying of the Classics in Chinese Medicine. These medical doctors and followers of Van Nghi, studying and practising Classical Chinese Medicine, were very active in their political public relationwork: They required from the Swiss government to include the studying of Classical Chinese Medicine, above all acupuncture, into the curricula of the Swiss universities and to accept acupuncture in the Swiss health system as a legal alternative besides the scientific medicine.

The first postgraduate course in Classical Chinese Medicine was held at the university of Berne in 1980. Zürich, on the other hand, the biggest university of Switzerland, rejected the new kind of medicine altogether, considering it completely

unscientific and unorthodox, unworthy for a university of world reputation.

The German speaking part of Switzerland was influenced by the works of Professor Manfred Porkert, a German sinologist, who translated Chinese Books of acupuncture and especially herbal medicine, adapting the Chinese terms to western thinking by using latin and greek nomenclature. As in scientific medicine, he translated the Chinese terms for the Jing luo into Latin, as well as all the other terms such as Xue, Extra Meridians, names for points on the meridians etc. I'm sure that these Latin terms, familiar to every western medical doctor, created a kind of „scientific“ aura, thus bringing the energetic terms, the energetic way of looking at the world, at medicine and at the human being into a more acceptable and digestible form for a western, scientifically moulded mind.

Disciples of Prof. Porkert, above all Dr. Hempen and Dr. Friedl from Germany, started courses for acupuncture and founded new societies for medical doctors in Germany as well as in the German part of Switzerland. In these schools, emphasis was not so much put on the study of the Chinese Classics, but more on an easier understanding of the energetic thinking in Chinese Medicine. Chinese terms were replaced by latin or german expressions, a kind of structure was laid on the complex web of thinking and understanding of Chinese Medicine.

Herbal Medicine quickly gained wide acceptance and followers among medical doctors in the German part of Switzerland, a Society for herbal practitioners was founded in 1980 in Zürich, firms for the import of Chinese Herbs opened up, quickly spreading the possibilities of a treatment with

prefabricated granules, be it in the classical herbal treatment formulas or in individually administered recipes.

As the PR of China opened up politically under Deng Xiaoping, this modernized TCM treatment, especially with herbs, was found to be an attractive export article: From 1996 onwards, there were dozens of so-called TCM Centers opening up in Switzerland, where TCM practitioners from China treat patients with acupuncture and especially with herbs.

Another branch of acupuncture, since the 1980ies widely accepted and practised by Swiss doctors, is auricular acupuncture, developed by Dr. Nogier in Lyon, France, and Dr. Bahr in Germany. This kind of somato-topical medicine was easily learned and could be integrated into a normal school medicine treatment, especially in the treatment for pain and all kinds of addictions.

Politically, Chinese Medicine had a difficult road to success, especially in the German parts of Switzerland: The Swiss population expressed their will to integrate so called „natural medicine“, including Chinese Medicine, into university studies of medicine in 1992. It took another 10 years until the first courses of the basics in Chinese Medicine were included in the curricula at the university of Zürich. And the Swiss people just recently expressed their firm will again – 70% of the voting population! – to include „natural medicine“, including Chinese Medicine, into our health system! But as long as so called scientific standards and paradigms are the one and only accepted standards, the people's will and the political implementation are miles apart.....

**School medicine versus traditional medicine:**

Fact is, that our modern so-called school medicine has the reputation of modernism, science, objectivity, plausibility – and I do not in any means wish to belittle the immense benefit of our modern scientific medicine! I also will not argue about all the totally unscientific treatment strategies in our western medicine. Not everything that is claimed to be „rational“ or scientific can stand the proof of evidence based, truly scientific verification. School medicine or scientific medicine as well uses „shaman techniques“ – just think about the magic power of injections or surgical rituals!.

Nevertheless: In modern science we search for the general laws of nature, applicable to all and every living being. The individual is reduced to these hard and fast rules, to these academic rules, where we categorize, reduce the individual varieties to the generally accepted laws of natural science. We name diseases, formed from different symptoms, grouped into different syndromes. We test treatment strategies for these syndromes, test them on evidence based rules, applicable for everybody, test them on large groups, cohorts. Only a treatment-standard which is applicable for every person affected by a special disease or syndrome is called scientific. We want one generally accepted treatment strategy for a special disease, we want „gold standards“ in our treatments, verifiable, reproducible by every trained doctor, repeatable everywhere and through everybody in the medical profession.

The traditional types of medicine however, as the Classical Chinese Medicine, are based on individual treatment plans, performed by individual doctors with their individual background, personally and as a professional.

In Classical Chinese medicine, in acupuncture, we have only a few general laws as Yin/Yang, the daoist way to follow the true laws of nature, of life, Qi and Xue, the 5 phases, the

invasion of wind, heat etc. We use these laws in our daily work, forgetting that in ancient times they were considered as scientific, as laws to explain the functioning of nature, then a modern canonical medicine - as opposed to the belief in ghosts, gui, in pre-modern times, gui who acted as evil, influencing the human being in a completely unpredictable way, when Daoist priests had to be called to perform rituals, to exorcize ghosts and other evil influence, to heal. In Classical – or let's say in scientific Chinese Medicine - we use the laws of nature, invasion of wind or heat, the influence of emotions etc., to explain a certain state of illness. We have treatment strategies – herbs, self training, behavioral advice, inner alchemy and acupuncture – to cure – always based on an individual's illness, or rather on an individual diagnosis for an individual person.

### **Modern TCM versus Classic Chinese Medicine:**

The true art in acupuncture treatment lies – in my opinion – in the capability to grasp an individual's state of Qi and Xue, of Shen and Jing, of imbalances in the free flow of Qi and Xue. The art lies in the very individualistic approach and diagnosis that serves as basis for a treatment according to the few laws as expressed in Yin and Yang or the 5 phases, the cycles of oppression, the Sheng cycle etc.

Modern Chinese TCM, however, is a modern construct of the 1950ies: Instead of cultivating the treasure of the Classical knowledge, based upon the Huang Di Nei Jing and the few „scientific laws“ as described above, the Chinese „Qi medicine“ was channeled into our modern scientific approach to illness and disease. Modern TCM combines the name of a western disease or symptom with treatment strategies of

acupuncture. Modern TCM lists a number of points to treat a specific symptom – as does modern scientific medicine. Treatment strategies can e.g. subsume all individuals with a stomach ulcer, pool them into a few different subgroups and give treatment plans for each group. By doing this, we can – as in scientific medicine – use our so-called scientific methods for studies – and we try to prove the effectiveness of e.g. acupuncture in a scientifically accepted manner.

Acupuncture was thus „herbalized“, and, above all, put into the rather rigid frame of western scientific thinking.

Modern TCM has completely lost the daoist background – and by saying daoist I mean the western use of the term: In the East, Daoism is a religion – whereas in the West, Daoism is considered as a philosophy based on the Dao de Jing, and on the Huang di Nei Jing in medicine.

It saddens me to read an article of a professor for complementary medical methods, above all TCM, at the university of Zürich, who states that „the TCM treatments in Switzerland are therapies, cleansed of mythological and historical conceptions, adapted to modern western needs and standards“. He explains further that „neither the anamnestic story of a patient nor his or her social and emotional problems play an important role in TCM“.

The rich treasure box of Classical acupuncture is more and more stripped to a skeleton of so-called reproducible and verifiable facts. Studies must be made according to the standards set up by bio-scientific based, western medicine. I Ching or Classics of Changes influences have mostly been expunged from modern TCM – as I hear, the book is still on the list of banned books in the PR of China...As Bob Flaws

puts it, we have the residues of a once rich and mani-faceted medicine in the form of a secular materialism called TCM.

### **Thoughts and concerns for the future:**

As in physics the perception of the world depends on the position of the observer (s. 68)

The basic laws of nature remain the same, yet the observation differs: „It all depends on the situation – and on the observer“!

This does not mean that we as practitioners have the free choice in our treatments – we must follow the rules of nature – as we understand daoism – e.g. Yin Yang, the 5 phases etc. Yet we take the individual frame of reference, the individual point of origin into our consideration. Thus the treatment strategy can never be invariably defined and decided on in the textbook, prescribed, otherwise we cannot react upon the individual situation.

As in physics, where one's point of view, one's coordinate system has to be defined, as no observer has the one and only, the unfallibly correct coordinates – we must define our patient's – and our own! – coordinates. The system he or she stands in, the story of his life, his socio-economic and emotional „coordinates“ – they are different for every individual we meet als practitioners. The individual is the „point zero“, where the universal laws of Classical Chinese Medicine can be applied upon.

And as in physics, these few laws of nature must be regarded under consideration of the individuals „coordinates“. If we neglect these individual viewpoints, as in my opinion the systematic, scientifically oriented, westernized approach in modern TCM does, we give up the most precious instrument



of Classical acupuncture. The technoscientific approach submits itself under the apparently „one and only“ correct viewpoint of standardization, whereas the classical knowledge allows all the different, individual standpoints.

As we intend to modernize the Classical Chinese Medicine, we standardize, apply the so-called scientific standards. Instead of a teacher for acupuncture, as it was custom in old times, a teacher who passed on his wisdom and knowledge of years and years of study and practice, we now look for schoolbooks, courses, where a standardized form of TCM can be studied. Standardized, devoid of mythological, historical gems like the I Ging, heavenly stems or shen and gui points, devoid of using the practitioners own intuition and knowledge for grasping a patient's deeper problem. In my opinion, TCM is pragmatic, influenced by economic interests, steered by political and ideological concepts. The adaptation to the modern world is accomplished through the listing of symptoms and syndromes, borrowed from a technoscientific medicine, replacing our western pharmaceutical treatment strategies by acupuncture points and herbal medicine.

The intricate web of CCM is dissected into it's bits and pieces – it is no more „the living who teach about life, but the dead and dissected teaching the living...“.

I fear that the kind of reduced, westernized, purely symptomatic acupuncture loses it's potency as a true alternative to the bio-scientific medicine. I fear for the virtue of a method, of acupuncture, since the result of a standardized form of acupuncture is often not as convincing as it could be. I fear for the sophisticated, intricate and delicate web of wisdom, hidden in Classic Chinese Medicine.

I fear that materialism will prevail over the subtleties of a medicine which is based on deeply rooted, daoist, philosophical concepts.

And I fear, that modern TCM will – in the end – disappoint practitioner and patient alike – because, as we say in Switzerland, „man does not live from bread alone“.

I know that life is in a constant change, I know that we cannot stop or influence the constant flow of life. Chinese Medicine changes just like everything else does.

Nevertheless, I try to live up to my own expectations – and I feel I have to contribute what little I can do to save what I feel is the rich treasure of Classical Chinese Medicine from a loss.

A good friend of mine read my paper – and put it quite bluntly: With your fear, he said, you end your plea in the phase of „water“, of stagnation. Where is your optimism, your belief in the constant change, the living cycle of the 5 phases? Where does your „wood-energy“ rise up from the frozen water?

It's the fire, that melts the ice – it's the feu sacré, the passion of the heart of each and every practitioner that can transform the stagnation of today's „scienticed“ TCM. And I do hope and believe that we as practitioners in Chinese Medicine will always be guided by this fire of the heart – so that it will not be the materialist might and influence that will prevail over the daily search for „veracity“, the art in acupuncture!

**Laotse:**

Let me finish with a quotation from Laotse:

Let Life and Death have the same importance for you, and your conscience will be without fear. Take up the same stance over change and durability, and nothing will becloud your clarity.

Thank you for your attention!

**Lass dir Leben und Tod gleich wichtig sein, und dein Verstand wird ohne Angst sein; nimm gegenüber Wandel und Beständigkeit die gleiche Haltung ein, und nichts wird deine Klarheit trüben.**

**Lao Tse**

Dr.med. Anita Meyer  
Obholzstr. 17  
CH\_8500 Frauenfeld

[anita.meyer@hin.ch](mailto:anita.meyer@hin.ch)