

# An Introduction to Classical Acupuncture\*

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## History

In China, acupuncture has been known for several thousand years. Being part of traditional Chinese medicine it is based on the principle that a disease occurs simultaneously with a disturbance of bodily vital energy and can be treated by puncturing, warming or massaging specific points on the surface of the body, thus re-establishing the disturbed energy circulation. The science of acupuncture deals with the puncturing of these control points.

In early times, i.e. two to three thousand years B.C., chips of stone and flint were used as needles. Later needles were made of various metal alloys (gold, silver, copper, platinum, steel, etc.). The principles of acupuncture have been handed down to us in numerous documents. These include the *Su-Wen* and the *Nei-Ching* which are still considered today to be fundamental to the understanding of acupuncture.

In China, acupuncture was transmitted by means of the above-mentioned documents and many schools developed around different teachers. Since written knowledge was partly lost, and since traditional Chinese medicine was not taken seriously during the colonial period, the tradition remained in the hands of many so-called masters whose qualities varied considerably. For this reason, many established principles were forgotten and replaced by mystification. Although the latter sometimes resulted in cures, it lacked connection with the original principles and their logical and coordinated background. It was difficult to distinguish the true expert from mere quacks.

Since the early nineteen-fifties, the whole system of acupuncture has been re-adapted and gradually introduced as a required subject in Chinese medical schools. In the course of many years of research, the study of ancient manuscripts has been sup-

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plemented with the results of experimental research, and efforts have been made to put the entire system on a scientific and logical accessible basis.

Prior to 1930, there existed several reports in Europe, especially from missionaries, concerning acupuncture. During the thirties, acupuncture was introduced to the West by a non-medical man, who had been French consul in China for many years, and who spoke and wrote fluent Chinese. This man, Soulié de Morant published a manual on acupuncture: *L'Acupuncture Chinoise*. Through his influence, a number of schools developed, and there can be no doubt about his great merit. However, Soulié de Morant was not a medical man, and he familiarized himself with acupuncture at a time when even in China this branch of medicine was in a chaotic state, making it extremely difficult to get a comprehensive view on the subject. With knowledge gained from Soulié de Morant, his pupils set up their own schools and societies which turned the basic ideas of acupuncture into a mysterious curing method employing dogmas and axioms different from those used in China. We in the West owe the first neutral discussion of acupuncture to the French doctor A. Chamfrault and his translations of the ancient text-books *Su-Wen* and *Nei-Ching*.

## Energy

Acupuncture is based on the principle of energy. We can regard the universe as the gradual transformation of existing nature, whereby the first amino-acids developed followed by the first living protein chains, gradually giving rise to the living world with its micro-flora, vegetable kingdom, and finally man. Comparative zoology and embryology point out criteria which permit a classification of the processes of life. In order to reach its proper stage, each kind of animal has to pass through the lower stages in its phylogenetic as well as embryological development. All these stages developed under the influence of different energies and are rooted in the chromosomal structure in order to assure the specific characteristics of each kind of animal or plant.

The ancient Chinese investigated and classified natural laws, and related them to man as microcosmos. This lead them to conclusions which are only now being confirmed by Western science in connection with nuclear physics. A few hints:

- energy = matter
- dualism of action and reaction
- electrical current with a positive and negative pole, which are necessary for the flow of electricity
- the existence of anti-matter

The principle of energy has been applied to the human organism inasfar as every process of life is related to metabolic energies and requires a specific energy circulation. Health is the normal flow of this energy. Disease results from disturbance in the flow of energy.

*Ying-Yang* The general flow of energy is interpreted in traditional Chinese Medicine by means of the principle of *Yin and Yang*, symbolizing two opposed and at the same time complementary energies. This results in a duality, which is encoun-

tered again and again in the whole of nature: man and woman, positive and negative, day and night, cold and warm, yes and no, beautiful and ugly, heaven and earth, and so on. This is the general principle: *Yang* actuates *Yin* and *Yin* produces *Yang*.

As far as the macrocosmos is concerned, the sky with sun and heat corresponds to *Yang* energy, while the earth with cold and water corresponds to *Yin* energy. As far as the microcosmos, i.e. man, is concerned, *Yang* energy comes from above and is exterior, while *Yin* energy comes from below and is interior, i.e. it flows deep in the organism. Under certain circumstances, i.e. with the secondary vessels, *Yang* energy flows invariably from below to above.

*The Organs and Their Energies* According to the concept of *Yin-Yang*, the organs of the human body are classified into those storing energy in the deep bodily interior corresponding to the *Yin* principle, which are the so-called storage organs, and those producing energy and in contact with the external world, the so-called hollow *Yang* organs. Thus the energetics of organs is one of the most important basic principles of traditional Chinese medicine. It is based on the assumption that organs within the body produce energy, which is perceptible in terms of energy conditions on the surface of the body. Any disturbance of these energy principles results in disease; this is the basis of pathology in Chinese medicine.

We must not be misled by our Western way of thinking, in which by organ we mean one particular organ. Here the term organ refers to everything which is connected in any way with this organ and its specific energy; similarly Western usage speaks of the lymphatic system, which covers not only the lymphocytes but all associated lymph functions etc.

Chinese medicine considers the organs to be paired, with joint and complementary functions. One homologous partner belongs to the *Yin* principle while the other belongs to the *Yang* principle. However, both partners are penetrated by both energies, i.e. *Yin* and *Yang*. The *Yin* organs or storage organs disguise pure energy. They have a core, but are not hard and have no fringe. The *Yang* organs or hollow organs convey the residues of digestion, which they eliminate without any retention. The *Yang* organs are covered with fringes. There also exists another type of organ, the so-called *singular organs*. Their exterior resembles that of the *Yang* hollow organs, but they have the same function as the *Yin* storage organs. They comprise the following systems: nervous system (brain and spinal cord), bone system, blood circulation, hepatic-biliary system, and genital system.

*The Organs and the Hollow Organs* Essentially there are six storage organs and six hollow organs. The storage organs are the following: lungs, kidneys, liver, heart and spleen. Another storage organ is the envelope of the heart (circulation). For the Chinese, this last term covers all cardiac functions, as well as those of the heart muscle and the heart defence. From the Chinese point of view, the heart also represents the center of psychical energy. The hollow organs are the following: large intestine, bladder, gall bladder, small intestine, triple-burner, and stomach.

As has already been mentioned, there is an affinity between a storage organ and its respective hollow organ, since both homologues belong to one element. Conse-

quently each pair of organs is related to one of the so-called *Five Elements*, with the exception of fire which is divided into imperial and ministerial fire. (Fig. 1)

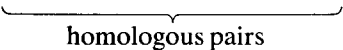
Element	Storage Organ	Hollow Organ
Wood	Liver	Gall bladder
Fire	Heart + Envelope of the Heart	Small Intestine + Triple-burner
Earth	Spleen	Stomach
Metal	Lungs	Large Intestine
Water	Kidneys	Bladder
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>homologous pairs</p> </div>		

Figure 1.

Each storage organ and hollow organ respectively has a certain time of day during which its energy flow shows a maximum, i.e. where its energetic tonus is at its highest. A so-called organic clock has been designed to demonstrate this, which also corresponds to the direction of energy flow. This flow of energy is thought to begin in the lungs (3:00 A.M.–5:00 A.M.), and to progress in order through the following organs: large intestine → stomach → spleen → heart → small intestine → bladder → kidneys → envelope of the heart → triple burner → gallbladder → liver.

*The Different Energies* Among the numerous energies of traditional Chinese medicine, we distinguish the following principle elements: *Ying* energy, *Wei* energy, *essential* energy, the blood, *ancestral* energy, *mental* energy and the *body humors*.

*The Ying and Wei energies: The Triple Burner* In order to understand these energies, we must first discuss the function of the triple-burner. This hollow organ is actually an organic function. The triple-burner and its function are intimately related to stomach function. The term triple-burner is derived from the three “digestion reactors” situated in the mucous tissue of the stomach. These reactors are responsible for the transformation or processing of foods into energy. The middle-burner is situated in the region of the greater curvature of the stomach and produces pure energy. In this context pure has a figurative meaning. The pure energy is light and flows upwards, while the impure energy is heavy and flows downwards into the intestinal canal which is sometimes referred to as the inner canal of the triple-burner.

From the middle-burner, the pure energy, being light and consequently tending upwards, flows to the upper-burner, which is situated on the cardia, and from there to the lungs. The pure energy is *Ying* energy. In the lungs, it mixes with energy derived from respiration and then circulates in the meridians, which are discussed below. *Ying* energy is the true alimentary energy of the organism, flowing in the interior of the body (i.e. *Yin*).

The lower-burner, located in the region of the pylorus, is known as the focus or

reactor of *Wei* energy. It is from here that the impure, heavy energy is purified as it flows into the intestines, i.e. into the inner canal of the triple-burner and then into the kidneys. During this process, one part of the impure energy is transformed into *Wei* energy in the kidneys, while the rest is stored in bladder as waste water. From the kidneys, the *Wei* energy flows to the liver and the spleen.

*Wei* energy has great force. It is produced by alimentation and is fast and agile. It does not penetrate into the meridians, and therefore circulates subcutaneously, in the muscular fibers, and in the peritoneum. It is in the chest as well as the abdomen. Because it circulates as a rule outside the meridians, the *Wei* energy is consequently the principle energy of the secondary vessels. This means that *Wei* energy circulates at the body surface (*Yang*). The *Wei* energy therefore represents the defence energy of the human body. It nourishes skin and hair, opens and closes the pores, and defends the human organism against atmospheric aggression.

*Blood and Energy* Under the influence of the middle-burner, organic fluid and *Ying* energy are converted into blood. As a rule, this takes place in the liver. Blood is a material substance, while *Ying* energy is immaterial. According to the principle of *Yin and Yang*, this means that blood is *Yin* and energy is *Yang*. This does not mean, however, that *Ying* energy is *Yang* under all circumstances. For in relation to *Wei* or defence energy which is *Yang*, the *Ying* energy which is situated in the meridians of the body interior, is *Yin*.

*Essential Energy* *Essential* energy is nothing else but a union of supernal energy (i.e. air; material element) and the energy of the earth (i.e. food; material element). Thus its function is to maintain the body by alimentation. The substances of alimentation pass into the stomach, the middle and lower burners to be converted into energy. In this energy, six solid organs and the six hollow organs are bathed. Depending on whether this energy takes the direction of *Ying* energy or *Wei* energy, it will be one or the other of these two energies. *Essential* energy is the true, principle and vital energy of man. Supernal energy (air and respiration) and the energy from the earth (food and digestion) are called primary energies. Under the influence of the triple-burner, they are transformed into secondary energies.

*Ancestral energy* *Ancestral* energy is the energy which is transmitted by the parents and situated in the chromosomes. In other words, it is the innate, ancestral energy which constitutes the basis of all somatic organization. Consequently, it is responsible for the development of the various somatic systems (i.e. nervous, bone, muscular).

*Ancestral* energy develops gradually and grows progressively more vigorous, making its appearance during stages of growth and in the course of mental and sexual development. *Ancestral* energy accumulates in the adrenal glands (kidneys), which develop especially from the age of 8 (1 x 8). For this reason, the first teeth fall out and the hair grows particularly fast during this period. By the age of 16 (2 x 8), the renal energy becomes still more vigorous and the child is in full growth. The spermium start to develop and procreation becomes possible. At the age of 64 (8 x 8), the spermium are exhausted and the renal energy becomes less powerful. These same stages apply to females, but are based on periods of 7 years.

The *ancestral* energy reinforces the *Wei* defence energy. Furthermore, in order to pass from the kidneys to the surface of the body, it does not flow along the principle meridians as might be expected, but takes its own course along the singular vessels, which are described below. In flowing to the body surface, the *ancestral* energy also assumes a defence function. Another special feature of the *ancestral* energy is that it has its own organs, namely the *singular organs* mentioned above, which contain a high amount of *ancestral* energy on which they rely heavily.

*Mental energy* As a rule, *mental* energy manifests itself in thought and consciousness. It is already being produced during the fertilization process, and increases during fetal development. The pure energy of alimentation is responsible for the continuity and maintenance of mental energy. According to the *Su-Wen*, the five flavors are preserved in the stomach and intestines during alimentation in order to maintain the five energies (*Wei, Ying, pure, ancestral and mental*). By being mixed with the five flavors, the energy is transformed into organic humors and *mental* energy. Thus the *pure* energy results from alimentation, and therefore constitutes the material basis of all organic activities. *Essential* energy is composed of the pure energy of the aliments and energy from respiration. It acts as the principle energy underlying the physiological functions of the body. The *mental* energy combines all normal physiological functions of the body. The union of *essential* and *pure* energies results in *mental* energy. If there is a sufficient amount of these, then *mental* energy will be sufficient. On the other hand, a deficiency of *mental* energy may be caused by a lack of *essential* or *pure* energy. A deficiency in *pure* energy will always result in a lack of *essential* energy and vice versa.

*The Body Humors* The totality of the water element in the body is called the *body humor*. It is produced under the influence of the stomach, the intestines, the bladder and the triple-burner. On this subject, we find in the *Nei-Ching* that "Under the influence of digestion", the aliments produce nutritive substances or "pure substances" which are converted into pure energy which flows to the spleen and then to the lungs. When the lungs have accomplished their part which consists of the transformation and circulation of the energies, the *body humors* follow the course of the energies and are distributed over the whole body. The water of the body always represents pure energy, which flows through the meridians of the organs. On the other hand, the eliminated water represents merely impure energy.

The organs are situated in the body interior and the exterior is comprised of the skin, subcutaneous region, the seven senses and the joints. Due to the body humor, the bodily exterior and interior are in a state of harmony and balance. According to the *Nei-Ching*, the body humor is of alimentary origin. Despite their different names, *pure* energy, *essential* energy, the organic humor, the meridians and vessels are all based on a single kind of energy, and their common origin is constituted by alimentation and their interrelated processes of development. This developmental interdependence explains why, for example, a lack of humor weakens the energy and the blood, and vice versa. Excessive perspiration, violent vomiting, grave diarrhea lead to exhaustion of the organic humor. A corresponding weakening of the blood may then be observed: the circulation seems to be cut off, the energy is insufficient, the pulse is small and frail, the heart thumps and the limbs are cold. After a hemor-

rhage, we can always observe the symptoms of an exhaustion of the organic humor: dry mouth, thirst, infrequent urination and slow action of the bowels.

## The Meridians or Channels of Energy

The 12 principal meridians or principal energy conductors represent the basic structure of the entire system of energy channels. They correspond to the six storage organs and the six hollow organs, as well as to the circulation. They flow from the head to the feet, from the feet to the chest, and from the chest to the upper extremities. The meridians which are assigned to the hollow organs flow along the outside of the limbs and along the back. The energy channels belonging to the storage organs or interior organs pass along the inside of the limbs and along the front of the body. Each meridian passes along its proper channel. Where there are no principal meridians the body receives its energy supply from sub-meridians or capillaries. For the practice of acupuncture the following physiological principles are of the greatest importance.

The meridians provide communication between exterior and interior and between the upper part of the body and its lower regions. Coming from the organs, the three upper *Yin* meridians flow to the hands; the three upper *Yang* meridians flow towards a hollow organ. From the hollow organs the three lower *Yang* meridians flow towards the feet and the three lower *Yin* meridians flow to a storage organ. For example, as a *Yin* meridian, the lung meridian flows from the lungs to the hand, more precisely to the thumb, while the large intestine meridian takes its course from the hand via the arm to the large intestine. A further example: the stomach meridian flows from its hollow *Yang* organ, which is the stomach, to the foot. The *Yin* meridian of the spleen flows from the foot to the spleen, which is the storage organ.

*Exterior and Interior Communicate* From the finger tip, each *Yin* meridian continues as a *Yang* meridian. At the level of the supra-clavicular fossa, the *Yang* meridian enters the thorax, flows into a hollow organ and finally into the corresponding, homologous storage organ. The lung meridian, for instance, continues from the finger tip as the large intestine meridian. The latter enters the thorax at the level of the supra-clavicular fossa, then is in contact with the large intestine which is a hollow organ, and finally with the lungs which are a storage organ.

All *Yang* meridians pass at the tips of the toes into the homologous *Yin* meridians. At the level of the inguinal region, the *Yin* meridian penetrates first into the abdomen, then into the storage organ, and finally into the hollow organ. The stomach meridian, for instance, continues as the homologous spleen meridian.

*Upper and Lower Regions Communicate* All *Yang* meridians of the hand ascend to the head where they pass into the *Yang* meridians of the foot. The latter flow to the foot, from where they continue as the homologous *Yin* meridians, which again rise to meet an upper *Yin* meridian at the thorax, which in turn flows towards the hand. This explains the polarization which occurs at the tips of the toes and fingers, and which is observed in the hollow and storage organs. Energy increases and decreases according to its location: interior or exterior, upper or lower region, *Yin* or *Yang*. The energy of the upper *Yin* meridian comes from the interior and is *Yin*. As soon

as it reaches the finger tips, it is polarized into the homologous, upper *Yang* meridian. At the level of the head, the *Yang* meridian of the hand joins the one of the foot, thus connecting the upper region with the lower region. At the thorax, the *Yin* meridian of the foot joins the one of the hand.

Along the principal currents or channels, the *Ying* energy dominates, but is accompanied by the defensive *Wei* energy and by ancestral energy. Thus the *Wei* energy and *ancestral* energy circulate in and outside the principle meridians.

*The Meridians* The twelve meridians or energy conductors (*Ching-Lo*) which we have described above can take an interior or deep course (*Yin*) and an exterior or surface course (*Yang*). Here surface and depth are not to be interpreted as interior and exterior channels. Each meridian has an exterior channel and an interior branch which is constantly in contact with its organ. The borderline between interior and exterior, and consequently between *Yin* and *Yang*, goes through the elbow and knee. Accordingly, the *Yin* and *Yang* meridians pass through a *Yin* region as well as a *Yang* region. The decisive factor is whether the flow of energy is proximal or distal in relation to knee or elbow. From the necessary relativity of all connotations of *Yin* and *Yang*, there arise the following distal and proximal distinctions:

- *Yang* zone with *Yang* meridians: *Yang* in *Yang*
- *Yang* zone with *Yin* meridians: *Yin* in *Yang*
- *Yin* zone with *Yang* meridians: *Yang* in *Yin*
- *Yin* zone with *Yin* meridians: *Yin* in *Yin*

*Submeridians and Subcurrents of Energy; The Tendino-Muscular Meridians* So far we have dealt only with the principal meridians or main currents of energy. Among the numerous ramifications of these principal meridians, we shall confine our discussion to the tendino-muscular meridians. However, the different kinds of secondary energy conductors are enumerated below:

- tendino-muscular meridians
- transversal *Lo* meridians
- longitudinal *Lo* meridians
- special meridians
- ancestral meridians
- interior courses of the principal meridians (already mentioned)
- connecting meridians

The tendino-muscular meridians draw energy in a centripetal fashion from the *Tsing* (Well) loci, and they get their supply of *Wei* energy from muscles and tendons. They do not penetrate into storage or hollow organs. Each principal meridian has its tendino-muscular meridian, which is usually a surface energy current which flows along the channels of its respective principal meridian. They also possess branches whose anatomy must be thoroughly mastered, since a lack of such knowledge may result in errors of diagnosis and treatment. The energy flow in the tendino-muscular meridians proceeds from lower to upper regions, and from the extremities towards the center of the body. The tendino-muscular meridians also supply regions through which principal meridians do not pass. The tendino-muscular meridians are not capable of alternately carrying *Yang* and *Yin* energy. As a rule, they carry only *Wei* and *ancestral* energy.



## AN INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL ACUPUNCTURE

Three unipolar tendino-muscular meridians have a common meeting area, where they join, not at a specific point, but in a multitude of common capillaries spread over a small area. Thus:

- the 3 t.m. *Yang* meridians of the foot meet at the cheek-bone
- the 3 t.m. *Yang* meridians of the hand meet at the parietal bone above the ear
- the 3 t.m. *Yin* meridians of the foot meet above the symphysis
- the 3 t.m. *Yin* meridians of the hand meet on the side of the thorax.

The pathological symptoms of the tendino-muscular meridians are of local character: pain in the tendons, muscles or joints. They are rarely associated with diseases of storage or hollow organs. The tendino-muscular meridians explain numerous healing processes which were formerly either unknown or incorrectly interpreted. The loci of a principal meridian can have a therapeutic influence on an area through which this particular meridian is not passing, if its associated tendino-muscular meridian itself is passing through. The *Ho-Kú* and the *Yang-Hsi* loci, for instance, act on migraine through the tendino-muscular meridian of the large intestine. This energy current rises to the head along the front and descends on the opposite side towards the maxilla.

The tendino-muscular meridian takes its energy from the principal meridian at the *Tsing* locus. Additional points can be determined only if they are painful and readily palpable along the path of energy flow. Of importance is the common area shared with the other two associated subcurrents, as mentioned above, as well as the so-called insertion points, which provide contact with the joints.