

*Therefore, the Great Man...
He takes
Heaven as his canopy
Earth as his carriage;
The four seasons as his steeds,
And yin and yang as his charioteers...
He superintends the four corners [of Earth]
Yet always turns back to the central axis.¹*

Huainanzi

PREFACE

‘So tell me. Where you will be going to work?’

The lovely singsong voice with disarming Spanish accent came from the young lady sitting at the computer station to my left. Rosa and I were work colleagues, in a glass-walled office building with beautiful views over the city of Madrid. She and several other colleagues were curious to know why I had resigned a lucrative post in charge of the Middle Eastern markets for an international corporation.

The truth was, I was hoping my boss would mistakenly think I would be working for the competition and show me the door before my designated leave date, with full pay of course. I was cutting it close. I still did not have an apartment in Portland, Oregon where I would be moving to attend acupuncture school. But there were no signs of an early dismissal, so with one month left I felt safe telling her the truth.

‘I’m going to study acupuncture!’

‘Ja. Ja. Seriously. What are you going do?’

‘I’m going to study acupuncture!’ I repeated in the same excited tone.

After a couple more rounds of the same, she decided to take me at my word. The alarm and disbelief which followed caused me to doubt for a brief moment my decision: ‘My God!...Have you gone crazy?...Are you serious?...WHY?’

‘Because it’s the love of my life!’

That love of a lifetime had saved me from what may otherwise have been a tragic professional betrothal. Two years earlier I had been in Northern Virginia in the process of interviewing with the CIA for clandestine service. In the post 9/11 environment, the agency had been desperate for Arabic speakers. I had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco and had

stayed on there as a tour guide. Thereafter followed a half decade of work as a trip researcher and tour guide in different areas of the Middle East, Europe, China, and India. Always in search of adventure, and despite some very deep moral objections, it had seemed like working with the CIA would be the next illogical step to take.

After several interviews I received a letter from the agency putting the interview process on hold, recommending I work in an office for a year to demonstrate the capacity to perform in a closed environment. A couple of months later a friend who worked at Expedia.com mentioned that the company was looking for someone with certain language skills and a background in negotiating to take over the Middle Eastern markets. The plan was to work a year at Expedia then resume the vetting process with the government. I jumped at the idea, brushing up on my French and Arabic, hiring a tutor to show me the ins and outs of Excel, and reading about something which didn't interest me in the least - revenue management. After a year of bureaucratic holdups and interviews with executives in France, Belgium, and England I was finally sent a contract. The week before the contract arrived something beautiful had happened.

For the past two decades I have made it a point to attend at least one 10-day meditation retreat each year. This habit began during a five-year period in which my job took me from country to country, hotel to hotel. I attended these retreats as way of trying to keep my center amidst all the outer (and inner) chaos. While serving at a retreat in Florida, I met an acupuncturist. I had seen a bit of acupuncture while living in China but never took particular interest in it as I never had reason to consider it a particularly effective form of treatment.

After the retreat, I went to visit my new friend at her clinic located in a small, cozy home in Savannah, Georgia, with the entrance hidden away beneath moss-draped oaks. The consultation rooms were filled with soft monotone music and a professional yet relaxing ambience which filled me with a sense of peace. While several of her patients were awaiting their treatments, I sat in the waiting room and asked them questions like 'Does this stuff really work?' The response to this questioning was an excited barrage of stories of cures: arthritis, depression, and a host of other ailments. My interest was piqued.

Seeing my friend at work in such a nurturing environment conjured up

images of my deceased grandfather. He had been a doctor in Hollywood at a major film studio, but while on a visit to his hometown in North Carolina he met my grandmother and was never to leave the East Coast again. He was a generous man and utterly dedicated to both his profession and his loyal following of patients. He was known to make house calls at any hour of the night and even accept the occasional chicken as payment if that was all the patient had to offer.

He would ultimately die of cancer, but not without leaving behind a deep impression engraved upon my psyche. Watching my friend at work in such a magical setting I recalled that as a child I had often told my parents that I too would one day be a doctor. As I grew older, my mind was drawn to other pursuits and I had forgotten about that childhood longing until, that day, being immersed in the calm, majestic, nurturing ambience of my friend's clinic, the forgotten yearning was reawakened.

While my friend was treating patients, I walked back to her bedroom and leafed through several books. One that particularly held my attention was one of the classic Western works on Chinese medicine entitled *The Web That Has No Weaver* by Ted Kaptchuk.

What I discovered in this book was a highly poetic approach to healing. In Chinese medicine, diagnosis was not a question of which physiological cause was producing unwanted symptoms, but rather a search for the overall pattern out of which the causes and symptoms manifest themselves. The practitioner of Chinese medicine takes into consideration the entire internal landscape of the patient of which disease is merely one component. Though I had some doubts about the literalness of the concepts he used, I was enraptured by this poetic blend of psychology, medicine, and philosophy. And what was more, judging from the results I saw in my friend's clinic, this stuff appeared to work!

Lying at the threshold between art and science, this medicine took the best of both, combining these diverse aspects into one highly effective healing art. I was sold. Why would I run about the world representing a government I didn't believe to be all that benevolent, when I could settle down and delve into the intricacies of my newfound passion?

Many people relate the experience of entering a room, catching sight of a particular person and realizing 'this is the love of my life.' I had never experienced that with another person, but what I felt in that moment toward

acupuncture must have been something similar. My childhood yearning had finally found its mate. It was a sense of knowing, of destiny perhaps. I had finally found my calling.

I decided to accept the job in Madrid and set aside some money to minimize the debt I would be incurring during three years of post-graduate studies. Thus I passed almost two years, biding my time, like a soldier at war, until I could (in the form of proper schooling) fall into the arms of my beloved. Like the love-sick soldier who reads postcards and smells perfumed letters, I read a host of acupuncture books and even stuck myself with the occasional needle.

During that honeymoon period I had idealized to some extent the art of acupuncture. And that phase slowly began to unravel once I began formal schooling. The first year of acupuncture studies at my school centered around a barrage of theory (initially fascinating) and observing acupuncture treatments which rarely had immediate effects (ultimately disheartening). The practitioner often glossed over the lack of instant efficacy by explaining to the patient that they were treating the root of the problem, and as such, it could take several treatments before results were noticed. This was despite the fact that treatment strategies generally included ‘recipes,’ or point prescriptions aimed at treating symptomatic complaints. The technique of placing a needle directly to the affected area and other point recipes completely diverged from what initially drew me to Oriental medicine: the concept of treating the inner landscape as a whole, rather than symptomatic complaints. Thus, it was not only the tepid results but the technique itself which left me demoralized by our course of studies.

Our school, like most others in the United States, teaches what is known as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Anyone wishing to practice in the US needs to study this style to some extent as TCM is considered the standard form and the content of the National Board Exam is based upon its principles. But I need to make an important distinction here. Despite its name, Traditional Chinese Medicine is a relative newcomer to the acupuncture scene.

The medical historian Kim Taylor identifies TCM as ‘the standardized, government-created, institution-bound medicine that has existed in the PRC since 1956.’² The Chinese Communist Party rose to power in 1949 and a wave of sweeping reforms were to follow. Free medical care to all and

the modernization of health care through promotion of a Western medical structure were high on the to-do list. Coming out of a long and grueling civil war with the economy in ruins, China was in no position to provide universal health care, much less via an expensive Western model. In 1956 the health ministry communicated the need ‘to train large numbers of doctors of Chinese medicine’ in order to satisfy the ‘requirements of the masses.’³ By 1959, several schools had been founded and the textbook contents standardized to impart a version of medicine known as TCM. Taylor says this institutionalization of medicine was a ‘means of mass producing future doctors of the medicine, of controlling their knowledge and practice, and of raising the status of the medicine.’⁴

Not everyone was enamored of the results. In 1962, five old and highly esteemed acupuncturists penned a letter to the Ministry of Health stating that TCM as it was taught in the government-sponsored institutions was ‘neither profound nor thorough’ and that ‘they felt that the general spirit of the medicine was not being properly communicated.’ Unfortunately for the doctors, their protests did not go unheard. The letter was denounced as ‘poisonous weed’ and the five ill-fated men were labeled ‘evil people of all descriptions.’⁵ One of the gentlemen was ‘beaten until his ribs broke and then locked up in a pen.’⁶ All but one died during the Cultural Revolution.

Acupuncture broke through the ‘Bamboo Curtain’ and into the US shortly after President Nixon’s visit to China in 1972. Impetus was provided by NY Times reporter James Reston after he came down with an acute case of appendicitis while in China preparing for the president’s arrival. Surgery was necessary and post-operative pain relief was administered with acupuncture. Soon thereafter, Reston penned an article which would help catapult acupuncture across continents. Just as China felt the need for Western technology, the Western world apparently had a yearning for Eastern wisdom.

Some twelve years after Nixon’s visit to China, the Oregon College of Oriental Medicine was founded. And here in my first year of studies at that respected institution I was going through a deep crisis of faith. I turned to several professors and older students as confessors. While acknowledging my doubts about the effectiveness of TCM, I heard profane murmurings which hinted at the existence other far more effective systems. My first encounter with one of these heterodox alternatives came toward the end of my first year of studies.

Prior to the standardization of acupuncture with TCM there were many currents of acupuncture with very different approaches to diagnosis and treatment. Individual families, clans, or townships had their own particular styles with closely guarded secrets and many of their techniques resisted inclusion into the newly standardized system of TCM. One of these currents belongs to the Tung family. A particular aspect of their system was later organized and made famous by a charismatic acupuncturist named Richard Tan and presented as the Balance Method. According to this method, one part of the body is said to mirror another part. For example, a big toe mirrors a thumb, an ankle a wrist, and an elbow a knee. By placing a needle in the representation of the affected area (e.g. a point in the elbow to treat the knee), pain can be diminished or outright eliminated. The practitioner had only to understand certain correspondences between meridians to discern the exact point needed to effect the treatment. The results were generally instantaneous. At the time, this style was heretical to the orthodox TCM taught at our institution, so I paid one of the school's more brilliant professors who specialized in this system to teach me at his private clinic.

That summer after the first year of studies, armed with newfound optimism, 1,000 needles, and a small backpack, I set off on a 500-mile hike from Lourdes, France to Santiago de la Compostela, Spain. Each year tens of thousands of pilgrims walk the Way of St. James, generally covering 10-20 miles daily, many suffering from problems such as sprained ankles, knee pains, headaches, and backaches along the way. During the hike I treated over 100 pilgrims and was amazed that in over 90% of the cases the problems were resolved almost immediately after applying needles. The Balance Method was so simple and effective in removing pains and aches along certain sections of the meridians that I thought I need search no further for an effective form of acupuncture.

And yet, deep inside, I felt that there was a serpent lurking in the garden. Though the system was remarkably effective, the intricate internal terrain with all of its poetic beauty that had attracted me to acupuncture in the first place played no role in it. Though it seemed far more effective than TCM and managed to take into account on at least some level the body's energetics, the treatment strategy was still determined by symptoms rather than an overall view of the body's internal terrain. By turning to Tan's

method for solace after my disillusion with TCM, I felt I had thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

Then one day in the clinic as a second-year student, I observed one of the legendary professors of our school, Dr. Eric Stephens, making a diagnosis. My first reaction was one of perplexity. With the patient lying face up, he reached each of his arms around the patient's back as if giving her a hug, running his hands up and down either side of the spinal column. He then proceeded to palpate different areas of the front of the body. Was this massage therapy or acupuncture?

That initial puzzlement was almost instantaneously transformed into a sense of rapture. This hands-on approach of two energetic bodies communing, struggling, arguing, seeking to understand one-another, and ultimately making up, was what my soul had been seeking. This was no analytic diagnosis of a mind brought to bear upon a body. The good doctor was playing the body like a piano, checking organ alarms up and down the front and back of the body then conversing out loud with whatever organ seemed to be out of balance. ("Oh liver...you are mighty feisty today...and you Mister Lung you are jealous of old man liver aren't you!...well just take care!"). The points he was palpating along the back reflected the state of the individual organs which they represented. These were referred to as organ alarms. Then with a single needle the recalcitrant alarm would immediately release, and sometimes symptomatic complaints would be reduced as well. This was acupuncture!

Observing that treatment was a turning point in my life. I felt as if a stale room had suddenly been filled with fresh air. A new exciting world had opened up before me, calling to be explored. As I was just a newly minted second year student, studying directly with Dr. Stephens was out of the question. However, one of the interns working in the clinic told me that if I liked palpation I should check out the work of Kiiko Matsumoto.

Kiiko Matsumoto is a brilliant Japanese acupuncturist who has studied with many of the great Japanese masters of the 20th century and has integrated their methods into a powerful form of diagnosis based almost completely upon bodily palpation. By finding sore areas (often in the abdomen and torso), generally referred to as reflexes, and relieving them by needling seemingly unrelated areas of the body, the practitioner is frequently able to eliminate symptomatic complaints. For the next few weeks, rare was

the day on which I attended a majority of the scheduled classes at school. Rather I sat in a corner of the library watching the half-dozen Kiiko seminars which were filed away in the video section. I ordered her latest book, and after devouring it wrote up sixty pages of 'Kiiko cliff notes' which I left as a reference on the clinic computers. And thus began my passion for palpating anyone who would let me near them.

Once I entered the clinic as an intern, my favorite moment of the day was when I could palpate the body, and by releasing one or two painful areas, thereby relieve symptomatic complaints which seemingly had no relationship whatsoever with the areas just released. For example, by relieving a sore point near the umbilicus on one patient, her headache and shoulder pain disappeared almost instantaneously. This system seemed just as effective as the Balance Method, yet seemed to address the body's overall energetic system rather than its symptoms. The only things that took away from that pleasure (apart from having to watch point selections nixed by the supervisor because it didn't fit in with the TCM curriculum being taught at our institution), were the necessary charting and the perfunctory questioning imposed upon us by supervisors. The objective line of questioning and the blanks on the intake sheet left me cold. The body was a miraculous organism with so many facets to be explored. What I really wanted was to converse with it directly (even if it was through reflex zones and alarms) and find out just what it really wanted.

So it was with great excitement that during the spring break of my second year of studies I travelled down to Oaxaca, Mexico to offer free treatments in rural Mixe and Zapotec communities. That initial trip lasted fourteen days, during which time I treated over five hundred people. As there were no hotels in the area, most nights I slept in a disheveled priory which housed two priests. One had actually asked to be sent to this area; the other was there as punishment after being accused of homosexuality by his parishioners and definitely would have preferred a more lucrative post (the fathers barely collected enough at mass to pay their gas and electricity). To say that I slept by night may be a bit of a stretch, as between the sweltering heat, the bed bugs, loud music from some drunks next door, and even a thief entering my room one night, 'sleep' may be more aptly described as a light state of trance which came and went numerous times throughout the night.

Despite these inconveniences, each waking day exuded the magic and energy of Christmas in childhood. The only thing better than having forty to fifty patients each day with whom to explore the energetic working of the body was watching those same people leave the makeshift clinics with relief from their aches, pains, and tensions. This was the first time I had ever met a people I could describe as 'noble.' They possessed a stoic pride. Though poor, their generosity (mostly in the form of fruits from their backyards, many liters of soda pop, and meals of chicken broth with hand-made tortillas) was heartwarming. Though I was still in the middle of my studies at school I promised to return the following month.

Thus began weeks of missed classes, rescheduling in the clinic, threats from supervisors, and unbridled bliss in monthly trips to Mexico. On one of those trips I had discovered by accident a way of opening several meridians with one needle. On another I found a variety of alternate ways to open entire areas of the abdomen with one needle. On yet another trip I came across a simple way to open the extraordinary meridians. And on it went during thousands of treatments. It was quite difficult returning to the clinic at school where at most we could treat eight people a day under the bridle of supervisors, many of whom kept a close hold on the reins.

The great Han dynasty physician Sun Simiao once wrote: 'In the great physician's therapeutic practice, he must make his mind serene and his will firm, so that he desires nothing and demands nothing. First he attains a compassionate and merciful frame of mind and vows his willingness to save all sentient beings from suffering.'⁷

One obstacle to this 'compassionate and merciful frame of mind' is the huge debt with which students today are riddled when leaving their institutions of learning. I graduated from acupuncture school \$75,000 in the hole. At that time all I could think of was returning to the mountains of Oaxaca to continue treating in the communities there. My first impulse was to leave the US along with my debt (or at least the illusion thereof), and if I ever returned would incur the wrath of the powers that be. After graduating, I decided to take the less extreme solution of moving to Xalapa, Veracruz. It was a sizable city and here I set up a private clinic to cover my living expenses and student loan payments. I also had time to visit the surrounding communities to help those who otherwise could not afford it.

One group of people who could not afford medical care was the inmates at a nearby prison. The prison is informally controlled by an infamous cartel known as the Zetas. They served at one time as the mercenary wing of the Gulf Cartel but eventually broke off from their employers (killing many of them) and formed their own operation. While the inmates belonging to this cartel are brought TVs, prostitutes, and a host of other amenities which, for them, seem to make life more palatable, the rest live in deplorable conditions, subject to (amidst other things) rape, servitude, extortion, and unsanitary conditions. The day before I was scheduled to arrive for the pilot inner prison clinic there was a riot (the prisoners had received nothing to eat but stale tortillas for several days) which left several dead and dozens seriously injured.

To witness acupuncture's capacity to penetrate and transform a toxic environment is truly awe-inspiring. Not more than a month after the infamous 'tortilla riot,' as fifteen prisoners lay on the ground (many snoring, most sleeping, all silent) with needles protruding from their bodies, a guard dressed in black stood hawkishly observing them with a keen and cautious eye. I hadn't even asked him if he wanted a treatment. Amidst the community of inmates he was a pariah, perhaps hated, and most definitely ignored. Suddenly the dour sentinel asked, 'Have you got any more of those needles?' Within twenty minutes he was lying on the floor amidst the ragtag group of one-time murderers, drug addicts, and thieves; snoring in unison with the people he was commissioned to guard.

The style of acupuncture I have been using in prisons, immigrant shelters, impoverished mountain communities, Palestinian refugee camps, my private clinic, and the same system presented in this book, has completely transformed my practice, and more importantly the lives of thousands of patients. In my experience, with the use of this technique, aggravating symptoms regularly disappear in the first treatment, though subsequent treatments are usually necessary to effect a total cure. Afflictions such as gastritis, colitis, chronic migraines, frozen shoulder, menstrual problems, and a multitude of others regularly receive a total cure in as few as 1-4 treatments. All of this is achieved without taking into account symptomatic complaints in the diagnosis and relying solely on an elemental approach.

The information presented here contains a theoretical and clinical ac-

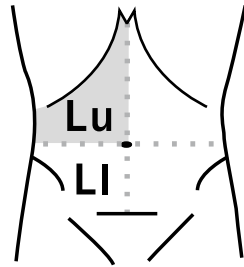
count of the technique I call 'Neoclassical Acupuncture.' The name implies a new (neo) look at or a revival of a form of acupuncture as it may have been practiced in classical times. Though it would be all but impossible to demonstrate with complete certainty that the present system was exactly that used by healers in the Han and Pre-Han periods, I do hope to show that the basics of this now unorthodox method were well established in classical times and, in some circles, provided the foundation for a seemingly miraculous form of treatment.

This method is excellent for practitioners working in the ever-expanding field of community acupuncture. A detailed diagnosis can be arrived at in less than a minute and the few needles needed to effect a cure means rapidity of treatment as well. When participating in social work in the communities outlying the city where I live in Mexico it is not uncommon to leisurely treat 10 patients per hour. Even then around 90% of the patients experience complete or near complete alleviation of aggravating symptoms in the first treatment. A modest amount of additional treatments is often needed for a complete cure. Again, as the treatment is based solely on a diagnosis of elemental imbalance, these results can be achieved without even knowing the patient's symptomatic complaints beforehand.

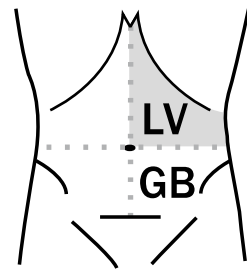
The rediscovery of the system began with the detection of a complex set of correspondences between meridians. A needle to a certain point of one meridian could open several other seemingly unrelated meridians. By opening the meridian, I mean removing any pain or sensitivity previously discovered along the entire length of a channel.

I initially thought that I had reached the end of my investigations once I had charted out the various ways of opening several meridians with one needle. But then something quite unexpected occurred. As correspondences were being charted out and tested in a clinical setting some strange incidences were noted. It was found that points often opened distinct areas which had no correspondence to the intended meridian. These areas were well defined zones such as quadrants on the abdomen, as well as other sections on the trunk and extremities.

For example, any point which opened the right Lung meridian also opened the right upper quadrant of the abdomen. Any point which opened the right Large Intestine meridian opened the lower right quadrant of the abdomen.



Yet the same was not applicable to the left side of the body. Through trial and error I found the left upper quadrant of the abdomen was released upon opening the left Liver meridian, and the left lower quadrant was released by opening the left Gallbladder meridian.



While mapping out these well-defined zones, once again, I discovered something strange and exciting. Often, by opening the most painful of these zones, every painful reflex on the body (meridians, organ alarms, etc.) would vanish immediately and, more excitingly, any symptomatic complaints the patient had been experiencing disappeared instantaneously.

It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that I felt a similar sense of adventure and excitement that Alice may have experienced after her plunge into the rabbit hole. This led to the second stage of investigation which was to map out these unusual sections and discover how best to employ them in a coherent therapeutic model. I had no idea what to call them other than, let's say, 'Lung dynamic,' or 'Large Intestine dynamic' until I came across a book which was to have an enormous impact on how this model was structured.

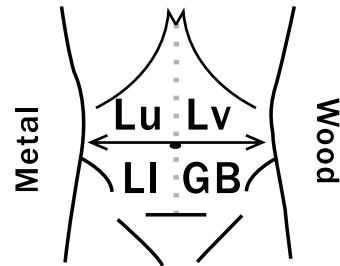
Shortly before his death in approximately 1082, the Taoist master Chang Po-tuan distilled the essence of what he had experienced to be the proper path to illumination into a short work which he left with a patron: 'All I have learned in my life is herein,' he is reported to have said on this occasion. 'Circulate it, and someday there will be those who arrive at the way through this book.'⁸ Though it may not have been the illumination he had in mind, Po-tuan's cryptic literary gift helped to shed light on the nature of what up to that point I could only call 'dynamics.' The passage which granted that flicker of understanding is contained toward the beginning of the work: 'When the five elements are complete, the tiger and dragon intertwine.'⁹ Had the 17th century commentator Liu I Ming not provided his generous elucidation of this and other passages from Chang's work, the spark may never have turned into a flame. Liu had the following comment to make on that passage:

The 'dragon' is yang, it commands the life-impulse. It belongs to the sphere of 'wood' in the eastern direction. In humans, it is the essence. The 'tiger' is yin; it commands the death-impulse. It belongs to the sphere of metal in the western direction. In humans it is sense... When the five elements are not in harmony their natures become isolated.¹⁰

This text immediately brought to mind the findings mentioned above. Under the most recent and inadequate terminology, I had been calling the upper right quadrant of the abdomen 'Lung dynamic' and the lower right quadrant 'Large Intestine dynamic.' These two organs are the representatives of the Metal element. And so it piqued my interest that this 11th century Taoist had proclaimed that Metal was to be found in the West i.e. the right side of the abdomen. I felt just as shocked about his statement that Wood could be found in the East. I had previously assigned the upper left quadrant to the Liver and the lower left to the Gallbladder. These two organs are representatives of the Wood element. And, congruent with the text, they lie on the 'Eastern' side of the abdomen.

Was it mere coincidence that I had found the reflexes associated with the Wood organs on the 'West' side of the abdomen, and those corresponding to Metal to be on the 'East' side just as the texts explained? Could it be that these 'dynamics' I had stumbled upon, which yielded miraculous results,

were in actuality what the ancients referred to as ‘elements?’ I then proceeded to chart out the location of the remaining elements. What I discovered was surprisingly in line with Chinese cosmology in general, but quite different from the abdominal mapping implied in the classical acupuncture texts.



Diagnosing the imbalance of a particular element is a pretty useless tool if there is no accompanying form of treatment. So I set about attempting various methods for righting the imbalance under the broader concept of ‘element’ rather than treating individual quadrants. Several options were tried using the commonly used generating and controlling cycles. However, no consistently effective means was found until I stumbled across a method which pits one element against its ‘opposite’. Again, the correct formula was arrived at via the same 11th century text by Cang Po Tang, mentioned above. In this text Water is contrasted with Fire. Metal contrasts with Wood. And Heaven is contrasted with Earth.

A simple schema for using this bi-polar interaction was eventually developed and the results were mind-blowing. For example, this system was used in treating a patient with extreme migraines where the Wood section of the body was found to be painful. When Wood was balanced with Metal, not only was there an alleviation of pain in the Wood area, but also an immediate alleviation of all aggravating symptoms. A similar phenomenon occurred when the Water element was found to be in predominance. When this element was balanced with Fire, symptomatic complaints generally vanished at once. There was, however, a sobering problem remaining. The common consensus was that in Oriental medicine there were only five elements; hence there was no element to balance with Earth.

Though I had been taught throughout my formal education that there were only five elements, there were of course two Fire elements (Imperial and Ministerial). Could it be that these were really two distinct entities? Astonishingly, when I assumed this to be the case and began balancing Earth with the ‘other’ Fire, via its two representatives the Pericardium and Triple Burner, the same surprising results occurred. This led me to scour over the ancient texts to see what they had to say on the matter. Parts I and II of the present work are a result of the exciting finds discovered during the ensuing investigations.

It would be beneficial and even necessary to expound upon two principle aspects of this system which may appear at first sight to be rather bizarre. The first of these aspects is the existence of a sixth element.

There is nothing radical about the idea that at one time there existed a six-element structure. Paul Unschuld, in *Medicine in China* (a text found in just about any budding acupuncturist’s library) concedes that at one time ‘a sixth phase was conceptualized, allowing for three yin and three yang phases.’¹¹ Rather than setting out into insurgent territory, it is our hope to bring about a *resurgence* of this forgotten system. The vagrant sixth element has been mentioned in most modern-day acupuncture texts in the form of Minister Fire. But the distinctness of its essence has not been stressed sufficiently to place it amongst the ranks of such independent entities as Water or Wood.

As we shall see, the shadowy ambiguity which surrounds this mysterious element has its origins in the concept of its representative organ, the Pericardium. This mystery began in the late 3rd century BCE, when, in the first text to mention meridians, the Pericardium’s corresponding meridian was denied its position amongst the lay lines of the body. It culminated in the 8th century when not only had it been bequeathed its own meridian and organ, but also its own element. The sovereign nature of this element plays a key role in making possible the application of the second unique feature of this style.

Arising from pre-Han times, generating and controlling cycles have become well accepted engines of influence amongst the elements. However, the basis of elemental interaction in Neoclassical Acupuncture is an older mode of interaction which consists of three axes, each with its yin/yang polarity (Metal/Wood, Fire/Water, Earth/Ether).

While this alternate mode of interaction once played a predominant role in classical cosmology and medical theory, in the ensuing centuries it fell into all but complete disuse. I say ‘almost’ because a vestige of it remains in the well-known Fire/Water polarity. Ultimately, the clinical effectiveness of the present method in and of itself should corroborate its validity.

The sixth element and the way these six elements interact - the present work - is dedicated to expounding upon these two important themes within the broader context of Taoist cosmological and medical thought. In doing so we will be privy to an exciting gaze across the ancient landscape from which this unique system of acupuncture arose several millennia ago.

I have tried to be as clear and detailed as possible to avoid any misinterpretations or misunderstandings. I would ask in advance to be forgiven by students and seasoned acupuncturists alike for any redundancies or oversimplifications in presenting the system.

INTRODUCTION

*We are leaving our time now.
 We are leaving our time now.
 There are places where time moves more slowly than here.
 We honor the four directions.
 East. West. North. South.
 And we also honor the fifth direction.
 The vertical one.
 Which is in us.
 Today.
 Here.¹*

Robert Bly, Poet

It was the year 139 BCE The Emperor Wu had ascended the throne to lead the Han Dynasty just two years prior. Liu An, king of the fiefdom of Huainan, set off en route to the imperial court on an important mission. He carried with him a text which contained a vast, encyclopedic assortment of occult, administrative, philosophical and ritualistic knowledge. The contents of the document were said to be the cumulative input of thousands of scholars and ‘masters of esoteric techniques’ which were assembled for the purpose of its compilation.² While borrowing heavily from existent texts such as the *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuangzi*, it contained original material as well. It is thought to have been the most complete exposition of Taoist thought of that era.

While nowadays we curry a teacher’s favor with an apple, it seems the ancient rulers were a bit more demanding. Liu An certainly hoped to curry his cousin’s favor with such a literary delicacy, and also perhaps to influence his political views. The latter reason must certainly have been on Liu An’s mind as he travelled to the court.

The Han Dynasty was in a bit of a conundrum at the time. There was much discussion going on as whether to centralize the imperial power or leave more autonomy to the rulers of the individual kingdoms which made up the empire. It is understandable that Liu An would have wanted a little freedom to rule his ever-dwindling kingdom. A little push in the direction of *Wu-Wei* and the hands-off form of governance which it proposed would have certainly have been to the astute king's advantage.

Some three decades earlier, Liu An's father, who happened to be the brother of a previous sovereign (Emperor Wen) had rebelled against his elder sibling. The rebellion, to put it lightly, was no success, and Liu An's rebellious father passed on, taking his place amongst the ancestors while on his way into exile.

Emperor Wen was not to take revenge for the 'sins of the father' on his nephews, and after breaking the kingdom of Huainan into three parts, it was divided amongst the deceased rebel's surviving children. One of the territories conserved the name Huainan and was given to Liu An (the ruler and budding author/editor who we now find enroute to the imperial capital).

Growing up to be a rather intelligent sort, Liu An had likely learned from the experience of his father that outright rebellion was not the safest of options. Rather he turned his passions toward subtler ventures and was to become a man of great learning and intellectual talent as well as a prolific writer. His greatest work (or editing job) was to be the *Huainanzi*. And this was the document he now carried with him to present to the emperor.

Some prominent scholars believe it likely that upon arrival at the imperial court, Liu An was received personally by Emperor Wu. If that were the case, it is likely that the 21st and final chapter of the treatise entitled 'An Overview of the Essentials,' was read by Liu An to the emperor himself.³

If you have ever been nervous at reading a work of poetry in public, imagine what Liu An must have felt when coming before the emperor to present a summary of his work; a work which had most likely taken decades for he and his many scribes to take down. Any additional tension would have been understandable considering that the brother of the man before whom he now genuflected had killed his father. Following some voluptuous praise to the emperor, Liu An would have begun thus:

We have created and composed these writings and discourses as a means to
 Knot the net of the Way and its Potency
 And weave the web of humankind and its affairs,
 Above investigating them in Heaven,
 Below examining them on Earth,
 And in the middle comprehending them through patterns...
 If we [only] summarized the essentials or provided an overview and our
 words did not discriminate the Pure, Uncarved Block and differentiate the
 Great Ancestor, then it would cause people in their confusion to fail to
 understand them⁴

Liu An's discourse goes on to speak of just how one is to 'discriminate the Pure, Uncarved Block,' informing the emperor that the first chapter of this work, 'Originating the Way,' '[begins with] the six coordinates contracted and compressed and the myriad things chaotic and confused.'⁵ The six coordinates referred to here are Heaven, Earth, and the four directions.

To understand the order beyond the chaos of the myriad beings, the six coordinates (not just the five elements) are key. The rest of the *Huainanzi* could thus be summed up as an unpacking of the six coordinates in an attempt to understand and even manipulate the universe as we experience it. Thus Liu An would have presented to a hopefully receptive emperor the essence of his remarkable tome of wisdom, and by extension the reason for his voyaging so many long and perilous leagues.

Had the emperor been impressed with these words? The answer to that belongs to a moment unrecorded or at least forgotten in time. What is known is that the work was duly placed within the archives of the imperial library. This was a most fortunate book deposit, as it is for this reason that the masterpiece is still with us today.

One would like to imagine that after all that toil and trouble, the tome was not a dust collector. It would perhaps even give us pleasure to believe that on some winter's day when his highness was not preoccupied with subduing the uprising of minor kingdoms or performing seasonal rituals, he may have sauntered into the royal library to peruse Liu An's work. Had he opened the masterpiece to the opening stanzas he would have found the following lines, much in keeping with Liu An's oral exposition:

As for the Way:

It covers Heaven and upholds Earth.

It extends the four directions....

Therefore,

Pile it up vertically: it fills all within Heaven and Earth.

Stretch it out horizontally: it encompasses all within the Four Seas.

Unwind it limitlessly: it is without distinction between dawn and dusk.

Roll it out: it expands to the six coordinates.⁶

Again those same six coordinates are mentioned. More than mentioned, they would have been (so to speak) drilled into the emperor's royal head. We have here a poetic device in which Liu An's group of literary magi repeatedly refer to the six coordinates both directly and indirectly. The six coordinates are invoked not once but three times in quick succession as if to plant a seed in the mind of the lector. First there is mention of Heaven, Earth, and the four directions. This is followed by a reference to Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seas. Finally, to allow no doubt about the prime importance of this theme, 'the six coordinates' are mentioned directly.

From the outset, the *Huainanzi* divides the comprehensive division of reality not into five elements but rather six coordinates or directions. Five of these coordinates are represented by an element, while the sixth, Heaven, would go unmentioned.

The *Huainanzi*, with its stress on the six coordinates, represents the culmination of early and pre-Han thought, ironically just as the Daoist school which inspired it was entering the twilight of its political influence. In the year 122 BCE Liu An was ordered to return to the imperial court to face serious charges. It appears that he had taken on his own imperial emblems and the emperor believed this to herald rebellion.

Seventeen years earlier, Liu An had travelled to the imperial court with the *Huainanzi* and had high hopes based on the influence he trusted his great work would inspire. One could easily imagine that on his long journey to see the emperor he had carried with him the cumulative insight of centuries of thinkers not only armed with the intention of gaining political advantage, but also the desire to safeguard the collective wisdom of that era.

Rather than return to the imperial court under these less auspicious circumstances, Liu An opted to take his own life. The bulk of Liu An's works

were subsequently confiscated by imperial officials. Not long thereafter, around the turn of the 1st Century BCE, Emperor Wu, under the influence of his high official, Dong Zhongshu, would overthrow the Daoist influence and establish a refurbished version of Confucianism as the official doctrine. Sinologist Robin Yates says that 'by the third and four centuries C.E. it was virtually forgotten and the tradition was interrupted, nevermore to influence intellectuals and the political, social, and economic policies of Chinese governments.'⁷

Those same coordinates which Liu An spoke of had been around long before his group of editors decided to make them the centerpiece of Early Han cosmology. Their roots extend deeper into a dark and distant past. Just as these six coordinates appear in the opening passages of the *Huainanzi*, so they make an appearance in the opening passage of China's oldest existent historical work, *The Book of Documents*, dating back to 500 BCE. Here the text asserts that the influence of the legendary Emperor Yao was 'felt through the four quarters (of the land) and reached to (heaven) above and (earth) beneath.'⁸ In addition to laying out a six-coordinate structure, this ancient work would go on to mention six elements: 'There are water, fire, metal, wood, soil, and grain: these must be duly regulated.'⁹

The philosopher A.G. Graham maintains that these coordinates may have in fact been precursors to the elements themselves.¹⁰ So what happened to that sixth coordinate, when these directions morphed into the five elements we so commonly refer to today?

On the surface, it would seem obvious that by the time of the compilation of the first of the great works on acupuncture still with us today, *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen* (approx. 2nd century BCE), the sixth element which would have occupied the sixth coordinate of Heaven had either been forgotten or at least gone underground. In the present work we will show that this sixth element never really disappeared. At times the Han texts make explicit reference to it, and at others, the silent, incongruent omission of the sixth element and its corresponding meridians and organs speaks louder than any claims to the contrary.

In the chapters that follow we will explore the nature of the sixth coordinate, its corresponding organs, and by de facto its corresponding element. To do so we will need to set off upon a field trip into the distant past, long before China existed as a unified state.

By digging into the ancient knolls of the early Chinese classics, it is our desire to piece together a coherent archeology of that most mysterious and polemical of organs - the Pericardium. The Pericardium has been a point of contention amongst practitioners and commentators ever since it appeared on the scene in the Han era. No other organ has been more prone to misunderstandings or the subject of such heated debates. At times this obscure organ was omitted altogether, at others it was said to exist without really existing. Once its tenuous foundation was established, some texts would not assign it an element. Others would declare it to be a sub-set of Fire. Within the meridian/organ/element matrix each meridian has a corresponding organ, and each organ pair has a corresponding element. To understand the sixth element, an appreciation of the evolution of the Pericardium is imperative.

In many ways, the present work can be considered a rags-to-riches biography of that enigmatic organ, following its transmutation from lonely vagrant to prominent member of the exclusive fellowship of organs. Ultimately the revelation of the Pericardium will bring to light its elusive element.

It is our intention to demonstrate clearly that the ancient Han doctors had not only a theoretical space reserved for the unmentionable sixth element, but that it played an important role in Han clinical practice as well.

In Chapter 1 (“The Extraordinary Case of the Missing Meridian”) we explore the mysterious absence of the Pericardium meridian in the earliest text in which those energetic lines, so fundamental in the clinical practice of acupuncture, are mentioned. The text discussed is part of the Mawangdui texts, and is thought to have been composed around 300 BCE.¹¹

In Chapter 2 (“The Elephant in the Room”) we travel ahead on our timeline (circa 150 BCE) to the Early Han dynasty where the Pericardium as a meridian suddenly appears on the scene; even then for some reason the early medical practitioners were loath to admit its existence as an organ.

In the next chapter, ‘Huang Di and the Numinous Orchid Chamber’, we listen in on a conversation between the Yellow Emperor and the feisty Qi Bo who is forced to cough up a little secret due to his interlocutor’s crafty prodding. But no sooner is this vital information revealed than it is hidden away, only to be divulged to the chosen few.

In Chapter 4 (“The Nan-ching and the Amazing Mr. Ping”) we make our way to the twilight of the Han Dynasty (circa 150), to that all-important

moment when the Pericardium was at last given its due and referred to as an organ. Now we get an inkling as to why the authors of the Mawangdui texts had left out the Pericardium meridian. For with the Su Wen’s inclusion of that mysterious meridian, the door to new possibilities within the Meridian/Organ/Element matrix had been left wide open...well, almost. Though the Pericardium’s meridian and even its loyal organ had trundled across the threshold into the light of day, conservative tendencies were not ready allow a sixth element through the portal. In what was perhaps a deliberate act of obfuscation we shall see some ancient sleight of hand was called upon in smashing the Pericardium into an already existent Fire element along with a couple of other organs.

In Chapter 5 (“The Joy of Confession”) we voyage to the 8th century and the Tang Dynasty, where the Tang intellectual Wang Bing takes on the remarkable travail of editing and salvaging a Su Wen which, by that time, was in pretty bad shape. Wang Bing seems to have been quite a prodigious editor - so much so that he increased the size of the original manuscript by 50%!¹² In this ‘new’ section Wang Bing brings the Pericardium mystery (begun in the Mawangdui texts) to a head by stating explicitly that Fire can be divided into two separate elements, making six in total. Pericardium and Triple Burner are seemingly bequeathed their very own element.

In Chapter 6 (“The Sound of Silence”) we examine the motive for such a crime of omission which was to span across centuries.

In Chapter 7 we examine how the sixth element which represented the space encompassing the other elements presented a similar quandary for Indian and Greek philosophers as well.

Finally, we make an exciting return to the Su Wen and find that this model was spirited into the first great acupuncture text - a closeted alternative to the more renowned generative, controlling cycles. This ancient model which managed to conserve Yin and Yang as the prime motor of elemental interaction, may seem to have been lost in the ancient mists of China’s philosophical medical system, but as we shall see it was there all the while.

The ultimate goal of this archeology is not only to introduce a new conceptual framework but rather to reintroduce the clinical application which it implies. The clinical use of a six-element model will be the theme of Part III.