

When Taoist Acupressure Energy Techniques leads to a Breakthrough in Pain Management – A Holistic Look at an ancient Chinese Energy Modality.

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When was the last time you were frustrated by a client who had chronic back pain that took a long time to heal ? Or when was the last time that your treatment of chronic migraine headaches offered only temporary relief ? And speaking of treatments , did you ever wish for a modality that didn't leave you exhausted at the end of the day? There is an ancient acupressure technique based on Chinese acupuncture and Daoist medical philosophy that has produced phenomenal results.

As an acupuncture physician , massage therapist and continuing education provider , I was exposed to a lot of ancient Chinese acupressure and medical massage techniques, ever since China started opening up in the last decade or so. Like so many acupuncture physicians and massage therapists , I was taught Traditional Chinese Medicine when I went to school in the 1990s. It was only much later , that through some visiting Chinese acupuncture masters , I was exposed to the Taoist way of thinking and achieved a breakthrough in my treatments .

Taoism loosely translated means “ the path “, or “way “ and refers to a mixture of philosophy and religion. However it is not an isolated and esoteric practice followed by any particular cult or sect in some remote part of China. The principles are intertwined with Chinese cuisine, traditional medicine, feng shui, astrology, immortality beliefs, martial arts and various styles of Qi Gong. The emphasis is on a natural order of things and behaviors . There is no worship involved. On closer examination, Taoism describes the flow of force through the universe , or the flow of qi behind the natural order. Qi, according to Taoism , is the essential life force that makes us exist and do things and that is subject to a natural order . Man is not separate from the universe or nature , but a microcosm of the universe and thus follows its universal laws. The five-phase or five element theory that people learn at massage and acupuncture school is based on Daoist philosophy. In addition , the theory of Yin and Yang (complementary opposites that are opposite and support one another) owes much to early Daoist Chinese doctors.

There is , one particular central principle in Daoism that explains much of their medicine and religious belief and that is the system of correspondences. The concept is so important that the famous German sinologist, Paul Unschuld , has called Chinese medicine the medicine of systematic correspondences . These are contained in that classic of Chinese medicine , the *Nei Jing* , which is loosely translated in English in a book titled: “The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal medicine”.

According to the *Nei Jing*,

“Humans correspond to heaven and earth and should follow the four seasons. They are in conformity to heaven and earth.”

The Nei Jing also goes to extend this theory of correspondences to the domain of human biology and medicine. For instance the Nei Jing says:

“ When the sages stipulated measurement, they must have considered the correspondence to heaven and earth. Therefore , as there are constellations in heaven and there are rivers on earth, so the human being has channels and vessels.”

Here follows an even more detailed description of similar correspondences:

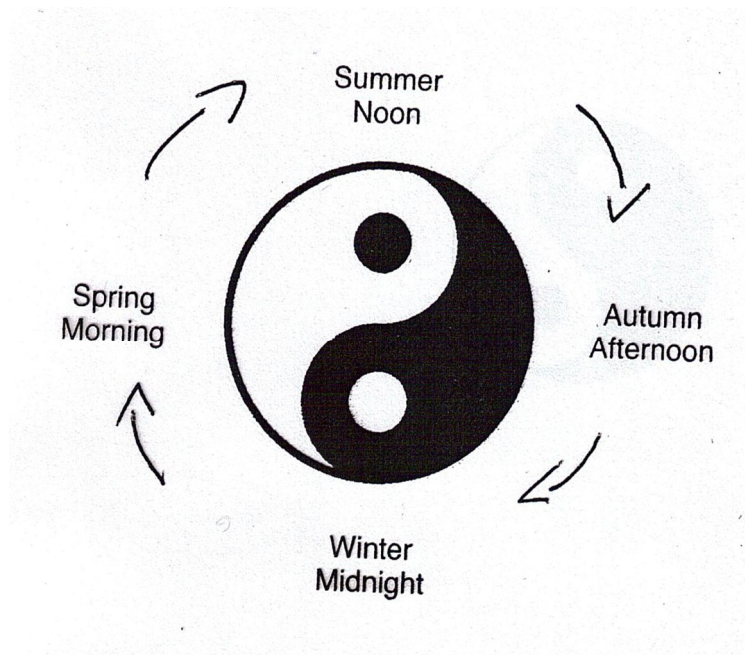
“ Heaven has four seasons, while human beings have four limbs... There are 365 days in the year, while humans have 365 joints (or acupuncture points) ... There are 12 channel rivers across the land, while humans have 12 channel vessels...”

When we look at the most important concept of needling methods , we see a similar approach in Shiatsu- Anma which are indirectly derived from Chinese medicine. The principles are , supplementation and drainage . You supplement or strengthen when there is emptiness of vacuity (insufficient qi or life force) present in the patient. You drain when there is overwhelming energy or what the Nei Jing calls , “ staleness “ . This is loosely translated as stagnation and congestion over lengthy periods of time. A Western massage analogy would be myofascial pain evidenced in trigger points. These trigger points contain surplus energy in most cases that has to be drained and re-distributed. Any insufficiency of energy as evidenced in fatigue has to be supplemented.

In addition ,one should look at the four seasons as times where the qi or universal life energy of the patient is in a state of ebb and flow. We often find ourselves and patients at peak energy during a particular season and bottoming out in another season. The Nei Jing also mentions that such seasons are in opposition to one another but not exclusively so. This can be the case for someone who finds that he or she has abundant energy in summer and little or no energy in Winter. But what is the connection ? Summer is the period that represents maximum functional energy (energy of action) in an individual. Translated to the everyday, let's take the case of Jane, a fictitious patient , who will represent the cyclical relationships of energy. Jane in summer, feels like getting up every morning , performs many long-term projects instead of just little short-term tasks. She is also much more mentally alert and enthusiastic about life than before. However, all that energy takes a lot out of her. So when winter comes , her body and mind slow down as it stores and replenishes energy. Then when summer comes , she is at her peak again. Therefore, as a massage therapist, you should do massage or acupuncture for Jane that drains and therefore relaxes her in summer. In winter you do the opposite. That way she is in harmony again with nature or the universe.

Let's look at the specific Daoist acupuncture techniques . The acupuncture techniques are of course, the same as acupuncture techniques . This is best explained by using the famous *Tai Ji* symbol of cyclical relationships (depicted below) . This symbolic representation will also clarify Jane's pattern of energy.

The light or white color represents Yang energy or fire. Fire symbolizes light, heat and activity. This represents the functional part of the human being. In terms of human biology, Yang would symbolize the physiology of the human being. The black or opaque color symbolizes Yin energy or water. Water symbolizes the dark, cool and passivity. Everything that is opposite to Yang.



TAI JI SYMBOL SHOWING CYCLICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Notice the four segments into which cyclical time has been divided. The very top describes the peak of Yang. During the height of summer or at noon is when light, heat and energy in general is most abundant. Activities and the mind (thoughts) expand. It occurs in summer and at noon. In contrast, the very bottom of the circle, describes the very bottom level of energy. Here, during winter and at midnight, there is a maximum of darkness, cold and a minimum and deficiency of energy. Activities and the mind contract or shrink. In summer, Jane has the energy to think and act as if all activities are long-term. In winter, it's just the opposite as she is spent. Now is the time for her to conserve energy. What about spring and autumn? Spring represents the rising and growth of natural energy towards summer. Autumn, on the other hand, the falling and shrinking

of natural energy , as the body prepares to shut down and replenish We also notice how Yang energy flows in a clockwise direction.

So, if I am an acupressure therapist, I should place my thumb, finger or even hand on a key acupressure point or an *ashi* point that is painful and rotate to the left or counterclockwise , if there is excess energy causing pain. I have to picture myself standing over the patient and doing it. The therapist wants to release and sedate, so he will go against the flow of Yang energy. First , I have to make sure that the pain is musculo-skeletal or myofascial and caused by excessive strain. This is because if the pain is due to a tumor or organ – related, a deficiency might be causing the pain. During the initial interview and examination the difference can be picked up. When we want to energize and strengthen we rotate clockwise . The length of time we do the acupressure technique is dependant on the condition of the patient and his or her constitution. . Chronic conditions take two to five minutes. Acute can take 20 or 30 seconds to have an effect . In the Tai Ji image below, can represent the pain as excess yang or energy that is invading Yin .Yang can represent two signs of inflammation, heat and pain. One notices how the Yin on the right, representing coolness and relaxation and no pain, has diminished



But what do the two circles , one black and the other white mean? Earlier in the article, it was stated that the Daoists believed that the two concepts of Yin and Yang were complimentary but opposite. When one looks at the Tai Ji symbol of cyclical relationships , one notices that the two curved parts in the diagram are like two fish of opposite colors lying in opposite directions. This suggests that the two parts composed of everything are different in nature and move in different directions. However, even if they are opposite, they share the same circle. This implies that there is unity between the two opposite poles in anything. In the diagram, the yin (black) fish) has a white eye, whereas the yang (white) fish has a black eye. This means that there is yin within yang and there is yang within yin. The one engenders the other. In the diagram above ,even if the pain is extreme the Yang condition still has in its nature to embrace the Yin aspect The dividing line between Yin and Yang has no space between it meaning that the Yin and Yang fish embrace one another within the circle.

Is there pressure involved in this action of regulation? Pressure can take longer time . Also, any pressure applied need not be excessive but on a scale of 1 – 10. from lowest to

highest, can be anything from 2 – 5. The therapist has to respect the pain threshold of the patient but also be guided by the intent of the therapy. It’s all about modulating the energy of the patient. The intent is not to “squeeze” out the painful point creating a situation of “ good pain “. When pressing in on the point , the therapist creates a circuit.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine , the skin is described as yang, while the inside tissues and organs are described as yin. One has to remember that Yin and Yang also represent opposite energies, like that of a battery, except that this energy is not the electrical energy we find in the nervous system. Scientists talk about this energy being a bio magnetic force, or Qi . Yang represents positive energy and Yin , negative energy. When the therapist presses the Acupressure point on the skin ,he is connecting the positive yang (on the outside) with the negative yin on the inside of the body. Since opposites attract, we have an energy circuit.

At the beginning of the article, I mentioned that Taoist energy techniques lead to a breakthrough in pain management. The Taoists believed in a rule of opposite correspondences based on a mirroring format. The mirroring format is designed to specify which part or parts of the body reflect tenderness or weakness distal from a “sick” area. If the knee is sore and has myofascial pain or arthritis, then the therapists mirrors that body part on an elbow that is most distal to the “ sick” knee. That would be the opposite elbow. If the knee is sore on the outside , then the therapist looks for a corresponding area on the lateral side of the opposite elbow . The exact acupressure point location is found by checking for an experiential sore point on the elbow. An experiential point is an acupressure point , called “ ashi “ that falls outside the normal established path of the meridian. It might even be on the meridian and not an official acupressure or acupuncture point. However the experience of countless past acupuncture doctors from China , who use the Taoist system, has shown that it is a valid acupressure point because it corresponds to the sore or “sick” area of the knee.

In almost all cases, the mirroring format balances an upper limb with a lower limb and vice versa. When we mention the limb we include all parts of the limb such as fingers, toes, wrists, ankles, elbows, shoulders and hips. For example , if the injured area is the upper arm , the opposite hip is selected. If the pain is on the lateral side of the Middle Deltoid, then look at the area of the Vastus lateralis and , or also the Iliotibial band . It is very important to pinpoint the area of pain first on the shoulder, select the most sore corresponding point or points on the lateral side of the leg.

<u>MIRRORING FORMAT</u>
FINGER < ----- > TOE
HAND < ----- > FOOT
WRIST < ----- > ANKLE

FOREARM < ----- > LOWER LEG
ELBOW < ----- > KNEE
UPPER ARM < ----- > THIGH
SHOULDER < ----- > HIP
HEAD < ----- > FOOT

Once you have located the most sore point, get the patient to move the “sick” or affected limb opposite to the area you are working on. Keep on working that area without increasing the pressure. The movement of the affected limb pushes the stagnant Qi through. The affected meridians and therefore fascia and muscles. Again there might be more than one sore point.

There are rare cases where the ipsilateral side to the pain has to be chosen. That is why the therapist must palpate both sides and choose.



One cannot help but notice that the technique of balancing through opposite correspondences, can also be visualized through the Tai Ji symbol. According to the Daoists the left of the body is Yang and the right is Yin . Yang represents the male aspects of the human being. Males according to Traditional Chinese Medicine mostly have anger issues . That would mean the acupressure therapist should start on the left side of the male body. All emotional issues , like anger, fear, worry, sadness and joy are functional aspects that involve an output of energy and are therefore described as Yang. Yin represents the female aspects of the human being . Traditionally women have mostly Yin related issues that have to do with blood, lymph and all the fluids . These are structural issues. In this case, the therapist starts on the right side of the body . Also, the area above the navel is described as Yang, while the area below is described as Yin. The root of the pain can be in myofascial issues that stem from emotional unresolved issues causing stress. However, the therapist might find the location of the painful injury on the Yin side of the body in a male patient , simply because that side was weakest. The emotional stress of the pain can still be treated on the left or Yang side of the body for purposes of balance. Also, because of the hectic and stressful pace of our modern lifestyle, women can also come to the therapist primarily with emotional issues. Thus when applying the rule of opposite correspondences one is also helping to balance the Yin and Yang of the whole body.

To sum up, the Daoist system of correspondences is a structured ,goal – orientated modality that achieves permanent pain relief and deep healing in a most economical manner. Not simply a technique, its roots lie deep in ancient philosophical principles. The massage therapist has to therefore realize that myofascial or musculoskeletal pain and issues are symptomatic of a fundamental imbalance in the mind-body connection of the patient, who has violated an ancient philosophical principle of order in the universe. Only when practicing the Daoist acupressure technique , can the therapist also gain respect for the power of qi in its many manifestations and see himself as part of a higher order of things

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