

Three questions

from the *Zhen Jiu Wen Dui*



By Wang Ji

Translation by Steven Clavey

The *Zhen Jiu Wen Dui* has three long chapters, and was completed in 1530. It uses a “question and answer” approach to discuss acupuncture theory and difficult questions, the author Wang Ji providing explanations from his own experience. Wang Ji lived in the Ming dynasty, from 1463-1539, in Anhui Province south of Nanjing. His *zi*-name was Sheng-Zhi, and his self-selected *hao*-name was Shi Shan Ju Shi (The Lay Buddhist of Stone Mountain). His father was a well-known doctor, and Wang Ji combined stringent study of the medical classics with studies in the *Yi Jing* and the Confucian classics. He wrote 10 other books including *Yi Xue Yuan Li* (Original Principles of Medicine), *Shang Han Xuan Lu* (Selected Records from the Shang Han Lun) and *Du Su Wen Chao* (Copied Readings from the Su Wen), the remaining works spanning external medicine, pulse diagnosis, meteorologic qi permutations, the *Yi Jing*'s medical applications, and a pharmacopoeia.

Some may ask:

Illnesses can be in the qi level, or in the blood level; does the acupuncturist differentiate qi and blood, or not?

Answer:

The acupuncturist should also know about qi level and blood level disorders. When the illness is in the qi level, it wanders unfixed [in location]; when it is in the blood level, it is deep and does not shift.

Let us discuss it in terms of a lump (*ji kuài*): if, in the abdomen, it appears sometimes in

the upper abdomen, sometimes in the lower, sometimes there and sometimes gone, this is qi level. If it is in the flanks, or in the epigastrium, or to the left or right of the umbilicus, and fixed without shifting, gradually growing larger, this is blood level.

If we discuss it in terms of wind: if it shifts from the left foot to the right foot, or from the right hand to the left hand, shifting and moving without constancy, this is qi level. If it is constantly in the left foot, or always in the left hand, halted without travelling, this is blood level.

All disorders [can be characterised] in this way. What one needs to know is that for qi level disorders, one needles below if the disorder is above, and needles above if the disorder is below; if it is on the right, one needles the left, and if it is on the left, one needles on the right. For blood level disorders, one chooses points appropriate for the disorder according to the location of the blood [stagnation].

If the qi is drained when the blood is disordered, or the blood drained when the qi is disordered, this is called *punishing the innocent* — to whom shall the guilt accrue?

Again, some may ask:

Which illnesses are affected by the needling of *San Yin Jiao* (SP-6)?

Answer:

The three yin [channels] of the feet travel from the foot toward the abdomen ... [and intersect at *San Yin Jiao*] ... thus it is called the Three Yin Intersection.

The Spleen governs the middle, while Liver and Kidneys govern the lower, thus the qi

of the middle and lower Jiao are encompassed by one point! Therefore unless the condition is dangerous or serious, and involves all three yin [channels], it cannot be needled lightly.

The qi of the Spleen and Kidney are often deficient, and even though Liver [qi] may be excess, it is yet an organ that stores blood, so mistaken needling can cause loss of a person's yuan/original qi — one cannot but be cautious!

Some may ask:

There are doctors nowadays who, when needling, hide their hands with their sleeves while manipulating the needle, saying that their method is secret and mysterious. They refuse to show anyone, for fear that their method may be stolen. What could these methods be?

Answer:

The 14 methods contained in the *Ode of the Golden Needle* (Jin Zhen Fu), and the methods such as “Green Dragon Waves its Tail”, could be said to exhaustively cover the topic. To set these aside and search out other “secret mysterious” (*shēn mǐ*) techniques stretches belief.

Furthermore such methods, if tested against the classical [tradition], will be found to go against it; if the rationale is questioned, it will be found to be contrary to sense. *They* call it mysterious, I call it deceit; *they* call it secret, I call it absurd.

Thus while they try to fool the common people, they actually disgrace themselves. The ancients were kind (*shàn*), they feared only that they could not [teach and benefit] people enough. Miserliness to this degree — supposing that they *did* have a secret mysterious technique — would obliterate its virtue (*shén*) and make the technique ineffective. What is the value in that?

Translator's comment: This is Wang Ji at his usual acerbic best, never fearing to call a spade a spade. The last section, however is particularly interesting in its implications, specifically that it is one's kindly virtue that gives virtue to the technique and makes it work.

This is very close to the original meaning of virtue, from Latin *virtus*, a strength or power that makes something effective. This is, moreover, tied to the Classical tradition, the *Jíng*, the warp threads of a loom, that which carries evaluated experience through generation after generation, which themselves weave upon these strands the design which makes up the culture. Anything in accord with this design is *zhèng*—proper and correct; that which deviates from the warp is *xíe*—deviant, distorting, or (as we often translate it) evil. Deviating from natural law in such a way, it is doomed to fail.