

Facing East: A "Scientific" Sojourn in Shanghai, Part 1

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The majority of these columns have targeted the paradigm shift in societal attitudes about the well-documented "graying" of the enormous baby boomer demographic in the Western hemisphere, particularly in the United States. But this philosophical about-face, and its impact on acupuncture and those drawn to it, is arguably a worldwide phenomenon. In particular, I have noticed a rise in inquiries regarding facial acupuncture as a holistic alternative to established norms of cosmetic surgery, Botox injections and other related procedures from around the globe.

Underscoring this point, in March 2007, a quartet of Japanese acupuncturists winged their way from East to West for a certification series in facial acupuncture. Spurred on by their intrepid leader, Takao Ueda, these strangers in a somewhat strange land had found themselves in the idyllic antebellum town of Frederick, Md.

There they proceeded, with the assistance of a Japanese-American translator (my colleague and student, Tomoko Kawamura), to immerse themselves in the novelties of what Ueda-san would later describe as "American-style" facial acupuncture. Their reaction to the treatment philosophy and protocols was so overwhelmingly positive that they vowed to return to Japan and lay the groundwork for my first-ever Japanese facial acupuncture seminar.

While I was aware earlier this year that I would be returning to Japan under their auspices (where I had previously lived as an American expat studying *shiatsu*), I did not anticipate that I would be combining this trip with yet another to China, the home of the ancient roots of our medicine.

AN Emissary from the West

Upon the recommendation of my Australian colleague, Dr. Kylie O' Brien (who is presently head of the undergraduate treatment program in Chinese medicine at the University of Western Australia and who is the sponsor for my Australian seminars), I was honored to be invited to appear as a guest presenter on Nov. 5, 2008, at the 2nd International Forum on Traditional Chinese Medicine in Shanghai, sponsored by Shanghai Shuguang Hospital, associated with the Shanghai University of TCM.

I arrived in Shanghai a few days prior to the forum, after a protracted flight via the North Pole; the first time in any of my travels that I had witnessed the great northern ice cap. It was now rent, even in winter, with large cracks and rivulets in these days of global climatic warming. Having recuperated somewhat from the rigors of the journey, I took one of the relatively inexpensive, ubiquitous Shanghai-nese taxis out to Pudong, the ultra-modern, space-age metropolis that has arisen in comparatively short order on the eastern banks of the Huangpu River. Pudong includes, among its scintillating "sci-fi looking" structures, three striking and lofty monuments. In order of increasing height, they are the Pearl TV Tower, the Jin Mei Tower, and the new Shanghai World Financial Center - which I would describe to you, respectively, as the "Rocket," the "Pen" and the "Bottle Opener," due to their distinctive profiles. These towering testaments to Shanghai's

emerging 21st-century financial prominence dwarf the 19th- and early 20th-century mercantile landmarks of the city's famous Bund that festoon the Western shore - a relic of its colorful, dissolute colonial period - which haunt the air like elegant shadows of a bygone era.

The forum, meticulously organized by Dr. Guan (Gavin) Xin of Shanghai Shuguang Hospital, took place at the sumptuous Dong Jiao State Guest Hotel. This "green" hotel, situated in an oasis of beautiful parkland, provided a welcome respite from downtown Shanghai's less-than-salubrious atmosphere and somewhat eased the respiratory difficulties that I had experienced since my arrival. Fortunately, I had close at hand a portable pharmacy of Chinese herbal remedies as insurance against every possible health-related contingency, as well as a supply of acupuncture needles.

The speakers at the event included practitioners and teachers from across the globe - all over Asia, Australia, Europe and a handful from the United States. I was chagrined to see that there were no other licensed acupuncturists or representatives from any acupuncture school in North America. Our profession was instead embodied in the presence of delegates from chiropractic schools, most of whom were researchers.

Topics of the various lectures, confined per the "scientific" model to 20 minutes, were diverse, from a consideration of the use of evidence-based medicine by a representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) to the challenges involved in the translation of TCM documents, the integration of TCM and acupuncture into the Canadian health care system, the study of TCM in the USA, etc., to mine (on facial acupuncture) - the only presentation that actually incorporated any kind of acupuncture needling.

This was the first time that I had to contend with the challenges of presenting to a body of practitioners of whom the vast majority had no knowledge of English. Thus, my talk was carefully tailored to the demands of simultaneous translation into Mandarin. However, I capped it off by offering a brief demonstration on Dr. Kylie O' Brien, who had earlier spoke on the reliability of the statistical results of Chinese medicine diagnosis. This awoke the participants from their collective stupor, and was indeed a first for this forum. While acupuncturists from China are well-acquainted with the use of facial motor points for the treatment of Bell's palsy, TMJ and neuropathies, they had never before witnessed a motor-point protocol targeted at enhancing beauty and increasing longevity.

Kylie and I had earlier been roused from our respective beds by Gavin in order to attend a lavish opening ceremony, where beautiful commemorative documents encased in red velvet had been bestowed upon the guest speakers. Following the conclusion of the afternoon's lectures, my partner MichelAngelo and I joined the assembled guests and visited dignitaries for a lavish Chinese banquet (10 courses in total) featuring many culinary novelties, including sea cucumber and a most delectable shark-fin soup.

We were welcomed, with great pomp, into the extended circle of the Chinese medicine family; the festivities were punctuated by numerous hearty *gam bei* (tossing the wine back in one shot) as we drank more than one toast of Chinese red wine. Our companions at dinner were affable, fun and outgoing. In our travels around Shanghai, we had invariably found that most citizens would readily respond to our smiles of greeting.

After a few more days of rest and a mini-vacation in the fabled Chinese city of Hangzhou (much-celebrated in poetry as one of two earthly paradises), I had the pleasure of touring the impressive facilities of the Pudong location of Shanghai Shuguang Hospital. My guide was Gavin, who, when not arranging international convocations of TCM professionals, functions as its director of the

International Cooperation and Exchange Center of International Health Care.

This facility integrates the practice of TCM with Western medicine, and has some 800 beds. It is a teaching hospital, and acupuncturists make the pilgrimage to Shanghai from the four corners of the globe to intern and study TCM. Gavin, with whom I had lunched in New York prior to my trip, is knowledgeable, outgoing and comfortably fluent in English, and is additionally responsible for their Exchange Program.

Gavin had arranged a meeting with two of the hospital's upper echelon: its president, Dr. Shen Yuandong, and the chief director and head of acupuncture, Dr. Shen Weidong. I had hoped to enlist the aid of the Chinese in studying facial acupuncture, which currently suffers from a lack of scientific validation of its mechanisms, despite the wealth of empirical results that are demonstrated by the beneficial changes in the health and appearance of our patients.

Both men were extremely open to the possibility of a collaborative research project, and the latter Dr. Shen suggested almost immediately that I return to Shanghai at the end of my Asian trip to demonstrate my approaches to his doctors and staff, to stimulate interest for a potential continuing education course in mid-December!

Since all projects at this hospital are state-supported, ample funds are available for research; there are currently 300 scientific studies in progress. Indeed, the results of these meetings were more than I could have possibly anticipated in advance, and I returned to my hotel room somewhat stunned yet hopeful at the turn of events. I will report more fully on developments with these various Chinese projects as they manifest.

In my next column, I will detail my experiences teaching facial acupuncture to a group of Japanese acupuncturists who proved to be of an entirely different character.

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