

# The Roots and Development of Chinese Acupuncture: from Prehistory to Early 20th Century

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## Summary

The use of stone Acupuncture needles, the "Bian Shi", is reported in several ancient Chinese manuscripts, pointing the origin of this form of medical treatment to Western China in the stone age. Early writings on silk fabrics and on stone have been retrieved from tombs and elsewhere to provide a fascinating insight on the useage and development of acupuncture. Over many centuries the tradition has been passed between generations of physician-acupuncturist families who were the attendants of Emperors, and the leaders of the medical profession, teaching and writing texts that were studied throughout the East.

## Key words

Acupuncture history, Traditional Chinese medicine.

Acupuncture is an important and distinctive part of traditional Chinese medicine. It has a long history, which can be divided into the following three periods:

### A. Early period: prehistory to the 3rd century A.D.

The origin of acupuncture can be traced back at least to the New Stone Age when the "Bian" or "Bian Shi", a piece of polished sharpened flat stone or stone needle was used for treating illness by pricking certain parts of the body. This was described many times in ancient Chinese literature (1). *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (Analytical Dictionary of Chinese Characters), one of the earliest Chinese dictionaries compiled in about 100 A.D., gives a clear definition for the function of the "Bian" by saying that it was a piece of stone used for treating illness by way of pricking the body. In the *Wu Shi Er Bing Fang* (Prescriptions for Fifty-Two Kinds of Disease), one of the earliest extant medical writings on silk fabrics, unearthed in 1973 from a 3rd century B.C. tomb at the Ma Wang Dui Village in Hunan Province, South China, there are descriptions about the using of "Bian Shi" in treating illnesses such as hemorrhoids, etc. (2). This New Stone Age "Bian" has been recently found in a number of places in China (3). As for the invention of this stone needle, it was attributed to the legendary figure Fu

Xi Shi, the earliest ancestor of the Chinese people who flourished in East China, and Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, the ancestor of the Chinese people who flourished in Central China (4).



Figure 1.  
Huang Di Nei Jing, the Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic.

The medical classic *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic), also called *Neijing* (Figure 1), says that acupuncture, using the "Bian" stones, came from the eastern part of China (5). It is interesting to see that four Han dynasty (25 to 220 A.D.) stone carvings found in Shan-Dong Province, North-East China, show a half-man half-bird figure pricking a patient with a needle (6). This not only confirms what the *Neijing* says about the origin of acupuncture, but also shows its remote origin, for the half-man half-bird image is actually a symbol of totem worship. That the origin of acupuncture came from Eastern China is further supported by an ancient Chinese geographical work, *Shan Hai Jing* (Classic of Mountains and Seas), which says that the foot of the mountains of the eastern ranges was littered with stone needles (7).

Among the numerous oracle-bone inscriptions excavated from the remains of the Yin-Shang period (21st to 11th century B.C.) is the character 𠄎 showing the early practice of needling the human body (8), although we do not know what kind of needle was used at that time.

The periods of the Spring-Autumn (770 B.C. to 476 B.C.), the Warring States (475 B.C. to 221 B.C.), the Qin (221 B.C. to 207 B.C.) and the Han dynasty

(206 B.C. to 220 A.D.) saw a definite and remarkable development of acupuncture, particularly after the period of the unification of China in the 3rd century B.C. By this time, acupuncture had become a popular therapy and had acquired fairly systematic theories and principles. This becomes obvious as seen from the following three points :

Firstly, the "Bian" (stone needle) was gradually replaced by needles made of metal. With the invention and progress of metallurgy there appeared bronze, iron, silver and gold needles. The replacement of stone needles by metal needles and

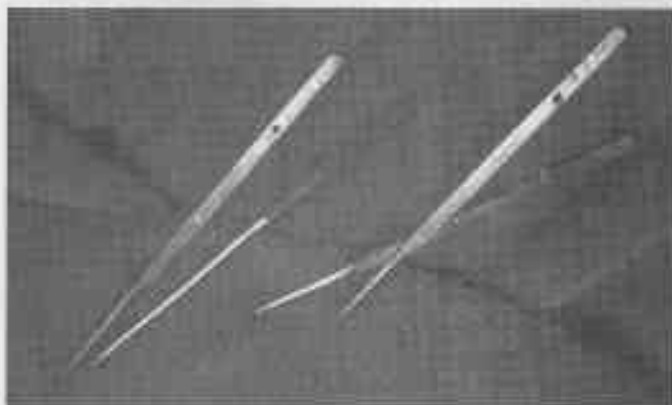


Figure 2. Golden needles found in the tomb of Prince Liu Sheng in Mancheng, North China (113 B.C.).

the wide use of metal needles during this time can be seen not only from ancient literature (9), but also from the many archeological findings of metal needles excavated at many places in China (10). For instance, nine acupuncture needles were unearthed (Figure 2) in 1968 in the tomb of Prince Liu Sheng of Zhong-Shan and his wife, of the Western Han dynasty, buried in the year 113 B.C. in Mancheng, He-Bei Province, North China. Four of them made of gold are still in perfect condition, but the five silver ones were damaged (11).

The *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic) describes both the metal needle and the "Bian"; more descriptions, however, were given of the metal ones. Particularly interesting are the descriptions about the ancient "Nine kinds of needles" (Figure 3); their shapes, lengths and usage.



Figure 3. The nine kinds of needles.

They are :

1. The arrow-head needle: the head is shaped like an arrow, very large and sharp; suitable for superficial pricking.
2. The round needle: the body is like a column, the head round like an egg; mainly for massaging at the points.
3. The blunt needle: the head is blunt, with a thick body; mainly for pressing.
4. The three-edged needle: the body is round, with a triangular, sharp head; used to cause bleeding.
5. The sword-like needle: it has cutting edges on both sides like a sword; used to make incisions to drain pus.
6. The round-sharp needle: the body is thick, the head is round and sharp; used for rapid pricking.
7. The filiform needle: the body is thin as hair. This is the most extensively used one .
8. The long needle: it is the longest needle of all, being up to 20cm in length; used for puncturing an area with thick muscle.
9. The large needle: the body is thick and the head is round; used for treating the joints (12).

There is little doubt that the appearance of metal needles and the introduction of the nine needles not only increased the methods of acupuncture and enhanced its therapeutic effect, but also enlarged its range of indications.

Secondly, there had appeared by this time, in various places in China, many doctors experienced in acupuncture, ranging from court physicians to popular ones, such as Huan, from North-West China, who, when summoned in the year 581 B.C. to serve the Marquis Jin, said that his case was incurable, because the disease was located in the "gao huang" (a site supposed to be below the heart and above the diaphragm) where moxibustion, or acupuncture, or medicine could not reach (13). This shows that acupuncture was practised as a therapeutic measure during that time.

Many stories recorded in the ancient literature show the dramatic results achieved by acupuncture in treating illnesses. One of the earliest stories is told of the wandering doctor Bian Que (Qin Yue-Ren), who flourished in the 4th century B.C. from Middle-North China (Figure 4), and who one day arrived in the Kingdom of Guo to be told that the Prince had just died and the funeral was being prepared. Having enquired about the cause of death and the condition of the Prince, Bian Que announced that he could bring the Prince to life. The King



Figure 4. Bian Que, also known as Qin Yue-Ren, the noted physician of around 500 B.C. who was skilled in acupuncture.

ordered him to do what he could to the apparently lifeless body. After taking the pulse, and examining and palpating the body, *Bian Que* diagnosed that the Prince was suffering from "*Shi Jue*", a state of deep coma. He then instructed his pupil *Zi Yang* to treat the Prince with acupuncture and moxibustion, and the Prince was restored to life (14).

Acupuncture was taught through apprenticeship. Quite a few famous doctors had served their apprenticeship, and they in turn had their own apprentices.

Among the many well-known physicians versed in acupuncture were: *Gong-Cheng Yang-Qing*, a native of Lin-Zi in North-East China, who flourished in the second century BC, and who taught a series of ancient medical texts related to acupuncture to his pupil *Chuan-Yu Yi*. The latter became a well-known physician and acupuncturist and was particularly famous for keeping clinical case-records. In one case, as he reported, he cured the Prince of *Zi-Chuan's* severe headache by pricking a point on the Foot-*Yangming* Channel. He passed his learning in acupuncture to his pupils *Gao Qi* and *Wang Yu*, who were also skilful acupuncturists (15).

*Fu Wong*, a popular doctor, who flourished in the 1st century A.D. in South-West China, treated patients with acupuncture with immediate effect. He wrote a book entitled *Zhen Jing* (Classic of Acupuncture) and had a pupil called *Cheng Gao*, who was also skilled in acupuncture. *Cheng Gao* had a pupil called *Guo Yu*, who became a court physician (89 to 105 A.D.) and who performed acupuncture with wonderful results (16).

*Zhang Zhong-jing* (150? to 219 A.D.), the "Medical Sage", a native of Nan-Yang in Central China, wrote *Shang Han Za Bing Lun* (Treatise of Febrile Diseases), one of the most influential books in the history of Chinese medicine, in which he recommended the use of acupuncture in combination with drugs to treat diseases (17).

*Hua To* (108? to 203? A.D.), the "Father of Surgery", from Middle-South China, now the Bo County, An Hui Province, treated patients with acupuncture with remarkable results by puncturing no more than two points. He treated successfully the severe headache of the famous historic figure *Cao Cao*, then Emperor of *Wei* Kingdom. A point called *Huatuojiaji* attributed to him is still used today (18). His pupil *Fan E*, was also noted in acupuncture (19).

Thirdly, there appeared, during this time, numerous works on acupuncture. Although quite a few of them have been lost (20), some, thankfully, remain in existence. From the above mentioned 3rd century B.C. tomb two other writings on silk were found, providing convincing evidence that over 20 centuries ago theories of channels had been established. One is entitled *Zu Bi Shi Yi Mai Jiu Jing* (Eleven Channels for Moxibustion of the Arms and Feet), the other *Yin Yang Shi Yi Mai Jiu Jing* (Eleven Channels for Moxibustion in the Yin and Yang Systems). They discuss pain, spasm, numbness and swellings that may occur along the channels, mouth

and sense-organ symptoms, etc. which are amenable to treatment by moxibustion. Although they do not mention acupuncture, we know well that acupuncture and moxibustion have been sister therapies since ancient times in China, so such writings on silk provide us with evidence and traces of the development of acupuncture in ancient China. The most important work that appeared during this period, however, is the *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic), the earliest and most comprehensive medical work extant in China. This work, said to have been written by the legendary Yellow Emperor, but actually the work of a number of scholars and physicians living between the 5th century B.C. and the 1st century B.C., contains two parts, namely, *Su Wen* (Plain Questions) and *Ling Shu* (Miraculous Pivot) (Figure 5). It is in this work that, for the first time in the history of Chinese medicine, a systematic and significant description of the theory of channels and points, principles and methods of manipulation of needles, and the indications and contra-indications for the use of acupuncture were recorded. In addition, 295 points (21), 12 regular channels and 15 main collaterals in the human body were also described.



Figure 5. *Ling Shu*, the Miraculous Pivot, part of the *Huang Di Nei Jing*.

According to the *Neijing*, organs deep within the body, as also more superficial ones, are connected by the channels through which the *Qi* (vital energy or life force) and the blood circulate, and there are points on the body surface where the *Qi* of the deep internal organs lies just below the surface. The points can be punctured to cure diseases by regulating the flow of the *Qi* and blood.

Adopting the *Yin-Yang* and Five Evolutive Phases (Elements) theories, the natural philosophy then in vogue, the *Neijing* expounds fundamental medical principles in holistic terms, emphasising that the human body should be treated as an entity, and that attention should thus be paid to maintain the human body in harmonious balance within and in relation to its external environment, and that the patient's condition and symptoms and signs should be analysed. All such principles are also applied to

acupuncture. Thus, the appearance of the *Neijing* signified the fact that acupuncture had developed into a unique therapy.

This summary of the knowledge and techniques of acupuncture in the *Neijing* laid the foundations of acupuncture and exerted much influence on its development in later generations.

Apart from the *Neijing*, there appeared around the first and second century B.C. a book entitled *Nanjing* (Classic of Medical Catechism) whose authorship is ascribed to *Qin Yue-Ren*. This book is a supplement to the *Neijing*. It supplemented in a number of ways the theories of channels and points that had not yet been fully expounded in the *Neijing*. It described in clear terms the concept of the Eight Extra-Channels; it also put forward the theory of the Eight Influential Points which were not included in the *Neijing*. But how did the ancients find the acupuncture points on the human body and form the concept and theory of channels?

As a matter of fact, little is known and we can only make the guess that it is possibly the result of a very long-term accumulation of experiences, countless tests and close observation. We may assume that the first points might have been found accidentally by the ancients, probably in prehistory times, when they found that by pricking certain parts of the body with a hard and sharp object, a piece of stone or bone, some pain or ailments could be relieved. After numerous such repetitions they would gradually realise that various points on the body had therapeutic properties. Experiences of this are described in the *Neijing* when it says: "As soon as the needle has reached the point the pain stops at once." "Where there is pain there is a point." (22). Further, such observation and perception were confirmed and deepened later on when better instruments, such as metal needles, were used. They then named the points, clarified their therapeutic properties in practice and, at the same time, they learned that if certain points on the body were punctured, a sensation of needling could be felt both by practitioner and patient. As the *Neijing* says: "To needle an acupoint, it must be aimed and hit on the *Qi-Xue* (point of *Qi*); when the *Qi-Xue* is being hit, there must be sensation propagating along the channel." (23). *Hua Tuo*, for example, the celebrated physician referred to above, used to say to the patient before needling that the needle should be inserted into the acupoints and stay there for a certain length of time, and that the needle should be withdrawn when the patient indicates that a needling sensation is present. This suggests that *Hua Tuo* knew and observed the phenomenon of the propagation of sensation along the channels (24). We now understand that following the insertion of the needle there is usually a hollow sensation, initially experienced by the practitioner, that gradually develops into a tight and heavy feeling upon twirling and vertical lifting-thrusting, and another sensation such as numbness, heaviness,

distension, coldness or warmth, or even muscular twitching during acupuncture experienced by the patient. And, what is more, these sensations would travel along a definite line in the body. Such sensations must have been experienced by many ancient physicians and acupuncturists who, after realising that many points had the same or similar effects, joined these conceptive points together forming lines. Thus, the concept of channels was born. They then deduced that channels had a special relationship between certain superficial parts and between other parts of the body, and between the internal and external organs and other structures of the body. As the *Neijing* says: "Internally channels relate to the viscera and externally they link with the limbs and joints." (25). As a result, the concept and theory of channels was established. Moreover, based on the fundamental theories and principles of traditional Chinese medicine, more and more clinical experiences were accumulated and acupuncture then began to become a distinctive branch of Chinese medicine with its own principles and theories as recorded and discussed in books like the *Neijing* and *Nanjing*.

#### **B. Period of further development and recognition as a medical specialisation: 4th to 10th century**

Acupuncture, as a unique component part of traditional Chinese medicine, continued to develop from the early period down to the 9th century. It became increasingly acceptable as a form of treatment and enjoyed more popularity in the vast land of China. During this period, outstanding physicians versed in acupuncture emerged in large numbers. Quite a few of them came from families who had been acupuncturists for generations, such as the *Xu* family, starting with *Xu Xi* who flourished in about the early 4th century and reaching his descendant *Xue Min-Qi* in the 7th century, who was also well-known as an acupuncturist (26).

It was during this period that more valuable works on acupuncture appeared. Although quite a few of them are now lost, some still exist. Among them is the *Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing* (A Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion) compiled by *Huangfu Mi* (214 to 282) c.259 AD. This is the earliest extant work devoted exclusively to acupuncture and moxibustion. *Huangfu Mi* was originally a literary man and native of Anding Chaona, now Pingliang, Gansu Province in North-West China, who developed arthritis and, in an attempt to treat himself, began to study medicine - particularly acupuncture. He became a famous acupuncturist and compiled his book by summarising the accomplishments of his predecessors in association with his own clinical experiences. In this book, the name and number of points of each channel and their exact locations are defined and systematised; the properties and indications of each point and the methods of needling are also dealt with minutely. What is more, acupoints of the four limbs are

arranged according to the Three *Yin* Channels and the Three *Yang* Channels of the feet and hands; the acupoints of the head and the trunk are described and discussed in relation to the head, face, chest and abdomen; and the number of acupoints is increased from 295 in the *Neijing* to 349. The indications for treatment of over 160 internal, surgical, gynaecological and paediatric diseases are listed: such as febrile diseases, pain of various parts of the body, diarrhoea, vomiting, carbuncles, malaria, cholera, dysentery, goitre, insanity, manic depression, amenorrhoea, menorrhagia, infantile convulsions, etc., as we now understand them according to their descriptions in this work. As the first systematic work exclusively devoted to acupuncture, it exerted much influence on its development in later times. In addition, acupuncture was included in many other important medical works of the time. *Chao Yuan-Fang* (550 to 630), for example, a noted imperial physician, included over 100 indications for acupuncture in his well-known book *Zhu Bing Yuan Hou Zong Lun* (General Treatise on Aetiology and Symptomatology) written in 610 A.D. *Sun Si-Miao* (581 to 682), one of the most outstanding physicians in the history of Chinese medicine, included in his monumental work *Bei Ji Qian Jin Yao Fang* (The Thousand Golden Remedies for Emergency) three large-size charts showing anterior, posterior and lateral views of the body with the 12 channels marked out in coloured lines and the eight extra channels in green.

The good results of acupuncture and its wide therapeutic range continued to ensure the popularity of acupuncture among all social classes as well as among the imperial court and high government officials.

*Qin Cheng-Zhu*, Minister of the Imperial Medical Affairs of the *Song* Dynasty, who flourished in the 5th century, was versed in acupuncture. He wrote several books on acupuncture and channels, which unfortunately have been lost (27).

*Xu Wen-Bo* (5th century), a member of the well-known *Xu* family of physicians and acupuncturists mentioned above, was able to use acupuncture as an oxytocic measure in helping women's delivery (28).

A famous anecdote tells how *Zhen Quan* (541 to 643), a well-known physician, cured the governor of Lu Zhou, (now in Shandong Province), of the severe shoulder trouble that so much affected his arm that he could not draw a bow. When *Zhen Quan* was summoned, he told the governor to face the target with bow and arrows in hand and try to shoot. As the governor did so, *Zhen Quan* punctured the *Jian-Yu* point on his shoulder and instantly the arrow hit the target (29).

Another prefectural governor at Shen Zhou, now in He Bei Province, suffered from an acute swelling of the neck and had not been able to swallow food or drink for three days. When *Zhen Quan* punctured the *Shang Yang* point at his right hand he rapidly felt much relieved and was able to take food and drink

as usual the next day. *Zhen Quan* was so famous that, in the year 643, the Emperor *Tai Zong* paid a visit to his house and made him a high official. He was appointed by the government to check and revise the acupuncture atlas. He wrote several books on acupuncture, which unfortunately are now lost (30).

It is told also of *Qin Ming-He* (early 7th century), a court physician, that in the year 683 he was summoned to treat the Emperor *Tang Gao-Zong's* headache, which was so bad that the Emperor had vision trouble. He cured him by puncturing the *Bai Hui* and *Nao Hu* points in the head (31).

As a result of its development and popularity, acupuncture was officially recognised as an independent speciality in the Imperial Medical Academy of the *Tang* Government founded in the year 618. There was a department with a professor, an assistant professor, 10 acupuncturists, 20 demonstrators and 20 students (32).

It was during this period that acupuncture, together with some other branches of Chinese medicine, was introduced into other countries. In 552, Emperor *Wen Di* presented *Zhen Jing* (The Classic of Acupuncture), an early acupuncture text which has been lost in China, to the Japanese court (33). Students were sent from Japan to China to study medicine and acupuncture. The *Taiho* Code, promulgated by the Imperial Government of Japan in 701, stipulated that courses for acupuncture offered by medical institutes should be based on the *Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing* (The Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion) compiled by *Huang-fu Mi* (34).

### C. Period of diffusion and temporary decline: 11th to early 20th century

This period saw the further development and diffusion of acupuncture as well as its temporary decline. Owing to the invention of printing in China by this time, engraved and typographic printing methods were used in printing medical books. An important government action was the establishment, in 1057, of a Bureau for Revising Medical Works, which collated and published a number of the medical classics like *Neijing* and *Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing*, etc. (35). Acupuncture, as a special section, was included in a series of voluminous medical works published under governmental auspices, such as the *Tai Ping Sheng Hui Fang* (The Peaceful, Holy and Benevolent Prescriptions) (992), *Sheng Ji Zong Lu* (The General Collection for Holy Relief) (1111 to 1117), *Pu Ji Fang* (Prescriptions for General Relief) (1406), and the *Yi Zhong Jin Jian* (The Golden Mirror of Medicine) (1742). Moreover, acupuncture was still officially recognised and included in the Imperial Academy of Medicine or Institute of Imperial Physicians as one branch of medicine, until the early 19th century.

All these aided the promotion and spread of the knowledge of acupuncture. What is more, the increasing number of works on acupuncture

published privately were diverse in both style and content. Some were devoted to a general survey of acupuncture of the past generations; some gave detailed discussion on channels and points; some provided a full description of the methods of handling needles; some laid stress on following ancient theories and methods in locating channels and points; some attached importance to collecting popular acupuncture experiences; and some paid attention to both the ancient and the popular theories and to clinical experiences. A number of works were written in verse, which made them easy to memorise.

According to the *Zhong Yi Tu Shu Lian He Mu Lu* (Joint Catalogue of Traditional Chinese Medical Books) over 80 works exclusively dealing with acupuncture appeared in this period (36).

Many works, especially those published officially, were influenced by the work of *Wang Wei-Yi* (c.987 to 1067), a court physician. In the year 1023, he was ordered to revise and compile a work on acupuncture to verify acupoints and channels. He spent three years on the task and compiled a book entitled *Tong Ren Shue Xue Zhen Jiu Tu Jing* (Illustrated Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion Points as Demonstrated on the Bronze Figure), which discussed the acupoints in detail and marked out a total of 359 points, clearly arranged on the fourteen channels on the human body. He also described the depth for puncture of each point and the indications for its use. His work did much to clarify a number of confusions about the points and channels that had arisen before the 11th century. Shortly after it was published in 1026, it was distributed to every prefecture of the country as an official text and the contents of the book were engraved on two enormous stone tablets erected in the *Song* capital for all students to see and follow (37). When the *Yuan* government came to power these important tablets were removed to Beijing, the *Yuan* capital, and were erected in the Temple of the Three Emperors at the Imperial Medical Institute (38).

While compiling his book, *Wang Wei-Yi* had two life-size bronze acupuncture figures cast and inscribed with channels and points. These were also used for teaching and for the examination of students. Students were asked to puncture certain points on the figure, which was filled with mercury or water and coated with wax. The accuracy of the students' needling was thus easily determined by whether or not the mercury or water leaked out (39). This was the earliest model of its kind in China, and indeed in the world (Figure 6).

The popularity of acupuncture, and the attention paid to it at this time by the Chinese elite and the ruling class, is illustrated in the case of the Emperor *Ren Zong*. In the year 1034, the Emperor was sick and imperial doctors had had no success in treating him. A doctor named *Xu Xi*, a native of Kai-Feng, Central China, was recommended and summoned. He examined the Emperor and announced that he

could cure him if he were allowed to insert needles between the external membranes below the Emperor's heart. Court officials thought the procedure extremely dangerous, so some of them, together with the court eunuchs, were obliged to test the method on their own bodies first. When it was observed that no harm was done, *Xu Xi* was allowed to proceed. The Emperor recovered. *Xu Xi* was rewarded handsomely and was appointed medical officer of the Imperial Medical Institute. Upon his request, one of his actions in that post was to have a temple built with the reward that he received from the Emperor to mark *Bian Que*, the "Father of Acupuncture". As *Xu Xi's* fame spread far and wide, many people vied with each other in seeking to become his students and an Imperial Medical Bureau was later built close to the Temple for that reason (40).

Reference must be made to some other noted acupuncturists who also contributed much to the development of acupuncture.

One prominent writer was *Wang Zhi-Zhong*, who wrote *Zhen Jiu Zi Shen Jing* (The Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion as a Life-Preserver) in 1220, a systematic presentation of acupuncture and moxibustion, which includes details of the location of 360 points on the body with their indications for use collected from his own clinical experiences and those of his predecessors and contemporaries. He corrected some mistakes recorded in *Wang Wei-Yi's* book and advocated the method of locating points by proportional unit of the body and the use of acupuncture in conjunction with other medicine.

*Gao Wu* (16th century), a specialist in acupuncture, also a literary man and a physician, compiled *Zhen Jiu Ju Ying* (Collection of Essentials of Acupuncture and Moxibustion) in 1537, which is a compendium of the theories of various authors with detailed commentaries. To help practitioners to locate the acupoints and channels correctly, he cast three bronze acupuncture figures, one man, one woman and one child, as models. *Yang Ji-Zhou* (c.1522 to 1620), a doctor descended from generations of physicians, after practising for forty years established himself as a skilful and outstanding acupuncturist. He compiled a book entitled *Zhen Jiu Da Cheng* (Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion) in 1601. This book contains copious annotations, commentaries on channels and acupoints, and personal experiences of combining acupuncture and



Figure 6. A Ming Dynasty, 15th century, life-size human figure in bronze showing acupoints and channels.

medicine. Its real value, however, lies in its extensive quotation from numerous ancient medical texts, many of which were already lost. Scholars of later generations and present researchers have therefore found his work of enormous value.

Apart from these general works, scholarly specialised studies concerned with the systematisation and enrichment of the theory of channels and acupoints also appeared. The number of effective acupoints discovered amounted to 588. Many of these new points had emerged during clinical practice and most of the works published contained clinical experiences. The well-known, 12th century physician *Li Gao* (1180 to 1251), reported many cases that he treated successfully with acupuncture, including anorexia, difficulty in swallowing (often caused by oesophageal cancer), vomiting, etc. (41). In the *Zhen Jiu Da Cheng* (Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion) by *Yang Ji-Zhou*, over 540 indications for acupuncture were grouped in 23 categories.

Methods of needling also became more refined, such as methods of insertion, direction, depth, speed, ways of retaining or withdrawing the needle, and the means of inducing the *Qi* (vital energy or life force of the body). Writing in the 13th century, *Dou Han-Qing* (1196 to 1280), an eminent acupuncturist, gave many of the methods of needling fanciful names: such as "Setting the Mountain on Fire" for heat producing needling to treat illness of *Yin* (cold) nature, and "Making Cool like a Clear Sky" to produce a cool sensation to treat illness of *Yang* (hot) nature. To make the insertion less painful, he recommended pressing the needled part of the body with thumb and index finger, and at the same time asking the patient to cough, so that the needle could be inserted quickly and smoothly (42). *Gao Wu* described the method of twisting and rotating the needle to reinforce or induce *Qi*, and the method of lifting and thrusting the needle to reinforce or reduce the *Qi*, which are still widely used today (43). *Wei Yi-Lin*, a distinguished 13th century physician and an expert bone-setter, described the sterilisation of the needle in detail as well as the way of managing a broken needle (44). *Li Yan*, a famous 16th century doctor, proposed that the insertion of the needle into the upper part of the body should be shallow, while the lower part, where the flesh was thicker, could tolerate a deep insertion (45).

As for the training of acupuncturists: it was still chiefly carried out in the traditional way, through apprenticeship and family teaching. There appeared, during this period, a number of well-known families whose skill in acupuncture lasted for many generations. For instance, starting with *Xi Hong*, an outstanding acupuncturist who flourished in the early 12th century, the *Xi* family lasted for 12 generations until their skill passed to *Liu Jin*, a renowned acupuncturist of the early 15th century, whose teacher *Chen Hui* was known for having 24

students who were all good at acupuncture (46).

From about the mid 17th century to the beginning of the 19th, acupuncture lost the clinical status it had previously possessed. Doctors and many other scholars and influential people regarded it, together with surgery, as an insignificant and petty skill. Moreover, in 1822, despite the experiences of his predecessors who had been benefited by acupuncture, the Emperor *Dao Guang*, issued an imperial edict, stating that acupuncture and moxibustion were not suitable forms of treatment for a monarch, and should be banned forever from the Imperial Medical Institute (47). As modern Western medicine began to be introduced into China on a large scale by Western doctors, acupuncture suffered further setbacks, for many Western doctors in China and most of the Chinese doctors trained in Western medicine looked down upon traditional Chinese medicine, including acupuncture. Acupuncture was further rejected by the ruling elite and officials when a series of proposals were passed in 1914 and 1929 by the government, which tried to ban all forms of traditional Chinese medicine (48).

But, the popular roots of acupuncture were deep; and far from ceasing to exist, its practice was increasingly disseminated by way of associations and societies, books and journals, correspondence and teaching, not only in China, but also abroad, for its roots had gradually extended throughout the world.

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11. *Ibid.*
12. *Su Wen*, *Zhen Jie Pian*; *Ling Shu Jiu Zhen Shi Er Yuan*; *Guan Zhen*; *Jiu Zen Lun*
13. *Zuo Qou-Ming Zuo Zhuàn*, *Cheng Gong* 12. See *Du Yu's Chun Qou Zuo Shi Jing Zhuàn Ji Jie*, the earliest extant annotation on the *Zuo Zhuàn*
14. *Sima Qian, Shi Ji*, *Bian Que Cang Gong Lie Zhuàn*, vol 150
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Fan Ye, Hou Han Shu*, *Yi Wen Zhi*, vol 3 *Guo Yu Zuan*
17. *Zhang Zong-Jing, Shan Han Zai Bing Lun*
18. *Wei Zhi*, *Hua Tuo Zhuàn*; *San Guo Zhi*, *Hua Tuo Zhuàn*; *Hou Han Shu*, Vol 82, *Fang Shi Lie Zhuàn* 72, *Hua Tuo Zhuàn*
19. *Ibid.* also see *Hua Tuo Bei Zhuàn*
20. The lost books on acupuncture, such as *Zheng Jing*, *Ci Fa*, *Jing Mai* have been quoted by the *Neijing*; other lost books on acupuncture; *Fu Wong Zeng Jing* was recorded in the *Hou Han Shu*, *Zhen Zhong Jiu Ci Jing* and *Yu Gui Zhen Jing* were recorded in the *Sui Shu Jing Ji Zhi*
21. The *Nei Jing* mentions 365 points, actually in the present extant edition only 295 points (270 bilateral points and 25 single points) can be found. This is perhaps due to some of the original texts of the *Neijing* being lost. The Twelve Regular Channels, known as the Twelve Channels, are each connected with a particular internal organ and each possess an exterior-interior relation.
22. *Neijing*, *Ling Shu*: *Jing Jin*
23. *Neijing*, *Ling Shu*: *Xie Qi Zang Fu Bing Xing* 4
24. See 19
25. *Neijing*, *Ling Shu*: 25
26. *Tu Shu Ji Cheng Yi Bu Quan Lu*, vol 1505 *Xu Wen-Bo*
27. *Wei Zheng et al. Sui Shu*, vol 34: *Jing Ji Zhi*
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29. *Ouyang Xu et al. Xin Tang Shu*, vol 240: *Lie Zhuàn* 129
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Li Fang et al. Tai Ping Guang Ji*, vol 218 quoting from *Tan Bin Lu*
32. See 29 vol 47, 48: *Bai Guan Zhi*
33. *Teng Jing Shang Jiu, Yi Xue Wen Hua Nan Biao*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Cheng Zhen-Sun, Zhi Zhai Shu Lu Jie Ti*, vol 13
36. *Zhong Yi Yan Jiu Yuan*, *Beijing Tu Shu Guan Zhong Yi Tu Shu Lian He Mu Lu*, 1961
37. *Wang Ying-Lin, Yu Hai*, vol 63: *Yi Wen Yi Shu*; Also see the Preface written for the *Tong Ren Zhen Jiu Shu Xue Tu Jing* by *Xia Song*
38. *Song Lian et al. Yuan Shi* vol 88
39. See 36
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41. *Li Yan, Yi Xue Ru Men*, vol 1: *Zhen Dao Jiu Fa*
42. *Dou Jie, Zhen Jing Zhi Nan*, *Zhen Yan Bu Xie Shuo Fa*
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47. *Ren Xi Geng, Tai Yi Yuan Zhi*, p. 1. *Zhi Zhang*
48. *Zheng Fu Gong Bao* (1912) No.208: *Jiao Yu Bu Ling*; (1913) No.25: 11, 25; *Shi Bao*, (1913) 12: 24



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