

An Interview with Robert Chu, LAc, QME, Master Tong-Style Acupuncturist: Part One of Two

By Brian Carter, MSCi, LAc

Robert Chu is the consummate Chinese-style healer. He strives to embody the traditional Taoist ideal of skillful mastery in all of the important disciplines of humanity. He studied the martial arts; became a *wing chun sifu* (master); and dabbled in *tuina*, *dit da ke* (traumatology) and herbology for 30 years before making the career shift to acupuncture. Now his research and clinical experimentation have provided him with valuable insights about the amazingly effective acupuncture style of Master Tong.

Brian Benjamin Carter (BBC): Tell us about your progression from TCM acupuncture to the style you practice now.

Robert Chu (RC): In my experience, the TCM method used too many needles, was too slow, and yielded mediocre results. I recall seeing a patient with sciatica. I inserted six-inch needles into GB30, and needled bilaterally at UB40; UB60; UB57 and innumerable *ashi* points. She got up off the table with minimal relief 45 minutes later. That really frustrated me. I sat up night trying to understand my mediocre results. I read a bunch of acupuncture books. When English ones didn't cut it, I read Chinese books. I found out that TCM is herbalized medicine, they took herbal theory and developed an acupuncture around it. TCM acupuncture is based on herbal paradigms: the Eight Principles; *Shang Han Lun*; *Wen Bing*; *San Jiao*; and *Zang Fu*. Often, those paradigms don't fit acupuncture theory. TCM was designed for quick and easy dissemination, as an answer to desperate medical needs in the rural areas of China. It's not that TCM acupuncture is not good, but there are better methods. I studied what they'd done for centuries before TCM. Acupuncture was based on the channels and collaterals, not herbal-style functions.

BBC: Your own style of treatment incorporates theories and techniques from a number of traditions. How did it develop?

RC: I have drawn from the best in acupuncture. My system is based on Master Tong's (*dong jing chang*). I draw heavily on classical acupuncture from the *Nei Jing (Inner Classic)*; *Nan Jing (Classic of Difficulties)*; *Jia Yi Jing (A-Z of Acupuncture)*; and *Zhen Jiu Da Cheng (Great Compendium of Acupuncture)*. I learned Korean *sasang* constitutional acupuncture from my good friend, Jacques Mora Marco. I do Korean-style *sa am* acupuncture. I also use some unusual methods of chronoacupuncture (based on time and day) called *ling gui ba fa* and *zi wu liu zhu*. I've studied Japanese methods of acupuncture, and am very impressed with Kiiko Matsumoto and the works of Yoshio Manaka. I use Japanese abdominal palpation; magnets; some needle techniques; and ionic cords in my clinic. I am a great fan of the work of Chen Chao, the creator of *yi lei zhen jiu* (acupuncture based on the principles of the *I Ching*), and the balance method of Richard Tan. Dr. Tan's *ba-gua*-based balance method really interested me, especially since I studied Daoism and Chinese martial arts. I later found out that Dr. Tan found his fundamental methods in Chen Chao's work.

BBC: Chen Chao, who's that?

RC: Dr. Chen created an acupuncture system based on the *Yi Jing (I Ching)*. Dr. Chen published seven books in the mid-1970s. He explained the *ba gua*/Chinese medicine relationship and how to balance the channels. He uses the *xian tian ba gua*, the *hou tian ba gua* and the *tai yang ba fa*. *Xian tian ba gua* is Fu Xi's *ba gua*. Each of the 14 channels equates with a *gua* (trigram), and they balance one another. For example, if there's right knee pain along the spleen channel, left Lu 5 will treat it, because hand *tai yin* balances foot *tai yin*. Limbic and symptomatic pain disappears immediately. It's remarkable! *Hou tian ba gua* is Wen Wang's *ba gua*. The five elements are superimposed on the eight trigrams. On the simplest level, we take the paired couplets of the six channels (i.e., *tai yin/yang ming*; *shao yin/tai yang*; and *jue yin/shao yang*) and treat the body with the *shu* stream/*yuan* source point and the *he* sea point of those channels according to the symptoms. This works great for internal medicine problems. The *tai yang ba fa* is a unique way of using the eight extra channel points. Chen Chao's configuration is to balance the *ren* (Lu 7) and *du* (SI 3); the *yin wei* (PC 6) with *yang wei* (SJ 5); *yin qiao* (K 6) with *yang qiao* (UB 62); and *chong* (Sp 4) with the *dai mai* (GB 41). This one has broad applications.

BBC: You emphasize imaging methods (a.k.a. microsystems). For example, what is the metacarpal bone system?

RC: I expanded the curriculum of the microsystems class at Samra University to emphasize practical methods. I taught the 12-point system of the second metacarpal bone, a system that can treat the entire body

with just a few points that stretch between LI 3 and *ling gu*. The clinical results are excellent! When I taught class, I always gave demonstrations. My idea was to inspire the students and show them that acupuncture should work instantaneously! I also taught periocular, Nogier and Chinese ear, face, nose, hand, foot, wrist and ankle microsystems; *sa am* acupuncture; Tong's acupuncture; and various styles of scalp acupuncture. In the Tong system, the eight imaging methods explain how to choose non-channel points and regular channel points.

BBC: How do you decide when to apply these systems?

RC: I decide according to the patient; the illness; how much time we have; and what I've tried before. For example, if a patient has back pain and TCM doesn't help, I'll try the Tong system, or metacarpal bone, or the hand acupuncture system. I then let the patient get up and walk around with the needles in their arm or hand. Then we can see what works. Patients like this. They want a physician who's always learning, who's willing to experiment, and who doesn't have all the answers.

BBC: Miriam Lee's book (from Blue Poppy Press) about Master Tong is long on points and short on theory/principles/concepts. What are we missing out on?

RC: I don't think Miriam Lee left out anything on purpose. Her book is a reference for Tong points based on her clinical style. It has a lot of practical value, and it's a great introduction for English speakers, but I'd advise studying the treatment formulary to see how to apply the system, rather than memorizing all the points. I learned some of the Tong style in school, and Dr. Tan's work influenced me, but I wanted more. I applied Miriam Lee's Master Tong acupuncture in my clinic. It was when I read Young Wei-Chieh's book on Master Tong's extraordinary points that I discovered the basic principles that were missing from Miriam Lee's book. Some point locations were off, and the treatment formularies reflected more of Miriam Lee's style rather than Master Tong's original style. This led me to seek out Miriam Lee's disciple and apprentice, Esther Su. We met to discuss what was in Master Tong's system and how Miriam Lee differed. Ester suggested I seek out Dr. Young. I attended his classes on Tong's points and read his works in Chinese. I later bought a library of books by Tong's students in Taiwan, and the whole puzzle became clearer. I started getting great results in the clinic, almost instantaneously, with Tong's method. I disagree with Blue Poppy's version of the Tong system's history. From the different books on the Tong system, it's clear that students that stayed with him at different times learned different points. He was constantly creating something new - experimenting and modifying points - based on the clinical results. I suspect he created the whole system. I

think he was a genius. The Blue Poppy book is also incorrect in certain point locations. For example, *ren huang* is not the same as Sp 6. *Ren huang* is higher. Most people locate Sp 6 from the lower tip of the medial malleolus. *Ren huang* is three *cun* above the top of the medial malleolus. There are too many other errata to mention here. My advice would be to find an experienced Ton practitioner like Esther Su, Frank Chong or Young Wei-Chieh to learn the proper locations of the points. (*Note:* Susan Johnson, another of Miriam Lee's students, is preparing a book of corrections.)

Editor's note: Part two of Brian Carter's interview with Robert Chu will appear in the January 2003 issue of *Acupuncture Today*. Robert Chu can be reached at the Upland Pain Relief and Rehabilitation Center, 876 North Mountain Avenue, Suite 107, Upland, CA 91786. He may also be reached by phone at (909) 920-3465, or online at chusauli@aol.com.

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