

Towards blended e-learning for Acupuncture: **a manifesto for the teaching of Traditional Acupuncture** **in the contemporary Western/postmodern world**

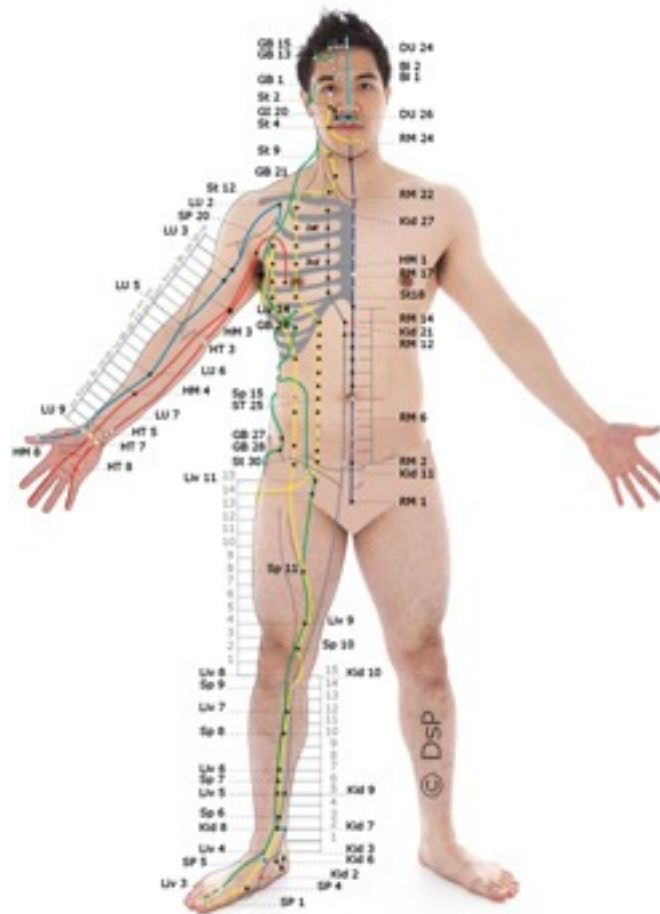


Fig.1:Acupuncture chart on living model

Abstract

As an established practitioner and member of The British Acupuncture Council, I have a special interest and insight into the practice and teaching of Chinese medicine.

The dissertation opens with a manifesto – an apposite method of exploring the political issues around the teaching of Traditional Acupuncture in the postmodern Western world. I use the format to set out the academic foundations of traditional Chinese medicine before considering a number of key contemporary issues that emphasise the ways in which acupuncture is being reinvented to suit the modern(ist) paradigms of science. The final section of the manifesto outlines the proposed methodology for the teaching of Traditional Acupuncture in the context of blended e-learning¹.

The first section addresses the issues of Tradition versus Modernity in relation to acupuncture. Utilising the four axioms of tradition, as defined by Laurent (1997), as they relate to Traditional Acupuncture and explore the connections between the micro- and macro- spheres of human existence as they related to the *Daoist* philosophy that underpins Traditional Acupuncture. I will then discuss the 'crisis of modernity' in relation to the Western scientific/medical worlds and the reliance on tangible proof and rationale that has led to the essential elements of Traditional Acupuncture being devalued, discounted and reinvented to suit establishment purposes. Finally, I will argue that passive pedagogy is a modern(ist) phenomena in which learners are not expected to question dogma presented as irrefutable truth.

In the second section I consider postmodernity and the evolution of learning, clarifying postmodernity as 'the era in which we live to be essentially a modernity that is fully lucid about its limitations and able to practice self-criticism' before considering how postmodern pedagogy and Knowlesian theories of adult education can provide an emancipatory

¹ Blended learning refers to a mixing of different learning environments in which traditional face-to-face classroom methods are combined with computer-mediated activities, with an emphasis on the technological aspects.

environment, pertinent to the *Daoist* proposition, where learning is considered as a process of mental inquiry rather than a passive reception of information. I will then discuss how distance learning can offer a safe and supported way to engage in/try out new ideas and contrast that with the experience of a conventional classroom environment.

In the third section, I review the technical tools that I have considered and adopted for the development of the e-learning platform taking account of how each fits with the essential elements of Daoist philosophy. Finally I address the issues of how the course and the key issues will be represented visually in the online learning environment, taking advantage of the creative analogies of traditional Chinese culture rather than adopting more conventional Western scientific iconography.

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Introduction

As established practitioner and member of The British Acupuncture Council, I have a special interest and insight in the practice and teaching of Chinese medicine.

Acupuncture is a holistic methodology of treating health conditions that originated in ancient China in which patients are treated by the insertion of thin, solid needles into established points in the skin. The traditional understanding is that the stimulation of these points can correct imbalances in the flow of energy known as *qi*² through channels known as meridians.

Despite the use of acupuncture to treat a limited number of specific conditions being endorsed by both the NHS³ and NICE⁴, the philosophy and practice of Traditional Acupuncture remains a controversial issue within mainstream medicine and healthcare in the UK (and many other Western countries).

It is the most popular of the complementary therapies, however (Thomas et al; 2001a), and in the last few years there have been some moves towards developing a wider understanding of acupuncture as a valid philosophy and practice in healthcare, as exemplified by a significant study conducted at the University of Southampton in 2004/5⁵.

This dissertation details the idea/s behind and development of an e-learning platform for the teaching of acupuncture/Continuing Professional Development for practitioners of acupuncture, taking account of the key issues of tradition, theory and practice of acupuncture

² *Qi* is the central underlying principle in traditional Chinese medicine and martial arts. The literal translation of *qi* is breath or air, however, it is generally understood as, life-force, or energy flow.

³ National Health Service

⁴ National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

⁵ “Attitudes towards traditional acupuncture in the UK”, Shao et al (2005) a study to explore the perceptions and attitudes of existing acupuncture clinicians in the UK, from a range of professional backgrounds and affiliations, towards traditional acupuncture philosophy and practice to determine the extent to which traditional approaches were both regarded as legitimate and utilised in practice

and considering them in relation to the contemporary attitudes of Western medicine towards Traditional Acupuncture and the 21st century postmodern world.

A business plan for this project was created in the Marketplace Course.

Pascal Da Silva: August 2012

Keystones of the Manifesto

It is vital to ensure that students/prospective students engaging in the course available via the e-learning platform appreciate the philosophy on which the course is based; the origins of traditional acupuncture and the key issues I will address are

The Foundations (commonly agreed position of academic sinologists)

- Acupuncture is a practical application of *Daoism*⁶ (Larre, Rochat de la Vallée, 2005) the indigenous Chinese thought that offers a holistic conception of the place of man in the Universe.
- Traditional Acupuncture relates to Chinese classical texts composed between 475 B.C. and 220 A.D; these were written in an ancient Chinese language, which requires translation by scholars for contemporary audiences.
- The first really significant academic translations of the Chinese classics for the Western world were undertaken by 19th century Jesuits
- There have been no subsequent major discoveries that contradict or significantly enhance the practice of acupuncture. (Milsky, Andres, 2004)
- Historically, there have been a number of preferred systems of representation of the physiology of energy; these are not contradictory but rather the development of different ways of organising or making sense of the knowledge. (Lafont, 2001)

⁶ *Dao* is often Anglicised as *Tao*; *Daoism* as *Taoism* and so on

Contemporary Issues

- Since the Cultural Revolution in China⁷, the ruling Communist Party has forbidden the various expressions of Tradition and has ensured the re-writing of Traditional Acupuncture manuals to suit their political purposes
- Discounting the academic work of the Jesuits, the contemporary Western world has re-invented acupuncture, operating a syncretism⁸ to ensure that it fits within the grand-narrative of the Modern scientific paradigm.
- As the West revises the Traditional Eastern practice to suit the purposes of the academic and medical establishments and China ruthlessly modernises in the name of progress, these two very different cultures are now able to engage with acupuncture as a simulacrum, a reinvented version with no grounding in tradition, original intent or reality
- Medical institutions offering training in this field deliver a reinvented version they call 'medical acupuncture'; perhaps a more appropriate term for this kind of theory and practice would be 'modern acupuncture' as the practice has not been medicalised *per se*, but has been synthesised and appropriated into a politically and commercially viable (l)imitation/s of Traditional Acupuncture
- Visual representation of the theory of acupuncture has become monopolised by the lifeless iconography of western medicine; such graphic expressions can only be considered as an idealised avatar of reality, not as an exclusive 'truth'.

The Proposition

⁷ The Cultural Revolution was a social-political movement that took place in the People's Republic of China between 1966 and 1976; instigated by Mao Zedong, then Chairman of the Communist Party of China, its stated goal was to enforce socialism in the country by removing capitalist, traditional and cultural elements from Chinese society, and to impose Maoist orthodoxy within the Party.

⁸ Syncretism is the combining of different, often contradictory, beliefs, often while melding practices of various schools of thought. Syncretism may involve the merger and analogising of several originally discrete traditions

A 1998 survey in the UK showed that approximately 7% of the population reported that they had used acupuncture at some time (Thomas et al, 2001b) – and it is increasing in both popularity and availability and a complementary therapy. The reinvention of acupuncture in Western(ised) healthcare and the problems for contemporary Chinese people in regard to access to their own Traditional heritage has led me to believe that we have a responsibility to protect and keep alive this extraordinary humanitarian cultural legacy.

The key aims of this project are, therefore

- to develop and deliver a methodology for the teaching of acupuncture in the contemporary world that is faithful to the former Traditional proposition.
- to enable Tradition to temper the hegemony of the Modern orthodox thought while avoiding any attempt to replace the grand-narrative of science with a grand-narrative of Traditional Acupuncture; neither medical science nor traditional medicine provide every answer for a holistic approach to health.
- acknowledge the natural cognitive reflex to consider something new in comparison to something known and therefore anticipate and deconstruct what the postulate of Traditional Chinese medicine both is and is not.
- provide an effective e-learning environment that is both in accordance with the Daoist tradition/s and rooted in the social-constructivist model of teaching that I believe to be most suitable for adult learners
- ensure that the teaching is less about submission/achievement of an imaginary standard level and more about personal development; in other words, support learning experiences that provide opportunities: to experiment, create, play, doubt, question and not necessarily find definite answers which is a more favourable attitude to appreciate the changeable nature of reality.

- respect the traditions of Chinese art and graphic representation, based on the infinite dialectic of analogies, to produce engaging learning materials.

Matters of Tradition, Modernity and beyond

1. The case for Tradition

Any pertinent contemporary methodology for the teaching of Traditional Acupuncture has to clarify that in this context 'Tradition' does not refer to a romantic nostalgia of the past but universal and timeless axioms that defines its postulate (Laurent, 1997) and address and respect the four key axioms that define the Traditional proposition.

(i) Effective initiation

Throughout this dissertation - and also the e-learning platform - it is critical that the term Traditional Acupuncture or reference to the Chinese tradition is not understood to refer to an obsolete romanticised past or "conventional practice" but rather to stem from the Latin *tradere*, meaning "to hand down to posterity" and holding to the concept of the cyclic nature of history⁹.

In addition to/building on this understanding, tradition/al

- should also be understood as operative - forming, reforming and transforming, operating as a direct transmission of experience from a 'guide to an apprentice' as opposed to anonymous and impersonal mass communication
- presupposes a commitment to put into practice the individual and collective experience for the community, rather than for self-gratification
- opposes any synthesis contradictory theories and methodologies that designed to suit the grand-narrative of Modernity¹⁰

⁹ Within the history of philosophy there are two opposing schools of thought: contemporary Western thought, tends to follow an assumption of linear progression: "this happened, and then that happened"; the alternative theory, originating in many ancient cultures including those of Greece and China, is that of cyclic history in which the major forces that motivate human actions repeat in cyclic phases

¹⁰ Grand narrative: term developed by post modern theorist Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1981) to mean a theory that tries to give an absolute, comprehensive account to historical events, experiences, and social/cultural phenomena based upon the appeal to universal truth/ values, thereby legitimising power, authority and social customs.

(ii) Unity

In the philosophy on which Traditional Acupuncture has its foundations, the universe is understood as a Unity or *Dao* which manifest itself in the duality of Yin and Yang: complementary opposites that interact within a greater whole, as part of a dynamic system where Yin = unseen (dark, hidden, feminine) and Yang = seen (light, manifest, masculine) and the two are always opposite and equal qualities that cannot exist independently of the other

- thus, within the philosophy, each part of the *Dao* is inter-related, with matter and energy being two expressions of the same ever transforming reality
- the *Daoist* philosophical theory was never socio-politically engaged in the way that Darwin's 'Theory of Evolution' has been – yet Darwin's theory could also have been called the 'Theory of Change'; the significant difference between the two is that Darwin superiorises that which is 'modern'¹¹ over that which has passed/gone before
- the *Daoist* philosophical concepts may seem irrelevant to the development of a system of medicine - but Traditional Acupuncture can only really be understood with an appreciation for the traditional Chinese approach to health and disease within which the ideal of health is perfect harmony in terms of Yin/Yang

(iii) Order

The *Daoist* philosophy does not contend that the world appears from random chaos but rather that chaos is an explicit "without-order" that contains the implicit order that is balanced and harmonious. Under this premise, cosmos means 'the Universe considered as a well ordered system' so that "what is below (Earth/manifestation) is alike what is above (Heaven/non-manifested)" (Carton, 1935).

Within the tradition, energy composed of Yin/Yang - *qi* - is present throughout our universe; within Traditional Acupuncture, the human body

¹¹ Latin: *modernus* = 'just now'

is seen as a micro-universe in which *qi* flows through a network of meridians that connect organs and tissues - and ideally everything should always remain in balance/harmony. It is when this balance is broken that disease occurs, therefore the traditional practitioner will look for and treat the causes of the imbalance by stimulating *qi*, using acupuncture needles, to restore balance/achieve harmony.

(iv) The law of analogy

Post-Enlightenment Western contemporary thought perceives/manages nature through abstraction, conceptualisation, separation and rational explanation - with Western medicine entirely reliant on double-blind clinical trials and physically evidenced practice. This is in total contrast with the Traditional conceptions and methodologies of integration, perception, analogical correspondences and participation (Lepeltier, 1994); within the *Daoist* philosophy that underpins Traditional Acupuncture utilises analogy to explain and enhance its holistic principles. As Western medicine attempts to adapt acupuncture for use within the profession, the value of analogy and the Tradition/al is discounted

“We regard traditional Chinese acupuncture as a fascinating part of history of medicine, and we respect the ancient physicians, but their explanations are not meaningful today” (White, Cummings, Filshie, 2008 p4)

“In spite of the relative integration of acupuncture within orthodox medical practice, a lack of paradigm conformity continues to divide traditional from Western approaches.” (Shao *et al*, 2005)

Such attitudes make it apparent that 'medical acupuncture' has - and will continue to - reinvent Traditional theory, creating a reductive, synthesised - and potentially dangerous - version of ancient ideograms that are built on misinterpretations and inappropriate analogies. An example of this misinterpretation, in Western medicine, the digestive function associated to the liver (a notion that carries through into medicalised acupuncture) is in fact associated with the spleen channel (that should have more

appropriately been translated as 'digestive') in Traditional practice (Rochat de la Vallée, 1995 & 2006).

2. The crisis of Modernity

Theorists from many and various fields of study have debated modernity: the origins, the key issues/ideas, the crises arising from and within modernity - and the emergence of 'postmodernity'. There is general agreement that during the era we call the Enlightenment modernity became an explicit and central theme for almost all significant thinkers after which "the "nature-culture dualism" became "a key factor in Western civilisation's advance at the expense of nature." "(Merchant, 1995). Since the Enlightenment, developments in socio-economics, science and technology have enabled 'progress' and 'rationale' to be embraced as superior to previous practice and in opposition to the concept of Tradition. This can be understood as both bringing about "the renunciation of the recent past, in favour of a new beginning, and a re-interpretation of historical origin" (Delanty, 2007).

It is not the purpose of this dissertation, however, to engage in the multiple and complex debates around tradition, modernity and postmodernity. Rather it is key to the whole ethos of the e-learning platform to acknowledge and highlight that in relation to acupuncture, the 'crisis of modernity' lies in the general reliance of the Western scientific and medical worlds on tangible proof and rationale, and that this reliance has diminished and devalued the essential elements of the philosophy and practice in which Traditional Acupuncture has its origins.

From my own personal knowledge and experience as a qualified acupuncturist who has lived and worked in both France and Scotland (in a medical centre) in addition to knowledge of the curriculum of the three British Medical acupuncture associations, it seems that the medical establishment continues to operate a 'reductive syncretism' in the understanding of acupuncture and, unsure what stance to adopt: the prevalent attitude seems to be that "a traditional therapy has been investigated, re-interpreted within a modern scientific context, and finally

incorporated, where appropriate, within modern health care" (White *et al*; 2008). While the clinical efficacy of acupuncture has been acknowledged by the National Institute for Clinic Excellence, with their recommendation that it should be utilised in the management of persistent non-specific low back pain (Royal College of General Practitioners, 2009), many within modern medicine remain sceptical as there seems to be no rational, scientific methodology to explain the Traditional theory and practice therefore they persist in their rejection of the Traditional proposition that would enable the training of effective holistic practitioners.

3. Passive pedagogy: a Modern phenomena?

Education has been a central project of modern and modernising societies. Since the early nineteenth century, mass education has been a crucial element of the modern nation state in the interests of collective progress (Meyer, 1999: 131) and it has been argued that education should not be considered as a means of emancipation of the individual, that may, as a result, question the comprehensive explanation of knowledge and experience of the political establishment (Stephens,1998). In relation to this modern(ist) concept of education, the term pedagogy may be understood to be the study of the methods and activities of teaching, particularly in relation to Freire's influential concept of "the correct use of instructive strategies" (Freire, 1970). As a generic term, it has also - inappropriately - become common parlance in the context of adult education. In its broadest sense, however, and referencing its origins in the Greek language - *paid* meaning 'child' and *agogus* meaning 'leader of' or 'guide' and thus 'child-guiding' - pedagogy means the holistic study and praxis of socialising, informing and upbringing children and young people.

The difference between the original meaning and modernist (mis)interpretations of the term has led to a situation in which it could be argued that, rather than being supported in developing their individual understanding of the world, the learner in the modern era, whether child or adult, is essentially considered as a passive recipient without consideration of his peculiar characteristic and motivation (Luo Quin,

2012). It is also vital to consider that motivation and commitment are essential in Traditional education but have become uncommon parameters in a time of consumerism, where capitalism enforces narcissistic behaviours engendered by socio-cultural conditioning (Laborit,1976).

Taking account of these arguments and rejecting the modern(ist) model of passive learning, the platform I am developing will be founded on the original principles of pedagogy and the theories of andragogy ('man-guiding') developed by Malcolm Shepherd Knowles¹² – in which individuality and the personal learning experience is considered and valued. The emphasis on individuality is particularly appropriate in relation to the teaching of 'five element constitutional acupuncture', a specific school of thought which relates strongly to the concept of *Tian Ming*, in which an individual's cognitive aspect is to be considered to fulfil his destiny¹³ as described in the Classical text *Nei Jing Ling Shu*¹⁴.

Postmodernity and the evolution of learning

1. The context of postmodernity

¹² Andragogy: a term relating to adult education coined by German teacher Alexander Kapp and more fully developed as a concept/methodology by American Adult Educator Malcolm Shepherd Knowles (1913 - 1997); andragogy aims to embrace the Humanist Learning Theory and the use of individual learner constructed contracts or plans to guide learning experiences

¹³ *Tian Ming* 'mandate of Heaven'

¹⁴ The *Ling Shu* (circa 2600 B.C) is considered to be the Canon of Acupuncture and is the second part of the Huang Di Nei Jing (The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic) which comprises conversations about heaven, man, and earth and their dynamic relationships.

There is a multitude of academic interpretations of postmodernity but in basic terms it can be understood to mean

- a personal response to a postmodern society
- the conditions in a society which make it postmodern
- the state of being that is associated with a postmodern society

It is, however, essential to note the distinction between postmodernity, as described, and postmodernism: the conscious, unconscious and/or subconscious espousal of postmodern philosophies and/or traits in the arts and culture/society. In the context of this proposition, therefore, we should understand postmodernity to be essentially a modernity that is fully lucid about its limitations and able to practice self-criticism (Stoetard, 2007) with a core premise that it should not oppose reason itself but favour an autonomous and critical reason rather than collective dogma.

Twentieth century American sociologist Robert Nisbet contented that at the core of the modernist project was the 'Idea of Progress', which, he believed was the single most important idea in Western civilisation. The central tenets of this Idea of Progress include the nobility of Western civilisation, the value of economic and technological growth and the belief in reason and scientific/scholarly knowledge obtained through reason. A number of eminent theorists can be cited as countering this modernist view including Nisbet's Russian-American contemporary P. A. Sorokin, who argued that the ancient Chinese, Babylonian, Hindu, Greek, Roman and most of the medieval thinkers supporting theories of rhythmical, cyclical or trendless movements of social processes were much nearer to reality than the present proponents of the linear view (Sorokin in Fay; 1947)

Thus we can see that postmodernity enables not only contradictory views to be held by experts but also enables examination of the way in which the world has been understood to be a totalised, homogenised entity with a normalised set of global power structures. Postmodernity also make possible a challenge the grand-narratives: the coherent system of interconnected and organised stories that share a common rhetorical

desire to resolve a conflict by establishing people's expectations in Western(ised) societies.

Within this understanding it is possible, therefore, to reject both the reliance on scientific/cultural certainties and the notion of a single, linear, chronological 'progress' in regard to the development of human society. These are both ideas that have driven Western society since the Age of Enlightenment and the refutation of these cornerstones of the modernist way of thinking enables the idea of cyclic history and thus the essential element of Tradition: acknowledging and respecting each link in a lineage, however minor or decisive it may appear.

By allowing us to question and dispute the grand narratives and normalised structures and values, in the context of acupuncture, postmodernity enables us to challenge views that are presented as irrefutable certainties of Western science with a more holistic, humanistic view founded in ancient, alternative philosophies. Thus we can confront this definitive statement in *An Introduction to Western Medical Acupuncture*

“Western Science has brought a whole fundamental change to the nature of our knowledge and understanding, and to keep hold of the old ideas while adding new ones would be the equivalent of asking the reading to accept both that the world is round *and* that it is flat.” (White et al; 2005 p4)

with the contention that, while we have knowledge of planet Earth as a globe and accept and appreciate that it exists as such, people *experience* the world as flat (at least in part, for those peoples in mountainous areas) so the world is, indeed, both round and flat at the same time. It is this ability to take account of both human scientific knowledge and the actual human experience that is key to the development of a contemporary e-learning platform for a holistic, traditional form of medicine.

2. East meets West: philosophy and theories of adult education

Chinese philosopher Lao Zi¹⁵, author of the Classic Chinese text *Tào Té Chīng*, may be understood as an original postmodernist in his countering of the imposed grand narrative/s of the established regime with his teaching of the belief in harmonious self-regulated small family-centred communities and the value individual deeds and destiny. The philosophy of Lao Zi also advocated for equilibrium in every human activity, a balance between quality as a 'Yang' virtue of 'Heaven' and quantity as a 'Yin' manifestation of 'Earth' – and for an ability to adapt to situations rather than resisting change through the pursuit and practice of this balance.

Influential educational theorist Malcolm Knowles contended that it is precisely because their experience was with adults, that many great teachers of ancient times – including Chinese philosophers Lao Zi and Confucius¹⁶ - developed very different concepts of learning and teaching to those that developed post-Enlightenment and came to dominate formal education. The key is that these ancient teachers considered learning as a process of mental inquiry rather than a passive reception of (instructed) content.

The Knowlsian theory of andragogy was the first major attempt to develop a theory specifically for adult learning; Knowles emphasised that adults are essentially self-directed and expect to take responsibility for decisions and that adult learning programs must accommodate this fundamental aspect. He also noted that too much education, received comprehensively from others would play against the awareness of personal experience and self-evaluation (Knowles; 1973, 2005). Similarly, Lindeman argued that the teacher is a “searcher after wisdom and not oracles” (Lindeman, 1926; pp10-11) and that adult education aims to discover new methods and incentives from those promoted by the apologists for the status quo in education, with adult learners also less likely to respond to conventionalised institutions of learning (ibid; pp.27-28).

¹⁵ also popularly known as Lao Tzu; considered the founder of philosophical Taoism, he wrote the *Tào Té Chīng* – translated as *Way To Heaven* or *The Book of The Way and its Virtue* - in 6th century BCE

¹⁶ Knowles also cited such diverse luminaries of the ancient worlds as Jesus, Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and the Hebrew prophets as employing very different - yet effective - concepts of learning and teaching to those we now understand to be models of education

Building on these respected theories of andragogy and embracing the four *Daoist* axioms, the learning process should respect a balance of qualitative and quantitative, in the sense that it fulfils the needs of individuals and the needs resulting from personal situations rather than people studying subjects in the hope that the information gained will someday be useful.

The e-learning platform I am developing for the study of Traditional Acupuncture will address both the needs of autonomous adult learners and the *Daoist* need for Yin/Yang equilibrium - a balance of instruction and self-directed learning and of teaching/learning of theory and practice. It will emphasise the proactive nature of study and offer a free trial for an introductory course on the basics of traditional medicine.

I do not intend to exclude potential learners nor invent/dictate an ideal acupuncture student profile but aim, rather, to invite students to reflect on whether the Traditional proposition resonates with them or if it represents too much of a paradigm shift, in regard of their former scientific training. I believe that when an educational proposal is presented with clarity and honesty and in opposition to a compulsory or commercial approach, adults can make an informed choice to commit to a course of study.

3. Matters of distance

We may consider that some forms of distance learning have always existed if we simply envisage it as a blend of synchronous and asynchronous¹⁷ forms of learning.

The oral linguistic traditions of ancient cultures ensured that information was transferred from one generation to the next and from one geographic location to another. The origin of scribed language then enabled people/s to do the same in concrete, tangible form.

¹⁷ **Synchronous learning:** a group of people learning the same things at the same time in the same place; **asynchronous learning:** information sharing outside the constraints of time and place among a network of people; now most commonly used in relation to student-centered teaching methods that use online learning resources

Confucius democratised education that was previously the privilege of a few. Working-people received education whenever possible and studied in their own time. The most important is that the learning experience be active (participative), to a certain extent personalised, and meaningful.

A collaboratively-produced manifesto produced by the students on the MSc E-learning course¹⁸ claims that distance learning can be the preferred option even when 'real-life' (face-to-face) learning is available; there are several ways to teach online that are more effective than the conventional classroom method/s, depending on context. The best distance courses are developed and created online specifically for online - as opposed to classroom course content being uploaded for availability online - taking advantage of creative and inspiring interactive tools and techniques for the benefit of both the facilitator and the learner. The collaborative and critical¹⁹ aspect of social constructivist teaching/learning models constitute a more transformational learning experience than the oppressive and restrictive modern(ist) classroom environment/s experience/s in which students are not expected to question the content provided for them.

In the contemporary postmodern world everything can be contested, questioned and reconsidered, something that is enabled even further in an online teaching/learning situation. What is expected from a student, therefore, is, essentially, to be able to develop and elaborate a pertinent argument and thus a more critical mind. No single theoretical framework is prioritised or more acceptable than another - and in that sense, the model serves the *Daoist* perspective in which Zuang Zi, in opposition to his own master, Lui Zi, liked to challenge the relativity of any mentally constructed theory to apprehend the complex nature of reality.

His teachings took the form of rhetorical positions that had the effect of de-stablising the certainties/paradigms of his students. A similar teaching strategy is still used in Buddhist education where trainee monks are

¹⁸ The manifesto was written by the students, teachers and researchers connected with the MSc in E-Learning at the University of Edinburgh to stimulate reflection about creative practices in the field.

¹⁹ As in 'critical adult education' in which students offer a considered critique of a theory or text

encouraged to defend one intellectual position and then immediately after, to defend a contradictory one with the intention of prompting an entirely new train of thought; this type of thinking is exemplified by the challenge to the scientific absolutism that the world is a sphere in which it can be argued that we may academically comprehend that the world is spherical but we may also accept that we experience the world as flat and thus accept that the world is both round and flat (see: White *et al*; 2005). Similarly, in the context of acupuncture, we can discuss the idea that humans are both psychosomatic²⁰ and somatopsychic²¹ beings.

The e-learning environment allows and promotes the exchange of ideas through activities such as forums and webinars. The Internet can enable the teacher/facilitator to provide a safe and favourable medium to test new ideas against other participants that do not interfere with or impact on the 'real' world. Ellsworth (1989) described the unequal power relations in a classroom where things are 'not said' for a number of reasons, which could include the fear of being misunderstood or misinterpreted or the fear of becoming vulnerable by disclosing too much (Merriam, 2007 p285). The anonymous aspect of the web can help people to move beyond sexism, racism and other prejudice/s in safe and supportive environments. Stepanova (2011) covered the favourable role that social media can play in countries where the authorities try to regulate the freedom of expression. It is outside the scope of this dissertation to fully discuss the pros and cons of virtual forms of communication - and the negative issues of online prejudice are well documented - but dedicated forums can be monitored, participants can be required to abide by agreed rules of behaviour and, therefore, it is possible to offer a safe platform that enables participants to experiment with unconventional theories and positions.

In her article *Toward a postmodern pedagogy* (2004) Deborah Kilgore considers that the core of postmodern pedagogy is "shaking up of the

²⁰ psychosomatic medicine is an interdisciplinary medical field studying the relationships of social, psychological, and behavioural factors on bodily processes and quality of life in humans and refers to the effect of the mind on the body

²¹ Somatopsychic (from the Greek: *somato* = "body" and *psychikosis* = "of the soul, mental") is a medical term for the effects of the body on the mind

social positions of teacher and student and the power relationship between them. Such aspirations will require us to consider the death of the teacher, the subversion of the student and the diffusion of power (Merriam, 2007 pp260).

In the context of *Daoism* we could say that even Lao Zi as 'the teacher' was subversive in the sense that the classic text *Tao Te Ching* is essentially deconstructing the hegemonic paradigms of the establishment of the time. Laozi rejected any form of structured power and returned the responsibility of the individual to the individual themselves. He also declined to engage in debate with competing schools of thought and left the individual to engage with the (human) world through meditation on/ interpretation by use of the complex text he left to the world. Merriam argued knowledge "is something that we exercise rather than possess" and that meaning lies not in text but in it's interpretation, which, in the context of philosophy, could be paraphrased as meaning lies not in the literal text but in it's inspiration.

Conveying the message: tools, technicalities and illustration

Selecting the visual appearance and appropriate digital media tools is a very important part of the development of any new e-learning project, especially as it is likely that you are making a commitment that will last a number of years.

Learning Management System

A learning management system (LMS), also called Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, and reporting of training programmes, e-learning programs, and training content. Changing a LMS once a platform is online can be a difficult, risky enterprise.

A recent versions of the two leading LMSs currently used by a growing number of colleges and higher education institutions - Moodle and Blackboard – have been comprehensively evaluated by Ralf Otto of Ruhr-Universität²² using a comparison matrix of 103 different aspects to identify whether each of the two systems is capable of each specific task. The published results show that Blackboard Learn 9.1 (SP3) and Moodle 2.0.1 are extremely similar in their capabilities in about 95% of the features and tools. With a few extensions and additional plug-ins, two can mirror each other in 100% of the functionalities they set out to provide.

Blackboard/WebCT is used at ECA²³ and I have access to Moodle as a free open source program; I was also able to meet two members of staff in charge of Moodle at the University of Glasgow to discuss student and staff user feedback. Both the research and my own personal experience indicated that Moodle is the most appropriate LMS option for this project.

²² the university of Bochum, Germany

²³ Edinburgh College of Art recently merged with the University of Edinburgh, combining with the University's School of Arts, Culture and Environment to form a new and enlarged Edinburgh College of Art within the University

The key aspects that attracted me to Moodle are

- matured to a point where it legitimately competes with/excels over commercial products
- full compliance with SCORM²⁴, a set of industry standards for e-learning software products that enables programmers to write their code so that it can communicate effectively with other e-learning software
- that it embraces the mobile digital era (m-Learning) with mobile templates and web apps that have focused on WebKit-based browsers
- design and development was/continues to be guided by what they refer to as a 'social constructivist pedagogy'²⁵

It seems that most claims published against Moodle appear to be acts of resistance against the market leader rather than a well-argued critique of the technology. Visual impact and appeal are also crucial elements of any website, however, with design not merely decorative but communicating a message about the content (Samara, 2007), and Moodle has been criticised for being restrictive in terms of visual creativity. This is something I have considered when making my choice – and I am satisfied that Moodle have addressed the issue of individual preference/s and needs, including my own, through the ability of their templates to be modified and enhanced with CSS²⁶.

When writing the business plan for this project in the Marketplace course (file available on the accompanying DVD), I analysed some Continuous Professional Development courses for acupuncturists available through distance learning/e-learning. It appears that one popular website²⁷ offers

²⁴ The SCORM standard makes sure that all e-learning content and LMSs can work with each other, so that, if an LMS is SCORM conformant, it can play any content that is SCORM conformant, and any SCORM conformant content can play in any SCORM conformant LMS. The SCORM module enables teachers to upload any SCORM or AICC package to include in a course.

²⁵ I have discussed the relevance of social constructivism in the section on adult education in the postmodern era

²⁶ Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) is a style sheet language used for describing the look and formatting of a document written in a markup language.

²⁷ Acupunctureprofessionals.com

podcasts and webinars which I found to be restrictive and reliant on the passive form of pedagogy that is least appropriate for my purposes. One college²⁸ accredited by the British Acupuncture Board offers some online support of the classroom course via Moodle – although this seemed to be a 'straight from the box' product in terms of design and appeal, which could be understood to indicate that the course/s are not digitally created but modified versions of classroom content uploaded online.

Authoring tools

As e-learning develops and the focus shifts away from the technological content and towards the process of actual user learning, the choice of authoring tools will almost certainly become a less sensitive and potentially problematic issue. Flash²⁹ is losing its position as the leading product primarily because Apple, whose mobile devices hold 65% of the market with products like iPhone and iPad³⁰, do not support it and also because HTML5 has now reached a level of maturity where it can outperform Flash.

As the e-learning platform/courses develop and mature, I may consider using additional tools/programmes to enhance the learning experience. The commercial e-learning tool Captivate 6 from Adobe is of particular interest to me as it can generate interactive media in HTML5.

Other tools I would consider for subsequent development are

- Prezi³¹, a cloud-based presentation software/storytelling tool for exploring and sharing ideas on a virtual canvas; this would allow me to create narratives and embed different media files from hosted

²⁸ The Northern College of Acupuncture – www.nca.com

²⁹ a multimedia platform used to add animation, video, and interactivity to web pages; it is frequently used for advertisements, games, animations for broadcast and more recently, it has been positioned as a tool for "Rich Internet Applications"

³⁰ [ABI Research date?](#)

³¹ Prezi is distinguished in the market by its Zooming User Interface (ZUI), which enables users to zoom in and out of their presentation media.

podcasts and other sources (video, images, light swf, pdf, links and so on) and offers a free iPad application

- Diver, a video editing software, available from the Stanford Centre for Innovations in Learning', part of the University of Stanford, California; this would allow me to create annotated "paths" collaboratively through a video recording

The web offers an infinite number of learning opportunities, including material that educational institutions give access to in the public domain. To support learning as a life-long experience, I created a learning group for acupuncturists and learners to communicate on their experience in the field of acupuncture on the professional networking website LinkedIn to promote what has been called social learning outside the Moodle environment.

The visual field of Acupuncture

As previously stated, the visual impact and appeal of a website is crucial and must effectively communicate a message in a second about the content to both the casual viewer and the prospective user, requiring in semiotic terms that the signified and the signifier are not separated (Saussure.1913). This notion is also key in the use of visual images/representation used to teach any aspect of acupuncture via the e-learning platform.

The Chinese classical arts, including medical literature, give as much importance to the form in which the message is conveyed as the contents. Cheng emphasised the notion/value of emptiness in Chinese painting in particular – and in the traditional culture in general. As a Western audience, we look at the trace that the brush of the artist/calligrapher has left – whereas a Chinese audience look at the density of the empty space that the brushstroke has created around it because the 'nothingness'; is just as real if not even more vibrant than the brushstroke in that it allows and supports what has been expressed by the artist/calligrapher. The way that a classical visual text is composed expresses a dynamic that is

significant to the message, just as in any written text. The classical sense of composition and importance of space also applies to any contemporary form of design created in the Western world (although different audiences will have different interpretations of that design); the e-learning platform aims to make use of the design interface and course content – as well as the structure of the programme – to try to communicate intention, emotion and pace, creating visual connections that will be as powerful and evocative as intellectually constructed discourse/s.

When considering how best to convey effective and appropriate messages about Traditional Acupuncture via the most modern of technologies, it is necessary to look at the traditions within both Chinese and Western art. Post-Enlightenment Western art embraced the idea of conquered nature presented in the form of 'still life' - as exemplified in the painting of a dead fish on a kitchen table (Fig.1); in direct contrast, the Chinese tradition decreed that living creatures should always be painted in their natural environment as exemplified by the leaping carp (Fig. 2) because a fish out of water is essentially no longer a fish but merely dead matter. It is interesting to note that the French term for 'still life painting' is '*nature morte*', which translates as 'dead nature'.



Fig. 2: 'Still life with fish' ('dead nature')

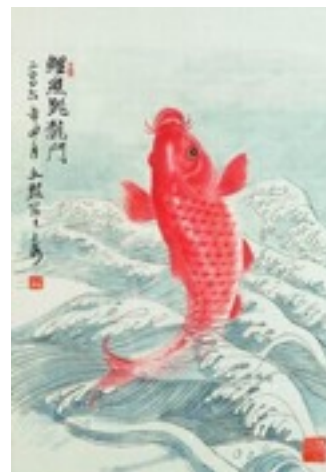


Fig. 3: 'Leaping carp' ('living nature' and an expression of the vitality of water)

This concept of the connection between nature and life(force) is mirrored within Traditional Acupuncture, in that the study of an organ should not be

disconnected from its physiology. Chinese doctors expected to make sense of the (material) manifestation by understanding its connection and interaction with the *Dao*, not only the immediate physical microcosm but also in the wider natural macrocosm that, encompassed an awareness of social health, synchronisation diurnal pattern (Yin/Yang) and the seasons (which accord to the principles of the five elements). As acupuncture was reinvented by the Western scientific principles, however, and within the restrictive parameters of evidential science, so the traditional visual representations were overwhelmed by the textbook iconography of western medicine.



Fig. 4: Tang dynasty (618-907), scene of medical palpation in the social context. Artist unknown



Fig.5: *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*. Rembrandt (1632)

Just as it was vital to show 'living nature' in Chinese traditional art, it was also vital to show the practice of acupuncture being carried out on living patients as shown in the image in Fig 3; this contrasts with the practice of showing anatomical dissections of dead bodies in Western art as exemplified by Fig.4 : traditional Chinese medicine considers that the physical matter of the body (Yin) and the vital qi/breath (Yang) that animates that matter exist (only) for one another. The study of inanimate matter is considered to be almost pointless – a cadaver is merely a vehicle, an object without life and function. From an analysis of the available texts, It is possible to observe that traditional surgeons and physicians had a wealth of knowledge and experience but did not study the human form in a way that modern science can recognise and validate for a more global understanding of the practice.

There is historical evidence to show that successful surgeries were performed in China for a long time before the practicing physicians were concerned about faithful recorded representation of their work. It is notable that Acupuncture charts from the past seem naive, despite the abundance of artistic talent we know to have existed in ancient China. We may speculate that those practicing acupuncture resisted the casual recording of their skills because they anticipated the potential for untrained people to improvise and pass themselves off as practitioners on the basis of access to some minor teaching materials thus protecting their philosophy and their knowledge from misuse. It was important for the theory and practice to be accurately recorded and explained, to give it gravitas and respect within the teachings of the ancient world. The classical text *Huang Ti Nei Jing* states "you must practice acupuncture with vigilance, as if you were waling along a cliff [edge] which serves to emphasise the responsibility of the practitioner towards both their art and their patient/s.

A common metaphorical image of the teaching of acupuncture uses and apple cut in -two, offering either two sections – representing Yin/Yang; or a five-way split around the core – representing five elements. This is a visual analogy for two approaches being represented in a single situation/ image.



Fig. 6. the analogy of the apple

This analogy can be adapted to compare 'the traditional' with 'the scientific' if the image was then shown as an apple on the tree (living) and the cells of an apple as seen through a microscope.

Any visual images and representations utilised for the e-learning platform will respect the traditional philosophies and practices. Acupuncture charts created from work on (representatively) living models are only an approximate indicator of where the points to place the needles are. Acupuncture Academy offers an intensive course in a blended e-learning mode (online and 'real-life' workshops). The most effective way of teaching needle placement would be during those workshops, supported by videos or/and webinars where live models are used so that account can be taken of the physiological 'geography' of the individual as well as the movement required to locate some points, the position of needle insertion and the angle and depth of the needle insertion.



Fig. 7 Ancient Traditional Acupuncture chart

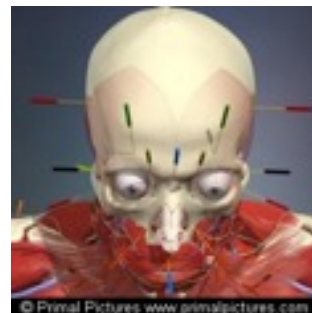


Fig. 8: Contemporary 3D chart showing acupuncture points

Many more charts would need to be created to compensate for the lack of perspective that has been generated by the standardised representations in which acupuncture channels and points are commonly represented in a two-dimensional way that does not allow for or express the three-dimensional reality of the human body. There have been 3D charts produced for the teaching of acupuncture as shown in Fig. 8 – but to the practitioner of Traditional Acupuncture these are just as inappropriate as diagrammatic anatomical charts and other lifeless representations. The result of using Western(ised)/medical(ised) forms of representation is that

practitioners study unnecessary data that are only relevant to a very different and specific form of scientific medicine – which is detrimental to the greater context of Traditional Acupuncture. In addition, the use of medical charts adapted to show acupuncture points/channels inevitably means that too much importance is given to the vertical meridians to the detriment of the other connections acupuncture points have on (unrepresented) horizontal planes. It could be argued that representing the human body in any chart is in fact a visual obstacle to the genuine development of understanding of the complex exchanges that happen both within and without the delimitations of the body; the development of such understanding could enable a new space in which to envisage and integrate the classical texts. I would argue, therefore, that rather than a chart or lifeless model on which a specific point on the muscular system has been determined without taking account of movement and individual physicality, that the most suitable graphic to use for the teaching of Traditional Acupuncture might be a 3D animation that could express the exchange in the physiology of energy and could be adapted to represent individual physical characteristics.

I aim to ensure that the iconography will always be contextual, taking advantage of the visual Chinese culture and the many analogies that are used in the context of Chinese medicine in which the aim is to express the connection of the microcosm with the macrocosm. I aim to offer representations that will stimulate the curiosity of the student about the Traditional proposition but I am aware that these images must be carefully selected to prevent the temptation for them to make inappropriate analogies or synthesise aspects of Traditional Acupuncture with any knowledge they may have of medical science. I envisage, therefore, the most appropriate graphics to be evocative of a way to seek knowledge rather than instructional diagrams.

It is possible that Western medicine could also, in some circumstances, benefit from the use of more life-like representations in a teaching situation; it is also possible to speculate that the Western(ised) scientific/medical world intentionally resists being associated from any creative

representations of the human body to avoid accusations of frivolity in relation to something as serious as medicine.

In the context of postmodern pedagogy/andragogy and the design of the visual content of the course/s offered on the e-learning platform, I will make reference to the essay submitted in the Media and Culture course in which I considered and responded to the question "If we agree that play is ubiquitous and has value in design, how and when can playful design be incorporated into more serious contexts?"

Interpreting the Home Page



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Acupuncture Academy. At the top left is the logo for 'ACUPUNCTURE ACADEMY' featuring a stylized green figure and a human torso with acupuncture points. To the right, it says 'You are not logged in. (Log in)'. Below the logo, the main heading reads: 'Acupuncture Academy offers effective online CPD and an intensive course (online + real-life workshops) for health practitioners'. A quote from NHS Direct is included: '*Acupuncture is the most established complementary medicine in the UK* NHS Direct. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has recommended acupuncture for lower back pain since 2009.' A 'Welcome' message follows, and a 'FREE INTRODUCTORY COURSE' banner with a 'Try Now' button is visible. On the right side, there are social media icons for LinkedIn and Facebook, a navigation menu with links to Home, FREE Introductory Course, Intensive Course and CPD, Is this for me, Who we are, and Contact us, and a login section with fields for Username and Password, and a 'Remember username' checkbox.

The logo is a graphic representation of a seeded dandelion head with the wind blowing the seeds through the air with the hope and intention of finding fertile ground; I understand the seeded dandelion head to be a symbol of hope, renewal and continuity with the floating seeds to relate to both the dissemination of information and to the Latin root of the word Tradition: *tradere*, meaning "to hand down to posterity" and holding to the concept of the cyclic nature of life.

The dandelion seeds are positioned to form to constellation of *Pei Tou*, which we know in the West as *Ursa Major* or 'The Great Bear', which in space, turns/revolves around the polar star or Celestial North Pole. In Chinese astrology, *Pei Tou* is the principle object of veneration as it is understood to govern the Four Directions, determine the Four Seasons, balances the Five Elements, divide Yin from Yang and regulate the divisions of time, emphasising the regularity of the Cycles of Heaven: day and night; the lunar cycle; the seasons of the year and so on.

In Traditional/classical Chinese images Man – here represented by the green figure in the banner - stands in a delimited space (Earth) and naturally faces the sun, which I have indicated by creating a shadow behind the green figure. To stand under the sun and create a shadow relates to the English verb 'to understand', which in turn relates to the process of learning; to understand is the mental process of someone comes to comprehend and apply a personal interpretation.

'Understanding' can also relate to the empathy between two people, as between client and practitioner, teacher and learner and so on.

Conclusion

Through my own learning experiences and my ongoing practice, I have become increasingly aware of the political aspects of and politics around health and education and, to address this, I created a manifesto for the teaching of Traditional Acupuncture in the contemporary postmodern Western world.

The manifesto outlined the origins of Traditional Acupuncture and the key issues faced by those practitioners trying to adhere to/promote the original underlying *Daoist* philosophies and principles in the face of the devaluing and discounting of these traditions by both Communist China and the Western Medical establishment. In addition, I acknowledge in the manifesto that both the Chinese and the West have reinvented the practice of acupuncture to comply with the scientific paradigm in the name of 'progress'.

I propose to address these issues by developing a methodology for the teaching of Tradition-based acupuncture in the context of blended e-learning. Rooted firmly in the four axioms of tradition while embracing the plurality of the postmodern world, I will (continue to) develop both the online platform and the course content on a social-constructivist model that embraces the Knowlsian concept of andragogy.

The crisis of modernity has exposed flaws of the inflexible, one-size-fits-all approach taken by the scientific/medical establishment when treating individuals – a methodology that is often to the detriment of the patient. By taking a more holistic approach and appreciating the patient as an individual with a unique set of symptoms, the practitioner of tradition-based acupuncture aims to help the patient find balance/harmony both within the body and between body and mind.

Having considered the conventional educational methods, I have chosen to offer a more pro-active learner experience, I aim to enable those engaging with the e-learning platform to embrace personal inquiry and development

of knowledge in an emancipatory environment, where they can express ideas and opinions in a supporting (and supported) forum.

I reviewed the technical tools available for the development of e-learning platforms, I selected those I believe to best suited to both the Daoist philosophy and principles and also the ideals of social-constructivism and active andragogy. I have been building a professional website with links to the e-learning platform using the Moodle LMS making modifications to the visual design that take account of the creative analogies of Chinese culture – and rejecting the two dimensional charts that have become commonplace in the teaching of medicalised acupuncture.

In the macrocosm of the globalised world, the course will offer a microcosm of *Daoist* harmony through a considered balance of andagogic content and personal challenge. The overall aim is to achieve a balance between traditional and postmodern: a balance between the positive aspects of medical knowledge and the theories, principles and practices of Traditional Acupuncture, emphasising that the apparent contradictions between the two are not obstacles to the acquisition of valuable knowledge but a stimulus for cognitive enquiry.

“teaching is not about filling up a recipient but lighting a flame”

Aristophane

The project can be accessed via <http://lms.acupunctureacademy.pro>

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