

FACIAL ACUPUNCTURE:

The Treatment Protocols of Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal:

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Introduction:

The noun “beauty” is derived, through the French “beau,” from the Latin adjective *bellus*, meaning “handsome” or “pretty.” Although in our culture we tend to associate physical beauty with superficiality and a corresponding lack of spiritual profundity, it seems that the ancient world recognized this desirable human attribute as more than skin deep -- a perspective that links a beguiling outer appearance to a manifest emergence of the deepest qualities of soul. This pre-modern notion of beauty as an aggregate of physical attractiveness and spiritual depth implies the existence of a deeper union between body and spirit, and reflects a multifaceted tapestry of possibilities for health, well-being and balance.

The treatment protocols that make up the program we call *Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal*¹ are based upon Chinese medicine, offering a comprehensive constitutional treatment that views the face as a mirror of the overall health and well-being of the body. This approach seeks to achieve more than just a pretty face, transforming and renewing the essential and original quality and beauty of life.

A synergy of methods is thus employed to first address the individual’s constitutional make-up before the purely cosmetic considerations.

Non-Needle Modalities

The methods employed in these treatment protocols include not only the core modality of acupuncture, but also these non-needle modalities:

1. Acupressure (a combination of European, Chinese and Japanese techniques);
2. Chinese herbal poultices and masks;
3. Tuning forks and magnets;
4. Isometric facial exercises;
5. Microcurrent

Recommendations for appropriate dietary changes, rest, exercise, herbs, meditation and visualization, *qi-gong*, good elimination and sufficient fluid intake are offered. Therefore, each person’s individual needs are addressed holistically, with the aim to transform them from the inside out.

Cautions

It is important to pre-screen the patient during an initial telephone interview, to ascertain that she or he is not contraindicated for facial acupuncture. The underlying constitutional issues must be addressed prior to any facial acupuncture; for example, acute migraine headaches, or any conditions of either Liver or Stomach Fire rising. Menopausal women need their *yang* well anchored to avoid triggering hot flashes, and the *yin* should be additionally nourished with herbs.

The Benefits of Facial Renewal

¹ The term “*Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal*” is trademarked as a proprietary name for this treatment protocol.

Prior to treatment, the patient is informed of realistic expectations for the treatment outcome, and the treatment's benefits are outlined, which may include that the quality of skin and muscle tone improves, fine lines recede, and deeper wrinkles diminish. The treatment increases local blood and lymph circulation, reduces bags, puffiness and sagging, and by its constitutional approach can treat TMJ, Bell's palsy and neuropathies, help sinuses and headaches, gynaecological and digestive problems, hypo- or hyper-thyroidism, and other health concerns.

Five Element Physiognomy

“According to Chinese physiognomy, each area of the face corresponds to a particular organ, so a disharmony in that organ affects the complexion, texture and moisture of the corresponding facial area.”

Ted Kaptchuk (2000).

The next step is to examine the patient's physiognomy, which incorporates the ancient Chinese art of hand and face reading. This practice originated in the Han dynasty, in the 3rd century BCE, when shamans called fang shi read faces, hands, and body types.¹ Livia Kohn (1996)² describes this:

Physiognomic inspection does not consist of guessing—it is the recognition of what is natural, of what is there latently, invisible to the untrained, non-intuitive observer ... The physiognomist may be a technician as well as a sage. The sage, as part of the underlying power of the Tao, spontaneously intuits people's standing in the world, while the fortune-teller or shaman is a trained technician who has learned his or her skill by memorizing signs and the character types associated with them. ...

This comprehensive art takes many years to master. In our clinic setting, along with the five element correspondences, five element hara palpation and a five element wrinkle chart, it is employed as a basic diagnostic technique.

By observing certain lines and physical attributes in the patient's hands and face, we can discern which element or elements she or he embodies. It is important to remember that each individual is incorporated from all five elements, but tends to manifest one or two more distinctly than the others.³

With this knowledge, the practitioner can treat the patient constitutionally, and have an added understanding of the patient's tendencies with respect to aging, health and longevity.

Wood-Earth Elemental Combination

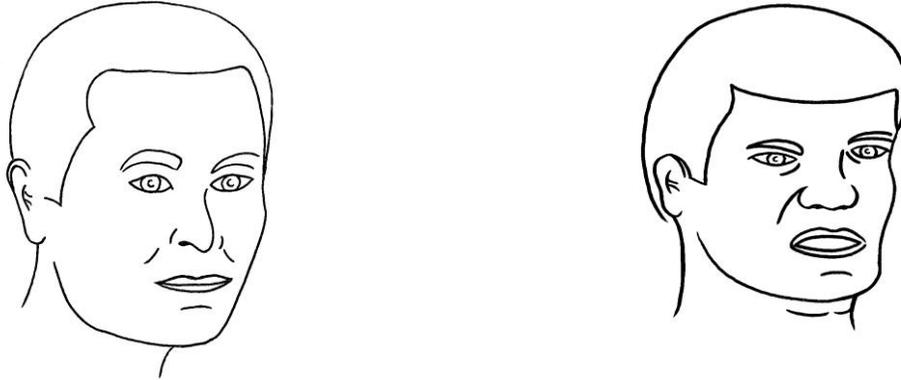
Let us consider, for example, a patient who comes in for treatment with a wood/earth element combination:

Wood-Earth Hand



A wood hand is well-proportioned, and has many small lines on the ventral surface of the palm and fingers. This trait usually indicates poor circulation in the extremities with a dry skin condition. Examining the earth component of this individual's hand structure, the practitioner might notice that this patient has a fleshy thenar eminence, and short, triangular-shaped fingernails with hangnails that they have bitten off with their teeth. The flesh on the hands may be either sagging (*yin*) or firm (*yang*).

Wood-Earth Face



The wood face exhibits a prominent forehead as wide as (or wider than) the cheekbones, a slope between the cheekbone and jaw, and deep-set eyes, with a high superciliary arch. The addition of the earth element would possibly show a double chin with sagging skin. Therefore, the upper portion of the face would manifest wood tendencies, and the lower jaw area would reveal the gravity of the earth element. Further investigation with the five elements will determine the constitutional treatment.

Five Element Wrinkle Analysis

The wood patient presents the most allergic facial landscape of all the five elements. Understanding this alerts the practitioner to inquire about possible sensitivity to topical medications, herbs and cosmetics, and could prevent an adverse reaction to poultices and herbal masks applied during the session.

The complexion may show liver spots or hyperpigmentation, deep creases between the eyes, and dark circles under the eyes, which indicate blood stagnation, and are typical pathological manifestations for the wood type. Coupled with the earth element, the patient might also bruise easily, have tendencies toward sagging skin and a double chin.

Tongue, Pulse and Hara (as per Kiiko Matsumoto)

In a constitutional treatment approach, we gather data according to Chinese medicine principles, as well as through Japanese hara palpation. All acquired information is tempered, weighed and balanced through these diagnostic techniques. Since the Edo Period (1602-1868), the tradition of Japanese acupuncture has been carefully maintained by successive generations of blind acupuncturists. Sensei Nagano (one of Kiiko Matsumoto's teachers) had a highly developed sense of touch that permitted him to "listen" to a remarkable degree with his hands; his fingers, in effect, functioned as a phalanx of little ears.

This systemized method of palpation provides the practitioner with instantaneous feedback, and also permits a healing dialogue between practitioner and patient, as the latter can report subsequent changes within the hara itself, relaying such subjective sensations as tight, tender,ropy, or lumpy.

With our sample patient, we palpate the wood hara (left area of *Tianshu* ST-25 to *Daju* ST-27) to check for tightness, pressure-pain or any “ropy” sensations. Because the Liver hara initially affects the micro-circulation of *qi* and blood throughout the body, it is usually needled first. This hara presentation is called “*oketsu*”, which means stagnant blood, and can arise due to surgery, stress (emotional or physical), and Liver *qi* stagnation, among other causes.

Treatment:

Left, *Chize* LU-5 (more lateral location than standard: on the cubital crease, midway between *Chize* LU-5 and *Quchi* L.I.-11, or 1 cun above or below the crease, depending upon palpation)

Left, *Zhongfeng* LIV-4

THE THREE CONSTITUTIONAL LEVELS

After needling the hara pattern, acu-points are selected according to the three levels—the *jing*, the *ying* and the *wei*—to support the patient’s specific TCM patterns, and the classical five element meridian imbalances involved in the aging process.

The Jing Level

This level uses the eight extraordinary meridians as the repository for ancestral *jing*, due to the relationship each of these channels has with the Kidneys. These meridians carry our original pattern of *qi* and the ancient Taoists believed that these extraordinary channels could enhance and lengthen life.

Since we are treating patients constitutionally, and are observing their tendencies during the aging process, it is beneficial to treat at a deeper level to support the essence. Only the opening points of the eight extraordinary meridians are needled contralaterally to support the *jing* level, both in consideration of the physical aspects of these vessels, and also their emotional/energetic and psychospiritual levels.

For example: for the wood/earth combination person, we might use these opening points:

<i>Waiguan</i> SJ-5 (Right)	<i>Neiguan</i> P-6 (Left)
<i>Gongsun</i> SP-4 (Right)	<i>Zulingqi</i> GB-41 (Left)

This is Kiiko Matsumoto’s Infinity treatment that opens the belt meridian, drains the channel, and regulates any gynecological or digestive problems.

The Ying Level

TCM level nutritive-*ying*, and its related patterns are included in the *Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal* protocol. *Ying* and blood are crucial for the nourishment of the cells of the facial tissue, and the textural quality of the skin in general, and thus we must assess the general state of the nutritive-*ying* as well as attend to local obstruction that may be preventing

nourishment from reaching the tissues involved. This is where a practitioner will use her or his own diagnostic tools to address the patient's constitutional signs and symptoms.

The Wei Level

This level releases the surface, and involves tight, tender *ashi* points that, when palpated, are registered as pain or discomfort by the patient. *Ashi* points can refer sensation to other muscles, and when needled, cause a jump in the muscle as it releases. For example, a patient might manifest the so-called “coat-hanger” syndrome, of tension manifested as shoulders held up around the ears. In some cases it may be difficult to even discern whether or not the patient even has a neck! By releasing *Jianjing* GB-21, the shoulders will be parted from the chin, and a neck will miraculously appear. Then work can be done on the double chin and jowls.

NEEDLING THE FACE

There are many approaches to needling the face: many practitioners use the basic principle of needling acupuncture points upward and outward, without deliberately engaging the muscles and their functions. This is wonderful for bringing *qi* and blood to the face (along with other benefits), but does not effectively tone the muscles or seriously improve sagging tendencies. Another technique is to use acupuncture points for tonification and sedation, involving the antagonist and protagonist muscles.

Yet another technique involves the use of the motor points of the muscles via the acupuncture points. This method creates a powerful lift to the face and neck, and the patient can feel the results of this process for several days after the treatment. A motor point is a specific location where the nerves enter the muscles (a neuromuscular junction). When these sites are needled, the muscle fires and grabs the needle, eliciting a local twitch response. This information is reported by the muscle spindle to the central nervous system (CNS), which gives instructions to either relax tight, contracted muscles, or to strengthen flaccid, weak muscles.

In facial needling, a combination of techniques is employed that always includes stimulating muscle functions via the acupuncture points and also addresses each patient's individual condition.

If we take a hypothetical wood/earth constitution patient as an example: On our wood/earth person's face, we may find a Liver “frown” line between the eyebrows, a hyperpigmentation spot on the right cheek, a droopy nasolabial fold or “smile line” and the beginnings of a double chin and crepe-like skin on the neck.

For the Liver frown line, spread the patient's skin to see if the line remains -- if it does, the line needs to be threaded up superficially under the skin, because it has lodged itself in the dermal layer, which affects the collagen and elastin levels.

Similarly, you can treat the motor point of the corrugator supercillii muscle by threading *Zhanzhu* BL-2 toward *Yuyao* (M-HN-6), looking for a slight grabbing sensation. The practitioner should be advised that both approaches may be used, i.e., the muscle may be treated and the line threaded, if necessary.

For the liver spots on the right cheek, we could “circle the dragon”, either with 1/2" red (40mm) Seirin needles or with intradermal needles. The painless Japanese needling technique is certainly appreciated by most facial acupuncture patients.

For the drooping nasolabial fold (the “smile line”), spread the smile line to see if the wrinkle is in the skin or not. If it is, thread the smile line superficially, upward toward the nose. This seems to enhance protein development under the line and can encourage collagen production.

Alternatively, the motor point of this muscle can be treated by needling *Bitong* (M-HN-14) angled towards *Sibai* ST-2 to get a grabbing reaction, and then retracting the needle to angle it slightly downward toward *Juliao* ST-3 for another reaction. These techniques work well for lifting out the smile line.

For the double chin, it is important to bring the patient’s attention to how she or he customarily hold the jaw and neck; often the problem is exacerbated by body language and old habits. We needle the digastric muscle, which opens the mouth by depressing the jaw and elevates the hyoid bone. Thread *Tianrong* SI-17 towards *Yifeng* SJ-17 under the platysma muscle. Once again, the practitioner is seeking to trigger that sensation of having the needle grasped by the muscle.

For the crepe-like skin of the neck, the platysma muscle must be strengthened. The platysma muscle is a large, thin sheath muscle that is one of the first muscles to droop, creating a wrinkled appearance. One of the best facial *qi gong* exercises to address the cords below the neck (aptly referred to as “turkey wattles”) is:

1. Move your head back and chin upwards, so that the entire throat feels taut;
2. move the lower lip over the lower teeth;
3. smile with the mouth corners backward and upward;
4. hold this position for 10 seconds, feeling the muscle all the way up from the chest and under the chin;
5. bring the jaw gently down and repeat 5 times.

Individuals with TMJ are advised to proceed with care when trying this particular facial exercise. Visible results can be seen in about a week. Also, motor points can help tighten up this neck area. Bilaterally needle *Daying* ST-5, 1 cun back toward the ear. Needle a second ST-5 on the bone, and then wrap the needle under the bone to elicit another motor point response (bilaterally); needling an extra point on the neck 1 cun lateral from *Renying* ST-9 on the SCM muscle can help tighten up this area as well.

Also recommended is the needling of *Qihu* ST-13 bilaterally for the neck and chin. After this, intradermal needles can be used on the deeper neck lines to bring *qi* and blood into the area. This works wonderfully! Retain the needles in the face for about 15-20 minutes, and leave the intradermals until the redness has subsided.

These are suggested protocols only. *Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal* is very much a “less is more” approach to the facial terrain; we do not overload the face with needles.

TOPICAL CHINESE HERBAL PROTOCOL

A Chinese herb facial poultice may be used prior to needling the body, relaxing the patient and saving time in the flow of treatment.

This poultice literally serves as a meal for the skin, neck and décolletage, it lifts the *qi* and the *yang*, and nourishes the blood and *qi*; it can also support the sinews, clear heat and dampness and nourish *yin*. Based on the traditional Chinese herbal formula “Four Substance Decoction” (*Si Wu Tang*), selected Western herbs are added to counteract the effects of poor nutrition, pollution and stress. This formula nourishes the cells of the facial tissue while it moistens and tonifies the skin.

Additional Chinese herbs can be used to clear heat, dampness, and toxins for special skin conditions such as acne, hyperpigmentation, eczema or rosacea.

A disposable cotton mask is dipped into the warm herbal decoction and topped with a warm gel mask. This poultice is usually left on the face for five minutes or so. This prepares the patient's face for needling and rehydrates the skin; when customized, it will address other skin issues.

After the facial needling, a mask of Chinese herbs, frothed with organic egg whites and essential oils, is used to penetrate facial tissues, nourish and stimulate the generation of new cells, and to astringe the skin and close the pores.

When this mask has dried and is removed, a moisturizer combining Chinese herbs, essential oils, vitamins, and soothing botanicals is massaged into the face to improve the texture of skin, reduce dryness and make the skin feel soft and elastic.

As a *grand finale*, jade rollers are rolled up over the face from the neck to the forehead. Cooling by nature, jade calls forth the yin to the face, and evens out the complexion. In ancient China, jade was not only worn for protection, but also to promote and preserve beauty.

Afterward, a hydrosol of either lavender or Bulgarian rose is sprayed on the face to either cool or hydrate the skin.

CONCLUSION

The treatment protocols embodied in *Constitutional Facial Acupuncture Renewal* are designed to reveal the natural goodness and beauty in each patient's appearance, of whatever age. We aim not for the mere appearance of youth, nor do we adopt a cosmetic approach that creates what we might term a facial *tabula rasa* -- a visage seemingly unmarked by the passage of time, reflecting in its unblemished smoothness a "brow completely unfurrowed by thought" or personal experience.

This is an organic, gradual process, but, after 12-15 treatments, most patients will appear to have shed between five to ten years of age. Often, too, this facial *renaissance* becomes the outward physical manifestation of an inner transformation that can be literally life-changing. An increased sense of worth and self-esteem blossoms for these patients, and they radiate a new confidence and joy.



Treatment photo

References:

1. Kaptchuk, T., (2000). *The Web that has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*. New York, NY; McGraw-Hill.

Endnotes:

¹ "The first systematic exposition or manual of the rules and principles of applied physiognomy in China, as extant today, is found among the Dunhuang manuscripts. Ascribed to Xu Fu of the Han dynasty, the *Xiangshu*, ('Physiognomy')

has survived in three different manuscript versions ..." Livia Kohn (1988). "Mirror of Auras": Chen Tuan on Physiognomy. *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (1988), pp. 215-256.

² Livia Kohn (1996). "The Looks of Laozi." *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (1996), pp. 193-236.

³ "Content of Chapter Five of Chen Tuan's 'Mirror of Auras': Physical appearance according to the five phases (wuxing). Here correspondences are given between 'metal' and angular appearance, 'wood' and slimness, 'water' and obesity, 'fire' and sharply-cut features, 'earth' and coarse, solid looks. In addition certain psychological dispositions are associated with the five types. They are in the above order: deep resolution, wealth, literary talent, courage, and caution." Livia Kohn (1988). "Mirror of Auras": Chen Tuan on Physiognomy. *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (1988), pp. 215-256.