

Water-Fire imbalance in children

Treating children can be very rewarding and have big effects on their future, as **Elisa Rossi** explains



It is the old story of *kan* 坎 ☵ and *li* 离 ☲: if Water is not sufficient to control Fire, the flaring *qi* blazes up, scatters *shen qi* 神气 and consumes *jing qi* 精气. The *yin* will weaken more and more, the *yang* will get harmfully excessive. As Liu Wansu said, ‘What we intend when we say that *yang* is movement while *yin* is stillness is that if form-*xing* 形 and *shen* 神 are exhausted, then there is agitation-*zao* 躁 and lack of stillness, whereas with stillness there is purity and tranquillity. Therefore the superior good is like Water, while the inferior stupidity is like Fire¹ in that weak *jing* does not have the power to root *shen* properly. When *zhi* is not concentrated and stable, *shen* is agitated and disarranged; ‘When *zhi* is not united, it is irregular like flames, there is confusion and doubt, if Fire is in excess, Water is weakened, *zhi* is lost and there is confusion and disorder, *zhi* is the *shen* of Water-Kidney.’²

Zhi and shen in children

Constant excessive Fire energy is excessive *yang qi* and just as strong flames do, it overheats, moves too fast, and it scatters energy too violently.

Children with a Water-Fire imbalance keep waking up during the night, and can be impulsive, intractable, prone to furious fits of rage, or have many fears, be over anxious

and always clinging to their mother. Such behavioural patterns sometimes lie behind the conventional medicine diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

In children, Fire manifests physically mainly through hard stools, rashes, thirst, red tongue or red tip, and a rapid pulse. It agitates their movements; they throw off the bedcovers during the night, never keep still during the day, they run and jump, with a dangerous tendency to have accidents, touching everything and often breaking objects. They have impulsive reactions, often affecting the relationships they have with peers and adults. Their minds are scattered, they have a hard time maintaining attention, moving from one thing to another without completing any task – often breaking the flow of their activity.

If the *yin* quality of quiet and receptivity is lacking, the child’s sleep is disturbed, there is no rest during the day, they are tense and intractable, and all their movements are impulsive. None of the child’s physical, mental and emotional reactions will have the space of a *yin* pause before answering to a *yang* stimulus.

Excessive *yang* moves the emotions too fast and heats them too much. These children have a hot temper and build up intense rages. When the *zhi*, the root of the Kidney *qi* is very weak, the child can be emotionally fragile, fearful, easily frightened, always in great need of reassurance and support.

Roots and patterns

The imbalance between Water and Fire can have various origins. It may develop from a prolonged and deep deficiency, such as when *qi* is lacking and it must be drawn from the deeper source of Kidneys, thus leaving the Water energy dredged and weak. In the first phases of life, *qi* is still immature, therefore easily insufficient. When we come into the world, we are extremely fragile: the *qi* that constitutes our individuality has just begun its existence, but has not yet been consolidated. Children are therefore delicate. Paediatrics exists as a speciality in Chinese medicine, with definite diagnostic criteria and therapeutic interventions that pertain specifically to children. Classical texts clearly describe the relative immaturity of children's *qi*. It is said that the *zangfu* of children are 'soft and tender' (*zangfu jiao ruo* 脏腑娇弱), which means that the functions of the various internal organs have yet to fully develop and consolidate. The network of the *jingluo* 经络 is also in the process of building up, and the flow of *qi* has yet to stabilise – it is therefore said that the *qi* of children 'easily loses its way' (*qi yi chu dao* 气易出道). During the first phases of life, growth is rapid and a large amount of *qi* is needed for the digestive processes of transformation and transportation. A child's digestive system is often not adequate for such a task, and it is therefore said that 'the Spleen of children is insufficient' (*xiao er pi bu zu* 小儿脾不足).³



Spleen and Stomach are the root of post-heaven *qi* (*houtian qi* 后天气); they receive and transform food into *qi*, which then takes its different forms, such as *xue*, *zangfu*, body tissues, functions, emotions, and so on. If the middle *jiao* 焦 function is weak, all these transformations slow down and/or fail, manifesting as low energy, slow growth, with an impaired digestion that easily allows Damp to transform into Phlegm. The child is generally weak, easily tired, with a poor appetite, pale face, crying at night, vulnerable both to external pathogenic *qi* attacks and internal *qi* movements, i.e. emotions. This may present as either a mild or acute condition, but reinforcing Spleen *qi* is almost always our main task in paediatrics. A vigorous middle *jiao* makes *qi* available where necessary. For instance tonifying the Lung and Kidney allows for the strengthening of defensive *qi*, transformation of Phlegm, nourishing of *yin*, Blood and *shen*.

A Kidney *qi* deficiency may also be the result of a *jing* weakness, originating from pre-heaven *qi* (*xiantian qi* 先天气), which in turn impairs *yuanqi* and *zhi*. In these cases, the condition is most likely chronic and involves retardation in psycho-physical development, congenital or genetic pathologies. In such a case, *shen* has a poor rooting and sufficiently focused cognitive abilities, alongside an integration of emotions, cannot develop smoothly and strongly. The *Yijing* states 'Zhi in stillness is concentrated; in movement it is straight and true'.⁴



It helps to recall that *jing* does not come only from pre-heaven *qi*, but also from post-heaven sources such as rest, food and care. In order to make these changes, cooperation from the parents is essential, as treatment needs to take place over a long period of time.

In most cases excessive Fire is mostly due to children's *yang* nature, more so than to a deficiency in Water. 'Childhood corresponds to spring, dawn, the Wood phase, and *yang* that grows within *yin*; it is the phase at which *yang* is at its highest potential. This *yang* quality can easily become excessive in relation to *yin*, and thus it is said that "the *yin* of children is insufficient". (*xiao er yin bu zu* 小儿阴不足) The *qi* that corresponds to the Wood Element is powerful and can easily become excessive, causing disorders involving excessive Liver *qi*, and it is therefore said that in children "the Liver often has excess" (*gan chang you yu* 肝常有馀).¹⁵ This physiological tendency towards excessive Wood and full Fire explains how fever and febrile convulsions can advance quickly, or why the tongue or its tip are red, or how rashes, red spots, and eczema occur frequently within children. This tendency combined with the underlying *yang* nature of the child explains why excessive Heat patterns can occur so rapidly – in their body, in their behaviour and in their emotional movements.

In babies, Heat may already be present at birth due to foetal toxins (*taidu* 胎毒), while in older children, Fire often originates from external pathogenic factors that penetrate inside and persist at a deep level; lingering pathogenic factors easily cause hidden heat (*fu re* 伏热).

However, in our consumerist society, there is an even more common cause of Heat in children; food accumulation (*shiji* 食积). Children are often over indulged in quantity ('the more, the better' is a dangerous attitude), in frequency (the *fu* organs must fill and empty), and in quality (in nature and tastes – which means junk food); all of these excesses jam up the middle *jiao* and in the long term damage its transforming functions.

Food accumulation leads to blockages and manifests in restlessness and discomfort, a swollen, hard abdomen, red spots on the cheeks, a thick yellow nasal discharge, greenish stools, foul smelling stools, skin or breath. The spreading harmonising function of the Liver is impaired and children become stubborn, intractable and angry.



Accumulation both transforms easily into Heat and facilitates the amassing of Phlegm-*tan* 痰, manifesting as catarrh, coughing and asthma.



The quiet project at the Xiaoxiao Children's Centre

In 2005, in Milan, Italy, we started Xiaoxiao, a paediatric centre that is open once a week and treats children with Chinese medicine, offering free treatments for two pilot studies supported by the Federation of Italian Schools of *Tui na* and *Qi gong* (FISTQ).

The subjects for the two pilot studies are: **cure and prevention of winter respiratory diseases** (such as cough, catarrh and fever) and the **quiet project**, for children who have difficulty in keeping their bodies and minds calm, in sleeping quietly, in staying still, and in maintaining their attention on something.

Treatments are based on a Chinese medical diagnosis (without following rigid protocols) and we use *tui na* as the main method, supported where appropriate with acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping, ear-seeds, *guasha*, and plum-blossom needle.

Our work is characterised by the importance placed on the cooperation of parents. Besides the suggestion of some modifications in diet and in daily habits, caregivers are taught a basic *tui na* sequence to be applied daily, along with some emergency sequences (in case of conditions such as common cold, cough, fever or constipation). By repeating the *tui na* sequences regularly at home, treatment is reinforced, the child's self-confidence is supported, and the child-parent relationship is improved. Of course, this is done without making parents feel guilty if they do not do it.

Considerations

No miracles happen, but some good changes take place. We find that results are very fast for babies and toddlers with sleeping troubles and hyperkinetic problems. Angry children (and their families!) get some peace, whilst fearful and insecure kids become stronger and more assertive. At this stage data is still too limited and the length of time too short to evaluate the treatment for children who received an ADHD diagnosis, but for the moment the quality of their life appears to be improved.

Regarding diagnosis and treatment, we can confirm what may be expected: Heat or Phlegm coming from food accumulation (*shiji* 食积) require a change in the eating habits; conditions of Spleen *qi* insufficiency respond faster than Kidney *qi* weakness; troubles originating from Phlegm that mists the Heart orifices (*xinqiao* 心窍) take longer than when deriving from Fire that agitates the *shen* 神.

Treating children with *tui na* and acupuncture is great for many reasons. Diagnosis is generally easier than in adults, given that there is less time for *qi* and patterns to become overly complex. Treating children is very rewarding, because a relatively small effort can have big effects on their future. Results are fast since their *qi* and organs are still 'clean' and respond promptly. As the Chinese say 'When the *zangfu* spirit is pure, health is easily and rapidly recovered (*zangfu qing ling, yi qu kang fu* 脏腑清灵, 易趋康复).'⁶

Marco's story – a case history

Marco⁷ was 19 months old when he presented for treatment at the Xiaoxiao clinic **quiet project**. He was very lively and active, moving non-stop, with the main trouble being that 'since his birth he has only slept quietly for approximately twenty nights'. He goes to sleep easily, but wakes up around midnight and then each hour after that. During his sleep, Marco moves, turns, kicks off the bed covers and sometimes has bad night frights (*pavor nocturnus*).

Marco is an only child, born by caesarean section at 37 weeks, after his mother spent the pregnancy in bed from the third month because of early contractions. He was breast fed on request (every 2 or 3 hours) and frequently suffered from infant colic.

He had a history of nosebleeds and had already taken antibiotics 5 or 6 times for recurrent colds and conjunctivitis. Between the ages of 6 and 18 months, Marco had suffered from eczema and at the time of his first consultation, he had small red spots on all four limbs (being treated with local antihistamine and cortisone).

Marco did not drink much, sweated easily from his head and ate voraciously – a large and varied diet with a lot of dairy products. He was rather pale with regular, sometimes hard stools, his belly was a bit tense, there were no enlarged cervical glands, the index vein was not visible, and the tongue had a thin white coating and some red dots.

Hyperactivity, nosebleeds, conjunctivitis, hard stools, and a tongue with red dots all indicate Heat, which in turn disturbs night *yin*, affecting *shen* and *zhi* leading to night frights and restless sleep. We might assume that the Heat in this case comes from a food accumulation-*ji* (frequent breastfeeding, actual voraciousness of food consumption).

The accumulation tends to consume *qi*, leading to a deficiency in defensive *qi* and consequently an invasion of external pathogens evident in his head sweating, and to collect Phlegm (catarrh in the Lung system). The treatment plan was therefore focused on releasing Heat, reinforcing the middle *jiao*, transforming Phlegm, and tonifying the Lungs.

The acupuncture point *yintang* EX-HN-3 was needled and a *tui na* sequence designed so that Marco's parents could continue his treatment at home. Acupuncture points massaged using *tui na* included: *Pijing, Banmen, Xiaotianxin, Shouyinyang, Tianheshui, Tianmen, Xinmen, Fuyinyang, Xielei, Jianjiagu, Jizhu, Zusanli, Qijiegu*.⁸

After the first treatment his sleep had markedly improved; 'Marco woke up just once, it is a miracle!'. This was followed by a brief period of worsening in which Marco exhibited constipation and nosebleeds. However after the third treatment Marco slept through the night until 6 am, sweated much less, ate less voraciously, had regular stools and clear skin with an absence of eczema. By the fifth treatment his mother said, 'We could not be any happier'.

Three months later, after summer, we saw Marco again and his mother reported him as sleeping well without night terrors. After a month's stay with his grandparents, where *tui na* was not used, he reverted to having some constipation, nosebleeds and rashes. In September 2010 he had a bad case of bronchitis. We recommended to the parents that they persisted with *tui na* and taught them a modified sequence to increase tonification of Lung *qi* and transformation of Phlegm, helping to treat full Heat (fever) in the presence of an invasion of an external pathogenic factor.



- ³ From Elisa Rossi, *Pediatria in Medicina Cinese*, 2010, to be published in English by Donica, 2011
- ⁴ *Yijing* (The Classic of Changes), *Xici* (added sentences), part 1
- ⁵ From Elisa Rossi, *Pediatria in Medicina Cinese*, 2010
- ⁶ Ibid
- ⁷ The child, whose name has here been changed, came to the Xiaoxiao Centre in April 2010 for six free treatments at the **quiet project**
- ⁸ Locations specific to children – see *JCM* 85 and 94 or access Elisa's articles online via the *JCM* article archive

Notes

- ¹ Liu Wansu, *Suwen Xuanji Yuanbingshi*, (Examination of the original patterns of the illness of the mysterious mechanisms of the Suwen, 1182), ch. *Bei* (Sadness). Liu Wansu developed the *wuzhi huare* theory, 'the five emotions transform into/produce Heat', and deeply influenced Li Dongyuan and Zhu Danxi. See Elisa Rossi, *Shen*, Churchill Livingstone, 2007
- ² Zhang Yuansu, *Yixue Qiyuan* (The Origins of Medical Science, 1186), ch. *Huo* (Confusion). Zhang Yuansu – to whom the first diagnostic systemising of the five organs with syndromes of deficit and excess goes back – was the direct teacher of Li Dongyuan

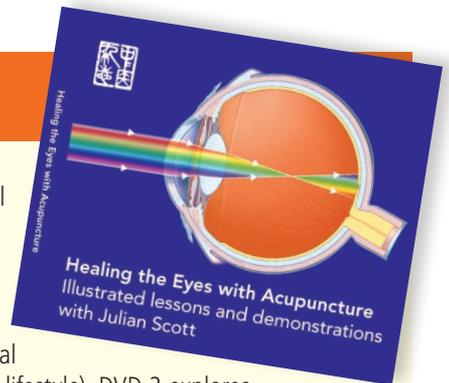
Elisa Rossi is a doctor of conventional medicine, acupuncturist, holds a PhD in clinical psychology, a BA in philosophy, and is a Jungian psychotherapist. She is also the author of *Shen – Psycho-Emotional Aspects of Chinese Medicine*, Churchill Livingstone, 2007. Elisa founded Xiaoxiao in 2002 – a free acupuncture and *tui na* children's centre in Milan.

See Elisa's two forthcoming CPD events, page 39

Healing the Eyes with Acupuncture: Illustrated lessons and demonstrations

Julian Scott, 3-DVD set, JCM/Boatyard Productions

There is something difficult about the eyes, but now at least I feel prepared to be bold and discover more. Julian Scott's three-DVD resource describes a holistic approach to healing them. Although he concentrates on acupuncture as his main tool, a number of options provide the student with alternatives. He takes us back to basics, covering traditional theory, integration with conventional medicine and the aetiology of disease (nutrition, constitution and lifestyle). DVD 2 explores the principles of treatment and the diagnostic process. His skillful use of cases captures the imagination and enhances learning. The most common diagnoses are covered in DVD 3. Julian has chosen diagnoses commonly seen in the clinic (dry eyes, cataract and conjunctivitis) alongside more specialist areas such as diabetic retinopathy. Finally, he covers technique – needling and moxa, along with a fascinating 'eyebright massage' (a form of *qi gong*). Suddenly the use of a 50mm needle in ST1 (*Chengqi*) or *Qiuhuo* is not so terrifying. The DVDs are clearly referenced and the conclusion is clear. This is a really enthralling resource which, despite its length (4hrs 22mins), will bring you back to refresh both general and specialist knowledge. It is a superb teaching and educational resource. I now have four hours of CPD and am off to buy Julian's DVD on needle technique! Well worth a look, especially if your patients are of a certain age!



Annie Elliot is the College's clinical advisor for conventional medical sciences To buy this DVD set for £t/b/c/€t/b/c+p&p (normally £t/b/c) call 00 44 (0)1608 658862 quoting code JS6