

Windows of Heaven (Windows of the Sky)

There has long been a debate as to whether the list of ten points known collectively as Heavenly Windows (Window of Heaven, or Windows of the Sky) is a modern innovation or not. This article began as a response to one recent article, but has been expanded to consider three known contributions to the discussion.

1. 'Acupuncture Today', February 16th has an article 'Windows of the Sky Points', by David Twicken, that takes a strong position that that they are a 'modern Creation'.

<http://www.acupuncturetoday.com/mpacms/at/article.php?id=33146>

2. 'Curtains for 'Windows of the Sky' by John McDonald takes the similarly strong line implicit in the title.

http://tcmcentral.com/TCM/Acu%20Edu/Library%20Articles/Library_Articles_Acupuncture_05.html

3. 'The Points of the Windows of Heaven' by Peter Deadman and Mazin Al-Khafaji give a fuller examination of the merits of these points than the previous mentioned articles, rather than a primary focus on their provenance.

<http://img2.timg.co.il/CommunaFiles/17395230.pdf>

The articles present facts about the history of this category that many would agree with, but the first two take a strong position on the unlikelihood of their origin before the modern era. This is open to debate. There is agreement that the modern teaching in Europe of ten points as part of this category can be traced to the Writings of Chamfrault and Van Nghi beginning in 1954. Peter Eckman says that Felix Mann is probably the source for their English exposition from which J. R. Worsley's teachings were derived.(213)

The author of the first article concludes (at the end) by saying "Understanding the history of new acupuncture point categories allows the practitioner to evaluate the basis of their development and then decide whether to use them in clinical practice.". This is a reasonable general statement. However, the introduction to the article prejudges the important question of the newness of this particular category.

There are two related questions here. Are Windows of the Sky a valid clinical category? And is this category a 'modern creation', or at least the evidence for a classic origin 'very scanty'. To be reasonably pedantic if they are clinically valid, then they are not a 'creation' of the French School, or anyone else, they are at the very least a discovery. (Just as Newton did not create gravity.) We shall see that speculations about these points do in fact appear to go back to the late 1500s at least).

There seems to be general agreement among these authors that the ideas about Windows of the Sky points are taken from two passage of the Ling Shu - Chapter 2 and 21. One could add Ling Shu Chapter 5 because it includes a list of points on the yang channels that are categorized as points of 'entering' which represent six of the ten points in an explicit category. The author of the first article says that Chapter 21 "lists a variety of points that treat conditions.." It does indeed include various points in several topics, but the passage in question is the only one that is a primary 'list', i.e. presented without a context of a particular condition. It describes five points and their functions. Whether one believes that the Nei Jing described a category of five points included in the characterized as Windows of the Sky depends on how one interprets the final line of this section:

此爲天牖五部 "These act as heavenly window five sections."

Anyone who is familiar with Windows of the Sky reads this statement as the most solid evidence for their classical origin, as suggesting some inherent commonality of these five points. However, it has been pointed out that this may have been intended as nothing more than a group of five points in the same body region (i.e. the neck) again SJ.16 tiān yǒu [天牖]: 'Heavenly Window' mentioned as a reference point. It has been said that no philologist would construe this passage of the Ling Shu as describing a particular category of points. Philologists like most scholars tend to be conservative in what they take as proven, but 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence'. It seems to be assumed that because the passage can be interpreted as an anatomical grouping that must be its meaning. The ancient texts particular acupuncture point names make a great use of double entendre and the possibility that this passage could be an anatomical grouping with properties in common with Heavenly Window, as well as anatomical proximity, does not appear to have occurred to the critics. Indeed it is often the case that points in the same anatomical region have properties in common.

An argument that someone may or may not have interpreted a particular phrase, and may or may not have put one passage together with another one or two may seem like a weak one. However, we should note that the classic texts are considered to be very disorganized, and many modern concepts are systematized from various passages. The possibility of finding retrospective confirmation for a later idea is very strong. And indeed could be taken at least for confirmation of the idea that East Asian medicine contains many natural laws which are evidenced by their ability of later innovations to not contradict the earliest ideas.

Ling Shu Chapter 2 could be described as presenting lists of points, and here it presents all ten points that are now known as Windows of the Sky. The passage starts a reference to 'broken bowl' which name of St.12 refers to the supraclavicular fossa, which is an often used anatomical reference for the topmost horizontal plane of the torso. Seven 'subsequent' points horizontally are described. This would make us think of the 'sections' in the passage discussed previously. It seems however, a little curious that Lu.3 is included in one passage, and XB.1 and Lu.3 in the other, because these points are not on the same body plane or region whether based upon St.9 in one passage, and St.12 in the other.

Ling Shu chapter 5 that is not commonly included in the discussion describes categories of points that seem like the precursor to or at least overlap with to some modern descriptions of point categories. Each Yang channel is said to have a point of Root, Flowing, Pouring and Entering.¹ The points of 'Entering' are all points that are now considered Windows of the Sky. This description of 'entering' may have figured in Van Nghi's thinking because he made a connection between the Windows of the Sky and the so called Divergent Channels. (It is another discussion, but the concept of Divergent Channels may indeed be a misunderstanding of the Chinese text).

Anyone reading these three passages might find it possible that a category of points is being described. Whether these passages were seen as connected, and whether they were interpreted as a functional group is not proven, but again 'not proven' seems safer conclusion than a definitive rejection of the possibility.

McDonald mentions the absence of any mention of these points in post classical texts. Firstly the Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing. However, again we find this is not cut and dried. The Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing separates these five points and includes each one in sections appropriate to the pathology it treats. It does however include the final line from Ling Shu Chapter 21 but amended to read:

¹ Although similar to the five shu point categories they do not match exactly

此为胃之大膻五部也 'this (these) act as stomach their great shu five sections'.

A translation of The Systematic Classic (+282) translated by Ying Shou-zhong and Charles Chace includes some discussion of these five points, including comments ascribed to a later editor. However, the date of this commentary is not given.² It cannot be said that the Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing ignores the possibility of these points forming a functional group, however, the implications of reference to Heavenly Window is removed. The Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing omits most of some twenty chapters of the Nei Jing, it omits much that might be described as philosophical and spiritual in favour of a pragmatic bio-medicine, it would be very understandable that it would omit the Windows of the Sky. McDonald mentions various other texts and authors who do not mention Windows of the Sky in later centuries. One might well have expected Sun Si-miao to have taken an interest in these points, but apparently he did not. However, again 'the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence'.

In looking for the first explicit reference to the idea of Window of the Sky seems to be in the commentaries to the Ling Shu by Ma Shi (c.1580) in which he addresses the final line of the passage from Ling Shu 21:

This sentence is the conclusion to the five preceding paragraphs. The kinetic points used are part of the Tian You (Window of Heaven - SJ.16) group. So when the ancient masters used one of these points, they called upon an ensemble of points from the same group, as in herbology when we name a master herbal formula after one of the principal components.³

It seems that the idea that these points were first considered a group by Chamfrault and Van Nghi is incorrect. Deadman more correctly states that theirs is the first mention in a European publication. Deadman quotes the commentary of Zhang Zhi-cong (17th century):

Zhou Zhi-cong [sic], in his commentary on this passage³⁵ stated: "The points and the orifices of the head and face are like the great windows of a high pavilion by virtue of which qi moves. When there is inversion qi [i.e. chaotic and rebellious qi] below, then the channels in the upper region do not move and there is lack of clarity of vision and hearing, sudden loss of speech, convulsions and dizziness. The qi of speech of the three yang originates in the lower and emanates in the upper. Therefore, to summarise, it is said these are the five regions of the great window"

Van Nghi in his translation of the Ling Shu includes the above as the commentary of 'Zhang Shi'. It would appear that 'Zhou Zhi-cong is the same as Zhang Zhi-Cong:

The term you means window. The ancients compared certain kinetic points in the head and neck region to 'windows' in a great palace, for these points are intended to aerate energy. When energy afflux occurs in the lower region of the body, the jing-mai in the cephalic region are obstructed, hence diminution of visual and auditory acuity.... (there is a longer discussion included comparing this to Chapter 2) ... The study of the ensemble of these elements makes it possible to establish the system of Wu Dai You (five great windows).⁴

² The oldest extant version of this text is from the 16th century and so these 'later editors' comments may well be related to the commentaries to be discussed

³ Ma Xuan Tai also known as Ma Shi, who produced commentaries on both the Suwen and Ling Shu in the late 1500's.

⁴ Zhang Zhi Cong (Tchang Tche Tsong). (1619 to 1674) He also goes by the name of Zhang An Yin (or Yin An).

So far what we can say is the classical text is not explicit in describing five or ten points as belonging to a category known as 'Windows of the Sky'. The earliest evidence we can find that the five points at least were viewed as a functional group is the 16th and 17th century. It certainly seems that to credit Chamfrault and Van Nghi with having created them is to credit them with too much. At most we might be able to say that theirs is the first explicit mention of all ten points in one category. Another argument against them is that modern Chinese practitioners report no knowledge of this category. Given that several generations of practitioners have now been schooled in a particular body of theory that is not comprehensive of the whole body of theory this has to be a very weak argument.

Even if we accept that these two or three passages were not originally intended to be put together to describe a category of points, and the final line of one has been misconstrued in the 16th and 17th centuries, we come to the question whether this category is clinically relevant. It is important to get the scholarship of language and history right, but we are not scholars we are practitioners whose primary interest is whether an idea is clinically valid, these are separate questions. In relation to the function of these points Deadman says:

...there are a few interesting observations that can be made. Firstly, most of the point names include the character 'Tian', literally 'Heaven' or 'Sky', in their name (although it should be stressed that there are other acupuncture points, such as Tianquan P-2, Tianding L.I.-17, Tianzong SI-11 etc. not included in this list). It is interesting, though, that an alternative name for Renying ST-9 is Tianwuhui (literally 'Heaven's Five Meetings'). Secondly, as indicated above, all but two of the ten points are located around the neck - the junction of the head and the body. Thirdly, there are strong hints of a discernible pattern in their indications, the following appearing with some 33 frequency:

- i. goitre or Luoli (glandular disturbance) or throat disorders
- ii. coughing, wheezing or chest oppression from rebellious Lung Qi
- iii. vomiting from rebellious Stomach Qi
- iv. headache and dizziness
- v. heat, redness or swelling of the face or eyes
- vi. sudden onset of disorders
- vii. disorders of the sense organs. viii. in some cases mental and emotional disorders

When these observations are put together, we can suggest that the Window of Heaven points are indicated in the following situations:

1. When there is a major disharmony between the Qi of the body and the head, usually with Qi or blood rebelling upwards. If rebellious Qi affects the Lungs it gives rise to cough, wheezing or oppression of the chest. If rebellious Qi affects the Stomach there may be vomiting. If blood rebels upwards there may be coughing or vomiting of blood. If rebellious Qi gives rise to fullness and heat in the head there may be headache and dizziness, and heat, redness or swelling of the face, as well as disorders of the sense organs, especially the ears and eyes....

The use of the points in Five Element practice could be said to be somewhat different because it more strongly emphasizes the spiritual aspects derived from their poetic names. However, they do overlap. Deadman's point 'vii' and 'viii' relating to sense organs and mental and emotional disorders could be said to be taken somewhat more broadly and less literally in Five Element terms. The other scenarios described by Deadman are not inconsistent with what might be considered in a Five Element perspective.

A category of points is often not an inclusive or exclusive. The Heavenly Window points are not the only points that can have a similar effect intentionally or otherwise. J.R. Worsley used to say that Wood did not have any Window of the Sky points because it was all about 'vision'. And any point done in the right patient at the right time could have the same result. What a practitioner seeks to effect with these points can happen with any point, but they are chosen when a particular intention is desired. The category is based upon the name of SJ.16 tiān yǒu [天 牖]: Heavenly Window. If we accept the validity of the category then we would also think of SI.16 tiān chuāng [天 窗]: Heavenly Window. (Note two different types of windows are referred to).

天	tiān	air / the sky / the heavens / the vault of heavens / the firmament / Nature / God / Heaven / providence of god / nature / natural / not artificial / a day / seasons / climates / weather / father or husband / something indispensable / necessities
牖	yǒu	a window / to guide / to teach / to educate / to enlighten
窗	chuāng	a window / a window sash / shutter / a skylight / a place where one studies / alternate 牕 窗 窓 窓

Certainly there are many practitioners who have been taught this category of points received either from the French School, or via J. R. Worsley, who would affirm their particular clinical effect. This author had a striking personal experience of the use of one of these points - a visual hallucinatory experience as intense as LSD, which I have never had before or since.

Summary

The category of Heavenly Windows (Windows of the Sky) is based upon putting together two or three passages from the Nei Jing Ling Shu and characterizing them according to the reference in one passage to their relation to Tian You 'Heavenly Window'. These points are at least an anatomical grouping with exception of XB.1 and Lu.3. It is not known if these various parts of the theory were combined in Classical times. The further meanings of the components of the points names particularly 'heavenly' and 'window' has also informed the understanding of their function. It is of note that whether the function is taken as largely mundane or spiritual both ideas can be found in the metaphor of their names. The earliest explicit reference to the five windows as a group of points with a functional relation is in the commentary of Ma Shi circa 1580. The commentary of Zhang Shi in the 17th century does not mention the number of points. In the modern era Chamfrault and Van Nghi are credited with the first European written account of these points in their full modern function. Whether the development of these ideas began in classical times or not until 1580 the modern exposition of their functions within different schools remains consistent with each other, and the classical text.

Appendix One Original Text

The original text that may have contributed to the received theory of Window of the Sky.

LS = Ling Shu

SC = Systematic Classic (Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing)

LS Ch.2 Para.14 Windows of the Sky?

Comments: The following locates points known in received teachings as Windows of the Sky in relation to the 'Broken Bowl (supraclavicular fossa). (Also see Ling Shu 5 and 21) Ling Shu 21 has five of these points referred to as 'heavenly window five sections'. Ling Shu 5 has the points of the hand and foot Yang channels categorized as points of 'entering'. It is of note that the last two points included are not in the same anatomical plane as the previous points - suggesting that location is not the only reason for this list.

缺盆之中，
任脈也，
名曰天突。

一次，
任脈側之動脈足陽明也，
名曰人迎；

二次脈，
手陽明也，
名曰扶突；

三次脈，
手太陽也，
名曰天窗；

四次脈，
足少陽也，
名曰天容；

五次脈，
手少陽也，
名曰天牖；

六次脈，
足太陽也，
名曰天柱；

七次脈，
頸中央之脈，
督脈也，
名曰風府。

腋內動脈手太陰也，
名曰天府。

腋下三寸手心主也，
名曰天池。

Broken Bowl (St.12) their centre (i.e. between the two),
Ren Mai {also},
name called Great Protrusion (CV.22).

First next,
assume Mai sides its pulsing vessel foot Yang Ming {also},
name called People Welcome (St.9) {also};

second next vessel,
hand Yang Ming {also},
name called Support Protrusion (LI.18));

third next vessel,
hand Tai Yang {also},
name called Heavenly Window (Skylight) (SI.16);

fourth next vessel,
foot Shao Yang {also},
name called Heavenly Appearance (SI.(GB) 17);

fifth next vessel,
hand Shao Yang {also},
name called Heavenly Window (Enlighten) (SJ.16),

sixth next vessel,
foot Tai Yang {also},
name called Heavenly Pillar (Bl.10),

seventh next vessel,
neck centre its vessel,
Du Vessel {also},
name called Wind Mansion (Du.16).

Armpit inside stirring vessel hand Tai Yin {also},
called name Heavenly Mansion (LU.3).

Armpit below three cun hand Xin Zhu {also},
called named Heavenly Pool (XB.1).

Comment: Heavenly Appearance is now called SI.16, but is a gall-bladder point in this text.

LS Ch.21 Para.4 Heavenly Windows: Neck points: Ren Ying, Tian Fu, Fu Tu, Tian Zhu

Also see Ling Shu Ch.2 and 5 for these points that have been called Windows of the sky.

頸側之動脈人迎。	Neck side its pulsing vessel Ren Ying (St.9).
人迎，	Ren Ying,
足陽明也，	foot Yang Ming also,
在嬰筋之前。	located necklace sinew it in front.
嬰筋之後，	Necklace sinew it behind,
手陽明也，	hand Yang Ming also,
名曰扶突。	name called Fu Tu (Support Prominence LI.18),
次脈，	Next vessel,
足少陽脈也，	foot Shao Yang vessel also,
名曰天牖。	name called Tian You (Heavenly Window (Enlighten)) SJ.16).
次脈，	Next vessel,
足太陽也，	foot Tai Yang also,
名曰天柱。	name called Heavenly Column (Bl.10).
腋下動脈，	Axilla below pulsing vessel,
臂太陰也，	arm Tai Yin also,
名曰天府。	name called Tian Fu (Heavenly Mansion Lu.3)

Comment: 嬰 Woman with necklace of cowries perhaps relates to the necklace and distribution of points.

LS Ch.21 Para.5 Heavenly Windows: use

See SC Ch.91 Part 2 also see SC Ch.123 Part 1; SC Ch.118 Part 2, also see SC Ch.123 Part 1 also see SC Ch.123 Part 1; SC Ch.104 Part 2 also see SC Ch.123 Part 1, also see SC Ch.123 Part 1

陽迎頭痛，	Yang meet [sic counter-flow] head ache,
胸滿不得息，	chest full not attain breath,
取之人迎。	choose it Ren Ying. (St.9)
暴瘖氣鞭，	Suddenly loss of voice Qi lash,
取扶突與舌本出血。	choose Fu Tu (LI.18) together with tongue root issue blood.
暴襲氣蒙，	Suddenly raid Qi deception,
耳目不明，	ear and eyes not clear,
取天牖。	choose Tian You (Heavenly Window SJ.16).
暴攣痲眩，	Sudden convulsion seizure giddy,
足不任身，	foot not support body,
取天柱。	choose Tien Zhu (Heavenly Pillar Bl.10).
暴痺內逆，	Sudden numbness, paralysis inner counter-flow,
肝肺相搏，	Liver Lung mutually wrestle,
血溢鼻口，	blood overflow nose & mouth,
取天府。	

此為天牖五部。
choose Tian Fu (Heavenly Mansion Lu.3).
These act as Tian You (Heavenly Window (Enlighten)) five sections.

Comments: Putting these two paragraphs, together with LS Ch.2 and 5, Windows of the Sky has come to be viewed as a point category. Some dispute that this was intended.

迎 meet, confront, Systematic Classic has 逆 ‘counter-flow’

See Systematic Classic Chapter 91 Part 2

Comment: The Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing (Systematic Classic) includes most of the above text however the final line is somewhat amended.

Zhen Jiu Jia Yi Jing Chapter 123 Part 1

暴瘴內逆，	Sudden numbness inner counter-flow,
肝肺相薄，	Liver lung mutually wrestle,
血溢鼻口，	blood overflow nose and mouth,
取天府，	choose Tian Fu (Heavenly Mansion Lu.3),
此為胃之大膺五部也。	This act as stomach its great shu five sections {also}.

LS Ch.5 Para.4 Root and Binding (cont) Root and flowing, Pouring, Entering (Windows of Heaven?)

SC Ch.20 (cont)

Comment: that points of ‘entering’ are called in received teachings Windows of the Sky (see Ling Shu 2 and 21). Only the foot and hand yang channels are included in this section

足太陽根於至陰， 溜於京骨， 注於昆侖， 入於天柱， 飛揚也。	Foot Tai Yang root (foundation) with regard Extremity Yin, flowing with regard Capital Bone (Bl.64), pouring with regard Kun Lun (Bl.60) enter with regard Heavenly Pillar (Bl.10), Fly and Scatter (Bl.58) {also}.
足少陽根於竅陰， 溜於丘墟， 注於陽輔， 入於天容， 光明也。	Foot Shao Yang root (foundation) with regard Crucial (Hole) Yin (GB.44), flowing with regard Wilderness Mound (GB.40), pouring with regard Yang Assistance (GB.38), entering with regard Heavenly Appearance (SI.17), Bright Light (GB. 37) {also}.
足陽明根於厲兌， 溜於沖陽， 注於下陵， 入於人迎， 豐隆也。	Foot Yang ming root (foundation) with regard Hard Bargain (St.45), flowing with regard Rushing Yang (St.42), pouring with regard Lower Mound (St.41), entering with regard People Welcome (St.9), Great Bulge (St.40) {also}.
手太陽根於少澤， 溜於陽谷， 注於小海， 入於天窗，	Hand Tai Yang root (foundation) with regard Lesser Marsh (SI.1), flowing with regard Yang Union (Pond) (SI.5), pouring with regard Little Sea (SI.8), entering with regard Heavenly Window (Oculus) (SI.16),

支正也。
少陽根於關沖，
溜於陽池，
注於支溝，
入於天牖、
外關也。

手陽明根於商陽，
溜於合谷，
注於陽谿，
入於扶突、
偏歷也。

此所謂十二經者，
盛絡皆當取之。

Upright Branch (SI.7) {also}.
(Hand) Shao Yang root (foundation) with regard Frontier Gate Rushing (SJ.1),
flowing with regard Yang Pool (SI.5),
pouring with regard Branching Rivers (SJ.6),
entering with regard Heavenly Window (Casement) (SJ.16),
Outer Frontier Gate (SJ.5) {also}.
Hand Yang Ming root (foundation) with regard Merchant Yang (LI.1),
flowing with regard Joining Valleys (LI.4),
pouring with regard Yang Ravine (LI.5),
entering with regard Support Prominence (LI.18),
Inclined Passage (LI.6) {also}.
This place (state) called twelve Jing-Conduits –
flourishing Luo (network) all serve as choose it.

Table One

Windows of the Sky The complete list derived from sources quotes above

	Ling Shu 2 Anatomic?	Ling Shu 21 Five Great Windows	Ling Shu 5 Points of Entering
Great Protrusion	CV.22		
People Welcome	St.9	St.9	St.9
Support Protrusion	LI.18	LI.18	LI.18
Heavenly Window	SI.16		SI.16
Heavenly Appearance	SI.17		SI.17
Heavenly Window	SJ.16	SJ.16	SJ.16
Heavenly Column	Bl.10	Bl.10	Bl.10
Wind Mansions	Du.16		
Heavenly Mansion	Lu.3	Lu.3	
Heavenly Pool	XB.1		

Bibliography

Eckman, Peter; “In The Footsteps of the Yellow Emperor”, Cypress Books Co., San Francisco 1996