

J. R. Worsley and the Classics

Synopsis

An examination of the teachings of J.R.Worsley, and how these teachings, both technical and philosophical, are supported by the Classic texts of Chinese Medicine

Introduction

When mainland China opened up to Westerners in the 1970s the teachings of Traditional Chinese Medicineⁱ as taught in mainland China began to become well known in Europe. It was very clear that these teachings differed markedly from the ideas that were commonplace in Europe at that time; for example, Europeans by and large put greater emphasis on the 'Five Phases'ⁱⁱ than is the case in TCM, and arguably no one more so than Worsley whose school is generally known as the 'Five Element' school. As TCM gained a greater following many of the European teachers of Worsley's generation and earlier were criticized by the new generation of TCM practitioners.

Clearly even Worsley's students recognized that his teachings were very unique. One story that was told among the students of Worsley was that his teachings were based more upon oral tradition not necessarily found in the texts. I will try and show that this is somewhat misleading, because J.R Worsley teachings are very solidly based upon the Classics.

There are two main texts that are included in the Chinese Medical Classics.

- Huang De Nei Jing (The Yellow Emperors Classic of Internal Medicine) is divided into two:
 - Su Wen (Simple Questions)
 - Ling Shu (Spritual Pivot)
- Nan Jing (Classic of Difficulties)

Other texts that are considered among the most important are the Shang Hun Lun and the Mai Jing, but we will see later that these are both secondary to some extent.

I was aware that the Nan Jing spoke much more about the Five Phases, and that it was the primary text that had originally been translated into Japanese, and thus Japanese traditional acupuncture focused more upon the Five Phases. And many of Worsley's teachings clearly came from a Japanese tradition. From both of these perspectives Worsley's teachings were something different to the mainstream of Traditional Chinese Medicine. This following comment from a Website on the history of Chinese Medicine emphasizes how pertinent this classic is to origins of Worsley's approach.

Nan Jing (Classic of Difficulties)

The goal of treatment in the Nan Jing is not so much to treat a disease or symptom but to adjust Qi to an ideal state.

What Worsley taught – 1 - Philosophy

It was a very basic principle of Worsley's teachings that the symptom or disease was not the primary way of getting to the root cause of the problem. Indeed it was a central tenet of his teaching that 'anything (i.e. any disease or ailment) could come from anything (i.e. a root cause in any of the Five Phases), and so the disease or ailment was at best secondary importance.

Worsley's teachings clearly follow the philosophy of the Nan Jing, but it would be a mistake to think that this makes them something apart or distinct from a 'mainstream' tradition.

Peter Eckman in his 'In The Footsteps of the Yellow Emperor' has done a wonderful job of tracing the origin of the ideas of many of the early, and predominantly non-mainland teachings of the early European acupuncture pioneers and especially Worsley. We can be sure that these Europeans were learning many principles not found in modern mainland China, and that these principles have a provenance among practitioners in the Far East. He discusses many of the basic principles and technical aspects of Five Element Acupuncture and where they come from in Taiwanese, Japanese and Korean sources. But a question arises; are they a mysterious oral tradition or are they derived from the Classics?ⁱⁱⁱ

When I was first studying acupuncture the only translation of 'the classics' in English, (that I was aware of), was a translation of half of the Su Wen by Ilza Veith. When reading this it seemed very obscure and little related to what I was learning. Since then I have been able to read a translation of all three main classics by Henry Lu (that includes original text), and more recently the translation by Van Nghi now available in English^{iv}. Ilza Veith apparently was not a practitioner of Chinese Medicine and so was limited in her understanding of the principles that she was translating. Henry Lu has done a very comprehensive literal, (but with the insight that comes from understanding of the material) and commented translation. Maoshing Ni's translation of the Su Wen is an interpretive translation, very close to Worsley in philosophy, but not as literal as Henry Lu. Van Nghi's text has undergone multiple translations that could have potentially caused some corruption of the text.

Reading the classics has been an eye opener for me. I have found solid basis for Worsley's teachings that does not seem to require positing some other mysterious source. It is true that how one interprets Chinese text can be strongly influenced by ones expectations, and thus multiple interpretations are often possible, but most of the content of J.R.teachings are not based upon any idiosyncratic reading. I will use Henry Lu's translation for most of my examples to reinforce the point that no special translation of the text is required.

We can look at Worsley's teachings and contrast them with the TCM model from two perspectives: the overall philosophy, and the techniques of treatment. I will start by looking at these in reverse the technical' first and the philosophical second.

What Worsley Taught – 2 - Emotions and Spirits

'Five Element' acupuncture as taught by J.R.Worsley is sometimes accused of being mainly about emotions. Those of us who practice these principles would have to say 'guilty on all counts'. But wonder about the negative way that this assessment is phrased. It may be just coincidence that as we saw that Chapter 8 of the Su Wen can be seen to be so pivotal in Five Element style, and we shall see that Chapter 8 of the Ling Shu also. According to Claude Larre what we know as Chapter 8 in the editions that were compiled in the 13th or 14th century actually had a more commanding position in earlier editions. "In the Zhenjiu jiaiyiing (which appeared in 259 AD) it begins the work... In the Huang Di neijing taisu, by Yang Shangshan (6th – 7th century AD), it appears at the head of the section consecrated to the zang/fu (viscera/organs)." (Larre xvii) However, according to the cover notes of Claude Larre's translation it has actually been excluded from some editions. Because of the importance of this passage I am including more than one translation.

Ling Shu Cha. 8: The Spirit as the Basis of Needling [Rooted in Spirit]

Comment: 'Discusses the importance of emotional factors in acupuncture treatment, particularly the spirit which should be observed closely in clinical diagnosis and treatment' [Henry Lu].

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Chapter 8 Ben Shen – Rooted in Spirit

黃帝問於岐伯曰：凡刺之法，先必本於神。

Huang di puts the question to Qi Bo

For every needling, the method is above all

Not to miss the rooting in the spirits.

血、脈、營、氣、精神，此五臟之所藏也。

Xue, and Mai, Ying and Qi, Jing and Shen,

These are stored by the Five Zang.

Larre

The laws of needling dictate that needling should be, first and foremost based upon the spirit. The blood, the meridians, the nutritive energy, the energy, along with the pure spirit, are stored in the viscera.

Henry Lu

It should be noted that the importance of emotions and spirit is not only found in Chapter 8, there are many other passages discussing with the emotions and spirits and stressing their (arguably paramount) importance.

Ling Shu Ch.1 Nine Needles and Twelve Starting [i.e. Yuan-Source] Points

Chi-Po replied: ...In my opinion, only an unskilled physician will confine himself to the physical appearance of the patient, a skilled physician will carry a step further and examine the spirit of a patient as well. [Henry Lu]

Alt Translation:

Qibo...The mediocre physician is concerned only with form (Xing), while the skillful physician attends to the Jing-Shen (mental quintessence) of the patient in a marvelous way. [Van Nghi]

What Worsely Taught – 3 - Aggressive Energy

Once treatment protocol, that is very strongly identified with Worsley's teaching, (but is largely unknown within TCM) is 'aggressive energy'. Aggressive Energy is a pathogenic qi that is found in the yin organs; it is very destructive in nature and tends to transfer across the ke cycle of the five phases. This is a particularly dangerous phenomenon and even though it is a secondary aspect of the disease (a branch rather than a root) it is considered so important in the Five Element system that it is always dealt with before any other treatment. This 'aggressive energy' is drained by use of the back-shu points of the yin organs.

Peter Eckman has demonstrated that the protocol known as aggressive energy was not of Worsley's invention and he has described well the important principles and components of Worsley's teachings, and I concur with him that the concept of 'aggressive energy' is clearly related to the 'law of similar transformation' of Li Wan-Su (1120-1200), and yin-fire theory of Li Dong-Yuan (1180-1251). These two doctors made valuable contributions to Chinese medicine. However, we can also find references in the classics that pertain to this concept. For example the use of the Back-Shu points of the yin organs to drain pathogenic heat.

Su Wen Ch.61 .On Acupuncture Points for Oedema and Hot disease

Ten points, including five organic points on the side of, and one and one half osteo units^v away from the spinal column, are good for sedating the heat of the five viscera.

Henry Lu

It is clear that pathogenic heat can be found in many other places, but Worsley placed a special emphasis on the yin organs. We can easily find support for the special importance of this in several texts.

Nei Jing Question 53 Concerning Transmission and Prediction of Diseases

Explained from the Generating and Subduing Patterns of the Five Elements.

The Classics stated: When a disease is transmitted according to the law of subjugation, the patient will die; but when a disease is transmitted according to the law of generation the patient will live; what does it mean?

Henry Lu

The Transmission of disease is discussed in Chapter 65 of the Su Wen, and Chapter 42 of the Ling Shu. It is said that diseases tend to pass between the Fu-Bowels around the Sheng cycle of the Five Phases. This process can continue indefinitely. But in the case of the yin organs (Zang-Viscera) disease tends to pass between organs across the ke cycle and when it returns to its starting organ this will result in death. This is literally described as 'seven transmission'^{vi}.

I have looked at one example of a treatment protocol that was taught by Worsley, that is largely unknown within TCM, but as Eckman has demonstrated, derived from Taiwanese practice, and as I have shown well supported in classic texts. We could also discuss for example, Worsley's pulse position teachings, these differ from modern TCM practice.

What Worsley Taught – 4 - Pulse positions

A discussion of differing pulse traditions could easily be an article unto itself. Suffice to say that the origin of the pulse positions as they are commonly understood in modern practice is in the Nan Jing, these were in principle unchanged in the Mai Jing (Classic of the Pulse)^{vii}, but were subject to modification in later works. This history is well detailed by Bob Flaws in his 'Secrets of Pulse Diagnosis'. This modification reflects a greater emphasis on the anatomical position of the organs within the San Jiao rather than the position of the channels, and thus arguably an orientation towards a herbal medicine paradigm, a greater emphasis on the San Jiao as the underlying model of body energetics, and most crucially reflect the differing concept of Kidney Yang or Ming Men within the San Jiao system as distinct from the 'Fire' within the Five Phases. The fact that Worsley followed the classic practice is unarguable, whatever the merits or otherwise of the two systems.

Next I will look in more detail at the philosophical basis of Worsley's teachings.

Part II

What Worsley Taught – 5 – The Natural Laws

Worsley taught an overall approach to treatment that can certainly be described as a Daoistic. We could further describe the treatment intent as wu-wei (non-action); 'non directive' (to borrow a term from modern psychology) would be an apt description. In other words we (the practitioners) are just instruments trying to help a natural process. In terms of treatment techniques they were clearly more intended to a 'support' the true qi rather than 'attack' the pathogenic qi.

The Su Wen establishes many of the basic principles of Traditional Oriental Medicine. It would be impossible to quote everything applicable here so what I will do is outline the text with some quotes mainly from the Henry Lu translation.

Su Wen Book 1

Cha. 1 On The Heavenly Truth in Ancient Times.

Comment: Establishes the basis of medicine in a Daoistic viewpoint.

In ancient times the Yellow Emperor was born with divine talents...

The Yellow Emperor asked the heavenly teacher: I have heard that people of ancient times had lived as long as one hundred and twenty years... but nowadays become weakened in their movements at the age of less than sixty years old. Is this due to change in the natural environment or due to man's faults?

Chi-Po replied: The ancient people who knew the proper way to live had followed the pattern of Yin and Yang which is the regular pattern of heaven and

earth, remained in harmony with numerical symbols... For this reason they could live out their natural life span and die at the age of one hundred and twenty years.

Or as Maoshing Ni puts it a little more succinctly:

“In the Past people practiced the Tao...”

Cha. 2: Great Treatise on Regulation of the Spirit in Harmony with the Climates and the Four seasons.

Comment: The basis of this chapter is the principles of Yin-Yang. It continues to elaborate the theme of living in accord with natural forces.

Cha. 3: On the Correspondence of Life Energy with the Energy of Heaven.

Comment: The basis of the discussion is Heaven and Earth, or more exactly the Great Triad of Heaven, Human, Earth. Also continues a theme of living in accord with the natural world and its cycles.

Cha. 4: On the Ultimate Truth in the Emperor’s Golden Bookcase

Comment: Further explores Yin and Yang phenomena and living in accord with nature; and introduces Five Element theory as developing from Four Seasons.

Su Wen Book 2

Cha. 5: Great Treatise on Yin-Yang Classification of Natural Phenomena.

Comment: Applies Yin-Yang to all natural phenomena, applies Yin-Yang to human physiology, pathology and diagnosis, third it points out the importance of the Five Elements in diagnosis and treatment.

Henry Lu

An overview of the above reveals a very purposeful structure to the Su Wen. We see that Book 1 introduces principles and the theme of living in accord with the Tao. Book 2 is clearly moving into practical medicine, and we can see the primacy of Five Phases to this. Clearly the suggestion that the Five Phases was a later system of thought is erroneous. Each chapter is also numerologically related to its subject matter. The next chapter continues this structure very clearly.

Cha. 6 The Parting and Meeting of Yin and Yang

Comments: Describes the Six Channels. It is particularly of note that in Chapter 31 On Hot [Febrile] Disease or ‘Shang Hun’ is the basis of another main text of Chinese Medicine the Shang Hun Lun. The latter is actually a recapitulation of the former. The Shang Hun Lun is often sited as the bedrock text of TCM. It describes the penetration of Wind-Cold disease through the Six Channels.

We can already see from within the Su Wen text the basis of the two main branches of Chinese medicine, that we could broadly describe as ‘Five Element’ and ‘Yin-Yang/Six Channels’^{viii}. The two models are not entirely reconcilable in a Western system of thought that attempts to reach a coherent synthesis, but are seen as part of one body of knowledge within a syncretic^{ix} system. Numerology is beyond the scope of this

discussion, but within Chinese numerology five being a ‘heavenly’ number is clearly applicable to understanding the more mysterious aspects of the macrocosm and microcosm, 6 being an ‘earthly’ number (all even numbers are generally resonant with yin-yang theory) is more aligned to the pragmatic. The not entirely coherent aspects of five and six (symbolized as the lily and the rose) as not completely reconcilable, but equally valid models of the universe, is also found in Western esoteric tradition.

What Worsley Taught – 6 - Twelve Officials

Worsley taught the concept of ‘12 Officials’ and although he did distinguish yin and yang organs, and channels, this clearly differs from Zang/Fu theory in a number of important aspects: the relative importance of the yang organ as representing the yang functionality of the pair of organs, and not just a ‘bowel’; and the importance of Xin Bao Luo^x and San Jiao as officials/functions in their own right. Looking at the Su Wen we can see that Worsley’s teachings stem from one of the earliest chapters of the Su Wen to describe the officials/organs.

Su Wen

Cha. 8: On the Secret Treatises Stored in The Emperors Treasure House of Books.

Comment: This Chapter discusses the twelve Cáng. The Chinese character Cáng 藏 means: hide, conceal, hoard, store up; with the addition of the flesh radical it actually become the character Zàng 臟 meaning: internal organs, or ‘viscera’.

It is of note that in this chapter we do not have the division of organs into the 5 Zang and 6 Fu. Instead we have one designation of Cáng. This is the basis of Worsley’s teaching of the ‘Twelve Officials’.

In the fuller elaboration of Chinese Medicine the Six Channels are of course elaborated into Twelve Channels, the organs of the body are separated into Yin (Zang-Viscera) and Yang (Fu-Bowels). The exceptional character of one or two or these leads to the modern elucidation of ‘Five Zang and Six Fu’.

Resolving the conflicts between these two apparent differing models that we have alluded to above, and their elaborations appears to be the inspiration of some of the Nan Jing; for example, the following two questions.

Nan Jing Question 25

There are twelve channels and there are five viscera and six bowels. What is the extra channel?

Bob Flaws

Nan Jing Question 38 Concerning Viscera 5 and Bowels 6.

There are five viscera (Zang), but there are six bowels (Fu); why is that?

Bob Flaws

Nan Jing Question 39 Concerning Bowels 5 and Viscera 6

The Classics stated: There are five bowels and six viscera; why is that?

Bob Flaws

The underlying import of both questions in the Nan Jing is in other words, how do we reconcile these statements with the fact that there are ‘12 channels’, and by inference 12 ‘organs/officials’. In other words these questions are trying to understand the discrepancy between twelve channels and the expression ‘five zang and six fu’, or ‘five fu and six zang’. One point is that neither teaching is wrong or right, but they are not entirely congruent and never will be. There is no ‘grand unified theory’, these equally valid statements will always be to some extent incongruent, but not irreconcilable.

Preliminary Conclusion:

There seems to be no question that J R Worsley’s teachings appear to be entirely founded on the philosophical principles, and technical structure that is described in these early chapters of the Su Wen. I have found many other passages that resonate with JRs teachings. One particular concept that is not fully explained in the text is mentioned in Chapter 65.

Ch. 65 On Primary and secondary conditions and Transmission of disease.

The Yellow Emperor asked: There are primary [ben 本] and secondary [biao 標] conditions and there are **direct** [opposing] [ni 逆] and **indirect** [corresponding] [cong 從] methods of needling*, how do you explain that?

*Translators’ note: the direct and indirect methods of needling may be translated as the **upstream** and **downstream** method...

Henry Lu [alternate transliterations Maoshing Ni 231]

The terms ‘root and branch’ are commonly used in modern practice; and so I will not discuss these here. This terminology of ‘upstream’ and ‘downstream’ is intriguing because they seem to cause translators some difficulty.

Ni	逆	Movement against, counter, inverse, converse, counter-flow
Cóng	從	Follow, accord with, secondary, flow

Ni and Cong are used frequently in the Su Wen in the context of living in harmony with natural laws (such as yin and yang) or going against the natural laws. Henry Lu elaborates later in the text that the upstream (counter-current) method is like treating cold diseases with hot herbs, the downstream (flow/current) method such as treating hot disease with hot herbs. It is curious that in trying to explain this he uses herbal medicine examples when the references clearly are intended to pertain to acupuncture. One can easily see that the treatment principles of modern systematized acupuncture namely ‘attack’ and ‘support’ and the techniques of tonification/supplementation and dispersion/sedation are to some measure derived from these concepts. But, anyone who trained with Worsley will hear a clear resonance to Worsley’s emphasis on a ‘natural’ treatment method that ‘goes with the flow’ of natural laws. One indication that the wider

philosophical implications of these terms are intended is the difficulty translators have with commenting on this passage in modern terms.

One clear practical difference that one can see here between TCM practice and 'Five Element' is in the use of five phase points. For example, in TCM books Spleen 9 is given as a point useful for clearing damp, in this case like many other examples that one could mention the 'water' point is used in a dispersive technique to clear the pathological 'water'. There are similar examples with 'fire' points, often being indicated to clear heat. With Worsley's approach the intent is not to clear the pathogen, but to support the true qi. The 'water' point would thus be used to support the 'water' within the 'earth'; i.e. an earth that is parched and dry needs more 'water'. Similarly where 'fire' points are often used to clear pathogenic heat in TCM, within Five Element approach the 'fire' point is used to support the weak 'fire'.

The Ling Shu does appear in many respects to introduce us to a more pragmatic world of symptoms, diseases, and protocols, (rather than the philosophy and principles of the Su Wen), that seem more in keeping with TCM and rather opposite to Worsley's teaching; however, there are some tantalizing glimpses of something else beyond the pragmatic.

Ling Shu Cha. 1 Nine Needles and Twelve Starting Points

Comments: Here we are introduced to the nine needles, an altogether more pragmatic text; however, the opening of Chapter One does give us an intriguing preparatory statement.

The Yellow Emperor Asked Chi-Po: "I love my people, attend to them, and also impose tax on their earning. I am very much concerned, however, not only about their lack of sufficient foods to feed themselves, but also about their being vulnerable to the attack of disease. For this reason I am not entirely content with the use of internal medicine, or needles made of stones, and I wish to have a sort of minute needle to be used for facilitating the flowing of streams of meridians..."

Henry Lu

[Alt translation of last few lines]

'I desire therefore that they be prevented from using the toxic remedies, and they stop using lithopuncture [stone needles] using instead the fine needles to...

Van Nghi

Worsley is not alone in having promoted a style of acupuncture that is specifically acupuncture, and not just an adjunct of a TCM herbal based medicine. This is a principle shared by many who adopt the term 'Classical' Chinese Medicine. The fact that this principle is stated in the Classics is incontrovertible whatever other debate there is about its merits or otherwise.

Many practitioners of TCM would have no problem finding support for their approach within the Classics and there is no need to argue the case.

What of the legend of JR being the recipient of an oral teaching not found in the written texts. We have seen that to account for many Worsley's teachings we do not need to posit a mysterious oral tradition; however, there are some other intriguing passages of the Ling Shu that actually throw light on this idea.

Ling Shu Cha. 28 Verbal Questions

Comment: Discusses twelve diseases caused by twelve 'unusual or strange' [Henry Lu] or 'peculiar' [Van Nghi] vicious energies.

The Yellow Emperor was at leisure one day. His majesty dismissed his attendants and asked Chi-Po. You have already told me about the nine needles as recorded in the classics and I have obtained an understanding of the six master meridians of hand and six master meridians of foot regarding their yin-yang classifications and **upstream** and **downstream** [my emphasis] energy. Now I wish to hear about the information which had not been recorded in the classics, but which you have learned from your teachers verbally.

Chi-Po left his seat and replied again with a bow: Your majesty's question is indeed a good one. I had in fact received some verbal instructions from my teachers.

The Yellow Emperor said: I wish to hear some of the contents of the verbal instruction that you received from your teachers.

The beginning of this exposition by Chi-Po starts out in a very promising way for one paragraph, but then becomes an explanation of, sighing, watering of the mouth, sneezing, hiccupping, and vomiting etc. I read on this with a sense that somebody was pulling my leg. The Yellow Emperor dismisses his attendants, and Chi-Po shows great respect before revealing the secrets of hiccupping, sighing etc! I can not help thinking that something is amiss here. Could this be a tantalizing glimpse that there is something beyond the text that is not actually revealed here? Perhaps Chi-Po was not being straight with the Yellow Emperor because he asks again.

Cha. 29 Medical Knowledge Taught by the Master

The Yellow Emperor said: I have heard that ancient teachers had accumulated many precious theories which had not been recorded in books. I wish to learn such theories and take them as guiding principles for governing people and for governing of the body, so that people will be immune from attack of disease, and people of different classes will remain harmonious and cordial with each other...

Chi-Po replied: That is indeed a far reaching question. It is impossible to govern **smoothly by reverse** [my emphasis] tactics, because only smooth tactics will entitle us to govern smoothly... Smooth is intended to mean here not only the smooth relationship between Yin and Yang meridians, it is also intended to mean the smooth (downstream) flow of energy and opposed to the upstream flow of energy.

Once again we find a reference to the 'smooth', 'downstream' or 'going with the flow' method of treatment that was very clearly the basis of J R Worsley's teachings.

Ch.48 Avoidance of Guesswork and Practice of Established Rules of Acupuncture.

Para 1. Dei-Kong asked the Yellow Emperor: I have had an opportunity to receive instructions and tried to master the sixty chapters dealing with the nine needles; I have tried hard to learn such things day and night, but some of the sixty chapters edited more recently have been lost while some edited long ago have been damaged or incomplete...

The Yellow Emperor explains some things and then the councilor continues.

Henry Lu	Van Nghi
Para 2. Dei-Kong said: They are the things I already knew before, but I do not know how they are to be summarized into a number of basic principles.	Lei-Kong: I have for a long time understood these facts; but I don't yet know how to form a synthesis.
The Yellow Emperor replied: To summarize the materials into principles is like putting things into a bag; when the bag is full but not tightened up the things in the bag will spread out of the bag. By the same token when the materials of study have been learned but not summarized into basic principles, they can not be applied with magic effects.	A synthesis [original italic] resembles the grouping of objects in the same bag. If the bag is full and not closed, the objects will fall out... Similarly without synthesis facts understood seem mysterious to the shen.
Dei-Kong said: Those with lower abilities seem inclined to start summarizing before their bags are full.	

The word translated as 'summarize' by Henry Lu, and 'synthesis' by Van Nghi could indeed imply a simplification, (約 yuē: make arrangements for, simple, brief, around approximately, to put in a nutshell); however, the radical is mì 糸 this is a bundle of threads twisted together. I agree with Van Nghi that the meaning here is more one of synthesis not mere summarization. The metaphor of the bag being closed seems to be trying to make sure that we understand this point, in other words, what prevents the contents being lost is something that secures them by binding them together.

It seems clear that a simple summarization is not the full meaning intended here; rather, an integration, and understanding of the practical application of the information. It is a tenet of Five Element practitioners that Five Elements is 'easy to learn, but hard to practice'. 'TCM is considered 'hard to learn' (because it involves a great deal of memorization), but its principles are very straightforward and (as anyone studying for national board knows) can be reduced very easily to 'Clif Notes'. Five Elements is even simpler on paper – the basic principles of the sheng and ke cycle and the attributes can be reduced to a few pages of notes. But especially in the case of the Five Elements this simplicity is considered profoundly deceptive. For this reason Worsley's teachings

emphasized a strong clinical approach to learning that tried to approach the traditional master and apprentice relation in a school setting.

There are many other passages of the Ling Shu in which students or J.R.Worsley will find a resonance. It is interesting how often these are the opening passages of a section; and the significance is not necessarily recognized by other authors. Chapter 38 of the Ling Shu discussed different techniques of needling robust and delicate individuals. However, the opening passage is below from two authors.

Ling Shu Ch. 38

The Yellow Emperor asked Chi-Po: I have heard the principles of acupuncture treatment from you and I have understood a great deal of it. The principles you have put forward have, without doubt, produced good results and they have been able to make patients feel more comfortable as if lost in a pleasant environment, and also they have never allowed disease to get tough and persist. Are these principles derived from your mastery of learning or from your careful observations of things? [Henry Lu]

Huangdi: I have frequently heard you discourse with clarity on the Dao of acupuncture. It seems to me that the Dao which you have subjected me to is a variable Dao, which corresponds to each disease with efficacy, and not a fixed immutable Dao. Does this Dao come from your personally acquired knowledge, or rather from inspirations of your heart while observing the natural world?

Van Nghi

The Chinese character can be translated as with a mundane meaning as ‘principles’ or as Dao. Many will realize that the latter translation obviously carries wider implications. But few commentators see much import to this passage; most focus on the more pragmatic information contained in the rest of the chapter. One translation that I have seen clearly thought that most of the passage was largely irrelevant and actually renders the whole of the above as:

The Emperor Huang Ti:

Does one puncture all sick people in the same fashion?

Qi Bo’s reply is of interest.

Chi-Po replied: The principles put forward by the sages are such that they must be in tune with the heaven in the upper region, with the earth in the lower region, and with man in the middle’ they are based upon bright rules, their effects must be measurable, and their errors must be capable of being checked, before they are passed on to posterity. For example the carpenter cannot measure things without rulers or identify a plane without strings and ink for marking lines; a worker cannot draw a circle without a pair of compasses, or draw a square without a rule. Such are principles dealing with natural things, and they may be taught for easy applications and as standards of judging something to be normal or abnormal.

Henry Lu

Qibo answers: The Dao of the sages is based upon the observations of above, which correspond to heaven (astronomy); of below, which represent earth (geology); and of the middle which corresponds to “human affairs”; according to precise means of measuring and specific procedures of calculation, in order to pass them to future generations. This is why a fine woodworker cannot determine lengths without the Chi (foot) or the Cun (thumb), nor establish a horizontal plane without a string blackened with ink. Similarly, a worker cannot draw a circle without a compass, nor draw an edge without a set square.

To use these tools is to obey the “laws of nature”, which consist of determining the reasoning behind *contrary* and *favorable* [original italics], a method that is easy to follow and pass down to posterity.¹

¹ This sentence which is difficult to decode has been known as different versions according to the translator.

Van Nghi.

What appears here in this difficult to decode section is a variation on the terms ‘upstream/counter-flow and downstream/flow’ that we looked at earlier.

Nì	逆	Movement against, counter, inverse, converse
Shùn	順	In the direction of, along, go downstream

Conclusion:

I hope that these brief extracts from the classics will illustrate that there is not doubt that J. R. Worsley’s teachings are thoroughly based upon the classics both in philosophy and particulars.

Further to this it is inescapable that a hidden teaching not able to be contained in books is being hinted at (not very subtly). Indeed it is possible that this teaching is not some mysterious other, but is actually contained in the text: that the true understanding and practice of acupuncture is more difficult than just memorizing the principles. Although the Ling Shu especially is full of much very straightforward and pragmatic information it is clear that J.R.Worsley was correct in viewing this apparent simplicity as deceptive and stressing the transmission from master to pupil as the only way to really comprehend the meaning of this information.

Glossary:

Attack and Support: terms referring to an approach to treatment that ‘attacks’ the pathogenic or ‘supports’ the true qi. ‘Five Element’ emphasis the latter, TCM (from the point of view of ‘Five Element’) emphasizes the former.

Circulation/Sex: a common terminology for the Xin Bao Luo, the derivation of circulation from the ‘heart wrapping collaterals’ is clear, the ‘sex’ part is related to the Ming Men function that is seen as part of the Fire Phase in the Five Phase model and Kidney Yang in the TCM model.

Law of Similar Transformation: Liu Wan-Su said that because the host qi is yang in nature, any invading guest qi is likely to transform into heat.

Yin-Fire Theory: Li Dong-Yuan elaborated the causes of pathogenic heat, in stagnation and damp, and any prolonged or excess emotions.

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ⁱ TCM or Traditional Chinese Medicine is the standardized system of Chinese traditional medicine practiced in mainland China since the 1950s.

ⁱⁱ I will use the terminology of 'Five Elements' to refer specifically to Worsley's teachings as that is the terminology used predominantly by JR Worsley and his students.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'The Classics' refers to the two or three main texts of Chinese Medicine, the Nei Jing (divided into the Su Wen and the Ling Shu), and the Nan Jing. These are by legend attributed to the Yellow Emperor, historians place their origins some 2500 years ago, the surviving text is said to date from about 100 AD.

^{iv} This edition is a translation from the French which in turn is a translation from the Vietnamese and in turn a translation from the Chinese. Although problems arise from this multiple translation it does include two traditional commentaries that as far as I am aware are not otherwise available in English.

^v Worsley used a system of 8 cun between the two shoulder blades that placed the back shu points at 2 cun from the spinal column, the classics and modern practice use a 6 cun standard that place the Back-Shu points at 1.5 cun from the spinal column.

^{vi} Worsley described this as completing 'five legs' of the ke cycle, 'seven transmissions' includes the origin and end organs, and the five steps between.

^{vii} The Nan Jing stated these in terms of channels, the Mai Jing referred to the organs, but the positions are unchanged.

^{viii} 'Five Elements' as a description does not completely encapsulate Worsley's teachings. Five Element practice includes many ideas that are not specifically 'Five Element'. Similarly the Shang Hun Lun does not contain the entirety of TCM, but in its emphasis on dealing with a more virulent (epidemic type) disease in a more pragmatic way we can clearly see that it enshrines a basic orientation of TCM.

^{ix} Syncretic: attempt esp. inconsistently, to unify or reconcile differing schools of thought.

^x Worsley referred to these as 'Circulation/Sex' and 'Three Heater' in accord with European custom of the time.