

CUPPING IN BUDDHIST MEDICINE

3

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3-1 Cupping in Buddhist Medicine

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WHAT IS BUDDHIST MEDICINE?

Buddhist medicine is the natural result of the Buddha's teaching on freeing beings from existential suffering through the realization of ultimate truth. Buddhahood is a state of mind in which the individual has attained perfect freedom from the compulsive pull of changeable emotional states and thoughts, and manifests perfect wisdom and compassion. This compassion is expressed in a practical wisdom that provides relief and treatment not only for the ultimate suffering of existence but also for the relative sufferings of physical and mental illness.

Both Buddhist healers and patients can draw, through their religious tradition, on about 2600 years' worth of empirical knowledge on the prevention and healing of illness. In India, Buddhist medicine (known as *Cikitsāvidya* or *Bodhicikitsā*) originating in the teachings of the Buddha naturally became included in the canonical Buddhist scriptures, particularly in the *Tripitaka* but also in other texts and commentaries. It forms a corpus of transcultural wisdom that has adapted to the various sociocultural conditions without losing its timeless essence – like Buddhism itself, which many scholars call 'the earliest world religion'. Buddhist medicine has been disseminated along with the Buddhist religion through countries lying on the Silk Road, and through sea routes across Asia, always expressing a vision of the body, illness and healing that is wider than a materialistic one. Buddhist understanding about the relative nature of these body processes has thus transcended all cultural and religious boundaries, and influenced such vast and diverse territories as India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Tibet, Korea, China and Japan. However, it was in China that it formally assumed the designation of Buddhist medicine – *Fojiao Yixue* – to distinguish it from the already existing Chinese traditional medicine (TCM).

Despite the adaptation of Buddhist medicine to diverse cultures, there are common core aspects. These comprise the root vision of Buddhist doctrine: illness as one of the four general unavoidable sufferings of conditioned existence (the others being birth, ageing and death), and illumination as the only definite cure for all these. The five 'components' of the human body naturally bear the potential for human suffering; of

these, the aggregate of form / body is compounded by four elements that antagonize each other, and from which illness naturally stems. Karma is the principle of cause and effect (not 'destiny'), which is the main cause of illness, and Kleshas, or conflicting emotions, are one of the main causes of humour imbalance. Both medical and therapeutic actions are inseparable from Buddhism spiritual practice.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPLES OF BUDDHIST MEDICINE

According to the Buddhist vision, which is the theoretical basis of Buddhist medicine, the universe is composed of the aggregation of subatomic particles that bear the qualities and functions of the great four elements: Earth, Water, Fire and Wind. These four interact in and with a fifth basic element, Space, and from this all aspects of the universe emerge, including phenomenal content and living beings.

From the medical point of view, three energies arising from this are especially meaningful: Wind, Fire and Water. These elements not only assemble to form the body, but also express the qualities of the mind. At death, these elements disassemble once more. During their life, the relation of individuals with these elements determines the quality of their experiences, as follows:

Wind creates and manages a vast number of functions. The best examples are breathing, inner energy flow, and circulation as expressed by blood circulation, the circulation of impulses through the nervous system, the arising of thoughts in the mind, and the transport of substances through the digestive system and the excreting organs. In the mind, it expresses itself as desire and attachment, and also conditions the individual's view of the material world. It manages memory, presence, sensory perception and speech. It also controls the opening and closing of bodily orifices.

Fire functions as the discriminative intellectual function of the mind, and originates and controls metabolism, hepatic function, eyesight, heart, gall bladder and skin. Most particularly, it regenerates the body and blood components. In the mind, the energy of Fire manifests as aggression, hate, anger, but also as zest and courage.

Water creates the physical principle by which energy is manifested in various functions. It relates to the lubrication processes in our body, and is also concerned with will and good memory, amongst other things. In the mind, Water is expressed as ignorance or lack of understanding, but also as mental stability and sensory satisfaction, and it is also related to taste experience and sleep quality.

Individual Typification

Individuals will differ in their psychosomatic constitutions according to the predominance of the above energies, as follows:

Individuals with Wind Predominance

Such individuals tend to be thin, with little physical strength and unhealthy complexions. They tend to walk with a slight crouch and are subject to many desires. When walking or moving, their joints can crack noisily. These people talk a lot and can be quite stern. They sleep little and cold weather does not agree with them. They enjoy singing and dancing. Their vitality is low, their life expectancy short and their metabolism is variable.

Individuals with Fire Predominance

These people tend to have a yellowish complexion and frequently feel hunger and thirst. Their physical strength is moderate, and they have a great tendency to sweat. They tend to be intellectually sharp and full of pride, are often entrepreneurs but can be uncaring. Their vitality and life expectancy are average. Their metabolism is strong and their bodily temperature is higher than normal.

Individuals with Water Predominance

The physical constitution of these individuals is robust, they are large and have great physical strength. Mentally their temperament tends to be easy-going and devoid of malice, they are good-humoured and have a relaxed nature. They tend to walk bending slightly backwards. They tolerate hunger and thirst well, and sleep deeply. They enjoy a long life expectancy, and often have a low body temperature and slow metabolism.

Most individuals are a mix of two or more of the above constitutions, however, single types being rare. A balanced combination of the three types is the most favourable condition for individuals, both physically and emotionally.

DISTURBANCE AND IMBALANCE OF ELEMENTS

A disturbance in any or in the combination of the elements results in disease. Disturbance can arise from eating behaviours or from environmental factors that, from their own component elements, act to disturb the characteristics of the body's elements. This results in disease in diverse ways, depending on the acute or chronic nature of the problem. Also, all illnesses must be seen as individual based on a patient's particular background.

Causes of Disease

The causes for disease are of three types: predictable causes, causes arising from daily habits, and unpredictable causes. According to Yogin Suklavastra's classic presentation, these are as follows:

Predictable Causes

- Basic elemental causes, from the effects of either their single energies or in combination with other elements
- Environmental variations caused by the change of season
- Age: infancy, childhood, young adulthood, maturity and old age
- Time of day
- Astrological conditions
- Conditions related to the location.

Daily Habits

- Eating and drinking habits
- Sleeping habits
- Work and exercise habits
- Posture: sitting, standing, walking, lying down
- Temperature extremes
- Emotional tendencies
- Repression of natural impulses.

Unpredictable Causes

- Accidents
- Poisoning
- Ghosts, spirit and demonic attacks
- Human aggression, thugs and guns
- Black magic.

Given that health depends on a balance of elements and energies, and their harmonic interaction, it follows naturally that disturbing and destabilizing conditions may cause various diseases to develop, such as an imbalance of constitutional energies arising from bad nutrition, negative emotions, bad conduct, trauma, attack by spirits, etc. Thus several types of imbalance may arise: deficiency or excess of elements, or 'conflict' between them. According to the Master Dharmaraja Ratna Akash, the causes are summarized as follows:

Wind diseases can result, for example, from eating too much light food, raw food, and generally little nourishing food, but also from lack of proper sleep, working on an empty stomach, too much sexual activity, exposure to cold and wind, intense intellectual activity, excessive talking; from sadness, worrying and mental obsession, among others.

Fire diseases can result for example from an excess of spicy and oily food, excess of alcohol, and excessive exertion at work and physical exercise, but also from afternoon naps, exposure to dry and hot environments, etc.

Water diseases can result from excess sugar in the diet, but also from too much oily, heavy and cold food. They can also arise from none or little physical exercise, and from sleeping during the day. Cold and wet environments are particularly destabilizing to mindsets characterized by apathy and passivity, as are also eating vitality-lacking food, such as fast food and milk products, and also lengthy intervals between meals.

Symptoms of Imbalance

Some symptoms of elemental imbalance are listed by the Buddhist Yogin Vajrabodhi as:

For Wind, visible and recognizable inquietude, jitters, reduction in the function of sensory organs, trembling, frequent need to stretch the limbs, frequent yawning. Also pain on the hips, waist and joints, and shifting pains. Nausea and retching. All these symptoms are aggravated by an empty stomach.

For Fire, a bitter taste in the mouth is a telling sign, and also hypothermia, sharp pains on the upper part of the body and headache. All the symptoms are aggravated after digestion is completed.

For Water, lack of appetite and difficult digestions can be observed, as also vomiting, heaviness after meals, burping, fatigue and apathy, and a generalized feeling of cold. All symptoms are aggravated after meals.

Additional symptoms of imbalance of these elements in the body can be observed by tongue, wrist and urine diagnosis.

Treatment Approaches

Once the nature of the imbalance or illness is diagnosed, it can be treated through multiple approaches: dietary changes, behavioural changes, appropriate medication and the use of external therapies, one of which is cupping.

A COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY: CUPPING IN BUDDHIST MEDICINE

The practice of cupping was widespread in the ancient world and so it became included in Buddhist medicine. In Tibet, Thailand and other countries, heated cups made of copper, horn, glass and bamboo were used to ease both chronic and acute located pain. Cupping has been used since antiquity in Eastern naturopathy to increase the blood circulation in the back and shoulders, to relax tense and stressed muscles, and to ease chronic pain throughout the body.

There is historical evidence in old Tibetan and Chinese texts that cupping has been practised in both countries for 3500 years. Since then, Buddhist medicine has maintained that cupping can help unblock the channels that carry the vital energy (Qi), thus contributing to rejuvenation, revitalization and regeneration of worn and tired bodily tissues.

The cupping technique generally consists of holding a naked flame under the cup and then immediately pressing the heated cup on the part of the body to be treated (though there are many other traditional cupping methods). The vacuum created by the flame inside the cup exerts a suction on the skin and body tissues directly underneath, and creates a powerful lifting action of both tissues and skin. This lifting action causes an increase in the blood circulation in the treated area and an activation of the lymphatic system, thus allowing the elimination of dangerous toxins such as carcinogens in that area. Due to the action on the deep tissues, it also constitutes a powerful method of deep massage.

Traditionally, copper or glass cups are used. Copper is said to have absorption properties that help negative energy to exit the body, and silver and brass are said to share those properties, though glass cups are most used nowadays. The technique extracts impurities and brings blood to the skin, and is known as *Dry cupping*. *Wet cupping* involves cutting the cupping marks to allow the practitioner to extract impure or stagnated blood.

Modern methods must be also mentioned, such as those using plastic cups that rely on a valve and hand pump for suction. These allow the therapists, specially beginners, better control over suction intensity, as well as monitoring of the skin reaction and the overall therapeutic process. Nevertheless, we must not ignore the fact that particular cup materials can add to the effects of the

therapy, as can various oils used as lubricant on the areas to be treated. As for the duration of the cupping, this will depend mainly on the state of the patient's health. All these procedures rebalance the humors and restore health.

Uses for Cupping Therapy

- When there is a perceived sensation of 'blockage', in either a physical or emotional sense
- Rigidity, tension and blocking of the neck, chest and breathing tract due to excessive mucus
- Energy stagnation
- Relief of musculoskeletal rigidity, tension and pain
- Digestive problems
- Blood circulation problems
- Diverse conditions related to humoral imbalance:
 - Pain and swelling
 - Respiratory disorders
 - Skin conditions such as boils, eczema
 - Facial paralysis
 - Common colds.

Since the technical aspects of cupping in Buddhist medicine are quite similar to those described elsewhere in this book by Ilkay Chirali and by Kei Ngu (who in [Part 2](#) of this chapter describes cupping in traditional Thai medicine, a variant of Buddhist medicine adapted to Thai culture, tradition and climate), I have not burdened the reader with a repetition of similar content here.

As Buddhist medicine is essentially an oral tradition that relies on apprenticeship, it is difficult to discuss at length the diagnostic methods (namely those that use the cupping marks themselves), the energy lines and points according to Buddhist tradition, and the characteristics of the oils, plants and other therapeutic aids used in Buddhist medicine. I therefore simply present a handful of case studies below, and recommend all those who are truly interested in learning to learn more to seek an apprenticeship with a teacher of Buddhist medicine, and I would be pleased to suggest qualified masters in this medical lineage.

Case Studies

CASE 3-1 Female Patient Aged 34 (Fatigue and Mental Issues)

Condition. Fatigue, mental agitation and depression

Medication. None

Pulse Observation. Preponderance (big) of Wind element, weak and irregular.

Background. The patient works in the accounts department of the local municipality. The responsibility entailed and the competition experienced in the workplace cause great mental agitation and emotional and physical stress. The ongoing economic recession has recently led to reductions in the workforce, causing anxiety about career and job dissatisfaction. The patient's partner is in an unstable work situation, leading to worries at home and relationship problems. The patient is very thin and has sleep problems.

Diagnosis. Imbalance of Wind element causing the mental disquietude, depression and insomnia. Wind element is also perturbing Fire element.

Objective of Treatment. Overall rebalancing of elements and stabilization of Wind element.

Treatment. Dietary change to rebalance elements. Breathing exercises to calm the mind. Application of compresses with

medicinal herbs, namely nutmeg, on the body points that control the inner Wind to calm the anxiety and mental agitation, and address the restlessness and insomnia. The patient has also used a phytotherapeutic tonic.

Cupping therapy was applied with Flash cupping and Light cupping in 10-minute sessions.

Moxibustion therapy was used on the Wind control points in the cervical spine and thoracic areas.

Massage therapy was used with oils to calm the Wind element and enhance Water element without an effect on Fire element.

Results. The patient felt less tense and physically more relaxed after the first session, but her insomnia continued. After five sessions, improvement in sleep quality and reduction in restlessness were observed, and the patient showed more acceptance of her work situation and a more relaxed attitude in her relationship. She was then changed to a monthly session maintenance routine, and was advised to start a regular meditation practice so as to handle her emotional issues better, without either suppressing or compulsively acting on her thoughts and emotions.

CASE 3-2 Female Patient Aged 26 (Cervical Pain and Immobility)

Condition. Cervical spine trauma in a car accident

Medication. Cervical collar, anti-inflammatory and analgesic medication.

Observations and Background. Neck immobility, strong muscular tension in the cervical area, and headaches. The patient had been given a recovery prognosis of 6 to 9 months, which led to professional issues as the patient is a personal trainer.

Diagnosis. Blocking and stagnation of Wind and Blood on the cervical area due to backlash trauma. Inflammation of muscles and tendons caused by the hyper-stretching. Blocking, tension and stagnation of the meridians and stress causing the headaches.

Objectives of Treatment. Tension and muscular rigidity relief. Dealing with the inflammatory condition. Unblocking Blood stagnation and re-establishing Wind flow in the meridians.

Treatment. Massage therapy was used on reflex and relaxing points with anti-inflammatory oils. Also vibratory massage techniques were used on the meridians.

Cupping therapy was applied on the trigger points of the affected area.

Results. Immediate relief of headache after the first session. After six sessions, spaced regularly three times a week, the patient was able to leave off the cervical collar, except when driving. Total recovery in $2\frac{1}{2}$ months.

CASE 3-3 Male Patient Aged 68 (Shoulder lesion)

Condition. Lesion on shoulder, pain and arm mobility issues.

Medication. None.

Observation and Background. The patient is a dentist and the lesion on the shoulder had been caused by the many repetitive small-amplitude movements he employed in his professional work.

Diagnosis. Blocking, stagnation and inflammation. Tendinitis.

Objectives of Treatment. Relief of tension and muscular rigidity. Addressing the inflammatory condition, unblocking Blood stagnation and re-establishing Wind flow in the meridians.

Treatment. Massage therapy was used with anti-inflammatory oils.

Cupping therapy was applied to reflex points on the shoulder, and also locally on the affected area (Fig. 3-1).

Treatment was in four sessions, with a 1-day interval between each.

Results. Mobility partially recovered after the first session, and pain was felt partially only in the extension and abduction movements of the shoulder. After the third session the immobility and pain disappeared and the treatment was discontinued because the patient had completely recovered.



FIGURE 3-1 (A) Treatment of shoulder pain; (B) result after treatment.

CASE 3-4 Male Patient Aged 80 (Shoulder lesion)

Condition. Shoulder lesion, pain and immobility after a fall.

Medication. Anti-inflammatory and analgesic medication.

Observation and Background. After the fall, the patient had received hospital treatment, which comprised anti-inflammatory and analgesic medication, application of ice and balms, and physiotherapy massage. After 3 months without recovery, the patient attended our clinic, complaining of pain, inability to move the arm and sleep problems due to muscular sensitivity.

Diagnosis. Blocking and stagnation of Wind and Blood on the trauma area on the shoulder. Inflammation of the muscle and the tendon. Blocking, tension and stagnation of meridians down the arm reaching the hand.

Objectives of Treatment. Relief of pain and muscular rigidity. Addressing the inflammatory condition, unblocking Blood stagnation and re-establishing Wind flow in the meridians.

Treatment. Massage therapy was applied on the reflex and relaxing points using anti-inflammatory oils.

Moxibustion therapy was applied on the reflex points of shoulder, elbow and forearm.

Cupping therapy applied on the reflex points of shoulder, and also locally on the affected area.

Treatment was in five sessions with 48-hour intervals between each.

Results. After the first session, there was partial reduction of pain and the flexion and extension shoulder movements were recovered, the sole remaining difficulty being in the horizontal abduction and adduction movements. Between the second and third sessions the pain disappeared and the patient was able to sleep without discomfort. He regained the amplitude of the remaining shoulder movements. At the conclusion of the treatment the patient felt fully recovered.

CASE 3-5 Female Patient Aged 37 (Sacral pain)

Condition. Lumbago.

Observation and Background. Severe pain affecting also the sacral area. The patient attempts to stand up rather crookedly, but cannot maintain an upright position due to backlash pain in the lumbar area. The patient is suffering from functional incapacity, since she works in catering and spends many hours daily standing on high-heeled shoes. She also suffers from longstanding work-related stress.

Diagnosis. Blocking and stagnation of Wind and Blood on the lumbar region of trauma. Inflammation of muscles and tendons due to repetitive effort and incorrect posture. Blocking, tension and stagnation in the adjacent meridians.

Objectives of Treatment. Relief of pain and muscular rigidity. Addressing the inflammatory condition, unblocking Blood stagnation and re-establishing Wind flow in the meridians.

Treatment. Massage therapy was applied along the spinal column and on the reflex and relaxing points, with anti-inflammatory oils.

Cupping therapy was applied on the affected area, gluteal muscles and on the leg (Fig. 3-2, Fig. 3-3).

Treatment was in five sessions, the first three taking place consecutively and the last two with a 48-hour interval.

Results. After the first session, the patient regained a vertical posture and also the ability to walk unaided; she also reported reduction in her pain. After the second and third sessions, she recovered full mobility, though reported some of the pain was still present. After the third session, the patient was able to resume her job, with limitations. At the completion of the treatment, she felt completely recovered from her lumbar area to the top of her head.

CASE 3-5



FIGURE 3-2 Treatment of lumbago pain.



A



B

FIGURE 3-3 (A) Treatment of sciatica pain; (B) result after treatment.

3-2 Cupping in Thailand's Traditional Lanna Medicine

Kei Ngu

INTRODUCTION TO CUPPING IN TRADITIONAL LANNA MEDICINE

What is Traditional Lanna Medicine?

Traditional Thai medicine (TTM) and traditional Lanna medicine (TLM) are two separate traditions. TTM is the standardized form of traditional medicine which was established during the time of the first, second and third kings of the Chakri dynasty and was later codified and standardized by the prominent doctors during the reign of the fifth king. It has been again revamped and re-standardized by the Ministry of Public Health during the last 50 years. Although TTM has some common features with the Lanna tradition (northern tradition) of medicine, it is a separate system.

Cupping can be found in almost every country where traditional medicine is practised. In TLM, it is one of the most popular physical therapies and is used together with bone setting, scraping, bleeding, compresses (cold, hot, dry, wet), liniments, balms, saunas, tok sen (hitting therapy), massage, etc. Traditionally the oldest cupping tools were horns, which were then replaced with clay cups and bamboo cups, and, latterly, with glass cups. In Thailand practitioners use whatever is handy! Sometimes cupping is used in conjunction with bleeding. In northern Thailand the traditional doctors use mantras with the cupping treatment. According to Ajahn Dao (one of my teachers from Thailand), it is quite common for TLM doctors to use mantras with cupping and other Lanna medicine and, in fact, it is an essential part of the tradition.

General Description of the Four Elements

In TLM there are four body elements – Earth, Water, Fire and Wind – that interact with and affect each other. Actually, the term 'element' refers to the qualities and not to the actual substance. For example, when we refer to Water, we are talking about its qualities and not the water itself; regarding any solid substances, we say that they have the qualities of the Earth element. The same applies for the other elements.

Balance and the harmony between the four elements is essential to create a positive effect in the body. A person with a good balance of the four elements will achieve good health, have overall immunity from disease and will be stronger. Conversely, when an imbalance of any body elements occurs – as for example excess or deficiency – this will lead to the development of various symptoms and eventually diseases.

Characteristic Qualities of the Elements in TLM

Earth Element

Experience: Solidity

Function: Resistance and support

Qualities: Hard, stable, heavy

Temperature: Mild

Parts of the body:

- Hair of the head
- Hair of the body
- Nails
- Teeth
- Skin
- Muscles
- Tendons and ligaments, vessels and nerves
- Bones
- Bone marrow
- Kidneys
- Heart
- Liver and pancreas

- Fascia (sometimes the diaphragm or sometimes the pleura)
- Spleen
- Lungs
- Large intestine
- Small intestine
- Stomach and new food
- Digested food and faeces
- Brain and central nervous system.

Water Element

Experience: Aqueousness

Function: Cohesion and fluidity

Qualities: Moist, fluid and soft

Temperature: Cold

Parts of the body:

- Bile
- Mucus and phlegm
- Pus and lymph
- Blood
- Sweat
- Fat
- Tears
- Oil
- Saliva
- Snot (mucus in the nose and throat)
- Synovial fluid
- Urine.

Fire Element

Experience: Heat

Function: Transformation and ripening

Qualities: Bright, reactive and sharp

Temperature: Hot

Parts of the body:

- Fire that causes ageing and decay of the body
- Fire that provides warmth to the body
- Fire that digests
- Fire that causes emotion and fever.

Wind Element

Experience: Movement

Function: Growth and vibration

Qualities: Light, mobile and dry

Temperature: Cool

Parts of the body:

- Wind that moves from the top of the head to the feet / Wind that moves from the top of the head to the abdomen
- Wind that moves from the feet to the head / Wind that moves from the abdomen to the top of the head
- Wind that is within the digestive tract
- Wind within the abdomen but outside of the digestive tract
- Wind that circulates to all parts of the body including the extremities
- Wind that is inhaled and exhaled.

THE WIND ELEMENT EXPLANATION IN TLM

In the TLM system it is understood that the internal environment is affected by the external environment. The Wind element in nature is *movement*, for example the wind rustling the leaves or animating nature. The body's health and harmony depend on the balance and smooth flow of 'internal Wind' within the body. At the same time, internal Wind is the most insubstantial and easily affected and distorted element in the body. The most effective way to keep Wind in balance is through the practice of Reusi Datton (Thai hermit exercise). *When the Wind element flows naturally through the channels in a harmonious way, the body itself will be in balance.*

When the Wind is distorted this will cause different imbalances in the body such as: joint stiffness, pain that moves, bloating from gas, anxiety and problems with mobility. Cold foods, irregular schedule, lack of sleep and over-study can all contribute to a disturbed Wind element in the body. For example, when Wind accumulates at a particular point that can't be dealt in a manner, such as by the skin, it turns into a 'waste product'. This 'waste product' must be purged from the body. Cupping is one of the best ways that this can be done effectively.

Diagnosing Wind in the Body

Wind diagnosis is part of a complex system for diagnosing the pathogenic elements in the body. However, this training can't be learned from a book; a teacher and long practice are required for this kind of training. Therefore, the explanation below will be limited to a brief introduction.

Diagnosis is performed at the Wind gate points (places where the Wind 'pools') – points that are used for assessing, redirecting, releasing and manipulating the flow of Wind. The points are located in superficial areas around the joints in the extremities, the abdomen, the clavicular fossa and the temples (temporal fossa). These areas are also places where one can easily access the rhythm and flow of Wind in the channels. When palpating these points we are looking for the general characteristics of the invading Wind so, though physically working on a pulse, we are accessing more than this; we are checking the pulse quality – is it hard or soft, fast or slow, deep or superficial, tense or relaxed, smooth or irregular, empty or full?

All channels originate at the navel. We first evaluate this Wind gate and then move bilaterally towards the periphery noticing where the peripheral pulses differ from the navel pulse. By doing so we can evaluate the flow of Wind throughout the channel system and see where it is becoming disrupted or blocked. Primarily the Wind gates are located near the navel, temples, wrists and ankles. Once you have established the location of the Wind disturbance you can work out the treatment protocol.

Causes of Disease

For an explanation of these refer to 'Cupping in Buddhist medicine' (in [Part 1](#) above) as the causes of disease in that tradition are very much the same as in LTM.

Layers of the Body

There are five layers in the body: the skin, tissues, channels, bones and organs. The disease's natural progression is from the outside to the inside. It also *condenses* as it penetrates into the deeper layers of the body. By its suction action, cupping reverses this process. Pathogenic factors such as the Wind element are brought up from the deeper channels to the more superficial channels where they can be expelled from the body. Depending on which layer of the body you are working on, it is important to work on the layers above the blockage when applying the cupping treatment. To make the cupping treatment more effective we can manipulate the channels during a session and move toxins towards the cup. You must pay attention to the direction in which you work the channels and how you are manipulating the flow of the Wind. For example, if the diagnosis indicates toxic Wind, we would work towards the cup and be mindful not to draw the toxins towards the periphery.

How an External Pathogen Enters Through the Layers of the Body

External pathogen enters through the skin → to the tissues → enters the channels → goes the bone → to the hollow organs (those which have contact with outside the body, e.g. lungs, bladder, stomach, intestines) → to the solid organs (those that are solid and considered 'vital', e.g. spleen, liver, heart, etc.).

The defence for the external Wind pathogen is the skin. However, if the body is weak due to an illness or already has a Wind invasion then the skin will not do its job properly (i.e. defending body from the outside attack!). Once the Wind goes through the skin, it penetrates down to the tissue, and once in the tissue it will create pain. If the problem is not treated then the Wind or pathogens will then penetrate to the channels lying just beneath the skin, and from here the Wind and pathogens will circulate throughout the body, and the person will experience more systemic problems. Then once the pathogens reach the level of the bone the problem will become even more serious, difficult to treat and also may cause more permanent damage. The same principle applies when the pathogen is permitted to penetrate to the levels of the organs.

The Sen (Channels) in TLM

(by Ajahn Wit, TLM and TTM Doctor)

In TLM there are different kinds of channels in the body. We can talk about two main kinds: channels of the *physical body* and *the subtle channels*. The difference between these two channels is that the first group of channels is visible, palpable and can be manipulated with medicine, cupping, massage and other therapies including Ruisi Datton (Thai yoga). The subtle channels are not visible and are not physically palpable. But these channels can be manipulated through meditation, visualization, breathing and other methods. These subtle channels are predominantly related to the mind first, and to the physical body later, whereas with the gross channels it is the reverse. When we talk about channels in LTM, we are referring to the gross channels. These are listed under the Earth element: nerves, tendons, ligaments and blood vessels. In Thai yoga, or Ruisi Datton, we work both with these and with the subtle channels, which have their own location and pathways; this is what is meant by the term 'sen'. When we are discussing yoga, meditation and breathing exercises, we are generally working with the subtle channels, which are also called sen. 'Prāṇa' means breath, specifically inhalation; it can also refer to Wind in yoga texts.

Importance of Cupping in TLM

As described above, the pathogens – be they Wind, Damp, Heat, etc. – move through the various layers of the body until they affect the body adversely. The benefit of Thai cupping is that, once those pathogens are drawn to the superficial layer, the body can actually deal with them in a better way and heal itself, or we can employ other therapies such as massage or hot poultices, etc. *Pathogens usually present themselves in the blood, lymph or tissue as Wind.*

Lom Pit / Wind-Poison

'Lom Pit' is the term used to refer to the Wind-Poison (or toxic Wind), which is normally released from the body during cupping. 'Lom Pit' is released both locally where cupping occurs, and also systemically. For this reason a person who has recently been cupped may experience initial cold- or flu-like symptoms. These include general malaise, tiredness, dizziness or feeling cold. In general, these symptoms last only a few hours.

'Lom Pit' also refers to the Wind that accumulates inside the cups. Because of the presence of Wind-Poison, it is important to remove the cups *away from your face!* Also, try not to breathe towards the cup you have just removed. Ventilate the room and burn cleansing herbs or incense.

APPLICATIONS OF THAI CUPPING THERAPY

Cupping is used primarily (in TLM) for:

- common colds
- pain and swelling
- helping scar tissue
- releasing tight fascia
- releasing Heat
- dispersing stagnation
- releasing accumulated waste
- headaches
- regulating Wind in the body.

Types of Cupping

- **Dry cupping:** Refers to cupping that does not promote bleeding.
- **Wet cupping:** Refers to the use of cups in bloodletting.
- **Flash cupping (also known as Empty cupping):** Cups are applied and then rapidly removed, followed by immediate re-application and removal, again and again for about 15 minutes. Flash cupping is a gentle form of cupping.

Tools

- Cups made from horn, clay, bamboo, glass or plastic
- Surgical spirit (alcohol)
- Cotton-wool balls
- Source of fire
- A tray to put cupping tools on
- Massage oil: almond oil, coconut oil, sesame oil, etc.
- A bowl with water to put potentially hot tools on
- Balms, liniments, herbal compresses, etc.

Cupping Treatment Procedure

- Explain to your client what you are about to do and warn him or her of the possible cupping marks. Make sure the person feels comfortable with the use of fire.
- Make sure the room temperature is high enough as people being cupped can become cold.
- Apply oil to the skin, especially if you are working on someone with a lot of body hair.
- Create a vacuum by inserting fire into the cup, quickly removing it and rapidly applying the cup to the skin.
- The strength of the suction can be lowered by gently pressing down with your fingers at the rear of the cup.
- In TLM one to three cups are commonly used in order to allow you to work on surrounding areas.
- The amount of time the cups are left on varies between about 5 minutes and 20 minutes, but usually they are left on for 10 to 15 minutes. There is no set rule, however.
- Different traditions and teachers encourage different degrees of suction. I personally do not like to make the suction very strong.

Cupping Mark Diagnosis

Diagnosis from the coloration of cupping marks is illustrated in [Figure 3-4](#).

A bright red coloration after cupping ([Fig. 3-4A](#)) indicates excessive Heat in the area and possible inflammation. Flash cupping is generally used. With inflammation, and especially in acute injuries, bleeding may be indicated. In such a case it is helpful to use cooling balms and liniments to cool the area. Ice is not normally used.

A deep red to magenta cupping mark ([Fig. 3-4B](#)) indicates stagnant Heat. Cupping and bleeding are indicated. You can then use a drawing liniment or trauma liniment that is cooling to neutral.

A purple-blue cupping mark ([Fig. 3-4C](#)) indicates stagnation with the absence of Heat. Wind is stuck in an area and it is unable to move. Cupping is indicated. Heating therapy can be used to disperse the area. With the presence of stagnation, you may want to cup more often and bleeding may be indicated.

A dark blue to purple-black cupping mark ([Fig. 3-4D](#)) indicates chronic build-up of 'Wind-Poison'. The blood in the area is toxic and needs to be drained.

A dark coloration receding after the cup is removed ([Fig. 3-4E](#)) means that the toxins are sinking back into the body and need to be drawn out with more cupping and drawing liniments, balms or poultices.

A pale whitish cupping mark ([Fig. 3-4F](#)) indicates the area is lacking in circulation because of a blockage somewhere around the area. Cupping is contraindicated in this condition. Stop cupping immediately and apply external warmth. Use hot compresses or a heating balm.

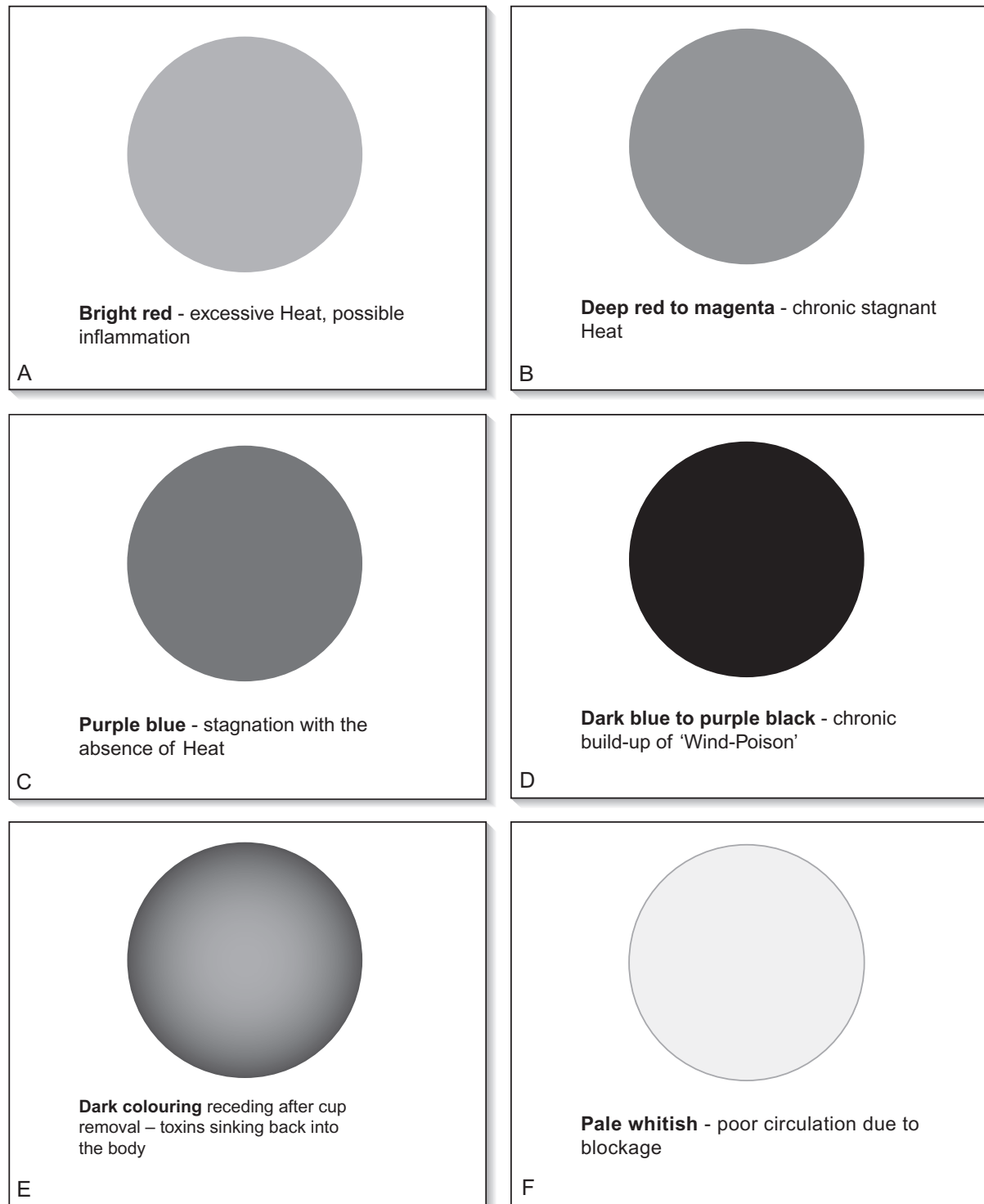


FIGURE 3-4 (A–F) Diagnosis through cupping marks (See Plates 41A–F in the colour plate section).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If you would like to study and know more about this tradition, I am happy to help and, if necessary, suggest the right teacher for you. I am forever grateful to Ajahn Wit for his teachings and guidance on cupping in traditional Lanna medicine. And to all my other teachers: Ajahn Chandor, Doctor Ang Lai Hiang, Ajahn Pichest, Thai Hill Tribe Cupping Practitioners from the market, Ajahn La, Ajahn Dao, Mama Lek Chaiya, Master Jack Chaiya, Ajahn Sinchai and last but not least to my first Thai massage teacher Dimpa.

BENEFITS OF CUPPING THERAPY

4

CHAPTER CONTENTS

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Before listing the benefits of cupping therapy, let us take a closer look at the skin and its relation to the internal organs, the lymphatic and the immune system, and at terminology as seen in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), such as Blood, Qi and Wei Qi phenomena, stagnation, bloodletting, Gua Sha and cupping. I am a great believer that cupping therapy has the most profound effect on the movement as well as the substance of the Blood, quality of Qi, the Wind element, and all the bodily functions that comes under their influence. Qi and Blood circulate throughout the entire body (internally as well as externally), on the skin, through the channels and collaterals and reach the organs.

SKIN

Any topical stimulus destined to influence and manipulate internal or external organs must start at skin level. The skin is our largest organ, containing fluid, blood, blood vessels, connective tissue, muscle and rich nerve supplies. Our body's first direct contact with the outside world is through the skin. It is also true to say that the skin is the mirror of our health: in good health the skin is shiny, tight and has a smooth texture. It responds to changes in temperature and is generally warm when touched. When the body is unhealthy, however, a dull, rather lifeless skin appearance is evident, with little natural colour and often cold to the touch.

As well as protecting the body from external pathogens, the skin has a major role in a number of body functions. It is the main organ of sensation, through many millions of nerve endings contained in its structure. A rich network of blood vessels and glands provides an effective means of temperature control. There are two main layers of the skin proper: the outer epidermis and the inner dermis. The fatty subcutaneous region lies beneath these two. The epidermis is the cellular layer of the skin, varying in thickness from 0.1 mm in the eyelid to over 1 mm on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. It has no nerves, connective tissue or blood vessels (Fig. 4-1).

The main 14 channels with a direct link to the internal organs (Zang-Fu) also lie within the skin. In stimulating a particular point, with acupuncture, massage, Gua Sha or cupping, the objective remains the same: through manipulation of the skin to influence and change a particular organ's Blood and Qi. If we look at this through the perspective of Western medicine, it is the blood vessels, veins, arteries, the nervous system and connective tissue, and through this network, each cell in a particular area, that are

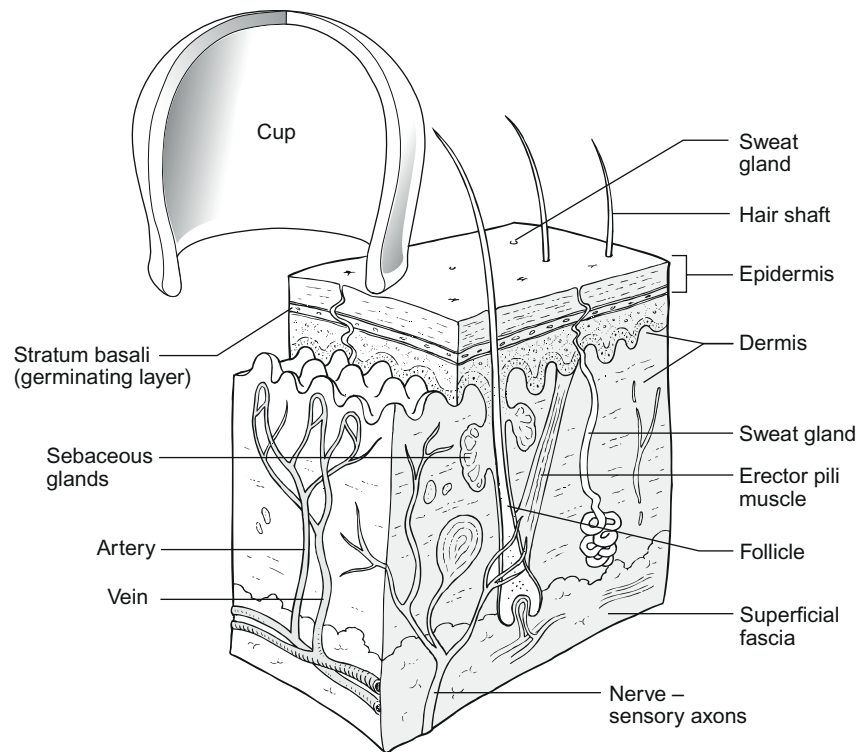


FIGURE 4-1 Section of skin with cupping application.

responsible for the above. However, from the TCM point of view it is the responsibility of the channels, collaterals, Blood and Qi. According to TCM, the skin is influenced by and under the direct control of the Lungs. When the Lung's Qi is in abundance the skin is nourished, glows and performs well, and hair and nails all receive nourishment and look healthy. Lungs spread the Qi and fluids all over the body through the skin. Therefore, skin moisture is also dependent on healthy lungs. Each Zang-Fu organ is represented by a channel on the skin; therefore, a connection, or an open door, mediates with external pathogens via the skin (Figs 4-2-4-15).

LYMPHATIC SYSTEM

The lymphatic system is made up of lymphatic vessels (similar to blood vessels) and lymph nodes (glands) that extend throughout the body. It helps maintain the balance of fluid in the body by draining excess fluid from the tissues of the body and returning it to the blood system.

Closely related to the cardiovascular system, the lymphatic system has several major functions. It is important in the body's defence mechanism, filtering out bacteria and also (along with the spleen) producing disease-fighting lymphocytes (white blood cells), generating antibodies that are so essential to the body's immune system. The fluid that circulates in the system is called lymph. In addition to lymph, the system includes lymphatic capillaries and large vessels, lymph nodes (glands), the spleen, the tonsils and the thymus. Besides forming lymphocytes and antibodies, the lymphatic system is also responsible for the collection of fatty globules from the intestine and their transmission through the mesenteric glands and the thoracic duct into the bloodstream.

The lymphatic system also prevents infection entering the bloodstream. It also preserves the fluid balance throughout the body. After an injury, the affected tissue generally swells. It is the lymphatic system that removes most of the excess fluid, and then returns it for circulation. All forms of massage or tactile therapy that involve stimulation of the skin surface will result in improvement of blood and lymph circulation. One advantage that blood circulation has over lymph circulation is that blood is pumped around the body by means of the heart. In contrast, the circulation of lymph relies on breathing, movement (walking or exercising) or external pressure, which is usually administered by various

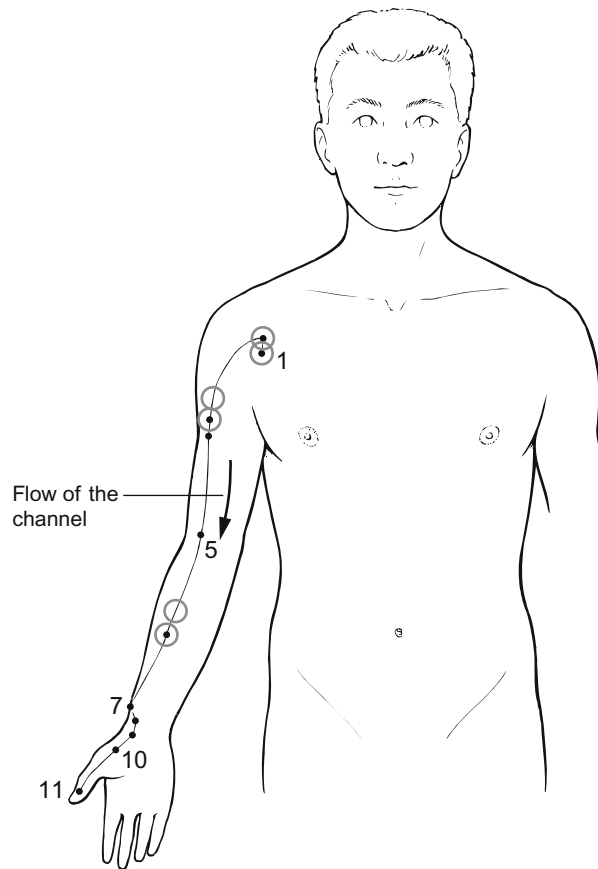


FIGURE 4-2 Course of the Lung (LU) channel. Conditions of the chest, nasal and fluid. Moving cupping or Gua Sha on the channel can be employed.

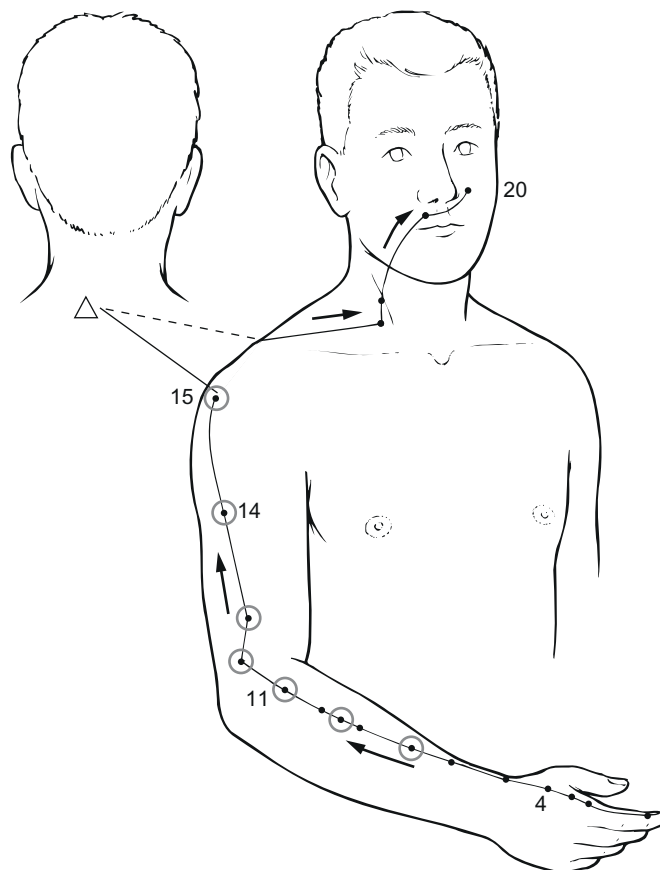


FIGURE 4-3 Course of the Large Intestine (LI) channel. Conditions of the head, nose, throat, intestines, febrile diseases and face (facial paralysis). Fixed cupping therapy on the facial points and moving cupping or Gua Sha to the rest of the channel can be applied.

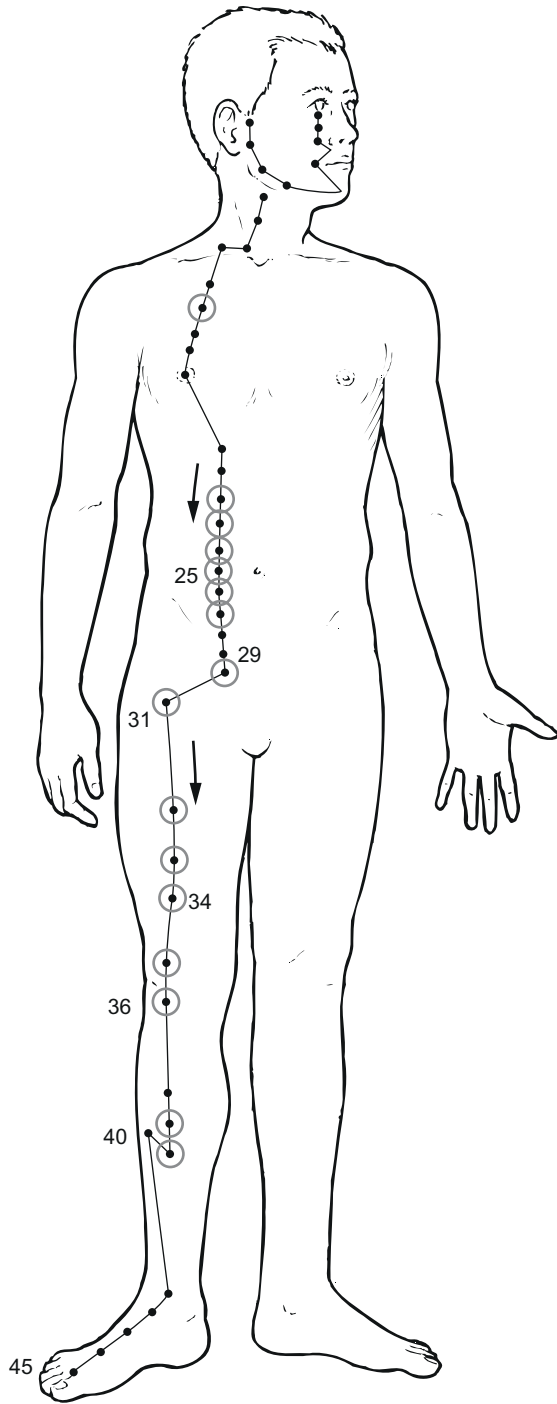


FIGURE 4-4 Course of the Stomach (ST) channel. Conditions of the head, face, throat, digestion, leg and Qi. Cupping therapy on the facial and abdominal points can be employed.

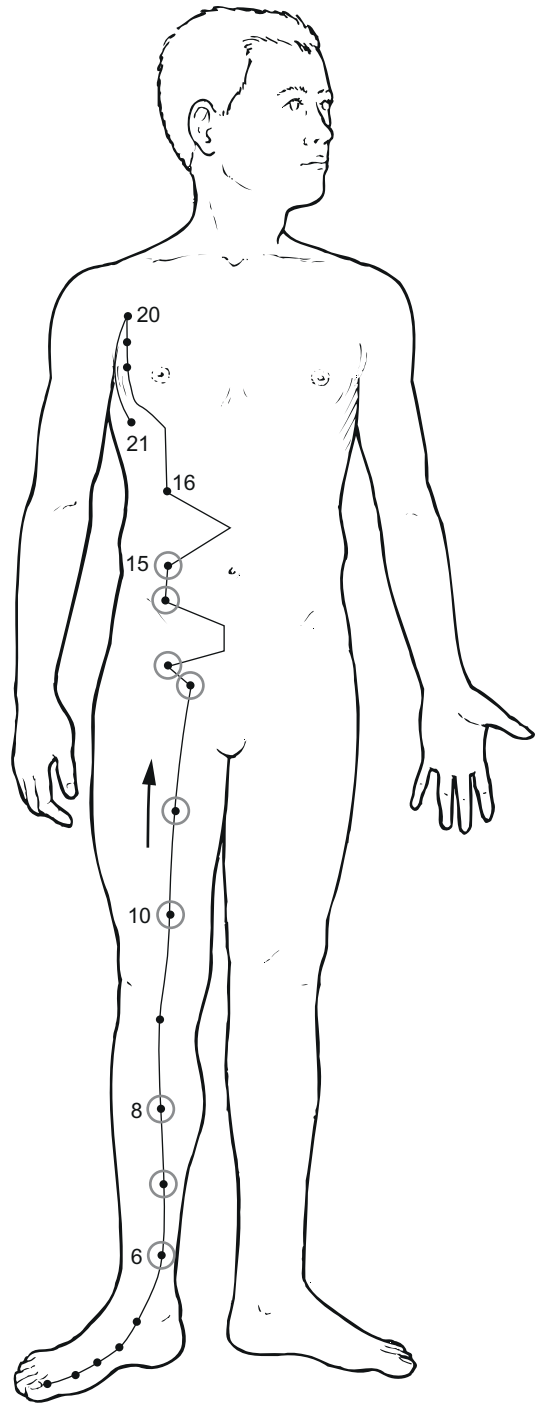


FIGURE 4-5 Course of the Spleen (SP) channel. Conditions of the stomach, spleen, intestines, lower extremities, Qi and urogenital. Cupping therapy on the abdominal points can be employed.

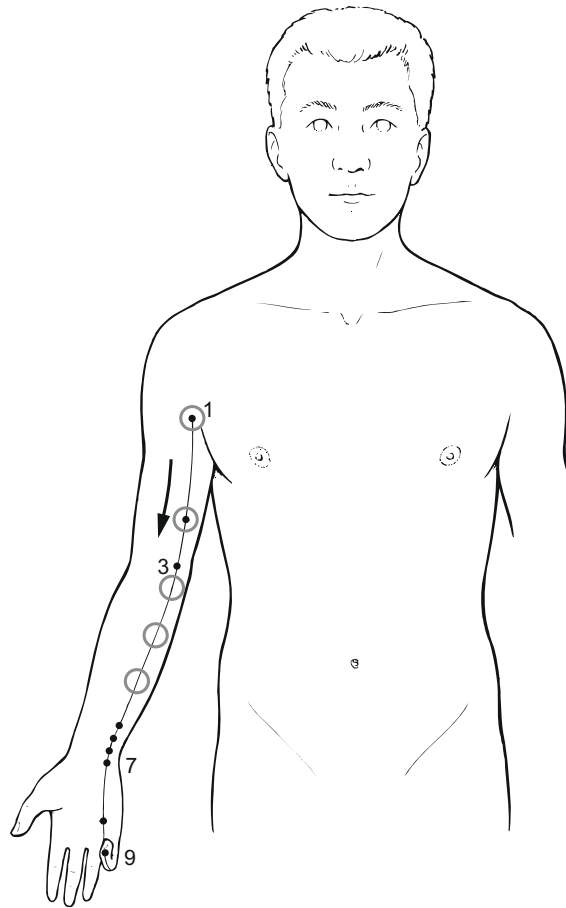


FIGURE 4-6 Course of the Heart (HT) channel. Conditions of the chest, heart, emotions and sleep.

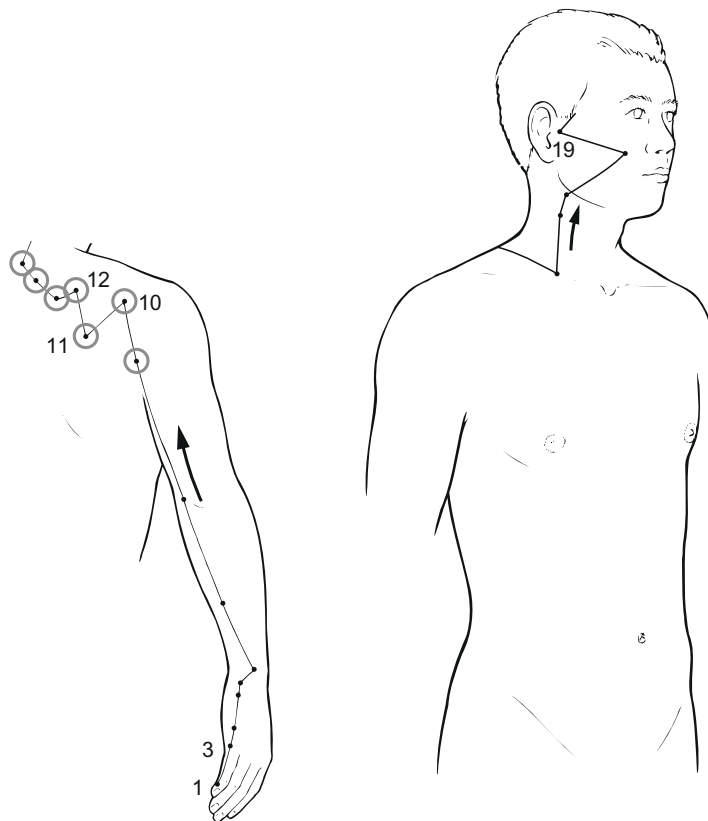


FIGURE 4-7 Course of the Small Intestine (SI) channel. Conditions of the head, neck, shoulders, eyes and emotional nature. Cupping therapy on the facial and shoulder points is applicable.

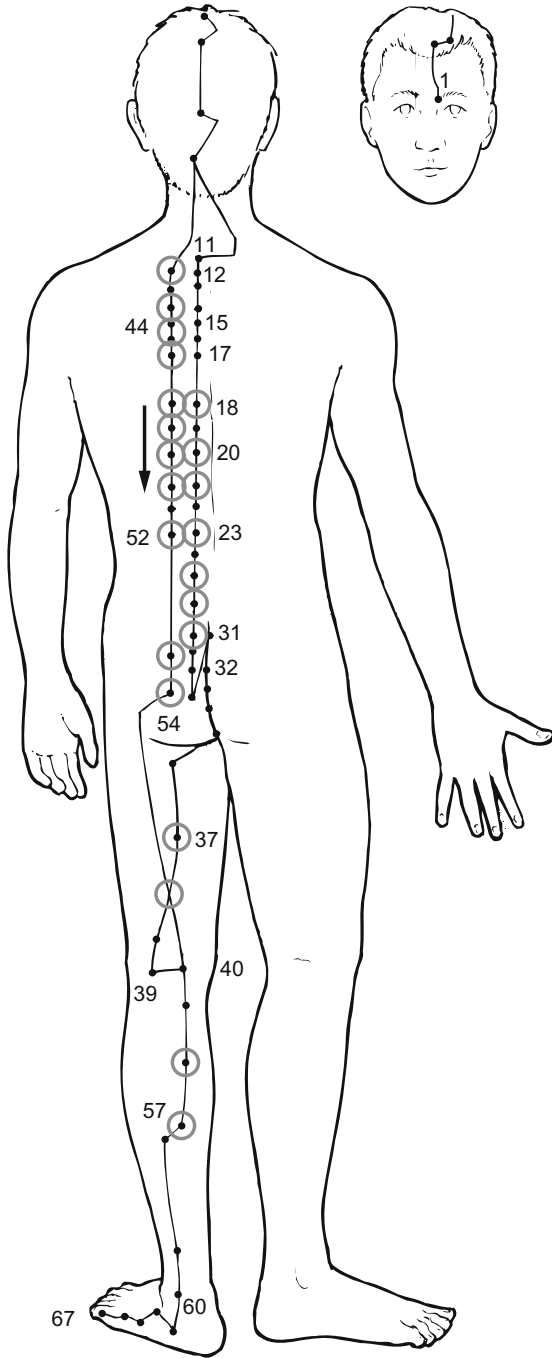


FIGURE 4-8 Course of the Bladder (BL) channel. All Back-Shu points are located on this channel; consequently, this is the most-used channel in cupping therapy. All 10 methods can safely be employed on this channel.

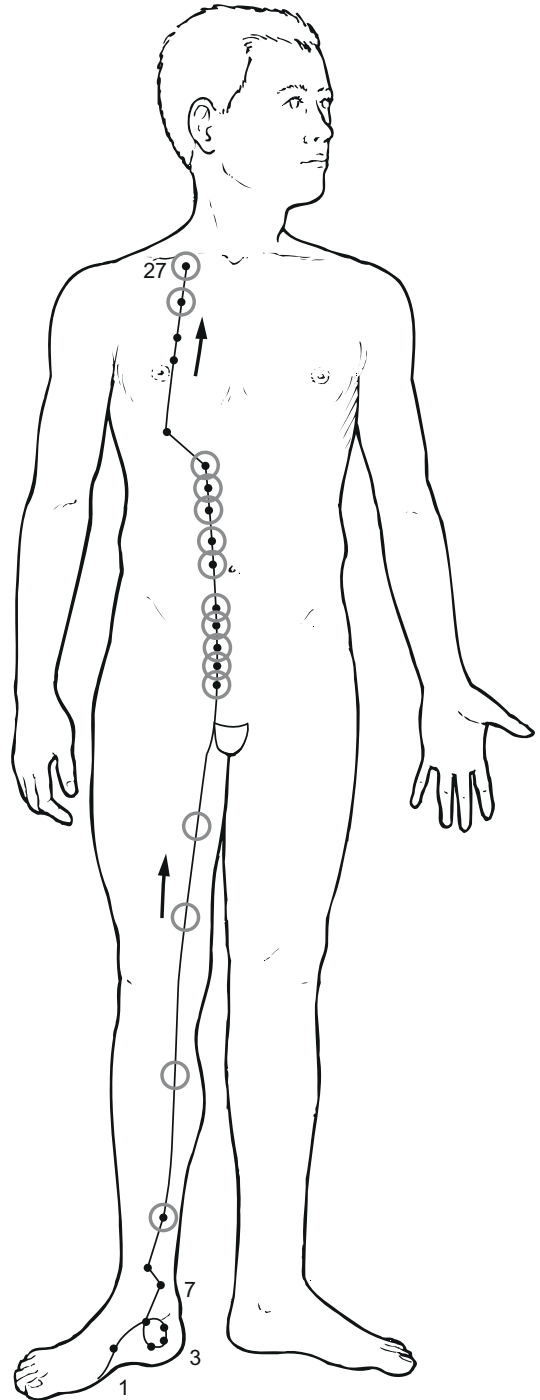


FIGURE 4-9 Course of the Kidney (K) channel. Conditions of abdominal, urogenital, Qi and emotional origin. Cupping therapy on the points on the trunk and leg can be employed.

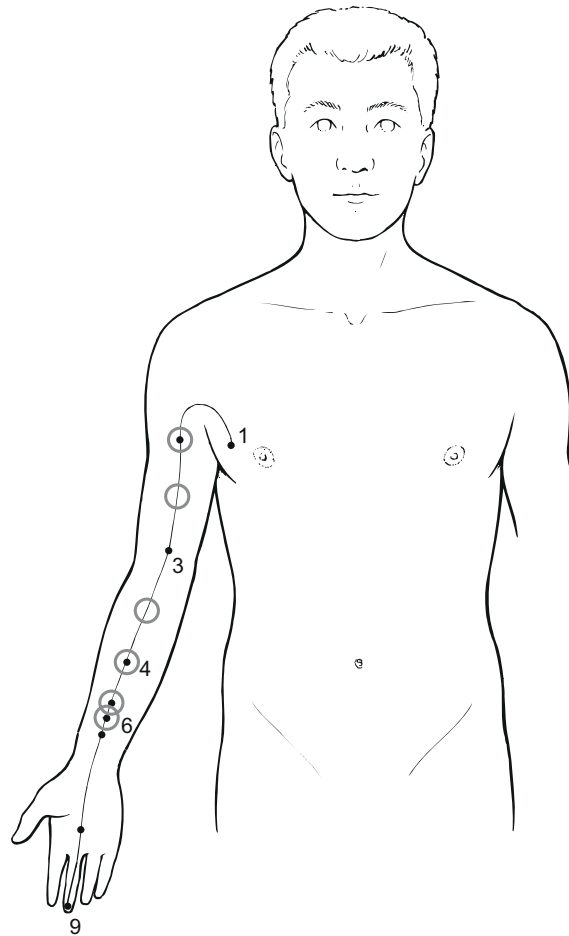


FIGURE 4-10 Course of the Pericardium (P) channel. Conditions of the chest, heart, nausea and emotional complaints.

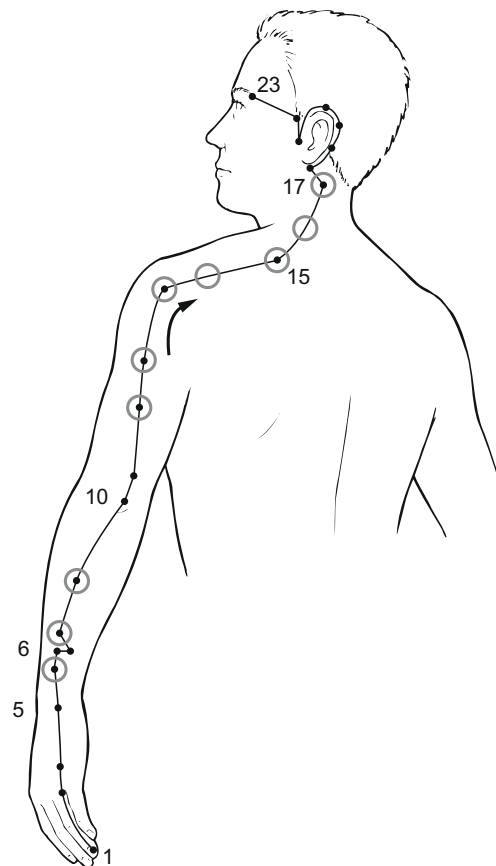


FIGURE 4-11 Course of the San Jiao (Triple Warmer – SJ or TW) channel. Conditions of the chest, ear, eye, throat and shoulders. Cupping therapy to the upper arm and shoulder points can be employed

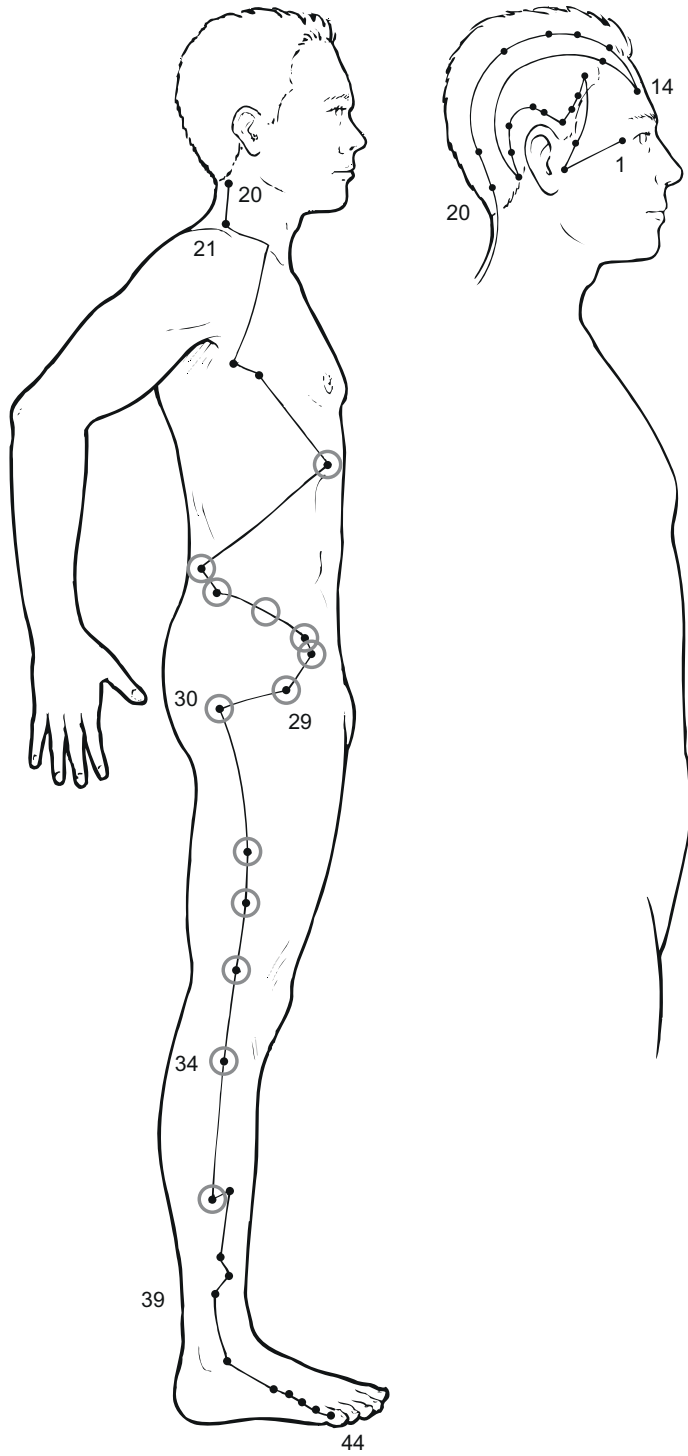


FIGURE 4-12 Course of the Gall Bladder (GB) channel. Conditions of the head, i.e. migraine, eye, chest, muscular complaints and febrile diseases. Cupping therapy to the trunk and moving cupping to the leg points can be employed.

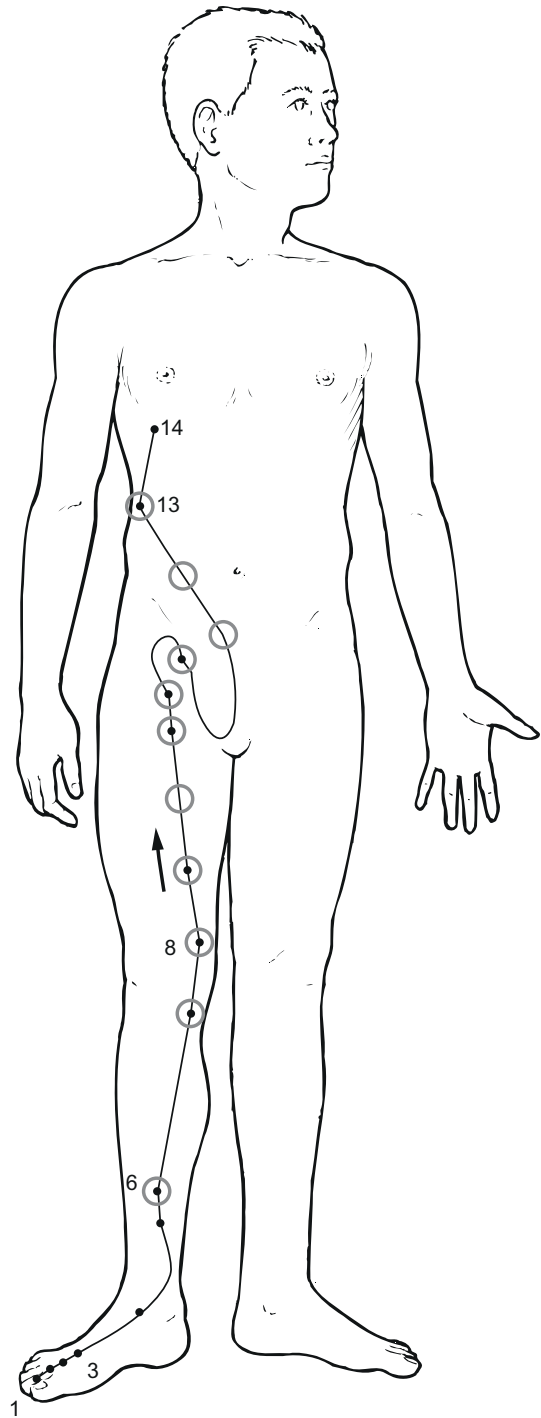


FIGURE 4-13 Course of the Liver (Liv) channel. Conditions of mental, emotional, digestive and urogenital systems. Cupping therapy on the abdominal and leg points can be employed.

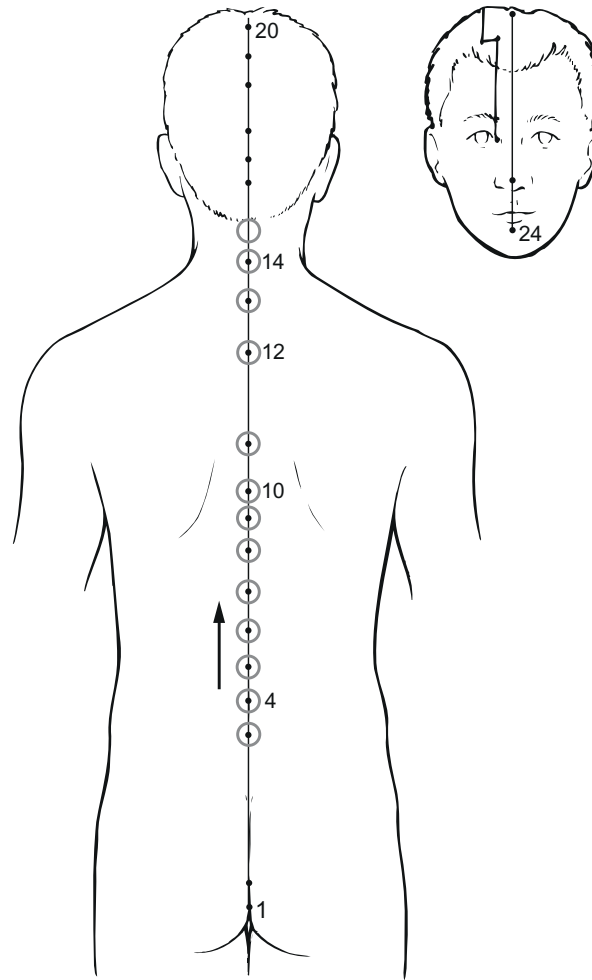


FIGURE 4-14 Course of the Du Mai (Governing Vessel – DU or GV) channel. Conditions of the head, neck, febrile diseases and Qi. All 10 cupping methods can safely be applied to this channel, on the trunk of the body.

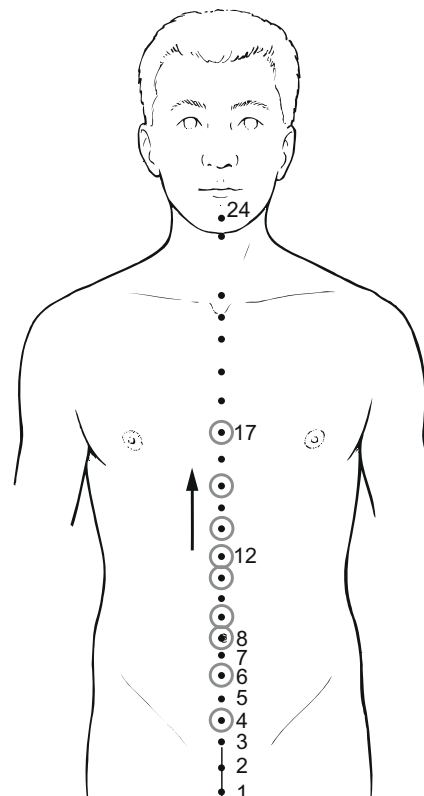


FIGURE 4-15 Course of the Ren Mai (Conception Vessel – Ren or CV) channel. Conditions of abdomen, digestive, urogenital and Qi. Limited cupping methods can be applied on this channel.

types of compression garments or bandages, and gravity. Since the origin of the lymph is the blood plasma, the two fluids are very much interconnected and inseparable physiologically.

As the lymph circulates between the cells, it collects waste matter including dead blood cells, toxic material and, if present, some cancer cells. While blood is responsible for collecting and distributing oxygen, nutrients and hormones nourishing the entire body, the lymphatic system is responsible for collecting and removing waste products in tissues, acting as a systematic garbage collection service! When this waste is not collected adequately or effectively, it congregates as a localized congestion. Waste-laden lymph is filtered by lymph nodes that are located throughout the body, some superficially under the skin and others situated deeper in tissue in the abdomen and neck, under the arms and the intercostal spaces both to the front and back of the rib cage. The function of these lymph nodes is to remove some fluid and toxic matter as well as killing many pathogens. They are also sometimes responsible for trapping cancerous cells, slowing down the spread of the disease.

During cupping therapy, in particular when 'Moving cupping' is employed, both blood and lymph circulatory systems are simultaneously stimulated to work more efficiently. This results in a more efficient collection and transportation mechanism for toxic substances, depositing them into the lymphatic system to be destroyed, and allowing the circulation of fresh lymph in order to nourish the tissues and generate a booster to the immune system (Fig. 4-16).

CUPPING THERAPY AND LYMPHATIC DRAINAGE

As mentioned above, during a normal course of cupping therapy blood and lymph are activated simultaneously. In a healthy person this improved circulation of the cardiovascular system is a beneficial outcome and one that the practitioner and the patient both desire. However, this might not be the case with patients suffering from lymphoedema (swelling caused by obstruction of the lymph vessels or abnormalities in the development of lymph vessels) or lymphomas (cancers that occur from within the lymphatic system).

Definition and Signs of Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is a swelling caused by a build-up of lymph fluid in the tissues due to a compromised lymphatic system. This condition is considered not to be a serious health problem and it is often neglected. Lymphoedema is caused by injury to the lymphatic vessels. It is most frequently seen after surgery or radiation therapy, which can cause unintended damage to the lymphatic drainage system. It is especially common after surgery and radiation therapy are used in combination to treat breast cancer. Lymphoedema can also be associated with accidents or any other sort of disease or problem that can inhibit the lymph from proper function. Symptoms include severe fatigue, a heavy swollen limb or localized fluid accumulation in other areas, deformity, and decolorization of the skin overlying the lymphoedema.

Signs and Symptoms of Lymphoma

Lymphoma is a type of cancer that occurs when there is a fault in the way a lymphocyte is produced, resulting in an abnormal cell. Like normal lymphocytes, the cancerous lymphocytes can grow in many parts of the body, including the lymph nodes, spleen, bone marrow, blood or other organs. There are two main types of cancer of the lymphatic system: Hodgkin's disease and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. A painless swelling in the neck, groin or axilla (armpit) may have been a reason for a visit to the practitioner. Other symptoms may accompany the swelling, such as fevers, night sweats, tiredness, weight loss, itching and, sometimes, pain after consuming alcohol. A lymphoma can occur in any part of the lymphatic system or outside it. Metastasis (spread of the cancer) can be within the lymphatic system or outside it.

Cupping therapy is categorically contraindicated and should be avoided on limbs affected by cancer or on limbs at risk of lymphoedema.

Beverley de Valois, personal communication, 2013

BLOOD

A kind of material transformed from the essence of food produced through functional activity of Qi, which circulates through the blood vessels and nourishes the body tissue.

Wang Bao Xiang, Dong Xue Mei, 1992

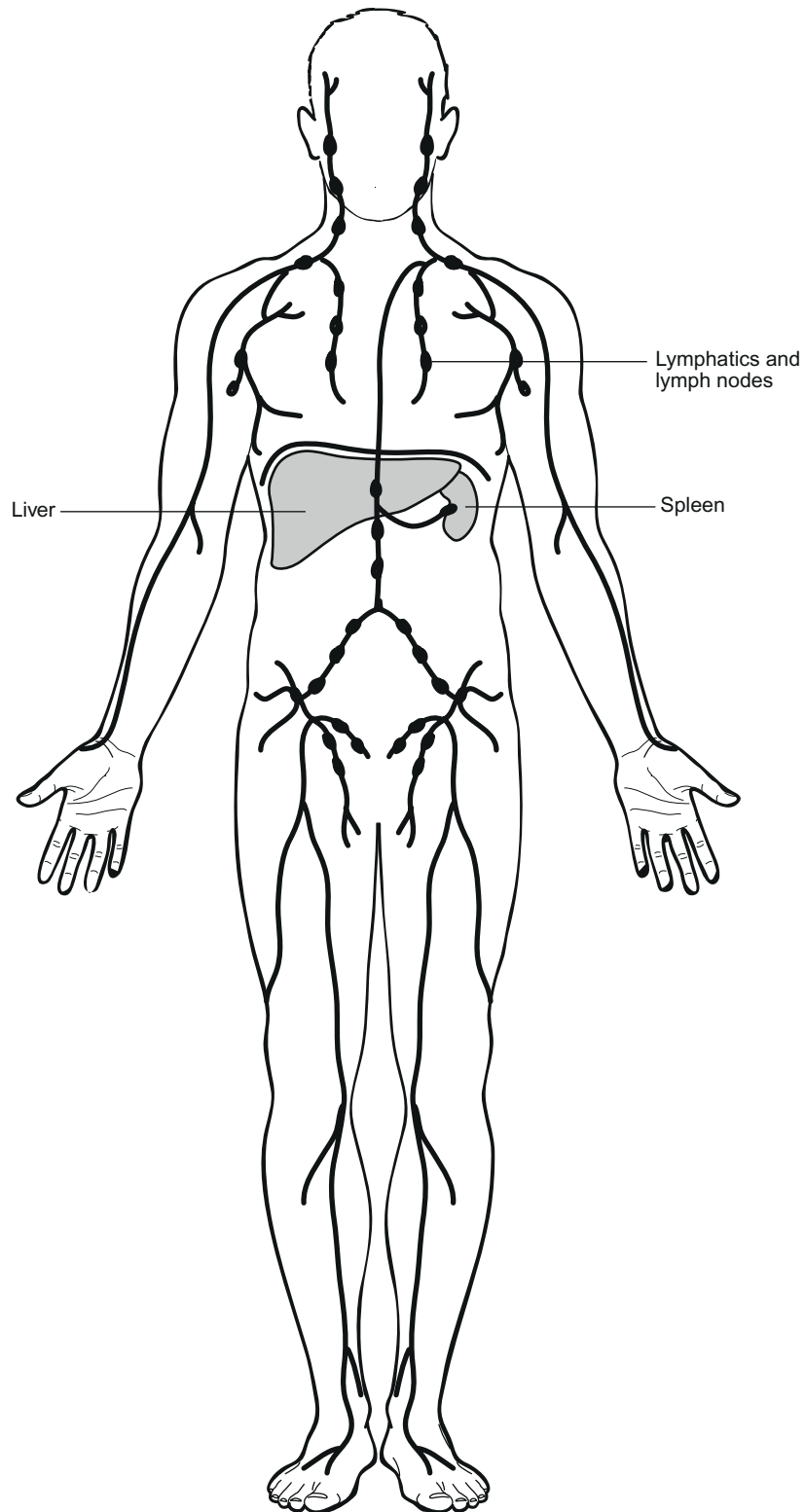


FIGURE 4-16 The lymphatic system.

Whenever Blood is mentioned throughout this book, it is within the context of TCM teaching (i.e. that the Blood is derived from Food and Qi and produced by the Spleen).

Like the skin, Blood has a different role to play in TCM from that of Western medicine. One of the most important characteristics of the Blood in TCM is that it contains Qi (life force). Qi is the locomotive of Blood. 'Blood is inseparable from Qi itself, Qi infuses life into Blood; without Qi, Blood would be an inert fluid' (Maciocia, 1989). Where Qi moves, Blood also moves, and vice versa: where Blood moves, Qi follows. When compared, Blood is Yin where Qi is Yang. Blood circulates in blood vessels as well as in the channels and collaterals. The Liver, Heart and Spleen have a special relationship with Blood. The Liver stores the Blood and is also responsible for the smooth flow of Qi within the organs. The Heart governs and harmonizes the smooth flow of Blood and blood vessels. The Spleen's responsibility is to rejuvenate Blood as well as control and keep the Blood within the vessels.

Blood Stagnation/Stasis

The TCM patterns 'Blood stagnation', 'blood stasis' and 'Blood congealing' all describe the same disorder. For some reason, Blood is obstructed and is not *moving freely* within the organs or blood vessels, causing discomfort. The most distinct symptom of Blood stasis is pain with a fixed, sharp or stabbing character. This type of pain can be felt deep in the internal organs or quite superficially at the muscular and skin level. *Light, Medium, Strong, Moving and Bleeding cupping methods are employed during the treatment of Blood stasis/stagnation syndromes.* During Bleeding cupping, however, *Blood stasis* is achieved by removing some blood from the stagnated location, thus encouraging a fast supply of fresh blood to the area. All other cupping methods have a similar action but tend to be milder.

QI

Many people frequently ask the question: 'what is the true meaning of Qi?' My understanding of Qi is the life force itself. It is the invisible force behind all happenings – like air and wind, immaterial yet with substance. When I travel in a car I often put my hand out of the window and feel the force of the wind, trying to hold it in my palm. It is so real, yet so immaterial and elusive.

'The Qi of life', 'vital force' and 'life force' all are Western attempts to describe the meaning of Qi, but there is no Western equivalent. Often we hear comments such as, 'last week I was very ill and lethargic, my Qi level was so low that all I did was stay in bed. Today I feel better and more upbeat and much brighter too.' In other words, we all experience the existence of Qi continuously.

Movement and heat signify Qi. Movement of any kind requires Qi, and often this is manifested as heat. Lack of Qi, on the other hand, is signified by cold and sluggishness. In the clinical situation too, when a patient complains of feeling cold, tiredness often accompanies their symptom. It is an old Turkish custom that, when a chair is vacated it must be allowed to cool down before someone else takes it. There is a genuine concern and fear of catching another person's unknown or hidden illness through their body warmth left on the chair. When treating a disease that is in the Qi Level, according to the 'Four Levels of Differentiation of Syndromes', the external pathogen is still fighting at the skin level and the body's overall resistance is still good. Some of the clinical manifestations are a high fever, a cough with thin yellow phlegm, wheezing and thirst. Cupping treatment at this level is very effective. There are two major conditions associated with Qi phenomena: Qi deficiency and Qi stagnation. Within these two main categories there are subcategories (for more information, see [Kaptchuk \[1983\], p. 38](#)).

Qi deficiency symptoms include unexplained tiredness, breathlessness, speaking with a very low voice ('like an ant'), poor appetite and an empty pulse. The clinical manifestations of Qi stagnation are moving pain (wandering pain), feeling of distension (breast or stomach) emotional conditions such as depression, mood disorders or irritability, and a wiry or tight pulse.

WEI QI

Wei Qi is the protective/defensive Qi that travels just under the skin within the membrane (thin layer of tissue which lines or covers an organ). It forms the outermost defensive wall against all external pathogens, such as Wind, Cold, Damp and Heat. Wei Qi also regulates the opening and closing of the

pores of the skin, and is therefore in control of perspiration. It warms and nourishes the skin, its source is Blood and Qi, and it is governed by the Lungs.

Wei Qi is one type of Yang-Qi, the result of the digestion and absorption of food by the Spleen and Stomach, having the functions of protecting the integument (skin, outer layer) and musculature against external pathogen, adjusting sweat secretion and nourishing the skin portion.

Failure of Wei Qi to protect the body against diseases: a morbid state marked by spontaneous sweating and aversion to wind, caused by deficiency of the superficial Qi, lowering the ability of the body to resist diseases, leading to the invasion of exopathic factors.

Wang Bao Xiang, Dong Xue Mei, 1992

Clinical manifestations at this level include fever with little or no sweating, occipital headache, stiff neck, thirst, sore throat, cough and a feeling of chill. Treating conditions at this level with cupping therapy is highly effective.

STAGNATION

In TCM the term ‘stagnation’ usually refers to congestion or accumulation through lack of movement – movement of any kind (i.e. Food, Body Fluids, Qi or Blood).

Stagnation of Food (Food Accumulation)

This pattern is often seen in children, where the parents are eager to feed the child with rich foods, sometimes with force.

High sugar intake, cold drinks and foods or irregular feeding habits can also cause accumulation problems. In adults, food accumulation occurs with the consumption of sugary, rich and fatty foods, often eating before feeling hungry, and lack of exercise, in particular walking. Food stagnation syndrome is also prevalent in today’s young generation, where eating out late, ordering fast food, high-sugar drinks, or a takeaway meal is considered to be ‘fashionable’ instead of time-consuming home cooking! This impairs the Spleen’s function of transformation and transportation. Clinical manifestations of Food stagnation are restlessness, vomiting and the production of phlegm, diarrhoea, constipation, a hardened stomach and painful abdomen.

As far as Western medicine is concerned, the spleen is the largest single organ of the lymphatic system in the body. It is responsible for manufacturing cells of the immune system and for filtering from the bloodstream the old and damaged cells, as well as foreign matter, such as bacteria, which circulate through its rich network of blood vessels. For this reason when damage to the Spleen’s Qi transpires through poor eating habits, the risk of compromising the immune system is a very real one. *Empty (Flash), Light, Medium and Light-Moving cupping methods can be applied during the treatment of Food stagnation complaints.*

Stagnation of Body Fluids

The Stomach is the origin of Body Fluids. The Lung is responsible for regulating water circulation throughout the body (between three [San] Jiao). The Lungs support the skin, which in its turn nourishes the Kidney. The lungs also excrete about 500 mL of water, as vapour in the expired air, under average conditions in a day. Under similar conditions the skin loses about 1000 mL as perspiration.

Body Fluids are the necessary Yin substance in the Stomach that helps it carry out the proper digestion process. When this process is impaired by Cold and Heat pathogens, or too many raw foods, this in turn damages the Spleen’s functions. Clinical manifestations of Fluid stagnation are very similar to those of Food stagnation, with the exception of fluids accumulating in the extremities (i.e. the hands and feet). Fluid build-up is also likely when the lymphatic system is overloaded or damaged (by operation, radiation or accident) and in elderly people who might suffer from Heart- or Kidney-Qi deficiency. *Empty (Flash), Light and Light-moving cupping methods are particularly effective methods when dealing with Fluid stagnation conditions.*

Qi Stagnation

This is the failure of Qi to flow smoothly throughout the body. The main clinical manifestations are a feeling of distension, distending pain that moves from place to place, abdominal masses that appear and disappear, mental depression, irritability, a gloomy feeling, mood swings, frequent sighing, a wiry or tight pulse and a slightly purple tongue. This condition is very apparent during the menstrual cycle, where the liver Qi is often impaired. Mental depression and associated conditions also come under Qi stagnation syndrome (see Chapter 14). One way of dealing with Qi stagnation is to administer 'channel/meridian cupping' as described in the channel illustrations. *Empty, Light, Light-moving and Medium cupping methods can all be employed when treating the Qi stagnation syndromes.*

Stagnation of Blood and Blood Stasis

See the section on Blood, above.

BLOODLETTING

For the history and practice of bloodletting, see Chapters 1 and 9.

GUA SHA

Professor Wong Lun of the School of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Melbourne, Australia, who was my first Chinese medicine teacher, was a great believer in and practitioner of both cupping and Gua Sha. Like cupping, very few practitioners use Gua Sha, and this includes the Chinese doctors in China. The only comprehensive study to date is the work of Arya [Nielsen \(1995\)](#). Gua Sha is a technique very similar to cupping, inasmuch as it creates a deliberate hyperthermia in order to bring the Heat and Wind pathogens to the surface. Nielsen explains that 'Gua means to scrape or scratch', and Sha is 'cholera, heat, skin rash'. 'The technique of Gua Sha intentionally brings the Sha rash to the surface. By expressing the rash that marks the crisis of the Sha syndrome, Sha-evil is eliminated and the Sha syndrome resolved.'

Gua Sha is used where pain, Heat and stagnation are present. The treatment itself is very simple and pain free in practised hands. However, in untrained hands it can be rather uncomfortable and sometimes painful, especially when used on the bony parts of the body and on rather thinly built patients.

Traditionally, a porcelain Chinese soup spoon is used to scrape the skin ([Fig. 4-17](#)). Before scraping the desired area, oil or talcum powder must be applied to facilitate smooth rubbing. Long, gentle strokes are applied until bruising appears on the skin. The colour of the rash and the time it takes to appear guide the practitioner. One of my favourite conditions to treat with Gua Sha is a muscular 'Bi',

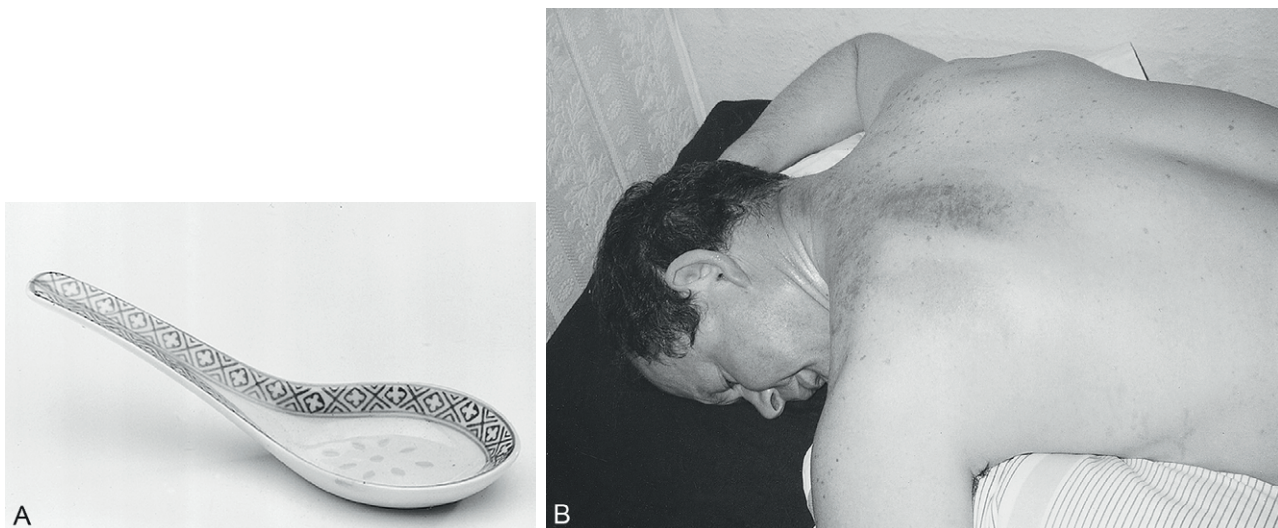


FIGURE 4-17 (A) Gua Sha. The traditional porcelain soup spoon used during Gua Sha. (B) Following the Gua Sha treatment, a mark (Sha) appears.



FIGURE 4-18 (A, B) Gua Sha over cupping points.

and ‘plum-stone throat’ syndromes. For longstanding muscular pains that also bring about stagnation of Qi and Blood, Gua Sha is extremely effective in releasing the stagnation and restoring the flow of Blood and Qi to the area. For the treatment of ‘plum-stone throat’ syndrome, which appears in extreme emotional conditions, the sternum is treated by Gua Sha from the top to the end of the xiphoid process, using gentle, even strokes as this area is very bony and rubbing can be painful. As a diagnostic tool in people with long-term emotional problems (i.e. Liver-Qi stagnation), palpating this area can also be painful. To Gua Sha this region releases the chest stagnation and opens the Heart. For muscular pain in the arms, legs and neck, where cupping can be difficult, Gua Sha is very effective, especially to the upper neck, where cupping is almost impossible. On my recent visit to Taiwan (February, 2012), I witnessed many practitioners applying Gua Sha following cupping therapy, in particular to the areas where cupping has left a dark or purple cupping mark. This action helps the local stagnation to disperse much quickly (Fig. 4-18).

CUPPING

The following paragraph reflects my own theory on the mechanism of cupping therapy, in which I passionately believe.

Cupping application on its own is a unique expression of a considerable energy exchange between the cells of the physical layers of the body, which incidentally triggers and kick-starts the healing process. The moment a cup is placed upon the skin this amazing energy exchange begins to unfold! The negative power inside the cup forces almost every molecule, cell, and tissue into a *movement*, i.e. towards the source of the power, which is the suction cup on top of the skin. When the pressure is released from the cup at the end of a treatment, the skin and each physical parts and particles directly under the cup returns to their original state. As a direct result of this forced activity, Qi (life force/energy) is created. With this newly found Qi, Heat is also generated. Heat in turn accelerates the metabolic rate, hence triggering the chain of activity and communication between the cells, tissues, channels and finally the organs! (See Fig. 4-1.)

Cupping regulates the flow of Qi and Blood. It helps to draw out and eliminate pathogenic factors such as Wind, Cold, Damp and Heat. Cupping also moves Qi and Blood and opens the pores of

the skin, thus precipitating the removal of pathogens through the skin itself. In my opinion, *nothing moves Qi and Blood faster than cupping*. From the very start of its application one can observe the Blood moving in the direction of the cup. Where a patient's Qi is deficient this movement will be slow; if the Qi is abundant it will be much quicker. One can actually observe this process if glass cups are used.

As discussed earlier, cupping is particularly effective when the external pathogen still resides in the superficial energetic area of the body, the defensive/protective level (Wei Qi). Whatever the vessel used, the objective of the treatment remains the same: to remove the external pathogens from the deeper layers of the body and restore the circulation of Qi, Blood and the Body Fluids, thus bringing health to the sick.

Below is a rare Japanese account on the subject of cupping therapy, taken from a Japanese cupping-set manual (no author is mentioned).

The effect of this therapy can be classified into two categories: the general (purification of blood, improvement of circulatory functions of blood and lymph, regulation and betterment of automatic nervous system, etc.) and the local (removal of pain, relaxation of stiff muscles, etc.). The former effects, that is, effects upon the bodily tissues and organs, are as follows:

1. EFFECTS UPON THE SKIN

According to one experiment on a 35-year-old male subject, fine hair on his back grew to thick hair of 1 to 1.5 cm long after about 140 applications of treatment by this method. This is because the direct physical stimuli on hair roots and the expansion of blood vessels of the skin, by means of the pull of low pressure, cause an increase in blood circulation, a rise of skin temperature, the promotion of metabolism within skin tissue, better functioning of sweat and sebaceous glands and of cutaneous respiration and sufficient supply of nutrition to the tissues. The essential point of 'cupping therapy' is not only to withdraw stagnant old blood within the skin but also to remove poisonous substances from the surface of the skin. This is why, when a doctor continues this therapy on a patient with his bare hands, they become yellowy. It accelerates secretion of salts and sebaceous matter and the excretion of water. Another important point is that it strengthens the renewing power of the skin and its resistance to various harmful conditions.

2. EFFECTS UPON MUSCLES

The pull of low-pressure 'cupping therapy', the functioning of blood vessels within the muscles is activated in response to the stimulation of the subcutaneous capillary vessels. Thus the expansion of the blood vessels in the muscles facilitates the flow of blood and has a remarkable effect on a stiff shoulder, for example, removing congested blood. Moreover, this facilitates the flow of lymph. After the 'cupping therapy', the skin will be all aglow as a result of the rise in skin temperature and muscles by the increase of the blood flow.

3. EFFECTS UPON JOINTS

Chronic joint rheumatism is one of the conditions for which 'cupping therapy' is effective. In this case the treatment is concentrated on the area of the joints concerned. When the condition is mild, an almost complete cure is possible, and this results from the better flow of blood within the joint, the activity and secretion of synovial fluids. In case of muscular spasms around the joints, they can be removed.

4. EFFECTS UPON THE DIGESTIVE ORGANS

Most patients feel hungry after the cupping therapy on the stomach region. As the digestive organs, especially spleen and stomach, looked upon as the 'engine' of the human body are regarded as the most important; and the treatment of the middle Jiao is considered equally important. In other words, as the natural healing power of the body derives its energies mainly from the digestive organs, a great emphasis is laid on the treatment of the stomach, spleen and intestines. The pulling power of low pressure upon the belly stimulates the inside of the organs, their peristaltic movement and secretion of digestive fluids, and strengthens thereby the power of digestion and absorption of nourishment as well as the power of secretion. Therefore, this therapy has remarkable effects upon chronic gastroenteritis disorders and the constipation as a whole. These organs are affected favourably even during the treatment of the back by way of the stimulation of the spinal nerves and the automatic nerves. Besides these the therapy strengthens the muscles of the respiratory organs.

EFFECTS OF CUPPING THERAPY

Purification of Blood

Among the general effects, the most important is the effect upon the circulatory system. Professor Kentaro Takagi of Nagoya University says that the skin-stimulating therapies are significant in that they awaken the greatest responses in the circulatory system. His remarks were not necessarily directed towards cupping therapy, but I think it has much in common with the skin-stimulating therapies he mentioned. Owing to the pull of low pressure, the flow of blood in the arteries and veins increases, although in the case of the latter, localized spots of congested blood appear and then disappear. It is possible to ease the interruption of blood circulation and congestion and to stop the inflammatory extravasation (escaping of body fluids such as blood) from the tissues. Therefore, facilitation of the flow of blood is the most important characteristic of this therapy. It is very beneficial for hardened arteries, stiff shoulders, etc.

Dr Katase of Osaka University suggests that this therapy may influence the composition of blood: it may help to increase red and white blood cells and change acid blood into alkaline or neutral. This leads to the purification of blood.

Effects on the Nervous System

Cupping therapy stimulates the sensory nerves of the skin. As demonstrated in a clinical experiment conducted at Kobe University, the inhibitory effects on hypersensitive pain are not limited to the area of direct treatment, but include the areas controlled by the relevant nerves. Treatment on the back is mainly directed to the central line (spinal nerves and parasympathetic nerves) and the sympathetic nerves beside it. The stimulation of these has, it can be said, a good influence not only on the automatic nervous system itself but also on various organs under its control.

Cupping therapy is, like massage, effective against the so-called syndrome of general malaise, such as chronic headaches, dizziness, languor (mental or physical weariness), stiff shoulders, fatigue, etc. These are said to derive from anxiety, worry and bodily pain. It is also effective against endogenous chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, neuralgia and rheumatism. During treatment with this therapy on the back or the loins, for example, some middle-aged or elderly patients fall asleep, snoring loudly. This clearly shows one of the effects upon the nervous system. The mechanism of its effectiveness will be clarified some day. Thus the general and localized effects of this therapy strengthen the healing power against diseases and, together with a healthy diet and psychotherapy, cure or prevent disease completely. *All cupping methods have some degree of influence on the nervous system.*

In October 1995, the World Federation of Acupuncture Societies held a 4-day symposium in Istanbul, Turkey. The theme of the gathering was acupuncture and Qi, and I presented a paper on cupping and Qi. Over 200 acupuncturists from around the world attended the seminar, of which only a handful were using cupping in their practice. Most lacked the basic knowledge and skills necessary for cupping and were unaware of the benefits this technique can offer their patients.

Cupping therapy, following a few thousand years of use, development and perfection, has been increasingly accepted by variety of cultures and people. Its application is extensive, its efficacy is good, its cost is low, and its easy application and safety without adverse side-effects resulted in many practitioners introducing cupping therapy into their practices.

Cupping therapy is suitable for the treatment of pains, Bi syndromes, inflammatory conditions, diseases of the digestive, circulatory and respiratory systems, some skin conditions such as boils and eczema, wind-stroke (facial paralysis), weakness of the muscles, sports injuries, high blood pressure, the common cold, emotional conditions and cosmetic purposes such as treating cellulite and during weight-loss programmes.

Wind Element

My personal opinion is that cupping is the most powerful complementary medicine tool to fight against the Wind pathogen. Given all the 'external pathogenic factors', the Wind element is by far the most affected and influenced as a result of cupping application. In almost all traditional medicine practices from around the world, the Wind element is seen as the most perilous external pathogen of all. Wind pathogen can cause external as well as internal diseases, therefore it is always recommended to avoid situations or exposure to the Wind element. In TCM too, when we look at the disease pathogenesis,

Wind pathogen is considered as a major causative factor. As well as external Wind attacks such as Wind-Cold, Wind-Heat or Wind-Damp, which are considered as the 'root' of many diseases, cupping therapy is shown to be quite an effective treatment tool. The 'internal Wind patterns' too respond well to cupping therapy. These patterns are usually the result of chronic deficiencies, such as Blood or Yin deficiency, or extremely hot weather conditions. In TCM, for instance, 'trembling or shakes' (muscular as well as internal tremors) are considered to be a sign of 'Wind-attack' pattern.

Cupping: the Multi-function Therapy

Finally, **cupping therapy has a multi-function action**. For instance, it can treat pain, improve the metabolism, improve blood microcirculation, activate the lymphatic system and the toxin elimination process, tone up the skin, and remove pathogenic factors such as Wind, Heat or Cold, all at the same time! To reiterate my earlier statement:

Nothing moves Qi and Blood faster than cupping!

Diseases and treatments will be discussed in detail later in this book.

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