

## Perspectives on Ho-sha and Kyo-jitsu: Historical and Modern Clinical Reflections

by Stephen Birch

NOTE: In this article all Japanese words are italicized while Chinese words are left unitalicized.

I would like to congratulate **NAJOM** for pulling together such an interesting collection of papers on the important but difficult-to-grasp concepts of *ho-sha* [補-寫] and *kyo-jitsu* [虛-實]. These are concepts, clinical assessments/judgments, and techniques that I, like many acupuncturists before me, have struggled with. I enjoyed the different perspectives and ideas described in **NAJOM** volume 19, number 54 and feel inspired to add to the conversation. I doubt I have anything useful or interesting to say, which has never stopped me before, but I do apologize if the following seems too tedious. Perhaps I should follow the advice of Yoshio Manaka, one of my teachers, who said the concepts of *ho-sha* and *kyo-jitsu* (tonification-dispersion and deficiency-excess) have different meanings according to who, when, and in what contexts they are used. He felt explanations about them in acupuncture texts don't do justice to their depth and complexity and thus he elected not to discuss them further [Manaka, Itaya, Birch 1995]. But I am not as smart as my teacher.

### A contrast of approaches

There is a fascinating and very big difference in the descriptions of needling techniques for *ho* and *sha* in the **Neijing** and **Nanjing**. These differences clearly suggest quite different concepts of *kyo* and *jitsu* and the purposes and possible actions of *ho* and *sha*.

An important innovation of the **Neijing** was the concept that problems causing a condition of *kyo* are at the root of disease. Once a *kyo* condition occurs (due for example to emotional imbalance), environmental influences (called *xieqi* or *iyaki* [邪氣]) can penetrate into the body and cause symptoms and disease.<sup>1</sup> The basic idea in the **Neijing**, where needles are introduced as tools for treatment, is that with the right technique and internal condition of the practitioner,<sup>2</sup> one can get the Qi to arrive and strengthen (*ho*) the Qi. If this strengthening is sufficient, it drives out the *iyaki* (literally disperses, *san* [散]).<sup>3</sup> If this does not occur, one can also use a *sha* technique to drain the *iyaki*, causing it to leak out of the body. So the basic idea of *ho* and *sha* in the **Neijing** is

one of strengthening the normal Qi and removing the pathogenic Qi.

The **Nanjing** on the other hand describes a completely different idea of *ho* and *sha*. It proposes two levels of Qi, one more superficial than the *jingmai* or channels and one within the channels. This is congruent with some of the concepts in the **Neijing** that certain Qi flows within the channels (*yingqi* [營氣]) and other Qi outside of the channels (e.g. *weiqi* [衛氣]). To accomplish *ho* according to the **Nanjing**, one first gathers Qi (*deqi* [得氣]) by a method of touch<sup>4</sup> and then inserts the needle superficially to the level above the channel; one gets the Qi to gather there and *then* pushes the needle deeper (into the channel) to introduce what one has gathered into the channels. Thus one accomplishes *ho* – increasing the channel's Qi content. Conversely, *sha* involves the deeper insertion of the needle after the Qi has been gathered by a method of touch, needling to the level of the channel, where one gathers Qi again and then pulls the needle back to the superficial level, thus decreasing the Qi content of the channel. Unschuld describes this as a kind of 'internal exchange' [Unschuld 1986:639].<sup>5</sup> The **Nanjing** (see Unschuld [1986:626]) and many commentators describe the more superficial Qi as 'weiqi' and the deeper Qi as 'yingqi,' but one has to wonder about this kind of naming. The descriptions of these techniques seem to imply that the *weiqi* and *yingqi* are inter-changeable. Probably many attribute a kind of resilient quality to these Qi<sup>6</sup> and will not like the idea of their inter-changeability. I suspect though that the **Nanjing** had other ideas in mind, to do with yin-yang balance and the effects it has on the overall Qi of the body (such as the *shengqi* [生氣], see below for further elaboration).

Another important difference between the **Neijing** and **Nanjing** can be seen in the following: **Lingshu** chapter one contains passages that are considered origin texts that other **Neijing** passages about needling comment on [Chace, Bensky 2009, Keegan 1998]. It makes the following statements about *ho* and *sha*: 迎而奪之, 惡得無虛, 追而濟之, 惡得無實 "By meeting it and taking it away, how could one not achieve depletion [of the qi]? By pursuing and assisting it, how could one not achieve repletion [of the qi]?" [Chace, Bensky 2009]. Most commentators interpret this practically as saying 'If you needle with the flow of the channel how can you fail to produce *ho*?' and 'If you needle against the flow of the channel how can you fail to produce *sha*?' The text and its grammar express this as a kind of certainty (if you do x you will effect *ho*, if you do y you will effect *sha*). So naturally everyone should want to do this. But the angle of needle direction is not the only way to interpret this pivotal passage.

**Nanjing** 79 re-expresses the passage with slight modifications as follows: 迎而奪之, 安得無虛? 隨而濟之, 安得無實? and then proceeds to explain this in terms of the five-phase creative cycle, thereby explaining the theory of **Nanjing** 69:<sup>7</sup> "For cases of *kyo* (apply) *ho* (to) the mother, for cases of *jitsu* (apply) *sha* (to) the child." [Unschuld 1986:583] In this passage of the **Nanjing**, *ho* and *sha* are achieved by a judicious application of five phase theory in point and channel selection, which is very different from the original passage in the **Neijing** which is (most commonly) seen as describing essential aspects of the needling techniques. Instead of focussing on increasing or decreasing Qi amounts directly with a needle, the **Nanjing** appears to maintain that one can achieve *ho* and *sha* by restoring balance (among the five phases). This is similar to the *ho* and *sha* needling techniques of the **Nanjing**, where the balance produced is a kind of yin-yang balance (transfer between the more superficial and deeper layers of Qi as discussed above).

What do these two different visions of *ho* and *sha* from the **Neijing** and **Nanjing** have in common? What do they imply about the nature of *kyo* and *jitsu*? These are difficult questions that no one else seems to want to discuss, and maybe I should be smart and stop here, but I have some thoughts. I will share them briefly.

The **Neijing** model works to correct *kyo* and *jitsu* of the *jingmai* in order to help regulate the Qi. **Lingshu** 75 tells us as a definition of acupuncture, "needling regulates the qi" [Rochat de la Vallee 2006:79]. *Kyo* in a channel is corrected by *ho*, adding Qi (from some unstated place) into that channel, while *jitsu* is corrected by encouraging the problem (*iyaki*) to leak out using the *sha* technique. Both of these methods use needling techniques that are dependent on the internal state of the practitioner and the level of skill of the practitioner. The **Nanjing** describes what sound like more reproducible techniques that focus on gathering and moving Qi around within the body to create more balance among different (yin-yang) Qi levels, and allowing any practitioner to do something by employing five-phase theory according to the ideas in **Nanjing** 79 and through the treatment principles and patterns of **Nanjing** 69.

Behind the **Neijing** model lie unstated ideas about what the *ho* technique might be doing, because it's not clear what kind of Qi is involved. The **Nanjing** appears to be more explicit. Since the technique revolves around manipulating Qi between different levels in the body, it is working more with the idea of balance. This description of needling techniques also implies a model of the *yingqi* and *weiqi* as basically the same thing – Qi, in its yin and yang manifestations. The techniques of *ho* and *sha* are

not about changing one form of Qi into the other by moving the two Qi between their two levels. Instead it seems to be about manipulating Qi in terms of its depth and location so that it can act differently according to where it is and thus create (yin-yang) balance. Unschuld drew attention to this [Unschuld 1986:639], but I have found no other author that has focused on this. Here the Qi that is talked about is of an undifferentiated nature, a kind of all-encompassing global Qi of the body that is named differently according to location and action/function so that medical practitioners could make differentiations in order to guide treatment [Birch 2009, Chiu 1986, Rochat de la Vallee 2006, Unschuld 2003].

What kind of description of this all-encompassing global Qi or natural healing power does the *Nanjing* give? It is likely that the *Nanjing's* model is based on the idea of the shengqi or *seiki* [生氣], the vital qi described in *Nanjing* 8. This *seiki* is rooted in the 'moving Qi between the kidneys' and is the foundation for all the major systems in the body (Qi, zang-fu, jingmai, sanjiao). *Nanjing* 8 states these relationships thus:

"All the twelve channels (*jingmai*) are linked with the origin of the vital qi. The 'origin of the vital qi' refers to the root and foundation of the twelve channels – that is to the 'moving qi' between the kidneys. This (qi) is the foundation of the [body's] five depots and six palaces (*zang* and *fu*); it is the root of the twelve channels; it is the gate of exhalation and inhalation, and the origin of the triple burner. It is also called the 'spirit guarding against the evil'. Hence the [moving] qi [between the kidneys] constitutes a person's root and foundation" [Unschuld 1986:130].<sup>8</sup>

Presumably when the vital Qi – *seiki* is in a healthier condition, the body's systems are better able to take care of what needs to be done.<sup>9</sup> It seems in the *Nanjing's* model that the job of an acupuncturist is to move Qi from one place to the other so that something (probably *seiki*) can do this. The idea in the *Nanjing* is to move Qi between the level inside the jingmai and above the jingmai and use the regulatory agency of five phase interactions. The *Neijing*, on the other hand, has a less-developed idea of the body taking care of itself and relies more on the imagery and language of adding influences (Qi) into the body as needed, and if this is not enough, to also remove disturbing influences (Qi) from the body rather than waiting for the body to try to resolve them. Evidence for these differences lies in the practical descriptions of how the *ho* and *sha* are carried out and the general background imagery and models employed in the different texts.

Another possible rationale can be proposed for

how natural healing is enhanced with needling. The Mawangdui sexual cultivation treatise the 'Heyinyang' [和陰陽] (circa 168 BCE) describes the arrival of Qi as follows: "The qi arrives, blood and qi flow freely, the ears and eyes are keen and bright, the skin gleams, the voice is clear, and the back, thighs and buttocks are sturdy, so that one 'attains divine illumination'" [Lo, Li 2010:381].<sup>10</sup> The needling techniques in both the *Neijing* and *Nanjing* require that the Qi arrive in order to be effective. Perhaps there was a common understanding based on passages like this from the Heyinyang that the arrival of Qi itself promotes vitality (Qi and blood flow, the senses are keener, the skin lustre improves, the physical body stronger),<sup>11</sup> while the actions of *ho* and *sha*, which are applied after the Qi arrives, help restore balance and order.

What I have described is quite different from modern explanations of *ho-sha* and their effects on *kyo-jitsu*. Modern texts tend to focus on hypothesized models of functional systems in the body that move into *kyo* and *jitsu* states, and *ho* and *sha* tend to be focused on correcting these *kyo* and *jitsu* states.

I believe the early acupuncture literature had not yet developed models like this. (It is not entirely clear to me whether this was due to lack of clarity in explanation or that such explanations were not intended). Instead, early literature focused on the rectification of a *kyo* condition of the *seiki* (shengqi)<sup>12</sup> and removal of pathogens (*kyaku-jitsu* conditions) that interfere with the *seiki's* function of maintaining a higher state of health.

*Ho* and *sha* techniques were dependent on the ability of practitioners to produce important changes within themselves so as to be able to influence the Qi (getting it to arrive). *Ho* and *sha* are directed to specific channels that are seen to be *kyo* or *jitsu* in order to also help restore better balance in the body, which itself encourages a better condition of the *seiki*. When the overall balance and distribution of *seiki* in the body is restored, healing occurs, problems are resolved, a higher, better physiological state of the patient is brought about. It seems to me that this is mediated through the *seiki* (or whichever term for the global Qi you prefer). I started working out this model a while ago and published a preliminary version of it in a paper three years ago where I described what is happening when we perform *ho* techniques – focusing on modelling the changes that can be observed in the pulses [Birch 2009]. Together with colleagues in Australia, I also studied the pulse changes associated with 'root treatment' (applying *ho* to the *kyo* channels and *sha* to the *jitsu* channels) in order to start figuring out the physiology of pulse changes and root treatment

[O'Brien et al. in press]. In this study we can see that fundamental changes occur in the body as a result of the root treatment. These changes also help reinforce the notion that the condition of the channels must be observed through pulse diagnosis, a principle premise of the very notion of the jingmai [經脈] (*keimyaku*) in the earliest treatise on the jingmai. *Lingshu* 10 states: 'the luomai can often be seen, while the jingmai cannot; to judge their *kyo/jitsu* condition, one must palpate the pulses'<sup>13</sup> [See Wu, Wu 1997 pages 570 and 574, and Matsumoto, Birch 1983 page 153.] It is through the pulses that we can observe the changes and condition of the channels. This gives us practical tools to assess the *kyo* and *jitsu* state of the channels and the effects of *ho* and *sha* on them. Modern needling techniques such as those we use in *Keiraku Chiryō* Meridian Therapy, the *ho* technique of *Toyohari* for example, are actually composite practical reproductions of many traditional ideas from various sources [see Shudo 1990:170-184, and for more details, Birch in preparation]. They include seemingly contradictory ideas from the *Neijing* and *Nanjing* [Birch in preparation].

All this seems to be very different than the notions of *ho* and *sha*, for example in moxibustion (*okyū*) and herbal medicine (*Kampo*). The effects of moxa as a tonic are seen sometime after the treatment when the stimulation of moxa triggers a range of biological reactions that help improve certain physiological parameters and create a higher functioning body – as can be seen in the excellent Moxafrica projects.<sup>14</sup>

The effects of moxa as *ho* build up gradually over time. The same is likely to be true with herbal products, which create changes in physiology gradually over time as the herbs are absorbed and reach their target systems. In acupuncture, the *ho* and *sha* techniques produce immediate changes at the time of needling that can be measured [Birch 2009, O'Brien et al. in press]. We thus see the same terms 'ho' [補] and 'sha' [寫] used in similar ways in three different medical practice systems, but with quite different actions both in terms of physiological effects and in time frames of action. *Ho* and *sha* thus appear to be very different concepts depending on the tradition of practice that uses them. I have focussed on needling above, since this is what I do, but I find myself coming full circle back to Manaka's cautionary words about terms like *ho* and *sha*.

As I stated in the beginning, I probably shouldn't have said anything. Based on the evidence I have come across, however, what I have described makes sense to me. I thought the different perspectives were not clearly represented in the various articles in *NAJOM* volume 19, number 54. Thank

you for reading this far and I hope I have not added to anyone's confusion.

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## Endnotes

1. See Li 2009:119.
2. See the excellent papers by Chace [2006] and Chace and Bensky [2009] for discussions of *Neijing* statements about the inner state of the practitioner. See also Birch [in preparation/submission] for further discussions.
3. *Suwen* 62 describes how with ho 'the evil qi will disperse' [Unschuld 2003:281]. This passage mirrors the *Lushi Chunqiu* [吕氏春秋] of the third century BC when it discusses health-preserving techniques that enhance one's Qi, "using the fresh and casting out the old, so there is a free flow within the interstices of the flesh. The vitalities (jingqi [精氣]) are renewed daily, heteropathic qi (xieqi) [邪氣] is completely expelled, and a full span of life is attained" [Sivin 1987:49].
4. See *Nanjing* 78 and 80 [Unschuld 1986:635+646] and discussions of this by Shudo [1990:170-171] and Wang [2008:523].
5. In his contrast of needling techniques between the *Neijing* and *Nanjing*, Unschuld describes

this as follows: "Obviously. The *Neijing* approach to filling and draining (ho and sha) is based on the assumption that an artificial hole opened by the needle serves, in addition to mouth and nose, as a further gate where influences may enter and leave the body corresponding to inhalation and exhalation. The *Nanjing*, with its concept of an internal exchange of influences between the sections of the protective (wei) and constructive (ying) influences, states, of course, that it is not necessary to link filling and draining to inhalation and exhalation" [Unschuld 1986:639]. This is the beginning theme of *Nanjing* 78. Interestingly the *Nanjing's* interpretation of ho and sha in relation to allowing Qi to enter or exit takes advantage of the Lingshu's definition of the acupoint: "(the acupoint) refers to where the divine ch'i (sic) travels freely and moves outward and inward, not to skin, flesh, sinews, and bones" [Sivin 1987:51]—See also the extensive discussion of this in Birch [in preparation].

6. Descriptions of the origin of the yingqi and weiqi such as *Lingshu* eighteen (see Matsumoto, Birch [1988:97-98] seem to imply a different nature, one not so easily exchangeable in a matter of seconds through manipulation of the needle.
7. As we know, *Nanjing* 69 forms the foundation for the model of Meridian Therapy (*Keiraku Chiryō*) developed in the 1920s-1930s by Inoue and Okabe, et al, providing not only rules for channel and acupoint selection, but also the foundation for the four patterns of diagnosis [Fukushima 1991, Shudo 1990].
8. Where Unschuld uses the term 'influences,' I have used 'Qi,' where he uses 'conduit-vessels,' I have used 'channels.'
9. "The earliest reference to sheng qi is the *Lüshi chunqiu* in a passage describing the cycle of the seasons. In the last month of spring, we are told, 'sheng qi flourishes, and yang qi flows forth; shoots emerge, and buds unfold.' From this context it is apparent that the term means something like 'lifegiving energy.'" [Field 2009].
10. Elsewhere Lo demonstrates that the 'Heyinyang' descriptions about the arrival of Qi during sexual intercourse at male climax mirror and are probably the precedent for the early descriptions of Qi arrival in the *Lingshu* when needling [Lo 2001].
11. *Lingshu* chapter one describes the importance of the arrival of Qi ('qi zhi' [氣至]) for needling and describes it as "the important thing in needling is that the qi arrives, then there will be an effect – and the sign of the effect will be

like the wind blowing away the clouds, as clear as the blue sky that appears” [Yang 2007]. It is highly probable that this reference to the clouds blowing away to reveal the blue sky is related to the use of the blue-sky analogy in meditation traditions [Birch in preparation, Forman 1999:164]. If this is correct, it implies that ho and sha needling techniques are techniques of balance accomplished when the practitioner has become able (through his own internal state) get the Qi to arrive. This is the work of the ‘superior physician’ – see *Lingshu* 1 [Chace, Bensky 2009] and *Nanjing* 78 [Unschuld 1986:635].

12. I could have mentioned other forms of Qi that are not localised to a specific region of the body, such as the zhengqi (seiki) [正氣], yuanqi (genki) [原氣], yuanqi (genki) [元氣], but, like others [Rochat de la Vallee 2006], I think it more realistic to view these as different names for the same undifferentiated, whole-body Qi [Birch 2009].
13. *Lingshu* chapter nine offers a means for doing this in the radial-carotid pulse comparisons described there [Wu, Wu 1997]. The author of the *Nanjing* made it a major theme that rather than palpate numerous body pulses that are described in the *Neijing* we should palpate only the radial arteries (cun-kou) [Unschuld 1986:15] to understand the whole.
14. See [www.moxafrica.org](http://www.moxafrica.org) and articles in *NAJOM*.

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