

Auricular Acupuncture: A Historical Perspective

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Auriculotherapy is the stimulation of points on the auricle of the external ear to alleviate health conditions in other areas of the body. Its original basis is in the ancient Chinese practices of acupuncture. Dr. Paul Nogier from France later developed the somatotopic correspondence of specific parts of the body to specific parts of the ear. Today, there is an integrated system of Chinese and Western auricular acupuncture in wide use. Many other cultures have also developed their own system. This article will cover the beginnings of the practice of auricular acupuncture and how it has evolved in a specific direction.

The use of the auricle to diagnosis and treat illness was referenced as early as the Huangdi Neijing, dating back to the Warring States period (475-221 BC) through the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). Since that time there have been many developments in the auricular system of treatment. For a better understanding of auricular acupuncture, we will look at its history and development from two different perspectives:

- Ancient auricular acupuncture: the Chinese system of auricular acupuncture dating before the 20th century and up to the 1950's.
- Modern auricular acupuncture: the Western or European system of auricular acupuncture, which further developed into auriculotherapy and auriculomedicine.

Ancient Auricular Acupuncture: Discovering the Meridians

Ear acupuncture therapy has long been used in China. According to the historical work done by Huard and Wong, the first written document about Chinese acupuncture is *Huangdi Neijing* (simplified Chinese: 黄帝内经; traditional Chinese: 黃帝內經), also known as the inner canon of Huangdi or the Emperor's Inner Canon.

This fundamental work is composed of two texts, eighty-one chapters or treatises each, in a question-answer format between Huangdi (Yellow Emperor) and his six ministers. The first text, the *Suwen* (素問) also known as Basic Questions, provides the theoretical foundation of Chinese Medicine and its diagnostic methods. The second

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text, the *Lingshu* (靈樞), **Spiritual Axis or Pivot**, discusses, in great detail, the use of acupuncture therapy. The ear is mentioned in the *“Huang di Nei Jing Su Wen,”* in particular.

In the *Suwen*, many of the theoretical origins of auriculotherapy first appeared, providing concepts such as “ear meridians,” which derive from the classical descriptions of the pathways of the channels. Of the twelve primary channels, the six yang channels traverse or skirt portions of the ear, either directly or through a branch channel. The six yin channels, having no direct connections, are nevertheless indirectly linked through their inner/outer relationships with the yang channels.

Among the miscellaneous channels, the Yin and Yang Heel channels (also called: Yin and Yang Qiao) as well as the Yang Linking (also called: Yang Wei Mai) channel have connections with the ear. Thus in chapter 28 of *Spiritual Axis*, it is written: “All the vessels congregate in the ear.” Li Shizhen, a famous physician in the Ming Dynasty discussed the relationship between the auricle and the meridians using the Eight Extra Channels. For instance, the Yin Qiao channel goes behind the ears, the Yang Wei channel goes into the ears.

Similarly, earlier recorded traditional medical literature established the connection between the ear and the Zang-fu organs, particularly the Kidney because the ear is its external manifestation. As noted in these chapters: *Spiritual Axis*, chapter 17: “The Kidney Qi communicates with the ear.” *Simple Questions*, chapter 4: “The heart opens at the ear.” *Simple Questions*, chapter 22: “As for diseases of the Liver... when there is deficiency, the ears cannot hear... when the Qi is rebellious, there are headaches and the ears are deaf.”

In chapter 20 of *Miraculous Pivot* it says, “When the pathogenic factor attacks the Liver, it will cause pain in the ribs on both sides...for the pain caused by internal blood stagnation...needle at the blue vessels

around the ear to relieve the dragging pain.” During the Jin and Yuan Dynasties, the chapter about “Tinnitus” from Lin Wansu's book *Yixue Qiyuan*, states, “The ear is one of the Kidneys' specific openings and is the place where the channels of Hand-Shaoyang, Foot-Jueyin, Foot-Shaoyin, and Foot-Shaoyang communicate with each other.”

In 1973, in China, two silk scrolls were discovered in the excavation of the No.3 Han tomb at Mawangdui, Changsha, Hunan, China (dated at 168BCE). The medical books unearthed included 11 books copied on silk and four books written on bamboo slips. The books were copied in about 3 B.C., and were the oldest TCM books in China. Most of the books are stray fragments of text without title. The books are entitled according to their contents: *Prescriptions for 52 Diseases*, *Classic of Moxibustion with 11 Meridians of Hand and Foot*, *Classic of Moxibustion with 11 Yin Yang Meridians*. They contained the channels and collaterals. The “ear meridian,” which connects the upper limb, eye, cheek, and throat is first recorded in *Moxibustion Classic with Eleven Yin-Yang Channels*.

In the oral inquiry chapter of the *Mystical Gate*, from *Lingshu's* book it states that the ear is the converging place of the main vessels. Being that the ear is connected to every part of the body due to the ceaseless circulation of air and blood through these meridians and vessels, the ear joins with the body to form a unified inseparable whole.

Diagnosis

Later in the *Zhongcangjing* or the *The Classic of Central Organs* from the Sung Dynasty (920 to 1279 A.D.) it was written that **prognosis** could be judged from the **inspection** of the auricle. In 1888, a physician of the late Qing Dynasty, Zhang Zhen Yun, described how the posterior auricle could be divided into five regions corresponding to the five Zang organs: upper (Heart), interior (Lung), middle (Spleen), exterior (Liver), and lower (Kidney). The

dividing method originated from the concept of the organism as a whole—as seen in the relationship between the part and the whole in TCM. See figure 1.

Figure 1: Mapping of the posterior auricle by Zhang Zhen Yun



Observation of the size, shape and color of the auricle were evaluated and recorded in Huangdi's *Internal Classic* in the 29th chapter of the *Miraculous Pivot*, "By inspecting the condition of the ear, one knows whether the individual has an illness or not." The book also states that, "The closer the structures of the ear are to each other, the smaller the Kidney. The more defined the ear is, the larger the

Kidney. The harder the ear is, the stronger the function of the Kidney. The thinner and softer the ear is, the weaker the function of the Kidney."

In his book, *Standards of Diagnosis and Treatment*, Wan Kentong mentioned that, "those who have a red Helix will live, and those who have yellow, black or blue Helix will die," and that "a thin and white ear or thin and black ear indicates a disturbance of the Kidney."

The ancient doctors observed auricle changes with chicken pox and recorded: "The red color of the blood vessel in the posterior auricle indicates a favorable prognosis. The purple color of the blood vessel in the posterior auricle indicates the states of disease is serious, especially when the color of the blood in the posterior auricle is not only purple, but also blue or black."

The 47th chapter of the *Miraculous Pivot* says, "The blue blood vessel in the auricle indicates dragging pain."

The 59th chapter of the *Miraculous Pivot* says, "a withered Helix that appears to be covered with a layer of dust indicates a disorder that may be in the bone. A dried up helix may indicate diabetes of the Kidney type (involving the Lower Jiao)."

The 11th chapter of *Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* by Yang Shangshan states that, "A blue auricular blood vessel indicates spasm and abdominal pain."

Ancient folk thought that a cold sensation in the auricular and the tip of the nose is an early sign of measles.

In the Qing Dynasty, Wang Hong not only recorded the experience of his predecessors, but also summarized and elucidated auricular diagnosis based upon the theory of TCM in the *Obedient Classic of Inspection*. He systematically discussed the macroscopic and microcosmic aspects of auricular diagnosis.

Traditional Treatments with Auricle Acupuncture

There are traditional references to treating certain diseases by direct manipulation of the auricle with needle, moxibustion, massage, and even herbal suppository to treat and prevent diseases. Today, those methods are still used as folk remedies.

In the first six centuries CE, Chinese doctors treated the ear with both acupuncture and moxa. The famous Tang Dynasty physician, Sun Simo, in his *Thousand Ducat Prescriptions*, recommended that a

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site corresponding to the modern lower abdomen point, above the opening of the external auditory meatus, be needled or warmed with moxa to treat jaundice and cold contagious diseases most common in the summer.

The Ming Dynasty classic, *Great Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*, prescribed that moxa be burned at the apex of the ear to treat cataracts on the eyes. Some traditional forms of folk medicine prick the ear lobes or bloodlet from the posterior auricular vein to treat redness or pain of the eye.

The ear lobes were pulled upward to treat headache, or massaged for infantile convulsions. In the late Qing Dynasty, a specialized physician in auricular therapy, named Sun Sanye of Shanxi Province, pointed out the use of some area in the auricle to treat certain conditions. For example, the helix can be used to expel wind and treat backaches. The antihelix and antitragus can be used for metabolic diseases, and nine kinds of headache, such as, headache due to wind-heat, or pathogenic fire, migraine, frontal headache, occipital headache, pain between the eyebrows, Taiyang headache, whole head headache, and vertex headache. The earlobe can be indicated for epilepsy or headache. The middle ear root can be used for regurgitation of food, vomiting, and abdominal pain.

These early discoveries laid the foundation for further exploration of the use of the auricle to diagnosis and treat.

Auricular therapy: A Western Approach

The French consul to China, George Soulie de Morant, reawakened western interest in acupuncture. On his return to France from China, between 1907 and 1927, Soulie de Morant tried to introduce Chinese medicine. At the time, France was facing a serious epidemic and Soulie de Morant did not receive the full attention he felt the medicine deserved. He resigned from his career as consulate and began to practice acupuncture with precise technique and great compassion for his patients. Soulie de Morant wrote treatises on acupuncture, which gave the West a better knowledge of this art and medicine. His introduction of the medicine is the origin of the great development the practice has recently undergone in the Western hemisphere.

Soulie de Morant created increasing awareness of acupuncture, but not necessarily ear acupuncture. Then an interesting thing happened. In the 1950's, the physician and neurologist Paul Nogier, who learned acupuncture from George Soulie de Morant, noticed a strange scar on the upper ear of some of his patients. He found that a local lay practitioner, Mme Barrin from Marseille, had treated all of them for sciatica pain. This woman had cauterized the upper portion of the pavilion, antihelix of the ear in order to relieve their low back pain. Dr. Nogier conducted acupuncture needles on the same area of the ear on his own sciatica patients and found that their back pain was also reduced.

During the same period, a French otorhinolaryngologist, Dr. Bonnier observed correspondences in the inside the nose (specifically the turbinate bones) with different parts of the body. This diagnostic method is called *centrotherapy*, it looks at the nervous centers, reflected in the nasal mucosa. Thinking about those cauterizations, Nogier was wondering whether there could exist, in the ear, a correspondence similar to the presence in the nose. Gradually, Nogier mapped out the ear with the body correspondence. He realized that the ear's shape could be superimposed with the shape of a homunculus-type human body, upside down. He discovered the correspondences in the musculo-skeletal relationships and the relationship with the organs of the body as well as the nervous system and the endocrinological system.

In 1957, Nogier published *Deutsche Zeitschrift fur Akupunkt*, his first map defining a somatotopic arrangement on the auricle with a drawing made by Gerhard Bachmann in a German acupuncture magazine. The publication of Nogier's auricular map led to the rapid spread and diffusion of this original concept in Russia, Japan, and China.

In 1972, he published his first book, *Treatise on Auriculotherapy*. In 1975, Nogier began teaching and treatment of ear acupuncture points spread across Europe and into America.

Nogier, who studied physics as a young man, developed further insights into the effect of electric and magnetic treatments and the connection with the reticular activating system. He identified a radial arterial pulse waveform, which reacted a few seconds after treatment to ear acupuncture points. He also discovered a three-phase process in the pulse.

Who was Paul Nogier?

Award-winning physician, Paul Nogier, M.D. was a conventionally trained neurologist. He also had an engineering background, which ultimately became useful in his medical research. Nogier studied abroad in the disciplines of Chinese medicine, acupuncture, homeopathic, and manual spinal correction. He was a highly respected professor at the medical school in Lyon, France. He was the President of the Medical Study Group of Lyon, which gathers many French and foreign doctors.

Raphael Nogier, the son of Paul Nogier and also a physician, says, "one cannot understand the work of Paul Nogier without knowing his character."

Raphael shared some memories of his father: "There are just few fortunate people who not only dream, but also are able to carry out their dreams and bring them into reality. He was a gifted clinician of exceptional abilities who attentively listened to his patients, respected what they had to say, and thoroughly understood their maladies. Tirelessly, he examined patients from Monday morning to Saturday evening, trying to understand and to cure their illnesses. He as a man who spent much time proposing contradictory new ideas, the majority of which fell by the wayside. Nevertheless, his most original ideas remain. It is for these discoveries that many students followed him so devotedly.

Dr. Paul Nogier Contributions

Dr. Nogier's discoveries, from the 1950's to 1970's, are used extensively in medical acupuncture circles today. Dr. Nogier left at least three legacies, explained in detail here. The ear map in China then was developed according to the theories of Traditional Chinese Medicine, however, Nogier is still known in China as the "Father of Auriculotherapy."

1) "The man in the ear" or a complete map of the body in the outer ear. See figure 2 and the chart with auricular points correspondence. In the 1950's Dr. Paul Nogier expanded the original Chinese charts into more comprehensive system, whereas the ancient texts showed only few points for special conditions. Dr. Nogier's work demonstrated that the ear is a micro-map of the entire body, with all body parts represented. Thus, all parts of the body can be evaluated and treated by means of the external ear.

Much of Dr. Nogier's original work has been verified in numerous research

Frequency G and A are universal to try for any condition.

3) **Vascular Autonomic Signs (VAS):** A system for reading the pulse, widely used in Europe as part of auricular therapy as well as by some acupuncturists for both diagnosing and assessing treatments. The **Vascular Autonomic Technique** is an ancient treatment advanced when Dr. Nogier noticed that there was a distinct change in the amplitude and dimension of the pulse when certain points on the auricle were stimulated. Being able to detect the VAS on the radial artery pulse of the patient's left hand and the other touching or palpating the auricle, enables the practitioner to precisely determine the location of a point, whether there is a pathology in the region of the body that relates to specific points, and whether certain substances (foods, medicines, herbs etc...) are appropriate.

Auriculotherapy Treatment

Auriculotherapy is used widely for pain control, addictions (as seen in NADA protocol) of all kinds, internal disorders, emotional issues and many other cases with excellent results. It is used by medical doctors, chiropractors, acupuncturists, naturopaths and dentists. The ear side is chosen from the most active ear points (using the designation of the chart) with palpation. Note that certain protocols involving the Liver and Gallbladder require the right side only. Auricular treatment is used with a wide variety of tools including acupuncture needles, focused pressure, lasers, magnets, and electrical stimulation. These tools are elaborated on below.

Small permanent press needles, tack shaped needles may be attached to the ear with a narrow band of tape for several days up to one week. They are used for conditions that may require constant stimulation to acupuncture points on the ear, such as addictions or chronic infections.

Electrical Stimulation of auricular points is used for conditions such as paralysis or nerve damage in the body, drug and alcohol addictions, and chronic pain. This technique provides electrical detection of the active points and treatment at the same time.

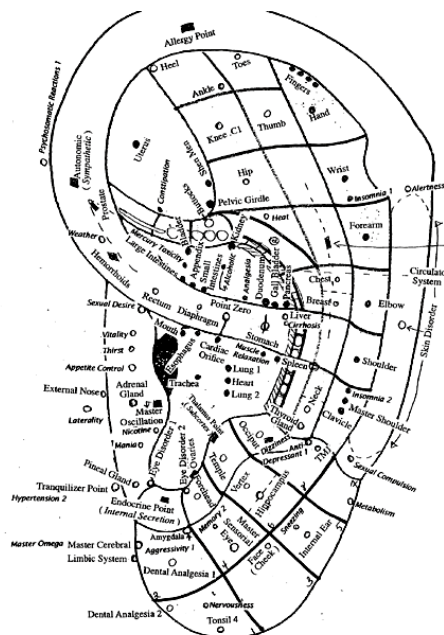
Bleeding includes removing one or two drops of blood at certain points on the ear to reduce high blood pressure, high cholesterol or heart disease.

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Silver magnetic pellets can be used to reduce excess conditions, or gold to stimulate energy. *Ear seeds* are small seeds from the Vaccaria plant. It is an annual plant, called *wang bu lui xing* that grows in China and parts of central and southern Europe. It is also known as the cowherb, or cow soapwort. It is held in place on the ear with a small piece of adhesive tape. You can keep them for few days for chronic conditions.

*When retaining the seed, pellets or press needle, one should be very careful not to keep humidity on these points after a shower. They can be tapped gently with a towel to prevent infection. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: This diagram contains the majority of the auricular acupuncture points as they are used within TCM.



In Conclusion

Auriculotherapy has its roots in Traditional Chinese Medicine. On the ear as on the body, points are used for healing purpose. The Chinese consider Nogier to be the Father of Auriculartherapy. In 1982, the World Health Organization standardized thousands of ear reflex points because it is so safe and effective in bringing rapid results.

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