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## Touched by the Magic Wand: Using the Teishin

by Ton van Huffelen

*The higher up you go,  
the more mistakes you are allowed.  
Right at the top,  
if you make enough of them,  
it's considered to be your style.*

– Fred Astaire<sup>1</sup>

*Most of us work with the teishin. But what have we learned from our Japanese teachers? Furthermore, we seem to develop slightly different ways of using this tool. Who does what? At an informal advanced workshop in May 2014 at “De roos”/Amsterdam, colleagues Ana Sofia Pacheco, Junko Ida, Sari Avis and Ton van Huffelen explored use of the teishin, as summarized below by Ton van Huffelen. We hope you will be inspired to experiment.*

### Introduction

The teishin is called *Shi Yuan* in Chinese. It is one of the two non-inserted needles of the nine needles described in the *Ling Shu*, chapter 1. The other non-inserted needle is the enshin. *Ling Shu*, chapter 1 describes the teishin: “Its tip is round like millet but slightly sharp. It is not inserted into the skin, but is used only by pressing the channel to make its qi and blood flow smoothly. However, the channel should not be pressed by it hard. Otherwise seiki gets injured.”<sup>2</sup>

The ends of the teishin are sometimes named differently. It has a round ball-like end – the head, and a sharp end – the tail. In the 2008 Berlin workshop, Abe Sensei called the round part the *tail* and the sharp part the *head*.<sup>3</sup>

The teishin is generally indicated for qi and blood deficiency. With qi deficiency, mainly, the respiratory function and nerve functions decline. The symptoms are weak breathing, difficulty breathing, palpitations even with tiny movement, asthma, the tendency to be depressed, poor memory, and hypersensitivity. When the condition progresses, tinnitus, tachycardia, headache, body heat, extreme anxiety and insomnia can occur.

Blood deficiency is a condition in which the blood and body fluid are insufficient; it also includes circulatory disorders of heart disease. In the classics, such symptoms as tinnitus, palpitation, dizziness, nervous breakdown, abdominal pain and constipation are listed for blood deficiency.

Sometimes patients are extremely qi and blood deficient or hypersensitive. Using *goshin* (regular needles) may exacerbate their condition, making their qi even more kyo if our technique is not good enough. For such conditions it is safer to use the teishin.<sup>4</sup> This reduces the treatment dose.<sup>5</sup>

The teishin can be helpful in our approach to our patients. If they come for treatment for the first time and are afraid of the needle, they may be more comfortable with the teishin. They can understand then that the needle is not painful. And we can gradually introduce them to the regular needle.

### Teishin Techniques

#### Hoho technique with teishin

The following complete quote is from the Translation from *Toyohari-East Asia needle therapy*. (The study and practice of Toyohari. A translation of lectures and notes from senior teachers, West Midlands 2010).

“After selecting the teishin you will use, position yourself in front of the acupoint to be supplemented, relax and place your oshide hand to find the live point.

“Stroke slowly and softly with the flow of the channel to find the live point.

“After finding the live point, place the oshide, making sure to relax and stabilize the oshide.

“Using the rounded end of the teishin for treatment, slowly and carefully introduce the teishin into the oshide, holding it perpendicular to the point with the sashide. Make sure that the rounded end of the teishin is first positioned about 2mm above the point.

“Slowly and carefully advance the teishin needle towards the skin, paying attention to the feeling of the tip of the needle and its encounter with qi. When you feel the first contact with qi, carefully assess it and advance the needle very slightly more so that the feeling of qi contact becomes a little stronger. When this happens, stop advancing the teishin.

“Carefully and without tension, slowly increase the left-right pressure (*sayuatsu*) of the oshide so that the bottom surface in contact with the skin of the patient slightly becomes more closed. As you do this, make sure to maintain the same feeling of qi contact at all times. Make sure to stabilize the sashide and line up the teishin with the line of direction of the index finger and thumb of the sashide.

“Holding the left-right pressure of the oshide evenly, relax while you wait for more qi to arrive. Usually the teishin is used because the patient is



sensitive. Qi arrives much more easily in sensitive patients, thus you need to be very attentive.

"As the feeling of qi starts to build up, carefully and gradually increase left-right pressure of the oshide without any increase in tension.

"When you have felt the qi build up enough, instantaneously remove the teishin while rolling either thumb or finger of the sashide over the acupoint to close it.

"Leave the digit that closed the point, pressing the point for one breath.

"Alternately for teishin removal: when you felt the qi build up enough, quietly and slowly pull the teishin away from the point enough so that the bottom surface of the oshide closes over the space previously occupied by the round end of the teishin. Wait for a second, then slowly remove the teishin without moving the closed surface oshide and making sure that the oshide seals the point. Leave the oshide for one breath."<sup>6</sup>

## Teachers Remark on Technique

During the EBTA workshops, teachers made the following remarks:

"In general, qi moves slower when using a teishin."<sup>7</sup>

"When one uses the teishin, the qi does not gather there as its tip is rounded, unlike a needle. If you supplement with a teishin, the pulse quality that you get is never as jitsu as the one you get with a needle."<sup>8</sup>

"Be cautious touching the skin: it may cause pulse to widen. If the pulse is too tight or too concentrated (for example in the case burn out, psychological tension and stiff shoulders, abdominal pain), go close to the skin or even press slightly to widen pulse."<sup>9</sup>

"For sensitive patients *sayuatsu* must be applied very slowly and gently and never 100 percent. If you make their pulse too strong or firm (with strong or quick *sayuatsu*) – they will feel worse. In an excess type it is ok, it is good for them."<sup>10</sup>

"The more the body is deficient, the more you want to lay down the teishin. Raise the angle for stronger patients. Stay on the point for two to three breaths."<sup>11</sup>

"Before removing, envisage the bottom of the surface of the oshide is closing, don't force or pulse will become hard.<sup>12</sup> Slowly remove by lifting vertically in the direction it came from. Don't close the point.<sup>13</sup> Wait three to four seconds on pulse to tonify<sup>14</sup>, or two or three breaths.<sup>15</sup> After removal the pulse should consolidate, slow down, the yin/

yang in the pulse should be more balanced, the skin should have become more elastic and lustrous."<sup>16</sup>

## Teachers on Treating Children

"Instead of using shonishin techniques on children, we can get almost as good results with the teishin. Place the teishin lightly and take care not to depress the skin. Two to three seconds are sufficient, five to ten if the child is still."<sup>17</sup>

"For children rub the skin horizontally with the ball side of the teishin."<sup>18</sup>

"Treating children with the teishin shaho technique: use the sharp side of the teishin, contact and pull away. It is quick and simple. For hoho technique it is possible to rub with perpendicular teishin, on the round side, while holding an oshide."<sup>19</sup>

"For shaho on children stroke with sharp end three to four times lightly against the flow. If they have high fever, do shaho on their finger webs stroking swiftly with sharp end from webs distally. The repeat on feet from webs upwards, proximally."<sup>20</sup>

## Teachers on Shaho Technique with Teishin

"Scraping the skin lightly at the meridian flow at right angles.

"Alternatively, approach gradually from 2-3 cm distance against the flow. Let the teishin contact the skin and continue with a scraping action, gradually lifting it 2-3 cm past the point. The teishin describes the shape of an inverted parabola."<sup>21</sup>

"In shaho, slide the teishin against the flow of the meridian. There is no need to angle or use sharp end."<sup>22</sup>

"For shaho, the sashide fingers can hold the teishin sideways."<sup>23</sup>

"For shaho, cut several times across the meridian with the pointed/sharp end."<sup>24</sup>

## Fine-tuning Teishin Techniques

"When the dosage of treatment becomes excessive, the patient can develop new symptoms or suffer more. When these happen, supplement ST-36, CV-4, GB-20 and/or GV-20 quietly and lightly with a teishin. This will help the calm patient's condition.

Also among our regular patients, there are some whose pulse becomes harder during root treatment with a regular or filiform needle. In these cases when the teishin is used instead for the root treatment, the pulse doesn't become harder

and the treatment result is good."<sup>25</sup>

At last we can say that the teishin can be used to check for the live point, to supplement around the eyes, and to drain the nose.

## Teishin Composition

Talking about a teishin in the sense of materials, we can say something about these aspects:

- the teishin's metal composition;
- the teishin's shape;
- its length;
- its thickness.

The metals commonly used for teishins are:

- stainless steel;
- copper (red)/brass (yellow, alloy of copper and zinc);
- silver;
- gold;
- platinum;
- Five metals (which is a mixture of platinum, gold, silver, copper and stainless steel).

The literature generally describes the effect of the metal on our clients as follows:

- stainless steel: dispersing or the least tonifying of all metals;
- copper/brass: tonifying;
- silver: tonifying, more than gold;
- gold: strongly tonifying, but gentle and smoothing;<sup>26</sup>
- platinum: very strongly tonifying (Yanagishita Sensei said to Sari in translation by Junko Ida: "The platinum teishin will make the pulse firmer, as opposed to gold coated teishin that will make it softer. The tip of your platinum teishin is very small and the body very heavy, so you should use it very lightly with no pressure, not touching the point, but holding it above." Sari thinks he said this to avoid over dosage;
- five metals: stronger pulse and less hardness, stronger effect than silver, according to Ana Sofia.

The *shape* of the teishin can also be of influence in the treatment:

- round ball or tail: qi more superficial;
- drop form of the tail: qi goes deeper;
- sharp head: dispersing qi;
- finer needles gather more qi.<sup>27</sup>

Another aspect of the teishin is length:

- short: qi more superficial;<sup>28</sup>
- long: qi goes deeper.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, the short teishin is better for children



(it can also be hidden in the practitioner's hand so the children can't see it).

Finally, about the thickness of a teishin, we can say:

- thin: qi gathers more;
- thick: broadens qi.

## Personal Styles

As I have said, we seem to develop slightly different ways of using the teishin. Below, Junko, Ton, Sari and Ana Sofia share their ideas and personal styles of using the teishin.

## Length

Junko explains: "I only use the Yanagishita teishin, which is gold plated and long, as well as the Kozato teishin which is made of brass and shorter. So I have no idea about the effect of the different metals. I think some practitioners like to use different metals on different kinds of patients by using specific characteristics of each materials. They say that the gold is more tonifying than silver or the silver more than stainless. However, for me the general characteristic of teishin is sufficient enough reason to keep using only these two kinds. And therefore, for me the effect of the length is more of my interest."

## Not Too Firm

Junko continues: "I use the teishin instead of the regular needle for severely weakened patients, such as those at the last stage of cancer, those who had a history of cancer in the past, and also for patients with hepatitis or HIV for hygienic reasons."

"For patients who are emotionally disturbed and sensitive, I tend to use the regular needle much more than the teishin. It means that I think using the teishin more for the physically sensitive patients, than for emotionally weakened patients. To be honest, I think this is a bit strange to say, because the physical and emotional aspects are inseparable. But I hope you understand what I mean. However, we were told that the teishin is used when we do not like to make the pulse quality firm, when we make the pulse quality of patients with emotional problems too firm, their condition gets worse. So, maybe I should also use teishin for these emotionally affected patients."

## Lift from Within

"I use my teishin the orthodox way: perpendicularly, barely or very lightly touching the skin. Remove the needle slowly without closing the point with a finger, but I still try to protect the point by the bottom surface of oshide. When I

am ready to remove, instead of pulling it at once, I lift it a bit within my oshide and stop it for a few moments, and then lift it completely. By doing it this way, the pulse maintains a certain degree of firmness. When there is a stubborn tightness, I sometimes advance the teishin slightly deeper to the tightness and keep pressing until the reaction is released, and then remove it."

## Which Needle is More Interesting

"In root treatment, I often use a silver #2 for shaho even when I use a teishin for hoho, like Ton does. However, sometimes I use a teishin for shaho by stroking once or twice against the meridian or by cutting the meridian flow when I think it is effective enough. Personally, I believe that regular needle applications are much more variable than the teishin, therefore using the regular needle requires more skill and is much more interesting. However, what each practitioner chooses to use for treatment is, at the end, very personal, and we cannot say which is better. I use the teishin on any part of the body," says Junko.

## Practical Considerations

Ton describes his teishin use: "Starting with Toyohari, I only used the gold-plated Yanagishita teishin. I was scared to leak qi and was very cautious to work with needles. At the Cherry Blossom workshop in Japan (March 2006), I bought a thin, small copper teishin and a small, firm, silver teishin. I started experimenting with these three teishins. The Yanagishita teishin is nice and the qi is smooth flowing. I like the format. I can hold it gently yet firmly with my thumb and two fingers. I don't like the copper teishin: it is too thin, the material is too weak, it easily bends, and for me other teishins work better in treatment. Besides that, once a week I had to polish it with brasso ... I prefer the small silver teishin: an easy format to use on points as LR-8 or KD-10 or BL-58, nice and stable and even a softer energy than the Yanagishita teishin."

## Strong Sensation

"Of course colleagues had lots of teishins which made me lick my lips! So Katie Yankula from the US sent me a small, thin golden teishin. When it came it was bent. I worked a day with it, but for some reason the non-straightness seemed to disturb the freeflow of qi. She sent me another one. This one worked very well. Now and then I treat Mirjam, my wife. Until then, I always used the silver or Yanagishita teishin on her and I didn't tell her I was using the golden teishin. Immediately after removing it from KD-7 she asked me what I was doing. She had a warm, strong sensation.

That was quite remarkable," says Ton.

## Subtle Nuances

"Probably, as Toyohari practitioners, we attract sensitive patients. At least, I seem to. We were taught to treat sensitive patients with the teishin. But overtime, my idea of that changed subtly. Once I had a very fat female patient. I couldn't feel both pulses at the same time. Her body was very large and her arms very short. Besides that, her pulses were so deep and slow that even standing on a box trying to grab the pulses together it took so much time that I developed a terrible backache. So I took the pulses one by one. Treatment with the Yanagishita teishin made only little progress. Treatment with the golden teishin brought very much improvement. Since then, when the pulse is deep and the patient is sensitive but doesn't have complaints of tiredness, I use the golden teishin."

"Lately I am using needles more and more. Junko once said in feedback on needling technique: 'Sometimes you have to use a needle.' This made me think and try. Treatment of the big female patient became better. Since working with the needle, the effect is a more clear treatment."

## Above the Point

"I use the teishin perpendicularly in hoho, guiding the direction towards my own center. I also like to close treatment with the teishin on REN-6 or REN-4. I saw Yukio Kurayama do it in a workshop at Joyce Vlaarkamp's practice in Amsterdam (2004): he even held the teishin a centimetre above the point with the round tip of the needle sticking out of the closed oshide. I do it sometimes: it seems to gather qi very strongly. And I must say that shaho with the teishin doesn't seem to work for me, so after hoho with a teishin I tend to use a #2 silver needle," says Ton.

## Platinum for Scars

Sari is very enthusiastic about the use of platinum in certain circumstances: "I use the Yanagishita teishin mainly on children, or to finish a treatment if I'm not completely satisfied with the pulse at the end. I would often use it on back shu points of the two main points in the treatment, for example BL-13 and BL-23 for kidney sho, but could using REN-4 on a woman and particularly with fertility issues. And I have an unusual, heavy platinum teishin, which is phenomenal with scars. I use it above the skin, not making direct contact, as instructed by Yanagishita Sensei."



## The Body Joins In

Ana Sofia started carefully with the teishin: "Since I graduated as a Toyohari practitioner in 2006, I used the Yanagishita teishin to close my treatments tonifying REN-6. It made a lot of sense to me, because this usually makes the pulse more balanced. Somehow, to me this was like I was saying to the body: "I did the treatment, now you do your own homeostasis!" And for me this was a way of reducing the patients' suffering from symptoms of overtreatment, which happened often when I still worked in the TCM style of acupuncture."

Later on Ana Sofia began to experiment: "When treating very deficient patients, I usually use the five metals teishin. For me it works very well because it is much easier to get a stronger pulse with less hardness. To disperse, I cut the meridian and this works fine also."

## All Parameters Better

And Ana Sofia grew: "As a Toyohari beginner, after doing the branch treatment I often realized that the pulse became wider or harder than before. When I saw Murakami Sensei in Berlin (2008) using the teishin in the naso and muno area, I started to use his strategy. I chose the Yanagishita teishin for tonifying ST-12. If the pulse was harder, it became softer. If it was wider, it became firmer and more consolidated. Also, if it was a little deep, it became more balanced and if it was fast, it slowed down. All the pulse parameters got better. After this I also tonified REN-6."

Ana Sofia and the Portuguese branch got inspired: "Last year in the Portuguese branch we conducted research on the use of the teishin on ST-12," studying changes in the parameters of strength, speed, deepness, hardness, and consolidation. We checked before and after treating the point with the teishin and we confirmed that all these parameters improved with the application of the teishin, if the pulse was not good enough. If the pulse would be good, applying the teishin on this point would spoil the pulse."

"This year we are testing for ST-12 and REN-6 as well. I believe these are the points to use when we are not very good yet in controlling treatment dose and to prevent overtreatment. Ana Sofia concludes: "As Fukushima Sensei said: "The general meridian flow in the whole body is strongly affected by the ST-12 point."

## Hari Do

Toyohari is a traditional yet modern form of acupuncture. It is traditional in the way of thinking about life and health and in its use of the techniques of needling and moxibustion. It is modern

in how it can fluently adapt to the changes the contemporary world is asking us to make as acupuncturists. As we have seen in this article about the teishin, Toyohari is modern in the possibilities of working with our tools within the borders of our tradition, open to subtle changes in a very personal way.

Our Dutch colleague Kathinka Droogleever Fortuyn once said to me on working with the teishin: "You know, when I was a child, I wanted to become a wizard. And I think with my teishin, I am pretty much on the way."

Many thanks to my colleagues Junko Ida, Ana Sofia Pacheco and Sari Avis. We had a great time working together.

## Notes

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2. Katsuyuki Kozato, *From my practice room*. Kozato-sensei designed a teishin made of brass, the Kozato teishin;
3. Berlin/Germany September 2008 Abe-sensei, notes Sari Avis; also Takashi Abe, "Back to Basics. Teishin", in: *International Toyohari News* (ITN) Dec. 2012, p. 25;
4. Berlin/Germany September 2008 Abe-sensei, notes Sari Avis; also Takashi Abe, "Back to basics. Teishin", in: *International Toyohari News* (ITN) Dec. 2012, p. 25; also Tokunaga-sensei, "Teishin, zanshin and enshin...and how to use them effectively", in: *International Toyohari News* (ITN) Dec. 2011, p. 18; also Stephen Birch, "Use of the teishin", in: *Toyohari-East Asia needle therapy. The study and practice of Toyohari. A translation of lectures and notes from senior teachers* (West Midlands 2010) chapter 16, pp. 218-220; also Kasumi-sensei, "How to deal with issue of dosage", in: *The study.. A translation*, chapter 16, p. 286;
5. Stephen Birch, "Use of the teishin", in: *The study.. A translation*, chapter 16, pp. 218-220; also Kasumi-sensei, "How to deal with issue of dosage", in: *Toyohari-East Asia needle therapy. The study and practice of Toyohari. A translation of lectures and notes from senior teachers* (West Midlands 2010), chapter 20, p. 286;
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9. Takashi Abe, "Back to basics. Teishin", in: *International Toyohari News* (ITN) Dec. 2012, p. 25;
10. *International Toyohari News* (ITN) Dec. 2005, p. 24, Nakada-sensei;
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12. Takashi Abe, "Back to basics. Teishin", in: *International Toyohari News* (ITN) Dec. 2012, p. 25;
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**Ton van Huffelen** (1965) studied history in Groningen, The Netherlands, and thoroughly practiced Taiji and Qigong. Interested in the background he started a course on acupuncture with an introduction on Chinese philosophy in 1997. Completely optional. He thought. From hobby his attention shifted from serious study and deepening towards a profession. That's how acupuncture found him. In 2002 he graduated. Since 2003 he has specialised in Japanese acupuncture, in particular Toyohari.