ACUPUNCTURE, SCIENCE AND MEDICINE
AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

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I am not going to tell you what is acupuncture. But I would like to outline its significance in our modern world, and to ponder the reasons why we are all here.

1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACUPUNCTURE AS A PHENOMENON:
The strength of this event draws on many fields of investigation, which at first have nothing to do with exact sciences.
A. Because of the longstanding history of the most important countries of the Far East, what happened in the last centuries or even in the last thousands of years carries a weight of existence, a dimension of being which is more difficult to discard than many recent events, although the latter could be more easily defended with our modern minds. In studying the historical events of China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, one comes across the constant presence of this therapeutical technique, inbedded in all the aspects of life, from medical treatises to works of literature, government decisions on medical organization to individual traditions of treating or being treated. History has no scientific value, but it carries the seeds of all human inventions and discoveries, which develop sometimes into the acquirements of our universal civilization.
B. The policies of the governments of these countries in the past have been, either to integrate the teaching and the practice of acupuncture in the frame of national medical programmes, or to treat it with benevolence and leave it to the initiatives of private schools or individuals. Rarely was its existence officially disapproved of, and acupuncture practitioners considered as not having the favours of the courts or country rulers. Recently, because of socioeconomic realities, because of the weight of history and the intrusion of the past right into present times, the leading bodies have tend to adapt their health structures or their legislations, in order to make the best out of the contents of this traditional technique, on a permanent, or even a transitory basis.
C. One of the main reasons for these attitudes is the national aspect of the countries culture.
All levels of life are supported and enlightened by the richness and variety of customs and traditions, which in turn borrow from philosophical and social concepts. These theories encompass the universe, the structure of society, the environment of human beings and the human individual himself, and penetrate into the very existence and functioning of the human body. From astronomy to agriculture, from alchemy to herbal medicine, from social order to gymnastics, the same ideas of harmonious relations and balance of forces bring together disciplines and fields which can be far apart in reality. If one is denied, the others are then also questioned, so even in countries where big social or political changes have taken place, it is difficult to reject part of a culture, for whatever good reason, because this rejection contaminates the whole culture itself, and that is not easy to bear for the individual who is stripped of his cultural identity.

D. The sociological approach sheds more light on the intricacies of government, social and individual reactions to this mixture of past and present, on the obvious or hidden motivations of actual policies, and analyzes the results with fairly objective techniques.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACUPUNCTURE IN MODERN MEDICINE

The phenomena has intruded on the three main levels of the medical field:

A. The practice of modern, or western medicine, has been invaded, not only by the use of acupuncture in daily situations, but also of its related techniques, widening the scope and possibilities of diagnostic or therapeutical techniques using some kind of stimulation on certain parts of the body. These techniques have sometimes no immediate relation with acupuncture, but participate, in one way or the other, in the search of new means of regulating or modifying the balance of the body as a whole, or of one of its components.

B. In order to justify the practice of acupuncture in a scientific world, clinical and fundamental research have been launched in many countries, either to verify the reality or the non-reality of the therapeutical impact, or to discover the possible mechanisms of its action, or to separate the different origins of the results. In the data-bank of our Belgian association we have more than two thousand articles published on this subject in the last 17 years. The least one can say is that acupuncture, as a technique, still stands strongly against all the efforts of those who, scientifically or non-scientifically, have tried to deny any truth or usefulness to the phenomenon, considering it as a hoax or an anachronical survival of traditional superstitions or magic rituals.

C. The most important and indirect results of all these operations are:

1 / To have stimulated the interest and research on pain mechanisms and on the different possible means of controlling it.

2 / To have further awakened neurophysiologists and neuropharmacologists to the possibility of influencing, through acupuncture or other stimulating techniques, the activities of organs, tissues or functions of the body, widening therefore the therapeutical scope.

3 / To have finally participated in a general philosophical questioning of the model of modern medicine, realizing the strength of its achievements, how much it is approaching the scientific truth, but also the necessity of modifying the model as knowledge progresses. Truth has many facets, and the phenomenon of acupuncture has changed some of them. It is dynamic, disturbing and stimulating, all qualities necessary for wanting to know more, and
how things happen in the body, and how one could eventually influence them.

3. **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACUPUNCTURE IN MODERN LIFE**

   A. Away from technology:
   The phenomenon appeared in the West at a time when techniques, including medical techniques, were becoming more and more sophisticated and complicated. The means used for diagnosis and treatment were becoming more powerful and more accurate, but because of the machinery and the operations involved, two consequences slowly emerged:
   1 / The patient was frightened by the sizes of the machines, by the power of the energies or drugs that were used, by the sometimes unavoidable side-effects of the treatments.
   2 / The doctors were so busy dealing with the intricacies of the techniques that they sometimes lost contact with the patients leaving them alone, scared and bewildered. The comfort of the very special doctor-patient relation was no more.

   B. An efficient technique:
   Then came on the scene a strange technique, supported by a strange theory, and integrated in a strange medical system. It arrived with two arguments:
   1 / The major surgical operations performed with very little chemical anesthesia, or none at all, but with an analgesic technique using acupuncture needles and, most of the time, some kind of electrical stimulation. As a result the patient was conscious during the operations, and if these were not always successful, and whatever other factors were involved, it was astonishing enough to deeply impress the western public, even the medical public to some extent.
   2 / Trailing on the steps of acupuncture analgesia came therapeutical acupuncture. The reason why it caught on so quickly lies in the sometimes immediate effects obtained in certain pathological conditions. These results could not systematically be assigned to suggestion, hypnosis placebo effect or coincidence. There was something else to it.

   C. An attractive philosophy:
   The western medical vocabulary, the theories underlying modern techniques, were so complicated that the public could not understand them. The philosophy of medicine itself was going through a crisis, where the ideas of scientific truth, scientifific doubt and objective methodology were major topics, but could not be communicated to the public.
   At the same time the media were talking and writing about, and many doctors were offering a new kind of treatment, which had no scientific explanation, but was backed by a very interesting theory. This theory used universal concepts, of balance and harmony, of relations between man and universe, and, in the human being, between its different components. The concepts were not precise, the relations were not defined. The terminology, although anachronistic, out of another context of civilization and culture, appealed to the public. More than a mathematical or rational structure, the theory was moving and dynamic, adapting itself to all situations by using many systems of references. It did not look for causes, but for relations, did not try to prove, but to explain the results in terms related to nature, to the environment and the cultural philosophy which permeated the whole civilization. This was very appealing to the western public, as it gave an appearance of explanation when, in fact, it was just saying things in other words, and these words were very soothing to a western mind wounded by the
harshness of scientific or medical vocabulary.
These theories looked like a nice and comforting dream, making people believe that they understood what was happening in the human body, and how a treatment like acupuncture brought but its effects. Fortunately the acupuncture practitioners never lost sight of the essential target, which was to obtain therapeutical results, and dissociated the theory from the practice. The concrete strength of acupuncture lay in its successes, and the abstract and cultural theories gave an intellectual satisfaction to a public of patients which had lost contact with doctors, and understood less than ever the justifications of modern medicine.

4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF ACUPUNCTURE IN MODERN SOCIETIES
A. The Academic Fields and Medical Faculties, which had rightly built their strength on scientific experiments and objective methodology, using a very precise technical vocabulary, were taken aback by several characteristics of acupuncture.
   1 / The fact that it belonged to a traditional medical system, using different approaches of the human being. All these systems are holistic, having arranged their knowledge in a self-sufficient structure, within a culture where new concepts cannot be integrated. Tradition is immobile, and progress would disrupt the structure. So the system has to be, at first, presented as such, and the modern scientific mind was reluctant to accept this way. Moreover, it did not know, in the first stages, how to integrate it in the medical teaching programmes, nor how to justify this integration from the scientific point of view.
   2 / The lack of reliable scientific experiments in the beginning, even on the most effective fields of application of acupuncture.
   3 / The mixture of practical results and imprecise underlying theories, making it difficult to separate the useful from the fancyful, and to concentrate on that part of the technique which could be effective, understandable and explainable through a scientific approach.
B. The legislations in each country regarding the practice of medicine can be very different, so several governments were taken by surprise, and had to adapt themselves to a situation over which they did not always have control. As a result, the discrepancies between the solutions adopted but the countries has led to a confusing international situation, which is, at present, one of the most important difficulties presented to acupuncture.
C. Many medical practitioners, dealing every day with patients, had come to realize that scientific medicine could not solve all the human problems, and were prepared to accept, learn and practice a technique which they found effective in certain pathological conditions, without having to wait for a scientific confirmation or a precise definition of the scope of acupuncture. However, most of them did not take the theories for granted, but used them as a mnemotechnic method and as a teaching and practical canvas.
D. At the same time, non-medical practitioners took to learning and applying the technique, and accepting the system as a whole. Their lack of scientific and medical training prevented them from seeing the possibilities and the limits, the weaknesses of the theory, the dangers of using acupuncture without having made a proper medical diagnosis leading eventually to a more effective treatment.

5. THE CONSCIENCE OF MEDICAL ACUPUNCTURE
A. The Nature of medicine:

1 / System medicines: for thousands of years, in all parts of the world, medicine was an empirical technique, backed by philosophical or religious beliefs specific to each ethnic group. These traditional systems cannot communicate with each other, as they are rooted in the unique characteristics of their culture.

2 / Recently Western Medicine has developed a new system, based on experimentation, on scientific observation and proof. It is not related to a culture, but to a certain level of knowledge and intelligence of the human mind. As such, it has become universal, because it can be applied everywhere, independently from culture and tradition. Moreover, it can lend the power of exact sciences, to which can be added the analysis of human sciences, in order to determine, up to a point, the validity of traditional systems, from the point of view of therapeutical results.

B. The education of Medical doctors has progressed in the last hundred years. Nowadays they represent the strongest, most efficient and most reliable body of practitioners when dealing with disease, although they acknowledge their limits.

C. The concept of medical act has slowly emerged from most medical and medico-legal groups, detailing the procedure of a doctor confronted with a patient, starting with interrogation to physical examination, using complex diagnostic techniques, reaching a diagnosis, and finally deciding which is the best treatment to be given to the patient. The medical act encompasses the whole range of what a practitioner is capable to do or decide, and the only ones able to follow the complete procedure are the western medicine doctors. Other practitioners, however efficient they might be in their specific field, cannot give the patient the same guarantee that all possibilities have been examined. Their scope of knowledge is too narrow, and they don’t know that they don’t know. Ignorance can bring assurance, and become a danger in some cases.

D. The responsibility of the doctor towards the public is of two major kinds:

1 / To apply the best of his scientific and human training and experience to treat patients, and to use the practical and efficient technique which he has learned, when he thinks they are necessary. This includes eventually acupuncture or related techniques.

2 / To help and promote in all countries the same kind of medicine, as he knows it is the one giving most answers to human disease and suffering, whatever is the technological level of the country, from primary health care to advanced medical techniques.

E. The attitude of the medical doctors towards non–medical practitioners should also be twofold:

1 / In countries where there is a lack of medical doctors, the training of these practitioners can be justified for a transitory period, in order to meet the immediate demands of the population, with the condition that these trainings must be done within the frame of official health care and under the control of medical doctors. This transitory period will end when enough doctors are trained in all fields, including traditional, and then the qualifications required for practicing any kind of medical act will be beyond the level of non-medical practitioners.

2 / In countries with a high technological level, and whatever are the legislations regarding the practice, the ethical responsibility of the medical practitioner is to concentrate on
helping and training other medical doctors. There is no reason why they should transmit part of their theoretical and practical knowledge to people with less medical qualifications, as they know that they will be breeding practitioners who will most likely be less efficient and reliable, even dangerous, because of their lack of complete medical training.

6. THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF MEDICAL ACUPUNCTURE

A. The first question which comes to the mind is why was it necessary. There are many reasons:
1 / Up to the seventies, and apart from the Far East, acupuncture was a rather confidential happening, even in the three European countries where it had already taken root, namely France, Germany and Italy.
2 / In 1943 was created the International Society of Acupuncture, with its registered office in France. A Society of individuals, it held several congresses and had correspondants in many countries. The problem of doctors or non-doctors did not raise many questions at the time, because it was a fairly marginal affair, and the issues of science, ethics, research, legislations, etc······ had not yet been examined.
3 / From the beginning of the seventies onwards, as the phenomenon of acupuncture exploded, the ISA could not keep up with its pace. The By-laws were not very democratic, control of membership criteria was difficult, and the society was literally invaded by non-doctors, while the few remaining doctors were struggling, and are still struggling today, with great merit I must say, to keep some decency and coherence amongst members.
4 / As the phenomenon erupted everywhere, the enthusiasm was such that many groups, in many countries, decided on the spear of the moment, to create international organizations, and I know of such initiatives in France, Switzerland, California, Spain, Korea, Taiwan, Italy, etc····
5 / The initiators of these projects did not realize that one thing was to create, another was to continue. It needed a lot of working, writing, organizing, convincing, meeting. It meant setting up international congresses at regular intervals, and at one time there were so many of them that several had to be canceled at the last moment through lack of enough participants.
6 / Another drawback was the poor representativity of these associations. Indeed they could claim members from dozens of countries, but those members themselves were not always representative of the main trends or groups of acupuncture in their own country. An international society of individual members is easy to start, but difficult to control, and the administrative burden is heavy.
7 / Then there was the problem of membership qualifications, and two aspects quickly emerged. One was the medical qualification, the other was acupuncture qualification. The first one was easily solved, as it fell under the words of the law. The second one was much more tricky, as there were no criteria, and are still none in most countries, for a specific level of theoretical and practical knowledge in acupuncture. There is no official or legal diploma of acupuncture, except in a few states, and only recently. The result was that these associations accepted every kind of member, doctor or non-doctor, whether the practitioner had studied one week or several years.
8. At the same time a lucrative business was set up by a few unscrupulous individuals, playing with the ignorance of people. The teaching of acupuncture, sometimes for heavy fees, to everybody and everywhere. To consolidate their business, these people created international associations, organized meetings, integrated all kind of non conventional therapies, and promised their members an official recognition to happen in the near future. Gullible students flocked by the hundreds, creating aggressive but uninformed pressure groups, and making the fortune of the initiators. This, of course, gave a bad reputation to acupuncture in the medical world, and gave us a great cause for concern.

9. Finally the inertia of medical faculties and academic people further isolated the medical acupuncturists in a fast moving world of all kinds of acupuncture training and practice.

To summarize this chapter, let us say that:
-the existing international societies were:
  - not active enough
  - not representative of the leading acupuncture activities in the countries of their members
  - accepting a mixture of doctors and non-doctors, with no real control on quality

The non-doctors themselves were getting organized, spreading a kind of acupuncture religion, related to traditional chinese medicine, and in the absence of scientific and objective minds.

These were the past errors that had to be avoided at all costs, and the reasons which led the first group of medical acupuncturists to start another international association called ICMART.

B. The main objects of ICMART, according to the by-laws, are:
1. To group Medical Associations of Acupuncture and Related Techniques, taking them away from the isolation in which they had been confined.
2. To strengthen the links between these associations, by contacts and exchanges of information, persons and ideas.
3. To promote the scientific progress in the field, and the application of the technique by those legally authorized in their country to practice the whole range of medical techniques.
4. To sponsor every two years the organization of a World Scientific Congress of Scientific Acupuncture and Related techniques.

C. So ICMART started to exist, with three special characteristics:
1. To respect rigorously the article regarding membership.
2. To accept only societies and not individuals, Which made ICMART become a Society of Societies.
3. To progress slowly but surely, avoiding rash movements, in order to be more convincing, and to become stronger.

D. The evolution of ICMART, since the first idea came up in 1982, because it played strictly according to the rules, was as could be predicted:
1. At the beginning a division in three groups:
   - Enthusiastic societies which became founding members.
   - Societies who already had strong ties with other international societies, and hesitated to
change immediately from one to another.

—Societies who liked the idea of ICMART, but were afraid it might just become another association with the same problems and drawbacks as the preceding ones.

2 / Then it appeared that some societies were not always organized enough to follow up with ICMART, and disappeared from the scene.

3 / But the most important is that the societies which were originally afraid, became more confident with the aims and regulations of ICMART, and gradually became members.

E. The activities of ICMART have mainly taken place at five levels:

1 / Continuous and active presence of its leading members in most of the national or international events regarding acupuncture and related techniques.

2 / Contacts with other international or regional associations possessing similar by-laws and aims.

3 / Information on the general situation of acupuncture in different parts of the world, regarding events, legislations, attitudes or tendencies, research and practice.

4 / A network of personal contacts and exchange of letters, strengthening the actual existence and efficiency of ICMART.

5 / The sponsoring of international congresses or seminars, where the members can gather, discuss and decide the future of medical acupuncture, exchanging at the same time scientific information.

7. ICMART TODAY

A. At the present time nearly twenty medical associations have become members. Our Congresses in Vienna, London, Prague, have been a success. We have contacts with dozens of other medical associations, in the eyes of which ICMART is considered serious and reliable.

B. However there is no infrastructure, no possessions, no buildings, no properties, no funds, no official backing. ICMART stands by the strength and trust of its members. To become member of ICMART brings satisfaction, work, and the feeling of belonging to an exciting.

C. It is true that ICMART is centered mostly on Europe, because it originated from there. But it does not intend to limit its presence to the area of origin, as medical acupuncture and related techniques is bound to spread more and more over the world. That is why we are here, speaking the same language of ideas. The fiction of getting together becomes a strong reality, which all of us are making step by step.

D. It is also true that ICMART members belong mostly to the "scientific" tendency, as artificially opposed to the "traditional" tendency. This does not mean that we discard the latter, many of us feel a great interest for the historical and traditional dimension of acupuncture, even in clinical applications, but we also feel that the system must undergo, like all medical techniques, the experiments and criticism of objective and constructive methodology.

8. ICMART TOMORROW.

Of course, if a lot has been achieved, much more remains to be done, at all levels:

—More clinical and fundamental research, in order to elucidate the mechanisms of the techniques, to which ICMART is very attentive.
The slow acceptance by academic institutions, and integration by medical faculties of acupuncture techniques in their teaching programes, in one way or the other.
- Therefore the spreading of acupuncture practice amongst colleagues, or understanding by them of the meanings and possibilities.
- Finally a constant effort to sensitize the general public to the importance of acupuncture being practiced by those who are best qualified to apply medical acts, for the safety of the patients and the quality of medical acupuncture.

9. WHY BE A MEMBER OF ICMART?
There are no evident advantages at first sight. No financial help, no official recognition, no government sponsoring, no superstructure on which to lean. And this seems even more obvious for associations in countries where the traditions and social structures are different from the West, and where distances are a major obstacle to repeated meetings.
But if we analyze objectively the situation, what do we have?
- In spite of its successes all over the world, acupuncture is still isolated in most states confronted with the power of western medicine.
- Medical acupuncturists are isolated from their colleagues, have difficulty in communicating and being accepted.
- Clinical and fundamental research is not organized on international levels, and sprouts from individual initiatives.
- The pressure of the non-medical practitioners is building up, through the lack of government reactions, and could destroy the image of acupuncture in the eyes of the medical field.
- In Far Eastern countries, because of the strength of traditional.