Enchantment and Enhancement in the Land of the Merlion

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The Merlion: The modern, half-lion, half-fish symbol of Singapore. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Pock).

WORDS, SYMBOLS, AND EVEN MYTHS can convey powerful messages that influence our identities, our behaviors, and our overall approaches to life. This was a theme that was especially evident during the course of the Ninth International Symposium on Auriculotherapy (Fig. 1), which was held on the enchanting island–nation of Singapore, August 10–12, 2017.

Formally established as an independent nation on August 9, 1965,¹ this small, but multicultural, island of only 273 square miles derives its name from the Sanskrit words *Singa* meaning *lion*, and *Pura* meaning *city*. While the history of this island can be traced back to as early as the third century, legend has it that^{2,3} sometime in the eleventh century,

Prince Nila Utama of the Sri Vijaya empire—an area now known as Indonesia—came upon this island-based fishing village, and upon his arrival, saw a large animal that he believed to be a lion. This itself is curious, in that lions are not at all native to this part of the world, and many scholars suggest that what the Prince really saw might have either been a tiger or even a tapir.⁴

In any event, as the well-known saying goes, perception is often viewed as reality, and it is this story of an ancient Prince being met by a lion that led to the creation, by Alex Fraser-Brunner,² of the Merlion—an image of a lion with a “fish like body riding the waves of the sea,”³ in 1964. That—coupled with the more contemporary history associated with

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FIG. 1. Symposium logo.

the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles and the British East India Trading Company, in 1819—is what has brought the historical and cultural identity of this nation to more widespread prominence.

It was with this enchanting background that the Ninth International Symposium on Auriculotherapy took place, bringing together ~175 auriculotherapy practitioners from 24 countries, ranging from Austria and Australia to Brazil, Canada, China, Hungary, Lebanon, Iran, Russia, Switzerland, New Zealand, and the United States. Conducted under the excellent leadership of Im Quah-Smith, MD, PhD, (Fig. 2) of Australia, the symposium was a phenomenal convention of international healers, who were all united by a common focus on the ear as a means to enhance health and healing.

The symposium began on Thursday, August 10th, with welcoming remarks by Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, the Chair of the Singapore Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioner's Board. Given that the Chair of the Scientific Committee, Richard C. Niemtzow, MD, PhD, MPH, was unable to attend the actual symposium (due to health-related reasons), this was followed by opening remarks from Raphael Nogier, MD, on behalf of the Groupe Lyonnais d'Études Médicale (GLEM), and by the senior Chinese delegate, Zhao Baixiao, MD, PhD, who subsequently delivered an interesting summarization of "Auricular Acupuncture Research in the People's Republic of China During the Past 10 Years." In his presentation, Professor Baixiao noted that, while a great deal of academic resources is currently being devoted to acupuncture-related research in China, relatively few of the 4701 journal articles published between 2007 and 2016, focused on auricular acupuncture. Of these articles, those that focused on clinical applications most commonly addressed the use of acupuncture for the treatment of insomnia, pain, obesity, constipation, and hyperlipidemia.

The afternoon sessions addressed an even more expansive array of topics, including the use of auricular acupuncture for

FIG. 2. Im Quah-Smith, MD, PhD, with a calligraphic design by Stephen K.H. Aung, MD, OMD, PhD, FAAFP, CM. This one conveys the image of "love." (Photo courtesy of Dr. Pock; used with permission of Dr. Quah-Smith.)

conditions ranging from pediatric neurodevelopmental disorders (Claire-Marie Rangon, MD, PhD; France), to sleep medicine (Gary Stanton, MD; United States), to vitiligo (Ayfer Kuzulugil, MD; Turkey). An evening reception was highlighted by a demonstration of exceptional Chinese calligraphy by Stephen K.H. Aung, MD, OMD, PhD, FAAFP, CM, who generously brought and displayed a selection of some of the calligraphic creations that he had produced a few weeks earlier, while meditating with his eyes closed (Fig. 3). Many of these works were displayed in the main ballroom, where the plenary presentations were delivered.

The second day of the symposium featured another assortment of outstanding presentations delivered by a venerable array of distinguished speakers from around the globe. Frank R. Bahr, MD, (Germany) started things off with a lecture titled "The Hidden Information in Your Brain Concerning Your Future and How to Influence Your Karma/Dharma and Weak Points in Your Constitution." This was followed by additional presentations by Raphael Nogier, MD (France), Terry Oleson, PhD (United States), and Dr. Bahr among others. In fact, Dr. Bahr's presentation on a "New International Nomenclature for Ear Points: The Development of the 2D Coordinate Ear" offered an intriguing solution to the chronic challenge of trying to locate specific ear points, many of which are located in exceptionally close proximity to one another.

Starting with the pioneering work of Paul M.F. Nogier, MD—and building on the work of other renowned auricular-mapping architects, such as Marco Romoli, MD (Italy), David Alimi, MD (France), and Dr. Oleson—Dr. Bahr demonstrated

FIG. 3. Stephen K.H. Aung, MD, OMD, PhD, FAAFP, CM, preparing some customized calligraphy (Photo courtesy of Dr. Wellington Tan, MB, BS; used with permission of Dr. Aung.)

how use of a superimposed clocklike dial could facilitate greater precision and reproducibility in the location of certain points on the external ear.* Finally, the morning ended with a lively discussion designed to clarify our organizational identity. While it was not possible to arrive at a consensus, the delegates gained a better appreciation for the historical basis pertaining to the use of the terms *auriculotherapy* versus *auriculomedicine* versus *auricular acupuncture*.

The afternoon sessions featured a fascinating array of clinically oriented workshops—one of which highlighted an especially intriguing approach to alleviating psychologic trauma by using a combination of auricular acupressure with auricular chromotherapy. Presented by Alexandre Yoshizumi, MD,⁵ this unique approach was demonstrated on an audience volunteer with impressive efficacy. It is a technique that has the potential to truly change the way patients suffering from a wide range of post-traumatic stresses are treated.

The second full day of sessions concluded with a gala event that provided attendees with an opportunity to enjoy a unique and exquisitely presented dinner at the Empress Restaurant (Fig. 4). The meal was, itself, a culinary adventure, as each entrée was prepared with a unique blend of traditional Chinese herbs and spices (Fig. 5), provided by Eu Yan Sang,⁶ an established and well-known source of traditional Chinese herbs and remedies. Representatives of Eu Yan Sang joined in the dinner and provided a short tutorial as each course arrived, highlighting the artful use of a variety of unique ingredients and their medicinal properties.

*See <http://earacupuncture-nomenclature.eu/> for additional details.

FIG. 4. Head table at gala dinner. (Photo courtesy of Wolfgang Raith, MD, aided by the long-arm of a “selfie” stick.)

The symposium concluded on Saturday, August 12th, after another full day of intellectually stimulating presentations ranging from a lecture on the use of “Cryotherapy as a Modality in Auriculotherapy” (Dr. Alimi) to an intriguing workshop presentation by Bruce G. Fa Shong, DAC (United States), focusing on some initial results stemming from the use of direct current microcurrent point stimulation on the auricular points used in the “Battlefield Acupuncture”⁷ technique. Although this was a pilot study ($N=8$), the resulting increase in vagal tone and the associated heart rate variability, portends some potentially significant implications for overall health and performance enhancement.

In summary, the Ninth International Symposium will be remembered as having taken place in an enchanting venue—one that brought together a truly multicultural array of auricular-based practitioners, giving each an expanded array of enhanced auricular techniques and practices to share with patients seeking their care.

FIG. 5. One of the exquisitely prepared entrees featured during the gala dinner. Each of the entrees included a specially designed combination of Chinese herbs and spices. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Pock.)

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