

# Editorial

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Halfway through the biggest election year in history, in which over half the world's population have a chance to vote, and the level of opinion and emotion - amplified by social media - is reaching Tower-of-Babel-esque proportions. Strange creatures, humans ... the more similar we are, the more we seem to focus on the small differences between us, and the more acutely offensive these minutiae become. This thought-based mutual flagellation reaches its apotheosis in religious difference - especially alternative takes on the same religion - to the point where human beings will gladly kill to prove themselves right and others wrong.


I find myself reflecting on this after reading a recent Facebook post, in which the poster urged his followers to 'Never forget' that a well-known teacher and author had betrayed the acupuncture profession by endorsing COVID-19 vaccination. The so-called betrayer had erred by stepping out of the expected code of behaviour of his tribe. His demanded punishment was, in time-honoured fashion, to be ostracised. Such factionalism is commonplace.

I have heard graduates of the Worsley-style five element style rail against the brutish artisans of TCM-style acupuncture ('They're just fixers, but we are healers'); a well-known authority on Chinese medicine, on the other hand, has written that Worsley's five element acupuncture taught him 'much about treating patients, but little about Chinese medicine'. And how about those of us who would like to reserve a special place in hell for adherents of dry needling (I may have read too much Dante's *Inferno*, but I'm thinking strong restraints whilst cackling *Diavoli* treat them to some fiery nociceptive input in their dorsal horns\*). The history of Chinese medicine abounds with practitioners slagging each other off for being wrong about stuff. Even more common is the tendency to huddle around our Chinese medicine tenets whilst

criticising biomedical doctors (or indeed Chinese medicine 'traitors') - the example above about vaccination is a case in point (but don't get me started about over prescription of antidepressants or topical steroids).

Such thought-based fault-lines seem to criss-cross the human psyche. Whilst clear discrimination in the search for truth is clearly no bad thing, what is the best way to understand and work with our tendency to factionalism? Confining our exploration to our own profession, a generous explanation might be to see different approaches as suited to different brains and their internal representational systems. A colleague once showed me how to work out a point selection based on some kind of *I Ching* mathematical algorithm - a non-starter for my mathematically-challenged grey matter. That said, I have always approached the diversity in our profession by learning as many approaches as possible, in the hope that in so doing the Venn diagram overlap of the different styles will reveal what is essential in all. The down-side to this is that one becomes a 'jack of all trades, master of none', and remains on the periphery of

the various style- or teacher-based communities. That said, I draw the line at applying needles and herbs based on modern scientific principles - it just doesn't seem to work as well (at least when I do it).

Another way to navigate this is to 'chunk up' to find the common ground amongst us all. As practitioners of traditional East Asian medicine, surely our primary aim is to relieve patients' suffering. You may say trigger point and I may say *ashi*; I may look through the six division lens while you look through the eight principle window; you may use 0.5 gauge knitting needles while I use red Seirins ... but from the ultimate perspective we are all working together towards the same end. 



\*Joke, please don't write in - I am fully aware what a foolish, flawed human I am.