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Phoenix Rising

An Interview with Heiner Fruehauf, PhD, LAc

By Bob Quinn, DAOM, LAc

The Rebirth of the Dizhen and Yuanzhen in Modern Clinical Practice



BOB QUINN

I want to thank you for making time for this conversation. We've had quite a few of these over the years, and my goal has always been to contribute to our field, to improve the clinical practice of Chinese medicine. I know you share my hopes in that.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Yes, we've covered quite a few topics in these conversations: Gu Syndrome, aconite and Fire Spirit Lineage prescribing, and other subjects. And, yes, I think these conversations have made a positive contribution to the discourse in our field. I am happy about that.

BOB QUINN

I want to start today with what we could call the big frame in your professional life. By that I mean your mission of bringing to the larger Chinese medicine community techniques and schools of thought that have been lost or even become deliberately suppressed, which have been left out of modern TCM education.

That is how I understand your professional life mission. Do you want to comment on that a bit before we launch into the discussion of these two Han Dynasty tools, the *dizhen* (*teishin*) and *yuanzhen* (*enshin*), and our upcoming seminar on August 22 and 23?

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Thank you first of all for making the time to talk today. I've always enjoyed our multi-layered explorations of topics that we both care about. All of us have a personal story about our Chinese medicine journey, and in my case the story is twofold. I was first trained as a sinologist, studying Chinese history, culture, and literature, with a particular interest in classical Chinese medical texts—writings that were created during the last 3,000 years, all the way into the early 20th century. Later, my own cancer diagnosis focused my interest more on the practice of this medicine. In this capacity, I started out as a patient and only later became an educator in the field. You and I have worked together at the College of Classical Chinese Medicine in Portland for many years thereafter.

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BOB QUINN

It was the best job I have ever had. It was a most unique program.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Indeed! Chinese medicine education around the world varies from barefoot doctor level instruction, where students learn a limited number of acupuncture points and some simple herb formulas—like *Shenqi Wan* for men and *Xiaoyao San* for women—to programs like ours that intended to plumb the medicine at greater depth. Chinese medicine is an ancient and sophisticated system, and I find that even in its most esoteric corners it tends to always be clinically relevant. I am grateful every day for the good fortune to have found this knowledge. And it is not just the sinologist side of me that is happy: Chinese medicine is most useful for the world of natural medicine at a time when Western medicine is in crisis. People are suffering and don't have real alternatives. I therefore consider myself privileged to work in this field along like-minded colleagues like yourself.

"Chinese medicine is an ancient and sophisticated system, and I find that even in its most esoteric corners it tends to always be clinically relevant."

— Heiner Fruehauf

BOB QUINN

If we take a look at these two tools in my hand here. These are the new Phoenix Rising tool sets for which The Healing Order is the exclusive distributor. They are so beautiful and feel almost alive in my hand. We have statements from the *Lingshu* that the *dizhen* (*teishin*) is intended for tonification, and the *yuanzhen* (*enshin*) is described a bit more like a massage tool to separate layers of tissue.

But here is the rub. I recall a Dan Bensky interview in 2012 in the *Journal of Chinese Medicine* in which he explained the difficulty

of claiming we are doing classical acupuncture. He said we really don't have enough information to know what a treatment looked like or how the acupuncturists back then really thought. What we do know is that the *dizhen* was used to tonify and the *yuanzhen* was a sort of massage tool to separate tissue layers. But where is the clinical guidance we need supposed to be coming from? Because those two words are just not enough information to intelligently and effectively use these tools. We can't have everyone with a few months' experience inventing techniques. It takes some time to learn the lay of the land, so to speak. It seems to me that we need to rely on senior teachers with deep experience using these tools. By and large, these masters will be in Japan because they have been using the tools for a few hundred years now, especially during the last 30–40 years. How do you see us making respectful progress? We want to respect the statements from Han dynasty texts, but in the end we need more information than that.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

There is quite a bit of food for thought here, and several ideas come to mind in response to your question. The *Neijing* sometimes only utters one line, but that one line then becomes the foundation for an entire field of research—whether it is for the blood-moving school or the fever school or one of the various *Shanghan* lineages. My understanding of Chinese medicine, and especially Daoist transmission in general, is this: What was written in these ancient texts that has a technical relevance is always twofold. On one level, it is an instruction manual that you could chisel into stone, meaning nothing written in here is trivial. That is why it is called a *jing*, a classic, and not a *lun*, where personal opinion and commentary may be involved. Everything in the *Neijing*, even if it is just one sentence, needs to be regarded as a direct transmission of ancient wisdom—almost as if the universe itself was talking to us. Every sentence is worthy of deep contemplation.

BOB QUINN

Do you have an example of this?

HEINER FRUEHAUF

An example from my personal life would be my research into the cosmology of the Chinese organ networks. So far, I have invested three decades into this project. In the *Neijing*, the organ networks of the body are described as being in direct resonance with the 12 months of the year, the 12 double hours of the day, the 12 stellar houses of the zodiac, and the 12 rivers and states of the ancient Chinese world—the alchemical perspective of 'as above so below' that we find in most ancient wisdom traditions. In the context of our recent *Cosmic Map* class, we went together through the 360

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classical acupuncture point names and discovered how many of them evoked concrete places along the 12 sacred rivers mentioned in Chapter 12 of the *Lingshu*. This enigmatic chapter lists how each of the channel networks is linked to one of these rivers without additional information, and is therefore a typical example of the point I just started to make—core knowledge was written down in the classics for the purpose of transmission, but always requires oral teachings by life-long researchers of our art to become fully understood. While classical learning naturally involves direct engagement with ancient medical texts, it is typically through oral lineages that the practical details of this knowledge are being transmitted. I therefore strongly believe that by studying with teachers of a more clinical and technical orientation, we often find the missing pieces to some of the more enigmatic statements made in the classics.

BOB QUINN

So, taking that insight into the *Lingshu* passages about the nine types of needles...

HEINER FRUEHAUF

The *Huangdi neijing lingshu* is headed by a chapter describing the "Nine Needles". It lists these two non-insertive tools, the *dizhen* and the *yuanzhen*, ahead of the *haozhen*, the fine needle intended for insertion that we think of as an acupuncture needle today.

"The non-insertive tools are listed ahead of the haozhen—the fine needle we think of as an acupuncture needle today. Their order in the classic is not incidental."

— Heiner Fruehauf

BOB QUINN

I had never considered the possibility that the way they were listed might be significant, that it might well communicate to us an order of importance.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

As a beginning student, you skim through the *Neijing*, and think you have an idea what it is, and then you encounter someone like Liu Lihong, who slows you way down and gives you a two-day lecture on the depth and significance of one single sentence in the classic. Mind-blowing, really! From this perspective everything that is in the *Neijing*, including the terse descriptions of these two tools, in what order they are listed, and how they were designed to be used is significant. I have learned to pay attention to these sorts of statements that at first glance seem too succinct to be useful.

BOB QUINN

I have the thought that these tools might find a place in every clinic, because there are healthy patients out there like you who just do not want to be needled—and yet they can benefit from

treatment. It is not just the highly anxious, the chronically ill, and those close to death who can benefit from treatment with these tools.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

I second that sentiment! I am deemed Metal deficient from the perspective of Chinese astrology, a circumstance that may have contributed to a life-long needle phobia of mine. At the same time, I have held the belief that acupuncture is at the heart of Chinese medicine. I say that even though I am primarily an herbalist.

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BOB QUINN

That is interesting to hear you say.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

The *Neijing* itself was written at a time when people were barely into metalworking. As we know from archeological excavations, Han Dynasty needles were quite crude. An insertion back then may have easily caused bleeding and/or infection. It is therefore not a surprise that they also had massage tools and other subtle energetic devices. We can also mention here the ancient wisdom that less is more—the bioelectric nature of our bodies can be influenced with subtle metal stimulation.

BOB QUINN

These Phoenix Rising tools are made with sterling silver.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Yeah, they are beautiful to look at. You are a practitioner who works with them all the time, so you would have more hands-on stories to tell. I think that these tools have the potential of being even better for many people, being more indicated than normal inserted acupuncture needles. We are part of a profession that is all about the detection and movement of subtle energy, after all.

BOB QUINN

I want to mention in passing that *morewithlessing* was a clever phrase that Buckminster Fuller used all the time. He wrote it as one word. He claimed that this is how nature herself works. You are probably tired of hearing me talk about Fuller. He did, by the way, receive acupuncture treatments whenever he was in Japan. He went to a famous Shinto practitioner, Mii Sensei, renowned for his minimalistic style. Fuller died in 1983, so this was long before

acupuncture became widely known in the U.S.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Interesting—and no, I never tire of hearing about him and his ideas. I like his focus of trying to understand the principles of nature and using them to benefit the rest of us. Quite Daoist, really.

BOB QUINN

Yes, there have been a variety of books that explored the idea of Bucky Fuller as being a Daoist of sorts. I want to bring up that both the Phoenix Rising *dizhen* and *yuanzhen* have Hexagram 11 engraved in them and a dot of jade inlaid. Each line of the hexagram is struck by hand. We did not make a stamp that could be used to save production time. The Navajo elder craftsman insisted that the tools would not be good medicine if we elected to go with that method. Each line has to be struck by the hammer individually. I want to invite you to mention your thoughts on jade in Chinese culture and on this particular hexagram.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

For me, Hexagram 11 is the most striking symbol representing life, health and vitality. Heaven at the bottom, poised to rise up, and Earth at the top, bound to sink down: An image of the non-matter of heavenly breath and the matter of earthly body intertwined in eternal embrace. As for the significance of jade, it has been a symbol for the purity of heart and our human connection to Heaven for thousands of years in Chinese culture. The shamans of the ancient Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties used jade implements in all of their important rituals.

"Jade has been a symbol for the purity of heart and our human connection to Heaven for thousands of years in Chinese culture."

— Heiner Fruehauf

BOB QUINN

You were talking just now about Liu Lihong, and it occurred to me in listening just now: We have just the Chinese word *an* 按 for pressing in connection with how the *dizhen* was to be used. We are instructed by the classic to press it. For the longest time, I wondered if the character gave a hint as to how strong the pressure was intended to be. A scholar friend said there is no clear clue; another suggests that there is a bit of a clue. But just now, in listening to you, it seems to me to be the wrong question. I know the intent in the *Lingshu* for the *teishin* is to tonify. Instead of looking for the *an* (pressing) character to nail down the technique for me, perhaps the key is to elevate one's perceptual ability, so that one accurately perceives what a given point with a given patient at a given moment in time requires for the best outcome. This might be gentle for one patient but more significant contact

pressure for another. There is a whole range of contact pressure used with the *teishin* in Japan and in the West. Some teachers want to hold you to five grams in all circumstances, and others use a more significant touch. A neurosurgeon I studied with in Wakayama is quite heavy-handed with this tool, and his treatment of pain and numbness is impressive. So, there is such a thing as a yang *teishin* style; it is just a lot less common. Anyway, do you have any thoughts on this idea that what we need to do is develop our assessment sensitivity to the point where we can determine what sort of touch is needed with these tools?

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Based on my personal experience, the Japanese approach to everything technical tends to be more detail oriented than the Chinese. I lived in China for seven years and in Japan for a year. When I first arrived in Asia in 1982, I naively believed that the two cultures were very similar. But the Japanese way of approaching things turned out to be way more "German" in comparison to the Chinese way—I am referring here to detail orientation and the inclusion of highly specific technical instructions. You can perhaps best observe this difference between those two cultures here in Portland when visiting the Japanese and Chinese gardens. The Japanese Garden is meticulously pruned, with significant amounts of daily labor involved, whereas in the classical Chinese Garden, the Dao of nature runs visibly wilder. The leaves don't get raked immediately—that is considered part of nature; what grows will eventually die. It is messier. In a Japanese Zen monastery, everyone is clean-shaven and dressed in freshly pressed robes, while in most Daoist monasteries in China the monks sport a more individual look and tend to rise later in the day.

BOB QUINN

(laughs) That appeals to me more!

HEINER FRUEHAUF

(laughs) This probably appeals to most of us more! You can even observe this cultural chasm within East Asian studies departments of Western universities. During my time at the University of Chicago, students of japanology and sinology congregated in the same building. The faculty and students on the Japanese side usually appeared super clean-cut, while on the Chinese side students often sported long hair and were prone to show up late for their classes. In sum, we can say that the Chinese like to look at the big picture. I always like to quote Zhang Xichun in this context, whom I often call the last classical physician. His book *Yixue zhongzhong canxi lu* (*Chinese at Heart but Western Where Appropriate: Essays Investigating an Integrated Form of*

Medicine) proposed to use Chinese medicine as a foundation for medical thinking—yin-yang, Five Phase Elements, Daoist cosmology with all its messiness and apparent incongruities—while utilizing the diagnostic and therapeutic modalities of Western medicine as nothing but an additional toolkit inside that overarching system. I consider him a true integrator of these two vastly different types of medicine. He even included Western pharmaceuticals such as Aspirin as ingredients in some of his anti-febrile Chinese herbal formulas. He further defined Western pharmaceuticals available during the 1930s from an energetic perspective and integrated them into his own updated Chinese materia medica. Modern approaches to integrative medicine, while trendy with patients and practitioners alike, tend to do the opposite. They use a Western biochemical lens to classify Chinese herbs. In this process, the baby often gets thrown out with the bathwater. Meaning: Items that have worked in the clinic for thousands of years are dismissed because they cannot be "proven" with the highly limited tools of materialist science. Liu Lihong's favorite language describing this dichotomy is from the *Yijing* (Classic of Change): *Xing er xia*, the physically palpable world of matter that is measurable and weighable in a Newtonian sense; and *xing er shang*, the meta-physical root sources of reality—spirit, energy, intention, consciousness. Modern TCM has chosen to adapt the matter specific angle of modern science, but the real heart of our medicine has always been energetic, even spiritual.

BOB QUINN

You are describing Chinese medicine as a way of thinking, not as a set of methods and materials.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Yes, let's look at the *Daodejing*, for instance. According to legend, Laozi was stopped at a mountain pass and was told: We are not going to let you pass unless you write down your wisdom. He wrote: *Dao ke dao fei chang Dao*—"The Dao that can be expressed in concrete words will never be the real Dao." Everything in traditional Chinese culture must essentially harken back to the Dao, which naturally belongs to the realm of the meta-physical. While "TCM"—the standard term coined for our medicine by the Chinese government—contains the letter "T" for tradition, this moniker must be viewed as a misnomer. The word *chuantong* 傳統 for "tradition" does not at all describe old things from the past that are not relevant any longer. It literally designates things of ultimate relevance, meaning that when you unpack them you will find that invisible "silken" strands connect you all the way to the Dao, to the spiritual source of all things. Only then can you technically call this body of knowledge "traditional". All truly traditional knowledge in China, medicine included, is a pathway to

the Dao. I have had the privilege to study and apprentice with numerous teachers over the years who were all teachers of the Dao. They were not narrow technique teachers. They wanted to inspire you to find out for yourself what is going on as you put your hands on the patient. This leads me back to your original question about how hard to press a point with the *teishin*. The Japanese approach would most likely give you more specific and concrete instructions regarding every detail of the procedure.

BOB QUINN

What you are describing really is how one should progress to a higher level of using these tools, the *dizhen* and the *yuanzhen*. It should be obvious to anyone reading this that if you simply touch a piece of metal to a point, not much will happen, not unless you are very lucky. There is something that you need to learn, and a comfort and confidence born from practice that you need to embody. This brings in another element in your life, the practice of qigong. To be successful with these tools is really a form of qigong incorporating a classical tool, as far as I am concerned.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Yes, I agree. It is definitely in the realm of energy work.

BOB QUINN

I remember some years back you lectured a whole day on the concept of *zhong* 中 (center), and Chinese medicine as *zhongyi*, the medicine of the center. To shift our awareness from mundane space to sacred space, as Mircea Eliade brilliantly describes in his work, we need to establish a center and work from there. With a center, this sort of shift to the sacred is possible. In the center is a point of stillness we can occupy and from which we can extend and treat the patient. *Zhong* is here not a throwaway concept—yeah, yeah, center, who doesn't understand a center, you have a circle, and there is a center—big deal! What's the point? What is so exciting there? No, it becomes the whole focus of your practice! And I want to also bring in your interest regarding the phenomenon of resonance. You always speak of the resonance between Heaven and Earth, the above and below, the macrocosm and the microcosm, but there can also be resonance shared between two acupuncture points.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Absolutely, that is also resonance. Let me share a few thoughts on *zhong*, since you raise it here as being important for someone using these tools. *Zhong* is not just a place in Chinese medicine but a functional state of being. It refers to the rebalancing mechanism of body, mind and spirit that constantly recenters what is temporarily pulled out of alignment. When this mechanism is working, we experience a full-body sensation that we are fully

grounded, centered and at peace. Too much upward movement descends and blood pressure normalizes, excessive cold becomes warmed, the excretion of too many stress hormones returns to an appropriate level, etc. The universe itself is designed to be in a constant process of realignment, seeking equilibrium between the polar nature of yin and yang and the related states of hot and cold, movement and stillness, alkalinity and acidity. Every storm is an attempt of the macrocosm to return to equilibrium, and every fever event is an attempt of the microcosm to regain a balanced state. When utilizing the *teishin* and *enshin* tools, we are connecting our patients to the formative rebalancing power of the universe itself. As practitioners, moreover, the application of these tools requires us to actively cultivate a centered state, so that we can more fully induce this rebalancing function—the only thing that truly heals—in our patients.

"When utilizing the teishin and enshin, we are connecting our patients to the formative rebalancing power of the universe itself."

— Heiner Fruehauf

BOB QUINN

I have been examining the possibility of resonance based on shared characters in point names. For example, CV12 *Zhongwan* and LU1 *Zhongfu*. Both contain the character *zhong*. I am encouraged by my early findings to continue this investigation. It might be that this could be an exciting extension of your point-name research. I want to be clear: I do not approach it with the assumption that there will be resonance because of the shared *zhong* character. I check to "see-feel" if there is resonance between those points. If there is, then my *dizhen* is on one of them, and a finger of my other hand, usually my middle finger, is on the other. The connection and resonance are often very strong.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

I like this idea and your way of approaching it. As Chinese medicine practitioners we are working with the energy field of the human body. Sometimes, just barely touching a point might have amazing results. I'm sure you have lots of case studies that can corroborate this assumption.

BOB QUINN

Yes, I'd say every day working with these tools surprises me. Perhaps it would be good to talk a bit about how these tools came to be, how I met the Navajo silversmiths I work with. I don't think I ever told you the story.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

Yes, go ahead. I am most interested in hearing this.



BOB QUINN

I was in Phoenix with my niece when I received a call from two of my Portland patients who are students of Garchen Rinpoche, a famous Buddhist teacher. They asked if I would go to his nearby institute and treat two of the resident lamas. One had post-surgical pain—he had his gallbladder removed—and the other had the worst case of Bell's palsy I have ever seen. Garchen is a true living Buddha. I knew of him from these patients and had watched a documentary about his life; I think it is on YouTube now for free. He spent 20 years in a Chinese prison work camp.

The institute was about a 90-minute drive from Phoenix. As I was driving into the grounds of the institute on the ten-mile-long dirt road, I had the sudden thought: Maybe Garchen Rinpoche himself will be there, and I can ask him to bless my hands for the benefit of my present and future patients. Hold that thought.

I treated the surgical pain first, and the treatment went well. The second lama, the one with Bell's palsy, had his left eye taped shut, half his face was horribly swollen, and he was bleeding from his ear. He was in great pain. This lama had received three treatments—one every day since the paralysis started—from a local practitioner with 20 years of experience in China. I treated him with my *dizhen*, a little moxa, *qigong tuina* (a subtle yin-yang style of bodywork), and some light needling of a few points. His pain and the swelling were 90% gone in one treatment. He kept saying that he didn't know that such gentle techniques were possible (the three previous treatments had been heavy-handed and quite painful and had helped little). I had a chance for a second treatment two weeks later, and that was all we needed for a complete resolution of the complaint. Probably some of my best work ever.

After the treatments, I went to put on my shoes to leave. The two lamas rushed over and told me that I should stay for lunch. Just

then, Garchen Rinpoche came down the stairs and stopped three meters from me. He looked at me, curious perhaps about this newcomer. I suspect that he did not know what I was doing there. I don't think he knew I was there to do acupuncture for the lamas. Then he came right up to me and gave me a bear hug. It was such a blessing. He stuck his hand in a waist pouch and took out a woven bracelet. He put my hands together in prayer position and held them in his and then put the band on my wrist. I still have it. Remember my prayer as I drove into the institute. They seated me next to him for the meal. And through lunch, he reached over several times and patted my right hand. I felt, of course, that my prayer had been answered many times over.

Why do I tell this? On the way home from the institute, I stopped in a small Arizona town and walked into a silversmith shop. Turns out the shop owner was himself famous in the world of silversmithing. He has won awards. Wealthy Japanese fly in to have him make a custom bracelet for them. He is also active in his tribe's healing ceremonies. He grew up on the Navajo reservation herding sheep, and Navajo is his first language. In his shop, healing chants were playing on the stereo as he worked. I showed him a collection of *teishin* and showed how they were used. He became interested in the idea of working with me, producing high-quality healing tools. What is unique in his way of working is that he had not only a Navajo master but also a Zuni one. That is not the typical path to follow. But then it gets more interesting, because he is a student of the Japanese aesthetic style we call wabi-sabi, the perfection of the imperfection of nature. He combines the three influences in a unique way. He, his son, and I have been working together now for nine years. It all started though with Garchen Rinpoche bringing me to that area. I like to think that he blessed not only my hands but everything about that day, including this tool project.



HEINER FRUEHAUF

I love this story. It captures so much that is important to me—the connection to a sacred way of working, the appreciation for tradition, the uncompromising commitment to quality, and that the artist works in a unique, eclectic way. I always aspire to keep these elements alive in all three pillars of my own work: The Healing Order clinic and retreat center, the ClassicalChineseMedicine.org website and its community, and the Classical Pearls herb company.

BOB QUINN

I thought you would appreciate the story. Let me add one more piece, very personal to me. My mother passed away a little after these treatments that I gave to the lamas. Without asking me, they held a special ceremony for her and then informed me. Having Garchen Rinpoche pray for my mother meant a lot to me. I was very moved and deeply appreciative.

I will close here, Heiner, once again thanking you for your time today.

HEINER FRUEHAUF

That's a lovely story. I enjoyed our talk today and thank you for coming out to the house to do this in person. I look forward to our teaching together and us working to bring these tools back into wider use in the practice of Chinese medicine.

This interview is one of a series of conversations between Heiner Fruehauf and Bob Quinn. Previous interviews, covering topics including Gu Syndrome, aconite, and Fire Spirit Lineage prescribing, are available at ClassicalChineseMedicine.org. Heiner Fruehauf and Bob Quinn will teach together at Phoenix Rising, August 22–23, 2026, in Corbett, OR and via live stream.