

# Paediatric tuina



by **Dr Elisa Rossi, MD**

In China, paediatric *tuina* is part of the training of TCM doctors and widely used in modern hospitals. Significantly different from *tuina* for adults, it requires specialist training because of the specific features of children's physio-pathology, symptoms and diagnosis. On the other hand, because it uses only a few, relatively simple, main techniques, it can be learnt fairly easily. Basic sequences can also be taught to parents.

**P**AEDIATRIC TUINA IS a highly effective treatment for both acute and chronic diseases and is extremely helpful for balancing qi and reinforcing the constitution. Treating children is relatively easy and extremely rewarding: diagnosis is generally more straightforward than in adults because the qi has not yet been disordered into complicated patterns; changes are seen quickly as children's qi has the rising, quick, strong quality of wind, of spring, of dawn, and of the mounting of yang inside yin. The results are good because at the beginning of life, the qi is still pure and re-

sponds very promptly – as the Chinese say, “*zang fu qing ling, yi qu kang fu* (脏腑清灵, 易趋康复, when the *zangfu* spirit is pure, health is easily and rapidly recovered)”<sup>a</sup>.

I have always been interested in the field of TCM paediatrics, as it seems to have great potential for both modifying an unbalanced system that causes illness and for preventing future problems. I observed children's treatments in 1983, when studying at the Academy of Acupuncture of Beijing, and I have always treated small patients in my private practice.

When my colleagues and I founded the Associazione MediCina school in 1994, we placed importance on teaching paediatrics, and invited Julian Scott to give lectures and support to the weekly children's clinic. I continued to study in China (paediatric acupuncture and qigong treatment at Xiyuan Hospital, Beijing, in 1992, with Dr Lu Guang-Yun) and paediatric tuina (with Dr Yin Ming, at the TCM Paediatric Department of the Provincial Hospital of Nanjing in 1999 and in 2000, and with Dr Zhang Su-Fang, at the Provincial Hospital of Jinan, in 2006).

a. Rossi, E. (2010): *Pediatria in Medicina Cinese*. Milan: C.E.A. An English edition will be published by Donica, 2011, including instructional DVD.

## Xiaoxiao Children's Centre

The Xiaoxiao Centre was started in 2005 in Milan; it is a paediatric clinic treating children with tuina and acupuncture, with the support of the Federation of Italian Schools of Tuina and Qigong. Now in its sixth year of operation, the clinic offers two pilot studies of a course of free treatments. These are "Cure and Prevention of Wintertime Respiratory Diseases", and the "Quiet Project" (for children who have difficulty being calm, sleeping well, and focusing mental attention).

Children have come to the Xiaoxiao Centre for other problems such as atopic dermatitis, infant abdominal pain, poor appetite, gastro-oesophageal reflux, slow growth, constipation, nocturnal enuresis, headache, cryptorchidism, juvenile idiopathic arthritis, and Tourette's syndrome.

Over the first five years we have treated 140 children, aged from two months to 12 years, for a total of 781 sessions. These treatments are individually designed according to Chinese diagnosis and not based on set protocols, and primarily use *tuina*, supported where appropriate with acupuncture, moxibustion, cupping, ear-seeds, *guasha* and plum-blossom needle.

Treatment data is recorded in a specifically designed clinical chart, which is available to other centres, with the goal of building a network for gathering and exchanging information. Parents are interviewed during the follow-up treatment, in order to gather their suggestions, and impressions of the centre, their evaluation of the therapeutic results, and whether they continued to use *tuina* at home.

Xiaoxiao is also a training centre for *tuina* practitioners and acupuncturists who choose to treat children: up to this date, 47 colleagues have taken a basic or advanced clinical course.

The practitioners at the Xiaoxiao Centre work as a group, generally composed of me plus one of the core group of four senior practitioners, and one of the junior practitioners.

Senior *tuina* practitioners and acupuncturists are colleagues who initially came for the paediatric clinical training and then

became more involved. Over time, some have left, but we all keep in touch and share what we learn.

The clinical course focuses on applying the four examinations for paediatric signs, recognising constitutional and pathological patterns, discussing diagnostic hypotheses, therapeutic principles and treatments. The trainees are involved step by step in using *tuina*, needles (in Italy restricted to only MDs), moxa, cups, *guasha* and ear-seeds.

We have also series of evening meetings to improve our observation and understanding of the relationship between child and parent, starting from our own emotional responses in the clinical setting. This is a very complex point, which would need much more space for discussion, but being able to explore the internal and relational dynamics, and building a therapeutic alliance, are essential issues. Parents seek help when something is not working well, so when we see them they are often overwhelmed by emotions: alarm and urgent need of cure and reassurance, as much as feelings of guilt and inadequacy that may express as open hostility or hidden anger and sabotage.<sup>b</sup>

### Paediatric tuina features

Without being too invasive, paediatric *tuina* is able to free accumulations and reinforce qi. Chinese medicine is very helpful for common conditions where conventional medicine has little to offer or where pharmacological treatment is overloaded with heavy side effects. Many children are prone to getting colds, otitis, tonsillitis, cough, catarrh, asthma, and are given antibiotics with alarming frequency. Sometimes antibiotic therapy is necessary, but most often provides only a temporary solution while actually weakening the child, who sickens more and more often. One Xiaoxiao pilot study focused on recurrent wintertime respiratory diseases, during which we noticed a definite change in the frequency of episodes, their severity and the children's recovery.

b. For more discussion see Rossi, E. (2000). The space shared between patient and acupuncturist. *European Journal of Oriental Medicine*, Vol. 3 No. 2. Also Chapter 15 of Rossi, E. Shen (2007): *Psycho-Emotional Aspects of Chinese Medicine*. London: Churchill-Livingstone, or Chapter 9 in Rossi, E. (2009): *Pediatria en Medicina Cinese*, Milan: CEA.



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■ Illustrations by Monica Curioni, reproduced from *Pediatria in Medicina Cinese*.



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We see big changes in treating children who are tired, whining, clinging, have poor appetite, lack of energy or get sick often. We can also do a lot for babies who wake up many times during the night, for toddlers who are agitated, angry or stubborn, or older children who are hyperactive, with difficulties in concentrating and staying still.

Some other paediatric problems that are easy to treat include acute abdominal pain in infants, constipation, diarrhea, and nocturnal enuresis; other issues such as eczema or asthma take longer to cure, but Chinese medicine is still a good choice for them. *Tuina* and acupuncture are also useful in cases of retarded development; the treatment is not miraculous, and much care and constancy of treatment is needed, but it is worthwhile.

Paediatric *tuina* is also a helpful preventive tool. Prevention is rooted in understanding the individual constitutional patterns: if we know what direction the child tends towards when they get sick, we can change the child's most harmful daily habits and teach the parents some therapeutic sequences for when the child is under stress (change of school, turmoil between parents, new baby in the family, excessive external pathogenic factors, weakness in their own qi, or immunisations).

#### Paediatric tuina stimulations

*Tuina* treatment for children is generally a sequence of eight to 10 stimulations, with each stimulation lasting one to two minutes, as the child either lies on the couch or sits in a parent's lap.

Traditionally, on the hand and forearm points, only the right side is used in girls and the left in boys, while the other points are used bilaterally.

At the centre we normally see the children once a week, while at home the sequence is done once a day (more often in case of an acute condition, e.g. fever).

The order does not matter, but the stimulations must be done all together; they should be neither too light to obtain an effect, nor too heavy, unpleasant, or harmful.

#### Fa (法): Main methods used in paediatrics

##### 推法 *Tuifa* (pushing method)



The movement is actually more rubbing than pushing. It goes along a line, always in the same direction, keeping a steady rhythm and uniform pressure (much lighter and faster than in adults), not too heavy (children's skin is delicate), but stronger than a light brushing. The direction is either towards the centre (centripetal) to tonify, or the opposite to clear.

##### 揉法 *Roufa* (kneading method)



This is done on single points (and the abdomen). It is gentle, but it goes deep, and triggers a sort of wave sensation inside.

##### 运推 *Yuntui* (round-pushing)



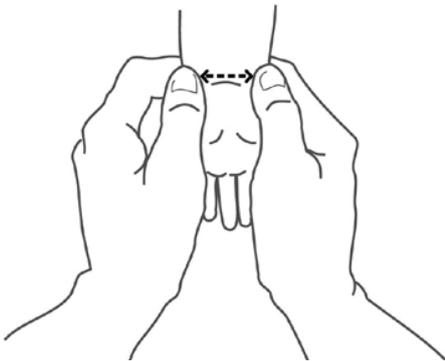
The same method as *tuifa*, applied in a circular motion.

叩法 **Koufa** (tapping method)



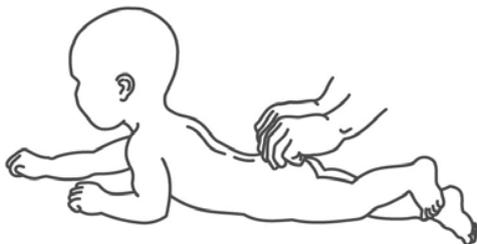
A regular tapping motion, done with the tip of your finger (at 90° to the surface), keeping the wrist soft and elastic.

分推 **Fentui** (open-pushing):



Also the same as *tuifa*, but performed with the thumbs towards the two opposite directions (“opening”) from one point.

捏法 **Niefa** (pinching method):



A relatively strong squeezing on points (e.g. on the knuckles for high fever) or a rolling along the spine to stimulate all the back-*shu* points.

Main points used in paediatrics

In children there are points and lines that are not found in adults, e.g. all the *zang* are represented on the hand (see diagram below). Most of the points/lines are located on hand and forearm, and they have specific functions. These points are the ones we use most often in our clinical practice (that is, not in emergency conditions). I have omitted the standard indications for these points because they say all and nothing. What I find important is the function, so that it is related to therapeutic principles and therefore to the diagnosis.

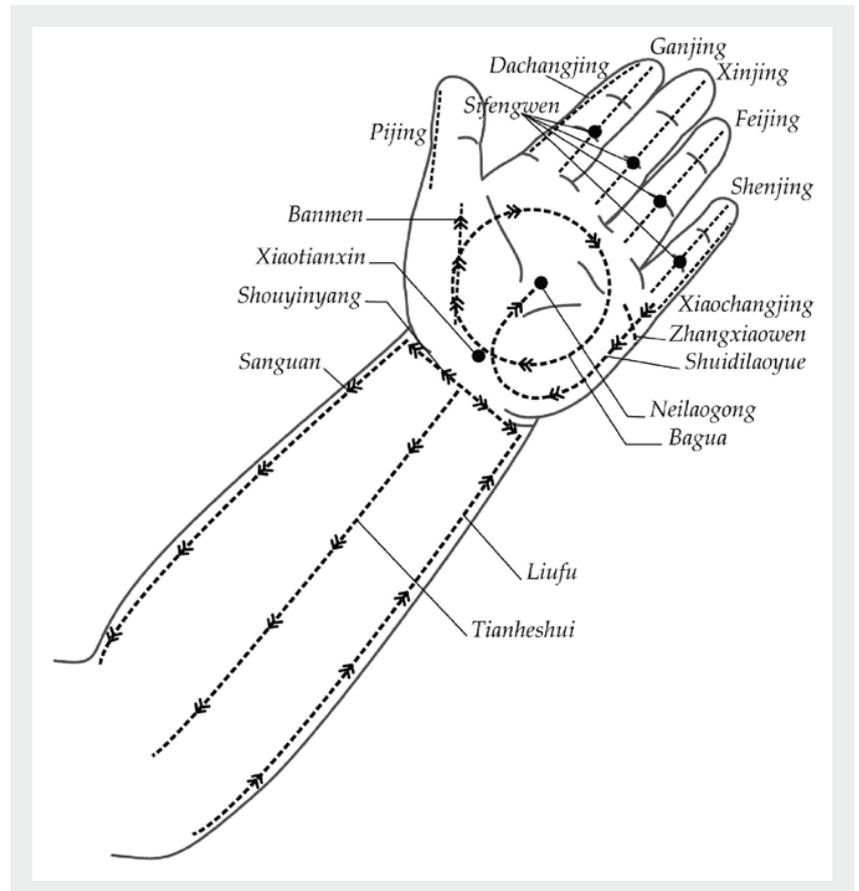
**Pijing** (Spleen)

Located on the radial side of the thumb; stimulated by using *tuifa*, to tonify.

This point tonifies the qi, reinforces the transforming and transporting functions of the earth, regulates the middle *jiao* and supports post-heaven qi.

**Dachangjing** (Large Intestine)

Located on the radial side of the index finger; stimulated by using *tuifa*, to tonify or to clear. This point tonifies the intestines





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or eliminates heat in the intestines (according to the direction).

**Ganjing** (Liver)

Located on the palmar side of the index finger; stimulated by using *tui*fa, to clear. This point eliminates heat and internal wind.

**Xinjing** (Heart)

Located on the palmar side of the middle finger; stimulated by using *tui*fa, to clear. This point clears heat disturbing the Heart.

**Feijing** (Lung)

Located on the palmar side of the ring finger; stimulated by using *tui*fa, to tonify or to clear. This point tonifies Lung qi, reinforces *wei*qi (defensive energy), regulates the diffusing function of the Lung or eliminates heat in the exterior (according to the stimulation).

**Shenjing** (Kidney)

Located on the palmar side of the little finger; stimulated by using *tui*fa, to tonify. This point tonifies Kidney qi, nourishes the *jing*, regulates Kidney function of governing the lower orifices, and warms the yang.

**Xiaochangjing** (Small Intestine)

Located on the ulnar side of the little finger; stimulated by using *tui*fa, to clear. This point eliminates heat from the intestines.

**Banmen** (Thick Gate)

Located on the thenar eminence, from the wrist crease to the base of the thumb, using *tui*fa (to clear) or *rou*fa. This point eliminates *ji* (food accumulation), benefits digestion and clears Stomach heat.

**Bagua** (Eight Trigrams)

Located on the palm, in a semi-circular line of two thirds the radius, around *Laogong* P-8; stimulated by using *Yuntui* generally from the hypothenar eminence to the base of the palm, and then to the thenar eminence. This point harmonises the circulation of qi and regulates the *zang*fu.

**Xiaotianxin** (Small Celestial Heart)

Located at the base of the palm, between the thenar and hypothenar eminences; stimulated by using *rou*fa or *kou*fa with the tip of the middle finger. This point clears the Heart and calms the *shen*.

**Shuidi laoyue** (Fishing for the Moon in the Water)

Located on the palm, in a curved line

from the base of the little finger, along the hypothenar eminence to the centre of the palm; stimulated by using *tui*fa. This point clears the Heart by bringing Water into Fire (from Kidney to *Laogong* PC-8).

**Shou yinyang** (Hand Yin-Yang)

Located on the medial wrist crease, from the centre towards the edges; stimulated by using *fentui*. This point balances yin and yang, and regulates the *zang*fu.

**Erma or Erren shangma** (Two Men Mounting Horses)

Located on the back of the hand, between the fourth and fifth metacarpal bones; stimulated by using *rou*fa. This point tonifies Kidney yin and yang, and nourishes *jing*.

**Ershanmen** (Two Panels Gate)

These two points are located between the second and third and between the third and fourth metacarpo-phalangeal joints; stimulated by using *rou*fa or *nie*fa on the two points at the same time. These points release the exterior and stimulate sweating, as well as tonify defensive qi.

**Wailaogong** (Exterior Palace of Work)

Located at the centre of the back of the hand; stimulated by using *rou*fa. This point warms the yang and scatters cold.

**Sanguan** (Three Passes)

Located on the medial aspect of the forearm, along the radial side from the wrist to the elbow; stimulated by using *tui*fa. This point tonifies qi and yang, and scatters cold.

**Tianheshui** (Water of Celestial Peace)

Located on the medial aspect of the forearm, along the midline, from the wrist to the elbow; stimulated by using *tui*fa. This point eliminates heat by cooling through nourishing Water.

**Liufu** (Six Hollow Organs)

Located on the medial aspect of the forearm along the ulnar side from the elbow to the wrist; stimulated by using *tui*fa. This point eliminates heat from the *zang*fu.

Parental co-operation

Co-operation with the parents is extremely important for supporting paediatric treatment, both in the treatment of chronic conditions and in preventing future illness.

In Europe we do not usually have the chance to treat three times a week as is done in China, so therefore daily *tuina* done by the parents greatly supports the treatment.

The child's caregivers are taught to apply an individually designed *tuina* sequence at home. When done regularly, the treatment is reinforced, the parents' confidence is supported, and the child-parent relationship is improved.

The parents also learn some sequences for acute problems (common cold, fever, constipation, etc.). We also give attention to modifying the child's diet and daily habits when needed.

We practitioners have group meetings with a psychotherapist, working on a better observation and understanding of the relationship between child and parents, focusing on our responses to the clinical setting.

#### Case history<sup>c</sup>

Bruno was a four-year-old boy, visibly quiet and bashful. In the previous two years, about every two to three weeks, he had frequent attacks of sore throat, enlarged cervical lymph glands, cough and high fevers. The fevers were about 40°C and lasted five to seven days, during which he ate almost nothing, had soft stools, felt exhausted and lost about one pound of weight. For the next four to five days his appetite remained poor and his energy very low, followed by a week of well-being as his strength and weight recovered, before he fell ill again.

As a baby, during breast-feeding, he had an episode of bronchitis and many of pharyngitis, otitis and tonsillitis, most frequently in the past two years when he had been prescribed antibiotics 10 times and hospitalised twice.

In the past year, he began to experience more bedwetting at night, and even daytime enuresis when falling ill.

His parents had tried treatments using homeopathy and moxa, but the results were not brilliant, and now they were worn out and discouraged. His mother reported that his birth was with epidural anaesthesia and oxytocin; she breastfed him for over

10 months but he had a lot of difficulties sucking and her milk was scanty. He weaned smoothly, and at six months had mild eczema for a few months. He had a careful diet, mostly avoiding dairy products; his appetite and stools were good when he was not sick; he woke several times at night, tended to be cold, and sweated very little.

He was pale, had slightly dark areas under the eyes, no swollen cervical lymph glands, his abdomen was slightly tense, his finger vein not visible, and his tongue was slightly swollen, pale, with a bluish shade.

#### Diagnosis and therapeutic principles

Bruno's story and presentation suggest Spleen qi deficiency, that has also weakened Kidney and Lung qi, and allowed phlegm to clump. At the beginning of our life, our individual qi has just begun its existence and is not yet consolidated. Chinese texts state that the "*zang fu jiao ruo* 脏腑娇弱 (*zangfu* are soft and tender)", the "*qi yi chu dao* 气易出道 (qi easily loses its way)", and the "*xiao er pi bu zu* 小儿脾不足 (Spleen of children is insufficient)". In Bruno's case, a weakness of the middle *jiao* at birth had impaired the basic functions of receiving and transforming food into *zhen qi* (true qi) the various forms of which then suffered: the muscles and skin, *ying* and *wei*, functioning of the *zangfu*, and emotions. His Lung qi was too feeble to diffuse and descend qi and to foster *wei qi*, the six external pathogenic qi easily penetrated through to the interior, manifesting in respiratory infections, cough and fever in a vicious cycle that weakened the qi further.

When the movement of qi is obstructed, fluids tend to accumulate into phlegm, which causes yet more stagnation. Accumulation of phlegm is also facilitated by the deficiency of the earth qi's transforming capability. Phlegm is heavy, sticky, thick, hard to eliminate and can localise "in the hundred places". In children, phlegm easily clumps at the upper orifices (seen in nasal obstruction, otitis, swollen tonsils, enlarged cervical lymph glands), often gathers at the *couli* (skin orifices), impairing the circulation of qi and blood (seen in eczema), may hide as "hard" phlegm deep in the Lungs, obstructing the free diffusion of qi (signs of catarrh and asthma), and



#### Ante Babic's Tips for running a successful clinic ...

The price you charge will determine the type of patient you will get.

c. This case is discussed in more detail in Rossi, E., (2010): *Pediatrics in Medicina Cinese* to be published in English by Donica, 2011.

may also take a non-substantial form and hinder the *xinqiao* (Heart portals), and misting the *shen* (manifested in emotional and behavioural disorders).

Long-term Spleen-Stomach qi deficiency produces a post-Heaven qi chronic shortage, thus qi has to be drained from pre-Heaven qi, the deep *yuan* qi pool, the precious *jing* reservoir.

Bruno's signs of increasing Kidney qi involvement are clear: bedwetting, dark shadows under the eyes, weakness, and chronic sickness.

Our therapeutic principles focused on reinforcing Spleen, Lung and Kidney qi, transforming phlegm and eliminating pathogens.

#### Tuina treatment

Reinforce the Spleen and middle *jiao* by *tui*fa at *Pijing* from the tip to the base; *rou*fa (on the abdomen and at *Zusanli* ST-36), and *tui*fa and *nie*fa on *Jizhu* (Spinal Column: this is located on a line from C-7 to the coccyx; stimulated by first pushing downwards along the spine and then pinching upwards along the sides of the spine).



Tonify and regulate the Lung qi and transform phlegm using *tui*fa at *Feijing* from the tip to the base, and on *Bagua* circularly on the palm; *fentui* horizontally on *Tanzhong* REN-17, *tui*fa on the *Xielei* (Below Ribs, on a line along the flanks, from the armpit to the level of the umbilicus; and *fentui Jianjiagu* BL-13, along the shoulder blades.

Tonify Kidney qi by *rou*fa on *Erma*, and *tui*fa on *Yongquan* KID-1 towards the toes.

#### Moxa treatment

Moxa on *Zusanli* ST-36, *Feishu* BL-13, *Shenshu* BL-23, and *Mingmen* DU-4.

We advised the parents to repeat the *tuina* sequence once a day at home, and to moxa twice a week on the points *Zusanli* ST-36,

*Zhongwan* REN-12, and *Qihai* REN-6, which they did regularly. We also taught them sequences to use when Bruno was getting ill, and for fever and acute symptoms.

#### Evolution and comments

Bruno was seen 10 times, starting with three times a week, then three times at two to three-week intervals, then four times once a month. After the first three treatments, he still got ill, with symptoms of fever, sore throat and catarrh, but all were milder, and he recovered with simple *guasha* and homeopathy treatment. During the winter, his episodes become less frequent and less severe, and he never had to take antibiotics. Nocturnal enuresis became uncommon, and never happened again in the daytime; he woke only once during the night.

After five months, his happy parents reported that he had caught some colds, but had no fever, took no medicines, quickly recovered from chickenpox, had no bedwetting in the past month, stools were good, appetite also and he gained five pounds, was less cold and pale, and rarely woke at night. However, they complained that he had become “stubborn and mulish”! We noticed that he was more active and chatty, his tongue was still slightly pale, but not bluish, and the tip actually a bit red. After a few more months, his mother wrote to us that Bruno was generally well and strong.

Since Bruno's qi was deeply depleted, results took some time to consolidate, but the process started soon enough to give the parents the motivation to continue. After six months Bruno was a much more sturdy child; his defensive qi, stools, lower orifices, sleep, body structure and social presence were all much stronger – as was his will to stand up to his parents!