Chapter 3
The Technique of Tongue Diagnosis

The patient’s face is turned to the light and the tongue is examined in a flat, stretched out position, not, however, to the extent that its natural color changes (Fig. 17). It is best to examine the tongue by daylight. If, under certain conditions, the examination has to be done by artificial light, the wrong results may be obtained. If the tongue has to be examined initially by artificial light, it is advisable to examine it again later on by daylight. It is important to distinguish between the true color of the tongue and a discoloration caused by certain foods, medication, or mechanical influences. Milk, for instance, leaves a white coating on the surface of the tongue, coffee a brown surface. Bilberries (blueberries) and beet tinge the tongue bluish-red, whereas colored sweets make the tongue look green, yellow, or blue. Chocolate leaves a brown smear; toothpaste can leave a white layer, etc. The coating on the tongue can also be changed by brushing it with a toothbrush or after eating certain kinds of food. Food can be responsible for rubbing off a thick coating and thus make the coating look thinner or even normal. Hot, pungent, and spicy food can change the color of the tongue, leaving it either bright red or dark purple. For these reasons, the physician should never examine the tongue immediately after the patient has eaten, drunk, or brushed his or her teeth and tongue.

Fig. 17
Chapter 4
Systematic Procedure of Tongue Diagnosis

The basic method of any medical examination is the differentiation between opposed phenomena. In Chinese medicine this procedure is called bian zheng, which is the differentiation between contradictory findings. It is the Chinese version of the famous Principle of Contradiction, which for occidental science was formulated by the Greek philosophers Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle.

In examining the tongue the physician must be able to differentiate between the body of the tongue and the coating. In addition, the structure or consistency of the tongue is important. The body of the tongue is made up of the tongue muscles, arteries and veins, lymphatic vessels, salivary glands, and fine blood vessels (capillaries). The coating is the uppermost layer of the tongue. Usually, the human tongue looks soft and tender and moves freely and easily. It is light red, slightly wet, and covered with a fine white layer. Chinese medicine refers to this normal appearance of the tongue as a “light red tongue with a thin white coating” (Fig. 18).

This normal condition of the tongue changes with the seasons and climate. In summer the coating is usually somewhat thicker or it turns yellow as the result of summer heat. In autumn the coating is thin, white, and slightly dry. The physician must be aware of these natural seasonal changes so as not to confuse them with pathological ones.

In the case of illness, changes in the body of the tongue must be differentiated from changes in the coating of the tongue. The body of the tongue can undergo changes in consistency, color, and form. It primarily reflects either strength or weakness of the arterial or venous blood flow (xue qi), increased or decreased capillary pressure and lymph drainage, decreased concentration of plasma proteins, etc. In Chinese medicine this is referred to as a deficiency or a fullness of the vessels of storage and hollow organs, the jing mai, running deep inside the organism. The coating of the tongue can change in form, color, and in consistency as well. This will indicate whether the
4. The thin, small tongue
A thin, small tongue which is light in color usually indicates a deficiency of blood and qi (xue qi) or it indicates that both heart and spleen are in a condition of emptiness. Such a condition can often be found in younger individuals with psychosomatic disorder (lack of appetite, insomnia, forgetfulness, nervousness, palpitation, etc.) (Fig. 34).

A dark red, thin, small tongue corresponds to a yin emptiness with an abundance of heat, rendering the body fluids (jin ye) diminished or impaired. This is usually a sign of a serious disease. The patient depicted in Figure 35 is a rather tall person but his tongue is not at all in proportion with his body height of 189 cm. He suffers from high blood pressure, insomnia, and diabetes due to yin deficiency and internal heat.
5. The fissured tongue
If the tongue has many transverse and longitudinal fissures with cracks and grooves in it, it is referred to as a “fissured tongue.” If such a tongue is also dark red, this usually shows the presence of an abundance of heat. The patient in Figure 36 suffers from a severe and generalized allergy.

If such a tongue is white and light in appearance, this can indicate a lack of yin and blood. The patient shown in Figure 37 suffers from multiple disorders of his gastrointestinal tract and has a history of hepatitis.
The Swollen Tongue (1)

Fig. 83: This tongue is larger and thicker than a normal tongue. If the color of the swollen tongue is light and white, this is a sign of an emptiness of the qi and yang in the spleen and stomach.

Fig. 84: This female patient, in addition, presents tooth marks on both sides of her tongue, which is typical for a yang deficiency. There is a sticky coating indicating an accumulation of mucus (phlegm) in the middle and the lower burner.

Therapy According to Syndrome Differentiation

Replenish qi and yang; strengthen the spleen and the stomach

Chen Chiu Foramina

- ST-36
- BL-20, BL-23
- CV (ren mai)-4, CV-6 (moxa)
- CV-12
- SP-6, SP-10, ST-40

Chinese Herbs (Prescription)

Zingiber officinalis, Dioscorea batatas, Atractylodes macrocephala, Astragalus membranaceus, Codonopsis pilulosa, Glycyrrhizas uralensis, Panax Ginseng, Cinnamomum cassia, Poria cocos.
Fig. 83: ▷ Shape of the tongue body

Fig. 84: ▷ Shape of the tongue body

Fig. 84: Leave *Panax Ginseng* out! Instead: *Angelica sinensis, Pinellia ternata.*

**Dietetic Treatment**

❌ To be avoided

Avoid food with cold and cool properties from the wood element with sour taste, milk products.

✔ Recommended diet

Eat warm and hot dishes from the earth element (e.g., fennel, cinnamon, potato, pumpkin). Eat warm meals and roasted cereals.
The tip corresponds to the upper burner (heater), including heart and lungs.

Case 1 (Fig. 133): Around age 45 years this patient developed emptiness of the heart yin and of the heart–blood (xin xue xu). Her complaints were palpitations, restlessness, insomnia, and sweating during the night. In conjunction with this, a round, shiny wart appeared on the end of her tongue. Her gynecologist had recommended treatment with estrogens, which had not brought about any improvement.

Therapy with acupuncture concentrated on nourishing the heart yin and the heart–blood. The patient was completely cured after 10 sessions. She is now without any symptoms, working full-time as a self-employed businesswoman, and needs no medication at all.

**Therapy According to Syndrome Differentiation**

**Strengthen the heart yin and blood, and strengthen the kidney yin**

*Chen Chiu Foramina*

- HT-3, HT-7
- PC-6
- SP-6, SP-10
- BL-15, BL-20, BL-23
- CV (ren mai)-6, CV-12

*Chinese Herbs (Prescription)*

Scrophularia ningpoensis, Salvia miltiorrhiza, Poria cocos, Schizandra chinensis, Polygala tenuifolia, Platycodon grandiflorum, Angelica sinensis, Asparagus cochinchnensis, Ophiopogon japonicus, Biota orientalis, Ziziphus jujuba, Rheamnna glutinosa, Cinnabar, Panax Ginseng (prescription: tian wang bu xin tang).
Dietetic Treatment

✘ To be avoided
Avoid too salty dishes and hot food from the fire element like chillies, brandy, and grilled meat.

✔ Recommended diet
Eat food that generates body liquids, especially from the earth and wood elements, for example wheat and morel cherries. Serve food which is not too salty from the water element to strengthen kidney *yin* (seafood, algae).
Case 3: Hypermenorrhea and Metromenorrhagia (Fig. 147)

There is a time difference of approximately 25 years between the two photographs shown in Figures 147a and 147b. Initially, apart from an appendectomy, the young woman had been healthy except children’s diseases such as measles, chicken pox, and mumps. Figure 147b reveals the development of her health situation around age 45. Her tongue has become markedly red, which is typical for a yin deficiency, and it is considerably swollen. The red tongue indicates an emptiness of yin associated with rising emptiness–fire (xu huo). The swollen body with tooth marks at the same time signifies a yang deficiency. During the past 10 years she suffered from insomnia, constipation, and gynecological problems like hypermenorrhea and metromenorrhagia, a condition Chinese medicine refers to as heat–fire in the lower burner, associated with myoma. Because of the myoma she was operated on twice, initially to remove the growth, and then, when the bleeding got out of control, a hysterectomy was carried out. She complains of mental depression, insomnia, nervousness, and night sweating. These are typical symptoms of an emptiness of yin associated with rising emptiness–fire which causes the red discoloration of her tongue. Her internal fire is quite strong and irritating, a condition motivating her to sleep with wide-open windows in the night, even in the cold wintertime. Consequently, she frequently suffers from cold attacks and flu.

Therapy According to Syndrome Differentiation

Nourish yin and blood extinguish internal heat, and reinforce yang

Chen Chiu Foramina
- SP-6, SP-10
- KI-3
- ST-36 (moxibustion)
- BL-15, BL-17, BL-23
- LI-4, LI-11
- HT-7
- CV (ren mai)-4
- GV (du mai)-14

Chinese Herbs (Prescription)

Ophiopogon japonicus, Asparagus cochinchinensis, Ziziphus jujuba, (red dates), Angelica sinensis, Rhemannia glutinosa, Trichosanthes kirilowii, and Glycyrrhiza uralensis.
Dietetic Treatment

✗ To be avoided
Avoid very hot and cold food and drinks, for example citrus fruits and bitter liqueur. Do not eat food from the fire element.

✔ Recommended diet
Eat cereals with a sweet taste (wheat, barley, buckwheat, millet), and soybean sprouts. Serve cool food from all five elements, in addition to uncooked food and milk products, with watermelon and cucumber.