

CC: Today's show is so special because this is the first time I have someone that comes on the show that actually speaks Chinese. , Michael Max, who is the podcaster of the whole TCM world for seven years, Qiological. If you haven't listened to this podcast, Oh my God, where have you been? So today Michael came on the show, which I was so nervous because he's been doing this for a long time and, I'm new at interviewing, but we had a blast because he's so easy.

He makes it so simple. We talked about. How and why he went to China and Taiwan to learn Chinese, the difference about reading Chinese versus speaking Chinese, and how one of them is so much easier than the other.

We also talked about how to start a podcast or why to start a podcast on TCM and the work it requires to have a podcast because he's been doing this for a long time. And then we went into talking about something I've never heard before, which is SAAM. Acupuncture. And you are going to love this because we had a great discussion and it was very interesting.

I actually now want to go and learn more about SAAM acupuncture. Oh yeah, curiosity is the word of the day today. You will see that. And then we also finished by talking about the 10 key formula families, which is from Dr. Huang Huang. And if you've never heard of this you're going to have a little bit of more curiosity.

So let's do this. Let's go.

Welcome to AcuPro, a show dedicated to making Chinese medicine and acupuncture easy to grasp and fun to learn. Hi, I'm your host Clara Cohen. I support practitioners and students like you in changing the world one patient at a time. My goal is to share my passion for TCM and empower you to achieve superior patient care.

I love to showcase the amazing benefits of acupuncture because after all, acupuncture rocks!

Michael Max makes me relax. He calms me. Why? He has had a podcast, Qiological, for over seven years.

So he knows what he's doing and he makes me feel so much better. So I'm so, so thankful that he has agreed to come on the Acupro show today to share his wisdom and years of practice. Cause he's been practicing for 25 years in the US and Missouri, and he has this podcast that I absolutely think is fantastic.

Seven years, you guys, like seven years every week. Mind. Blown. So I'm really looking towards learning from Michael because he's kind of like someone I look up to, especially for podcasts, but also because the guy speaks Chinese and went and learned Chinese. In China, mind blown, again. So I'm so impressed by all your accomplishments.

So welcome, welcome, welcome, Monsieur Michael to the show.

MM: Wow. Okay. I hope I can live up to this.

CC: Oh, of course. You already did. It's over. You can go home.

MM: Thank you for having me. I, of course, love talking about Chinese medicine. That's pretty obvious. I do it every dang week. So I'm really happy to be here on the other side of the microphone. It's nice to have somebody else drive.

CC: I've been on your podcast and I really enjoyed our conversation. I really, really liked it. And I'll have the links in the show notes below. So if you guys missed the episode, you can check it out because we had all that fun as well.

My first question is, why did you get into TCM? And of course, like most of us, it was probably not your first career. So why did you jump in the TCM love bandwagon?

MM: Yeah, okay. I didn't jump in. I was phenomenally cautious. Like many people, I was introduced to acupuncture because of a health issue of my own. I've got a really good buddy who basically badgered me to go get some acupuncture. I'm kind of an open minded guy, but, acupuncture's just weird. He insisted. I finally thought, great, fine. Nothing else has worked. I'll go. This won't work. You'll shut up. We can get back to drinking beer. I can tell you for sure that the acupuncture did nothing to help the problem that I had at that time.

But what it did do is leave me in a state of, what the hell was that? Eventually, the issue that I went in with Changed. But before it changed, I found that I was sleeping better. I was digesting better. I was way less irritable. It was nice. And I liked it. I don't like needles, but I liked the experience.

Because it helped me, if something was up, I'd go see an acupuncturist. I did that for years. So I just started thinking like, well, hmm, I wonder what else could I do? And somewhere in the back of my mind, I was thinking acupuncture.

And that thought just wouldn't go away. I don't know if I want to go back to school for one, and can I even make a damn living with it. My acupuncturist handed me a copy of the very famous, *A Web That Has No Weaver*. I'm going to do a quick shout out.

I had Ted Kapczyk on the podcast. So I read the book. It didn't make no sense to me whatsoever. But acupuncture was still an interest for me. Talked to my acupuncturist about it. She says, look, go to one of the schools.

You will know in six months if it's for you or not. And if it is, awesome. If it turns out that it's not for you, All you've done is learn a little bit more about something you're interested in. Either way, you can't lose. And that's what happened.

CC: That's, great advice. In the end, you need that little push, but at the same time, you know the answer already. You just needed a little bit of reassurance and someone to tell you more, but you knew already in your gut that you were going to go and give it a try and see what happened, right?

So I'm glad you did.

MM: I'm glad I did too.

CC: So that leads me to my next question. You went back to school. You obviously stayed and you obviously passed the six months mark to see if you're going to like it or not. And then you decided after you did your master's, you were like, okay, I need to understand this better.

So I'm going to go and learn the language. So tell me about how you decide to do this and specifically, how hard was it to learn Mandarin? Because, oh boy, oh boy, when we took Mandarin in class, I found the character writing and reading was so much easier than having to speak and the pronunciations.

MM: Character reading and writing is easier than pronunciation.

And in fact, you could make a study of reading Chinese, not being able to speak a lick of it and be able to read Chinese pretty well, enough to learn what you need to from medical books to help you in clinic. I learned to read a little bit of medical Chinese when I was in school. By the time I graduated, I could kinda read a little bit with the help of a dictionary.

After a couple years of practice, My wife at that time, and I, we separated. Now I'm about to lose my house, end a relationship, and my thought was, well, this is kind of an opportunity, isn't it? I could just, light out for China for a couple of months and go study me some medicine.

That might be a good idea, good timing. I ran into Andy Ellis of Springwind at a conference. I know that he had lived abroad and studied in China and in Taiwan. So I asked him, suggestions on where to go, who to study with. And he says, how long are you going for? I said, I don't know, maybe six months. I'm about to get divorced. It's an open ticket. And he says, in that case, why don't you go to Taiwan first? You can study Mandarin for six or nine months, and then head over to China and do Chinese medicine in Chinese.

And about six months later, I'm in Taipei, at the Guoyu Zhongxin. The Mandarin Training Center in Taipei, learning enough Chinese so that I can maybe do medicine in Chinese.

I was in Taiwan for about a year and a half, and I had an opportunity to study with a Shanghanlin doctor in Beijing. And so I went to Beijing and I spent a couple of years in Beijing and then I missed Taiwan. So I went back to Taiwan.

CC: Wow. So how long were you away from North America then?

MM: Almost five years.

CC: Okay. Wow. That's really cool. When you were there, did you have the opportunity to work and make a living? How did you support yourself? Because four years is a long time, right?

MM: That's right. I basically supported myself by teaching English.

CC: So in the end, you learn the language, but you work in the TCM environment, which now you learn the TCM language within the language, which is like a double learning.

How did that serve you? When you came back, in treating your patients or in practice in general?

MM: It's helped me in that I've been able to read books, even translate some materials and be able to use that. I had this idea if I could learn it in Chinese. Then, I could explain it better in English. Guess what? Completely wrong. I can speak about it really well in Chinese, but trying to translate some of those concepts into English? That's much

harder. When I'm trying to talk to people about Chinese medicine in English is I have to get a sense of how they think and what their metaphors are and what their worldview is and, what aspect of the medicine they're trying to understand and be able to speak to them within that.

CC: I think concepts are hard to explain as well. Every culture, every different languages has a way to look at things so differently. So it makes it challenging. So I get that completely. Yes. And I will say this as well. In some ways, it's easier to think about and learn Chinese medicine in Chinese. Then it is in English, because so many things in English, you're speaking some kind of pinyin sound, and it's approximating the Chinese, but you don't know what the Chinese actually means.

MM: If you know the Chinese. It makes it easier in some ways. Here's the other thing about Chinese language. If you can read it, You'll get access to the treasure house of Chinese medicine.

CC: I remember when we learned how to look up characters in a dictionary, right? You don't think of that, but you're like, Oh, how do I look up a character in the dictionary? So we had to learn that in order for us to be able to look that up. And that was really cool too.

MM: Look, I met wonderful people. Taiwan in particular is a wonderful, wonderful place.

The tea is delicious. The people are very kind. You go to restaurants, make sure you're ordering in Chinese, you put yourself in front of it, eventually, you get the hang of it.

SHOW BREAK

Are you ready to unlock the remarkable potential of a microsystem that is so effective for pain disorders, you cannot bypass it.

This is what scalp acupuncture course taught by my friend and colleague, Dr. Sonia Tan is all about. This is at your own pace and it focus on treating pain and tightness, including all the types of musculoskeletal pain and injury. chronic and acute, as well as burning pain, tingling, and numbness. This course contains what you need to know to start practicing scalp acupuncture immediately upon completion.

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have learned the right technique to treat patients when it comes to balanced methods for acupuncture scalp.

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CC: I'm glad you did this. And I think it's great that you're so curious and you go and you want to meet people and you open to possibilities and ideas.

And I think that's what makes your podcast. Qiological, really fascinatingly interesting because you always have different guests and you have great conversation that can go in different directions. Why did you decide to do it? How much work does it take for you to be so consistent and obviously really great now after seven years?

But yeah, how much work and why did you want to do a podcast and where do you see the podcast going?

MM: In 2013 Podcasting is just barely starting to happen.

I meet this guy and He says I podcast and I teach people to podcast. So having some conversation. I'm saying hey look I've got an acupuncture practice. I've got a website. I write for the website I got great SEO because I write for the website every week My phone rings all the time with people asking for an appointment.

Why would I want to do a podcast? And he said, Oh, it's very simple. The people that would listen to your podcast are not the same as the people that would read your website. The curiosity kind of kicks in and I'm thinking, I want to play with this podcasting thing.

I don't know what I'm going to do with it. I don't need it for my business. I don't want to do it for my business. I'd been in Missouri at this point maybe four or five years, and I missed my friends in Seattle because we used to just hang out and and gab about Chinese medicine in a very qiological way.

I thought, maybe I could do a podcast. I can invite my friends, we can jawbone about Chinese medicine, we'll do it in plain English. It can, help people understand Chinese medicine. Maybe go find an acupuncturist if they need one. So it started out with that idea.

Hang out with my friends, make it accessible to the general public, and maybe it'll help some people that way. That's what started it. After a few months, I got emails from acupuncturists saying how much they loved it, and I'm really confused. Because it's very simple, basic stuff for the general public, and these acupuncturists and these students, seasoned acupuncturists, are writing in saying how much they like it.

And if they like that, maybe they'd like a deeper dive. That was the beginning of Qiological.

CC: You know why? In my opinion, it's because you pretty much were the only one doing podcast talking about TCM and acupuncture. Nobody else was. I don't think there's a lot of people that that's their sole focus.

There might be some people that talk about health and then they have an episode on Chinese medicine or health. Great. But you were the only person that did this. So for us thirsty people that want to stay connected to our TCM around the world practitioners and not feel lonely like you did, like I needed my bodies, then.

It's like a great way to like, Hey, there's other people that are talking about this. I'm not the only one by myself here and I can listen to other people. So I think that's why they reached out because there was nothing else. So they probably like kind of keyword, acupuncture, Chinese medicine. And then you came up and it was like, Oh, cool.

We've talked about this too. When I was on your show, but a lot of TCM lovers and TCM rock stars, like I like to call them, have started podcasts on acupuncture and Chinese medicine over the years, but have never continued. You've been so consistent and you're still around seven years later, which nobody else in our industry is still doing it.

I haven't found it. I've looked, and there's not many people that do this. I know Michelle Grasek does acupuncture marketing school. She was on the podcast as well. And she has been doing her podcast for quite a few years now, but not as long as you. So you're literally the OG. of that and you inspire us to continue to be part of this group of people that love to listen to podcasts and connect with other TCM people around the world.

So I really appreciate that. So now tell me how much work it takes to do this, all this fun stuff. Cause obviously you did it for the fun and the connection, not for any other reason. So what did you get out of it and how much work do you put in?

MM: I have wanted to be persistent in this. I want to keep that streak going. Some of it is just a sense of responsibility to the listenership. Some years ago, I was burnt out and I was just like, I just need a month away. I'm just going to close up the shop and just, like, put it away for a month.

I was talking with a friend of mine who used to work in radio and she goes, Oh, no, no, no, no. You can't do that. You cannot close up shop. People are expecting you Tuesday morning. I'm expecting you. You got a whole bunch of people. You don't know who they are, but they're waiting for you on Tuesday morning.

You can't close up shop. But here's what you can do. You can pick out four of your favorite episodes that maybe people haven't listened to. And you could do summer reruns. You just put those up and then you can walk away. All right. The show can go on, but you don't have to be in it. It was such a great idea. Summer reruns. I remember those when I was a kid. So one of the great things about doing a very niche podcast like Qiological is you can get sponsorship and that's actually what primarily what powers the podcast.

I also have memberships and I also have donations and that's also very, very helpful. I mean, without the people that have memberships and donations, it would be a much harder lift. So it's also a business. It generates some revenue and that's it's a big piece of what makes it possible.

CC: It is true. If you've done like a hundred episodes, who has gone back to the number one? Not many people will listen to the episode number one from a hundred, right? So of course you could totally do that. It makes so much sense. So it's repurposing all this great content that so many people haven't even listened to yet.

When I first started. The podcast in January, 2024, my thing was, I have to have at least eight episodes done, ready to go before I even start. That way I don't feel overwhelmed and I don't feel like, Oh my gosh, I got to come up with an episode for next week. What am I going to do? And I'm busy or I'm sick or something happened.

Or, we had to do something and we had to go away or on holiday. How am I going to do this? Everything has to be in place at least eight weeks ahead. Then that way I can breathe, and I don't have to worry, and I can enjoy the whole process.

MM: Exactly. Yes, that, I think that's exactly it. You get that momentum going, and once you've got the momentum, now you've got some slack. If something comes up and you can't work on it this week, no big deal. You can put some extra work in later.

CC: Thank you for sharing the whole It's behind the scene, Qiological. And again, we'll put the links in the show notes. You have to go and check out the show if you haven't yet.

I listen to podcasts, when I'm commuting, driving, when I clean, when I cook, if I'm all alone in the house, there's always someone teaching me something in the background. Now I know that's what you do, but you also have a practice. One of the things I wanted to ask you, because I don't know much about it, and I don't know many people who practice it, but you do SAAM acupuncture, S A A M acupuncture, which is Korean acupuncture.

So, can you explain how different it is from Chinese acupuncture? I would love for you to share with us.

MM: I love talking about this. I believe it's pronounced S A A M. Sa'am is an interesting method. It's named after a Buddhist monk who, what, 400 years ago had a enlightenment of sorts.

Basically what came out of that was a sense of diagnosing, but beyond that, the Sa'am acupuncture system organizes the organs, the yin yang relationships, differently than we were taught in school. So in school we learned about the lung and large intestine are yin yang pairs, or we learn that lung and spleen are like arm and leg tie in.

We learn that kind of thing. We learn those sort of correspondences. The thing that's fascinating to me about Sa'am is it, will link the lung with the stomach. The spleen with the large intestine.

CC: So, the spleen and the large intestine, because the spleen is all in charge of digestion, and every time we have loose stools, we're like, oh, spleen qi deficiency, but really loose stools comes from the large intestine area.

Both the lung and the stomach can qi rebel, right? Like coughing and nausea and vomiting, so maybe it's an esophagus thing, but that's all I can correlate it with.

MM: There's other correspondences. For example, heart, is linked not with the kidney, but with the urinary bladder. Now the heart bladder is a really interesting correspondence because when you think about heart, you've got Shaoyin, which is fire.

You've got heart, which is a fire organ. So that's like the hottest organ of the body. And then you look at the urinary bladder, it's Taiyang, that's corresponding with cold, the deep water of the north, and it is a water organ, so that's cold. So urinary bladder is the coldest. organ system in the body. So you've got the ultimate hot of the body paired with the ultimate cold of the body.

So I'm not going to get into all the pairs here, but suffice it to say that the Saam system arranges the organs in a different way. It's a very powerful way of looking at physiology, the way the five phases work, and it's all integrated in there together. So, number one, organ correspondences. They're different.

They're powerful. They'll change how you think about things and it's super helpful in the clinic. Now, the second thing is the needling is, it's very simple. I think all of us have heard about the four needle technique because we don't have the diagnostics that are behind it. The Saam Acupuncture Diagnostics will help you use that four needle technique in extremely powerful ways.

Spleen and large intestine, let's start with that because it's also as simple to understand as heart and urinary bladder. So spleen, taiyin. Taiyin is associated with dampness. Spleen, associated with dampness. The spleen is the dampest organ in the body. If you need to bring some moisture into the system, you Tonify the spleen. Meaning, make more dampness. Now, in TCM, when we say, tonify the spleen, this is the difference between Sa'am and TCM, we're actually saying, dry the spleen. When you think about

any points that you would use, when you think about any herbs that you would use to TCM, tonify the spleen, you're actually drying the spleen.

Essentially, you're tonifying the large intestine to take the dampness out of the spleen. Large intestine is yang ming. A healthy yang ming is dry and it's cool. You can't really get more dry than the large intestine organ because it's metal and it's yang ming. Metal is dry. Yang Ming is dry. Spleen is taiyin.

It's damp. You have ultimate damp counterbalanced with ultimate dry. With the lung in particular, you will often see people who are overweight. They often carry some extra weight. That's a sign of dampness. They'll be damp on the inside, but they'll have really dry skin. People with an excess of lung energy, excess of lung chi, often they'll have very, very dry skin.

The stomach types, they're dry on the inside and wet on the outside. That means it'll be skinny people with like greasy skin. You'll often see this constitutionally. So, if you need to move fluids, From the inside to the outside, you would tonify the stomach to draw the fluid from the interior out to the exterior.

Likewise, if you need to move the fluid inward Then you could tonify the lung. To put the stomach with the lung, why not keep it with the spleen? Because it's kind of opposite as well. The stomach goes down, the spleen goes up, the spleen gets affected by dampness, the stomach gets affected by dryness and heat, while the spleen gets affected by cold.

They're so opposite. Perfect opposition, in my view. But that's why I love Those different ways of looking at things because it opens your world to different ways of treating patients too, which is always awesome. When you look at the Chinese clock, you've got lung, large intestine, stomach, and spleen, right?

You got that, you got that quartet in there. The lung is tie in so that it has an aspect of it that's about moisture, but it's also metal. So there's an aspect of it that's about dryness. It's mixed. It gets a little confusing. I think one of the things that makes it also so uniquely powerful is with the traditional lung large intestine, both of those channels are on the arm.

With Sa'am, you've got a leg meridian, you've got an arm meridian, one's Yin, one's Yang. So you're getting this really dynamic play of the entire body being involved because

you've got top and bottom. Because you have this interplay of yin and yang. I like that actually. I do like the yin and yang not being on the same limb.

CC: Being opposite limb. Because it is opposite. So you covering the whole body. That I really like. I think that's just a great way to look at it. You made me think really deeply when you said, well, long. He's a metal, metal is dryness, however lung is in charge of water and damp and water metabolism specifically of the upper jowl.

So I'm like, wait a minute, you're right. And I never thought about it. I'm like, Oh, yeah. This is why I love to listen to other ways of looking at acupuncture or Chinese medicine from different perspective or like the Korean way. Because years ago when I was in school, I learned Korean hand therapy and I really enjoyed it.

I appreciate you sharing that because this was completely new to me. Sa'am. Acupuncturist. Can you explain a little bit what is the 10 key formula families?

MM: The 10 key formula families, and that book's been out for a while. So Dr. Huang Huang is somebody that I came across when I was in China, where I was living in Beijing. A friend of mine handed me. Shida Leifong, Ten Key Formula Families in Chinese Medicine. Because I was working on my Chinese still.

So Dr. Huang, who is a teacher and a practitioner in Nanjing, he looks at different herbs and formulas, herbs in particular, as having a kind of personality may not, that doesn't quite cover it, but it's a piece of it.

In essence, there are different herbs that match different people. For example, when you think of Gui Zhi, as in Gui Zhi Tang, we know that it's this herb that helps with stabilizing the exterior. so Gui Zhi kinds of people, they're often kind of thin, they'll often have delicate skin, they often have moist skin because they sweat easily, they are extremely sensitive to drafts, and so Guajirotang helps with that.

You can always tell a Gui Zhi Gui Zhi person when they walk in your office because it's middle of summer and they've got a scarf on because the air conditioning bothers them. So, the idea behind Ten Key Formula Families is to understand that there are certain people that resonate with a particular herb and it's generally a good place to start with them.

So, again, if somebody looks and acts.

I'm probably not going to start them with a formula that has Chaihu or Mawflong or something like that. I'm going to start them with Gui Zhi because the idea is that you want to look at the person and their unique strengths and weaknesses. You want to look at the symptomology that they're having, and then you want to look at their physical constitution, and if all those match up, then that herb and that formula family will likely be safe and effective.

The reason that I like this so much is that it's a kind of shorthand. Again, it's not something that you would use all the time for everyone, but it's a really helpful screen in the beginning.

CC: The idea is that you can just rule out a lot of formulas that might not be helpful. You don't have to think about 15 different formulas. You might only have to think about 3. It's interesting because when you look at food, walnuts look like a brain, so they're great for your brain. Different foods are great for different areas because of the way they look.

And I found that the 10 key formulas of Dr. Huang Hong are a little bit like this. It's like you're looking at the herb itself and its property and the way it looks like, and then you look at the person and you match them, kind of like you match the walnut to the brain. And for people that don't do herbs, uh, Gui Zhi.

Don't quote me on my pronunciation, because, unlike Mr. Michael, I don't speak Chinese. But grager is cinnamon, and when you see a cinnamon stick, you can see it's thin, it's long, right? So it kind of matches a bit the person. So for people that have never done this, can you share another one, let's say huangxi, because I know huangxi is part of it, which is astragalus.

What's a huangxi person would be like?

MM: Huangxi people, they tend to be really fluid filled. And, and one, helps with fluid, the fluid metabolism. You could also see. Sometimes, people who are more ginger people, they'll often be kind of pudgy and fluid filled as well. So, the Huanxi person versus the ginger person, let's say, Shenzhen, what's the difference if they're both full of fluid?

CC: How do you know which one to use more Huanxi or Swagalus for versus the ginger, the Shenzhen person?

MM: The ginger people are going to be colder because ginger warms you up and you're going to see More sweating with the Huangqi people because of the qi deficiency that's there as well.

CC: I think it's just so fascinating to look at herbs because not every person that goes to TCM school learns all the herbs, but they're so valuable and they have such a beautiful way to be and such a strength in TCM that is often not used for everybody because I know in some countries they can't use them at all.

They're not allowed anyway, like in the UK.

MM: I would say too with Tenkey, Dr. Huang Huang's work. It's helpful, but make sure that you've got your basics down for your herbs and formulas because if you don't have those basic building blocks, and then I think reading Ten Key Formula Families and the new book, then these books are really helpful because they will help you clarify and refine the basics that you've already got.

Chinese herbs is, you really need to understand them and to have a strong base to understand how they work together, how they interact, how you form a formula, how do you custom everything, and what each herb strength, and what they need in order to be able to be the best for each patient.

CC: I appreciate the reminder. We went in different directions, which I really appreciate. Any final thoughts or anything you would like to share before we go on our way for the beautiful day that it is? Thank you for having me. It's always fun to talk about the medicine that engages our curiosity so much.

MM: I love what you're doing. You help to make it so learnable and accessible. It takes a long, long time to really get this stuff. And we have to come at it again and again and again from different perspectives. And just, just kind of keep chipping away at it. It's much like learning a language. You just have to be persistent.

So thanks for all the work that you're doing and thanks for having me on. It's really been a blast.

CC: This is why I love to have the movers, the shakers, and you're definitely one of those movers and shakers in our industry. So thank you very much Monsieur. Thank you so much for spending your time with me today.

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