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Meanings and uses of measuring units in pre-modern China

Chaired by **Karine Chemla** (SPHERE UMR 7219, CNRS & U. Paris Diderot, ERC Advanced Research Grant SAW) & **Zhu Yiwen** (PhD Institute for the History of Natural Sciences, CAS, China & Post-doc, ERC Advanced Research grant SAW, SPHERE UMR 7219)

Asaf Goldschmidt 郭志松

Dept. of East Asian Studies, Tel Aviv University, Israel

Email: gasaf@post.tau.ac.il

Measuring the Body – Locating Acupuncture Loci during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127)

Abstract - When the topic of measurements comes up in the history of medicine it is often either associated with the amounts each drug that makes and ingredient on a medicinal formula or associated with measuring the body and locating the acupuncture loci on it. Surprisingly, at least from a Western perspective, the former received rather limited attention in Chinese medical literature. This is probably due to the fact that, unlike their contemporary Western counterparts, Chinese doctors focused more on the quality of the drugs making the formula than on their specific quantity. In contrast, measuring the body and thus precisely determining the location of the acupuncture points was a topic of interest in medical treatises. This was probably due to the fact that inserting a needle to an incorrect spot could cause a severe injury.

In this paper I would like to discuss the Tang to Song transition with regard to measuring the body and locating the acu-points on it. This shift, which brought back the prominence of acupuncture in comparison to moxibustion, was achieved by implementing new means of transmitting spatial knowledge of the body via drawings and even a bronze figure. The latter, on some level, may be compared to the golden meter in its usage. I will begin with the earliest concerns about measuring the body from the Han dynasty to the Tang dynasty. I will then present the solution brought forward by Song dynasty doctors and scholar officials.