

Fertility and the Face

Abstract

This article describes the main aspects of traditional Chinese face diagnosis relating to fertility, and includes various illustrative examples of famous faces as well as short vignettes from the author's clinical practice.

Introduction

A long time ago, I attended a patient consultation day with the late Dr. John Shen, the eminent acupuncturist and herbalist (and face-reader, I subsequently found out) who practised in New York from 1971. One of the patients who came that day was trying to get pregnant. Dr. Shen's primary prescription was to 'stop worrying'. He explained that he could see from the narrowness of her philtrum (the groove running vertically from the nose to the upper lip) that not only was it congenitally difficult for her to fall pregnant, but also the stress of trying to conceive was making her uterus tense and contracted, and that even if she became pregnant, the subsequent labour and birth could be problematic and long. I had already been studying face-reading for years, but other than my teacher, Daphne Youngson, and Alan Papier, I knew of no other Chinese face-readers.¹ There I was, in the presence of a practitioner whose demeanour, luminosity and *shen* came closest to my idea of The Eight Immortals,² and to my amazement he was diagnosing according to the old principles of face-reading (*mian xiang*) that can be found in ancient Chinese texts, from the third century *Bamboo Chronicles*, the fifth to eleventh century *Dunhuang Manuscripts* through to the 18th century *Golden Scissors*.³

Traditional Taoist knowledge of physiognomy has a strong relationship with Chinese medicine, in which assessment of the harmonious flow of *qi* and blood in the channel system is identified not only from the pulse, tongue and symptoms, but also from facial analysis. In Taoist physiognomy, one's vitality as shown in the face is seen as one's fortune. Both are based on centuries of observation, are highly systematic and very subtle. They are holistic rather than linear, and diagnosis produces a unique picture of the whole person - their body, mind and spirit, *jing*, *qi* and *shen*. I was recently reminded of Dr. Shen's fertility patient after listening to an interview on BBC Radio about acupuncture and fertility treatment. Along with feeling outraged at the biased and hostile approach of the interviewer, I was inspired to write something about face-reading and fertility to assist practitioners in their diagnosis.

The philtrum

Let us start with the observation of the philtrum (*ren zhong* / *jen chung*). This gives the face-reader immediate information about the person's ability to conceive, the state of their reproductive *qi* and *jing*, vitality, longevity, sexual stamina as well as the uterus itself in females. It is one of the 'rivers' of the face - i.e. the soft tissue - and is thus yin (as opposed to the 'mountains' - the bones - which are yang). The ideal philtrum is a deep, long and wide groove bounded by two parallel ridges, perhaps with a slight flare where it meets the upper lip, and a radiant colour. The groove



Figure 1: Donald Trump showing his flat philtrum

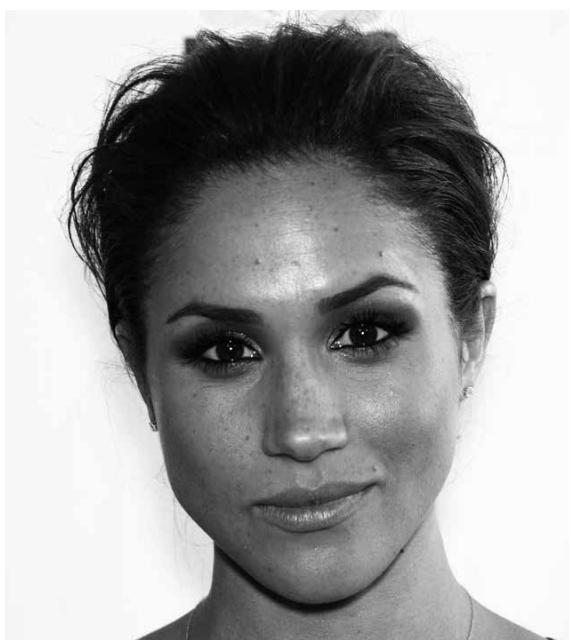


Figure 2: Meghan Markle showing her well formed philtrum

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Keywords:

Face diagnosis,
Chinese medicine,
acupuncture,
fertility, infertility.

should be centred in the face, the distance between the bottom of the nose and the edge of the upper lip should be ample, and the depth of the groove and clarity of the ridges should be consistent from the nose to the top lip.

At the time of writing, the UK's Prince Harry is currently dating US show *Suits* star Meghan Markle. I notice she has a well-formed and age-appropriate philtrum, indicating a healthy sex drive and fertility. On a young woman a flat philtrum indicates low Kidney qi, poor inherited constitution, a history of gynaecological surgery, low fertility and/or the likelihood of early menopause. If the philtrum is short but still defined this indicates that getting pregnant may be problematic, that there will be few children and/or that labour may be difficult. By contrast with Meghan Markle, President Donald Trump's philtrum is flat - a sign of low sexual and reproductive energy. This is perhaps not surprising as at 70 years of age the Kidney qi and *jing* are in decline. However, this example shows how face-reading can illuminate a person's backstory: all that grabbing and groping is about power and domination, not sex.

Ever wondered why there has been such hysteria about the UK actor Benedict Cumberbatch the star of the BBC series *Sherlock*? It is all in the mouth: a subliminal message from his pronounced philtrum, with the cupid's bow shape of his top lip, which according to traditional face-reading theory shows a caring and emotionally expressive lover - a man who likes and understands women and values the feminine. The Chinese texts say that such a philtrum means auspicious fortune: many healthy children, wealth,



Figure 3: Benedict Cumberbatch's pronounced philtrum and 'cupid bow' top lip

respect and a long life.⁴ So ladies, if you are feeling broody and want to settle down, make sure you check out your suitor's philtrum.

Priscilla Chan, the wife of the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, has a fairly short philtrum. Their problems conceiving and multiple miscarriages have been extensively covered in the media. However, although short, Priscilla's philtrum is well-formed, which likely mitigates her husband's less than flourishing groove. Despite this they produced a daughter with extraordinary 'Buddha ears'.⁵ Indeed, both parents have large, well-formed ears that show a robust inherited constitution, which might also mitigate their deficient philtrums. This example shows that practitioners should look at all features relating to *jing*, constitution and destiny, rather than focusing diagnosis on one alone.

Under the eyes

Another facial indicator for fertility is the area under the eyes. If this area is sunken and blue this indicates Kidney yin deficiency, as well as adrenal insufficiency, 'burnout', poor sleep, anxiety, stress and excess coffee and salt intake. Horizontal lines in this area denote a lack of minerals. Puffiness of this area indicates Kidney yang deficiency, as well as allergies, poor fluid balance and excessive intake of cold food. If the delicate tissues around the eye are a muddy green/brown colour, this indicates toxicity of the liver. The beneficial effects of acupuncture treatment on the hormonal imbalances that typically accompany such presentations have been well documented.⁶ I combine this with advice on yin-type relaxation instead of punishing gym routines, toning down the type-A behaviour,⁷ mindfulness practice, and switching off the phone/ipad/computer. This allows acquired essence to rebuild and thus it nourishes blood. Unfortunately, asking women to lead a less frenetic life can sometimes create more stress in an already intense situation.



Figure 4: Horizontal lines in the undereye area show a lack of minerals needed for adrenal/Kidney health



Figure 5: Two under-eye areas showing Kidney yin depletion



Although these under-eye signs are a commonplace sign of burnout, sometimes a different appearance can be seen: a swollen roll underneath the lower eyelid. In Chinese physiognomy this is called the 'sleeping silkworm' as it resembles a silkworm in its cocoon. The old texts advise to choosing a wife with this facial attribute, as it constitutes a guarantee of fertility and many children. If there unexplained infertility but also a 'silkworm', one has to look for other facial indicators to explain the pathology.



Figure 6: Sleeping silkworm (larger on one side depending on which Kidney is stronger)



Figure 7: Sleeping silkworm

Lines, colours and blemishes

A horizontal line across the philtrum on a young woman can indicate that the endometrium is too thick, possibly associated with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), endometriosis or being on the contraceptive pill for too long. It may also indicate a congenital anatomical abnormality such as malformation of the uterus. In Chinese medical terms it can signify stagnation, particularly if combined with a colour such as blue or green. A white or a pale colour on the philtrum indicates cold in the uterus. A horizontal line on the philtrum can also be seen on post-menopausal women whose Kidney yin has diminished, or else often develops following hysterectomy.

The philtrum is the crossover point between the Conception (Ren) and Governing (Du) Vessels (Mai) and the Stomach channel. If a line across the philtrum is combined with other lines across the Governing Vessel, such as a horizontal line across the bridge of the nose, it can mean there is an obstruction to having children, perhaps instead to follow a spiritual path such as Sai Baba or a distortion of the energy into sexual abuse such as the case with PR guru Max Clifford. It can also point to a tendency to diabetes – particularly in women – so careful diagnosis is required. I see this line across the

bridge of the nose most commonly on men. A vertical line on the philtrum groove has a similar meaning: a block to pregnancy or some problem with fertility. In such cases I often focus treatment on the Eight Extraordinary Vessels.



Figure 8: Philtrum showing vertical and horizontal lines

Chinese face-readers identify the significance of moles according to their position, shape and colour, although this type of face-reading often falls under the category of divination rather than medicine. The Chinese system of face-reading documents positions on the face associated with specific years of a person's life. For example, Abraham Lincoln had a facial mole in the location corresponding to the year he was assassinated.⁹ Dull black moles are traditionally thought to be the most unlucky and impairing to the life force. Occasionally the placement of a mole can be crucial in terms of reproductive health. Black moles on or next to the philtrum show pathogens or other obstruction affecting the lower jiao and/or gynaecological problems. This could mean the person is more susceptible to invasion of cold into the womb, or that long-term frustration, stress and repression from family or childhood dynamics has had a deep impact on fertility/the uterus.

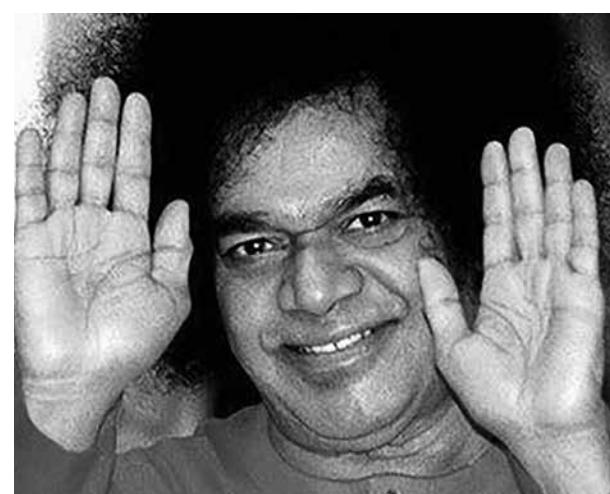


Figure 9: Sai Baba - note line across the bridge of the nose

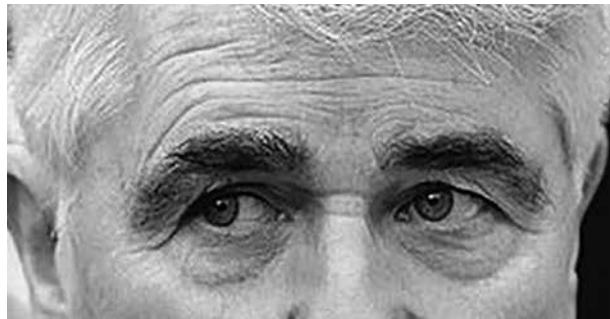


Figure 10: Max Clifford - showing line across the bridge of the nose

Other aspects

The space on either side of the philtrum groove provides information about the state of the ovaries. Discolouration, redness and spots around the philtrum and around the corners of the mouth are signs of hormonal imbalance, inflammation, pelvic inflammatory disease, empty or stagnant heat and disturbance of the Penetrating (Chong) and Conception Vessels, problems that are typically caused by poor diet and stress. Combined with a prominent jawbone (think Minnie Driver) this would point towards oestrogen dominance.

The lower part of the face generally relates to the pelvic area and patients with redness on the pad of the chin tend to present with Kidney deficiency and damp-heat in the lower jiao. Asking your patient to do a big pout (see picture) will often reveal the true picture of the amount of heat and burnout involved.



Figure 11: Minnie Driver's prominent jawbone



Figure 12: Redness on the pad of the chin indicating Kidney deficiency



Figure 13: Chin-pad showing inflammation and damp-heat in the lower jiao

A useful facial barometer of life force and creativity is the eyebrows. Long, abundant and thick brows (think Cara Delevigne) are indicators of good health and strong reserves of energy. Thyroid problems and reduced metabolism show in loss of hair at the lateral ends of the eyebrows, and in severe cases of hypothyroidism there is often only half an eyebrow left.



Figure 14: Cara Delevigne's strong eyebrows

No exploration of facial diagnosis would be complete without a look at the ears, which represent the Kidney qi.⁹ They reveal the constitution inherited from parents and grandparents, as well as the state of the spine, and nervous system. I often tell patients that the Kidneys are like batteries that hold the yin and yang of the body, and like batteries they can be 'topped up' or flat. Ears which are large, thick, close to the head and with a healthy colour show healthy Kidney qi. The larger the lobes, the better. As part of diagnosis it can be useful to get behind your patient and wiggle their ears – you will be amazed at how

different people's ears can feel: either firmly 'attached' to the head, or such that they can be moved all over the place, which indicates that the Kidney qi is not firm (this is also evidenced by ears which stick out from the head or are small and 'crumpled'). Ears which are redder in colour than the face show adrenal stress. Digestive (earth) deficiency is reflected in thin or no lobes: these patients should do practical things to ground themselves, such as gardening or yoga. Red lines in the area of the auricular point Shenmen can indicate Kidney deficiency and stress on the spine. A pronounced 'inner helix' - the cartilage inside the rounded outer edge of the ear - reveals a person who 'lives on their nerves' and in such cases work to regulate the sympathetic nervous system is often required. The area behind the ears relates to the pituitary gland. A patient who started to take natural yam supplements for menopausal symptoms reported that after a week the area behind her ears became red and itchy. My diagnosis was that excessive oestrogen was suppressing pituitary function. I recommended she stop the supplement and her skin cleared up immediately.



Figure 15: Red ears indicating adrenal stress



Figure 16: A pronounced inner helix and small earlobe - a person living on their nerves

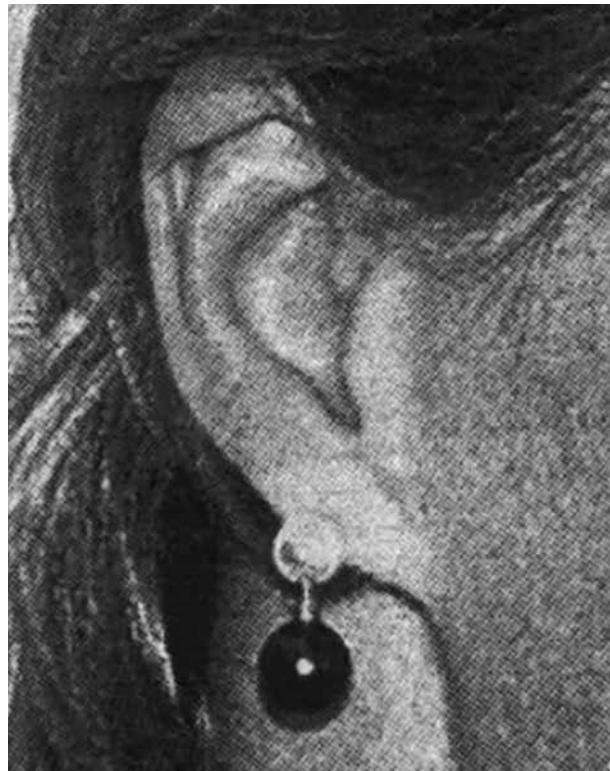


Figure 17: No earlobes, indicating lack of grounding and weak Stomach and Spleen qi

Clinical examples

In my clinical practice I have seen some wonderful successes with infertility patients, often against the odds. One patient came to the clinic in despair after her consultant had told her she had 'an incompetent womb' and had already entered the menopause. Even her therapist had told her it was 'too late' to have children. She was 41 years old and very stressed, her under-eye area showed clear signs of Kidney yin depletion (due to her busy and stressful high-powered job) and there was a horizontal line across her philtrum. I treated her for Kidney deficiency and balanced her hormones, and we agreed that she would take supplements and make lifestyle changes such as eating more warm food and protein to strengthen her digestion and her blood. After seven months on this programme she phoned her consultant to say she was making history by going through menopause and having a baby at the same time.

Another patient had lesions and stagnation in the lower jiao after a long history of surgeries for endometriosis. She had been trying to have a baby for years and presented with a vertical line on her philtrum. I concentrated on clearing blockages, especially through the Penetrating and Conception vessels and the Liver channel. Because she was a committed vegetarian we also had to add plenty of whey protein powder into her diet. After a year - success!

Conclusion

This is a short introduction to face-reading and fertility. Like pulse and tongue diagnosis, face-reading is a complex system which cannot be learned quickly or easily. It reveals the delicate intertwining of fate and self-determination, personality and health, which makes it invaluable for those who deal with illness and the human condition.

Maura Bright has specialised in Chinese face reading since 1986, which she uses alongside facial acupuncture to help her patients look and feel their best. Maura has taught face reading at all the major acupuncture colleges in the UK as well as holding seminars for other health and business professionals. She can be contacted through her website at <http://www.futureface.com>.

Endnotes

- 1 I am blessed to have known my teacher and mentor Daphne Youngson for over 25 years now: the oral tradition I received from her remains my lodestone. We met in 1987, a year after I graduated from the Traditional Acupuncture College. I was immediately fascinated by face-reading, and it remains my passion in life. Daphne lived for nine years in Hong Kong. While a member of the Hong Kong Association of Hygiene she studied acupuncture and face-reading from Dr. Frances Wong, a Chinese doctor working in a local hospital who was President of the Hong Association of Hygiene. Dr. Wong had learnt face-reading from a nun in Macau, who was herself taught by a Taoist master in China. Thus the lineage that Daphne taught me has its roots back in Taoism and even further back to shamanism - long before Mao and the Cultural Revolution. Dr Wong's teaching was based in the oral tradition: no poring over texts - it was taught in the clinic, not the classroom. In the same way, Daphne passed on her knowledge to me during our many one-to-one sessions. The information I share in this article is therefore based on this, along with extensive further reading on every other face-reading lineage I could find (including French, Italian, English, esoteric, Japanese, Hebrew and Chinese texts). I am also indebted to Timothy Mar, Kwok Man Ho, Michio Kushio, the late Jon Sandifer and the late Dr. John Shen.
- 2 Mythological figures revered in Taoism as embodying a state of realisation and spiritual power.
- 3 As detailed in Kwok, M.H., Palmer, M. & O'Brien, J. (1986). *Lines of Destiny*. Rider & Company Ltd: London.
- 4 Ibid, p.107.
- 5 Although this result may seem to counter the facial attributes of the parents, it should be noted that genetic strength is also passed down from the grandparents. Studies have shown that if the grandparents lived in a time of abundance or famine, this has an effect on the grandchildren's health. See the following paper on epigenetics: Thayer, Z.M. & Kuzawa, C.M. (2011). "Biological memories of past environments; Epigenetic pathways to health disparities", *Epigenetics*, 6:7: 1-6.
- 6 See for example Stener-Victorin, E. & Wu, X. (2010). "Effects and mechanisms of acupuncture in the reproductive system", *Auton Neurosci*, 157(1-2):46-51.
- 7 Typical type-A behaviour includes impatience, competitiveness, perfectionism, driving oneself too hard, high work involvement and easily getting 'wound up'.
- 8 Although he died when he was 56 and the mole was at position 57, the correspondence holds true as in Chinese physiognomy a person is seen to be one year old at birth.
- 9 According to the traditional axiom, 'The Kidneys open into the ears'.