

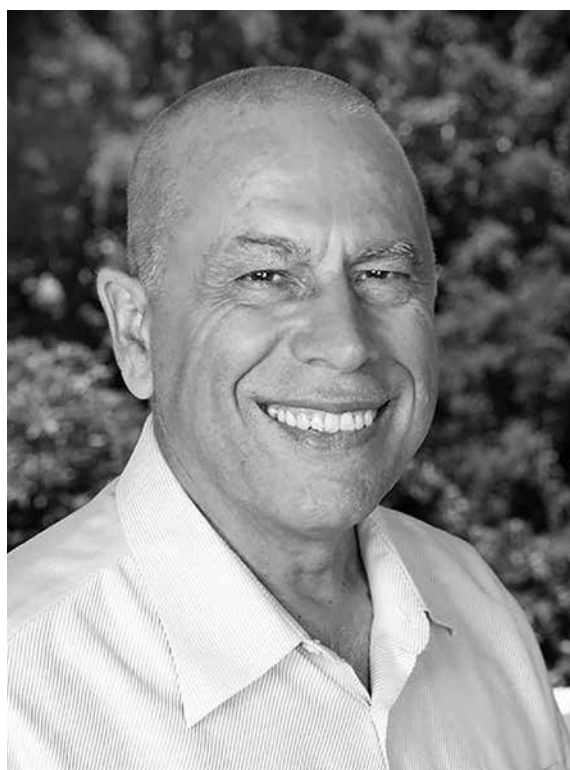
Giovanni Maciocia 1945 - 2018

Abstract

This article is an obituary in memory of the pre-eminent practitioner, author and teacher of Chinese medicine, Giovanni Maciocia.

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Keywords:
Obituary,
Giovanni
Maciocia.



Giovanni Maciocia, who died in March this year at the age of 73, probably did more for the development of Chinese medicine in the West than any other single individual. The announcement of his death was met with shock and grief by the many thousands of students and practitioners who used his books on a daily basis, were lucky enough to attend his lectures and who loved and respected him.

Giovanni was born in Naples, Italy in 1945, the youngest of four children. His mother was one of 13 children and his father a successful building contractor who later became mayor of the tiny village of Civita d' Antino. At the age of eight, Giovanni's uncle gave him the nickname of 'the professor' because of his serious mien, though by the time he was in his 20s he was also known for his radical left-wing politics, great parties and skill at making obscure cocktails. This love of a good time stayed with him throughout

his life in a passion for music, especially opera, and for salsa dancing in his later years. He was famous for hosting the best salsa parties in Santa Barbara with mariachi bands, fire dancers and Mexican food.

Giovanni took a degree in economics in Naples and then, declining joining his father's business, moved to the UK to work for the car company Fiat.

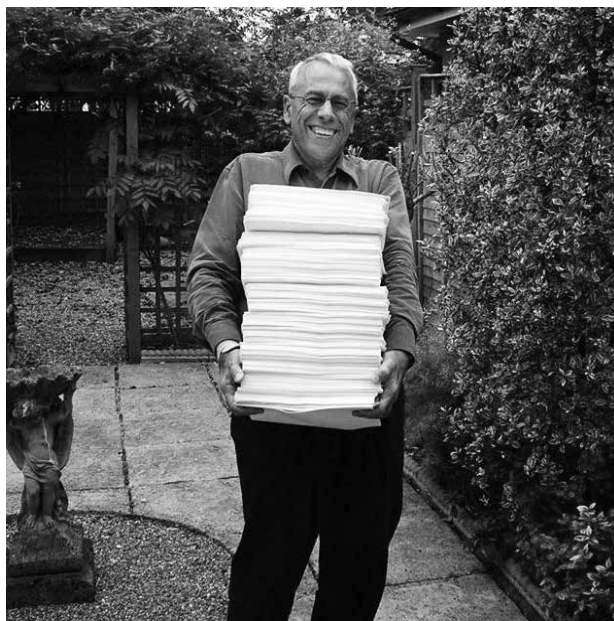
Like many of us, he first encountered acupuncture because of his own health problems – in his case disabling migraines. Somebody advised acupuncture and, perhaps because he had been fascinated by Chinese culture from an early age, he went for treatment. This ignited a passion for Chinese medicine and in 1971 he embarked on a three-year course with Dick van Buren. As was common in those days he began teaching and treating patients in van Buren's school immediately on qualifying in 1974.

Giovanni was one of the first Western practitioners to take advantage of the opening up of study opportunities in China, attending a three-month course in Nanjing in 1980. The depth and sophistication of Chinese medicine that he encountered was a revelation to him as the prevalent opinion at the time – in the UK at least – was that China had abandoned its rich medical tradition. He developed deep relationships with his Chinese teachers, and returned to Nanjing several times.

In 1981 he organised the first group of practising acupuncturists to study in China and I was lucky enough to join what was grandly called the 'First International Course for Further Studies in Acupuncture & Moxibustion' in Nanjing.

In 1996 Giovanni was appointed visiting professor at Nanjing University of TCM who described him as the 'father of Chinese medicine in Europe.'

This trip led to the setting up of a post-graduate course in London taught by what came to be known as 'the gang of four' (Giovanni, Julian Scott, Vivienne



Brown and myself). In the mid 1980s we organised the first visit to the UK of doctors from China.

In 1996 Giovanni was appointed visiting professor at Nanjing University of TCM who described him as the 'father of Chinese medicine in Europe'. His given Chinese name was Ma Wan Li 'Horse of Ten Thousand Miles'.

Already a multi-linguist (English, Italian, French, Finnish and Spanish), Giovanni taught himself Chinese and began his extraordinary writing career. Over the subsequent years he produced one seminal textbook after another - *Tongue Diagnosis in Chinese Medicine*, *Foundations of Chinese Medicine*, *The Practice of Chinese Medicine*, *Diagnosis in Chinese Medicine*, *Obstetrics & Gynecology in Chinese Medicine*, *The Channels of Acupuncture*, *The Psyche in Chinese Medicine*. Many of these were completed in the house he bought on Italy's lovely Amalfi coast, among the famous lemon groves. He also wrote numerous articles and was particularly generous in his support of this journal in its earliest days.

He had the ability to completely absorb his students - and the effect was extraordinary.

Giovanni played an important role in launching Chinese herbal medicine in the UK, setting up a school in London with Michael McIntyre in 1987. Later he created a commercial range of herbal formulas (Three Treasures, Women's Treasures and Little Treasures).

Giovanni lectured all over the world, both in person and online. He was unstinting in his support of his students and fellow practitioners, and was known for his generous responses to those who contacted him for advice from all over the world. He is sorely missed.

Personal reflections

I have always had a strongly independent streak, and while I am grateful to have learnt from many thousands of people in my life, there are very few I would honour as my teacher in the fullest sense. Giovanni was one of those.

In 1977 I was at the start of my last year at acupuncture school and was in despair. Whilst allowing for the now unimaginable lack of resources (there were barely four books on acupuncture in English), the standard of education was so poor, the ignorance of Chinese medicine so great, and the mystical obfuscation that in my eyes mostly served to cover up this ignorance so frustrating, that I was on the point of giving up. Then, miraculously, Giovanni appeared to teach us and everything changed. His dedication to study and reflection, his wide reading (especially from French sources), his openness to the information that was beginning to trickle in from China, and his empathy and care for his patients, inspired me deeply and I delighted in learning from him.

His teaching had a special quality that in later years, as I began my own teaching career, puzzled me. When I taught, I felt an obligation to entertain my audience with jokes and stories to break up the potential monotony of the audience's experience, yet I never saw Giovanni do that. He had the ability to completely absorb his students - and the effect was extraordinary. You might say that by his presence he created a 'qi field' that wrapped everyone up in it.

His teaching in my last year at college, and the great good fortune I had to be able to join his trip to China in 1981, were the springboards to my own career in Chinese medicine. I owe him an enormous debt and am proud that we became both close colleagues and friends. Although I lost touch with Giovanni after he moved to Santa Barbara in the US, his death has touched me deeply.

Peter Deadman is a former student of Giovanni, the founder of The Journal of Chinese Medicine and the author of Live Well, Live Long: Teachings from the Chinese Nourishment of Life Tradition.