

Book Review

“Traditional Japanese Acupuncture: Fundamentals of Meridian Therapy”

The Society of Traditional Japanese Medicine, 2003

Is there such a thing as Traditional Japanese Acupuncture?
The spirit of acupuncture is permeated by Japanese
naturalism

Reviewed by Hirokimi Matsuda
Acupuncture journalist and member of the Japan
Society of Acupuncture and Moxibustion

The question of "What is Traditional Japanese Acupuncture (TJA)" contains a built-in paradox. After acupuncture was brought to Japan from China more than 1000 years ago, the Japanese developed deep respect for the elements of Chinese classical acupuncture theory, including meridians, acupuncture points, and yin-yang five phase metaphysics. Viewed solely from this angle, it would seem that there is truly no such thing as "traditional Japanese acupuncture" (TJA), but only "traditional Chinese acupuncture" and its imitators. But is this really the case?

The Chinese classics included a high-level philosophical system on the basis of theories such as yin-yang five phase metaphysics, as well as the art of divination and the perspective of fatalism. TCM grew out of that context. As can be seen from the TCM perspective on life and from theories regarding the human body, the meridians, the organs and entrails, and the etiology of disease, this Chinese system was complex and had many elements that were formalistic, mechanistic, and metaphysical.

In contrast, located on the fringes of Asia and molded by a warm and moderate climate, Japanese culture developed a preference for simplicity over complexity and for intuition over theoretical systems, with a strong tendency toward naturalism and a highly valued sense of unity with nature. In the area of acupuncture, although Japanese practitioners made use of the graphs and illustrations from China of the meridians and acupuncture points, they also developed an experiential approach based on palpation and

relying primarily on sensory experience and hands-on practice to confirm their findings.

This book was compiled from classical Japanese and Chinese acupuncture literature and from acupuncture techniques hidden within the folk wisdom of the common people in 1930's Japan, systematized under the title of "Meridian Therapy." Made widely available at the time of its publication, it became quite popular within "society". The title, *Traditional Japanese Acupuncture*, has been criticized by other schools of acupuncture for being overbearing. However, the text succeeds both in providing good theoretical points based on TCM and also in revealing the experiential and sensory characteristics of Japanese acupuncture that establish TJA as an acupuncture form separate from TCA.

The reader is encouraged not to simply conceptualize the meridians and acupuncture points as something to be memorized from a book, but also to verify these points experientially by feeling with the fingers for depressions, pain on pressure, and indurations. This experience, acquired from the surface examination of patients' bodies over many generations, is summarized in statements such as the following. "When there is a problem in the Spleen or Stomach, the points ST-19 to ST-25 tend to show pain on pressure, resistance, or depressions. Particularly, ST-21 will always show deficiency when there is a gastric ulcer." (p. 65) "The Spleen channel on the lower limbs tends to exhibit pain on pressure. Healing will be slow if there are depressions along the Spleen channel here." (p. 69) Similar information is reported throughout the book. Secrets of Japanese acupuncture are revealed that are not available in any TCM textbook, but are specific to TJA.

This subtle awareness of small changes in the surface of the body also shows up in pulse diagnosis, which is performed differently than under TCM. Pulse diagnosis to diagnose sickness in the entrails and meridians, and to determine which acupuncture points

to select, is specific to Japanese-style acupuncture and is not used in modern TCM. In the process of taking a detailed reading of the body surface and the pulse, the practitioner talks with the patient, which builds communication and encourages the patient to cooperate and participate in the healing process. Japanese-style acupuncture is characterized not only by the use of very fine needles that do not hurt, but also by a feeling of comfort. There is a heightened sense of connection between the practitioner and the patient, which contributes to a strongly beneficial healing environment.

At the end of this book, there are some interesting statements that reveal the spiritual posture of Japanese acupuncturists.

"This is hard to understand without experiencing it firsthand, but in short, a feeling of "now", or "it's better", or "this is enough" will just come to you. This feeling will come without a clear reason when you earnestly perform treatment with an empty or clear mind." (P.331)

The key words here are "without a clear reason" and "perform treatment with an empty or clear mind". Many Japanese acupuncturists would agree that there is an area held in common among all of the different Japanese acupuncture schools within TJA, which is similar to the experience of Zen meditation. The closer we approach this area, the more we see the expressions of naturalism and the Japanese heart that permeate acupuncture.

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