

## Introduction of Japanese Acupuncture

### *Considering the Therapist's Hand (3)*

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### III. Training of the therapist's hands

From the author's perspective the role of palpation in current acupuncture and moxibustion should be revised and the training of clinicians who have acquired excellent palpation skills remains an important task. The "training of the hands" that traditionally has been emphasized in Japanese acupuncture and moxibustion should be subject of re-education during clinical acupuncture and moxibustion training. To this end, solutions to the below listed tasks are urgently needed (table).

Tasks pertaining to the improvement of palpation skills

1. Organization of the biological responses identified through palpation
2. Establishment of palpation skills to identify responses
3. Establishment of appropriate stimulation methods to modify these responses
4. Establishing the theoretical role of responses, response identification and induction of modifications within acupuncture and moxibustion theory
5. Establishment of educational methods and practices to acquire the above mentioned

1. Organization of the biological responses identified through palpation

There are an infinite number of biological responses. Attempts at identifying these responses through palpation inevitably are marked by pronounced subjective trends. Doubtlessly, efforts are made to identify the findings in an "objective" manner and reported accordingly. It cannot be denied that these are nevertheless extremely subjective. Information pertaining to acupuncture and moxibustion (not restricted to acupuncture and moxibustion) is gathered for specific purposes based on advanced determined therapeutic theories or medical systems; in other words, following the yin-yang or five phase patterns, and then classified according to purpose.

Moreover, the contents of the medical treatment and the identified findings are strongly regulated by therapeutic methods. Depending on whether you use acupuncture, moxibustion, manipulation or any combination of these, determines which findings are gathered. It is meaningless to gather findings for parameters that cannot be changed and findings that are not subject to therapeutic intervention or evaluation. That is because findings and therapies will become organized in a system of mutual correlations. Identification of findings that will not be the subject of therapeutic interventions for some time is still not meaningless, but rather needs to be incorporated as a reaction within the system.

Muscle tonus is a representative palpatory finding observed during acupuncture and moxibustion treatment and emphasized in Japan. In association with it indurations and similar changes are also mentioned as well as: swelling, feeling of warmth, pain and other signs of inflammation, and of course their respective opposites like feeling of cold, muscle atrophy and similar responses. These findings reflect the strong integration of physical therapy in current Japanese acupuncture and moxibustion.

However, if palpation is performed based on classical theory, findings that need to be mentioned include muscle tonus, indurations, stiffness etc. that would be classified as "excess" conditions; contrasted with "deficiency" conditions marked by findings like lack of muscle elasticity, popularly termed lack of strength. Moreover, when based on classical theory, there are problems preceding the level of muscles that need to be emphasized. This refers to a lack of skin tension and elasticity, tonus of subcutaneous (connective) tissues and indentations due to a lack of strength. These are essential when considering "acupoints" and may be regarded as an extension of the body surface reactions presented in the "Lin Shu" (Spiritual Pivot). When these findings are classified according to the Yin-Yang concept, they are inseparable from the concepts of tonification and sedation in clinical acupuncture and moxibustion and in this sense may require to be arranged anew.

## 2. Establishment of palpation skills to identify responses

The technique of palpation varies depending on the kind of reaction that is sought. During the establishment of the palpation skills, the reactions to be identified must be classified and systematically organized. Attempts at the palpation of the above described reactions raise the question as to how to develop the relevant technical skills. For the palpation performed during acupuncture and moxibustion treatment it is ultimately important to find and determine the sites that are to be stimulated. The sites eligible for acupuncture stimulation include the skin or connective tissue and muscles (occasionally the bones). Moreover, stimulation methods for the various sites differ, so that the needle stimulation techniques for the pathologies manifesting at those various sites also need to be classified accordingly.

Thus, target pathologies are classified and the palpation skills for their determination established. During this procedure, patient stress (pain or discomfort) should be kept at a minimum, while maximum efforts should be made to avoid subjective evaluations. Occasionally, when only the pathology is identified without troubling oneself with any further details, a possibly increased burden of the patients with pain or discomfort tends to be neglected. This possibility should be kept in mind and not forgotten.

For example, when considering treatment for increased muscle tonus, the condition of muscles, tendons, and bones should be well understood and an appropriate palpation should allow one to discriminate between them. Also, inducing contractions or extensions of muscles may make it easier to determine their status. Thus, considerations of patient position and exercise instructions must be integrated into the theory.

For the establishment of palpation based on deficiency-excess, tonification-sedation the palpation should be performed based on the correlation between skin - connective tissue - muscles - bones in order to determine the condition of the respective tissues. Palpation in Japanese acupuncture and moxibustion concentrating on locomotor organs like muscles or bone and tendons are, as has already been described, is strongly influenced by physical therapy. The performance of treatments using contact acupuncture or extremely shallow needle stimulation, also represent an important field of Japanese acupuncture and moxibustion. Therefore, organization of body surface information from tissues located shallower than muscles or bones is also essential.

Yet, most importantly, it is necessary to carefully first pick up the individual physical reactions (actually observing the body) in order to establish a system of palpation without restricting oneself to the above mentioned therapeutic aims or theories.