

Medical History in Japan

Sotetsu Ishizaka's "Shinkyu Chiyo Ichigen (2)

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[Part 2 of this series]

- Unless the reasons are known why needles cure diseases, needling techniques become a useless thing and cannot be put to practical use.

Once the significance of their application has been understood, like pollution transforming into cleanliness, or entangled things becoming undone diseases can be cured. When the essentials have been sufficiently grasped, the criteria can clearly be formulated in words.

Well, formulating the essentials in an easily understood language, a bamboo or wood spine (splinter) piercing the body is not different from a needle made of gold, silver or iron piercing the body, in both cases similar splinters are inserted into the body. The difference lies in whether these splinters are stuck by mistake, or inserted for the purpose of treatment.

When bamboo or wood splinters have pierced, it is possible to remove them by pulling them out with human strength, but if that person were not able to pull it out with his own strength, the vital force of that particular person will cause the development of inflammation and calor at the site of the splinter, gradually concentrating essence and spirit as well as nutritive and protective qi (effects of nerves and blood vessels) forces, so that the fever at the site of the splinter becomes exuberant, transforming the heat into pus so that gradually even splinters that cannot be removed with the strength of that person are discharged together with pus and thereby removed from the body. Drainage of the pus and following recovery from the inflammatory symptoms, the body naturally returns to its whole, unharmed condition.

During acupuncture & moxibustion treatment

gold, silver or iron needles are inserted at the site of the disease and similar to the local development of calor at the site where bamboo or wood splinters have pierced, essence and spirit as well as nutritive and protective qi concentrate and gather beneath the needle.

Retaining the needle in place for a while, properly gathering these forces under the needle and then removing it will finally scatter essence and spirit as well as nutritive and protective qi along with the pathogenic evil and result in a sudden healing. This is exactly like the way wind blows away clouds, after which a clear blue sky emerges. In the classics too it says "Piercing three times will heal a person in whom 10 days have passed since the onset of the disease. Piercing ten times will heal a person in whom 1 month has passed since the onset of the disease. Anyway, regardless of whether the disease is mild or severe, one treatment every three days is the standard for the treatment."

Regarding the needling technique the sites of the pathogenic qi are needled, and through treatment of the evil the essence and spirit as well as nutritive and protective qi gather properly at the site. By removing the needle the gathered essence and spirit as well as nutritive and protective qi will eliminate the evil. In other words, this can be considered to be the same technique as if drastic drugs like ginseng or aconite were used to raise the weakened vital energy to achieve vitality.

- Sites that should not be needled are constantly and widely moving organs. The two organs heart and lungs and thick arteries (i.e. the aorta) as well as along the course of major ('gathering place of the heavenly vessels for essence and spirit' (i.e. nerves)) "somyaku seishin", where needling could result in various accidents. Thus, unless one has a detailed knowledge of the course of the qi and the courses of vessels the particular person is

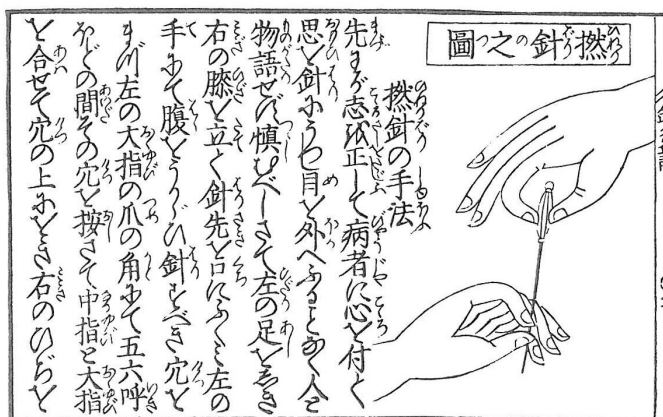
nothing more than a layman, poking a sick person. When facing acute diseases people highly skilled in the art may achieve good effects by piercing forbidden sites that usually should be avoided. That is the same as using the “militia” in war.

- Needling technique is really all about direct insertion, but not restricted to it. The skills of properly using the left and right hand, adopting a proper posture, serious concentration, relaxing the arms and the skills to move the fingers freely have to be acquired.

The index and middle finger of the left hand are placed alongside each other and press on the site to be needled, taking care to be able to change at will between light touch and deep pressure, and between these two fingers the needle is held in the right hand and pressed in.

Once the needle has been inserted, it is pushed further in with the right hand. Here it is important to take care to keep it constantly moving from the start to the end in a rhythmical fashion. This is called the secret of the needle.

[Illustration 6] Illustration of twisting a needle, “Shinkyu Chohoki” (Description of acupuncture and moxibustion treasures) by Masatoyo Hongo (1718)



[Illustration 6]

For that reason it says in the classics “the right

hand governs the advancement of the needle, while the left hand holds and controls the needle and thus reins it.”

It is also said that “people practicing acupuncture must believe their left hand”.

Unless the hand that inserts the needle is kept heavy and rhythmically moving, the needle turns into a lifeless thing. When there is only a minimal amount of vital force left in the sick person’s body and the hand of the acupuncture practitioner is a lifeless thing, it can have various harmful effects. One has to be very careful about this.

For this reason the classics describe the relevant acquaintance as: “The person performing the acupuncture must maintain a wakeful proficiency and a frame of mind as if looking into a deep abyss, or walking on thin ice, kneeling in front of dignitaries, or as if grasping the tail of a tiger with the hand.” Various mistakes are all caused by inattention.

- There is the phenomenon of the needling sensation (resonance). From the site where the needle has been inserted a phenomenon like a flowing resonance always spreads up, down, left and right and may cause a needling sensation in the most unexpected places. Needles inserted into hands and feet may for example affect the face, chest or back. Those are all due to effects on the “Somyaku” (zong mai; gathering place of the heavenly vessel essential vessels). It is not due to the nutritive and protective qi channels called “Eie”. Neither is it due to the muscles.

* Author's note: When Sotetsu refers to “Somyaku”, he means nerves, while “Eie” refers to blood vessels.

- Gold, silver or iron is used for the manufacture of the needles.

The standard for the length of the needle metal in Japan should be 3 "sun" (inches).

The vitality of the physician does not reach the needle tip, when they exceed this length, so that this would not be beneficial for the disease any longer.

The thickness of the needle (thick, thin) is restricted to needles of sizes between gauges No. 1 to No. 7.

In modern times through tapering during the process of the metalwork the needle body may be manufactured with an initial thickness of gauge No. 6-7 and that gradually becomes thinner down to No. 1-2, but this is meaningless. It may facilitate the insertion of the needle, but is not beneficial for the disease.

- In case of tube needles a guiding tube is used and the needle tapped in for only a portion of its length.

The outer skin in most people is rather insensitive to pain and itching. The needles are inserted to this pain insensitive depth. There is no harm.

But here too, if the acupuncture practitioner performs this treatment rough and mindlessly, inserting the needles in an unskilled manner, there may be severe pain. This too has to be performed very carefully, with watchful, vigilant attention.

In case the needle is inserted without the use of a guiding tube, it is important that the needle tip is pressed firmly pressed against the skin to pierce it and then be manipulated.

[Illustration 7] Illustration of needling a guiding tube, derived from "Shinkyu Bassui Taise" (Comprehensive Compilation of Excerpts about Acupuncture and Moxibustion) by Ippo Okamoto (1699)



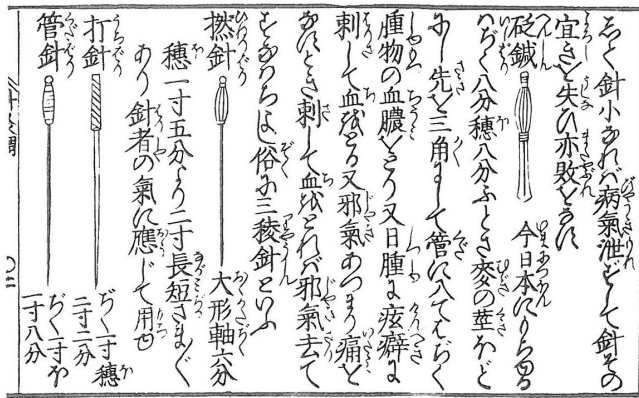
[Illustration 7]

- The needling method includes aspects of tonification-sedation, receiving-following, and deficiency-excess.

Tonification helps to boost the sick person's spirit and engorge the vessels, which is a method to remove the harmful qi.

Sedation is a method of eliminating congestion of the nutritive and protective vessels by purging the blood. I have also heard that in the west there is a purgative method using needles. Although I don't know any details of that technique, I believe something like the three-edged needle is been used for this purpose.

[Illustration 8] Illustration of twisting a needle, "Shinkyu Chohoki" (Description of acupuncture and moxibustion treasures) by Masatoyo Hongo (1718)



[Illustration 8]

The receiving-following technique resembles the breathing method, when the needle has already been inserted, that depends on careful considerations of the coming and going in the nutritive and protective qi in the vessels and is performed with the practitioners mind set to either meeting or following the flow. One has to be very patient when entanglements of the disease are disentangled, and has to pierce with the needles carefully and concernedly.

The deficiency method is a technique where the needle is quickly removed and both the spirit as well as the nutritive and protective qi are used to treat exuberant disease.

The excess method is the application of the receiving-following technique. The needles are slowly inserted over an extended period of time, without causing any pain at all, only mild needling sensation, and where the breathing interval of the needle is gradually increased. This is used for persons in whom both essence and spirit as well as the nutritive and protective qi vessels have fallen into a state of deficiency.

Well, in a certain patient the excess method may be applied at one site and the deficiency method at another site. Or else the deficiency method is employed in the upper region, while the excess method (or a similar technique) is employed in the lower region.

Depending on whether the disease is located shallowly and whether the symptoms are marked by deficiency or excess the choice of the needling technique is used either shallowly or deep, or else deficiency or excess, tonification or sedation, meeting or following techniques are used depending on the ingenuity of the physician.

Diseases have to be treated based on a thorough comprehension of these techniques. The question of whether the acupuncture physician is either skillful or inexperienced depends on whether there is a profound knowledge of the body's interior and exterior, upper and lower portions, the twelve organs, essence and spirit, the nutritive and protective qi physiology, and the causes of all diseases are carefully scrutinized. Those who accomplish this can truly be called superior doctors.

With this the outline of the needling method is complete.