

## Medical History in Japan

*"Historical Significance of the Standardization of Acupoint Locations", the Second Japanese Acupoint Committee (1)*

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The historical significance of the present day will only be known in the future. Nevertheless by going back into history it should be possible to catch a bird's eye view of the historical role of the standardization of acupoint locations made on this occasion.

In the past acupoints were standardized three times. The first time was approximately during the first century and constituted standardization on a "conceptual level". This had the common purpose of a conceptual clarification of the meaning of meridians (channels) as prerequisite for acupoints and the very nature of acupoints themselves. The second standardization in the second century represented a unification and standardization of various ideas about meridians and acupoints that had sprouted from the first standardization on a "theoretical level". The third standardization occurred after acupuncture and moxibustion therapy has spread all over China in the 11th century and the Chinese government realized the necessity of a support for this useful therapy, leading to a unification and standardization on a "national level".

These first to third implementations were standardizations based on the subjective views of one or several scholars. And today, at a time when acupuncture and moxibustion is about to assume

a role in the medical care worldwide, based on modern scientific views, a standardization allowing an objective verification was needed. And that is precisely the nature of the current standardization. Historically the fourth of its kind it probably can be designated as an objective standardization on a "global level".

Based on the above I would like to trace the history of the discovery of meridians, acupoints and their changes, as well as the standardization process.

### 1 Meridian concepts and moxibustion treatment prior to the second century BC

[text excavated from the Mawangdui tomb]

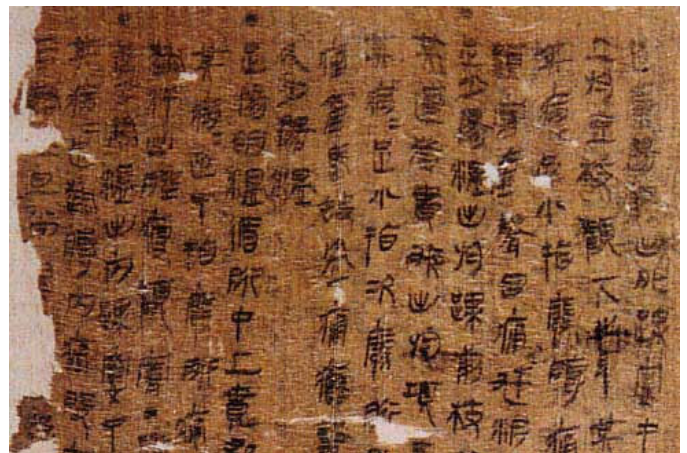


Figure 1 足臂十一脈灸經 Zubi Shiyi (11) mai Jiuqing

The oldest firmly established text pertaining to meridians is not a text that has been handed down above ground, but has slept under ground until its excavation. The tomb No. 3 site of Mawangdui in Hunan province in China, in the outskirts of Changshayao is the site of the excavation of a group of medical texts. One of these has been written on a silk cloth and named after its excavation the "『足臂十一脈灸經』". Figure 1 shows that it was written in the seal-engraving style of writing Chinese characters and is a text dealing with moxibustion treatment of 11

meridians on the arms and legs, but its content antedates the contents of the chapter on meridians (jing mai) in the *Ling Shu*.

These characters are today completely deciphered [1]. For example, the first line in Figure 1 can be interpreted as "The greater yang warm (meridian) begins at the hollow of the external malleolus ...". However, in the underlined character "warm" the portion meaning "speak" may actually represent "eye" and therefore interpreted as the character for (blood) vessels or meridian (mai). This section corresponds to the "The greater yang meridian ... (and its branching vessels) ... behind the external malleolus ..." part appearing in the chapter on jing mai in the *Ling Shu*. Further, line 5 shown in Figure 1 denotes "The lesser yang (warm) meridian of the foot originates in front of the malleolus ..." and this corresponds to the "The lesser yang gallbladder meridian ... (and its branching vessels) ... originates in front of the malleolus ..." part appearing in the chapter on jing mai in the *Ling Shu*. The "*Ling Shu*" was thought to be a forged text from the later period of the Qing dynasty, but this example here clearly provides its firmly established evidence.

Moreover, not only the 『足臂十一脈灸經』, but also the texts named the first and second volume of the "Yin-yang shih-yi mo-chiu ching" and materials of similar contents have been unearthed simultaneously with aforementioned silk texts [2]. These Mawangdui medical texts have been burial accessories for a woman who died a few years before 168 BC. The woman's body had not been decomposed and was unearthed as a still moist corpse, suggesting that it had been buried immediately after death and therefore the Mawangdui medical texts also had remained buried since the second century BC. Yet, the characteristics of the ideograph form used in the Mawangdui medical texts suggests, that they

have been transcribed sometime between the Qin dynasty and the early Han dynasty, so that the inception of the content probably goes back to pre-Qin times.

These Mawangdui medical texts offered the following insights. First, 11 meridians corresponding to the five viscera and six bowels of later generations were recognized, but no vessels corresponding to the modern pericardium meridian, conception and governor vessels are mentioned. In other words, the twelve meridians for six viscera and six bowels described in the chapter on meridians in the "*Ling Shu*" are apparently a concept of later ages. While there are many entries pertaining to moxibustion treatment, indicating "use moxibustion on the greater yin meridian of the foot for all kinds of diseases", no acupoint locations are given. Moxibustion was applied mainly on the hands and feet only, but seemingly not on the torso. Needling methods were not mentioned either.

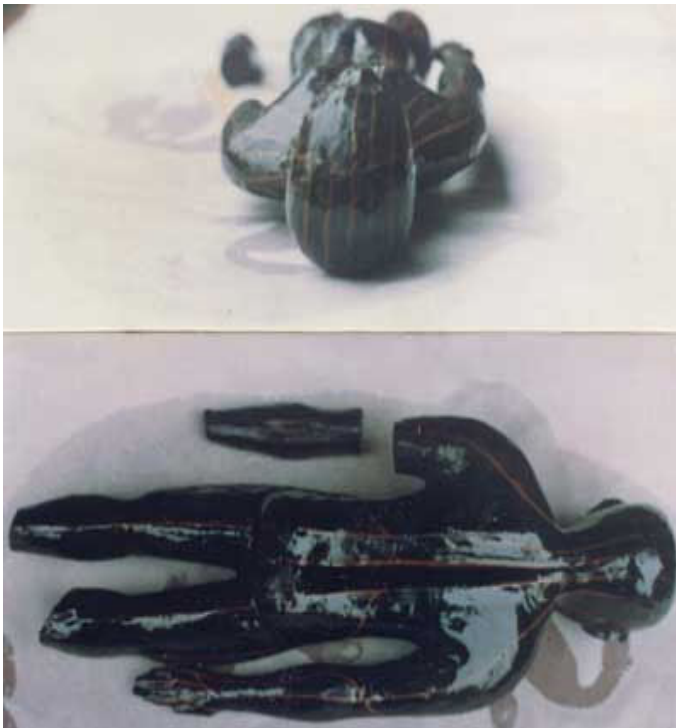
In other words, the meridian concept was presumably developed first and acupoints discovered later. These texts also suggest that moxibustion treatment based on this meridian concept had been developed first and acupuncture only later.

#### [Origin of moxibustion treatment]

Why has moxibustion been developed first and has mugwort (*Artemisia princeps*) been used? Professor Jianmin Li from the Academia Sinica in Taiwan has focused on the employed ignition method [3]. In other words, in China mugwort has customarily been used since ancient times as a fumigation smoke to drive away evil qi and since mugwort contains a lot of essential oils, it easily ignites. For that reason the focus of round carved ice lenses has been used to ignite the mugwort. This ignition technique has been used since ancient times.

Adding the authors own conjectures, among the various ignition methods since ancient times this method was probably considered to be strongest in its yang nature, since the sun provided the source of the ignition. On the other hand, human body temperature gradually decreases over time and at the end of this process death is recognized. This was considered to be caused by evil qi. In other words, because evil qi deprives the body of its temperature, it has been thought since ancient times to be a form of yin qi. I believe therefore that this justifies the interpretation that mugwort was ignited by the sun to expel the evil qi and the elimination of yin qi using this yang qi led to the development of moxibustion treatment.

#### [Excavation of dolls in Mianyang]



**Figure 2** Wooden black lacquer doll (early Han period)

On the other hand, from a grave dating back to the early Han period in the city of Mianyang of Szechuan province a wooden doll has been

excavated, the body of which is painted in black lacquer [4]. Judging from the coins excavated at the same time allows to infer that the burial took place between 179 and 141 BC. As Figure 2 shows, there are on the body surface 9 pairs of symmetrical lines running up- and downward as well as a midline on the back drawn in red lacquer. However, no markings or characters that might denote acupoints are found. Although interpretation of these red lines as blood vessels may not be impossible, there is no vessel in the center of the back, so that these lines indicate more likely meridians than blood vessels. If that is so, the central line on the back conceivably indicates the governor vessel and the other 9 lines the three yin and three yang vessels of the hand and the three yang vessels of the feet. It should be noted then, that there are no three yin vessels of the feet.

The above mentioned Professor Jianmin Li also directed his attention to the drawn governor vessel that is not correlated to the viscera and bowel concept and discussed in detail the origin of this governor vessel. I can add my own speculations to this. The part of the body surface most resistant when exposed to cold is the face, so that the face was envisioned as of an area where yang qi accumulates. For this reason all the yang meridians gather on the face, while conversely the yin meridians follow a course gathering in yin areas. On the other hand, human (male) external secretions apart from the excretions are saliva from the mainly yang mouth and semen form the mainly yin reproductive organs. For that reason the concept that large amounts of secreted saliva flow via the spinal cord, that is the governor vessel, into yin regions to supplement semen has also been formed in ancient times. The concept that the governor vessel is the route for the circulation of saliva and

semen is correlated to the origin of the development of Taoist sex practices (fang shi) or the gymnastic breathing exercises called "guiding and pulling" (Tao yin) and later the governor vessel was considered to be of great importance for the Taoist sex practices and the guiding and pulling exercises.

Moreover, on this figure no lines were drawn for the conception vessel and the three yin meridians of the foot. The conception vessel is a meridian also related to pregnancy and since ancient times there seem to have been the concept that viewed the conception vessel as a meridian of women. And since all of the six yang meridians, the governor vessel and the three yin meridians on this figure are strongly yang in nature, Professor Jiro Endo of Tokyo University of Science suggested, that the figure probably represents a male.

### [Development and fusion of the meridian concepts]

Based on the above description it seems that there have been different concepts regarding the origin of the conception vessel, governor vessel and 12 regular meridians of the six viscera and six bowels. The 11 meridians recorded in the medical texts of the Mawangdui correspond to five viscera and six bowels and are considered to be a concept designed for therapy. Thus, the 12 regular meridians of the six viscera and six bowels have developed during later ages. On the other hand, the figure from Mianyang reveals the initial stages of a combination of the concepts pertaining to the conception vessel and governor vessel through the Taoist sex practices in correlation to reproduction and birth with the yin and yang meridians. In the various chapters of the "Su Wen" and "Ling Shu" the main differences in the dialog represent differences among schools and since several school regarding the meridian concept were established, their fusion undoubtedly proceeded along several distinct stages.

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