

Medical History in Japan

Historical Significance of the Standardization of Acupoint Locations”, the Second Japanese Acupoint Committee (4) “Detailed Guide to the Location of Acupoints” from the classics to the WHO standardization”, pp411-422, Tokyo, Ishiyaku Publishing, June 2009 (partially revised)

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3. Spread of metal needles and increase in the number of acupoints



Figure 3 Silver needle (the two on the left) and gold needles (the four on the right)

The excavation of the Mawangdui medical texts revealed, that the meridian concept had been used for therapeutic purposes prior to the second century BC, using mainly moxibustion. However, as the centuries passed by, this too changed. From the early Han period in the second century BC the regular use of iron vessels in China began to replace the former use of bronze vessels. In the late Han period of the first century filiform iron needles also seemed to have spread. Also, for the royalty and aristocracy gold and silver needles were used.

Figure 3 shows replicas of gold needles (the four on the right) and silver needles (the two on the left) that had been buried in 112 BC in the Han dynasty tomb of Mancheng 滿城漢墓, along which a modern Chinese long needle (12 cm) is placed for comparison. These artifacts have been excavated from the tomb of Liu Sheng, Prince Jing of Zhongshan, member of

a family from the early Han dynasty along with vessels for making decoctions that had the characters "medical craft" engraved on them [6]. Judging from both material and form of these gold and silver needles allows to rule out that they were sewing needles and they are currently the oldest metallic needles for use on the human body in existence. However, they are not as thin as the filiform needles and could probably only be inserted to a depth of about 5 mm below the skin.



Figure 4 Stone relief (second century BC)

On the one hand, materials allowing to speculate about the acupuncture treatment include about 8 stone reliefs unearthed in Shandong province that had been decorating the tomb walls [7]. All of which date back to the first half of the second century BC, where a creature with a human face and a bird's body takes a hand of a person facing it, while it holds something up towards the person with the other hand (Figure 4, 5). On these stone reliefs the creature with a human face and a bird's body does something to the persons, all of whom have long flowing head hair. Appearing with not formally tied hair is considered to be a characteristic of sick people. In Figure 4 a crow like bird is sitting on the wings of the creature with a human face and a bird's body. This bird is said to be a magpie and the Chinese name for magpie is "鵲" = Que. Moreover, what the creature with a human face and a bird's body is holding over the sick person is big and thick and

therefore considered to be a stone needle that were used to drain pus etc.

By the way, in the "Historical Records" (Shiji) there is description of the legendary famous doctor "扁鵲" = Bian Que. The first character of the name "扁" and the first character in the term for stone needle = "砭" = bian had in the past and today still have the same pronunciation. It may thus be surmised, that stones (bian) were used und the magpie (que= 鵲) was a symbol for a bian que called group of physicians. The motif depicted on these stone reliefs, where Bian Que takes the hands of the sick people is conceivably a symbolic representation of the pulse diagnosis. Pulse diagnosis is a major characteristic of the Bian Que school and it has presumably been recognized at that time. Further, as a reproduction of the rubbed copy shown in Figure 5 unearthed in the same Shandong province shows, there are also stone reliefs depicting the retaining of thin metallic needles. It can be deducted from these materials that metal needles had spread throughout the entire region of the Shandong province by the first half of the second century BC. Considering the migration of people at the time and the transmission of knowledge, it can be inferred, that these had been transmitted to a considerably large area throughout China.

In the original form of the "Sun Wen" and "Ling Shu" of the first century a unification of the 12 regular meridians, the conception and governor vessels as well as the 365 acupoints was attempted, but in practice the number of acupoints was only about 130 points. Yet, by setting the ideal number to 365 points and the spread of metal needles the number of acupoints doubtlessly increased rapidly thereafter. However, because determination of individual point locations varied with period, school and region, the occurrence of differences was inevitable. The recognition that the meridians have a certain course and that there new extraordinary meridians probably led to confusion on a theoretical level.

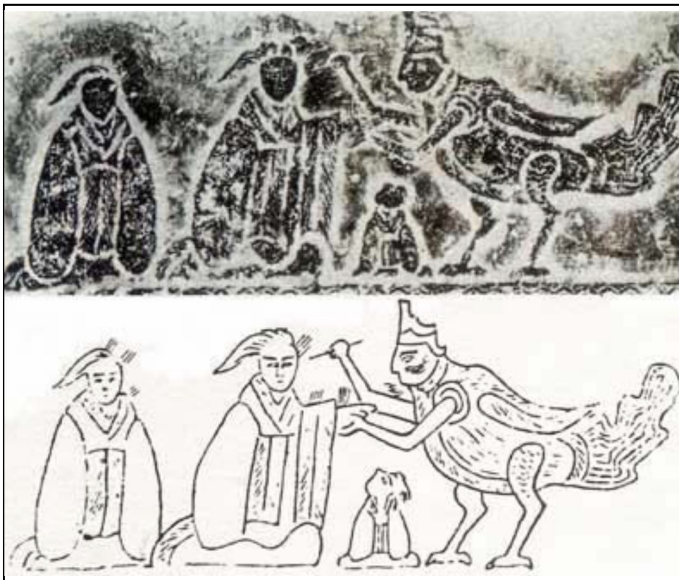


Figure 5 Stone relief (first half of the second century BC) rubbed copy, reproduction