History and Progress of Japanese Acupuncture

Akiko Kobayashi, Miwa Uefuji, and Washiro Yasumo

Department of Acupuncture and Moxibustion, Morinomiya College of Medical Arts and Sciences, 4-1-8, Nakamoto, Higashinari, Osaka, 537-0022, Japan

Received 1 March 2007; Accepted 17 April 2007

Abstract

After Chiso brought acupuncture to Japan from Wu (China) in the sixth century, it has progressed in unique ways within the various historical milieus of the past 1500 years. Ishitsu-rei, the first medical law of Japan established in 701, explains the medical system of acupuncture in detail showing that acupuncture was being administered under the authorization of the national government. For the next 1200 years, acupuncture continued to be an important facet of public health in Japan. From the Azuchimomoyama through the Edo period, the knowledge exchange with China became active and people who studied in China developed new styles and techniques of acupuncture treatment and organized their own private schools or ryu-ha in Japan. In 1635, when the Edo government decided to close the country, Japan cut-off exchange with foreign countries for over 200 years. The national isolation caused some development that was unique to Japan. During that time, acupuncture filtered into people's everyday lives. Moxibustion, in particular, became popular as a treatment that ordinary people could practice by themselves. Also in this period of isolation, Western medicine was imported from Holland, the only country allowed to maintain trade with Japan. This novel modern medicine had a strong impact on Japanese medicine, which has its foundation of Chinese traditional medicine. At the same time, Japanese acupuncture was introduced into Europe via Holland. When Japan opened its borders in 1865 period, the new government was eager to accept Western culture to the extent of prohibiting the progress of Japanese acupuncture for a period of time. Even so, Japanese acupuncture has survived and flourished up to the present day due to the strong demand and the great efforts of the practitioners. Scientific studies are now in the process of establishing a firm evidence base for over a millennium of clinical use, respecting the classic ideas of the traditional treatment.
Acupuncture involves sticking needles or sharp points into the body at specific meridian sites to change the qi and Yin Yang balances. The meridian spots are outlined in charts and traditional texts. An acupuncture treatment often involves fire cupping, moxibustion, message, acupressure (tuina) or other techniques as well. The needles may be heated by burning mugwort herb for moxibustion. When people go to traditional doctors in China, acupuncture is a common treatment, but its effectiveness isn't clear. Here is some information on the history, method, and effectiveness of acupuncture. 

Acupuncture is an ancient holistic health care system still widely practiced in China. Each year, millions of Americans also turn to acupuncture to relieve chronic pain, high blood pressure, nausea, and much more. Some Chinese hospitals offer acupuncture and allopathic medicine side-by-side, allowing patients to choose. Acupuncture may even be used in lieu of anesthetic drugs during surgery. The science and art of acupuncture is well documented and spans across centuries, all the way back to the Stone Age. Records of its use have been found in many parts of the world, not just the Orient. A no