THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE ACUPUNCTURE AND MOXIBUSTION

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ABSTRACT: The author traces in this paper the origin and development of Chinese Acupuncture and Moxibustion and discusses its various techniques in detail.

1. The origin of Acupuncture and Moxibustion

Human beings appeared in the vast continent of China about 17 hundred thousand years ago. It was about 600 thousand years ago that Beijing-men began to use stone implements and fire. From the remote past to 21st century B.C. our ancestors had gone through primitive society of different eras, invented primitive agriculture, animal husbandry, handicraft industry and primitive culture and art. Keeping pace with these inventions acupuncture and moxibustion began its formation.

Treating diseases with stone implements was mentioned in the ancient books “Suwen” (The Plan Questions) and “Lingshu” (Canon of acupuncture) compiled in the period from 6th century B.C. to 1st century B.C., as well as “Maifa” (The pulse Way) written on the silk scrolls excavated from Han Tomb of Mawangdui, Changsha in Hunan Province in 1974. Among them, the instrument that was used to pierce into the skin was called “Bian Stone” which were cone-shaped or cuneiform-shaped small stones used to tap the skin or cut an incision on abscess. Then it finally developed into stone needles to treat diseases. The Bian stones that have been discovered by the archaeologists are of various shapes, some shape like a knife, a sword, a needle, etc., Most of them appeared from the New Stone Age to the Spring and Autumn Warring State Period (770-221 B.C.). There is no doubt that the metal needles are originated from Bian stones, and acupuncture therapy was developed from Bian stones therapy.

Although there is no definite record about moxibustion in the ancient literatures, but it is considered to be originated in the primitive society after the introduction of fire into human’s lice. Fire was introduced into human’s life in the Beijing-man’s period in China, people gradually learned to utilize fire. The introduction of fire into human’s life provided condition for the invention of moxibustion therapy.

Moxibustion therapy was initially mentioned in the ancient literatures of “Zuo zhuan” (Commentary on the Spring and Autumn
Annels) and “Huangdi Neijing” (canon of Medicine) in which the author mentioned moxa in many chapters. It revealed that moxibustion was prevailing at that time. The ancient people accidentally found in their daily life that applying heat to or scorching certain places on the body surface might relieve pain or abdominal distention, etc. Basing on such experience hot compress and moxibustion were developed through a long historic period.

II. Establishment of the Theoretical System of Acupuncture and Moxibustion

The appearance of inscriptions on bones and shells at 21st century B.C. provided favourable condition for the development of medicine and pharmacology, “Huangdi Neijing” took its form in the 3rd century B.C. was the representative works. Its main contents comprised of the theory of Yin-Yang, Vital Energy and Blood, five Elements, Zang-fu, Channels an Collaterals, etc., It described the physiology, pathology of human body as well as the principles of diagnosis, prevention and treatment Up to 265 (Jin dynesty), Dr. Huangfu Mi compiled “ Zhenjiu Jiayijing” (A clas sic of acupuncture an moxibustion) which is the earliest specialized acupuncture book with a comparatively integrated system.

Based on the experiences of incising therapy of abscesses with Bian stones, the idea of puncturing where there is a tenderness was gradually developed. That is to apply puncturing or cauterization to tender spots explored before treatment to relieve pain. Later on, people gradually discovered that tenderness on the body surface had certain relations with diseases of internal organs. The above mentioned tender spots were named by the ancient people as “Shuxue” or “Kongxue”, and later on they were popularly known as “Point”. Hence the concept of Acupuncture Points was formed. Some of the points mentioned in Lingshu are tender spots. Besides the tender spots on the body surface, people had also found that to cause bleeding on certain areas or to stimulate certain spots was efficacious for treating certain diseases. All these were predecessors of Acupuncture Points.

The formation of the theory of channels was the result of observation on anatomy and physiology of human body, and this was recorded in the ancient book. For instance “ an human being, 8 feet tall with flesh and skin, one can measure him and palpate him outwardly. After his death, on can make autopsy for observation”. Ancient people at that time understood to some extent to blood vessels, tendons, muscles and internal organs be macroscopic observation, and they discovered the characteristics of blood vessels which communicated with every part of the body and their distribution had certain relations with the propagating sensation of various channels, so it was considered that blood vessels were the substantial ground of Channels and collaterals. This was the reason why the Channels and collaterals were known as “Mai” (vessels) in ancient days. Later on it was found that Mai could not completely explain the function of Channels and collaterals, so the word “Jing” was added in front of “Mai”, that is why Channels and collaterals was known as “Jingmai”.
As mentioned above, the Points and their indications discovered during treatment, the phenomenon of propagating sensation along the Channels in diagnosis, the blood vessels found in anatomy were all closely related with each other. The theory of Channels and collaterals was a summing up of all these discoveries.

III The Development of Acupuncture and Moxibustion

1. The Development of the Theory of Acupuncture and Moxibustion

The theory of acupuncture and moxibustion has been greatly developed since 1949. The research on acupuncture and moxibustion can be divided into following three stages:

In early 50s the main work was done on systematization of basical knowledge and summing-up of clinical acupunctural practice: from the end of 50s to 60s clinical research on a large scale (including clinical acupuncture anaesthesia) and experiments were carried out to observe the functional influence of various organs exerted by acupuncture and moxibustion; since 70, extensive and profound research were done on acupuncture anesthesia, mechanism of acupuncture analgesia and the propagating sensation of Channels.

In the past 30 years, 9,000 articles have been published and a lot of historic cultural relics of acupuncture and moxibustion discovered in recent years by archaeologist such as Bian stones, brown needles, gold and silver needles, etc. which provided the substantial evidences for investigation of acupuncture history.

In addition, annotation and correction for the ancient acupuncture literatures “Lingshu” and “Zhengjiu Jia Yi Jing” has been complished. There are 404 kinds of extant books on acupuncture and moxibustion collected in 1961 in “The United Library Catalogue of Traditional Chinese Medicine”. Recently 460 kinds of books on acupuncture and moxibustion are undergoing systematization in the Academy of traditional Chinese Medicine, and they will be the extended edition of the former ones.

The theory of acupuncture and moxibustion has been gradually developed based on the experiences of long-term practice and experiments. As early as about 6th century, the theory of Channels and acupuncture therapy had been introduced into some Asian countries, such as Korea and Japan. Later on it was introduced into Europe. Nowadays acupuncture therapy which has become a part of world medicine is practiced in many countries and its theory research as well.

2. The Development of Acupuncture Technique.

After the publication of “Zhenjiu Jia Yi Jing”, acupuncture was being gradually specialized. In the 7th century A.D., it was officially confirmed as one speciality and then established department of acupuncture and moxibustion in the royal medical college. The needling instruments were also developed from “Bian stone” to “Bone needles”, “Bamboo needles”, “Pottery needles”, and other kinds of needles stem by step. In 400-200 B.C., with the development of iron-smelting technique, the
manufacture of needling equipment reached a rather fine stage, so the metal needles come out. Most of the needles used clinically at the present stage are made of stainless steel, which is better than any other kinds of metal needles, for it is tough, tensile and not easy to become rusty.

On the basis of inheriting and developing ancient acupuncture treatment, many new methods have been invented and applied for the last 30 years. Among acupunctures, there mainly are filiform needles, electric needles, hydro-needles (small dose point injection), fire needles, warm needles, skin needles (including plum-blossom needles), ear needles, prick blood-letting therapy and many others. A brief introduction of acupuncture techniques commonly used in China at present is as follows:

(1) Filiform needling therapy: use the needles with 13-150 mm in length and 0.26-0.32 mm in diameter. Clinical manipulation usually are puncture perpendicularly, obliquely, shallowly, deeply and many other reinforcing and Reducing methods. It can treat a wide range of diseases. For instance, puncture Shangzhong, Neiguan and Zusanli, etc, for coronary heart disease. An observation made in 600 cases shows that the effective rate for angina pectoris is 89.2% and the effective rate of ECG is 53.2%.

(2) Prick, blood-letting therapy: It is described as “Pricking the collaterals”, “cause bleeding by Reducing the collaterals” in “Huangdi Neijing”, which has the functions of resuscitation, heat dispelling and swelling-removing. Usually the three-edged needle is selected and blood-letting is always done on Dazhui, Fufen and Pohu points. 1,000 cases of acute mastitis have been treated with this method, 970 cases were cured, and the effective rate is 98.8%.

(3) Fire-needling therapy: it was also named “Burn needles” in ancient times. This is a method for curing diseases by inserting the heated needles into the certain areas of the human body, mostly seen for treating scrofula, carbuncle and skin ulcer. 165 cases of scrofula was treated with this therapy, 102 cases found complete recovery and markedly effective 61.82%.

(4) Ear-needling therapy: it is to explore sensitive spots on the auricle, then needling and embedding therapy is applied. This is another method of treating diseases. For instance, when puncturing sciatica point on the auricle, the phenomenon of propagation sensation along the call Bladder channel occurs. It indicates the ear is closely related with Channels, collaterals, and internal organs. Through the clinical examination in the past few years more than 200 points on the auricle have been found now.

3. The Development of Moxibustion Technique.

The book specially dealing with moxibustion first published as early as in the 3rd century A.D., Moxibustion became more popular since the 17th century. There were not only many specialized moxibustion doctors, but also more and more specialized moxibustion books published. At the early stage, twig was used in cauterization, and up to the spring and Autumn Warring States
(770-221 BC,) period, the moxa leaf was taken as the main material for moxibustion method was selected, and later on various indirectmoxibustion”, methods were developed. For instance, indirect – moxibustion”, which was the beginning of applying apparatus in moxibustion, it was described in “Qian Jin Fang” (Thousand Gold Remedies). Afterwards moxa stick, which was made by mixing moxa wool and drugs, was developed. Moxibustion therapy has the properties of warming the channels, eliminating Cold, regulating vital Energy and relieving pain. Several moxibustion methods commonly used in clinic at present are briefly introduced as follows:

1) Con moxibustion: It includes direct and indirect moxibustions. These are principle parts of moxibustions. These are principal parts of moxibustion. Moxa cone is made of moxa wool with various sizes, which is also called “Zhuang”, 5-7 “Zhuang” can be used each time. In ancient record some dozens of “Zhuang” to several hundred of “Zhuang” had been used.

a) Direct moxibustion: A moxa cone is placed directly on the skin (Point) and ignited, then non-bacterial purulation after the local tissues being burned will be produced. This is called “Purulent moxibustion” or “Scarring moxibustion”, Another kind of moxibustion, which only makes the local skin flushed and without obvious burning, is called “Non-purulent moxibustion”. 54 cases of hypertension wad treated with “Scarring moxibustion” and a follow-up was made, only 5 cases had developed into apoplexy within 17 years. Yet in the control group consisted of 12 cases, 4 cases had already become apoplexy. This fact shows that “Scarring moxibustion” can not only lower blood pressure, but also decrease the apoplexy occurrence.

b) Indirect moxibustion : This is a moxibustion method by placing a moxa cone with a slice of ginger, garlic and salt, etc. on the point for treating purpose. The advantage is not to cause scars.

2) Moxibustion with moxa sticks: this is a moxibustion method by placing and igniting a moxa stick on the point. A moxa stick is made by wrapping up moxa wool with paper and rolling it into a stick shape. It includes “Drug moxa sticks”, which mixes drugs with moxa wool.

3) Warm needling therapy: This is a moxibustion method by placing a moxa cone or a 2cm moxa stick on the handle of a filiform needle and igniting it.

4) Moxibustion with pipes: put moxa wools and moxa sticks in a special moxibustion apparatus and applied it on the affected areas after igniting. It is suitable to be applied on a large body surface.

The beneficial function of moxibustion to health has been proved in clinical observation and experimental research in recent years. 20 cases asthma was treated with purulent moxibustion method, whose white blood cell count were lower or higher than normal before treatment, 19 cases were adjusted to normal after treatment. In animal experiment it also proved that moxibustion has marked effect in strengthening the immune defensive functions of the organism.
While inheriting the ancient acupuncture techniques, acupuncture anaesthesia was developed on the basis of relieving pain by needling. Nowadays there are many kinds of acupuncture anaesthesia method, such as simple acupuncture anaesthesia, electric acupuncture anaesthesia and hydroneddling anaesthesia, have been invented.

At present, Chinese medical personnel engaged in scientific research, medical treatment and teaching will make still greater efforts to inherit and carry forward the research on Chinese acupuncture theory as well as the clinical and experimental researches, to do academic exchange with friendly countries in the world actively so as to serve the people all over the world better with acupuncture therapy.

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