

Hari-kyu, the art of acupuncture and moxibustion

(Publicity)

Modern take on traditional medicine

"The practice of medicine is an art, based on science."
William Osler, considered "the father of modern medicine," proclaimed these famous words. His philosophy serves as a standard of excellence and a model for the evolution of all practitioners, not simply those of Western medicine. Indeed, the ancient art of acupuncture and moxibustion (burning of dried mugwort) in Japan, called *hari-kyu*, dates back more than 1,500 years and continues to be practiced today by licensed practitioners whose skills involve a balance of logic, deductive reasoning, perception and intuition.



Left: Modern moxibustion (burning dried mugwort); Right: An early 19th-century ukiyo-e shows a woman holding her son's hand to perform moxibustion on him. SIMONE CHEN/HARIKYU MUSEUM-MUSEUM OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE



This November, Japan will be hosting, for the first time in 23 years, the International Conference of the World Federation of Acupuncture-Moxibustion Societies (WFAS), whose theme is the art of acupuncture and moxibustion. The conference aims to address issues such as standardization in the practice, its strength as a sustainable form of treatment and developments in innovation.

"Medicine should target a human being not only as a science but also as an art. True medicine should target the overall health of each individual," said Shuji Goto, president of this year's WFAS conference. A prominent figure who has made great strides in the practice, Goto also serves as president of The Japan Society of Acupuncture and Moxibustion (JSAM) and chairman of the Goto College of Medical Arts and Sciences in Tokyo.

Hari-kyu provides a holistic approach to treating disease and illness, the body, mind and spirit. The practice focuses on all of the patient's bodily systems as a whole, to restore homeostasis, or the body's natural balance. It thus emphasizes the body's

natural healing. Knowing that the body is capable of regaining its own natural balance with consistent, appropriate stimulation is a pillar of *hari-kyu* philosophy.

Derived from ancient China some 1,500 years ago, traditional Japanese medicine evolved throughout history into a uniquely distinct form. Insiders will note the uniqueness of Japanese practice lies in palpation, a touch technique essential to diagnosis and treatment. While examining a patient, the practitioner touches the skin, connective tissues, muscles and organs to gather sensory information used for diagnosis. Palpation continues throughout the session to ascertain changes and responses in the body, allowing for the practitioner to adjust the treatment and making the approach highly individualized.

As much as palpation is necessary for the practitioner, the act of gentle touching by itself soothes the patient, aiding in healing.

Another characteristic of Japanese

acupuncture is the shallow insertion of very fine needles using a guide tube to reduce pain. The importance of detecting excess and deficiency in the skin and connective tissue is essential to treatment, thus the development of various techniques to stimulate the surface of the body. The subtle, fine needling approach tends to be favored in Western cultures by patients wary of long and thick needles.

Hari-kyu is as much unique as it is effective in treating a wide array of ailments. From musculoskeletal complaints — lower back pain and shoulder stiffness being the most common — to headaches and fertility issues, the practice has gained a foothold in less oft-used areas such as sports medicine, mental health and in terminal illnesses such as cancer.

Even the world of professional sports has begun to recognize the benefit of a holistic approach to athletes' health.

Just take a look at Haro Ogawa, the team trainer and acupuncturist to the San Francisco Giants. It is no coinci-

dence that since he joined the team in 2008, the team has won the World Series a record three times. Ogawa keeps the players at the top of their game throughout the year and as he was educated in Japan first, he stresses the importance of palpation. "You have to feel imbalances with your hands and fingers to get a good diagnosis" he said in an interview. Needless to say, both acupuncture and moxibustion are drug-free treatments, and thus ideal for professional athletes who are subject to doping tests.

Some skeptics may doubt traditional medicine, with the recent trend in medicine focusing on efficacy in clinical trials first, followed by debate over the scientific mechanisms to endorse its effectiveness.

But researchers across the world are collecting scientific backing on the efficacy of traditional medicine. They use randomized controlled trials and meta-analysis results to assess the effectiveness of *hari-kyu*. Studies to clarify the efficacy of *hari-kyu* are being conducted on chronic pain, chemotherapy-induced nausea, migraines, fibromyalgia, osteoarthritis, alleviating labor pain, correcting fetal breech among others.

Following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, medicine, doctors, water and power were limited. Many afflicted by the disaster were forced to sleep on hard gymnasium floors or in their cars, suffering from insomnia and post-traumatic stress disorder, turned to *hari-kyu* treatments at evacuation shelters throughout the Tohoku region.

A recent pilot study conducted in sub-Saharan Africa investigated the efficacy of treating drug-resistant strains of tuberculosis (TB) with Japanese direct moxibustion. Rooted in the



There are 361 basic acupuncture points to memorize. *Shonishin*, Japanese non-invasive acupuncture for newborn babies to children is effective for various symptoms like bed wetting. IDO NO NIPPON/ETSUKO INOUE/YOSHIAKI MIURA

work of Shimetaro Hara who used moxa (dried mugwort) to treat TB in 1930's Japan, the African study reported reduction of pain, improvement in energy and overall immunity in patients, as well as a reduced rate of infection. Importantly, patients learned to perform treatment on themselves and others in the community, providing a sustainable and affordable care model.

History is evident. The healing art of *hari-kyu* has worked for more than 1,500 years and continues to evolve to show its potential as a sustainable form of health care. Understanding that the only constant is change, Japanese modern practitioners continue to adapt to changes in medicine and social development, drawing on the value of *hari-kyu* in positive ways without letting go of traditional theories.

Acupuncture treatment dates back centuries

Amid Ise-Shima's ancient groves of cypress giants lies the most revered Shinto shrine in Japan, the Ise Jingu shrine. With over 2,000 years of history, it is dedicated to a goddess considered the predecessor of the Imperial family and the supreme deity among the countless deities of the Shinto faith.

About 450 kilometers away, on a quiet street in Tokyo's Sumida Ward, the lesser-known Ejima Sugiyama Shrine sits, dedicated to a man known as the god of acupuncture. In Shintoism, gods are believed to reside in objects of the natural world — rivers, mountains, and animals — even in ordinary human beings, whose spirits are enshrined in some of the 80,000 shrines in Japan.

One such ordinary man, Waichi Sugiyama, made extraordinary contributions to the field of acupuncture. Born in 1610, he went blind at an early age after contracting smallpox. For the blind in Japan at the time, the primary jobs available were acupuncturist or traditional massage therapist. At 18, he traveled to Edo (now Tokyo) to apprentice for a famed blind acupuncturist.

As the story goes, while out, Sugiyama tripped on a rock and fell to the ground. What happened next gave way to an idea that would change the practice of acupuncture. As he fell, a pine needle, sheathed in a bamboo reed, pierced the skin of his leg. Literally struck by inspiration he realized the bamboo had helped guide the pine needle deep into the skin.

He later devised a needle insertion technique using a small pipe to help guide the acupuncture needle vertically into patient's skin. Guide tubes enabled acupuncturists, blind and sighted both, to insert needles with stability and ease. Sugiyama's guide tube invention revolutionized the practice and continues to be used today. It was as much a benefit for practitioners as it was for

patients, as guide tubes lessened the pain of needle insertion.

After Sugiyama successfully treated Shogun Tsunayoshi Tokugawa for a chronic illness, he served as court physician until his death. Today, the Ejima Sugiyama Shrine honors its namesake, whom locals consider the god of acupuncture, and whom the rest of the world considers the father of Japanese acupuncture. He is attributed with establishing the first acupuncture, moxibustion (burning of dried mugwort) and massage school for the visually impaired.

Sugiyama's contributions paved the way for the practice of blind acupuncture to present day. Currently, 19 percent of the roughly 90,000 licensed acupuncturists in Japan are visually impaired. They are subject to the same licensure and rights and regulations as sighted practitioners.

Japanese clinicians use more palpation during treatment than those trained outside Japan. Feeling toughness, tenderness, warmth, moisture and so on is important before, during and after treatment to assess patients' health and efficacy of treatment. This Japanese style developed thanks to the historical background that the occupation was equivalent to social security for the visually impaired to be financially independent.

The long history of visually impaired acupuncturists brought emphasis to Japanese acupuncture. Their success can be attributed to the development of certain senses — touch and smell — in ways that sighted people rarely appreciate. In a hands-on profession like acupuncture, fingers are deemed the second eyes. With a heightened sense of touch, blind acupuncturists pick up on minute sensory stimuli that sighted practitioners may overlook, including sensations of firmness and softness, hot and cold, thickness, sharpness and

resistance of a patient's body.

Passing on the art

Every twenty years, the Ise Grand Shrine is ceremonially dismantled and entirely rebuilt. The practice, representative of Shintoism core ideals, is a symbol of renewal and continuity. Rebuilding every twenty years allows the time-honored skills in carpentry, and metalwork to be passed on from one generation to the next. Similarly, practitioners of acupuncture and moxibustion, called *hari-kyu*, pass on their skills to young practitioners to keep this ancient art form alive.

At a college in central Tokyo, a group of about 30 students, dressed in identical white lab coats, partner up and practice with acupuncture needles on each other. Another group in the corner practices moxibustion by timing the burning of fine cones of moxa (dried mugwort) on a paper grid. It's the afternoon, and having completed a day in classes, the students remain voluntarily to practice on each other even though it is not counted as academic credit. Their instructor attentively watches over the group, showing proper needle insertion, stance and posture.

Like other certified *hari-kyu* institutes across Japan, the school prepares its students for the national acupuncturist and moxibustionist exams. Examinees are required to not only memorize 361 basic acupuncture points, but also have a firm grasp on both Eastern and Western medicine, anatomy and physiology, sanitation, and clinical and rehabilitation practice.

Currently in Japan, there are about 4,000 students learning acupuncture at college, of whom 300 are visually handicapped. They are in three-to-four-year programs in preparation for the national exams. In the past decade alone, huge steps have been made to develop educational guidelines, revise textbooks and curriculum, and increase the level of clinical training at these institutions. The continuous renewal is needed to match the needs of 21st century medicine for sustainable social and health care structure. Meetings to revise curricula are held at the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare every few months.

As with any field of medicine, professionals learn invaluable skills through clinical practice that a textbook cannot teach. Students are trained to have a profound understanding of the art of *hari-kyu*. This is evidenced as students' fingers deftly glide over each others' skin, determining point location with anatomical landmarks and measuring with their hands. For these young practitioners, this is just the beginning of mastering the age-old art of *hari-kyu* and its rich diversity of methodology.



Left: Home-use moxibustion (burning dried mugwort) plasters are available at the Sennenkyu showroom in Ginza, Tokyo; Right: Different sizes of needles with guide tubes made by Seirin Corp. are identified by color. SIMONE CHEN/SEIRIN CORP.

Today's treatment methods easier, less painful

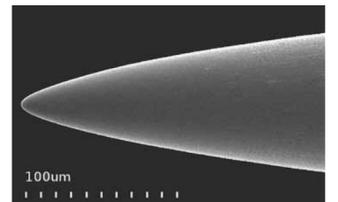
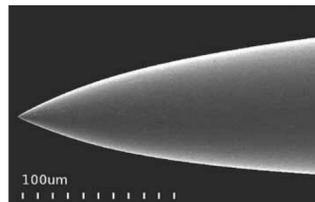
As anyone versed in acupuncture knows, the most effective tools are human hands. Throughout the 1,500 years history of the practice in Japan, the therapist's hands have served as a sentient bridge connecting patient to therapist. Since the post-war era, major advances in treatment techniques have evolved. Today, what tools are available to the modern practitioner?

In 1980, the Japanese needle manufacturer Seirin Corp. developed sterilized disposable acupuncture needles, a major innovation, as well as a necessity in the face of the HIV epidemic. Seirin was also the first to introduce the guide tube kit at the time, which has since become a global standard. Guide tubes not only make inserting the fine needles used in Japanese acupuncture easier, for both sighted and visually impaired practitioners, they also reduce the patient's pain from needle insertion. Currently, disposable needles with guide tubes are the preferred choice, used in schools for training and at clinics and hospitals around the world.

Until the 1990's, the angle of conventional needles was relatively wider, which easily caused pain upon penetrating the skin. Seirin developed new grinding technology to make the tip's angle more acute, producing a more streamlined tip that eliminated pain and discomfort, even for thick needles. Recently Seirin has developed rounder-edged, acute-angle needles to further minimize pain.

In current practice, needle size can be distinguished by sight, but more easily by a color-coded grip, also developed by Seirin.

Even though the main choice of needles today are disposable stainless steel, some practitioners use precious metals such as gold and silver. Many schools use silver needles for students as they are more soft and flexible, thus requiring more skill to insert.



A round-edged needle (right) provides painless acupuncture. SEIRIN CORP.

Moxibustion (or *okyu*), a form of heat therapy in which moxa (dried mugwort) is burned near the skin surface, is often used in conjunction with acupuncture to stimulate the flow of energy in the body. Various forms of moxa therapy are practiced. Commonly, the Japanese practitioner burns a cone-shaped moxa as small as half a grain of rice applied on an acupuncture point without letting it burn the skin.

Gentle yet effective forms of moxibustion are gaining traction with the mainstream consumer nowadays. At the stylish Sennenkyu showroom in Ginza, customers can get a demonstration from a licensed practitioner on how to apply small moxa plasters to the skin, while browsing through the shop's extensive selection of plasters for home use. Sweet smelling scents — apple with citrus to green tea — and even smoke-free versions are available to try.

A plaster, about the diameter of a yen coin, includes an inner chamber filled with moxa, offset from the skin. After the moxa is lit, heat radiates through an aeration pore contacting the skin, warming the desired point, with no risk of burning the skin. A sticky film helps the plaster stay on the skin through the five to ten minutes of heat, reaching about 40 to 50 Celsius.

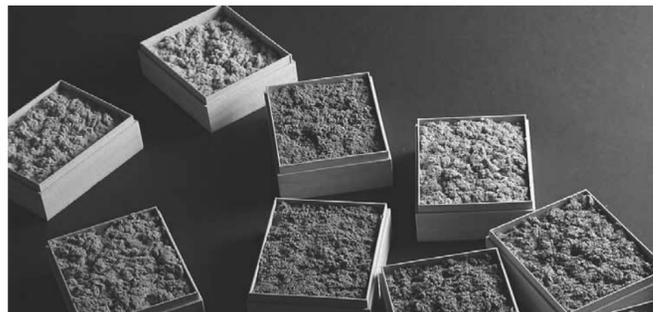
"The combination of heat and fragrance is comforting and healing. It gives people the feeling they are doing some-

thing good for their body," said the store manager. On a recent visit to Sennenkyu's showroom and clinic, where patients can be treated with moxa, I was able to experience *okyu* firsthand.

After palpating my back, forearms and calves with a light touch, the practitioner applied a couple of plasters to my legs and feet to help release lower back tension. Indeed, within minutes, I felt a pleasant heat radiating from these spots, while the room filled with an intoxicating aroma, similar to burning incense. These portable, disposable plasters, sold in packs of 50 to 80 units, are perfect for home use, and have become especially popular with office workers suffering from chronic back and shoulder pain.

Sennenkyu is as much about making moxa treatments more simple to use and accessible as it is about changing the image of moxibustion. Once regarded as simply a folk remedy, moxibustion has made a breakthrough as a safe and effective form of holistic therapy. The company believes in transparency in showing and teaching customers moxibustion's effectiveness and benefits. In line with this principle, the bright and modern shop features large wraparound windows that showcase the demonstrations and products within, truly a one-of-a-kind store.

All text by Simone Chen



Moxa dried mugwort comes in a variety of grades. HARIKYU MUSEUM-MUSEUM OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

