History & Development of Chinese & Moxibustion

The science of acupuncture and moxibustion is a subject dealing with the prevention and treatment of diseases of needling and moxibustion methods. For thousands of years it has been accepted by the general population for its good curative effect, wide range of indications, simple application, low cost, safety, etc.

Acupuncture and moxibustion are an important component of traditional Chinese medicine with a long history. As early as in the New Stone Age in China, the primitive human beings used bian stone, the earliest acupuncture instrument, to treat diseases. With the development of productive forces, bone needles and bamboo needles appeared. After the development of metal casting techniques and metal tools, the people began to use metal medical needles, such as bronze, iron, gold and silver ones. At present, stainless steel needles are widely used.

Moxibustion was gradually created after discovery and use of fire. At first, primitive man found that warming themselves by fire may relieve or stop cold pain of a part of the body. Thus, they came to know how to use burnt hot stone or sand wrapped in animal skin or bark to treat diseases through local hot compression. Based on this, the people gradually perfected the technique, using ignited branches or hay to warm the diseased part of the body. This is the most primitive moxibustion. Afterwards, the people selected moxa leaves as the moxibustion material by repeated practice.

The science of acupuncture and moxibustion experienced an uninterrupted course of development.

In the period of Warring States, ancient doctors widely used acupuncture and moxibustion to treat diseases. Two silk scrolls recording channels and collaterals, Moxibustion Classic with Eleven Foot-Hand Channels and Moxibustion Classic with Eleven Yin-yang Channels, were discovered in the excavation of the No. 3 Han Tomb at Mawangdui, Changsha City, in 1973, which reflected the earliest outlook of the theory of channels and collaterals. The book Huangdi’s Internal Classic, the earliest classic of traditional Chinese medicine passed on to now, generally discusses the basic theory of acupuncture and moxibustion and the basic knowledge of point-needling manipulations. Especially in Miraculous Pivot, one part of this book, it describes acupuncture and moxibustion in detail and systematically. Thus, another name of this part of the book is Canon of Acupuncture.

From the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Three Kingdoms Period, the science of acupuncture and moxibustion developed further, Hua Tuo, the famous physician at that time, could select only one to two points in acupuncture treatment and paid much attention to the propagation of needling sensation. He was ascribed to the authorship of Canon of Moxibustion and Acupuncture Preserved in Pillow (Lost). Zhang Zhongjing, another physician in this period, also elaborated the
methods of acupuncture, moxibustion, fire needling, warm needling, management of erroneous treatment in acupuncture, etc. In his book Treatise on Febrile and Miscellaneous Diseases, he stressed very much on combining acupuncture with medicinal herbs in the treatment according to the differentiation, of symptom complex.

The famous medical doctor Huangfu Mi in the Jin Dynasty compiled the book A—B Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion by collecting the materials of acupuncture and moxibustion from the ancient books Plain Questions, Canon of Acupuncture and Essentials of Points, Acupuncture and Moxibustion. The book consists of 12 volumes with 128 chapters, including 349 acu-points. It tells the locations, indications and manipulations of these points, manipulating techniques and precautions of acupuncture and moxibustion, and the treatment of common diseases by acupuncture and moxibustion. It is the earliest exclusive book on acupuncture and moxibustion which has been one of the most influential works in the history of acupuncture and moxibustion.

During the Tang Dynasty, China was undergoing the process of economical and cultural prosperity of the feudal society. The science of acupuncture and moxibustion also witnessed great development. In the late Sui and early Tang Dynasties, the famous physician Sun Simiao compiled Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold for Emergencies and A Supplement to the Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold, in which a great deal of clinical experience in acupuncture treatment of various schools were included, and location and application of Ashi points were introduced for the first time. He also designed and made three multicolored hanging charts of acupuncture and moxibustion — Charts of Three Views, which are the earliest multicolored charts of channels and points, but have been lost. Soon after, Wang Tao drew twelve multicolored hanging charts. He also wrote the book The Medical Secrets of An Official, in which a host of moxibustion methods were recorded. In the Imperial Medical Bureau of the Thang Dynasty, the department of acupuncture was an independent one, which housed personnel in this field, such as professors of acupuncture, assistant professors, instructors and students.

In the Song Dynasty, the extensive application of type-case printing technique greatly promoted the wide application and development of acupuncture and moxibustion. The famous medical doctor Wang Weiyi revised the locations of the acu-points and their related channels, and made a supplement to the indications of acupuncture points. In 1026, he wrote the book Illustrated Manual on the Points for Acupuncture and Moxibustion on a New Bronze Figure. The next year, two life-size bronze figures designed by Wang Weiyi were manufactured. These were excellent medical teaching models of the ancient times, and an important invention of visual teaching in the educational history.

Hua Shou, the famous doctor of the Yuan Dynasty, did textual research on the pathways of channels and collaterals as well as their relationship with
acupuncture points. He wrote the book *Exposition of the Fourteen Channels*, in which the *Du* and *Ren* Channels, and the twelve regular channels are mentioned in the same breath, making up the fourteen channels.

The famous acupuncturists He Ruoyu, Dou Hanqing, and others of the Jin and Yuan Dynasties suggested that the acupuncture points should be selected according to midnight-noon ebb-flow. They explained the close relationship between selection and compatible application of acupuncture points and the time.

In the Ming Dynasty, acupuncture and moxibustion were worked up to a climax. Many famous doctors specialized in this field emerged with many exclusive books on acupuncture and moxibustion, such as *A Complete Collection of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*, by Xu Feng, *An Exemplary Collection of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* and *Essentials of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* by Gao Wu. But the most important one was by book *Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* by Yang Jizhou, which was a new milestone in the history of development of acupuncture and moxibustion science. Yang Jizhou wrote the book on the basis of his ancestor’s book *Mysterious Secrets of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* combined with the summarization of his own clinical experience. His book describes the channels and collaterals, acupuncture points, manipulating methods of acupuncture and their indications. It also introduces the experience in the treatment of diseases by acupuncture combined with herbal medicines, and records the cases of successes and failures by acupuncture and moxibustion, a comparatively comprehensive summary of the achievements of acupuncture and moxibustion before the Ming Dynasty.

In the Qing Dynasty, certain progress was made in the development of science of acupuncture and moxibustion. There came the book *Golden Mirror of Medicine, Essentials of Acupuncture and Moxibustion in Verse* compiled by Wu Qian and his collaborators, the book *The Source of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* compiled by Li Xuechuan, and others at this period. During the middle and late periods of the Qing Dynasty, however, the authorities of the Qing Dynasty issued a decree to abolish the acupuncture-moxibustion department from the Imperial Medical College under the pretext that “acupuncture and moxibustion are not suitable to be applied to the Emperor”. So, acupuncture and moxibustion were restrained to a certain extent. But the treatment by acupuncture and moxibustion was widely accepted by the broad masses, and spread and used among the common people widely.

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the science of acupuncture and moxibustion has developed vigorously because of the implementation of the policies for traditional Chinese medicine. The therapy by acupuncture and moxibustion has been popularized extensively in China. On the basis of exploring and inheriting the traditional acupuncture and moxibustion, modern scientific knowledge is applied to the research work. For example, according to
the principle of acupuncture analgesia, acupuncture anesthesia has been creatively developed and popularized in clinical practice, and the experimental research on it has been carried on. Since the 1970s, investigations have been done on the mechanism of acupuncture analgesia and therapy by acupuncture and moxibustion from the viewpoints of neuroanatomy, pain physiology, biochemistry, medicinal electronics, etc., on the phenomena and nature of the channels from the viewpoints of propagated acupuncture sensation and other angles, and on the relationship between acupuncture points and zhang-fu organs, between acupuncture points and needling sensation.

Acupuncture and moxibustion were introduced abroad, and popularized and applied in many countries long ago. They are the important content of the medical exchanges between China and foreign countries, and have made great contributions to the people’s health.

Since the 1950s, the international spread of the science of acupuncture and moxibustion has become widened. Many countries have sent their doctors to China to learn acupuncture and moxibustion. Particularly after 1971 when China made known the achievements of acupuncture anesthesia, acupuncture anesthesia evoked strong repercussions in the medical field of foreign countries, and a great upsurge in study and research on acupuncture, moxibustion and acupuncture anesthesia was set off. Since 1975, at the request of the World Health Organization, the International Acupuncture Training Courses have been offered in Jeijing, Shanghai and Nanjing, and acupuncturists have been trained for many countries. Up to now, acupuncture and moxibustion are being used and studied with good results in more than one hundred countries. The World Association of Acupuncture and Moxibustion was founded in 1987. Since then, the Chinese academic society of acupuncture and moxibustion has further strengthened the connections and exchanges with the corresponding academic organizations of various countries; and China will certainly make new contributions to the development of acupuncture and moxibustion all over the world.