

Archaeology of Acupuncture Songs and Odes

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Abstract

The rise of acupuncture and moxibustion can be traced back to more than two thousand years ago. Usually the knowledge of both medical skills has been accumulated and handed down to later generations by four ways. The first way is family heritage. The second way is disciple heritage. The third way is common practices found among people. The fourth way is the heritage of acupuncture literature and canons. Of course, the most influential legacy of acupuncture and moxibustion comes from canons.

Earliest canons such as *Foot and Arm Eleven Meridian Moxibustion Classic*, *Ying Yang Eleven Meridian Moxibustion Classic*, *Huangdi's Internal Classic*, *Classic of Difficult Issues*, and *A-B Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* have the greatest impact on later generations. The later acupuncture and moxibustion literature just follow, revise, and add extra information and data to make this ancient medical technique more colorful and better.

This essay is to concentrate on acupuncture rhymed songs and odes from earliest to the present literature canons as a way to show how knowledge and practice of both acupuncture and moxibustion are handed down from generation to generation.

Keywords: acupuncture, moxibustion, canon, rhymed songs and odes

General Introduction

It is taken for granted that deciphering history depends largely on historical documents and archaeological excavation of ancient tombs. Originally, *Huangdi's Internal Classic* (黃帝內經) used to be commonly regarded as the earliest extant medical texts on acupuncture and moxibustion.¹ When more and more excavated sites—Hantanpo (旱灘坡) at Wuwei, Gansu,² Zhangjiashan (張家山) Bamboo Slip at Jiangling, Hube³ and Shuangbaoshan (雙包山) at Mianyang, Sichuan⁴—were

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unearthed, all these tombs built during the Han Dynasty (202 BC to 220 AD) unraveled some medical facts more than two thousand years ago in China. At Mawangdui Han Tomb 3, *Foot and Arm Eleven Meridian Moxibustion Classic* (足臂十一脈灸經), *Yin Yang Eleven Meridian Moxibustion Classic* (陰陽十一脈灸經), *Models of Meridians* (脈法), and *Formularies for Treating 52 Diseases* (五十二病方) provided the earliest medical manuscripts with moxibustion-related knowledge. At Zhangjiashan Han Tomb, *Book of Meridians* (脈書) contained interrelationship between meridians and their related diseases. At Hantanpo Han Tomb, *Wuwei Medical Slips* (武威漢代醫簡) consisted of some acupoints and acupuncture taboos. All these unearthed medical literatures were written before *Huangdi's Internal Classic* and there existed some minor differences among them. For example, the location of TsuSanLi (ST36) at *Wuwei Medical Slips* was five cuns below the knees instead of three cuns in *A-B Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* (針灸甲乙經). This discrepancy might lie in the different length measurement of cun between the Eastern Han Dynasty and the Jin Dynasty.

Since the rise of acupuncture and moxibustion, medical knowledge has been accumulated and handed down to later generations by four ways. The first way is family heritage. The second way is disciple heritage. The third way is common practices found among people. The fourth way is the heritage of acupuncture literature and works.⁵ Of course, the most influential legacy of acupuncture and moxibustion comes from medical works, in which diversified perspectives and controversies are analyzed, evaluated, summarized, argued, and gradually regarded as canons. The omnipresent acupuncture rhymed songs and odes are expounded to show how specific acupuncture technology is included in these songs and odes and how these songs contribute a lot to the development of acupuncture skills.

Rhymed Songs and Odes of Acupuncture

Ancient canons of acupuncture and moxibustion have left numerous clinical practices and prescriptions in forms of rhymed verses and songs, which incorporate, commingle, and synthesize thousands of years of theories and clinical experiences to facilitate learners and practitioners to memorize essence of acupuncture and moxibustion easily and effectively. Table 1 is a list of rhymed songs and odes of

acupuncture in chronological order as a way to show when, by whom, or in which medical book acupuncture songs/odes are initiated and developed. This is very significant because when a song or an ode is composed, it will surely be passed down and included in subsequent medical anthology. The legacy of medical literature of acupuncture and moxibustion is constantly preserved in later collections of medical works. In doing so, previous medical knowledge can be protected from extinction.

In ancient acupuncture canons, plagiarism didn't exist. Almost all medical canons reflect a simple fact; that is, any individual work reflects collective accumulation of knowledge of previous medical masters in previous dynasties. Inevitably, the majority of all acupuncture works are anthologies. The collaborative conglomeration of expertise not only aggrandizes but also contributes to miscellanies of specific treatment and clinical practices of acupuncture.

Table 1. List of rhymed songs and odes of Acupuncture in chronological order

| Dynasty | Original Author/work/Source | titles |
|---|--|--|
| Tang and Song Dynasties 618- 1279 AD | Sun Simiao/ <i>Supplement to the Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold</i> | <i>Song of Thirteen-ghost-acupoints</i> |
| Jin and Yuan Dynasties 907-1368 | He Ruo-Yu 何若愚 | <i>Pivotal Ode of Meridian Flow</i> 流注指微賦 |
| | Wang Guo-Rui 王國瑞 | <i>Bian-Que Divine Song of Jade Dragon</i> 扁鵲神應針灸玉龍歌 |
| | Dou Han-Qing/ <i>Guide to Acupuncture and Moxibustion Canon</i> 竇漢卿/ 針經指南 | <i>Essential Ode of Meridian Flow</i> 流注指要賦 <i>Essential Ode of Transcendental Acupoints</i> 通玄指要賦 <i>Ode of Deciphering Abstruse Acupuncture Theory</i> 標幽賦 |
| | Ma Dan-Yang 馬丹陽 | <i>Song of 12 Celestial Acupoints by Ma Dan-Yang</i> 馬丹陽天星十二穴雜病歌 ⁶ |
| Ming Dynasty 1368-1644 | Gao Wu/ <i>Collection of Gems of Acupuncture and Moxibustion</i> 高武/針灸聚英 | <i>Nine-Acupoint Song of Restoring Yang-Qi</i> 回陽九針歌 ⁷ <i>Essential Guide Song of Manipulating Needles</i> 行針指要歌 ⁸ <i>Song of Behind-Elbow</i> 肘後歌 <i>Eleven-Acupoint Song of Miscellaneous Diseases</i> 雜病十一穴歌 <i>Ode of One Hundred Symptoms</i> 百症賦 ⁹ <i>Ode of Jade Dragon</i> ¹⁰ 玉龍賦 |

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| | | Ode of Blockading Flood 攔江賦 <i>Therapeutic Song of Eight Confluent Acupoints</i> 八脈八穴治症歌 |
| | Zhu Quan/ <i>Business of Heaven and Earth</i> 朱權/乾坤生意 | <i>Song of Four Holistic Acupoints</i> 四總穴歌 ¹¹ <i>Confidential Celestial Song of ChangSangJun</i> 長桑君天星秘訣歌 |
| | Xu-Feng/ <i>Complete Anthology of Acupuncture and Moxibustion</i> 徐鳳/針灸大全 | <i>Ode of Gold Acupuncture</i> 金針賦 ¹² Ode of Xi-Hong 席弘賦 ¹³ Ode of Inspiration 靈光賦 |
| | Yang Ji-Zhou/ <i>Complete Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion</i> 楊繼洲/針灸大成 | Confidential Song of Curing Cataract 針內障秘歌 ¹⁴ Song of Surpassing Jade Dragon 勝玉歌 ¹⁵ |
| Qing Dynasty 1644 – 1911 | Wu Qian/ <i>Golden Mirror of Medicine</i> 吳謙/醫宗金鑑 | <i>Song of Extra-Acupoints of Miscellaneous Diseases</i> 雜病奇穴主治歌 |
| Republic of China 1912 | Xiu Yang-Zhai/ <i>Book of Acupuncture and Moxibustion by Xiu Yang-Zhai</i> 修養齋/修式針灸全書 ¹⁶ | <i>Yang-Zhai Therapeutic Song of 104 Acupoints</i> 養齋一百零四穴治病歌訣 |
| | Sung Pei-Rong/ <i>Collection of Acupuncture Medical Cases</i> 孫培榮 孫培榮/針灸驗案彙編 | <i>Collection of Acupuncture Medical Cases</i> 孫培榮 榮針灸驗案彙編 ¹⁷ |

The earliest record of acupuncture songs and odes could be found in two medical works by Sun Simiao in Tang Dynasty: *Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold for Emergencies* and *Supplement to the Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold*. The Song of Thirteen-ghost-acupoints first appeared in both medical works and then reappeared in *Complete Anthology of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*, *Complete Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*, and *Collection of Gems of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*. Sun Simiao, after a long period of clinical practices, summarized his experience to cure patients of mental and spiritual diseases and listed these thirteen acupoints as a combined acupuncture prescriptions to fight against mental disorder. In other words, this combination of acupoints has been used as an acupuncture prescription to relieve patients of problems of insanity. One thing

needs pointing out is that acupuncturists must follow the order to insert acupuncture needles to perform a maximum effect: GV 26→LU 11→SP 1→PC 7→BL62→GV 16→ST 6→CV 24→PC 5→GV 23→CV 1→LI 11→EX-HN11. This special order is supposed to aggrandize medical effect because this order can bridge and connect upper and lower acupoints and meridians alternatively. In 1601, Yang Zizhou included these thirteen acupoints in his *Complete Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* with a minor variation—he changed Ghost Den (鬼窟/ Gui Ku) from PC5 to PC8 and pointed out that after inserting these thirteen acupoints, reinserting acupuncture into PC5 and SI 3 would have other extraordinary effects.

However, in *Acupoint Guidance of Bronze Figure by Lingmen*¹⁸ (凌門傳授銅人指穴), a medical work found in Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), included another Thirteen-Ghost-Acupoints by Xu Qiufu (徐秋夫), a famous acupuncturist during South-North Dynasties (220-589 AD). Nine out of thirteen acupoints are the same as those by Sun Simiao as listed on Table 3. The order of insertion is also different from that of Sun Simiao. Instead of using alternative upper-lower order, acupuncturists insert needles by using top-down order. That is, Xu Qiufu Thirteen-Ghost-Acupoints ignores to link upper and lower meridians. This method relieves problems of patients with mental disorders by inserting needles from head to toe as a way to get rid of insanity-related problems.

Table 2. Song of Thirteen-Ghost-Acupoints by Sun Simiao and by Xu Qiufu

| Ghost Title/Chinese/Pinyin | English/Chinese Title | WHO Code | Sun Simiao | Xu Qiufu |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------|------------|----------|
| Ghost Palace/鬼宮/ Gui Gong | Shuigou | GV 26 | √ | √ |
| Ghost Trust/鬼信/ Gui Xin | Shaoshang | LU 11 | √ | √ |
| Ghost Base/鬼壘/ Gui Lei | Yinbai | SP 1 | √ | √ |
| Ghost Heart/鬼心/ Gui Qin | Daling | PC 7 | √ | √ |
| Ghost Road/鬼路/ Gui Lu | Shenmai | BL 62 | √ | |
| Ghost Pillow/鬼枕/ Gui Zhen | Fengfu | GV 16 | √ | √ |
| Ghost Bed/鬼床/ Gui Chuang | Jiache | ST 6 | √ | √ |
| Ghost Market/鬼市/ Gui Shi | Chengjiang | CV 24 | √ | √ |
| Ghost Den/鬼窟/ Gui Ku | Jianshi | PC 5 | √ | √ |
| Ghost Hall/鬼堂/ Gui Tang | Shangxing | GV 23 | √ | |
| Ghost Harbor/鬼藏/ Gui Cang | Huiyin | CV 1 | √ | |
| Ghost Subject/鬼臣/ Gui Chen | Quchi | LI 11 | √ | |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|---------|---|---|
| Ghost Seal/鬼封/ Gui Feng | Hai Quan | EX-HN11 | ∨ | ∨ |
| | Shenting | GV 24 | | ∨ |
| | Ruzhong | ST 17 | | ∨ |
| | Yanglingquan | GB 34 | | ∨ |
| | Xingjian | LR 2 | | ∨ |

Indeed, there are three kinds of clinical prescriptions and formulas for curing patients of various diseases and disorders collected in these rhymed songs and odes: individual acupoint, combination of twin acupoints, and combination of multiple acupoints. The majority of acupuncture prescriptions in these songs and odes are individual acupoints. Combined prescriptions of twin acupoints and multiple acupoints are especially applied by taking advantage of the special knowledge of specific acupoints to help patients fight against one specific ailment or to restore patients to holistic health. With the knowledge of rhymed songs and odes, it is quite easier for acupuncturists to enrich and enlarge their memorization of specific functions of every acupoint.

References

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² Yong Yang and Miranda Brown, “The Wuwei Medical Manuscripts: A Brief Introduction and Translation,” *Early China* 40(2017): 241-301; Xie Guihua, “Han Bamboo and Wooden Medical Records Discovered in Military Sites from the North Western Frontier Regions,” in *Medieval Chinese Medicine: The Dunhuang Medical Manuscripts* ed. Vivienne Lo and Christopher Cullen (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 77-105.

³ Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 1: The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 B.C. – A.D. 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 521.

⁴ Qiu Ke, Zhou Xing-lan, Sun Rui-rui, Zeng Fang, Xie Tao, Jiang Zhang-hua, and Liang Fan-rong, “Distribution Evolution of Hand-Jueying Meridian Based on Lacquer Figure with Meridian-points Marked of the Western Han Dynasty,” *Journal of Basic Chinese Medicine* 22(10) (2016): 1372-1373.

⁵ See 魏稼 Wei Jia、高希言 Gao Xi-Yan ·《針灸流派概論 Introduction to Branches and Schools of Acupuncture and Moxibustion》·北京 Beijing: 人民衛生出版社 People’s Medical Publishing House · 2017 。

⁶ Ma Dan-Yang, one of the famous medical Taoist in Song Dynasty, composed this song according to his clinical experiments and experiences. This song first appeared in *Bian-Que Divine Song of Jade Dragon* by Wang Guo-Rui in Yuan Dynasty. Originally, there were only 11 acupoints. Later in Complete Anthology of Acupuncture and Moxibustion by Xu-Feng in Ming Dynasty, Xu-Feng added another one acupoint, Taichong(LR3), to the original 11 acupoint. Since then, it has been called *Song of 12 Celestial Acupoints by Ma Dan-Yang*.

⁷ When a patient is in critical danger and he/she is running out of yang qi and yin qi, these nine acupoints can restore him/her from critical condition into normal vital signs. The Chinese song is composed as follows:

啞門勞宮三陰交，湧泉太谿中脘接 環跳三里合谷併，此是回陽九針穴

⁸ This song is made up of nine symptoms and their juxtaposed nine prescriptions. These nine symptoms are wind, water, accumulation, fatigue, deficiency, qi, cough, phlegm, vomit.

⁹ In *Collection of Gems of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* by Gao Wu, Gao Wu said that the author of *Ode of One Hundred Symptoms* was anonymous.

¹⁰ *Ode of Jade Dragon* is simplified and essential version of *Bian-Que Divine Song of Jade Dragon*.

¹¹ 肚腹三里留，腰背委中求，頭項尋列缺，面口合谷收。Based on these four essential acupoints and their clinical experiences, acupuncturists in later centuries added another four important acupoints: 心胸取內關，小腹三陰謀，痠痛取阿是，急救刺水溝。See 朱觀民 Zhu Guan-Min ·《歷代針灸經典歌賦註釋 Lidai Zhenjiu Jingdian Gefu Quanshi》·(河南 Henan: 河南科學技術出版社 Henan Science and Technology Press · 2016): 102-109.

¹² Ode of Gold Acupuncture first appeared in 針灸大全 by 徐鳳. This ode has been the most famous and influential guideline of needling manipulations and skills. Many acupuncture terminologies, such as—經走氣四法 Four Methods of Flying Meridians and Connecting Qi: 白虎搖頭 White Tiger is Shaking Head、青龍擺尾 Blue Dragon is Wagging Tail、蒼龜探穴 Grey Turtle is Seeking Cave、赤鳳迎源 Red Phoenix is Going Smooth—derive from this ode. For a detailed discussion and explanation of acupuncture manipulations, please see Liu Yan, *Diagrams of Acupuncture Manipulations (Chinese-English Edition)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Scientific & Technical Publishers, 2003; 王富春 Wang Fu-Chun ·《針法大全 Complete Anthology of Acupuncture Manipulations》(北京 Beijing: 人民衛生出版社 People's Medical Publishing House · 2011) · 頁 59-112。

¹³ Xi-Hong came from a famous acupuncture family in South-Song Dynasty. For twelve generations, his family members were all acupuncturists. This ode is a collection of clinical experiences of his family and first appeared in *Complete Anthology of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* 針灸大全 by Xu-Feng 徐鳳.

¹⁴ This song is very famous for curing patients of cataract. The reason why this song is so popular lies in the fact that ophthalmologist 唐由之 Tang You-Zhi took advantage of techniques found in this song to cure president Mao Ze-Dong 毛澤東 in China and prince Sihanoukville 西哈努克 in Cambodia of their cataract. See 陳以國 Chen Yi-Guo、王淑娟 Wang Shu-Juan、陳澤東 Chen Ze-Dong 編 ·《針灸歌賦註釋發揮 Elucidation of Acupuncture and Moxibustion Songs and Odes》(台北 Taipei: 大展出版社有限公司 Da-Zhan Publishing House · 2015) · 頁 116。

¹⁵ This song comes from generations of clinical experiences of experiments of Yang Ji-Zhou and its title, *Song of Surpassing Jade Dragon*, symbolizes that this medical song is superior to *Bian-Que Divine Song of Jade Dragon*.

¹⁶ 修養齋 Xiu Yang-Zhai ·《修式針灸全書 Book of Acupuncture and Moxibustion by Xiu Yang-Zhai》·(台北 Taipei: 時時出版社 Shi-Shi Publishing House · 1960) · 頁: 279-280。Yang-Zhai *Therapeutic Song of 104 Acupoints* takes advantage of 104 couplets to form a rhymed song which provides 104 medical solutions to solve medical problems. The following three couplets show the link between three acupoints and their therapeutic treatment.

中府原屬肺之募，喘氣胸滿針之無。

雲門舉手穴能取，善治頸項麻喉扶。

少商穴在大指側，咽腫喉痺並乳鵝。

¹⁷ 孫培榮 Sung Pei-Rong ·《針灸驗案彙編 Collection of Acupuncture Medical Cases》· 臺北 Taipei: 孫培榮醫師七秩華誕籌備會 Provisional Office of 70-year-old Birthday for Dr. Sung Pei-Rong · 1971。In this book of medical cases, there are 221 therapeutic cases of diversified diseases. By using rhymed songs to link symptoms and their curative acupoints, the book is made up of 221 quatrains of acupuncture therapy. The followings are the first five therapeutic quatrains:

001 頭痛異常疾因多，昏沉癡呆久成痼，須針關元有奇效，太衝丘墟病即瘳。

002 前腦疼痛實難當，昏暈疲憊目惚恍。隻取中腕名胃募，妙用金針效自彰。

003 後腦疼痛苦心煩，暴痛如破近枕難。束骨陽輔針有效，大椎陶道肝俞痊。

004 頂心痛在正當中，重若石壓目難睜。穴從足掌陷中取，尋到湧泉用針攻。

005 啞門風府痛何堪，強直怎能面仰天。委中靜脈分三股，依照患路刺便安。

¹⁸ For a detailed analysis of this ancient book, see revised edition by 賀普仁 He Puren 編，《凌門傳授銅人指穴 Acupoint Guidance of Bronze Figure by Lingmen》·北京 Beijing: 北京科學技術出版社 Beijing Science and Technology Press · 2014 。