

Chapter 5

Kyū—Moxibustion

A BRIEF HISTORY

Though most moxa therapy was practiced by acupuncturists and moxibustionists, much of the long history of moxibustion practice in Japan included folk medicine, where family members treated other family members, or where moxibustion therapy was practiced by monks or nuns in various Zen temples. Although moxibustion is primarily practiced as a clinical specialization in Japan today, it is still a common—though less popular—practice to have patients apply some form of moxibustion technique on themselves or some family member as a form of home therapy.

Today, separate licenses for acupuncture and moxibustion allow for a high degree of specialization in the use of moxa and for an extension of its uses into areas where it has either not been widely used before or is currently not used by most acupuncturists outside Japan.

While there have been a number of specialized classical moxibustion books from China, such as the *Zu Pi Shi Yi Mai Jiu Jing* (*Eleven Vessel Moxa Text*), the *Yin Yang Shi Yi Mai Jiu Jing* (*Yin Yang Eleven Vessel Moxa Text*),¹ the twelfth century *Huang Di Ming Tang Jiu Jing* (*Yellow Emperor's Ming Tang Moxa Text*), and the nineteenth century *Shen Jiu Jing Lun* (*Miraculous Moxibustion Classic*), highly specialized use of moxibustion is now found primarily in Japan.

Some relatively modern Japanese moxibustion specialists, such as Isaburo Fukaya, who practiced for over 60 years, Takeshi Sawada, who inspired a whole generation of practitioners with his uniquely brilliant and powerful treatments, and Seiji Irie, the leading proponent of Fukaya's style, studied the Chinese classical literature extensively, and many of their techniques derived from their

¹Both were found in the Mawang Dui graves, dating from the second century B.C.

studies of the classics. One of Fukaya's favorite texts was the *Huang Di Ming Tang Jiu Jing (Yellow Emperor's Ming Tang Moxa Text)*.

Though Sawada wrote no books, his student, Bunshi Shirota, wrote both about Sawada's work and his own. Much of the material found in Shirota's books comes from Sawada. While Sawada used moxa almost exclusively, only occasionally using gold needles, Shirota practiced acupuncture as well as moxibustion, and wrote more than eight volumes about both therapeutic modalities. Toward the end of his sixty years of practice, Fukaya wrote more than ten volumes almost exclusively concerning the use of moxibustion, and little, if any, mention of the practice of acupuncture. Irie wrote a moxa text about the treatment methods of Fukaya, the *Fukaya Kyū Hō (Moxa Methods of Fukaya)*, which remains quite popular. He continues to write articles about moxibustion practice. A number of other non-moxibustionist specialists wrote extensively about the practice of moxibustion. For instance, the late Yoshio Manaka, an internationally renowned practitioner and researcher, wrote a moxibustion text for the layperson,² and has extensive references to moxibustion therapy in his other texts.³

TECHNIQUES OF CURRENT MOXA USE IN JAPAN

In this chapter we will focus on clinical details by describing some of the more commonly used moxibustion techniques. We will cover the following general areas:

- Types of moxibustion currently in use in Japan.
- Techniques of *okyū* or direct moxibustion, including recommended applications and prohibitions; numbers, size, placement, and lighting of moxa, and precautions and contraindications.
- The general treatment ideas of Sawada.
- A list of points used for specific diseases from Shirota.
- Indirect moxa techniques such as *ibuki* moxa that can be used at home as substitutes for *okyū* moxa.
- Techniques of *chinetsukyū* or cone moxa, including numbers of applications, precautions, general treatment strategies, and recommended techniques and prohibitions.

²Y. Manaka, *Okyū no Kenkyū (Moxibustion Studies)*.

³See Y. Manaka, K. Itaya, and S. Birch, *Chasing the Dragon's Tail*, pp 206-217, for a list of moxibustion treatments from Manaka and Shirota. This book also contains an essay by Kazuko Itaya on the history and nature of moxibustion therapy, a compilation by her of Japanese research on the physiological effects of moxibustion, and a further compilation of classical references to the points contraindicated for the use of moxibustion (cf. pp. 348-361). A useful series of essays on moxa therapy authored by Junji Mizutani can be found in the special Spring 1998 issue of the *North American Journal of Oriental Medicine*.

The practice of moxibustion can be divided into two general categories. These are traditionally called the *yukonkyū* (scarring) and the *mukonkyū* (non-scarring) moxibustion techniques. Techniques that have moxa burnt directly on or down to the skin are scarring or “direct” moxibustion techniques. Traditionally, direct moxibustion resulted in scarring, though today this technique does not have to form scars. The non-scarring techniques utilize moxa applied indirectly on the skin. In these techniques moxa is either placed on the skin, but not burned down to the skin, or burned through another substance which shields the skin. Some practitioners utilize a wide variety of techniques that apply heat to the skin, where the heat source is not necessarily burning moxa.

SCARRING TECHNIQUES

The three scarring or direct moxibustion techniques are the *tōnetsukyū*, *shōshakukyū*, and *danokyū* methods. The *tōnetsukyū* technique is the most commonly used. Also called *okyū*, it refers to the placing of small pieces of moxa punk directly on the skin which are then ignited by incense, and allowed to burn down to the skin in order to stimulate the selected acupoint. This technique was the most commonly used by Fukaya, Irie, and Manaka, and is the major focus of this section.

The *shōshakukyū* technique is used specifically for cauterizing warts, corns, and the wounds of poisonous insects or snakes. It is less commonly used and thus not a focus of this book.

The *danokyū* method applies large moxa cones to cauterize the skin at the acupoint and is followed up by the application of an irritating herb paste, which causes the formation of a small ulcer with a purulent exudate. After the exudate production slows down, a second herb paste is applied to heal the wound. This method is used to cleanse the blood, to treat blood stasis, and to improve liver function. As with *shōshakukyū*, this method is not used very commonly and thus is not a focus of this book.

NON-SCARRING TECHNIQUES

There are many forms of non-scarring or indirect moxibustion. In some, the moxa is placed on top of a paste or substance so that the heat intensity is reduced and more diffuse. Examples of this are bean paste moxa, where the moxa is placed on a small amount of miso; garlic moxa or ginger moxa, where the moxa is placed on top of a slice of garlic or ginger; and salt moxa, where the moxa is placed on top of a mound of salt. These are techniques used widely in China.

The *onkyū* moxa method is commonly used in Japan by lay practitioners. Moxa placed inside a bamboo tube or a ceramic or unglazed bowl is ignited. As soon as heat is felt on the bottom surface of the tube or bowl, these are pressed to the points or areas to be treated.

Other applications utilize moxa placed on a small platform so that the heat of the moxa irradiates the point but the moxa makes no direct contact with the skin. Examples of this kind of technique are the *ibuki* moxa methods and the moxa-box method (commonly used in China).

The *ibuki* method can easily be substituted for the *onkyū* method and is suitable for home therapy because there is a lower risk of patients burning themselves. Fukaya, Sawada, Shirota, Irie, and Manaka normally used direct moxa and would teach their patients to use moxa techniques at home. We also recommend use of the *ibuki* moxa for home therapy because there is less chance of a self-inflicted burn or scarring. However, if patients appear able to use the direct moxa techniques without burning and scarring themselves, or if they have a family member or partner to do it for them, you may be able to teach the patient, family member, or partner to use direct moxa.

Indirect application can also be done using moxa rolled up into a pole shaped like a cigar, which is then ignited and held over the acupoint, area, or needle being treated. There are a variety of kinds of moxa poles available, and their use is often part of a Chinese-style practice.

A moxibustion method commonly used by Keiraku Chiryō practitioners in Japan is the *chinetsukyū* method. Relatively large cones of moxa are rolled and placed at the acupoint, and can be removed as soon as the patient begins to feel a little heat, or after the heat is felt a little more intensely. This places moxa directly on the skin, but is considered a non-scarring or indirect method because the moxa is removed long before it burns down to the skin, thereby giving only mild heat stimulation.

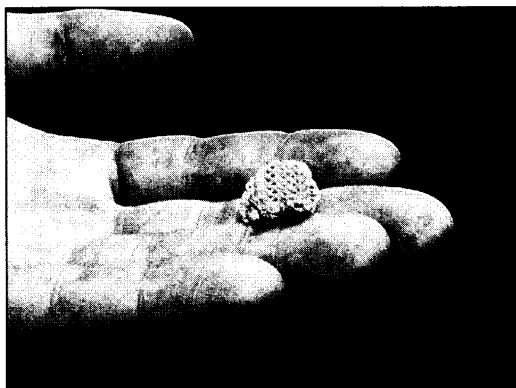
The *kyūtōshin* method, discussed in the last chapter relative to the type of needle used, involves placing a ball of moxa on the handle of the needle and igniting it to give heat stimulation to the needle, points, and surrounding areas.

Additionally, there are readily available devices or tools used to apply heat to acupoints without actually burning moxa, such as self-heating hot packs that stay warm for a number of hours and apply a relatively constant heat to the point or area stimulated, and electrical heating instruments designed to apply heat either to a small point or to a larger area.

Of these diverse methods of direct and indirect moxa treatment, the *okyū*, the *ibuki*, and the *chinetsukyū* methods will be described in some detail below.

MOXA PUNK “GRADES”

Many grades of moxa are available in Japan. There are several grades of “pure” moxa, “semi-pure” moxa, and finally “crude” moxa. The crude moxa is used in moxa poles and with various instruments, none of which are discussed here. The semi-pure moxa is used specifically for the *kyūtōshin* and *chinetsukyū* techniques.



Pure moxa.

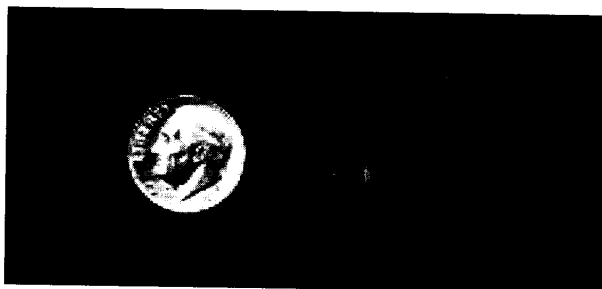
The pure moxa is used in *okyū* applications, and is processed specifically for use in this method. Thus, when applying the direct *okyū* moxa methods, always use pure moxa, and never the semi-pure or crude moxa. The pure moxa is processed so that only the moxa “wool” remains, with most of the plant fiber and particles either sieved or washed out. This allows for a very soft, malleable moxa-wool that can be easily molded to shape. It burns with less intensity, thereby allowing for greater control over the amount of heat applied to the acupoints. With appropriate techniques, this allows the practitioner to control the degree of heat applied and not burn or scar the point. The semi-pure moxa has more fiber and particles left mixed in with the moxa-wool; the crude moxa has much more fiber and many more particles left in it. The greater the amounts of fiber and particles in the moxa, the harder it is to roll the moxa to the desired shape and size, and the hotter it burns. This makes it more difficult to control the amount of heat delivered to the point by the moxa punk.

OKYŪ—DIRECT MOXIBUSTION

Rolling moxa to the right shape, size, and consistency is a skill attained only with hours of careful practice. In Japan, students in acupuncture school spend many hours learning and perfecting their moxa rolling, placing, and burning techniques, so that they can

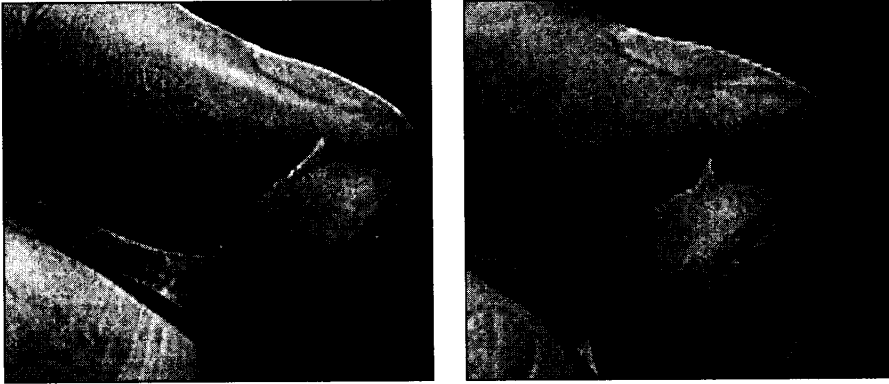
pass the rather difficult practical parts of the curriculum of the various schools and national licensing exams. In the West, this level of repetitive diligence is less common, though still very important, as a general level of skill must be attained so that moxa can be used effectively and repeatedly without burning and scarring the patient. To this end, the following points should be observed:

- Roll the moxa correctly, both with respect to a consistent size and a consistent degree of compression.
- Generally the moxa should be felt as slightly hot to the patient, but not uncomfortable and not to the point of burning the skin.
- If the moxa is rolled too large or is compressed too tightly, it tends to burn hotter and deliver a more intense heat to the point, which if not properly controlled can blister and scar the skin.
- To ensure the delivery of the correct degree of heat to a point, make sure that the moxa cones are rolled to the same size with the same consistency. Once able to do this, you can ensure that the same dose of heat is delivered to the point with every cone, thus giving you much greater control over the total dosage delivered.
- When correctly applied, the heat of the moxa is generally like a brief pinprick. Sometimes it even elicits the same stimulation sensation obtained normally with needles.
- Perfecting delivery technique requires constant practice in moxa rolling. You might set tasks for yourself, such as rolling and placing twenty moxa in a row that are all the same size and consistency.
- The moxa cone or punk sizes are usually very small, ranging from thread size, to sesame size to half-rice grain size—usually the biggest used. The piece of moxa should be shaped either in a thin rod shape, or like a grain of rice. What is important is to ensure that when the piece of moxa is placed on the skin, it stands up with only minimal contact with the skin. A piece of moxa that has a wide base is not desirable because it will burn hotter as it burns down towards the skin. The following pictures show the shapes and sizes of moxa relative to a U.S. 10-cent coin (1.7cm diameter):



Sizes of moxa relative to a U.S. 10-cent coin.

The moxa should not be densely packed or rolled tightly. When rolling the moxa, mold the moxa to shape and size without compressing it. The rolling is usually done between the pads of the thumb and forefinger of whichever hand is the easier to use. Ideally, the piece of moxa should be rolled without the finger and thumb touching. This assures the most correct pressure because it molds but does not compress the moxa. When correctly rolled, the moxa should be loose but well formed.



Rolling moxa.

There is a Korean form of pre-rolled moxa that can be used as direct moxa, called *sook*. This is made of a combination of mugwort (moxa), wormwood, and sagebrush. This burns differently from pure moxa, delivering a hotter pinch of heat. It also burns very slowly, and can thus increase the time of a treatment. While this may be a useful technique for some, especially the absolute beginner who has not yet achieved good technique, we cannot overemphasize the importance of using hand-rolled pure moxa. Achieving consistency comes with regular and steady practice, and once skill is gained, you will have much more control over the intensity and duration of heat delivered to the point.

PLACING THE MOXA PUNK

Moxibustion is applied to a palpably reactive point. Chapter 3, Palpation, describes common reactions to seek which for *okyū* are usually points with knots or indurations and pressure pain. After determining what points to check, that is, those indicated for the symptoms, palpation is used to determine exact point locations. Moxa therapists usually palpate more points and areas of the body than most acupuncturists. There are two reasons for this. First, the point treated is usually very small, and because the piece of moxa is also very small, it is easy to miss the point, if even by a few millimeters. When one misses the point, the success of the treatment may be seriously compromised. Second, moxibustion practice

is very pragmatic; it strongly de-emphasizes theory. Because theoretical methods, including patterns of diagnosis and so forth, are not part of mainstream moxibustion practice, the method of selecting points has to shift away from a theoretically selected point and is determined empirically by palpating points.

Palpation is the tool that moxibustionists use to find the exact point to be treated. In fact, in their relatively frequent study groups, moxibustionists in Japan, such as Seiji Irie, practice point location, even after many years of clinical experience. They recognize, as should any practitioner, that point selection and location must be extremely precise when using moxa. After finding the point, mark its location with a pencil or pen.

Once you have selected a point on which to apply moxibustion, the next step is to place the moxa so that it stands upright, directly on the point. For some, this is often the hardest step and requires considerable practice. It can be a little difficult because the actual size of the moxa punk can be very small, and if your fingers are big, or if your hands tend to sweat a little, you will find doing this takes much practice to master.

In order to place the moxa punk on the point you must first hold the moxa correctly. Probably the simplest approach is to hold the small moxa punk lightly between the finger and thumb, so that it protrudes slightly. To facilitate placement of the punk, position it point-down, without squashing it, standing it up at an angle, or having it fall over on its side.



With the moxa protruding slightly between thumb and finger, gently but firmly position it point-down.

You can help achieve placement of the punk, so that it stands up and does not fall off the point, by moistening either the point or bottom surface of the punk with a little water. Some recommend using a very thin film of wax- or oil-based balm on the point. We recommend using water, as once balm is on your finger tips, it is difficult to manipulate and place the moxa punks. Moistening the point or