

## Fukaya Sensei and the Bent String

by Felip Caudet

In the field of acupuncture and moxibustion point location has always been a subject of great concern and discussion. Palpation seems the most natural, instinctive and exact way to locate points, but for theoretical study and technical descriptions other methods are needed.

One of the methods used for point location in clinic by Fukaya Isaburo (1901-1974) and mentioned in his texts, was Jōsetsu-hō (じょうせつほう 繩折法) or the Bent String Method. Like following the steps on a treasure map, this consists of taking measurements with a piece of string on one part of the body and applying them on other parts of the body, to find the hidden moxibustion point at the end of the string.

Fukaya was the last great teacher of Japanese moxibustion from modern times, someone who cherished the survival of a practical, popular and traditional method, behind which lies the richness of the experiences of multiple generations of moxa practitioners.

### Ancient Concerns

The first reference to the location of points using an instrumental technology is in the classic *Su Wen* (chapter 24), in which the location of the back shu points is described through the use of a long stem of grass. It seems that these techniques were only developed for the practice of moxibustion, and not for acupuncture. This detail informs us that this method was populist in intention.

In general, it is believed that the development of this methodology was a response to the difficulty indicated by the classical texts in relation to the location of points. According to Lorraine Wilcox (2008) there are several theories that can explain its development:

1. A medical development to explain to patients how to continue the treatment at home.
2. A pedagogical method developed by a doctor to explain the location of a special point that he had seen in other practitioners.
3. A simple explanation of point location by natural healers with no medical training.

Regardless of the original reasons, it seems that this information has come from much clinical experience, through some practitioners and some texts that refer to it. Some of the techniques of

jōsetsu-hō do not always refer to regular points or meridians. Some refer to one person's special treatments or experiences. In some cases this provides extra value, allowing us to develop an argument about the reasons for its creation, that maybe these were not only techniques for profane people in point location, but also have been a method of transmission of 'secret' information in an encrypted way by some teachers to their students.

The first time, Fukaya Isaburo came across this practice was in 1936. Excited by the technique, he made an exhaustive review of the Japanese moxibustion classic, *Meikakyūsen*, written by Wake Koreyuki (1760-1826), also known as Asai Nankō. In this classic book, there were many references and techniques of jōsetsu-hō for moxa point location.



FIG 1. Jōsetsu-hō for night-wetting. Model was Shinma Hideo, aged two. Original from Isaburo Fukaya (1938).

The preface of this work was published in 1804 and it was finally published as a book in 1813. Accompanying this text are two more treatises, both prefaced by Wake Koreyuki, and published by his student Hirai Tsunenobu. These two treatises are known as *Zoku Meikakyūsen* (1807) and *Meikakyūsen Sanpen* (1813).

The work, revised and commented later by Fukaya Sensei, was published under the title *Meikakyūsen Syakugi* (1973). It was reissued by his main student, Irie Seiji (1928-1985), and Fukaya's son, Shinma Hideo, in 1977.

The *Meikakyūsen* is considered to be an exceptional work since it was published in the Edo period (1603-1868) and it was written in *kanbun* style, a Chinese literary style considered complex. Vigoroux (2008) conjectured that perhaps with the use of that style, at that time popular and mostly in the

hands of monks, the original author sought to elevate this knowledge to the category of medical practice.

It is important to note that the author Asai Nankō was influenced by different schools of thought and by different teachers. In the Edo period, there were schools that influenced each other and that facilitated the development of techniques and theories. It was an independent and worthy branch called Sechuuha (or School of Commitment) that was influenced by the Goseiha (School of Successors) and the Kohoha (the School of Ancient Practices). Asai Nankō was never officially a member of any of these schools, but their influence on his work is evident, especially the influence of the Kohoha branch and its concept of *shinshijikken* (development of the treatment through clinical practice). The Kohoha school based its ideas on the return to primary sources, classical Chinese medical texts such as the *Shan Hang Lun* and the *Jin Gui Yao Lue*.

In *Meikakyūsen* it is made clear from the beginning that in spite of the existence of many other jōsetsu-hō techniques, the techniques explained are only those that have been shown to be effective through clinical practice. This detail shows the pragmatic and positive character of the author's practice. It also connects with the later work of Fukaya. Another important influence, which connects the works of Asai Nankō and Fukaya Isaburo in a deep way, was the figure of Goto Konzan, who was a member of the Kohoha branch. This teacher influenced Asai Nankō through his therapeutic understanding. Konzan advocated treatment tools such as moxibustion, hot baths, baths under natural waterfalls, red pepper and bear bile. The influence on Fukaya becomes evident through the value placed by Konzan on moxa as a therapeutic tool and for his theory about stagnation of the ki.

In the review, or version, that Fukaya made of the classic *Meikakyūsen* and its accompanying texts, the master improved the understanding of the text. He described causes and he gave details of the symptomatology and commentaries and made illustrations of the points. He explained how moxa should be applied and how many cones should be used for healing. He complemented the work with other opinions and advice on what was originally described in the classical text.<sup>1</sup>

### The Moxa Point

For Fukaya Sensei, one idea that should prevail in the practice of direct moxibustion and jōsetsu-hō practice was the definition of the point from the perspective of moxibustion. This understanding would really make a difference in relation to effectiveness. According to Fukaya, a point must al-

ways present two characteristics to be considered appropriate and effective for direct moxibustion. These two characteristics are reactivity to pressure (pressure pain) and local induration.

If these characteristics are not presented at the point indicated by the string, that point will not be considered suitable for moxa. To do moxa on that point will be a waste of time and energy. So, after locating it with the string, you have to make sure that the characteristics of the point are ideal.

In the decalogue of Fukaya Sensei, commented and published by Irie, the master defined how the practice of moxa should be understood and how it should be performed. In the description of the method for doing moxa it makes clear that the point has a mobile and changing nature in its presentation, which must be reactive to palpation and must be indurated.

Goto Konzan's theory, known as the Ki Stagnation Theory, can be considered the forerunner of the theory of points put forward by Fukaya. This theory says that all diseases are a product of stagnation of ki. The ki that is referred to is what gives life to living beings but this is not kidney essence, it is a ki that has both yin and yang aspects at the same time. When it is imbalanced is expressed through a stagnation of that ki, leading to the appearance of disease.

It is easy to see the connection between these two masters, since the indurations of the points referred by Fukaya Sensei are the result of the stagnation of ki and blood discussed by Konzan Sensei.

## Hands Have the Last Word

The techniques of jōsetsu-hō are going to bring us to the points with great precision, but once the theoretical location has been found, we must know exactly where we are going to move. Proper palpation will serve to confirm the presence of induration and its reactive characteristics.

When we arrive at the location of a single point through jōsetsu-hō, we should understand that there are two different directions to treatment: one, the point can be used for symptomatic treatment; or two, for the complete resolution of the problem. This second direction can only be understood from a pragmatic perspective and total confidence in moxibustion, common among those who have the fire of moxibustion inside them.

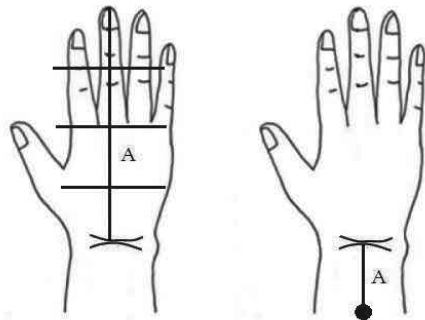


FIG 2. Locating a point for treating tooth pain using jōsetsu-ho

On the other hand, when we locate a group of points, we must consider that the combination is compatible with the overall recovery of the patient, not just the treatment of symptoms.

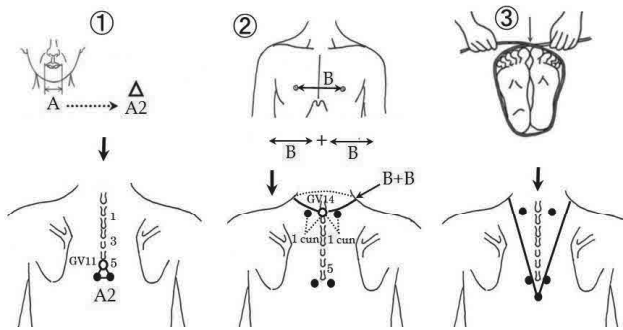


FIG 3. Asthma treatment with jōsetsu-hō.

## The String and Other Tools

For the practice of jōsetsu-hō, we can use any type of string, not too thick and with a minimum length of 90cm.

Another complementary and popular tool used in jōsetsu-hō is the triangle ruler. It is an equilateral triangle of cardboard from 6-10cm on each side with marked divisions. The use of the triangle ruler as a point location method was known as *sankaku syuketsu-hō*. This triangle ruler was a practical tool to locate points in a triangular relationship. Fukaya's triangle ruler measured 6cm per side and had in the center, aligned with one of the vertex, a rectangular mechanical aperture that served to locate points vertical to the upper vertex.

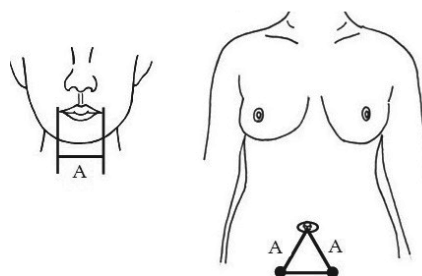


FIGURE 4. Chujoryukyu. Jōsetsu-hō technique for infertility with string and triangle ruler.

## Notes

1. As update, in 2015 Caudet and Shinma published (in Spanish) a compilation of 64 jōsetsu-hō used by Fukaya.

## References

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