

History of Shiatsu

Vicky Evans



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Shiatsu is a complementary health practice, that evolved during the 20th century in Japan. Historically, there had been two types of physical manipulation that evolved from the Chinese practices of Anma (which is similar to Western massage in style) and Do-In (which is similar to yoga practices). Both forms support mind-body health and are two of the oldest forms of medical treatment in the East. Whilst chiropractic, osteopathy, and physiotherapy methods in more recent times in the West introduced a more medicalised approach to bodywork, it wasn't until Shiatsu took aspects of Western medicine along with ancient bodywork (dating from 8000 BC) that this unique form of healing practice truly emerged. Carola Beresford-Cooke explains in her teaching book *Shiatsu Theory and Practice* that 'it is possible that Shiatsu predates acupuncture although this form of pressure using needles in China became the main form of therapy' (Beresford-Cook, 2008).

Through understanding Yin and Yang theory, we can better understand what Shiatsu can offer in terms of diagnosis and how treatment can support healing. In the 2nd millennium BC, the first recorded writings about Yin-Yang theory were found in *The Book of Changes*. Here, heaven is seen as the Yang archetype of the creative active principle where masculine, light, warmth, and sunshine characteristics exist. Earth is seen as receptive or passive, which is regarded as being feminine and material nourishment is offered from fields, shelter, and rest. The book goes on to suggest that all life is seen as being dependent on their harmonious interaction and the changing seasons are indications of the interrelatedness of Yin and Yang. It can be said that they both create and control each other and nothing is wholly yin or yang: each contains the seed of the other. Yang will change into Yin and Yin into Yang and so on. It is important to also note that something can be yin or yang in relation to something else and that it is the relativity of this relationship that is unique. Ki arises from the interaction of Yin and Yang and is the primary energy of the universe. Matter and changing states are characterised by its Qi, Ki, or Ch'i which is the circulating life energy thought to be inherent in all living things. Our bodies depend on Ki, along with blood and other essential substances which change, flow, and circulate. From this viewpoint it is said that blood and Ki support and complement

each other: blood needs Ki to keep it moving and Ki needs the blood to nourish the organs that generate it.

Yin Yang theory goes on to describe the energetic relationship between inner and outer aspects of the body through internal organs and the skin and this organisation is mediated by the systems of channels that carry the Ki to all parts where Ki flows from within and circulates near the surface of the body. It is also said that the internal condition of the body is reflected on the outside and that work on the outside can affect the inside. From a health perspective, this system can be recognised as the body's regulating mechanism which allows us to adjust to the environment in which we live.

During times of sickness, discomfort, or 'dis-ease', the physical, self-regulating system efficiency breaks down, and symptoms are produced on the outside of the body. So, the ability to move Ki inside the body by giving treatment from the outside arises from the continuity of the energy network moving between the inside and outside. This action nourishes the body to seek to restore the harmony and resolution of health issues. This is the energetic relationship Shiatsu works with.

Japan has always had a close relationship with China, and in the 6th century AD, adopted Chinese forms of acupuncture eventually introducing elements of creativity and refinement to this system of health management. A pressure massage in the abdomen area called Ampuka evolved offering diagnosis and treatment for patients. Elements of this approach remain in Shiatsu practiced today and it is known as Hara diagnosis. Here, the body's life force or Ki is a 'potent centre of energy to be developed by the Shiatsu practitioner' (Beresford-Cook, 2008).

The Oriental view of health takes wholeness as the starting point and that the universe is an energy field containing all different manifestations of energy in different patterns: everything is connected. The primary tenet of Oriental medicine is that we should live in accordance with nature as opposed to adapting nature to the needs of mankind. In China, people took note of the influence of the natural world and began to link people's tendencies to types of ailment to the characteristics of the natural world and it became understood that emotions and lifestyles could be contributory factors in health and disease.

Toru Namikoshi in 1925 sought to place Shiatsu within a Western framework and his methodology remains the most studied approach in Japan. His system features an analysis of the body's ailments in terms of location anatomically rather than meridian theory (which is more prevalent in the UK today) and also favours a Western scientific approach over classical theory. It is important to note that understanding and treating the uniqueness of the individual and their symptoms is crucial in understanding how Shiatsu can support health. He writes:

“Though illnesses may be named and the most exhaustive and careful data entered on medical records, the individual patient and his illness cannot be categorised in the kind of broad, clear-cut generalities that dominate modern medicine. The foundation of shiatsu treatment is the belief that each individual case must be regarded as unique. By adjusting treatment to subtle variations in the individual's condition, it is possible to stimulate the body's miraculous self-healing powers and to cultivate both mental and physical wellbeing” (Namikoshi, 1981).

This important approach remains central to current practice and further developments of Shiatsu in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Through understanding the earlier history of Shiatsu it can be seen there have been several theoretical approaches in the 20th century. As these forms evolved, practitioners are able to specialise more. Some examples include Movement Shiatsu, Relational Shiatsu and European Shiatsu which all offer a different approach to their practice.

. As stated previously, the rather unique nature of the human body and how it places itself in accordance with the environment can lead to a myriad of ailments if balance is not maintained. Another useful tool in the understanding of treatment and support is that of Five Element theory which is a part of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Although a little simpler this can provide a useful framework to examine the situation a patient finds themselves in.

Five Element theory is explained concisely by Beresford-Cooke:

“Five Element theory postulates that the Ki which constitutes and animates the universe can be subdivided into five different phases, which are like qualities or

'flavours' of Ki, namely Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, and Wood. The human body mind contains all of these qualities and each pair of meridians pertains to a separate Element and channels that Element's 'flavour' of Ki" (Beresford-Cooke, 2008).

Each Element governs a pair of meridians (except Fire which governs two pairs) and because Ki is everywhere this means that the qualities of human Ki can be seen in the world around us for example the coolness of water, the rising heat of fire, the stability of the earth. This analysis of prevalent characteristics can be a useful tool as codified lists of 'element correspondences' can support the student's growing understanding of how each meridian manifests in the body and how the transformation of Ki functions.

Beresford-Cooke (2008) goes on to explain that in Traditional Chinese Medicine, there are many layers of theory that support physical conditions: Yin and Yang; Correspondences of Five Elements; Five Vital Substances and it is acknowledged there is less emphasis on psychological and spiritual factors which also influence health. She writes that the principal methods of diagnosis include questioning, observation of the tongue, palpation of the pulse, and classification of the patient's symptoms under the Eight Conditions of Yin/Yang, Full/Empty, Hot/Cold and Interior/Exterior. Having an in-depth knowledge and understanding of TCM for any Shiatsu practitioner is useful as it widens the sphere of knowledge treatment can come from both through understanding the emotional, physical, spiritual conditions of the patient. Additionally, the Shiatsu practitioner can use specific acupuncture points to support the patient in treatment.

As a student and then a teacher for Namikoshi, Shizuto Masunaga (the considered father of Zen Shiatsu) developed his interest in Oriental medicine, ancient Chinese texts and began to blend psychology, orthodox Shiatsu, and his historical research with a Western understanding of physiology. This style became known as Zen Shiatsu amalgamating Eastern and Western healing approaches. Masunaga further developed the practice of Zen Shiatsu by honing his approach to support clients so they gained deep relaxation and were treated in response to their current needs. Zen Shiatsu is characterised by:

- Hara palpatory diagnosis methods to include a wider whole body approach working with meridians (pathways in the body) to correct presenting energy distortions
- Classical Meridian Extensions where the traditional classical 12 lines of Ki running through the body are extended throughout the whole body allowing treatment of any

meridian in all areas of the body thus offering greater flexibility for a practitioner to be able to respond appropriately to their receiver.

Masunaga reminds us in his work *Zen Shiatsu* that “Today we are so accustomed to modern drug therapy that we have forgotten the importance and necessity of realising our body’s own healing powers. Without this force, our bodies would remain in a state of disease.” He goes on to explain that the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare refers to Shiatsu as a “form of manipulation administered by the thumbs, fingers, and palms, without the use of any instrument, mechanical or otherwise, to apply pressure to the human skin, correct internal malfunctioning, promote and maintain health, and treat specific diseases” (Masunaga, 1977).

Having a wider, broader knowledge of any field of practice surely has to be a good thing and will help any student stay abreast of developments in the field and work to establish Shiatsu as ‘one of the four main branches of traditional Oriental medicine’ (Beresford Cooke, 2008). Through a greater understanding of historical developments Shiatsu as a healing therapy has been though, students will be able to gain a greater understanding that

“Oriental medicine is not as rational as western medicine but if we respect the mysteries of life and make the patient aware of himself, disease will disappear and the patient will endeavour to get well on his own. By applying your hand on a point or stub and following the meridian lines with your fingers, you may feel the ‘echo’ of life” (Masunaga, 1977).

It can be said that through gaining a wider knowledge base and experience of practical application of the varied theories and practices, the Shiatsu practitioner will be able to draw on a range of approaches to support their client to the best of their needs drawing on a multilayered approach of theory and practical application. By holding fast to the fact that each human body is unique and therefore each Shiatsu treatment should also be unique to best support the health and wellbeing of each person to bring about more comfort, easing and optimisation of health at physical, mental, emotional and spiritual level.

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