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Acupuncture statue with acupoints locations for practitioners.



From left: Doctors offer free acupuncture treatment to people in Taizhou, Zhejiang province. Children learn about acupuncture in Shijiazhuang, Hebei province.

PHOTOS BY WANG HUABIN / LI MINGFA / FOR CHINA DAILY

It's all very healthy, if you get the point

As research lends scientific support for ancient technique, global recognition is rising.

Yang Yang reports

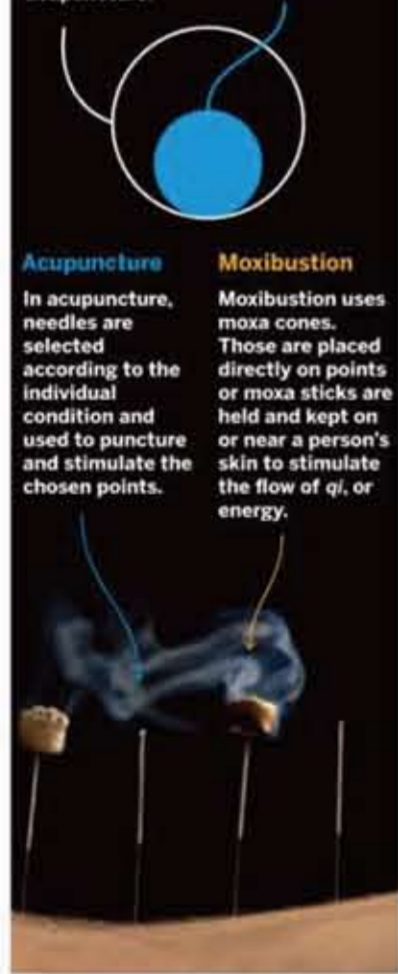
HISTORY

Generations of physicians and surgeons throughout history have contributed to the development of acupuncture and moxibustion.

- **Bian Que** during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC)
- **Hua Tuo** during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220)
- **Sun Simiao** during the Tang Dynasty (618-907)
- **Yang Jizhou** during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)
- **During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Li Xuechuan** listed all 361 acupoints on the human body, and his compilation is still used by practitioners today.

183 countries and regions are involved in the study and use of acupuncture.

59 countries and regions recognize the legal status of acupuncture.



For thousands of years the Chinese have relieved pain and cured disease through acupuncture. Evolving from the discovery that using stone needles to prick specific points on the surface of the body could relieve pain and symptoms, acupuncture has become an integral part of traditional Chinese medicine, in line with the philosophy that promotes the harmonious coexistence of humans with nature.

According to *Records of the Grand Historian*, written by Sima Qian about 2,100 years ago, Bian Que, a physician during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), was renowned for having saved a prince's life by using needles to stimulate the Baihui acupoint on the head of the unconscious man.

According to TCM, there are a dozen meridians in the human body, where the *qi*, or life energy, circulates to nourish the organs. Cold, infections or diseases can result in the blocking of the energy, so stimulating the acupoints is said to unblock stagnant *qi*, restore normal circulation and improve health.

Today acupuncture is still widely used in China.

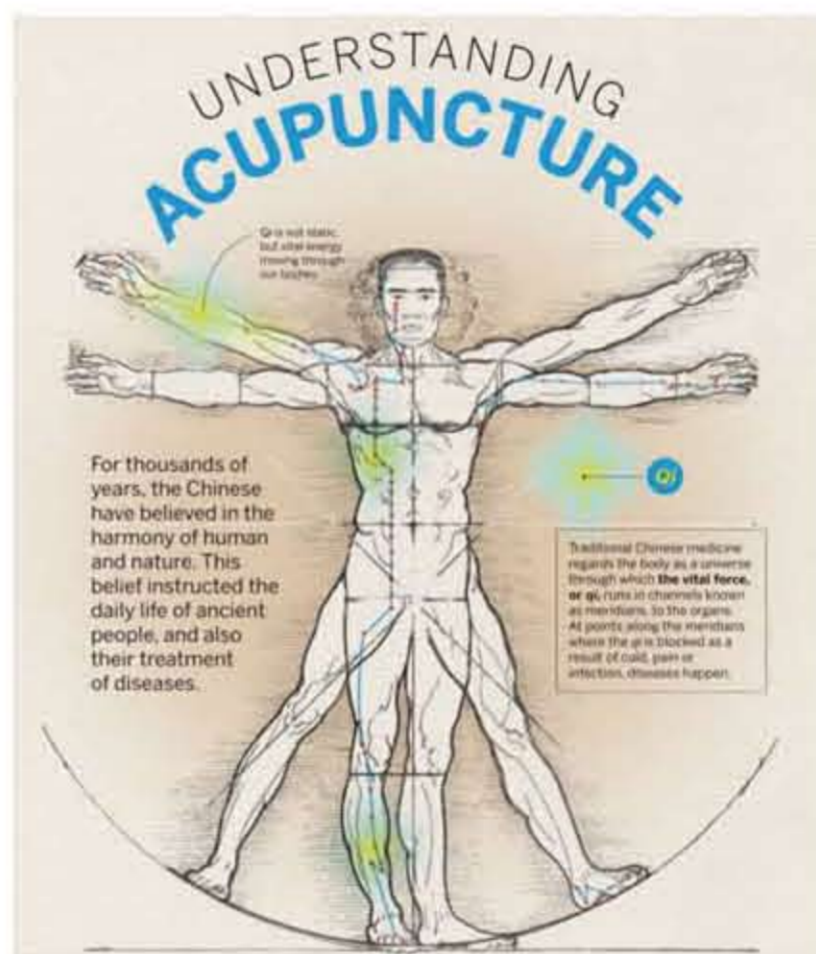
Li Ming, 41, who works in media, said that acupuncture helped treat the dry eyes she had been suffering from since 2009. After trying many other ways, a friend suggested she turn to a doctor at Beijing Tongren Hospital who excelled in treating the condition with acupuncture.

Li's treatment lasted 18 months, and after more than 130 visits her symptoms significantly decreased, and her eyes became moist enough for her to resume work in 2013.

Liu Cunzhi, head of the School of Acupuncture, Moxibustion and Tuina at the Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, said he has been using acupuncture to treat patients at the first stage of Alzheimer's disease. "Many of my patients come to me twice a week for seven or eight years to maintain their current condition," he said.

In 2010 UNESCO inscribed acupuncture and moxibustion of TCM on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Yet the practice is not just cultural and historical, but also a medical technique widely used and researched today.

For years, despite the clear therapeutic effects of acupuncture in treating many diseases, there



were few convincing studies that explained how acupoint stimulation worked, or what meridians were anatomically speaking, so the technique always seemed somewhat mysterious.

However, as scientific research of acupuncture has grown in recent years, producing better quality results, the technique is being more commonly used worldwide.

One debate revolves around the foundation of acupuncture, the question of whether meridians really exist.

Yang Shengya, director of the Department of Acupuncture and Moxibustion at the Beijing Massage Hospital, said meridians are more of a functional concept than a concrete anatomic structure.

"The *qi* and blood only run in meridians in a living person. When a person dies there is no *qi*, and blood circulates no more, so comparing meridians to vessels or nerves is inaccurate.

"From the perspective of clinical practice, meridians describe the function of pathways through the human body. Once a person dies, the function ends immediately.

"One day perhaps we'll be able to explain what meridians are exactly.

But just because you cannot see something doesn't mean it doesn't exist."

Liu echoes Yang's opinion, saying that studies of the anatomic structure of meridians lead nowhere, so now many researchers are trying to explain the mechanisms of acupuncture, instead, such as why pricking the acupoints on the face can relieve toothache.

Through studies conducted over the past century, scholars now have a deep understanding of the working mechanisms of acupuncture, said Jing Xianghong, director of the Institute of Acupuncture and Moxibustion at the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences.

Chinese scientists have accumulated a great deal of information in the study of acupuncture analgesia, the sensitization of acupoints, and the effects of acupoint stimulation, she said.

In TCM, acupoints reflect the body's internal condition. When diseased or injured, corresponding acupoints become sensitized, displaying effects like expanded receptive fields, heightened pain perception and increased heat

sensitivity, which gradually disappear as the body heals.

In 2021 Ma Qiufu, a professor at Harvard University, co-authored a paper, titled *A Neuroanatomical Basis for Electroacupuncture to Drive the Vagal-Adrenal Axis*, with researchers from China including Jing, which was published in the journal *Nature*.

Since then, basic scientific research on acupuncture and moxibustion has once again drawn the attention of researchers, Jing said.

Last year professor Xu Nenggui and a research team at the Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine published *Evidence Mapping and Overview of Systematic Reviews of the Effects of Acupuncture Therapies in BMJ*, the British medical journal.

The study established the most comprehensive database and data matrix for acupuncture clinical effectiveness research to date, and recalculated the effect values of acupuncture for each disease. The paper suggests which diseases and conditions acupuncture can substantially treat and which show promise but still require further study, said Lu Liming, who was part of the team.

The study can help acupuncturists and researchers make decisions quickly in clinical practice and research, Xu said.

Liu said acupuncture's advantages lie in the fact that it is an external technique, so it is safer than taking medicine, and is effective in treating many conditions.

According to the study by Xu and his colleagues, acupuncture can substantially benefit post-stroke aphasia, neck and shoulder pain, fibromyalgia, nonspecific lower back pain, vascular dementia, postpartum lactation insufficiency and allergic rhinitis.

Yang is working on the research into the therapeutic effect of acupuncture for benign paroxysmal positional vertigo, a common inner ear condition causing sudden and intense dizziness triggered by movements of the head.

Based on strict randomized controlled trials conducted by researchers worldwide, acupuncture has been found effective in treating conditions such as chronic severe functional constipation, female stress urinary incontinence and migraine, Jing said.

History of print under spotlight in new gallery

By WANG KAIHAO

A gallery displaying printing woodblocks opened at the Palace Museum in Beijing recently, the first such exhibition space of its kind since the museum opened to the public in 1925.

The Palace Museum, also known as the Forbidden City, was China's imperial palace from 1420 to 1911.

It houses 1.86 million cultural relics, about one-third of them ancient books, documents and related printing woodblocks, making the museum a key venue in the development of Chinese literature.

However, these precious relics for academic studies had lacked a venue in which they could be publicly displayed.

Wang Xudong, director of the museum, said it now has a collection of about 240,000 printing woodblocks, including 210,000 made in the royal court during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, which relate mainly to classic literature, records of national affairs and Buddhist sutras.

The opening exhibition of the new gallery, near the Gate of Supreme Harmony, features 32 woodblocks.

"These exhibits are of great value for people to understand the politics, culture and printing techniques of that era," Wang said.

"Putting them in the context of the history of Chinese classic books and the Qing inner court, we can learn more through in-depth studies, which will inspire us to develop modern culture."

For example, an exhibited woodblock carved with dragon patterns was made in 1644 shortly after Qing troops seized Beijing.

It demonstrates a Qing imperial admonition demanding that princes and high officials strictly stick to their duties and avoid corruption. Related records in historical files and printed notices using this woodblock are presented alongside it.

Some woodblocks were also made to record aspects of the royal lifestyle, with a group used to print landscape pictures of the Chengde Mountain Resort and Emperor Kangxi's poems lauding its beauty.

To give visitors an immersive experience, a part of the gallery is designed as a warehouse, where more than 15,000 printing blocks are on shelves.

Woodblock printing reached its peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties, said Ji Zhangwei, a researcher at the Palace Museum Library.

The royal courts of the two dynasties made a great effort to sponsor printing as an important way to demonstrate national strength and promote cultural development. Pear wood was the most common material to make the blocks at the time.

As a result of the preservation of these woodblocks, "many precious ancient documents survive to this day", Ji said.

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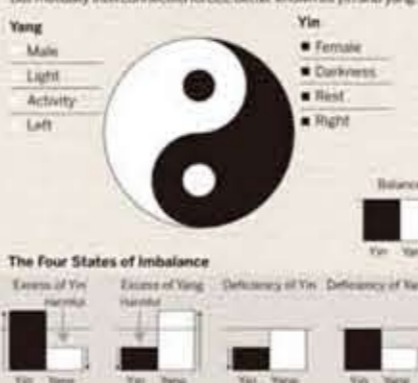
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MERIDIANS AND ACUPOINTS



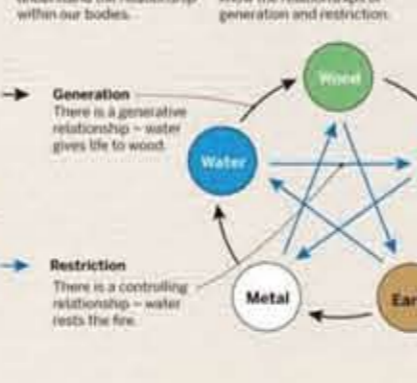
YIN AND YANG

According to *I Ching* (Book of Changes), an ancient Chinese classic, any object or phenomenon is composed of two opposites, but mutually interconnected forces, better known as yin and yang.



FIVE ELEMENTS

The Five Elements theory is used in acupuncture to understand the relationship within our bodies.



THINGS RELATED TO ELEMENTS

