

Academic Debate

Traditional Chinese acupuncture manipulations and “dry needling”

中国传统针刺刺法与“干针”

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the authors studied the manipulation of “dry needling”, reviewed Chinese ancient and modern literature of acupuncture-moxibustion, and found that “dry needling” is very similar to triple needling, superficial needling, joint valley needling, surround needling, and other traditional Chinese acupuncture-moxibustion manipulations; even if in modern China, before and after the invention of “dry needling”, some unique therapies, such as oblique insertion therapy at *Ashi* point, sliver needling, Fu’s subcutaneous needling, and long-round needling, were also invented. It can be seen that “dry needling” therapy is actually a kind of differentiation of traditional Chinese acupuncture-moxibustion in the international communication. The spread of traditional Chinese acupuncture-moxibustion in the West is the basis for the invention of “dry needling” therapy, and “dry needling” therapy develops and enriches traditional Chinese acupuncture-moxibustion.

KEY WORDS: Dry needling; triple needling; superficial needling; joint valley needling; surround needling; oblique insertion at *Ashi* point; sliver needling; Fu’s subcutaneous needling; long-round needling; traditional acupuncture-moxibustion

Recently, a kind of acupuncture manipulation, which is called “dry needling”, spreads widely. “Dry needling” is a “new” acupuncture manipulation proposed by scholars in Europe and America and other countries based on the theory of trigger point (TrP), it’s main manipulation: after being determined, the trigger point is fixed between two fingers, and the needle is inserted at 1–2 cm from the point. The angle between needle tip and skin surface is about 30°, and the needle is inserted into skin along the direction of the muscle fibers. Rapid lifting and thrusting is mainly adopted. It is emphasized that on the basis of fixed induration, the needle is directly inserted into the trigger point and lifting and thrusting method is quickly performed with an appropriate speed of 20–30 times/min. If there are multiple trigger points in a part of the muscle,

and each trigger point has its induration, fan-shaped needling manipulation or surround needling should be conducted in the region. It is emphasized during the dry needling therapy that the needle tip should be fully inserted to penetrate the induration region, then the tip is lifted to the subcutaneous tissue; then the needle is inserted for the second time; the manipulation is conducted repeatedly, so as to eliminate all the trigger points in induration as much as possible.

“Dry needling” is mainly used for the treatment of muscular fascia painful diseases. The inventor thought that this is a new way of body surface stimulation, and has no relation with traditional Chinese acupuncture. However, the authors deeply studied the manipulation of “dry needling”, reviewed Chinese ancient and

modern literature of acupuncture-moxibustion, and found that “dry needling” is very similar to some traditional Chinese acupuncture manipulations; even if in modern China, before and after the invention of “dry needling”, some unique therapies are also similar to it. The details are as follows.

CHINESE ANCIENT MANIPULATIONS SIMILAR TO “DRY NEEDLING”

After reading ancient books, the authors found that there are many methods of oblique insertion or perpendicular insertion on partial lesion, such as triple needling, superficial needling, joint valley needling, surround needling, etc.

Triple needling therapy

As one of “twelve needling methods”, triple needling was seen in *Lingshū* (《灵枢》, *Miraculous Pivot*) at the beginning, and was an acupuncture method for *bi* syndrome caused by cold invasion in ancient times. Triple needling refers to that three needles are inserted into the lesion parallelly, with one needle perpendicularly inserting into the middle of lesion, and the other two into both sides. It was said in *Miraculous Pivot* that “Triple needling refers to an acupuncture method with one needle perpendicularly inserting into the middle of lesion, and the other two into both sides, so as to treat *bi* syndrome caused by cold invasion.” Acupoints on the tenderness point or middle of lesion or main acupoints were selected. Firstly, one needle is perpendicularly inserted into the lesion, after *deqi*, two needles are perpendicularly or obliquely inserted into skin 1–2 *cun* from the lesion in the direction of upside, downside, left or right. Then, lifting and thrusting and twirling should be conducted, and the needling sensation should be to the extent that the feelings of tingling, swelling and heavy appear in partial skin, and spread to the surrounding^[1].

Superficial needling therapy

Superficial needling, also called subcutaneous insertion or transverse insertion, refers to a kind of acupuncture manipulation conducted subcutaneously or in the shallow part of skin when the disease is superficial. Superficial needling was comprehensively discussed in *Huangdì Nèijīng* (《黄帝内经》, *Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic*). It was said in *Miraculous Pivot* that “Superficial needling refers to shallow and superficial insertion, which can treat muscle spasm”, which indicated the relationship between the layer of disease and the depth of acupuncture, and the superficial needling manipulation and its clinical application. According to *Nèijīng* (《内经》, *Inner Classic*), superficial needling refers to a kind of

manipulation that the needle is inserted obliquely into the muscle, which can be used for the treatment of muscle spasm. Manipulation: The patient is asked in supine or lateral position, stainless steel needles with different lengths are adopted by a doctor to insert into skin with a small angle, and the angle between the needle body and skin is 15–20 degree. After insertion, the needle body is not inserted into the muscle layer but perpendicular insertion or penetration needling is conducted subcutaneously^[2].

Joint valley needling therapy

“Joint valley needling” does not refer to needling at Hégu (合谷 LI 4), but refers to the contents said in *Miraculous Pivot* that “Joint valley needling looks like a foot of chicken, and the needle is inserted into muscle for treatment of *bi*”. Manipulation: One needle is perpendicularly inserted into the deep muscle of the acupoint, lifting and thrusting is conducted. After *deqi*, the needle is lifted to the shallow layer, and oblique insertion towards left or right side is conducted, respectively. Joint valley needling is a reinforced stimulus method with the main manipulation of multi-direction lifting and thrusting. The needle at the same acupoint is inserted to three different directions with a strong incitement; it is a heavy stimulation method with the functions of calming, spasmolysis and relieving pain. Joint valley needling is adopted in order to give play to the function of penetration needling, so as to select few acupoints, obtain strong needling sensation and good efficacy^[3].

Surround needling therapy

Surround needling refers to a kind of surrounding acupuncture manipulation conducted around the lesion for the purpose of improving efficacy. This method is evolved from “central-square needling” in ancient times. It was recorded in *Miraculous Pivot* that “Central-square needling refers to a kind of acupuncture manipulation with one needle in the middle of lesion, and four needles around the lesion; all the insertion should be shallow acupuncture with the purpose of treatment of pathogenic cold”. The characteristic of the surround needling is to take the place of the lesion as the center, and carry out surrounding acupuncture. Its manipulation is similar to that of central-square needling, but it is not limited to 4 needles. Therefore, it is believed that surround needling is the evolution of central-square needling^[4].

Lifting and thrusting manipulation

Lifting-thrusting and reinforcing-reducing manipulation was definitely put forward in *the Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic* in the Spring and Autumn

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