
TIBETAN MOXIBUSTION

The practice of moxibustion has been popular in Tibet since the pre-Buddhist time and probably began more than three thousand years ago. This method of healing is not only practiced by medicine men, healers and physicians but also by most Tibetan men and women who are versed in the art of using herbs and moxa to heal and help their families and friends. Tibetans are particularly fond of moxibustion and blood letting because it costs little and is available everywhere and at any time. Both methods are also very effective for high altitude disorders. Archaeological findings from the Dunhang¹ cave also include two texts about moxibustion. It is said that these texts were hidden and couldn't be found even in the library of the King's palace. This proves that moxibustion was already practiced in Tibet even before the Tibetan kings began to collect medical literature and practices from foreign countries. Ancient Tibetans use external body points to treat the humoral disorders and organs by simple way of heating. The *Gyudshi* already contains a chapter on moxibustion which mentions more than 71 points. Later, scholar Deumar Geshe (17th A.D) made more detailed elaborations and 360 body points were identified. Yet according to official medical history, the art of moxibustion was also brought to Tibet with new techniques and ideas from Dolpo (Mustang, in Nepal), Mongolia, China and other neighboring countries.

The general term used for external heating therapy is *Tsug* and is sometimes a synonym for moxibustion works. The physical body points are pressed or heated by different types of external objects to cure internal disorders². Here³ are the general names and types of *tsug* practiced in Tibet since ancient time.

Tsug (heating the physical body point by pressure and fire)

There are numerous *Tsug* practiced in Tibet:

- *Dhotsug* Stone *tsug* (5 types)
- *Ratsug* Horn *tsug* (different types of domestic and wild animals)
- *Shingsug* Wooden *tsug* (8 types)
- *Tel-me* Metal *tshugs* (cauterizing or branding)
- *Ser-tel* Golden branding
- *Ngul-te* Silver branding
- *Zang-tel* Copper branding
- *Chag-tel* Iron branding
- *Zi tshug* Tiger eye *tsug*
- *Metshug* Moxibustion
- *khandro metsa* Dakini moxa
- *Tendrel metsa* Miracle moxibustion
- *Horgyi-metsa* *Hor-me* practice (Mongolian heating moxibustion)
- *Gyanag-metsa* Chinese water moxibustion
- *Gyagar-metsa* Indian moxibustion
- *Thrulme* Magic moxibustion
- *Melongdarseg* Mirror moxibustion
- *Ngo-tsar-metsa* Wonder moxibustion
- *Bame* Hidden moxibustion
- *Num-tel* Oil-healing therapy

¹ Dunhang cave and ruins of ancient monasteries found in the Sinkiang site of the East Turkistan of China by French, English and American archeologist in beginning of the 20th century.

² See details in Desid Sangye Gyatsho's '*Khogbhug Drangsrong dgyepej gatun*' published by People's publishing house, China 1982

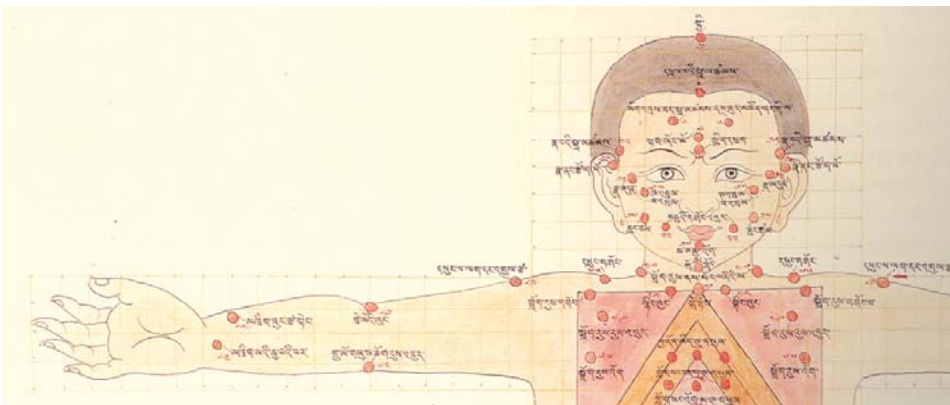
³ Deumar Geshe Tenzin Phuntshog's '*Laglen-cedue*' published by T.Y. Gangpa Leh, Ladakh 1970

External therapy tradition in ancient time

According to history, Tibetans have used stone *Tsug* therapy since ancient time to cure many disorders. They also discovered the effects of hot spring and fire and they introduced the fomentation method. The use of wooden *Tsug* was probably also discovered after the use of fire. This practice is still used in Tibet and in the Himalayan countries of Asia. Gradually, Tibetans began to tame various wild animals for domestic purposes and milking. They discovered that hot melted butter disinfects fresh wounds and learned about using animal products.

During the reign of the ninth Tibetan King Pudhegunyel, there was a wise minister, Rulekye, who learned to produce metal by melting stones. He also learned how to make gum from animal skin, dams for agriculture, bridges and houses. Tibet saw rapid development and the metal era in Tibet began. Different metal instruments and weapons began to be used. The healers and medicine men invented lancets, metal branding and surgical instruments for various healing procedures. The developments in the art of healing practices - especially those concerning external therapies - aided the constant development of the Tibetan medical system. Tibetans, like everyone else, appreciate precious and rare objects and began to use them for protection and cures. They discovered the value of using the *Zi-tsug* (mystic object - Tiger eye tsug) for many different disorders.

During the middle of the 8th century, the Indian, Chinese, Sogdian and trans-Arabian cultures and sciences began to flourish in Tibet. The *Gyud-shi* (the four medical tantra, believed to have been taught by Lord Buddha) also came to Tibet and the *Somaraja* and *Astangahydraya samhita* were later introduced there as well. Both of the latter were important medical texts from India and China. All these medical texts included detailed information about moxibustion and its uses.



The moxibustion technique was made systematic by Yuthok Yonten Gampo the Younger (1126-1202) and is to be found in Chapter 21 of the fourth tantra (*Chima gyud*). It was later elaborated on by a number of Tibetan physicians. Desid Sangye Gyatsho (1653-1705) and many other Tibetan physicians created various anatomical charts in the form of thangkas to illustrate the moxa points and their effects. There are about 71 basic

points which were later expanded to about 360 detailed points by the Zurkhar physicians and Deumar Geshe Tenzin Phuntshog (1672-?)

Theory of Tibetan Moxibustion

Tibetan moxibustion is not at all based on the concept of meridians. Tibetan moxa practice was developed¹ and is based on the psycho-physical formation of natural energy passages (*gSang*, points, channels). The body is like a bamboo basket full of natural energy passages or connections between the external body and the internal organs. You can see the objects inside, through these external holes or windows. When the body is in the right position (its natural position) the energy passages (channels) allow the internal organs to be directly reached by moxibustion and heat therapies. The energy passages are connected to the life force of the organs and their vital functions. The same concept holds true for *zubitsug* points because they are branches of the energy flow for the extremities.

Moxa wool

Tibet is the land of herbs and minerals. It is full of flowers and fossils. Tibetans are naturally prone to great knowledge of herbs and minerals and their uses to cure various ailments without depending on the classical medical systems set before the eighth century. The Medicine Buddha said in his herbal chapter in the fourth tantra: “In fact, herbs are more powerful than the abstracted ingredients”. The Great Atisha, the Indian Buddhist Master who visited Tibet (1040), praised the power of Tibetan herbs.

Artemisia vulgaris is an herb and its different types of species grow in all parts of Tibet. Moxa wool is made from different *Artemisia* species which are very powerful in healing disorders.

The way of application

There are four different moxa methods:

- **Cooking moxa** Used one after the other for continuous heat, for problems such as benign cold tumour or Lipoma
- **Burning moxa** Direct, cone moxa
- **Heating moxa** Direct and indirect moxibustion on the skin points
- **Warming moxa** Light moxa for children

Indications

General moxa therapy can help cure the following disorders:

Indigestion, low metabolism, low temperature, melancholy, pain caused by stress and tension, insomnia, anxiety, fear, panic attacks, stomach distension, vertigo, hiatus hernia, benign tumours, cold bile disease, joint pains, arthritis, bone deformation, joint local inflammation, superficial fever (empty fever), post-menopause syndrome and nerve inflammation (sciatic nerve, neurological disorders, etc.). In short moxa treatment is good for diseases which manifest from phlegm and wind humoral disorders.

Counter indications

Moxa therapy must not be used for bone metastasis, serious skin disorders, hot bile fever and blood disorders, profound inflammation and infections. Also avoid moxa on the sensory organs and on the hollow organs after eating.

Spiritual integration

Apply the moxa cone on the selected point and light it. Invite the Medicine Buddha with his disciples who ‘hold the science of healing’ to transform the moxibustion into nectar by reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra with prayer, deep meditation and visualization. (see in the Medicine Buddha practice).

Moxibustion paper

Tibetan paper is the best to use for moxa because it is smooth, strong, elastic, and has a naturally strong healing power. This paper can generally be found in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and the Indian Himalayan countries without any difficulty.

¹ It was taught by Buddha and without questions about truth, but the human level of practice can be said to have developed in passed centuries in Tibet.

Moxa preparation

Tibetan physicians use only moxa cone in different sizes. It is quite simple to prepare. Cut the paper in 2 square inches and put some moxa wool in the centre of the paper. Roll the paper on each side like a piece of candy. Then put it in the palm of your hand and roll it between your two hands. It becomes like a candy when you are finished. Then cut it in the centre to get two cones. Each cone can be put on the points. This is called cone, or Tibetan traditional moxa.



The shortest moxibustion points are given on a chart, illustrated by the author with a short code name made for the students, easy to memorize, and to learn the practice. It is available in English and Italian.

The basic points are in three sections:

- 20 Back vertebrae points (BV)
- 9 Frontal points (FC, FA) and
- 41 *Zubtsug* points of body extremities.

Note: The drawn charts and text are available during the seminar.