

Homage to Masunaga

by Carola Beresford-Cooke



Carola Beresford-Cooke has been practising and studying Shiatsu since 1978; she sat next to Michael Rose at the beginning of her first Shiatsu workshop with Wataru Ohashi, and hasn't looked back. She was one of the founding members of the Shiatsu Society and of the Shiatsu College, and has written or co-written several books, including "Shiatsu Theory and Practice". She practises Shiatsu and Acupuncture in West Wales.

Let me ask you something; how, practically, do you perform a Shiatsu session? I am guessing here that, plus or minus a few individual variations, your form is as follows – do a Hara diagnosis and, on the basis of Kyo and Jitsu in the Hara, choose a couple of Meridians to treat; use a Yin, stationary hand ("mother" hand) to listen, support and guide while the Yang, active hand works along the Meridian; pay attention to the empty, weak or deficient areas in order that the tense, hard ones can relax. This, broadly speaking, is the form that at least 90% of practitioners in the UK follow, and this form was developed by Shizuto Masunaga. It is thanks to Masunaga that we use the familiar Hara diagnostic areas, the practice of the "mother" hand, the concept of Kyo and Jitsu and their interaction. Most of us, whether we think we are doing Zen Shiatsu or not, are using the practice which Masunaga introduced and which is known as Zen Shiatsu, after the title of his book published in the West thirty years ago.

Masunaga's work is the foundation for the developing practice of Shiatsu in the West, yet the importance of his work is poorly understood for the most part, and he is little credited. Let us look for a moment at the history of Shiatsu teaching in this country to understand why.

Although Shiatsu must have been practised by a few isolated individuals in the UK during the fifties and sixties (I know of only one) it was not until the Seventies that the spirit of the times encouraged its manifestation on a wider scale. I have books on my shelves that indicate what became available at that time – for example "The First Book of Do-In", published in California in 1971 (by the Happiness Press!). The enthusiasm for Macrobiotics that began to sweep through Europe and the West in the 60's and 70's engendered an equal enthusiasm for traditional Do-In and Shiatsu, practised as an adjunct to the Macrobiotic diet.

"Shiatzu" (with a z) by Yukiko Irwin (publ. 1976), is a guide to family treatment for the lay person. It shows lines of (unlabelled) points to be pressed with 20-pound or 15-pound pressure, one thumb on top of the other, with the pressure coming from the giver's shoulders

and back. This is pretty much standard Namikoshi style; the Namikoshi school (which Yukiko Irwin attended before she began to practice in America) is the only one which will get you an official certificate to practise in Japan, so the Namikoshi style predominates. Incidentally, if you check out Shiatsu in Wikipedia you will see the control which this school still exerts over the definitions of Shiatsu practice.

"Massage, the Oriental Method" by Katsusuke Serizawa, M.D., (publ. 1972), is a more scholarly tome, combining some elements of traditional Japanese massage (Amma) with some Chinese medical theory. Along with his descriptions of rubbing and tapping, Serizawa mentions using the weight of the whole body in pressing points and he also instructs us to press towards the centre of the receiver's body, showing an awareness of the importance of intention in Shiatsu practice.

Serizawa also mentions another avenue through which Shiatsu reached the West, that of the martial arts. Many Judo and Karate teachers included Shiatsu techniques for healing injuries sustained during training, but there is no written material to record their methods.

Shiatsu did not really take off in the West until the arrival of Wataru Ohashi. A fantastic teacher and performer, he made Shiatsu accessible to the droves of people who attended his workshops in Europe, where he arrived in the late 70's following the publication of his book "Do-it-Yourself Shiatsu". But his book, which we all bought, though easy to read, was nothing like as exciting as the style of Shiatsu we learned in his workshops. In fact, Ohashi was teaching the Zen Shiatsu style he had recently received from Masunaga while visiting Japan after writing his book. So the Zen Shiatsu style arrived in Europe well ahead of its originator.

Apart from the heady buzz of learning an "ancient healing art" from the exotic East, the appeal of the Shiatsu we were learning at that time came from the difference in emphasis which the Zen Shiatsu style offered; that of relaxation, the "mother" hand, attention to the

Kyo. These are first principles to us now but then they were utterly ground-breaking. No previous method had advocated these principles; we didn't know that, and just dived into the Zen technique we knew only as "Shiatsu" with gusto. Ohashi was a natural to propagate the style, since he rejoiced in the fluid dance of relaxed bodywork and was supremely able to communicate the concepts of Hara and "crawling" which are still usually the basics of every Shiatsu beginner's first lesson. The extent of his reverence for, and indebtedness to, Masunaga were not, however, widely known.

Masunaga had developed the practical aspect of Zen Shiatsu long before he perfected the theory, which he only finished just before he died. By that time we had gleaned our theory elsewhere, where we could. The Macrobiotic group found their theory within the Macrobiotic system, others found it in Five Element theory, popularised by a single, some say renegade, Acupuncture school, but instantly attractive because of its cosmic connections. In the 80's, as the graduates from the Chinese Acupuncture schools, only recently open to Westerners, began to return and disseminate their knowledge, TCM was added to the repertoire. The theory of Zen Shiatsu came in fourth, disadvantaged by its simplicity and hampered by the fact that the Zen Shiatsu technique worked brilliantly, no matter which theoretical model it was attached to. To labour a point, let me repeat that we are nearly all of us doing Zen Shiatsu, and the fact that we don't acknowledge the originator of the technique is because he never publicised or claimed it in this country. He was a modest man, and also quite ill when the moment to seize fame arrived. But perhaps we were not ready to understand the magnitude of his contribution, being mere beginners in the traditions of the 'Sons of Heaven'.

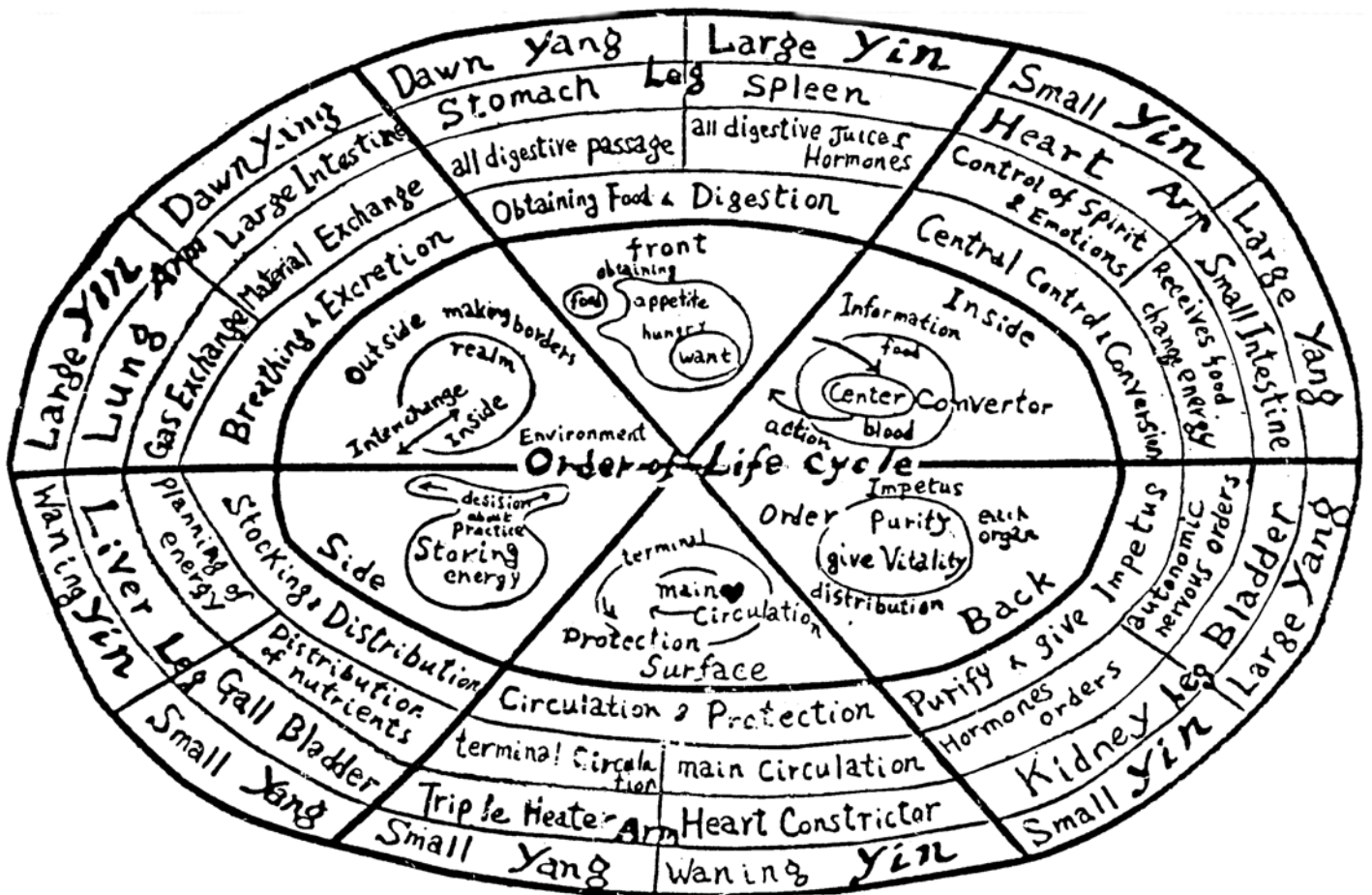
The great leap forward in the Zen Shiatsu technique was the introduction of the "mother" hand to counterbalance the working hand, and the corresponding theoretical innovation is the relationship of Kyo and Jitsu.

For the first time, the active commingling of Yin and Yang was brought out of the textbooks and put into dynamic practice. In Acupuncture the receiver's stores of Yin or Yang can be stimulated individually, by needle or moxa. In previous styles of Shiatsu, the healing mixing and blending of Yin and Yang was performed with the hands, but intuitively, without conscious awareness or teaching of how it was happening. Masunaga was the first philosopher of East Asian medicine to define in practice, as well as in theory, the dynamic connection of Yin (mother hand) and Yang (working hand). Side by side with this practical innovation came the new concept of seeking the "Kyo", often manifesting on the physical level as empty, weak, hollow, deficient, in counterbalance to the more obvious, active "Jitsu". This, too, had been conceptually familiar to Acupuncturists, who tonify Deficiency or sedate Excess in organs or Vital Substances as separate procedures. The innovation came in seeking and experiencing the Kyo in relation to the Jitsu, both on the Hara and within the Meridian. Once again, the mixing of Yin and Yang came off the printed page and into the experience of the giver of Shiatsu.

It has proved to be the key to unlocking and understanding a new world of experience of "energy". Through the conscious training of the two aspects of ourselves, the receptive and the active, as well as the seeking out of these principles in our receiver, we become more sensitive to the exchange and resonance occurring both within and between the receiver's field and our own. By "field" is meant the complex of the various fields already known to be produced in living tissue by electrical, electronic and magnetic activity, as well as those yet to be discovered or investigated (Oschman 2000). These three forms of activity depend, to simplify the case, on reactions between positive and negative charges; transposing the phenomenon back into the original Chinese, we could say they are produced by reactions between Yin and Yang. The Chinese philosophy of dual, opposite yet interdependent polarities does in fact, we now know, underpin the fabric of life. When we connect with the interaction

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**“Order of Life Cycle”
Masunaga’s theory
diagram**

between them in the process of bodywork we gain entry into the many-layered and intricate network of communication within the human system. In other words, using our two hands differently enables us to experience the movement of Ki with greater sensitivity.

Masunaga was a modern philosopher, a pragmatic man whose interest was in systems that work. Through Kyo and Jitsu and the ‘mother’ hand he found that the connecting of Yin to Yang does indeed increase the experience of Ki. His research into Meridian theory is equally practical in its conclusion. Studying the writings on Chinese medicine from earliest times through to the present day, and then linking his conclusions with what is currently known about human biological functions, he evolved a theoretical system of the Meridians and their functioning so simple that it can be written on a single sheet of paper, yet infinitely profound in its possible interpretations.

Simply put, his final conclusion in terms of Meridian location and function is “The Meridians are where they are because they do what they do”.

Masunaga’s hypothesis was that if Meridians are real, they must exist not only in humans but in other forms of life, and they must express themselves in the everyday functioning of those forms. He took each Meridian pair in the time-honoured order of the Chinese clock and experimented with positions which activated, stretched or otherwise emphasised that Meridian pair, noticing how the different positions affected consciousness. From this perspective he could re-define the classical functions of the Meridians, simplifying them into a basic movement of energy common to all life-forms, such as “which way to turn?” or “obtaining nourishment”. By simplifying the locations of the Meridians to “front” or “back” or “edges/borders” the movements of energy

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expressed in the Meridians became clear impulses which could form themselves in the simplest of body shapes, such as that of the one-celled amoeba. "The Life-Cycle of the Amoeba", at first glance almost too simple to be interesting, is in fact a sophisticated explanation of the relationship between consciousness and form from the single cell upwards. The movements of energy it describes can take place in terms of physical function – individual cells within the body must obtain nourishment, adapt to danger etc. – through the emotions and into the subtlest vibrations of the human field, which an amoeba resembles.

Masunaga's extended Meridians are the subject of much debate. Are they versions of the 6 Divisions? Substantially, yes. Are they the deep pathways and connecting Meridians? Often, yes. Clearly, he was also familiar with the Meridians of the Han dynasty figurine found in a tomb at MianYang, from an era before Acupuncture confined itself to points. But it is not worth arguing the toss, for the Japanese approach to Meridians and points is far more subjective than that of the Chinese; "find it by feeling" seems to be the approach. It is what the Meridians express, how they resonate in the human field, that is Masunaga's focus, and he followed that resonance throughout the receiver's body by the pathways that presented themselves to his touch.

Masunaga's theory is the first to be exclusively Meridian-related, the first to apply exclusively to Shiatsu. Repetition, over- veneration of tradition and the gradual narrowing of cultural perspective had diluted the original expanded vision of Taoist energy medicine, whose practitioners described the experience of Ki in Meridians and Tsubos in phrases such as this from the Ling Shu "the celestial pivots are in the cavities; clear, quiet yet subtle, the coming can not be met with and the goings can not be followed." Masunaga forged a Shiatsu style whose theory, inseparable from its practice, re-animates this tradition and renders it compatible with Western scientific knowledge. In this thirtieth anniversary year since his name first reached the West, he deserves to be remembered and honoured.

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