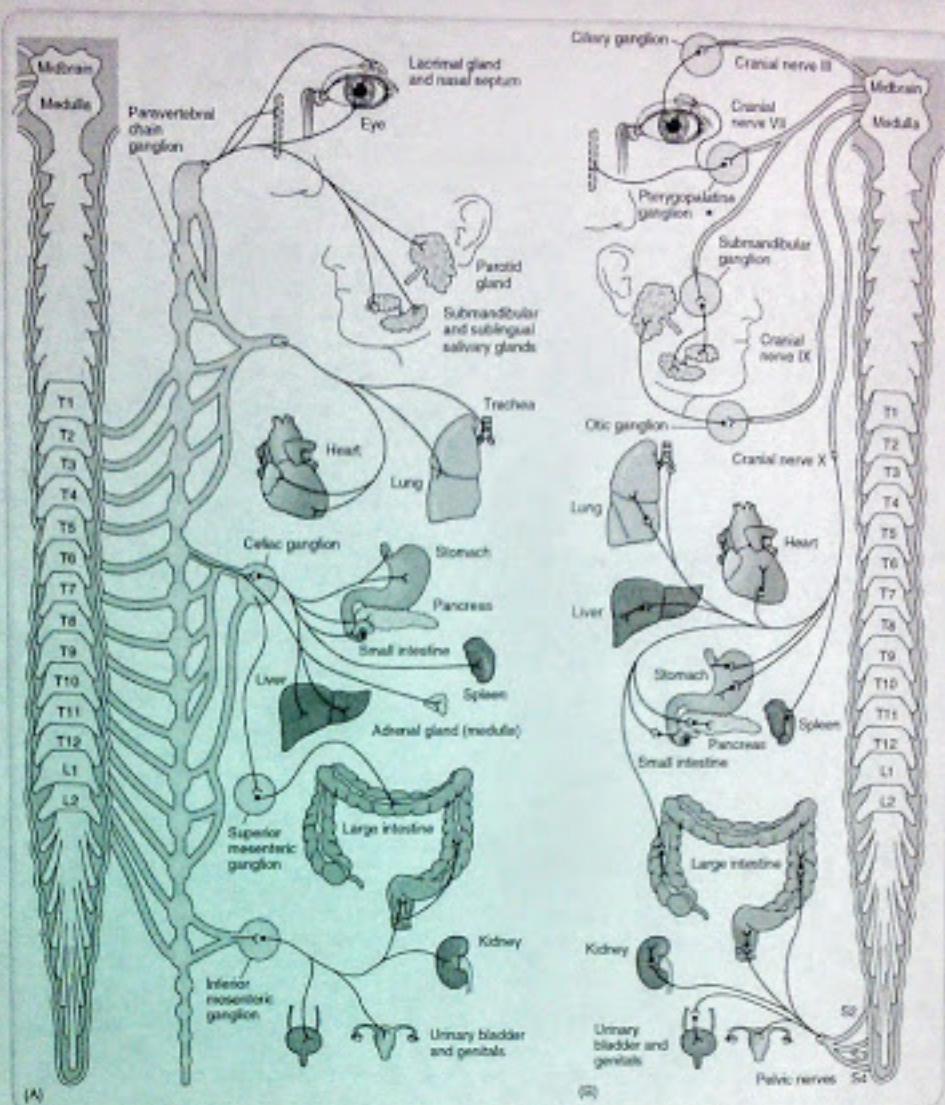


## Back Diagnosis and Theory

by Kokubo Junzo

Acupuncturists generally do not use modern medical equipment or gadgets for diagnosis. We still try to rely on our senses and follow diagnostic interpretations in traditional Chinese medical textbooks (obviously acupuncturists today are also trained in modern, Western, science-based medicine and take advantage of opportunities for ever more accurate diagnosis and effective treatment).

In TCM, diagnosis is grouped into four major categories: (1) Observation, (2) Listening (includes smelling), (3) Questioning, (4) Palpation. Each category includes myriad diagnostic techniques and each therapist adopts and emphasizes certain techniques depending on their training and preference. Generally speaking, Chinese acupuncturists focus on pulse and tongue diagnosis, while Japanese acupuncturists emphasize palpation of the skin and muscles with the palm and fingers. The latter includes the detection of abnormalities in skin temperature, appearance (such as shininess), texture (stiffness or sluggishness, minute lumps or knots), and responses (such as tenderness in the muscles upon finger pressure, etc). These abnormal signs can be vital diagnostic clues for the patient's overall health condition as well as the primary treatment points for acupuncture and moxibustion.



### Theoretical Background

In traditional acupuncture, there are major points called Bo (募) (energy collecting) points on the abdomen and Yu (俞) (energy entering) points on the back. These represent specific organs and are used for both diagnosis and treatment of internal organs. More specifically, disorders of specific internal organs are reflected in their corresponding BO and YU points, mainly as tenderness. The detection of tenderness at these points can help you diagnose the conditions of specific organs, and at the same time, treatment of these tender points with acupuncture and moxibustion can help heal disorders of specific internal organs.

Modern physiology also has an explanation for this. Functional or organic disorders of the viscera manifest abnormal signs on the abdomen and the back via the autonomic nervous system and the spinal nerves. These abnormal signs are mainly tenderness, tension or stiffness of the muscles. This phenomenon is called the "viscera-cutaneous reflex." An especially tender spot or zone usually corresponds to a specific internal organ, and therefore, by detecting it one can guess which internal

organ is affected. As points representing specific organs, almost all Bo Points on the abdomen and Yu Points on the back correspond to the location of such tender spots. Physical stimulation of these points with acupuncture and moxibustion can render healing effects on the affected viscera via the autonomic nervous system and spinal nerves. This is called the "cutaneous-viscera reflex."

Abnormal signs of tenderness or stiffness on the body surface caused by the viscera-cutaneous reflex tend to manifest more clearly on the back than on the abdomen. More specifically, those abnormal signs on the abdomen are mostly related to disorders of the digestive system. However, signs on the back can reflect not only disorders of the digestive system but the respiratory organs, heart, kidney, reproductive organs, etc.

There is also an explanation for this. The autonomic nervous system, consisting of the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems, coordinate with the endocrine system to control and maintain the overall internal functions of the body. The sympathetic nervous system forms a very complex network of connections with corresponding spinal

The pursuit and practice of palpation diagnosis by Japanese acupuncturists for the past millennium culminated in what is known as Hara (abdomen) Diagnosis developed and refined by Todo Yoshimasu (1702-1773) during the Tokugawa Shogunate period. And in 1951, Dr. Kobei Akabane invented intracutaneous or dermal needles – extremely short and fine needles (30mm long and 0.10mm in diameter) that are embedded horizontally under the skin and held fast with adhesive tape. The needles are placed mainly on points that respond with pressure pain and serve to relieve pain and heal various ailments.

My Japanese master Dr. Kiyotaka Omura fully utilized manual diagnostic techniques of both traditional Oriental medicine and modern medicine like the majority of current Japanese acupuncturists do. However, he was a real expert in palpation diagnosis of the back. While working as his assistant for 10 years, I learned his techniques and the background theory thoroughly and I have been using this as my favorite diagnostic method ever since.