



American  
Organization for  
Bodywork  
Therapies of  
Asia

## The 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Shiatsu

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2019 has been an interesting year for me in my own evolution. I attended my 50th high school reunion and now, as Director of Education for AOBTA®, I need to write an article explaining why this marks the 100th anniversary for the term Shiatsu. "Easy enough," I thought when I volunteered to do this — since I knew I already had the most pertinent information either posted on my own website or in the Long Definitions that the AOBTA® continues to hold from all of our various Forms.

Having been the Founding (and only) President of the American Shiatsu Association, I have been privy to countless hours of discussion about the origins, history, and meaning of the word Shiatsu — in fact, most of it being discussed by the foremost experts and teachers of the subject as we pounded out a common identity for what eventually became the American Oriental Bodywork Therapy Association. Since then we have changed the name of our umbrella organization in order to eliminate the word Oriental all together, deeming it to be politically incorrect. I am reminded now, however, that I cannot write very much about the subject of how we came to recognize and know what Shiatsu is without being able to use the word Oriental in order to explain it.

Originally the word Oriental was considered very politically correct because it embraced all the different practices whose representatives had come together to form one organization describing Oriental Medical Theory as its common base. We agreed that Traditional Chinese Medical Theory was what we were describing in terms of our 100 hours of common theory, and this continues to describe the root for all our work. However, we included work from many different countries who all had their own variations and evolution of how that manual therapy was understood and applied. Of these, many were not happy with referencing the work as "Chinese." So instead, we all agreed to use the term "Oriental" in order to describe the general theory of our manual applications. These distinct practices had arrived here in the U.S. from several different countries in East Asia. Early on, Japan and Shiatsu were undoubtedly the most well-known and widespread among them.

On the east coast of the U.S., where the American Shiatsu Association had originated, the word Shiatsu was generally used to describe what we now think of as Asian Bodywork Therapy. On the west coast, the word acupressure was similarly used to describe anything that one thinks of as manual therapy using Oriental Medicine's meridians and points. The problems and arguments which we had about the definition of Shiatsu can be addressed in a future article about the origins of the AOBTA® (next

year as we begin to celebrate our own 30th anniversary). But the ensuing semantics and political evolution of our lexicon are not what I want us to get distracted by here. I just need to explain the vocabulary being used as I describe the birth and significance of Shiatsu to us practitioners, recipients, and fans as we unpack why this past year of 2019 marked its 100th anniversary.

The following is pulled directly from my own website where I describe a History of Shiatsu and offer a tribute to Toshiko Phipps, one of the AOBTA®'s founding members and foremost authorities on Shiatsu. This article was written by Toshiko Phipps for the first newsletter of the American Shiatsu Association (originally published in August 1986).

### **The Development of Oriental Medicine in Japan**

*by Toshiko Phipps*

Chinese Medicine came to Japan in the 6th century A.D. However, it was the physical therapies that prevailed because in the voyage from China most herbal materials would spoil. Over time the Chinese physical methods integrated with ancient Japanese techniques called Amma, Hari and Kyu.

Chinese medicine reached the height of its popularity during the time of the brilliant Emperor Meiji. At the end of this Edo period (1868 – 1911) contact with the West, particularly Holland and Germany, led to the introduction of Western medicine along with Western massage.

By 1925, a combined technique – the association of Anma (a form of kneading manipulation and pressure), Chinese acupressure (using meridian energy lines) and Western-style massage was called Shiatsu.

The following long excerpt is from the book *Bodywork Shiatsu* (Healing Arts Press 1997), by Carl Dubitsky. Carl was a friend of mine whose early passing was a great loss to our entire field. He was an academic and extremely enthusiastic student of Shiatsu! Very proud of having studied with both Dr. DoAnn Kaneko and Toshiko Phipps, Carl always did a great job of citing his resources. In reviewing my own resources, I realize that I only need to defer to the work which Carl has already done on this subject. I highly recommend his book for a lot more information and interesting details! Carl explained that:

“There has been a fair amount of bickering over who originated the term Shiatsu therapy. In 1965 Okura Sadakatsu wrote a series of articles entitled ‘Nippon No Ryo Jutsu’ (Healing Therapies of Japan) for the newspaper Zen Ryo Shinbum. He thoroughly researched the origins of Shiatsu therapy and reported that Tamai Tempaku was clearly the founder of the Shiatsu school of bodywork. (p 7).

In 1919 Tamai Tempaku published a book entitled Shiatsu Ho (Finger-pressure therapy). Tamai had studied and practiced koho anma for many years and had studied the Chinese acupoint system. He specialized in ampuku, abdominal massage, which had originally come from China but was further developed and extensively practiced in Japan. He studied the textbook Ampuku Zukai (Diagrams of hara treatment) by Ota Heisai, which became the standard text for Oriental abdominal therapy [Carl notes: According to Masunaga Sensei, this work was the prototype for the development of shiatsu]. Tamai practiced and taught do-yin (dao-yin), Oriental breathing practices and physical exercises to circulate vital energy and help to integrate the bodymind. He also thoroughly studied Western anatomy and physiology and European massage.

Although Tamai had previously published a book, Shiatsu Ryoho (Finger pressure way of healing) in 1915, the attention of the therapeutic bodywork community did not focus on his work until Shiatsu Ho was released. This book described a system that integrated koho anma, ampuku, acupoint therapy, do-in, and Western anatomy and physiology. In it Tamai described treatments for a variety of Western ailments using traditional Oriental bodywork techniques, and he integrated traditional spiritual wisdom with his modern medicine. In the preface he wrote:

‘People must have high spiritual development to do shiatsu, because healing disease is not only by finger pressure. You have to have spiritual power to do healing by hand.’ (p.5)

In his notes Carl explained that "Toshiko Phipps translated this passage for me from a manuscript in her possession."