Wang Weiyi, acupuncture expert of the Song Dynasty

Wang Weiyi, also known as Wang Weide (987–1067), a renowned acupuncture expert lived in the Song Dynasty (960–1279). As he was skilled in healing art and acupuncture, he served as an imperial physician for two emperors.

In 1027 at the emperor’s order he forged two man-sized acupuncture bronze figure models, named Tian Shen Bronze Figure. It was in the shape of an upstanding young man about 170 cm tall with hair wrapped in a piece of cloth, looking smart and handsome. It was nude above the waist, covered with pelvic girdle and with arms downward, hands facing forward. The bronze figure model was made of two parts—the front and back of the body, on which 365 acupoints were marked at a depth of 0.4 cm together with the travelling course of the body meridians. Each acupoint was arranged according to the actual proportion of the human body. Besides, the internal organs and skeleton made of wood were put inside the body. Their shape and size were nearly the same as the real ones. The outer layer was disassembled and the limb joints were movable.

What on earth is it for? It is said in Qidong Yeyu (Popular Report) by Zhou Mi of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279) that the bronze figure was used as an acupuncture examination aid in selection of physicians. Before examination, it was covered with wax to seal the acupoints and the inside overflowed with water (or mercury). If the examinee inserted the needle correctly into the acupoint according to the chief examiner’s instruction, water or mercury would flow out. Otherwise needles would not get in. The two models were deemed to be the national treasure by the imperial court or singularity by neighbouring countries. One was placed in the Imperial Academy of Medicine, and the other was kept in a big temple in Kaifeng, Henan province, which attracted a large number of pilgrims. The forging of the acupuncture bronze figure model in the Song Dynasty promoted the development of the Chinese medical history and it was regarded the forerunner of teaching aid, which was changed from paper model into visual three-dimensional apparatus. Since then acupuncture teaching and therapeutic effect were greatly improved.

Wang was not only a great master who designed and forged the man-sized bronze figure model, but also an outstanding acupuncturist. At that time, acupuncture therapy was quite popular, but people had different arguments. Acupuncturists usually gave treatment based on their own understanding of the ancient medical literature and experience. In order to change such a situation, he consulted a large number of medical classics and gathered all the strength of acupuncture writings in past dynasties in combination with his own clinical experience, in 1029 Wang finally compiled Tongren Shuxue Zhenjiu Tujing (Bronze Figure of Meridians and Acupoints) in 3 volumes, in which 657 acupoints were recorded. The book described the travelling course of meridians, acupoint location, needling depth, number of moxa cones used and indications. The book with precise stylistic rules and layout also contained illustrations of the meridians in the front, back and lateral sides of the body. It gave a detailed explanation of the meridian theory and made an overall summary of the experience in acupuncture therapy before the Song Dynasty.

For further popularization of acupuncture therapy at the government order Wang assumed the responsibility for engraving his acupuncture book on tablets in the big temple in Kaifeng in 1030, known as the "Acupuncture Stone Wall". The acupuncture bronze figure model, Bronze Figure of Meridians and Acupoints and Acupuncture Stone Wall are Wang’s three major contributions to Chinese acupuncture. Wang deserves people’s reverence, and we will never forget his achievements.
References

1. Wang WY. *Bronze Figure of Meridians and Acupoints*. Beijing, China: People’s Press; 1956:5 [Chinese].