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Hot Property: Moxa in Germany

by Ton van Huffelen

Question

Before we can begin our work as acupuncturists, there are a number of things we must first take care of. These include the tools and materials we work with. Henning Heisse from Berlin is the owner of the web shop DocSave, which specializes in the supply of acupuncture materials and moxa. Henning started his company in 2005 and perhaps it is not altogether a coincidence that his last name Heisse (or rather heiße) means "hot" in German. He now visits acupuncture congresses all over Europe on a regular basis and was invited to the EBTA-sponsored workshop in The Hague this September. We spoke to Henning to find out how it was that he got into the business of selling needles and moxa.

The reply: From Henning Heisse

While I was studying Business Administration in Cologne, I spent some time in Hong Kong in 1998. I have always had a passion for foreign culture. After my stay there this passion turned into a determination to link my future profession with China. Although I was fascinated by the opportunities China seemed to offer to entrepreneurs, it was seven years before I found a way to fulfil my ambition. And in the end I have to admit it all happened by chance. I had arranged to visit Shanghai in 2005 to look for office space, when a friend of mine came up with an unusual question. He asked me to bring back some acupuncture needles from China. I was a bit surprised, but promised to look around.

After returning to Germany the project I was working on went up in smoke, leaving me at loose ends. What was I going to do? I decided to take a closer look at the acupuncture needle market in Germany. What I discovered was a pricing system that was hard to justify and suppliers who looked none too professional. I thought I could do better. I looked for professional manufacturers in China, who could meet international medical standards. They do exist, contrary to some of the statements put out by non-Chinese manufacturers. And they are getting better every year, just like in any other industry.

A Burning Question

My wife, Dagmar Baust, was already working in marketing. Together we set up our website www.docsave.com, and started importing needles direct from China and selling them to customers over the internet. And then, well, things have to grow, you know. I got more and more involved in acupuncture. I discovered that the Chinese character for acupuncture 鍼灸 is actually made up of two parts. The first part has to do with needling, and the second part with fire, with the burning of mugwort, and hence moxibustion. That was new to me.

I thought it was the right time to open up the market in Europe to Chinese needles, but when I talked with acupuncturists I had the feeling that moxibustion hadn't been discovered yet. And there were even fewer companies in Europe selling moxa. When I looked around for information about moxa on the internet my attention was drawn to China, South Korea, and Japan. I hired a translator and together we searched the web for suitable addresses. We found Kobayashi Rouho in Japan and we contacted them.

Pampanini

Kobayashi Rouho is a family company in a small village in the Shiga prefecture at the foot of Mount Ibuki. The family has been making moxa since 1780. It is of very high quality. Seven generations of knowledge: it's incredible.

Our word moxa comes from the Japanese *mogusa*, which means the punk you get, from a process of cultivation of dried *artemisia* leaves. *Artemisia* is a plant from a botanical family with 240 species. In Japan *artemisia princeps pampanini* is used for the processing of moxa. It is named after the botanist Renato Pampanini (1875-1849) who discovered this species. In Europe we have *artemisia vulgaris*. On the way to the workshop this morning I even saw it growing between the tram rails. But it is not possible to use *artemisia vulgaris* for a good quality moxa punk.

I visited Kobayashi Rouho in March 2007. I found it very interesting to see their production process. The leaves of the mugwort are harvested between May and July, before the plants grow too big. The leaves are sun-dried and then stored until winter in a dark room. Further processing takes place in midwinter when it is extremely cold. The mugwort is re-hydrated, this time by warming it for 24 hours over a charcoal fire. After that, the leaves are untangled and cut. The rest of the process involves refining the moxa by grinding it in different stone mortars and then riddling it. Kobayashi Rouho differentiates up to six qualities. The moxa you use

for your *okyu* is of the finest quality. It is ground in a very fine Toumi riddle. Only two to three percent of the original leaves are in the *Tenkyuyo Miyabi*.

Making Contacts

In Berlin I got to know one of your Toyohari colleagues, Sascha Gröbe. He organised the EBTA-sponsored workshop in 2008 and invited me to attend. Later, together with Sascha we made instruction videos about moxibustion. They are on our website. I even heard that Dutch acupuncturists are referring patients to it, so they can see how to make their *okyu* at home.

With you Toyohari practitioners, a lot of questions have come up over time about Japanese needles, teishins, and shonishin instruments. I was able to import some material from Japan, and some material, like the Manaka hammers, are made for me here in Germany. But there has always been a strong demand for needles from Maeda. I faxed them: no reaction. I emailed them: no reaction. In the end it was at the intervention of the Kobayashi family that I was finally able to get in contact with Maeda. Things in Japan are done on the basis of trust, you know. So now at long last I am able to offer the Maeda needles here at this EBTA workshop.

And to come back to your original question, that's how I got into selling needles and moxa!

Ton van Huffelen (1965) specialises in Toyohari and has had a practice since 2001 in Groningen, The Netherlands. He is President of the Dutch Toyohari Association (Nederlandse Toyohari Vereniging).