

# Koshi Balancing - A Method of Structural Alignment and Therapy

by Jeffrey Dann

In this second essay, I introduce the Japanese cultural body-mind concept of the *koshi* - the lumbar-pelvic center and connect this to notions of structural alignment derived from the therapeutic systems of So Tai Ho, Seitai Ho and Seitai Shinpo. In this Part 2, I will discuss the concept of *koshi* and relate it to its core anatomy and Japanese traditional medicine.

In Part 3 we will integrate this anatomical structural view of the *koshi* with the Channel energetics of acupuncture emphasizing the crucial relationship of the Dai Mo (Belt) extraordinary meridian to the Gall Bladder Channel, Sineu Channels, Liver Blood, and Shaoyang (*sho yo*) energetics.

## I.Koshi - Japanese Cultural Body Mind Concept

Cultures create and express different maps of internal and external reality. We practitioners of Oriental Medicine understand this conceptually and somatically when we deal with Qi, Blood, Yin and Yang, concepts that have little definition in Western popular or medical culture, but which we have learned to perceive, palpate, and treat.

Japanese medicine holds a pervasive interest in structural balance, symmetry, and the body-mind dynamics between structure and function.

This interest stems in part from the Japanese martial arts tradition where the understanding between proper form and movement, power and effectiveness is highly developed. In martial arts (*budo*) education a person's form or physical posture clearly reveals their "spirit" and intention. Thus the outer proper form (*shisei - omote*) reveals the nature of the inner spirit (*kokoro - ura*). Careful somatic instruction is paid to the spirit, the center of balance, and to outer form.

For Japanese culture, these concepts of outer form, power, and body center involve two uniquely Japanese body-mind concepts. The first now well known to the Western world, is that of "*hara*" or abdomen. Many authors have dealt with this term in the cultural literature on Japan. It is reinforced in the Asian medical tradition by the concept of dan-tien (*tanden*) and the acupoint qihai (*kikai*) CV-6, Sea of Energy.

Less well known to the non-Japanese world, however, is the concept of *koshi* (*yao* in

Chinese), which has no clear reference in English and has been variously translated as hips, waist, low back or buttocks.

*Koshi* represents the locus of physical strength and movement, which encompasses the thighs and lumbar-sacral region. All Japanese martial arts and especially the ancient wrestling art of Sumo are concerned with "moving from the *koshi*" as the locus



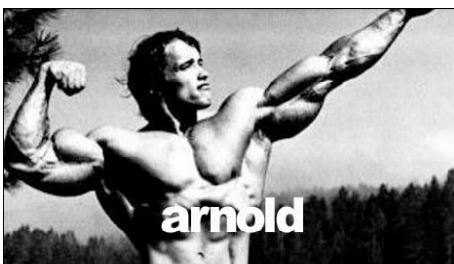
of strength and adaptability.

I have been unable to find a good explanation of the etymological origins of the character for *koshi*. We see the body radical on the left.

On the right is West above woman. Western woman? Swaying hips, central Asian wrestling and belly dance movements? Perhaps one of the sensei in Japan can come up with an answer to the origins of this *kanji*.

The translator of this article, Kanazawa Shinjiro, points out that the two sub characters on the right side of the *kanji*, also known as *kaname*, means "vital pivot", indicating an archaic understanding of the lumbar-sacral area as the vital pivot of the body. It still has not been explained to me how those two sub characters, west and woman, came to represent the concept of "vital pivot".

The image of the strong man in the West has the seat of power located quite differently from the Japanese body-mind map. Arnold Schwarzenegger is the epitome of



Strong Men



Yokozuna

the Western body strength - small tight narrow waist with excessively developed upper

thoracic musculature of the exterior muscles of display - the trapezius, biceps, deltoids, and latissimus dorsi.

The Oriental body map locates the center of power much lower, not in the chest and arms but in the belly, the lumbar-pelvic zone, and emphasizes the belly - the *hara*

Even a comparison of the two archetypal spiritual representatives of East and West - the Buddha and the Christ- display the different valuation and mapping of the central region of the abdomen.



Hotei

Christ

Although many representations of the Buddha are not full bellied, it is common to see large bellied representations such as Hotei, one of the Seven Dieties of Good Fortune . We see a similar appreciation of the round belly in the representation of the Bodhidharma, the 28th patriarch or successor to Buddha according to Zen (or Chinese Ch'an) Buddhism. This is the Daruma doll and the Japanese saying "*Nanakorobi yaoki, jinsei wa kore kara da*" translates as "To fall seven times, to rise eight times, life starts from now." Thus, Daruma teaches us to be dedicated and persistent, to rise no matter how many times we stumble.



Daruma

The positive idea of the big belly is also seen in the Japanese expression, "*hara o dekita*", which literally means to have completed or finished the belly. It is a mark of the accomplished and mature individual. I can remember when in my thirties and training in kendo at the Mito Tobukan, the chief of police who saw my skinny frame, said to me, "don't worry, keep training and you will develop a full hara". Whereas in English, we say a person is "big hearted", the Japanese say he is "big bellied" (*hara ga hiroi*).

Koshi is a concept widely appreciated in ev-

everyday Japanese culture, whether assessing sports or even people's behavior in general. In Sumo, the public is well aware of the role of *koshi* in the winning and losing of matches. Power batting in baseball, and by extension, all Western sports in Japan, has incorporated the concept of *koshi* in practice and assessment. We also see the appreciation of *koshi* in dance movement.

Whatever the Japanese art, instruction always trains the person to keep the *ki* in the *hara* and movement from the *koshi*.

*Koshi* is used in many everyday linguistic expressions.

The term "*koshi*" has a clear anatomical reference as in "my back hurts - *koshi ga itai*". But, like *hara* psycho-emotional states are also reflected in the linguistic usages of *koshi*.

"To put *koshi* into..." (*koshi o ireru*) means to become earnest.

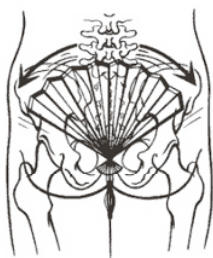
To have a strong *koshi* means one is strong willed whereas a person with a weak *koshi* (*Yowa goshi*) lacks determination. Or is weak-kneed.

To insult a person, telling him he has no hips (*koshinuke*) is to tell them they are gutless or spineless.

To make something one's own is expressed at attaching your *koshi* to it, *koshi ni tsukeru*.

In the exacting code of bowing (*rei*) in Japanese social etiquette, a haughty arrogant person has a high *koshi* while humility is expressed by having a low *koshi*.

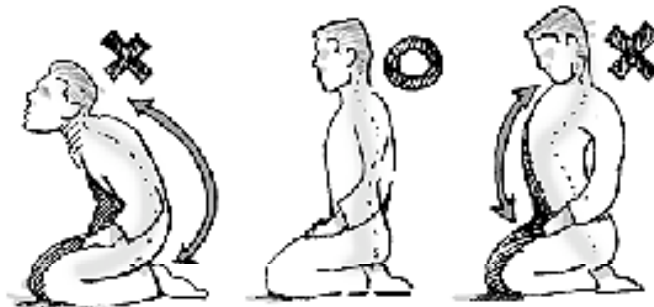
The linguistic usage of *koshi* has migrated from its anatomical locus to include such concepts as "the central point of a thing"- its foundation or base as in debating. It can also refer to that part of a carpenter's tool that is grasped by the hand for leverage, and it can refer to the "turning point" in the classical poetic structure of the *waka*.



In the body-mind construct of Japanese culture we might understand *Hara* both as immovable stability (the Yang force within the Yin abdomen) the visceral center that holds the body-mind focused; and *Koshi* as the power vector of the structural musculo-skeletal center (the Yin structure within the Yang posterior), that puts driving power, and rotational adaptability into movement.

**Japanese structural alignment therapies**

The Japanese have a highly developed concept of musculoskeletal postural alignment that has the *koshi* as its foundation. This is also seen in the many formal situations utilizing the traditional aligned sitting posture, *seiza* ("correct sitting"). The ability to maintain formal posture, it is believed, integrates mind and breath and is stable and centered. Considerable somatic educa-



*Seiza*

tion in all forms of traditional Japanese arts addresses learning correct *seiza* as sitting "with *koshi*".

In the traditional medical techniques of Japan, then, attention to postural symmetry and correction of patterns of distortion is highly developed. I have been significantly influenced by three Japanese therapeutic systems. First is that of Sei Tai Ho, a modern form of manual medicine that corrects asymmetrical spinal distortions through exercise, stretching, and chiropractic-like manipulation. My kendo instructor, Miyata Tomei of the Mito Tobukan, taught this basic form of Japanese bodywork to me.

Another structurally focused system is that of So Tai Ho, developed by medical doctor Hashimoto Keizo. Hashimoto was interested in chronic muscle and movement patterns that created distortions in the skeletal alignment. So Tai Ho uses gentle resistive range of motion guidance to unwind key structural and movement distortion. I have learned So Tai Ho from Peter Thompson, originally in 1980, and later on repeated training with Sorimachi Dai-ichi sensei's seminars starting from 1987. Sorimachi's Seitai Shinpo or structural acupuncture incorporated many of Hashimoto's structural ideas, and he developed a four pattern diagnostic system of *koshi* misalignment and a deep dorsal needle protocol for relieving these distortions in the lumbar-sacro-iliac *koshi* region.

**II. Anatomy of Koshi**

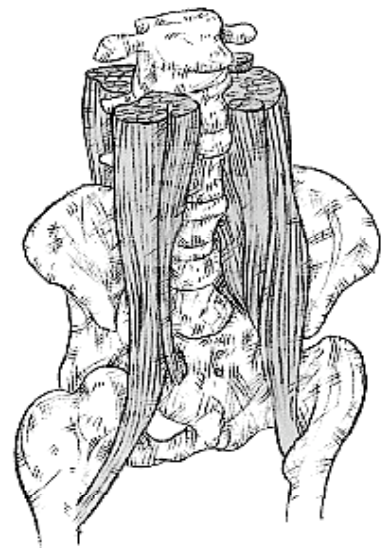
I would now like to look at the actual anatomical structures that define the *koshi*. The

power and stability of the lumbar-sacral *koshi* is best understood as the balanced muscular-tendinous relationship of anterior, posterior, and lateral interconnections based on tensegrity of the dynamic body.

The sacrum is the key stone arch in upright bipedal structure that allows power and momentum to be translated through the sacroiliac joints. It acts as the fulcrum for engaging all movements involving both the upper and lower extremities.

The psoas muscle together with the erector spinae provide the central core of spinal stability. However, the psoas is the direct central link integrating the posterior lumbar

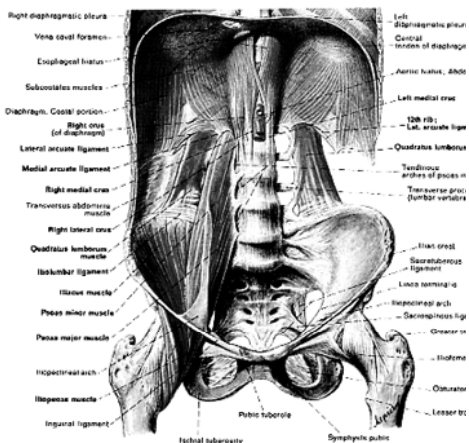
spine with the pelvis (ileo-psoas) and the lower extremities as it attaches to the anterior lesser trochanter on the medial femur.



*Psoas-erectors, psoas, ilio-psoas*

The *Koshi* is most directly associated with the Dai Mai Belt channel. Of the anatomical structures that integrate and stabilize the lumbar pelvic zone the key muscles are the ilio-psoas and the transverse abdominus. Core posterior stability is reinforced by the erector spinae and lumbar dorsal fascia and anteriorly by the ilio-psoas.

The most accessible superficial points at the Dai Mai are along the ilio-psoas and the transverse abdominus.



Deep Koshi Structure

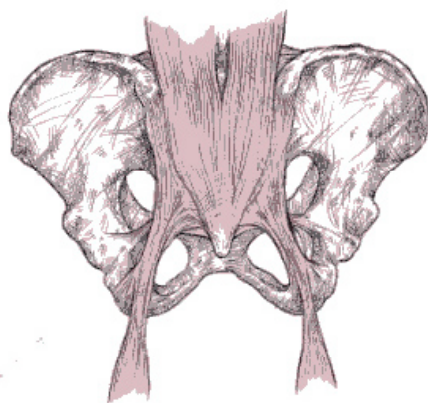
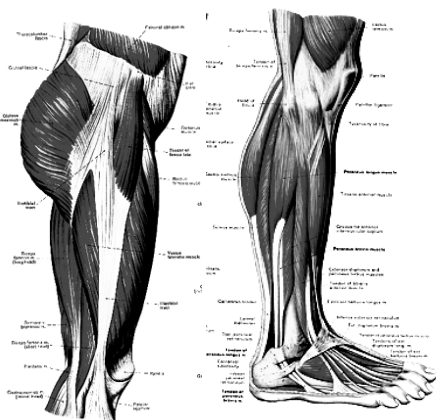


Fig. 3.17 With a knife, it is possible to isolate the sacrotuberous ligament as a separate structure. In life, though, it is connected both up to the sacral base and the anular space and down to the lesser femoral.

Sacro-iliac Ligaments

When we look at the anatomical pathway of the Gall Bladder Channel we see large sheets of superficial connective tissue and large fascial connective tissue anchoring points.



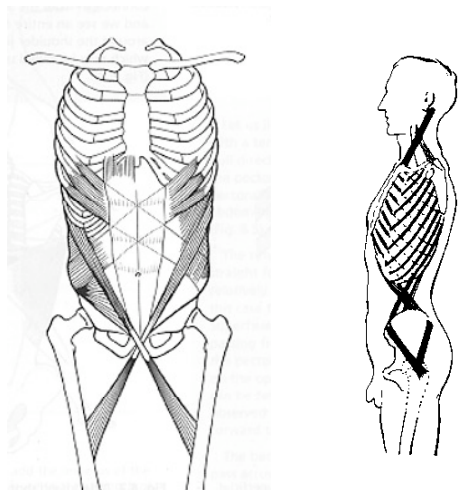
Anatomical Pathway of the Gall Bladder Channel

We take special note of the psoas, the only muscle that directly integrates the diaphragm, the thoraco-lumbar spine to the pelvis, and to the proximal femur of the lower extremities. Thus the psoas connects front

and back as well as interior and exterior. The stability of the lumbar area is strongly reinforced by the binding action of the transverse abdominus, holding the front and broadly investing into the dorsal lumbar fascia.

The central tensegrity<sup>1</sup> of the torso is seen in the following illustration, which notes the significance of the oblique internal and external abdominals and the quadratus lumborum. Further superior integration is established by the diaphragm which has a common lumbar tendon attachment with the psoas.

Below, stabilization is provided by the “deep



gluteal rotators” that include the piriformis, obturator, gemellus, as well as the gluteus minimus and gluteus medius. They transfer driving power from the sacro-iliac joint outward to the legs.

In the next issue of *NAJOM*, I will deal with the anatomy of the Koshi and relate it to channel energetics of the Dai Mai, Gall Bladder, Liver Blood, Shao Yang Sinew Channel, and Shao Yang level energetics.

**Note:**

1. ‘Tensegrity’ describes a structural-relationship principle in which structural shape is guaranteed by the finitely closed, comprehensively continuous, tensional behaviors of the system (muscle-tendon groups) and not by the discontinuous and exclusively local compressional member behaviors (skeletal bones). Tensegrity provides the ability to yield increasingly without ultimately breaking or coming asunder.

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