

Rolfing® SI in Japan

The Development of a Region Seen Through the Lens of Education

By Hiroyoshi Tahata, Certified Advanced Rolfer™, Rolf Movement® Instructor

Editor's note: Rolfers who trained in their own language in an established region – for example, at the Rolf Institute® of Structural Integration (RISI) in Boulder, Colorado – perhaps can't quite fathom the additional effort many of their colleagues went through to learn the profession, whether facing the challenges of a language barrier or having to organize their own trainings. Many Rolfers practice alone here and there around the globe, but to galvanize a region to the extent that the profession is established and grows takes a massive homegrown effort and great dedication, as illustrated in this account of the development of our profession in Japan.

The Early Years

Before local Rolfing Structural Integration (SI) trainings were held in Japan in the early 2000s, there were only a few Rolfers practicing in Japan. Yoshitaka Koda was the first Japanese national certified as a Rolfer, practicing since 1987. He and New Zealander Christine Faris, practicing since 1990, were the primary Rolfers inspiring the first wave of Japanese nationals to seek Rolfing training. Like Koda and Faris, this group had to go abroad for their training, sometimes paying for an interpreter to accompany them. With this hindrance, it was slow growth for the Rolfing profession in Japan, with the number of Japanese Rolfers increasing by one in 1996, one in 1997, one in 1998, and two in 2000.

The First Basic Training

During my Unit III class in Boulder in 1998, Jonathan Martine, the assistant instructor, talked to me about the possibility of a Rolfing training in Japan – the first ever in Asia. We imagined holding a Unit I within five years. The next year, Noboru Yasuda and Naomi Nakamura, inspired by their experience of Rolfing sessions, asked me to coordinate a training in Tokyo. Encouraged by their passion to become Rolfers, we joined forces to organize the class; I liaised with RISI as class coordinator and assistant instructor, while they were the information liaison for students and the bookkeepers. Finally, in 2001, a group of highly motivated people gathered for Unit I, with Martine and John Schewe delighted to come and teach in Tokyo. Ultimately, the cooperation of many people led to the achievement of this first step.

Next, Carol Agneessens, who was one of my Rolf Movement instructors, came to teach Unit II. I personally think her presence at this training planted the seeds for the first Rolf Movement training in Japan in 2005. Through Units II and III, the students themselves did the hard work of coordination and accounting.

This first training was completed in 2002, with twelve Rolfers being certified. Besides the central support that came from the steady practice of several Rolfers, I see a few key factors that helped to prepare the ground for the first Rolfing training in Japan:

- An accumulation of potential students – the people whose own Rolfing experience was meaningful to the extent that they wanted to change their lives and careers.
- Opportunities to learn and experience touch from Rolfers, which motivated individuals to become Rolfers. These opportunities included cranial workshops with Jim Asher, and workshops with Liz Gaggini in the 1990s.
- More opportunities to have Rolfing sessions using gentle interventions influenced by Somatic Experiencing® (and also Rolf Movement sessions, discussed next), as many Japanese prefer a non-invasive sensitive approach.
- The availability for Rolf Movement sessions as Japan had two resident Rolf Movement practitioners starting in 1999. Besides benefitting clients, this allowed potential students to fulfill the Rolfing training prerequisites.

Developing the Infrastructure for Ongoing Training

After this first endeavor, we had a process in place for our region to grow with local trainings. Again, a Rolfing client motivated to become a Rolfer stepped forward to provide the impetus for the next basic training: this was Takeo Ohnuki, who laid the groundwork for the training until 2004 when the newly approved Japan Rolfing Association (JRA)¹ took over the coordinating duties. A central role in organizing the next Unit I in 2005 was played by graduates of the first local training, including Kotaro Ogiya and Eiko Mizobe, collaborating with Kanji Hirose, who graduated from a training in Boulder. I greatly respect the energy and dedication of these new Rolfers whose motivation stemmed from having clients lined up for the class, who they wanted to have a good learning experience. After this second basic Rolfing training was completed in Tokyo in 2006. Hidenori Kato asked the JRA to organize a third training, this time in Kyoto, in 2008-2009.

So Japan has now had three rounds of basic training, these early ones all organized at the behest of potential students. With this base, a fourth basic training is in progress. As Rolfing [SI] develops as a profession in Japan with an increasing number of practitioners enjoying a steady private practice, enrollment seems to be getting easier. This has also been assisted by many descriptions about Rolfing SI in books by Noboru Yasuda and by Mizuho Saito, and some magazine articles by Rolfers, helping to get our work better known in recent years. There has also been the contribution of introductory seminars by Rolfers.



Hiroyoshi Tahata teaching in the movement component of Unit I in Kyoto, 2008.

Movement Certification

As of June 2010, we have eighty-two Rolfers in Japan! Moreover, 55% of them have completed Rolf Movement training, more than double the worldwide average of 25%. Half of the movement certifications came from Carol Agneessens' two movement trainings in Tokyo, in 2005 and 2007, classes that graduated a total of twenty-three Rolf Movement practitioners, and that most of the graduates of the first basic training attended. Agneessens' perspective and embodiment of the movement work particularly resonated with some local Rolfers who told me they may not have continued to work as Rolfers if they had not experienced Agneessens's training. After movement certification, some of them continued to attend small-sized workshops with Japanese Rolf Movement practitioners.

Rolfing Continuing Education

JRA is developing as an association, and thus far the focus has been on the groundwork of basic trainings and movement trainings. As of yet, we have no formal continuing education (CE) programs like mentoring or clinics, and no advanced Rolfing training has been held yet. Not many CE classes are held in Japan, so it is not easy for Japanese Rolfers to get enough CE credits and to participate in an advanced training within seven years of their basic training.

With the growing pool of Rolfers wanting to hone their skills, our region is now ripe for CE workshops and further trainings. One opportunity the JRA capitalized on was to hold some CE workshops with the instructors of each basic and each movement training while they were in Japan. Workshop topics were decided by arrangement between what the teachers wanted to teach and what the students requested.

Other Workshops

Other CE opportunities have come from Rolfers independently organizing various kinds of workshops and a few study groups. For example, Yoshitaka Koda, the first Japanese Rolfing instructor: he has invited many instructors to give workshops – including Rolfers Asher and Gael Olghren and osteopath Tom Shaver – thus contributing significantly to the Japanese Rolfing community. Meanwhile, the first Somatic Experiencing training in Japan has started, organized by a Japanese psychotherapist.

There are also some home-grown CE opportunities with resident Rolfers in the form of study groups regarding Rolf Movement or craniosacral therapy and one on joint issues with a Japanese osteopath.

Developing Local Instructors

I have trained as a Rolf Movement instructor, a process that involved being an assistant in various trainings as well as teaching a solo workshop under faculty supervision. Besides assisting in Agneessens' two movement certification trainings in Japan, I also assisted in a Principles of Rolfing segment for Unit II with Jane Harrington in Tokyo in 2006, a second with Rebecca Carli-Mills, Kevin McCoy, and Agneessens in Boulder in 2008, and a third with Lael Keen in Kyoto in 2009. I also taught movement in Marius Strydom's Unit I in Kyoto in 2008. The final stage as an instructor-in-training was my solo workshop in Tokyo in 2009, which was attended by fourteen Rolfers, including both Rolfers and Rolfers dual-certified in movement. The JRA sponsored this workshop, which was the first Rolfing workshop to be taught in Japanese (with an interpreter for Pedro Prado, the faculty supervisor who came during a break from teaching Unit III in Kyoto). With this, I was approved as a Rolf Movement instructor in December 2009.



Hiroiyoshi Tahata (seated, center) with the participants in his solo movement workshop, the first RISI-approved class taught in Japanese.

I could not have imagined these developments talking to Jon Martine twelve years ago. I appreciate all the instructors' support, especially Agneessens' continuous effort as my mentor. I am also grateful to all the Rolfers who participated in the various classes. I would like to support our local community now through Rolf Movement workshops to help each Rolf

in cultivating his/her skills and developing strong private practices. Hopefully the presence of a local teacher will spur further growth in our region, and I will be excited to see other Japanese Rolfers apply for instructor training.

I am also excited to have opportunities to share with the broader Rolfing community. Since my movement training with Agneessens and Carli-Mills, I have been developing a movement intervention that we call "yielding," which Agneessens and I will present as a workshop in the United States next year, and also introduce in a future issue of *Structural Integration*.

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

This article was written through the lens of my own experience in Japan and in becoming a Rolf Movement instructor. I want to give special thanks to Kotaro Ogiya, JRA's behind-the-scenes architect, who kindly provided information for this article. Many, many Rolfers have contributed to the development of Rolfing SI in Japan – as I hope is apparent from this article – and I apologize to those whose efforts I have not been able to single out here.

Endnotes

1. JRA was approved as a nonprofit organization in Japan in 2006, the result of the collective energy of many Japanese Rolfers.