

Chen-Chiu – A New Healing Paradigm The Far Eastern Challenge of Needle and Moxa Therapy: Model for an Improved Medicine

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Chen-Chiu is an updated English translation of a German book first printed in 1975. The unusual title was deliberately chosen, the author explains, to emphasize Chinese Medicine's non-linear Taoistic paradigm, and literally means "puncturing and moxibustion."

I was interested to learn that "acupuncture" is really a misnomer, dating back to the failure of French Jesuit priests of the 17th and 18th centuries to correctly interpret the depth and scope of Chinese Medicine (CM). Similarly, the notion of ch'i being "energy" is apparently a mistaken translation promulgated in 1939 by George Soulie de Mourant in his book *L'Acupuncture Chinoise*.

Schnorrenberger says the ch'i is a phenomenon which spans the whole range between energy, Blood and body fluids, and that the idea that CM is energy medicine is a mistake which emerged in the West out of the Cartesian assumption of a separation between energy and matter.

However, as is becoming increasingly clear, Cartesian thinking and its reflection in objective scientific medicine is an inappropriate philosophy with which to understand CM. "It is wrong," Schnorrenberger says, "...to regard that which is not measured and objectifiable as correct, real, or sensible, and to consider the personally experienced and that which can be felt and lived merely as unscientific, nebulous, or mystical. The ch'i is something that everyone in Asia can fully understand and explain simply because it can be experienced."

With such words the author demolishes the sanctity of Western scientific objectivity, arguing for the adoption of a broader scientific paradigm which would include both the objective and the subjective. He humorously suggests a slight adjustment to Descartes' famous statement "Cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am), to make it more in accord with insights gained from modern physics and quantum theory: "*Sentio cursum sanguinis et vim vitalem, ergo sum* (I feel the circulation of blood and ch'i within me, therefore I am.)"

For similar reasons Schnorrenberger argues that the Western research model, which is based explicitly on an assumed split between matter and consciousness, is totally inappropriate for evaluating CM. "Chinese Medicine and Chen-Chiu" he says, "...are based on a phenomenological approach and have not been developed on the biased theoretical model of Western thinking. Consequently it is logically inadequate and quite wrong to subject Chen-Chiu and Chinese Medicine to placebo research."

The author further suggests that the West actually has a rich medical tradition which is more holistic than modern physicians might imagine. He draws parallels between Taoism and similar ideas emanating from some of the great Western philosophers such as Aristotle, Leibnitz, and Spinoza, scientists like Szent Györgi and Bernard, physicists like Einstein, Born, Heisenberg, and Pauli, and physicians like Hippocrates, Galen and Paracelsus.

He discusses basic CM theories such as Yin and Yang, Blood and ch'i, external factors such as Wind, Cold and Damp, and explores needle techniques, Tuina, auriculotherapy and Moxibustion, again drawing many parallels with Western thought. For example, Hippocrates apparently considered "wind" to be a factor in illnesses (Few people might be aware that the word "Malaria," which emerged from the Hippocratic school, actually means "bad wind" or "evil air"). In another example he mentions a 19th century physician who deliberately drank a cholera bouillon and remained well, just to prove that Claude Bernard's energetic concept of a "milieu intérieur" was more important than the bacteria.

Later, the author explores some of the difficulties involved in integrating Chen-Chiu into conventional medical practice, discussing everything from basic philosophical contradictions, to economic and politic factors. He is forthright about the need for people to accept more personal responsibility for their health, and even broaches the taboo subject of the energetic consequences of third-party payment, suggesting the need for patients to make some contribution to the cost of treatment.

On the negative side, I felt a bit more could have been done to revise the book for the modern reader, because the attempt to do so by including several references to Pomeranz dated in the 1990s didn't quite succeed to change the overall dated tone. For example, in a chapter on the perils of indiscriminate drug use, some of the drugs he mentions – such as butazolidin and chloramphenicol – are no longer in common use. This oversight somewhat detracts from his argument that medicine doesn't pay proper attention to the downside of drugs, and could easily have been addressed by changing the examples. Another difficulty was that several figures were actually missing from the text and also, and the supposedly color plates were actually in black and white, making them harder to interpret.

In summary, although much has changed since 1975 in terms of integrating acupuncture into mainstream medical practice, much of that integration has occurred at the expense of acupuncture's holistic philosophical base. This is precisely what Professor Schnorrenberger so eloquently warns against, and indeed, says must never be allowed to happen. So the fundamental message of *Chen-Chiu* remains as pertinent today as it ever was. We must engage Chinese Medicine in its own terms, embracing its non-dualistic and phenomenological approach, or else completely misunderstand what it is all about. This is a message that cannot be stated often enough, and for that alone *Chen-Chiu* is well worth the read.