

CHINESE MEDICINE: THE IDEAS THAT SHAPED IT

Chinese Medicine: The Ideas that Shaped It is one of three volumes for people who want to understand Chinese medicine from the Chinese viewpoint. It is intended for those contemplating the study of acupuncture and Chinese medicine, students early in their career or practitioners interested in background not provided in their clinical education. It is also suitable for lay persons who want to understand more about Chinese medicine in its native culture. Although it is available separately, it provides excellent preparation for ***Chinese Medicine: Theories of Modern Practice*** for students who require practical professional information at the level of detail required in the professional courses taught in the People's Republic of China.

The authors, Nigel Wiseman, Sabine Wilms, and Eric Brand are individuals so intrigued by Chinese medicine that they mastered its language, studied with its scholars and clinicians, and tested their skills and conclusions at the most challenging levels of academic achievement. This book describes what these people, who have worked with Chinese medicine in its native language and culture, know will benefit your study.

In this book students beginning to study acupuncture and Chinese medicine will find firm footing for their studies. The entire text is designed to provide context for a culturally accurate "sense of things." Native Chinese students beginning their medical studies come equipped by their language, education and culture to grasp the sometimes-complex relationships critical to the effective practice of Chinese medicine. In fact, sometimes those links are in the Chinese characters themselves. Westerners lack this preparation. Yet, if people learn the observations that are the roots of Chinese medicine, many relationships between concepts, pathologies and treatments will be grasped without rote memorization.

Because the authors have accepted the responsibility to see that the concepts expressed in English retain the detail and precise context of the original Chinese idea, readers are able to set aside pre-conceived notions based on popular literature. While the depth of concepts in this text does not reach the depth and breadth of ***Chinese Medicine: Theories of Modern Practice***, its conceptual consistency means students will be prepared for the more advanced text.

The first chapter, *Historical Development*, begins with the often-ignored topic of how Chinese medicine became what it is today. In the west the most recent information is the only information needed until newer information comes along. Chinese medicine has built upon, but not replaced, its earliest understandings. From its formative period through to its reception in the modern west, and the effect of that reception in East Asia, the principles and practices of Chinese medicine evolved in direct response to the observation of results in a huge population through significant time.

In Chinese medicine, where an idea comes from is not just an academic curiosity. It is an aid to understanding medical concepts by knowing the circumstances that brought them about. In this book, readers will see the medicine's development from the formative period, the time

before the early medical classics, the period of the early medical classics, and the evolution from these texts forward to the modern era. What is classical, what is modern, and what is both is made clear.

In the second chapter, *Basic Theory*, those unfamiliar with these notions gain a understanding free from lay ideas that fail to account for the Chinese view of the cosmos, often replacing the Chinese vision with western ideas that make comprehension easier for English readers but deny them the value that comes from grasping the Chinese perspective. Those who are already familiar with qi, yin-yang and the five phases will appreciate how these core concepts developed and have been understood and applied over time. Those who are unfamiliar will begin their exploration of Chinese medicine grounded in Chinese thought.

The third chapter, *Cognitive Influences*, is both ground-breaking and unique. In the 1950s when Chinese health officials looked across the Chinese – English linguistic divide, they naturally assumed that what Chinese doctors did would be something English-speaking doctors would do. Thus, acupuncture and Chinese medicine were offered as if they were a science for physicians. This was supported by a significant body of Chinese academic opinion that westerners would not be capable of grasping the Chinese concepts and that traditional Chinese ideas would need scientized to be accepted.

Based on these assumption Chinese health authorities made available English texts that summarized, simplified, and scientized Chinese medical principles. Western authors adopted the same approach. This is easily seen in the substitution of “pathogen” for “evil,” the actual Chinese (邪 *xié*) word. Although *xié* has no western religious connotations, fear that it would be taken as such lead translators to steer away. The same is true of 虛 *xū*, the early translation of “deficiency” neatly fits with uses in biomedicine. Unfortunately, it also obscures the Chinese medical reference to an emptiness of the whole body. When Chinese clinicians think of “heart qi vacuity,” they mean not just the insufficiency of heart qi itself but also the relative emptiness of the whole body created by an insufficiency of heart qi.

Over time, however, both Chinese and western scholars have come to realize that Chinese medicine and acupuncture are best presented in their own terms. Based in long observation of nature and therapeutic outcomes, Chinese medicine is a vast repository of materials and ideas that can make life better for anyone. When seen as such, denying its integrity and value becomes impossible. When people understand how Chinese medicine developed, how it was practiced and recorded over millennia, they can recognize its value to their own cultures.

Scientizing Chinese medicine did not accomplish the recognition early authors, both Chinese and western, intended. In fact, these often “stretched” equivalences have contributed to the opinion that Chinese medicine is pseudoscience. *Cognitive Features*, provides a thorough review of how Chinese thinkers thought about the cosmos and how they applied that thought to intervention in the unpleasant circumstances that arise in nature. By understanding the logic of Chinese thought, you will be better prepared to study the medicine itself.

The fourth chapter, *External Influences*, describes how Chinese philosophy and religion influenced the development of Chinese medicine. By understanding the historical influences of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism and the modern influences of biomedicine and Chinese Communism, students will be better able to more effectively deal with ideas like “Classical Chinese Medicine,” “Daoist Medicine,” or “TCM,” as well become better prepared recognize what is authentic and what is not.

The fifth chapter, *Western Characterizations*, also concentrates on authenticity. People seek healing based on how they see the world. If a medicine fits someone’s world view, they will choose it. If it offers a social, financial or esthetic value, they will choose it. By comparing our notions of Chinese medicine to those of patients and practitioners in its homeland, we are better able to understand our own biases, and thus better able to manage our clinical decision-making.

The chapter examines the ideas of naturalism and holism as they apply (and don’t) to Chinese medicine. This is particularly important because the practice of Chinese medicine outside of East Asia takes place within, and is attractive to, a population that favors nature and holism. Any clinician working in western societies needs to manage patient expectations regarding these ideas in tandem with managing their clinical expectations.

Chinese Medicine: The Ideas that Shaped It provides a practical and authentic foundation for the study of Chinese medicine. It also provides the information necessary to earn acupuncture and Chinese medicine broader acceptance and encourage more and more people to avail themselves of its vast capabilities.