

# Reviews



## ACUPUNCTURE RESEARCH: STRATEGIES FOR ESTABLISHING AN EVIDENCE BASE

by Hugh MacPherson,  
Richard Hammerschlag,  
George Lewith & Rosa

Schnyer, Churchill Livingstone, softback,  
288 pages, £29.99

With this book MacPherson, Hammerschlag, Lewith, Schnyer and co-authors have produced a comprehensive synthesis of the current state of acupuncture research that will be a valuable reference for existing researchers as well as offering a clear overview for practitioners and others wishing to find out about or embark on research in acupuncture.

It becomes clear from the outset that the contributors have made a real effort to elicit the key research themes and concepts that have developed over the years, and to thread these together to present the bigger picture. Initial chapters were written by small groups of authors and then discussed and debated in a workshop amongst all the participants before being re-written to incorporate these discussions and feedback. This process gives the book a coherence that is not often found in other works that present a collection of chapters by different authors, and the advantage gained by pooling together the collective experience of the different authors in this way is one of its main strengths.

Its focus is on strategies that bridge the gap between current evidence and the actual experiences of acupuncturists. The authors seek to find a balance between the simplification of problems required to make them amenable to modern methods of research whilst keeping them representative of the real practice of acupuncture.

Birch and Lewith present a chapter giving a background to acupuncture research, and the potential for philosophical mismatches between Eastern and Western paradigms, such as when modern reductionist methods are not appropriate for the evaluation of a holistic system of medicine. They also provide perspectives for understanding the complexity of acupuncture research in the face of a huge diversity of styles of clinical practice.

Following chapters make the case for patient-based research strategies, emphasising the role of patient beliefs and perceptions about acupuncture, how to measure treatment outcomes from the patient's perspective, and how to identify and quantify levels of risk associated with acupuncture. Throughout the discussion, the authors present and compare a broad range of qualitative and quantitative methods, and give numerous examples from the literature to illustrate their differing strengths, and how these multiple perspectives can be integrated to produce a holistic research programme.

Three chapters are devoted to evaluating the effectiveness of acupuncture, but the authors go far beyond their very clear exposition of RCTs and associated sources of bias, control procedures and assessment of efficacy. They make a strong case for the development of research feeding continuously through all levels from the lone acupuncturist making case reports on treatment effects observed in the clinic to groups of scientists engaged in rigorous clinical trials. They argue that acupuncture provides a unique arena to develop more global approaches to quantitative research, seeking to understand and embrace those elements which conventional research often seeks to screen out, and they give a good account of different types of trials that

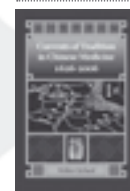
have been developed as a result of this.

Other chapters explore current thinking on biological correlates and physiological mechanisms of acupuncture, how to bring evidence together in systematic reviews and how acupuncturists can become more involved in research and help to foster the links between research and clinical practice. A final chapter by Lewith speculates on the future directions of acupuncture research.

Each chapter contains a comprehensive list of references, and where appropriate contains links to useful online resources. The book will certainly be a valuable reference for researchers who are looking for a current overview of the state of acupuncture research. It will perhaps be even more valuable for teachers, students and practitioners of acupuncture, as it provides a clear roadmap to the many different techniques and perspectives necessary to take an idea born in the clinic and develop it into a coherent research theme that will be of value to the profession as a whole.

Mike Cassidy

This book is available at a reduced price from The Journal of Chinese Medicine bookshop [www.jcm.co.uk](http://www.jcm.co.uk)



## CURRENTS OF TRADITION IN CHINESE MEDICINE:

1626-2006

by Volker Scheid, Eastland Press, hardback, 564 pages,  
£26.95

While sitting in the waiting room of a colleague in Munich, this time as a patient, I struck up conversation with two middle-aged *Damen* - sisters it turned out - who had flown in that morning from Berlin. They made this journey once a month, they

said, to have their pulses taken and their tongues looked at, receive acupuncture treatment and take their prescriptions to a local pharmacy. The herbs would be ready to be picked up by the time they had finished eating their *Weißwurst* at the Franziskaner restaurant. After a leisurely promenade on the elegant Maximilianstrasse and a peek inside one of the splendid new art galleries, they would board the evening flight home to Berlin.

Had they perhaps considered seeing any of the famous Chinese doctors in Berlin, I asked. Indeed, but they had been disappointed with the consultation and treatments; the Munich physicians were infinitely superior! Did I know that many years ago, 1950 it was, a German scholar had founded an association to study and promote real, traditional Chinese medicine? Was I aware that the doctor we were all waiting to see, the most famous student of the illustrious scholar, was known for treating the root of his patients' problems and not just treating symptoms? Also a respected teacher and the president of a medical association? They confided that they were here on the recommendation of a member of the Bundestag in Berlin, who had been cured many years ago by this doctor.

They persisted: was I drinking my herbs? Did I feel the benefit of the decoction? They liked this doctor's prescriptions very much; the decoctions were not too bitter, they were easily digested, and – they assured me – did not harm their delicate constitutions. And the excellent pharmacy had been filling out Chinese herbal prescriptions for more than 30 years. Munich had a tradition for Chinese medicine, something we had to respect, *nicht wahr?*

Impressed by these women's devotion to my colleague, I was escorted by an assistant into one of the consultation rooms. The room, tastefully appointed and full of light, displayed all the trappings of a scholar-physician: copies of one of his recently-authored books were piled on the floor next to the desk, a manuscript sent for review marked "urgent" lay untouched in its original wrapping nearby; a few gifts from

grateful patients (objets d'art, a small mixed-media sculpture depicting the doctor treating a patient) were scattered among the bookshelves; on the desk, casually placed to one side, a fax from a famous stage actor assuring that two complementary tickets for that night's sold out performance would be held at the box office; a plaque commemorating a visit from a Bulgarian TCM delegation and a red banner with gold Chinese characters proclaiming friendship between Germany and China hung in a corner. I couldn't wait to speak to the great man about my ailment.

In 400 years or so, descendants of the doctor's lineage will be researching this type of medical encounters, thumbing through a tattered copy of his formula book and writing the equivalent of *Currents of Tradition in Chinese Medicine: 1626-2006*. In it, they will draw parallels between the development and spread of specific styles of Chinese medicine in both countries and in both millenia. While reading the first part of Volker Scheid's scholarly documentation of the famous families or lineages of Menghe doctors, I was struck by the similarities between Scheid's scholar-physician hero Fei Boxiong (1800-1879) and my Munich therapist – both built up their practices thanks to one or two "star" patients (the Empress dowager) who recommend the practice to gentry clientele in distant places (to the village of Menghe from Beijing instead of Berlin), both recognized the necessity of "light" prescriptions for patients with weak constitutions (wealthy patients who did neither physical work nor exercise), they inherited medical knowledge from a teacher-scholar (members of the Fei family), published books (*Yifang lun*) and were important members of a medical association (Hanlin Academy).

In the second part of the book ("Republican China: Native Place, National Essence and Divergent Modernities") I found additional similarities between Ding Ganren, another prominent Menghe physician whom Scheid credits with the modernisation of Chinese medicine, and my Munich colleague. Ding Ganren

(1864-1926), took the Menghe medical tradition out of the backwater hamlet in Northern Zhejiang province and became a highly successful medical entrepreneur in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Shanghai. Like my Munich colleague, Ding's business efforts were supported by a pharmacist who marketed "Ding family-owned secret prescriptions". Ding Ganren was also an inspiring teacher, who developed a modern curriculum and created uniform teaching standards. A wily politician, Ding used his lineage's network to place his practice and school in an advantageous position. Scheid recounts recent meetings with descendants – family members and students – of the Ding lineage and describes how they have come to terms with the decline of the Menghe tradition.

Scheid's vivid descriptions of the in-fighting among the various Chinese medical factions which co-existed in Republican China and their struggle against proponents of conventional Western medicine are painfully reminiscent of struggles which continue in Europe (and elsewhere) to this day. In Chapter 12 ("The Institutionalization of Chinese Medicine and its Discontents") Scheid addresses this thorny issue and presents some of the Menghe heirs as chief players in the scramble for hegemony during the early days of Mao Zedong's rule. He also includes a biography of the modern physician and educator Qin Bowei who was able to assimilate Western medical concepts into his Chinese medical practice; an inspiration for contemporary physicians attempting this balancing act.

The above are just a few of the many fascinating biographies and anecdotes included in this scholarly work. This alone would have been a remarkable *tour de force* of anthropological fieldwork and historical research. However, as in his 2002 publication – *Chinese Medicine in Contemporary China: Plurality and Synthesis* – Scheid has gone beyond the merely descriptive, and throughout the first two sections, but most clearly in the third part – "Contemporary China: Inheriting, Remembering and Reconfiguring Tradition in a Modern State" – he presents

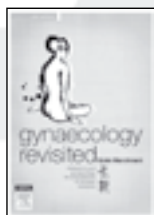
the already-dazzled reader with a brilliant analysis of a multitude of important subjects in Chinese medicine. These have been cleverly woven into the tapestry of the narrative of the Menghe doctors throughout the centuries and include topics such as: what is a lineage; what is tradition; the role of the scholar-physician in society; the art of medicine; how *li*, the Neo-Confucian concept of principle, ideal or axiom, was transformed from a private virtue to a shared communal effort and how the disorderly strands of a myriad lineages of Chinese medicine were neatly packaged and exported as the product we now know as TCM.

*Currents of Tradition in Chinese Medicine* is a remarkable book which requires attentive reading and a good memory; the glut of unfamiliar personal and place names and the intertwining genealogies may be bewildering. However, readers will find that once they venture one toe into the sparkling waters of the book, they will be swept away by Volker Scheid's elegant writing style and into the compelling narrative of how the Menghe current grew to a mighty river which shaped the landscape of Chinese medicine, only to wither into a tired rivulet a few decades afterwards. This book, lovingly designed and printed by Eastland Press, includes many early 20<sup>th</sup> century photographs of China and portraits of the Menghe doctors. Looking at these pictures only increases the poignancy of the loss of this medical tradition.

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Velia Wortman, Fürth, Germany

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GYNAECOLOGY  
REVISITED: OBSTETRICS  
AND GYNAECOLOGY  
FOR PRACTITIONERS OF  
CHINESE MEDICINE

by Robin Marchment,  
Churchill-Livingstone,

2007, 380 pages, £40.99

There is something about Robin Marchment's *Gynaecology Revisited* that is guaranteed to appeal to readers, and quite deliberately: in her own words, it is "characterized by leanness." Lightness in weight has definitely become a positive selling point in Chinese medicine textbooks over the last few years, although the physical benefits to a sedentary profession of heftier texts should also not be ignored.

Intellectually, however, *Gynaecology Revisited* is not lightweight at all. It provides a good grounding in the whole range of gynaecological and obstetric conditions one is likely to see clinically, based on the format of a simple Chinese medicine gynaecology textbook, but supplemented with much modern information. Each condition includes the essential Western bio-medical information clearly set out. In fact one of the several excellent features of this book is the up-to-date, detailed but clear bio-medical viewpoint, and the author's discussion of how it might relate to the Chinese traditional explanation of the same clinical condition.

By contrast, however, the discussions of Chinese mechanisms of pathology are frequently rudimentary, and in a few cases such as polycystic ovaries and endometriosis even the suggested treatments are cursory, although the reader is usually referred to other sections in these cases for further information.

For most conditions the Chinese differentiation and treatments are presented, along with essential modifications to the suggested base formula, and also in some cases other formulas that could be substituted.

The price paid for the not inconsiderable benefit of 'leanness' lies in the choice of what to leave out. In this case it is explanation of the formula action, and

detailed actions of the modifying herbs, so the reader will have to be well-versed in formulas and materia medica, using this text only as a reminder.

There is one space-saving decision however that will potentially impact strongly on the book's reception in North America, and that is the lack of Latin for herb names, and more seriously, not even a Latin-pinyin cross-reference as an appendix. This will not be excessively distressing for Australian readers, since the preference here is pinyin as the primary nomenclature, but for readers who are most comfortable with Latin, its lack may prove somewhat daunting. A last quibble is the book design, which for the second edition should be completely redone by a professional.

The final section of the book contains some excellent illustrated appendices, including: female anatomy, the hormone cycle and basal body temperature, pelvic organ prolapses and relevant nomenclature, useful acupoints on the lower abdomen and their location in relation to the uterus, an illustrated timeline for embryonic development, assessment of foetal age by fundal height, and foetal lie and presentation at full term. There are also a number of tables showing at a glance the potential patterns of disharmony, useful acupoint suggestions, and points contraindicated in pregnancy.

Overall, a worthwhile book especially for its ease of reference for treatments, and its linked discussions of Chinese and Western descriptions of gynaecological conditions.

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Steven Clavey

This book is available from The Journal of Chinese Medicine bookshop [www.jcm.co.uk](http://www.jcm.co.uk)