

# Pocket Atlas of Chinese Medicine

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## Foreword

Chinese medicine belongs to all of us. People in all cultures value its perspectives. It is a distinctive treasure because its 2000 years of continuous—if often contrasting—commentary represent the best example of the subtlety and power emerging from the examination of human experience. Chinese herbalism is more sophisticated than other herbal traditions because the Chinese were persistent in observing and recording their experiences.

As Western society became familiar with Chinese medicine in the late 20th century, acupuncture was emphasized because it was an easy fit with the licensed, private practice professionalism characteristic of health care in the West. Related methods of acupressure, *qi gong*, and *tui na* were largely ignored. Acupuncture was progressively revised to emphasize the idea that mechanical action in a precise location creates a specific effect, a recasting of traditional acupuncture concepts into a linearity that felt comfortable to Westerners.

In actuality, acupuncture grows out of the profound nature of human touch and the relationship of vital energy between people. Locating points by touch is more effective than using purely anatomical guides, since the therapist feels the movement of *qi* just as a *qi gong* practitioner does, and is guided by the dynamic of sensation between patient and therapist.

Chinese medicine begins with an appreciation of life and vital energy (*qi*). When *qi* flows smoothly it provides balance and protection. Treatment enhances and facilitates the flow

of *qi*. In an acupuncture treatment we help patients help themselves, by inviting *qi* to move as it needs to. From this perspective, the location of stimulus and the timing of sensations are considered valid according to the perceptions of patient and practitioner, rather than according to a static chart.

I was born with a bilateral cleft palate. Consequently, I owe my life to Western technological medicine. Most aspects of technological medicine involve surgery, prostheses, and testing, all of which have clear practical value and are easily integrated into different cultural paradigms. However, a cultural contrast is revealed when we compare Chinese medicine and Western pharmaceutical medicine.

In medical school we learned that disease is an alien process that needs to be attacked. We learned that the body itself is frequently the source of disease. As a consequence of this philosophy, most pharmaceuticals are designed to suppress one or another of the functions of components of our body. Significantly, pharmaceuticals which are not suppressive of physiological function, such as penicillin and digoxin, are derived from herbal traditions and incorporated into Western medicine.

As a clinician, I have observed that pharmaceutical medicine and its implicitly adversarial model can drain its practitioners. In contrast, Chinese medicine seems to have an invigorating effect on practitioners, perhaps because it recognizes, and uses, the experiences of the patient and the intuition of the therapist in each treatment. The clinician partners with the patient. Increased self awareness of the therapist

can have a clear and beneficial impact on treatment outcome.

Western medical research seeks information about life by testing linear models of cause and effect. Greater accuracy depends on a lack of confounding variables, and a simple model: one action leads to one outcome. Only a limited number of variables can be traced statistically. While these analytical methods provide statistical power, they underestimate our body's complexity. The heart or lungs, which behave more like machines, are widely studied and well understood using this model. Parts of the body that have more layered functions, such as the liver and the flora of the intestinal lumen, are less well understood.

The Austrian philosopher Karl R. Popper asked us to focus on assertions that are specific enough so that it is possible to prove them false given the right kind of evidence. While this is appropriate in many settings, it does not apply to most biological situations, where the issues posed by high degrees of complexity challenge its reductive orientation. The evolution of life includes complexity and redundancy at every level and every moment of existence, posing real challenges to reductionistic models.

No survival traits could be more important than homeostasis, tissue repair, and the removal of toxins. We need to appreciate the body's healing intelligence as a product of evolution. Let me refer to my own clinical experience: I was asked to help a pregnant woman during an unproductive labor. I chose SP-6, a point on the lower leg commonly used to assist labor. I

needed it, hoping for stronger labor. Instead, the patient fell asleep for 4 hours, woke up and delivered the baby in 2 hours. I made a suggestion; the body adapted and prioritized its processes according to its needs.

To summarize, there are three significant contrasts between Chinese medicine and Western medicine:

- 1) Chinese medicine builds upon active homeostatic bodily function. Western pharmaceutical medicine seeks balance by suppressing certain components of physiological systems.
- 2) Western research focuses on linear models, while Chinese medicine accepts the challenge of our complex biological world.
- 3) Chinese medicine is a welcoming context for long-term change and self development.

The editors, authors, and publisher of this beautiful book felt it was important to present a full, well-rounded picture of Chinese medicine and its engagement with health and disease. In today's world, we need a health care model that focuses on more complex bodily needs. I believe that this book offers a unique window on the ways in which Chinese medicine understands the world and the body. Thank you, Thieme, Marnae, and Kevin Ergil for helping us find a more open path to the future.

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