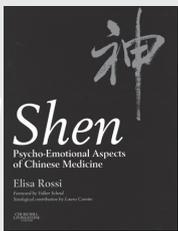


Reviews

SHEN: PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL ASPECTS OF CHINESE MEDICINE

by Elisa Rossi, Churchill Livingstone, hardback, 480 pages, £41.99



This is a great book! A bit unwieldy at first, but well worth the effort of grappling with its rather uninviting design and complicated structure. There is a multitude of sections, heads and sub-heads – some seemingly repetitious, and all divided up in usual Churchill Livingstone style with too many breaks and under-linings which tend to stop the flow of the text. But this is a minor setback and it all comes clear in time. In fact quite quickly.

So how can some 450 pages be written about what is, after all, an aspect of the unnameable?

The book is presented in four main sections, five including the appendices. Beginning with the historical perspective of the philosophical and medical classics, the book concludes with contributions from various modern practitioners. It draws together the impersonal, in its presentation of a wide range of classical texts and modern research, and the personal, in its presentation of case studies and clinical data. It also has a great introduction – not to be skipped – which presents the reader with an overview of the subject and its specific terminology. I like the way that Rossi has managed to move away from the usual Churchill Livingstone house style of capitalising everything that may have a possible symbolic meaning. She says, 'In order not to create a dichotomy between abstract/symbolic and concrete/material, which is completely unknown in Chinese thought, we never use capital letters, not

even for terms such as 'fire', 'earth' or 'path'.' Having struggled to maintain a strictly non-capital system as a publisher I was grateful for such an articulate and accurate validation. The book is full of this kind of sensible scholarship, which makes it such a pleasure to read.

Section one, called the Clinical Foundations of Shen, begins with a presentation from philosophical and medical texts on the Daoist concept of 'nourishing life' (yangsheng). The section continues with the classical presentations of the emotions as movements of qi and concludes with the so called spiritual aspects or 'psychic souls', all well illustrated with classical references.

Section two, Classical Aspects of Pathogens, Symptoms and Syndromes, moves on to the presentation of pathology, introducing in separate chapters agitation and restlessness (fanzao), insomnia (bumei, budewo, shimian, bumian), mental health conditions (diankuang - a category which includes various severe mental conditions such as schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder), and a number of 'later classical' (explained by the author as anything pre TCM) disease categories. These are zangzao (literally 'agitation of the zang' - and characterised by changing emotions), bentunqi ('qi of the running piglet' - disorderly movement of qi deriving from fear and fright), baibeibing ('one hundred reunions illness' - affecting all channels) and meibeqi ('plum stone qi' - 'the knotting of qi and condensing of liquids caused by the seven emotions', globus hystericus in Western terminology). Each pathology is explained according to its classical etymology and modern differentiation, and each is accompanied and differentiated by a case study from the author.

Section three presents Therapeutic Approaches and it is here that the

book leaves its hitherto conventionally structured presentation of the classics and becomes an interesting conglomeration of ancient and modern, personal and impersonal reportage. It begins with a pretty standard presentation of patterns of fullness and emptiness, with good explanations of suggested point combinations and in-depth case studies after each section. There follows an interesting chapter on techniques, beginning with the art of acupuncture, and a quote from Suwen 25:

'Qi arrives like a flock of birds, expands as though through a field of millet; its movements are like flights of birds whose origin you do not know; in the same way the physician must be ready to shoot his arrow like an archer in an ambush when the moment comes.'

At a time when so much of the available literature is herbal theory based, it's good to have a reminder that as acupuncturists we are working with qi and need to become familiar with its movements – getting feedback from our patients, and learning to differentiate the sensation of insertion - "which should be painless", from the sensation of the work on qi. The section continues with moxa, cupping, ear acupuncture, scalp acupuncture etc., all clearly presented, practical and useful. After a section on Points with Diverse Applications, which concentrates on points of the Conception and Governing vessels, there follows a strange chapter on the treatment of emotion by emotion in the classics. Much of this follows the text of Suwen chapter 5, which first aligns an emotion with each of the five phases and thus a specific zang, and by applying the generating and controlling cycles suggests for example that 'sadness overcomes anger'. These ideas are elaborated with both classical and modern examples of using emotion to treat emotion. This leads on quite

smoothly to a discussion of the clinical encounter, drawn both from classical texts and the author's experience as both acupuncturist and Western psychotherapist.

In section four the author invites contributions from various contemporary practitioners: Barbara Kirschbaum on the tongue, and Julian Scott, on hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder in children, the two Westerners amongst the otherwise Chinese contributors. A final chapter in this section describes a piece of research on anxiety carried out in a Milan hospital. Qiao Wenli calls her contribution 'stress disorders' and links this specific pathology to modern lifestyle - both in modern China and the West.

Zhang Mingjiu works at a major psychiatric hospital in Nanjing and this contribution, put together from lecture notes, is called 'severe shen disorders'. He defines shen as the activity of consciousness, seen in the thoughts and speech, and further defines consciousness as the ability to recognise oneself and one's surroundings - citing the confusion of dream and reality as a disturbance of consciousness. He considers an emptiness of Heart qi to be at the root of most of these symptoms, with the Gall Bladder as a secondary.

Jin Shubai's contribution is drawn from a Chinese text on the treatment of mental disorders with acupuncture and moxibustion, and details case studies within the diankuang, yuzheng, bentunqi, and meiheqi classifications.

I particularly liked the contribution of Zhang Shijie of the Gulou hospital Beijing. He describes the differentiation of syndromes as the "initial stage" of diagnosis, "one then has to unite all these elements, tracing the real cause which does not lie where it manifests". For this he suggests we need a deep understanding of the channels and points, and that "the more detailed the diagnostic method ... the more its level of synthesis must be accurate". After long explanations, he usually seems to come up with treatment at Taixi KID-3.

The Appendices include a concise presentation of the pulse in emotional disorders, with classical quotes and great

illustrations based on classical sources, an overview of the diagnostics of Western psychiatry and some references to internet sites.

This is a work of deep scholarship and wide ranging research. But it is also personal and accessible and Rossi's clinical experience shines through. The best thing - and this is rare - is its neutrality. Ideas are presented 'without preference' (the essential Daoist attribute for attracting the shen) thereby avoiding the most common pitfall in Western texts of using selected quotations from the Chinese to forward an already held opinion or belief. In the introduction the author makes the important point that she and her classical Chinese scholar/helper Laura Caretto compared all available commentaries to ensure this impartiality. The result is not an easily digestible synopsis but a wide ranging discussion complete with conflicting ideas and opinions. It celebrates the plurality of Chinese medicine, both in its historical development and modern practice, the voices of the four Chinese practitioners testifying to the breadth of practice in modern China. As Volker Scheid comments in his introduction, it shows the way forward for the development of Chinese medicine in the West.

This is essentially a book about the treatment of emotional disorders, and at times I found myself wondering why the author did not simply call it Psycho-Emotional Aspects of Chinese Medicine, and leave the shen out of it, but maybe that would not have the same appeal. The beauty of a compendium type text such as this is that it can span all the various interpretations of a concept as intangible as shen, from the early shamanic ideas of spirits and intermediaries with heaven through to the modern Western TCM translation as mind, without coming down on one side or another. It does not attempt to draw any conclusions about the shen, or to explain the views of the practitioners. And although the shen are not specifically given a lot of page space - it is a feeling of the shen that finally comes shining through - what emerges through these various presentations is a rich pattern of understanding.

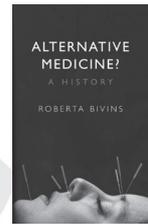
So all in all this is a great read; a book to keep for reference, to dip into again and again. Best of all it is inspiring. I felt like going to China and searching out some of these practitioners and it also made me think again about needling techniques and point combinations. I would even go as far as to say it brought some enlightenment - a sure sign that the shen are in there somewhere. ■

Sandra Hill

This book is available from The Journal of Chinese Medicine bookshop www.jcm.co.uk

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE?

by Roberta Bivins, Oxford University Press, hardback, 238 pages, £14.99



This is a fascinating book for those interested in Chinese medicine for two main reasons. First of all it shows how modern biomedicine - just one of a whole variety of competing medical systems - succeeded in dominating medical discourse and gaining power, and secondly it shows how the practice of 'alternative medicine', including Chinese medicine, is much older and much more varied in the West than we might think.

Take for example the story of R.B, "businessman, gentleman about town, and medical consumer". Suffering from hydrocele, and discontented with the treatment proposed by "one of the most celebrated professors of surgery" which was to be the injection of port wine into his scrotum, he fortuitously bought the May 1836 copy of *The Lancet*. An article described a technique of painlessly inserting acupuncture needles into his scrotum. He acquired needles and proceeded to puncture himself, eventually drawing a single drop of clear fluid. Much disappointed at this seemingly unsatisfactory result, he was amazed to discover at bedtime that the swelling had disappeared. He was so pleased by his success that he wrote a letter to *The Lancet* which was published

and eventually circulated around the world.

Or take the fascinating story of the treatment of gout by moxibustion. Hermann Busschof, a Dutch minister in what is now Jakarta, took to his bed in 1662 in agony from gout. After six weeks he was persuaded to allow an "Indian doctress" to visit him. Although she was confident of easily curing him, he at first rejected the treatment when he heard that it involved burning. Yet driven by despair he then repented and she burnt moxa on his hands and knees. Busschof was so impressed with the results that he published an account of it that first appeared in English in 1676. His experience inspired Sir William Temple, a British diplomat, who self-treated an attack of severe pain and swelling of gout with moxibustion. Although he morosely stated that medical treatment "seldom reaches to the degree that is promised by the prescribers", and although the claims he encountered for moxibustion suggested that it should be applied as soon as there is pain and before swelling had occurred, he was soon able to walk "without any pain or trouble and much to the surprise of those who were about me, as well as to my own". Temple's published account brought widespread prominence to the treatment.

Bivins discusses at length the various reactions such an effective treatment aroused and it is no surprise that they often mirrored the current orthodox medical response to acupuncture, acceptance of the technique but rejection of, and even contempt for, its theoretical and philosophical context.

Moxibustion, and needling, are by no means the only forms of 'alternative' medicine that Bivins discusses. There is a fine discussion of Mesmerism, the invention of Anton Mesmer in the late 18th century. Mesmer claimed to have discovered 'animal magnetism' which responds to "the action of a universally distributed fluid, a fluid that surrounds all that exists and which serves to maintain the equilibrium of all the vital functions". Treatment (usually given by a vigorous male, super-endowed with animal magnetism, to his predominantly female

patients) was to stimulate the patient or even directly transfer magnetism by means of various strange contraptions and the practitioner's focused will. The treatment induced crises or trances. Bivins' account of Mesmerism practised by John Elliotson, Professor of Practical Medicine at University College, London, and a follower of Mesmer, reads like a cross between qigong, stage hypnotism and Derren Brown, "Thus, his young subjects were hypnotized via mirrors, lifted weights beyond their strengths, imitated his unseen movements and saw through closed containers ...". Mesmerism was immensely popular in the 19th century with several journals and widespread practice, including by doctors who mostly rejected the magnetic fluid concept but adopted the practice because of the remarkable results they witnessed among their patients. There was an account in 1842 of an amputation achieved on a conscious patient by means of painless 'mesmeric anaesthesia', an extraordinary achievement at a time when there really was no effective anaesthetic.

There is a fascinating overview of the rise of homoeopathy and the long struggle for medical dominance in the United States in the 19th century between it and 'regular medicine', a battle which was eventually won by the regulars, although Bivins demonstrates that what eventually became orthodox medicine had to respond to homoeopathy's gentle approach by moderating its own fierce, 'heroic' treatments such as bleeding, blistering and the application of strong and often toxic drugs.

For those who believe that Chinese medicine did not spread through Europe until the latter half of the 20th century, it is salutary that even in the beginning of the 19th century acupuncture had become popular (espoused by a young Parisian physician L.V.J Berlioz, the father of the composer) and the observation that acupuncture was recommended at sites distant from the site of the disease made it "among the first therapies to be examined in terms of its electrical potential". In Britain, James Morss Churchill published *A Treatise on Acupuncturation* in 1822.

Bivins' account includes much that is wonderful and revelatory and is not confined to the impact of Oriental and other 'alternative' medicines on Europe, covering also the spread of mesmerism, homoeopathy and Western medicine to India and its inter-relationship with existing traditional medical systems. As Wellcome Lecturer in the History of Medicine at Cardiff University she is well qualified to offer this historical overview of how medical expertise has migrated from one culture to another and what battles have been fought for pre-eminence between various medical systems. In many ways these struggles show that the debates we find ourselves engaged in today have been mirrored in past centuries. For anyone with any interest in the history, politics and culture of medicine, this is a great read. ■

Peter Deadman

This book can be purchased at a reduced price from the JCM Bookshop (www.jcm.co.uk)