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The Guardian (London)

February 24, 1998

**Health: Feel the force;**

**An acupuncture alternative may fast be replacing many complementary therapies. More and more people are turning to Chi Kung, reports Bill Harpe**

**BYLINE:** BILL HARPE

**SECTION:** The Guardian Features Page; Pg. 12

**LENGTH:** 620 words

**Acupuncture** is increasingly respected in Europe as a complementary therapy. But **acupuncture** has its own complementary therapy. While in **acupuncture** the patient is passive and the practitioner does the work with needles, there is a therapy where the patient does all the work and the practitioner may not even be present. This complementary therapy is called Chi Kung (also spelt Qigong and literally meaning 'cultivating energy').

Like **acupuncture**, Chi Kung utilises the meridians which are the basis of **traditional Chinese medicine.** Meridians are the pathways through the body, along which energy or chi flows. In the Chinese view, blockages of energy lie at the root of illness. Whereas in **acupuncture** a needle may be inserted into a meridian running to stimulate energy; in Chi Kung a heel-and-toe walking exercise can be used to produce the same kind of stimulation.

Given its provenance (like acupuncture Chi Kung has been tried, tested, and developed over at least two-and-a-half-thousand years) Chi Kung may indeed be the ultimate DIY therapy. And, while it has always been a mainstay of both preventative and curative medicine in China, this may now be a therapy whose time has come in the West.

Interest has grown in the US over recent years and, with the recent publication of an authoritative and practical guide - The Chi Kung Way - Alive With Energy - Britain is beginning to wake up to the therapy. There are now teachers in London, Newcastle, Bristol, Reading, Liverpool, and Manchester. And this awakening to Chi Kung is due to be further stimulated by the publication in May of Basic T'ai Chi Chi Kung: 15 Ways To Find A Happier You.

The author, James MacRitchie, is at Liverpudlian working in the US. After a training in dance and acupuncture, he became attracted to Chi Kung, because of its basis in using movement to stimulate energy. MacRitchie now runs Boulder's Body-Energy Centre with his wife Damaris Jarboux, and is founding president of the Chi Kung/Qigong Association of America and a council member of the World Academic Society of Qigong (Beijing).

In many ways that combination illustrates the ways in Chi Kung can be and is used. As Professor Feng, Director of the Immunology Research Centre in Beijing, notes in her foreword to the book, in both China and the West clinical research is being conducted into the curative capacities of Chi Kung, particularly in combating tumours and diseases such as diabetes.

However, while Chi Kung is an essential part of Chinese medicine, and is being used in the West for its curative powers, it shares with other Chinese therapies the principle of trying to maintain health. Like the currently better known t'ai chi (the roots of which lie in the martial arts), Chi Kung exercises can be used to keep fit. It emphasises slow and gentle movements, which are said to help the flow of energy around the body, producing a feeling of well being and emotional stability. MacRitchie's book describes exercises for the gymnasium, field or bed - they may be performed at any age.

But Chi Kung, like ballroom dancing, is not something which can be learnt entirely from a book - anyone interested should seek a personal teacher.

The Chi Kung Way - Alive With Energy (A9.99), by James MacRitchie, is published by Thorsons.

The International Chi Kung/Qigong Directory ($ 20) is a guide to the different teachers and specialist magazines. Order it from The Chi Kung school at The Body-Energy Centre, PO Box 1970S, Boulder, Colorado 80308, USA.

Basic T'ai Chi Chi Kung: 15 Ways To Find A Happier You (A12.99), by Peter Chin Kean Choy, is published by World, Kyle Cathie Ltd 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA.

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The Guardian (London) - Final Edition

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**G2: Health: The sceptic: Acupuncture**

**BYLINE:** Druin Burch

**SECTION:** Guardian Features Pages, Pg. 25

**LENGTH:** 418 words

The slogan for my wristband? "Make bullshit history". And I welcome to the struggle a group of Germans carrying sharp needles and giving out misleading instructions.

A Munich-based complementary-medicine research centre recruited people complaining of frequent headaches. Three treatments were offered, two of them **acupuncture.** One type of **acupuncture** followed traditional Chinese principles. "The other type," sufferers were told, did "not follow the principles of **traditional Chinese medicine,** but (it) has also been associated with positive outcomes in clinical studies."

The headaches must have been too blinding for them to have recognised such a great description of a placebo. Several hundred entered the trial. Those who were needled in the Chinese manner - by highly trained veteran acupuncturists, all aiming to achieve an irradiating feeling of "de qi" - experienced great benefit. The number of days spoilt by pounding headaches dropped away considerably.

Those who underwent a treatment of sham acupuncture were looked after by the same practitioners. With equal skill and familiarity they shoved needles in flesh as far from recognised acupuncture points as possible. Any feeling of reaching "de qi" was vigorously avoided. The benefits were the same.

Both placebos and acupuncture are sanctified by a long history of use. Could the researchers come up with something equally traditional for the third arm of the trial? They could, but they had to draw their inspiration from Britain rather than China: they put the remaining patients on a waiting list and did nothing. It didn't work. People don't like queues and they don't like needles, but it seems they're willing to accept the second as a good placebo. If it hurts, after all, it must be doing some good.

All the patients in this trial suffered from tension headaches. It might be the case that a feeling of "de qi" is just the thing to get rid of a different headache such as a migraine (although that prospect has to seem less likely than it did before). Nevertheless, it's nice to see this recent study (British Medical Journal, August 13) giving us a rare fragment of reliable evidence with which to judge acupuncture. If only the authors had managed to avoid those deliberately misleading words

"complementary" and "alternative". Let's be willing to properly test any treatment that might possibly work. If it does, let's name it a medicine. If it doesn't, we'll call it fraud. Bring on those wristbands.

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The Guardian (London)

April 22, 2003

**Health: Chinese revolution: Liz Gill on how traditional medicine can relieve anything from arthritis to tachycardia**

**BYLINE:** Liz Gill

**SECTION:** Guardian Features Pages, Pg. 16

**LENGTH:** 1102 words

As a 65-year-old retired engineer, Peter Worsop is perhaps not the most likely candidate to be practising T'ai Chi in a glass-fronted shop in Manchester's Trafford Centre, visible to the curious eyes of passers-by. He used to be embarrassed, he says, but not any more, so grateful is he to the ancient form of exercise which, together with **acupuncture** and herbs, has relieved his arthritis and reduced his bouts of tachycardia.

Worsop, however, could be seen as a symbol of the way in which **traditional** **Chinese** **medicine,** or TCM, is increasingly moving from ethnic communities into the wider population. Indeed the premises in Manchester are themselves symbolic of the transition from backstreet mystery to mainstream commodity. The idea that you can now pick up a remedy based on the 3,000-year-old principles of yin and yang between nipping into Next and M&S is the brainchild of Dr John Wu, who opened his first Dr and Herbs shop in Luton in 1997 and now has 65 branches across the country, all based in shopping malls. Last year, he says, they dealt with a million consultations; this year he expects double that.

Dr Wu, 48, is himself an interesting example of cross-culturalism. Like many of his generation starting working life in China, under the cultural revolution he was only allowed to study TCM - the regime's fanatical anti-intellectualism forbade western medicine. When the revolution ended he switched to ophthalmology and became a specialist in cataract surgery. He did not, however, abandon TCM and would prescribe it for non-surgical conditions such as retinal haemorrhage in diabetics and corneal infections.

Although a move to this country to work first at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London and later at Southampton University as an epidemiologist setting up a glaucoma screening programme, prevented him continuing to mix the disciplines - British regulations do not allow such combinations - he never lost his conviction that the two could work in tandem. "You don't have to pull down the old bridge over a river when you build a new one."

The problem, he believed, was one of image rather than efficacy: practioners were often hard to find, premises were shabby, clients had no sense of quality control or safety. What he decided to offer was walk-in accessibility and a recognised brand in which people could have confidence.

In simple terms the theory behind TCM is that illness is caused by an imbalance in the body between the complimentary yet endlessly changing and interactive energies of yin and yang, or a blockage along one of the meridians or pathways associated with various organs through which flows the vital energy of Qi (pronounced 'chee'). A diagnosis is reached by taking a patient's history, looking at their tongue and taking their pulse: not just in the brief way of conventional medicine but more, as Dr Wu describes it, in the manner of playing a musical instrument. "So you get a different interpretation according how much pressure each finger applies."

Problems can then be corrected by acupuncture, acupressure and herbal remedies to restore the proper energy balance and stimulate the appropriate meridians. Advocates claim it works for a vast number of conditions including migraines, skin diseases, hormonal problems, sexual dysfunction and infertility, stress and depression. In fact, they claim, virtually the only conditions it cannot treat are acute, life-threatening ones or something requiring surgery.

Peter Worsop from Swinton, near Manchester, was one such. Married with a grown-up son and two grandchildren, he first developed arthritis in his right hand about 10 years ago.

"It was quite painful and it had also started to get worse. The joints were beginning to swell and it was also starting in my left hand. I tried anti-inflammatories but I didn't like the idea of having to take something for the rest of my life.

"My other problem was that I got this tachycardia. If I was stressed, particularly in situations over which I had no control, my heart beat could shoot up to 130 beats a minute. As well as being an awful sensation, it impairs the blood flow and so you can pass out. I hit the floor a few times. I had a full check-up but there was no underlying physical cause so I was sent to a behavioural psychologist who taught me relaxation techniques. They did work but you have to wait for the condition to come on and then practising meditation might not be very convenient if you're, say, in the middle of a traffic jam.

"I can't say I trooped around endless consultants, but I did feel that no one in western medicine could really help. They could give you things to make the conditions less unpleasant but they couldn't cure you, so when I saw the shop I thought I'd see what they could do."

After taking his history, checking his blood pressure, examining his tongue and taking his pulse for several minutes on both wrists, the doctor said his problems were renal in origin. The treatment was to comprise six weekly acupuncture sessions and a course of herbal medicine. She also recommended T'ai Chi as a means of relaxation. "Every customer is given free instruction; you do it in the shop and everyone joins in, including the consultant."

The herbs were to be boiled for 30 minutes in two cupfuls of water every morning and the brew drunk. The same herbs were to be infused again in the evening and that weaker solution also drunk. "The smell was disgusting and the taste was absolutely foul.

"But at the end of six weeks the arthritis had gone. The pain has stopped and the swelling seems to be going down. It's wonderful."

There are probably thousands of success stories like Peter Worsop's and presumably plenty of failures too. At the moment, however, all evidence remains anecdotal and the although many individual doctors maybe increasingly sympathetic to complimentary therapies the medical establishment in this country remains wary.

A spokesperson for the British Medical Association says: "We have no specific policy on TCM, but our view of alternative medicine generally is that it should all be more closely regulated by a statutory body, not just an organisation which practioners have set up themselves, but a regulated organisation with rules, recognised training and qualifications and which can also strike someone off.

"We're aware that lots of patients want to try these approaches but they should talk to their GP first if they're on conventional medication to see if there are any contradications."

For further information go to www.ic-tcm.com

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