

beginning it is useful to acknowledge there are many shades and nuances in pulse diagnosis. It is a wonderful tool for honing our sensitivity to our patients, and I would welcome further discussion of these nuances in pulse literature to come.

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ZHENG GU TUI NA:
A CHINESE MEDICAL
MASSAGE TEXTBOOK
by Tom Bisio and
Frank Butler
Zheng Gu Tui Na,
Hardback, 270 pages, \$90

This book is endowed with plenty of what is good about Chinese medicine. Clear, practical and effective, it is “no frills” in the best possible way (which means not to have to hack through endless pages of basic TCM theory aimed at the general public before getting to the meat and bones of the book). This authentic approach seems apt for two authors who have clearly paid their dues in terms of developing their skills - lengthy traditional apprenticeships as bone-setters in China, alongside extensive training in the Chinese internal martial arts. Their deep understanding of tuina is evident in these pages, as is their passion for its therapeutic effectiveness. Tuina, they point out, is currently suffering a crisis of misperception, seen either as “akin to manual labour” in China, or as a non-therapeutic “spa”-type treatment in the West.

The *Zheng Gu* (“correct bone”) system is an amalgamation of the authors’ studies across the Chinese healing arts, and is structured to enable students to absorb material in a synergistic way. Each aspect of the training is designed to support and inform the others: specific qigong practices provide a foundation for learning tuina techniques, which are put in context by the appropriate TCM and biomedical theory, and expressed through actual treatment protocols. This approach to learning is a departure from the more linear approach traditionally used in Chinese teaching institutions, where students might be expected to master their technique by massaging a rice bag for weeks, before beginning to practise on a living body.

Whilst traditional in its focus on developing a strong foundation of basic theory and practical skill, the *Zheng Gu* approach undoubtedly takes learning tuina to a new level. The authors’ descriptions frequently express traditional theory in modern terms. Take, for example their explanation of the use of different tuina hand techniques: “Forming the hand into different positions allows us to generate wave-forms that are appropriate to the varied terrain of the body ... different hand techniques provide different ways of “inputting” information into the body”. This is tuina for the 21st century, and for some practitioners, the authors’ descriptions may well clarify areas of confusion that a traditional teaching approach has left shrouded in mystery.

The authors make the cogent point that Chinese medicine should be based on “a visceral/internal understanding

of body movement, anatomy and the meridian system”. Many schools of Chinese medicine (both in China and the West), they point out, currently tend to prioritise intellectual, theoretical learning over an experiential development of internal awareness (as cultivated during qigong practice). For Bisio and Butler, regular practice of qigong is crucial not only for tuina practitioners, but for those practising acupuncture as well. This resonates with my own personal experience - it was not until studying tuina some years after graduating from acupuncture college that I began to engage with the qi of a patient directly, through my hands and body, rather than as expressed through the patient’s pulse, tongue and speech.

The only potential problem with *Zheng Gu Tui Na* is that it is clearly a textbook geared to accompany a particular course (which no doubt it does extremely well). For those with an existing understanding of tuina and qigong it will, nevertheless, be a rich source of study. The sections on particular conditions are especially useful to tuina practitioners as reference. In my own practice I used the section on piriformis syndrome fairly soon after reading the book, helping a patient with sciatica considerably. Beginners who wish to learn qigong or tuina, however, would be better off joining a good class - most of the information in this book inevitably has to be shown, “hands-on”, in order to use it effectively.

Daniel Maxwell

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