

Acupuncture

By James K. Walker

Founder: No conclusive historical data is available but most researchers trace the roots of modern acupuncture to the Chinese Emperor Huang-ti (2697-2596 B.C.)

Founding Date: By most estimates the practice of some forms of acupuncture can be dated over 5,000 years ago.

Publications: The earliest authoritative text is *Huang-ti Nei-ching Su-wen*, (also called *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* or *Nei-ching*) which was compiled between 2500 and 1000 B.C.

Unique Terms: Yin/Yang, meridians, and pulse diagnosis.

INTRODUCTION

Acupuncture practitioners and patients testify to the amazing healing powers of acupuncture. According to the theory, needles (of gold, silver, steel or copper) are inserted into the skin of patients at special points along alleged energy paths in order to bring balance and health. Advocates claim that acupuncture can be effectively used to treat emotional problems such as anxiety and depression as well as a host of physical ailments including headaches, ulcers, digestive disorders, arthritis, sciatica, psoriasis, asthma, bronchitis, etc.¹

It is reported that Chinese hospitals routinely use acupuncture as the only pain-killer during major surgery. "Operations for the removal of lungs and tumors have been performed while patients remained wide awake, even sipping tea or eating fruit while surgery was performed, the sole anesthesia administered being acupuncture needles either twirled by hand or electrically stimulated by small machines."² Anesthetic acupuncture is actually only the newest of several applications. *The Encyclopedia of Alternative Health Care* reports three basic types of treatments:

Traditional Acupuncture: The oldest usage, traditional acupuncture, was used primarily as a preventive treatment, to maintain the balance of the body's "life energy," usually in conjunction with other forms of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) including teas, herbs, food therapy, exercise, and massage.

Symptomatic Acupuncture: Also called First Aid Acupuncture, Symptomatic Acupuncture treats pain and discomfort associated with injury or disease. The treatment is usually temporary and is not intended to cure the disorder itself.

Anesthetic Acupuncture: The use of needles instead of or as an aid to traditional anesthesia during surgery or dental work is called Anesthetic Acupuncture. This modern adaptation of acupuncture is a mixture of Western medicine (surgery) with that of the Chinese.³

THE BEST RESOURCE COLLECTION ON CULTS AND RELIGIONS



The *Watchman Fellowship Profile Notebook* provides you with an extensive personal library of information about cults, new and alternative religions, world religions, and religious leaders. You will have at your fingertips over twenty years of research to answer your questions, strengthen your faith, and improve your witness to others.

- Over 100 Profiles
- Over 400 pages of information
- The history and primary teachings of each group
- A Christian response to deepen your faith and enhance your outreach



[CLICK HERE TO ORDER YOUR COPY OF THE WATCHMAN FELLOWSHIP PROFILE NOTEBOOK](#)



Be sure to also order your [free subscription to the Watchman Fellowship Profile](#). Several times each year you will receive a new, four-page Profile that you can add to your Profile Notebook, as well as the latest news from Watchman Fellowship. [Click here to order your free subscription!](#)



HISTORY

Historical accounts are somewhat sketchy and understandably contradictory. Swiss physician and psychiatric consultant, Dr. Samuel Pfeifer, suggests treating diseases with needles “goes back to the earliest doctors, probably spiritistic shamans. They performed rituals similar to those found in today’s Voodoo-cults that attempt to expel evil spirits by sticking needles into the body...”⁴

Modern acupuncture can be directly traced to the Chinese Emperor Huang-ti (2697-2596 B.C.) whose teachings were passed down through oral tradition until they were compiled in *Nei-ching* between 2500 and 1000 B.C.⁵ Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon note, “The text is composed of a dialogue between the legendary Huang-ti, the Yellow Emperor of China, and his physician, Ch’i Po.”⁶ Acupuncture was first introduced in Europe about 200 years ago by Jesuit priests who served as Catholic missionaries in the East. Most of its modern popularity in America and Europe followed the normalization of relations between the West and the Peoples Republic of China.⁷

ACUPUNCTURE THEORY

The *Nei-ching*, which is to this day the classic text of acupuncture theory and practice, is based on Eastern religious theories concerning the nature of the universe. All of nature and the universe (including man) eternally exist as vibrations of impersonal, polarized energy called Yin and Yang. The key to spiritual, mental, and physical well-being, according to this Taoist dualism, is to balance the positive and negative aspects of this energy. Acupuncturist Dr. Stephen Thomas Chang, founder of the Tao Foundation in San Francisco and Vice-President of the Chinese Medical Association in Japan explains: “The *Nei Ching* states that ‘The entire universe is an oscillation of the forces of Yin and Yang.’...In terms of medicine, the interaction of Yin and Yang is the basis of the energy pervading and activating the body, and an imbalance in the relative amounts of Yin and Yang energy is seen as the root of all pathology.”⁸ Chinese astrology is also involved in the theory. Pfeifer observes that every human “organ was also correlated with a planet and a season of the year.”⁹

Acupuncture is based on Chinese religious theories, including Taoist philosophy and Yin Yang dualism. Chinese practitioners speculated that this invisible energy flowed along unseen paths called meridians. “For health to be maintained the ‘ch’i’ [life energy or *Yin Yang*] must flow without hindrance and the skill of the acupuncturist lies in his ability to free the meridians so that there is an even energy flow. This is done by the light insertion of needles of pure copper, silver or gold into the flesh at specific points along the lines of the meridians.”¹⁰

The meridian theory is closely tied to the Chinese doctrine of the five elements and two cycles of destruction and generation. Dr. Chang writes:

Energy flows through the body via the meridians and their respective organs and bowels in well-defined cycles, the cycles of the flow of energy within the body are an exact reflection of the cyclic energy in interaction between the five earthly elements, fire, earth, metal, water, and wood....In the first cycle the cycle of generation each element generates the succeeding element: thus fire produces earth, earth produces metal, metal produces water, water produces wood, wood produces fire, fire produces earth, and the cycle begins again. In the second cycle the cycle of destruction each element destroys or absorbs the succeeding element....Chinese medicine identifies each of the viscera with one of the elements in the following manner. Fire: heart, small intestine, triple heater, heart constrictor. Earth: Spleen-pancreas, stomach. Metal: Lungs large intestine. Water: kidneys, bladder. Wood: liver, gall bladder.¹¹

Dr. Chang, who is also author of *The Complete Book of Acupuncture*, concludes:

According to the Law of the Five Elements, the lungs (metal) support the kidneys (water). If the lungs are indisposed and consequently must use all their energy to sustain their functions, the kidneys must become polluted, because they do not have enough energy to function. To revitalize the kidneys, one must treat the lungs.¹²

These alleged imbalances are usually discerned by the practitioner through Chinese pulse diagnosis, which is based on the theory that the twelve main meridians are reflected in the radial artery at three zones which can be read by the practitioner by feeling the pulse.

Some acupuncturists' claims sound uncomfortably like psychic discernment with promises that, "Pulse diagnosis is so sensitive that at times past illnesses will be registered and a virtual life history of the patient's health can be determined." All this by simply feeling the pulse. Some also claim the ability to predict and treat future diseases long before traditional science can even make the diagnosis.¹³

Once diagnosed, the imbalance of *Yin Yang* energy is manipulated by placing needles along some of the approximately 365 to 800 meridian points in the human body to stimulate the increase or decrease of Yin and Yang as needed. The needles are often activated by twirling, or applying a small electrical current to them. Similar results are reported by applying physical pressure (acupressure) to these points.¹⁴

Western medical doctors and those with a Christian world-view find it difficult, if not impossible, to accept any of the metaphysical Chinese religious assumptions that lie at the very heart of acupuncture theory. Dr. Pfeifer notes that some "acupuncturists have completely turned their backs on Taoist philosophy, the mother of their art. 'Forget about the teachings of Taoism,' I was told by an acupuncture doctor."¹⁵

Most specialists in acupuncture disagree however.

The amazing effects of acupuncture can be reached, 'only when the practitioner follows the principles handed down through the millennia,' declares acupuncture-specialist Dr. Schnorrenberger.... Similar statements have been made by modern Taoist philosopher George Ohsawa, the father of Macrobiotics. He expressly states that oriental medicine cannot be separated from its philosophical underpinnings. Many parapsychologists and psychics, therefore, regard acupuncture as proof of their occult teachings.¹⁶

How Does It Work?

"A satisfactory explanation for the efficacy of acupuncture has not been offered by either Chinese or Western physicians."¹⁷ While rejecting most of the claims of traditional acupuncturists, Dr. Morris Fishbein and other Western physicians are interested in some apparent, limited results mostly in the area of anesthetic acupuncture.

Several theories have been proposed that attempt to partially explain the psychological and physiological effects of acupuncture from a Western scientific basis. "Authorities on pain believe that acupuncture somehow send signals to the brain that compete with or eliminate pain signals that ordinarily would accompany surgery."¹⁸ While Dr. Chang himself accepts the metaphysical, Taoist basis for acupuncture, he also mentions some non-religious theories. He suggests that, according to one theory, the needles simply

block the impulse from reaching the brain... [or] generate an impulse that will preoccupy the nerve center in the brain. The nerve center, being preoccupied with the surrogate impulse, fails to attend to the original pain, which has become secondary and will eventually subside.¹⁹

Some researchers also believe that puncturing the skin could help release endorphins (a naturally occurring chemical similar to the drug morphine), adrenalin or other body chemicals that can blunt or mask pain. These and similar theories, in addition to some clinical work with anesthetized laboratory animals, give some scientific support for limited

effectiveness of acupuncture to temporarily relieve some types of pain.²⁰ Studies also suggest that part of acupuncture's effectiveness is psychosomatic. Authorities on pain, "also suspect that the psychological component of successful acupuncture is strong, and that the procedure works most effectively with persons who are generally friendly, cooperative, helpful, and strong believers in the principles of a religious or political system. Possibly a degree of self-hypnosis in controlling pain is significant."²²

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Because of acupuncture's origins, many Christians may be more comfortable choosing an alternative treatment. It should be noted, however, that some reputable medical doctors reject the Taoist theories of acupuncture and have developed physiological theories that may justify its practice. Christians who are considering acupuncture treatment should note that even the Western physicians who do accept a limited use of acupuncture as a pain killer or anesthetic almost always see it as a temporary treatment for symptoms and not a cure. At the very least, Christians should avoid practitioners who claim to manipulate invisible energy, or base their practice on Taoist dualism or other Chinese metaphysical assumptions. These speculations are the foundation for traditional acupuncture theory and are incompatible with both known science and the Christian view of the human body and the universe.

RECOMMENDED READING

Can you Trust Your Doctor?, by Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon. A complete guide to New Age medicine from a Christian perspective, this book contains a 34 page chapter on acupuncture. Index, soft bound, 445 pages.

New Age Medicine: A Christian Perspective on Holistic Health by Paul Reisser, Teri Reisser and John Weldon. Paul Reisser is an experienced medical doctor and John Weldon is one of the nation's premiere researchers and Christian writers on the New Age Movement. This work contains over 25 pages of information on classic Chinese medicine and acupuncture. Index., soft bound, 205 pages.

Facts on Holistic Health by Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon. A very brief synopsis of some of the information in *Can You Trust Your Doctor?*. It includes a small section on acupuncture and acupressure. Soft bound booklet, 48 pages.

Notes

- 1 Malcom Hulke, *The Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine and Self-Help*, ed. Ann Walker (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 22.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Kristin Gottschalkolsen, "The Encyclopedia of Alternative Health Care" (New York: Pocket Books, 1990), 53.
- 4 Samuel Pfeifer, *Healing at Any Price?* (Milton Keynes, England: Work (UK) Ltd., (English Edition) 1980), 28.
- 5 Ilza Veith, *Huang-ti Neiching Su-wen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966)
- 6 John Ankerberg and John Weldon, "Can You Trust Your Doctor? The Complete Guide to New Age Medicine and Its Threat to Your Family" (Brentwood: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991), 114-15.
- 7 Keynes and Pfeifer, *Healing at Any Price?*, 28.
- 8 The Berkeley Holistic Health Center, *The Holistic Health Handbook: A Tool for Attaining Wholeness of Body, Mind, and Spirit*, ed. Edward Bauman, et. al. (Berkeley: And/Or Press, 1978), 47-50.
- 9 Keynes, *Healing at Any Price?*, 27.
- 10 Hulke, *Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine and Self-Help*, 21.
- 11 *Holistic Health Handbook*, 47.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Hulk, *Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine and Self-Help*, 22.
- 14 Ankerberg and Weldon, *Can You Trust Your Doctor?* 110.
- 15 Keynes, *Healing at Any Price?* 28.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Morriss Fishbein, *Fishbein's Illustrated Medical and Health Encyclopedia* (New York: HS Stuttman, 1977) 1:38.
- 18 Fishbein, *Fishbein's Illustrated Medical and Health Encyclopedia*, Vol 1, 42.
- 19 *Holistic Health Handbook*, 46.
- 20 See *Fishbein's Illustrated Medical and Health Encyclopedia*, 42 and *Healing at Any Price?* 40-44.
- 21 Fishbein, *Fishbein's Illustrated Medical and Health Encyclopedia*, 42.



Profile is a regular publication of Watchman Fellowship, Inc. Readers are encouraged to begin their own religious research notebooks using these articles. Profiles are published by Watchman Fellowship approximately 6 times per year, covering subjects such as new religious movements, counterfeit Christianity, the occult, New Age Spirituality, and related doctrines and practices. Complete Profile Notebooks containing all Profiles published to date are available. Please contact Watchman Fellowship for current pricing and availability. All rights reserved © 1994.