In this superlative study, Sandra Hill - whose knowledge of classical Chinese medicine and language will already be familiar to readers of her regular book works both as a singular examination of Chinese medicine that is at once accessible, scholastically rigorous, and rich in unexpected insights. As such, the book works both as a singular examination of classical Chinese medicine that will appeal to existing practitioners, and as a general purpose introduction for new initiates.

This work also serves as a profound rebuttal to those who would seek to divorce modern 'medical acupuncture' from its roots in Chinese culture and philosophy. As Elisabeth Rochat de la Vallée says in her foreword, 'Chinese medicine can be used and practiced by non-Chinese people, and it can continue to evolve throughout the world - [...] to build a firm foundation for this [...] a true understanding of its roots, of its vision of health, life, disease and disorder is absolutely necessary.'

The benefits of learning the basics through a study of the classical sources become immediately apparent: difficulties are resolved, ill-defined, familial confusions rendered clear. When one’s understanding of the concept of qi, says, begins from its contextual position within Daosist cosmology, many of the Western translations of these terms simply drop away. Qi need no longer be ‘energy’, ‘functionality’ or ‘informational patterning’, it is simply the movement generated through the interactions of heaven and earth, yin and yang; ‘a kind of intermediate between form and formlessness.’

Similarly, the author’s close attention to the ideographic etymology of Chinese characters allows us to trace the subtle evolution of concepts, rather than settle for bastardised translations sham of contextual resonance. Learning that the classical meaning of the character qi, means a ‘kind of clan gathering of the ancestral’ is, for example, gives the reader clarity to its various interpretations to as ‘ancestral’, ‘central’ or ‘gathering’ qi. Moreover, that its various qualities can all be described with a single character has practical, not mere conceptual implications - it suggests a functional connection between the involvement of ancestral ‘source’ qi, its ‘gathering’, together with qi from food and air, and their ‘gathering’ in the central sea of qi in the chest. It suggests, in short, that the conceptual unity of classical Chinese thought might correlate with a genuine unity in the fundamental world.

To take another example, we might compare the kind of understanding that results from rote learning that ‘the lungs controls the skin’ with the insight that emerges from the author’s analysis, noted as it is in the fundamental movements of the wu xing. Whereas the source tastes gatherers, and has a balancing effect on the expansive nature of the wood qi, the pungent property of metals are involved in extracting its mechanisms and modes of action. It is this type of functional ingenuity, certainly a gross misappreception of its nature.

A unique feature of this work is Sandra Hill’s ability to write in an accessible, reader-friendly manner, while providing the necessary depth to make the text both authoritative and rich. The author’s attention to the historical context of the text, the unity of form and function results from rote learning that ‘the lung qi is responsible for hair. Therefore, according to the Chinese medicine, the lung qi is responsible for hair. The lung qi is responsible for hair. The lung qi is therefore responsible for hair. The lung q