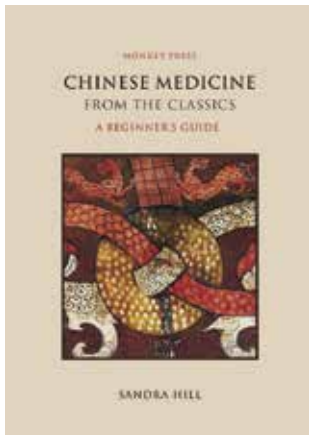


A beginner's guide for experts



CHINESE MEDICINE FROM THE CLASSICS: A Beginner's Guide, by Sandra Hill, Monkey Press: 2014

I'LL REVEAL HERE a bias: I am a fan of anything published by Monkey Press. So it's fairly obvious that my review for this latest edition is going to be far from critical.

For most practitioners, and even maybe seasoned students, there is nothing new in this book. As the sub-title says, this is a "beginner's guide". However, I do feel that for many of us, this book offers a fresh glimpse into the knowledge we already have, by virtue of discussing the basic first-year material in a simple, no-nonsense way, drawing mainly on original, primary source material. In the act of carrying out our CPE obligations imposed on us by bureaucrats, we often have the clarity and purity of our art muddled by disparate theories, schools of thought and methods of practice—which is historically part of the rich syncretic tapestry of Chinese medicine, of course. So there is something beautiful in reading a book such as this, which reminds me—to paraphrase either the *Dao De Jing* or the *Yi Jing*, I don't recall which specifically—of the notion that the "movement of the Dao is return".

In my opinion as an educator, this book should be the required text for first-year students. It covers all the basics: yin-yang, *wu xing*, the Dao, the *zang-fu*, the extraordinary organs, the aspects of Spirit, the *jing-luo*, and the eight extraordinary vessels. The difference between this book and standard reference texts is this: it is easy to read, complex concepts are explained succinctly, and, more importantly, with reference to primary sources with simple (but not simplistic) explanations of terminology. The sources referenced are as diverse as the *Su Wen*, *Ling Shu* and *Nan Jing* to the *Huai Nan Zi*, *Guo Yu*, and *Lü Shi Chun Qiu*.

There are also plenty of references to Monkey Press publications—given that

these are wonderfully primary-source filled expositions on specific topics in Chinese medicine, this book in many ways is a primer or reader on their bibliography, one that I have enjoyed reading again and again.

To me this entire publishing house, and the work of the writers who produce these books speaks to the maturity of the direction of Chinese medicine in the West. Given the rise of what I call "reductionist fundamentalism" within the lower reaches of the scientific community, returning our profession's thoughts and meditations on health and healing to what sets our practices apart from others is the key to offering our unique services to a community searching for wholeness. To quote Sandra Hill directly:

"The sages and physicians of ancient China developed their philosophy through close observation of the world ... They observed the movement of life, rather than its components. They were concerned with the way in which life emerges and the way it returns ... They were engaged in the practical task of finding the best and most efficient way to live." (p. 201)

I agree with her assertion that Chinese medicine is closer in language and ideas to those of systems theory, chaos and complexity. At the forefront, the cutting edge of modern science the implications and applications of these discoveries are closer aligned to the presuppositions of the Daoist, Confucian and Buddhist scholars of ancient China, rather than the reductionist-materialist. Perhaps if we start to pay more attention to these ancient and classical writings as we teach, learn and practise, we will indeed have a medicine that sets us truly apart from the other professions; to employ a pun, that provides a "point of difference".

– PETER LOUPELIS