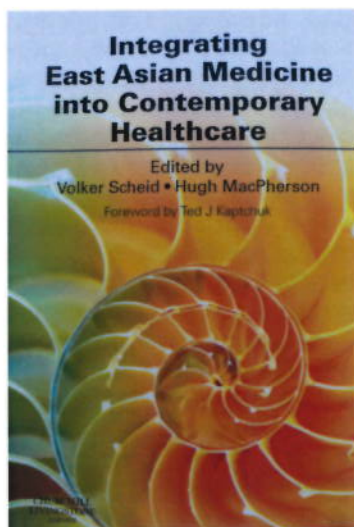


REVIEW

**Volker Scheid and Hugh MacPherson eds
(with a foreword by Ted J. Kaptchuk)
*Integrating East Asian Medicine into
Contemporary Healthcare* Churchill-
Livingston-Elsevier 2012 ISBN 978-0-
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By surveying current expert opinion this book is intended to inform researchers in the field of Traditional East Asian Medicine (TEAM). Hang on though, and pause a minute before you switch channels! Far from being a manual only for dry researchers, it is in fact highly relevant to any of us who are genuinely concerned about traditional East Asian medicine and its future. Ultimately it is as much about the survival of TEAM and understanding the medico-political issues we face as it is about the business of research.

As we know, the question of importation, validation, application and research in the field of TEAM is fraught with complications that become increasingly evident year on year. We used to think that it was just the oriental metaphysics bit that was tricky - getting to grips with exotic ideas and terminology. Then we realised that there were linguistic and translation and authenticity issues. We had to factor in the difficulties that arise from the East-West cultural divide. Also, we spotted the numerous versions of TEAM found in countries such as Japan, Korea, Vietnam. In addition we found a multiplicity of practices reflected in the literate medical traditions through history. Then we wondered about all the *non*-literate medical traditions!

Also, we started to think more carefully about the question of clinical trials, how the evidence base is constructed and what kind of acupuncture do we should use? These issues are all very cogent for those who consider themselves to be activists in this medicine and not only practitioners. It is quite clear that we cannot, as we imagined at first, simply *learn* acupuncture or herbs and just do it and expect a place in modern healthcare. Things have turned out to be more complicated.

Integrating East Asian Medicine into Contemporary Healthcare is a collection of writings by fourteen leading contributors to the field, with additional short essays ("vignettes") by a dozen others. The editors Volker Scheid and Hugh MacPherson are ideally placed to bring together the A-list scholars who have meaningful things to say about the issues involved in the integration of East Asian medicine into modern healthcare. Having the ideas of so many authors squeezed into a 230 page book does wonders for communication, helping to eliminate the academic vices of tortuous definition of terminology, meticulous referencing, pontification, fluff and waffle. Plain narratives by great thinkers make the book a joy to read.

In Ted Kaptchuk's introduction we find him in characteristically engaging form. First he succinctly chronicles the internationalism inherent in Chinese medicine from the *shennong bencao* to modern times, stringing together some interesting instances of this along the way. It's a refreshingly neat trick to cover 2000 years in two pages whilst avoiding the usual platitudes - I am reminded of why Ted was for so long my main Chinese Medicine hero. He then gets down to business by outlining the key questions the book aims to address: How do we identify the true, authentic tradition that we should study, research and practice? Whose job is it to distinguish the valid from the delusional in the vast TEAM panoply? What actually constitutes *best practice* in East Asian medicine? Is this something inherent in the doctrine or does it include the practitioner in a critical way - something that biomedicine aims to remove from the equation. What, Ted asks, is legitimate healing and what is just storytelling? These are extremely important questions for us all as practitioners as well as for our profession as a whole.

Following on from this a wide range of themes then emerge through the book. One is the contrast between the biomedical orientation towards *best practice* in which the practitioner works as a functionary delivering pre-ordained EBM-derived