The Foundations of Chinese Medicine
(2nd edition)
Giovanni Maciocia
Hardcover, 676 pages, price: £75
Churchill Livingstone; 2005
ISBN: 0443074895

This is a real tour de force in the acupuncture literature, by a European who has mastered the language enough to read Chinese Classics and who has studied extensively in the old Chinese capital of Nanjing.

He classifies acupuncture, quite rightly, as only part of Chinese Medicine, which also accentuates the importance of a good diet, lifestyle (eg balance of work and exercise), as well as herbal medicine, surgery and tuina. The author elaborates on the avoidance of sexual excesses (which deplete the Kidney essence and thus qi), with quotes from the literature that provide a guide for the recommended frequencies in certain age groups!

He also discusses the theories of Yin and Yang, Five Elements and especially the replenishment of qi, by using certain acupuncture points, or by using Yoga and Taiji (tai chi).

Everything is related to qi and it is interesting that a recent PET scan study has shown changes in the limbic system when de qi is accomplished by needling a traditional point. The diagnosis of disease is presented by observation, interrogation and by disease patterns ie a collection of symptoms and signs. The disease pattern section takes up approximately 25% of the book and some doctors may find this rather alien and indigestible. The remedial acupuncture points are then recommended for each syndrome.

The author next discusses the functions of the acupuncture points and channels (assuming the reader knows the position of the points). He discusses at length the different functions of the main points in an effort to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western medicine, with several Western indications. No formulae are given for Western diseases.

A CD-ROM is attached, which gives good anatomical diagrams in pdf format (eg relevant positions of vertebrae to organs), as well as pictures of different tongues etc. A good search facility is incorporated.

I have been exposed to Chinese medicine in China and Hong Kong and found this book fascinating. Unfortunately my regional BMAS group seemed to be rather put off by the size, although they recognised the author’s name. At £75 this is not cheap, but it encourages an insight into Chinese medicine from the classics, which I feel any serious acupuncturist would benefit from reading. Nowadays many Chinese practitioners use a formula approach especially in busy clinics, but still manage to harness some traditional approaches.

Recent research in the West has indicated that traditional acupuncture points are effective and future research may well cast light on some of these Chinese syndromes.

Rosemary Alexander