

You may have had acupuncture treatment in the past and assumed that all acupuncture is pretty much the same. Here is why you would be wrong in that assumption.

My original training in acupuncture and Oriental medicine prepared me to later get a second degree in Naturopathy.

There is a huge overlap of Oriental medicine and Naturopathy that many people do not realize. The reason is that original Oriental medicine used all modalities of natural medicine; as the licensing laws used to say, “all of nature's agencies and forces”. It was divided into two categories: the “Inner” and the “Outer”.

The “Inner” consisted of medicines made from plants, mineral sources, and some organic extracts such as venom etc. It consisted of the dietary recommendations based on the individual and the conditions the individual had. Certain foods were to be avoided, others were to be emphasized as therapeutic agents. Also, organ meats were utilized as a therapy to target the afflicted organ or

organs. In other words, organotherapy. In addition to dietary regulation, there were detoxification methods that fit in the inner category. Original Oriental medicine even had colonic irrigation. They would lubricate a hollow reed with goose grease and wade out into a body of water up to the waist, thus filling the entire colon with water. Then they would get out and expel it. A little crude, but effective. Then there was also a kind of counseling that would involve contemplative and meditative exercises according to the imbalance that the person had.

The “Outer” consisted of point therapy, whether by needle acupuncture or by pressure on the points, moxibustion, soft tissue massage, joint and spinal manipulation, topical medications in the form of poultices and ointments, hydrotherapy in the form of controlled temperature immersions but also hot and cold packs, as we would call them today. There were energy inductive exercises (designed to increase circulation of bioelectrical energy in the body) and postures and movements prescribed for the person’s weaknesses, like exercise or occupational therapy today. Of course, all the typical supportive treatments like splints etc., were used, as in Western medicine.

Naturally, the various approaches to all these modalities varied a bit from school to school, resulting in family styles (just as in martial arts). The turning point came in the 1950s under Chairman Mao, who sought to standardize the various indigenous Chinese medical methods as a feather in his cap and as a propaganda tool, just as a good communist leader would do. To explain that last sentence, Mao secretly utilized Western medicine for his own health care but promoted traditional medicine in China as a cultural heritage and a competitive practice to the increasingly present Western medicine. Mao set up a council to do this which was dominated by the herbalists, who had many fanciful theories. In addition to eliminating many schools with a longstanding reputation for efficacy (they killed some of them), Mao's herbalist directors subjected acupuncture to their esoteric philosophes. Principally, the "Five Element theory" upon which herbal prescriptions were based, and the very complicated energetic layer theories. This became known as TCM, or traditional Chinese medicine. It was anything but. The framework for it did not exist until the 1950s and was unveiled in the early '60s as part of the Cultural Revolution.

Acupuncture in other countries continued to develop more scientifically and more practically than in China. Japanese acupuncture, for example, developed in accordance with neurological findings from modern medicine long before. French and German acupuncture did the same. They were the ones we looked up to when I was at school. And the Russians were considered to be far above anyone else, based on what little we knew about what they were doing.

When acupuncture education got going in the United states, there was a diversity of schools ranging from the ultra-scientific to the most esoteric. What happened in the years after I graduated was that, unknown to me and a lot of others, the Chinese were slowly invading the US acupuncture scene by establishing more and more schools using the TCM method and propagating their use of the Chinese TCM compound medicines. This proved to be an ongoing problem because the Chinese companies had (and still have) a penchant for lacing their supposedly herbal products with pharmaceutical drugs and not screening for toxic materials like heavy metals. The FDA has done battle with Chinese herbal compounds coming into the country on many occasions. I'm no big fan of the FDA, but when they are exposing

this kind of deception, they are actually doing their job. Most acupuncturists, I think you will find, continue to use the Chinese herbal medicines because they are taught their use in school.

Anyway, most of the schools that do *not* teach TCM have withered away, and they were in essence...naturopathic schools, whether they used the name or not. The graduates of these schools are now older and fewer in number, and as a result, the typical practitioner you are likely to find today is using TCM-style treatment. I continue to use the science-based neurological acupuncture I was taught. None of the herbal medicines I use come from China. And I still use all the other modalities such as hydrotherapy, heat and cold, corrective exercises, diet, topical treatments, etc.