Energy Medicine: East and West: A Natural History of Qi
by David Mayor and Marc S. Micozzi
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Energy Medicine: East and West: A Natural History of Qi is a sterling collection of insightful and scholarly chapters, each one quite technical. This engaging and well-organized volume, edited by David Mayor and Marc S. Micozzi, is not really an introduction to energy medicine, nor a broad survey of the subject or the field, no matter how the book is being marketed. Rather, it is a comprehensive, detailed, and very sophisticated examination of *qi* for academic scientists and researchers. Accordingly, this is a superb contribution to the ongoing development of a “basic sciences” for complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).

The two-dozen chapters are uniformly fascinating and authoritative, penned mostly by expert academic contributors. The content of the chapters, collectively, bridges current biomedical research, contemporary basic-science theories regarding CAM, bioenergetic and bioelectromagnetic features and correlates of anatomy and physiology and pathophysiology, and esoteric teachings regarding *qi*. Contributors represent an especially broad range of medical specialties and scientific disciplines, emphasizing published investigators and individuals with professional or scientific background in CAM modalities.

The book is divided into five major sections: global ethnomedical perspectives on a vital life energy, Chinese medicine’s understanding of *qi*, theory and experimental research on *qi*, treatment modalities involving *qi*, and clinical applications of *qi*. The book concludes with a fascinating and revealing content analysis of the dozens of words used by chapter authors to refer to characteristic features and functions of *qi* (e.g., energy, breath, biofield, matrix, quantum, spirit).

As a research scientist with a particular interest in conceptual and theoretical aspects of nonmainstream therapeutic phenomena—that is, the “what” (boundaries, models) and “how” (mechanisms) that, respectively define and explain such phenomena—I especially enjoyed the chapter by John A. Ives and Wayne B. Jonas of the Samueli Institute. Their chapter, which questioned the value of an “energy” metaphor in describing and making sense of modalities typically grouped under the rubric of energy medicine, elaborates on a discourse on this subject that has been ongoing for many years. One of the earliest contributions, in fact, is a famous essay published 20 years ago, entitled, “But Is It Energy?” written by Larry Dossey, this journal’s founder and executive editor.

Ives and Jonas state their claim directly and honestly:

“We are not so bold as to suggest that we know the mechanism for energy medicine. On the contrary, we contend that there is legitimate debate over whether there even is such a thing as ‘subtle energy’ (p. 163).

They go on to identify and describe several competing theories for “the underlying mechanisms giving rise to the effects of energy medicine” (p. 163). These include explanations based on conventional understandings of energy, the biofield hypothesis, placebo effects, and quantum entanglement; their chapter emphasizes the latter. The presence of the Ives and Jonas chapter is a clear indication that the editors were seeking critical and expansive thinking on the subject of energy medicine and were welcoming of perspectives that challenge tacit presumptions and, one might say, that embrace the mystery of energy medicine.

Although this book is subtitled, “East and West,” the focus is mostly “east,” specifically on *qi*. Other systems or modes of energy medicine or energy healing are not as emphasized. There is not a thing wrong with that at all—this remains an impeccable overview of state-of-the-art theory and research regarding *qi* and its associated paradigm in the context of health, healing, and medical care for a Western audience. But, still, other systems or traditions of energy medicine and other worldviews regarding energy healing are left to a future volume by someone else. Contributors clearly identify, however, the convergences and overlaps among Chinese medicine and other non-Western worldviews when it comes to features of an energy-medicine paradigm; so this should not be taken as a substantive criticism.

The foreword is written by James L. Oschman, the author of two outstanding volumes on energy medicine. This was thus a very appropriate choice and, indeed, the present volume makes an excellent complement to the two Oschman books. This edited collection is the most comprehensive and accessible resource on *qi* and healing for a Western scientific audience that has been published to date, and is a lasting contribution to the scientific literature on energy medicine.

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