

NARRATIVE

Chakra use in acupuncture – myth or magic?

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Abstract

Chakras have their root in ancient yoga texts and Indian Ayurvedic medicine. Modern New Age depictions of Chakras have expanded from these original descriptions based on interpretation of historical texts, meditation practice, and energy medicine. Current usage describes seven Chakras lying within the body and attribute's physiological function and colours to them. Usage varies widely and is often based on sparse research which is either qualitative or of low-quality quantitative type. Parallels have been drawn between original Chakra descriptions and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) concepts such as deficient or excess energy, and five element theory. Anatomical similarities have been overlayed on Chakra position to expand their original description to include internal organ and acupuncture point position. This article describes acupuncture points of the Conception Vessel (CV) and Governing Vessel (GV) which are most often described in Chakra usage. Classic acupuncture point function of these points is compared to Chakra usage to guide patient management.

Keywords: Acupuncture, Chakra, Ayurveda, TCM, New Age, Yoga, Energy medicine, Conception vessel, Governing vessel, Evidence based practice.

History

Anyone who has ever been to a yoga class or encountered meditation, will have come across the term, Chakras. They are often described as seven energy centres associated with emotions, colours, and crystals. Their function is said to be to balance body energy. When 'blocked' health can suffer, and this can be improved if the Chakras are unblocked or cleared. The process of clearing a Chakra is said to be accomplished using techniques such as yoga, breathing exercises (pranayama), meditation, acupressure, and various types of 'energy healing'.

Although Chakras often feature in New Age writings, their origins can be traced back

thousands of years to ancient yoga texts. They were first mentioned obliquely in the Hindu Vedas, a collection of four religious texts written between 1500-1200 BCE. However, the modern version of the Chakras stems from the writings of John Woodroffe (who wrote under the pseudonym Arthur Avalon) in the book *The Serpent Power*, originally written in 1919 and republished in later years (New Age books 2012). This work is a translation and commentary of the book *Sat Chakra Nirupana* (description of the six centres) written in AD 1550-70. The original description of the Chakras was of stages of meditation focus

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rather than energy vortexes. There is no mention of them being blocked or cleared, or that the Chakras correspond to emotional states, colours, or gemstones (Narayan 2022); so this would seem to have been added later. Woodroffe's interpretation was later expanded by Charles Leadbeater in his book *The Chakras* (1927). The meditation connection to the Chakras was highlighted by Rudolf Steiner in his book *How to know higher worlds* (1904).

Chakra theory

Chakra theory runs parallel with the mystical view that the human form exists in several layers. The physical body is believed to be surrounded by a further subtle body. Often called an Aura, this concept occurs in many Eastern beliefs but is also seen in Western traditions such as alchemy. There have been attempts to photograph this region using Kirlian photography (Konikiewicz 1977), with studies in the 1970's claiming to visualise auric changes in cancer patients (Gadsby 1993). Several other body layers have been described which are said to be influenced by emotions, thought, and beliefs (Cross 2008), including the Astral or dream body referenced in out of body experiences (OBE). Chakras are said to pierce through each of the body layers and create binding points raising the possibility that they may affect the body on a non-physical basis.

In popular health culture, it is said that when a Chakra is blocked or out of balance the energy flow through the chakra system is incorrect. If there is a depletion of energy a person may find it difficult to use the quality associated with the chakra. Where energy is excessive, the qualities of a particular chakra become the dominant aspect of the person's life (Lindberg 2020). This thinking is similar in many ways to one of *the eight principles*

used to differentiate syndromes in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Deficiency and excess are terms used to describe the relationship between strength of a pathogen affecting the body, and the proportional strength of the defensive systems of the body (antipathogenic Qi) to combat that pathogen.

The location of the chakra in relation to a body region (see below) may cause its imbalance to affect the related region (Lindberg 2020), with both physiological and psychological features being important. Physiological changes may be seen in a related organ (for example gastric symptoms related to the sacral or heart chakras) and psychological changes may be seen related to the psychosocial aspect of the chakra (table 1). Again, there is a parallel with TCM where pathogens may be external related to the environment (classically termed the *6 external pathogens* – wind, fire, cold, damp, dryness, and summer heat) or internal related to psychological factors (classically termed the *7 emotions* – anger, joy, worry, overthinking, sadness, fear, and shock).

The use of seven colours corresponding to a rainbow and seven notes corresponding to a musical scale, in addition to gemstones are all New Age additions often related to meditation focus or energy healing.

Chakras in relation to Western physiology

Most modern texts describe seven Chakras, one at both the top and bottom of the body (crown chakra and base chakra) and five on the body itself (sacral, solar plexus, heart, throat, and third eye). The five body chakras are said to be level with dividing planes of the body cavities including the pelvic floor, diaphragm, thoracic inlet, thoracic outlet, and the sellar diaphragm housing the pituitary gland (Cross 2008).

Table 1: Traditional Chakra position and functions

Chakra	Position	Psycho-social aspect	Dysfunction	Associated endocrine organ	Nerve plexus
Base	Base of spine	Grounding	Constipation, IBS,	Gonads	Inferior mesenteric
Sacral	Below umbilicus	Pleasure, sexual energy	LBP, menstrual problems	Pancreas	Superior mesenteric
Solar plexus	Upper abdomen	Confidence, self esteem	Digestive disorders	Adrenal glands	Celiac
Heart	Centre of chest	Love, compassion	Palpitations, angina	Thymus	Heart
Throat	Throat	Communication	Asthma, sore throat	Thyroid	Thyroid
Third eye	Between the eyes	Intuition	Dizziness, eye problems, insomnia	Pituitary gland	Pineal
Crown	Top of head	Enlightenment	Headache, Epilepsy	Pineal gland	Pituitary

IBS – IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME. LBP – LOW BACK PAIN.
(DATA FROM LINDBERG 2020, TANG 2021, STUX 2003).

The position of the Chakras (table 1) has led to their association with internal organs and nerve plexuses. The first (base or root) chakra is related to the sex organs and its function is one of survival of the individual and of the race. It is said to be related to the grounding of an individual and gives stability to things such as relationships and work projects (Tang 2021). It is concerned with sex hormones such as testosterone, oestrogen and progesterone which have actions in many body areas in addition to the sex organs, including the bones, brain, and blood vessels. The second (sacral) chakra is related to the pancreas and as the pancreatic hormones insulin and glucagon regulate blood sugar, this chakra is often associated both with energy levels and food conversion into energy. These two chakras are said to be related to the interior (base chakra) and superior (sacral chakra) mesenteric nerve plexuses.

Chakra number three (solar plexus) is related to the celiac plexus and linked to the adrenal glands which release adrenaline and cortisol, and this chakra is associated with energy levels and self-confidence. Colloquially people talk about nervousness as a feeling of ‘butterflies in

the stomach’ or a sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach and these sensations occur in the region of the solar plexus chakra. The heart chakra is related to the heart nerve plexus and involves the thymus gland. Primarily active in children, the thymus is important to immunity (producing T cells) and this chakra is associated with compassion, and to both giving and receiving love. Additionally, the heart chakra is said to link all the lower chakras which are related to physicality while the higher chakras above the heart chakra level

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The thyroid and parathyroid glands are linked to the fifth chakra, that of the throat. These hormones have effects on metabolic rate and this chakra is said to be linked to expression of feelings. The sixth chakra is related to the pineal gland and is sometimes called the third eye. The primary hormone is melatonin which governs circadian rhythm, and this chakra is related to intuition. Colloquially people talk about ‘seeing the bigger picture’ or to see things at a deeper rather than superficial level, and this capacity is linked to the third eye chakra. Finally, the seventh chakra (crown) is linked to the pituitary gland, often called the ‘master gland’ as it produces several hormones and hormone releasing factors which interact with other glands. Hence the crown chakra is linked to overall enlightenment. The thyroid, pineal and pituitary glands of the 5th, 6th, and 7th chakras are said to be linked to the thyroid, pineal, and pituitary nerve plexuses respectively.

Chakras and acupuncture theory

Traditional medicine types have developed knowledge over long periods not through the scientific method and experimental research, but primarily through observation of patient responses and changes occurring in general health in relation to the lived environment. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) describes the five elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water). Ancient Greek writings of the 5th century BCE attributed to Empedocles (a pre-Socratic philosopher) which gave rise to western science, described only four elements (earth, water, air, and fire). In both systems however, the elements were also related to non-physical items. In the case of classical Greece forces such as Love, and Strife were said to affect the elements directly. In TCM anger, joy, over thinking, grief and fear are related to the five elements respectively. This relationship

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in TCM goes further with each element related to a season, climatic feature (wind, heat, damp, dryness and cold), and internal organ. In Indian Ayurvedic medicine, the Chakra system is also related to emotion or psychological state.

TCM theory broadly encompasses *Yin and Yang*, and the five element theories (Bing and Hongcai 2010). *Yin and Yang* theory is a concept of complementary opposites such as warm and cold, static and dynamic, deficiency and excess. Health exists where balance is achieved, and disease when balance is lost. Within this same principle, meridians on the outer (lateral) aspect of the limbs are categorised as a group as *yang* meridians, while those on the inner (medial) aspect are referred to as *yin*. Treatment aims at restoring balance, for example stasis would be treated by introducing movement, excess by reducing and deficiency by reinforcing, cold by warming and excess heat by cooling. The five elements (table 2) are each related to an internal organ, climatic element, emotion, sense, and tissue (as well as tastes, colours, seasons and voice used in other aspects of TCM). Five element theory is used to classify movement and change in nature generally. Within TCM the relationship between the various parts of the body and mechanism of homeostasis is reflected within the 5 elements through *interpromotion* (one element promoting the next), *interaction* (one element restricting the next), *overaction* (excessive action) and *counteraction* (reversal).

The physiological function of the body and its organs have their material foundation in *Qi*, Blood, and Body Fluids which are said to be fundamental substances, with each related to each other. When these substances are balanced, health is promoted, and when out of balance pathological changes may occur.

Although the chakra system belongs to Ayurvedic (Indian) traditional medicine and five

Table 2: Five element theory in TCM

Element	Climate	Zang organ	Fu organ	Sense	Tissue	Emotion
Wood	Wind	Liver (LR)	Gall Bladder (GB)	Eye	Tendon	Anger
Fire	Heat	Heart (HT)	Small Intestine (SI)	Tongue	Vessel	Joy
Earth	Damp	Spleen (SP)	Stomach (ST)	Mouth	Muscle	Over thinking
Metal	Dryness	Lungs (LU)	Large Intestine (LI)	Nose	Skin & Hair	Grief
Water	Cold	Kidneys (KD)	Bladder (BL)	Ear	Bone	Fear

(DATA FROM BING AND HONGCAI 2010)

Table 3: Chakra relationships to TCM and the five elements

Chakra	TCM parallel by Author			
	Huang	Stux	Greenwood	Cross
Base	Wood (LR)	KD Yin	Water	Water (KD & BL)
Sacral	Water (KD)	KD Yang, BL & LI	Earth	Earth (SP)
Solar plexus	Fire (HT)	SP & LR	Wood	Earth (ST)
Heart	Air (LU)	HT	Fire	Fire (SI & TE)
Throat	Earth (SP)	LU	Metal	Metal (LU & LI)
Third eye	Water (KD)	Yintang & GV-15 point	No element	Wood (LR & GB)
Crown	Wood (LR)	GV-20 point	No element	Fire (HT & PC)

(DATA FROM STUX ET AL 2003, GREENWOOD 2006, CROSS 2008, HUANG 2021)

element theory, Ying and yang, and fundamental substances to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) some authors have linked the two although the correspondences do not always match (table 3).

Chakra specific acupuncture points

The evidence base on Chakras is poor. Many papers draw on aspects of pseudo-science and pseudo-history biasing previous work to fit in with a paper's aims. However, evidence from patient and practitioner experience may indicate a potential

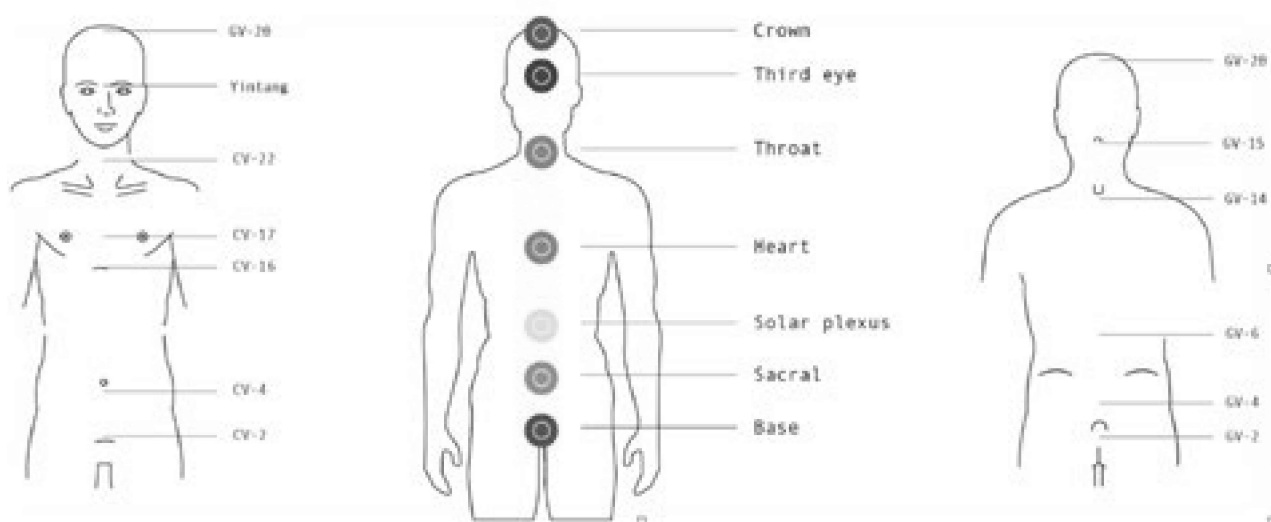
use for the Chakra system within mind-body approaches to therapy and exercise. Within this field the consideration of acupuncture point choice based on Chakras may have a place adjunctive to other approaches such as Western protocols, TCM, segmental methods and Dry Needling / muscle based clinical reasoning.

The Chakras are said to be positioned within the body, and so access to them through acupuncture points is via the Conception (CV) vessel channel anteriorly and the Governing (GV) vessel

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Figure 1

Chakra positions and acupuncture point correspondence



posteriorly (figure 1). Both sets of points have specific uses in acupuncture, either for local pain or systemic conditions. The Governing vessel points are often used as midline points for spinal pain, and although they may be used for the Chakras if the patient is lying prone, the Conception vessel points are more commonly associated with Chakra treatment. The base Chakra lies close to CV-1 anteriorly, and GV-1 posteriorly. As these points are on the perineum, the next point along the meridian (CV-2 and GV-2 respectively) is needled instead. CV-2, lying on the upper border of the pubic symphysis, is typically used for genito-urinary conditions, while GV-2 being over the sacro-coccygeal hiatus, may also be used for sacrococcygeal conditions. These functions broadly equate with the chakra description of grounding described above.

The sacral Chakra is level with CV-4 and GV-4. Some authors quote this chakra as a region CV-2 to CV-4 anteriorly and GV-2 to GV-4 posteriorly rather than a single point (Stux 2003). CV-4 and GV-4 are powerful points in TCM with CV-4 (said

to tonify the Kidneys, original qi, and essence) being used for fertility treatments and GV-4 a much-used point for low back pain. Interestingly, in TCM GV-4 has two names, *Mingmen* (Gate of Life) reflecting the points use in acute back conditions (where it is said to clear heat), and *Jinggong* (Palace of Essence) indicating the points usage in urinogenital conditions. CV-4 lies 2 cun superior to the middle of the superior border of the pubic symphysis while GV-4 is positioned below the spinous process of L2, at the same level as point BL-23 a commonly used point in low back pain (LBP) management. Again, this function is similar to that quoted for the sacral Chakra (table 1) both in terms of local pain conditions and energy.

The solar plexus Chakra is level with CV-12 and GV-6. CV-12, located at the midpoint of a line joining the umbilicus and sternocostal angle, is typically used for epigastric pain and in TCM is known as the Front-Mu (gathering) point of the Stomach. GV-6 can be used as a local point for pain in the region of the thoraco-lumbar junction. The heart Chakra is associated with CV-17

anteriorly and GV-11 posteriorly. CV-17, located on the midline of the sternum at the level of the 4th intercostal space, is a frequently used point in respiratory conditions and is often needled in cases of shortness of breath or wheeze. The point also has a use for chest pain in TCM where it is said to be the Front Mu (Gathering) point of the pericardium. Its TCM function targeting chest pain is the same as the chakra function. GV-11 can be used as a local point for central thoracic spine pain.

The throat Chakra is accessed via CV-22, positioned in the centre of the suprasternal fossa, or GV-14 found below the spinous process of C7. The throat Chakra is associated with the voice and communication, and CV-22 is a point classically used for cough, sore throat, and loss of voice. GV-14 is an important point for neck or upper thoracic pain. In TCM it is said to eliminate pathogens from all the yang channels of the body (GV-14 is said to be the meeting point of the Governing vessel and the six yang channels of the hand and foot). Clinically it is often used for neck pain with referral into the arm.

The third eye point is represented by the extra point *Yintang* lying between the eyebrows, and GV-15 in the nape of the neck (0.5 cun below GV-16 which lies level with the external occipital

protuberance). Although designated as an extra point, *Yintang* (EX-HN 3) lies along the GV channel, and is often used in the treatment of frontal headaches and in the treatment of anxiety as well as to clear the frontal sinuses, all actions similar to those listed for the third eye Chakra. The crown Chakra is represented by GV-20 lying at the vertex of the head and this point is traditionally used for headache and the treatment of vertigo. As the highest point in the body, it is the most *yang* point in TCM and so is often used with headaches (head wind in TCM terms). It may also be used in cases of dizziness, tinnitus and hemiplegia which are all related to the wind pathogen in classical acupuncture practice. Acupuncture points associated with the Chakras are listed in table 4.

Table 4: Acupuncture points associated with the Chakras

Chakra	Anterior points (abdomen)	Posterior points (spine)
Base	CV-1 (2)	GV-1 (2)
Sacral	CV-4	GV-4
Solar plexus	CV-12	GV-6
Heart	CV-17	GV-11
Throat	CV-22	GV-14
Third eye	Yintang	GV-15
Crown	GV-20	GV-20

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Using Chakras in therapy

There are several ways in which Chakras may be used therapeutically. Breathwork, yoga, meditation, acupuncture, and massage therapies all have areas where Chakras may be emphasised. Several studies have been carried out which have attempted to measure the effects of these therapies and although they are often low quality from a research perspective, they are of interest in a case-to-case basis. A 2021 study looked at Chakra energy in SARS Cov-19 patients and claimed to measure the energy within Chakras using radiesthesia. This technique used movement of a crystal pendulum when it was placed over the Chakra. The amount of pendulum movement was rated numerically, and the author claimed that 89% of the analysed patients showed energy deficiency within the chakra which could be treated using homeopathy and TCM 5 element theory. Chakra meditation was used in a 2020 study which measured results using anxiety questionnaires. The meditation method consisted of focusing the mind on each Chakra in turn for three minutes. Prior to the Chakra meditation, yoga postures (Asana) and breathing (Pranayama) were practiced and a relaxation pose (Savasana) used to finish the programme. The study attempted to produce a model for method and measurement of Chakra meditation and reduction in anxiety and improvement in health perception was noted (Lim and Lee 2020).

A number of classic studies have been performed in the past and published either locally as case reports or in non-peer reviewed journals. Motoyama (1981) measured high frequency oscillation using a magnetometer when placing copper electrodes over Chakras. Meditation focusing on each Chakra was said to produce an increase in high frequency oscillation and energy emission measured on a photoelectric cell. Hunt (1977) produced an internal report using silver/silver chloride electrodes over Chakras receiving healing and claimed alteration in waveforms separate to those naturally generated by heart, brain, and muscle activity.

Discussion

The physiotherapy profession, like other medical professions adheres to Evidence-Based Practice (CSP 2021a) which requires the integration of best research evidence, individual clinical expertise, and patient choice. All three components are important, but not necessarily equal, and the relative contribution of each may vary between patients. Research evidence of both efficacy and effectiveness must exist before a treatment can be considered. Once this is known, the decision to use an intervention must be agreed between the patient and practitioner. Material concerning Chakras can be biased because the person writing the paper has a vested interest in the method due to financial or intellectual interests. On a research basis alone, the use of Chakras with energy medicine within physiotherapy must be dismissed, and indeed is now considered outside a physiotherapist's professional scope of practice (CSP 2021b). However, patients can express a desire to use the Chakras if they have a background in mind-body exercise or healthcare. To acknowledge this patient choice, if clinical reasoning has indicated that Chakras should be used, it would seem more logical to use them from an acupuncture perspective as acupuncture has robust evidence within the complementary, alternative, and holistic (CAH) therapies (BMAS 2022). When used within an acupuncture approach, Chakra-based points particularly on the conception vessel (CV) channel are probably more effectively used as an adjunct to limb-based points rather than in isolation. Their choice of use and point combination may be clinically reasoned from a Western medical, TCM, or combined framework dependent on the practitioner's expertise.

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