

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

The study of TCM is a mixture of myth and fact, stretching back well over 5000 years. At the time, none of the knowledge was written down, apart from primitive inscriptions of prayers for the sick on pieces of tortoise carapace and animal bones, so a mixture of superstition, symbolism and fact was passed down by word of mouth for centuries.

TCM still contains very many remedies, which were selected by their symbolic significance rather than proven effects; however this does not necessarily mean that they are all 'quack' remedies! There may even be some value in medicines such as tiger bone, bear gall, turtle shell, dried centipede, bat dung and so on.

The herbs, however, are well researched and are becoming increasingly popular as people become disillusioned with Western medicine. Again, Chinese medicine is philosophically based and as a holistic therapy the concept of balance and harmony is supremely important.

CONCEPTS IN TCM

THE ESSENTIAL LIFE FORCE

Qi (or **chi**) permeates everything. It is transferable.

For example, digestion extracts qi from food and drink and transfers it to the body; and breathing extracts qi from the air and transfers it to the lungs.

These two forms of qi 'meet' in the blood and form 'human qi' which circulates through the body.

It is the quality, quantity and balance of qi that determines your state of health and lifespan. Obviously, therefore, food and air affect health, so diet and breathing exercises are very important. These aspects of treatment will be considered first, before herbs are introduced. It is considered that the original vital energy, **yuan qi**, is gradually dissipated throughout life, so it is important to conserve it using diet, kung fu, breathing exercise and herbal medicine.

YIN AND YANG

These have already been mentioned as central to Taoism and the theory of yin and yang still permeates all aspects of Chinese thought. Attributes of both are:

- **Yin:** negative/ passive/ dark/ female/ water
- **Yang:** positive/ active/ bright/ male/ fire.

Yin is considered to be the stronger: fire is extinguished by water, and water is 'indestructible'. Yin is always mentioned before yang; however, they are always in balance. Both contain the seed of each other: their opposites within themselves.

THE FIVE ELEMENTS

The earth is divided into wood, fire, earth, metal and water. They dominate everything on earth and each is associated with a vital organ of the body:

- Heart: fire
- Liver: wood
- Spleen: earth
- Lungs: metal
- Kidneys: water.

THE VITAL ORGANS

These do not correspond to our organs exactly.

Exact anatomy was not considered important since it was the relationship between the organs, the five elements, qi and yin and yang that mattered. Until the 20th century, cutting up a human body (dead or alive) was considered a grave insult to the ancestors. An example of the relationship between them all and its treatment is that of a person with a red complexion (fire color) and who laughs a lot (fire sound) may have an over-fired heart; in this case, herbs to sedate the heart will be given.

The organs are also considered to be yin or yang and are paired. Coupled organs are connected by meridians, or energy channels, through which qi flows. Meridians are not associated with the nervous system and cannot be seen physically. They are stimulated with herbs and by acupuncture and will have a direct effect on a particular organ as well as a toning effect on the system.

CAUSE OF DISEASE

Bacteria, viruses and chemicals are not considered to be causes. If an organ is weak, it may be attacked and therefore the weakness is the cause and must be rectified. It may be the result of external forces and internal emotional factors. The external 'cosmological' forces are called the **six excesses**:

- Wind
- Cold
- Summer heat
- Dampness
- Dryness
- Fire.

Most people if healthy are not affected by the six excesses but if the body is deficient in qi or weather conditions are abnormal (i.e. not what is expected), then this may cause problems.

THE SEVEN EMOTIONS

These are considered to be the major internal causes of disease. Excessive emotional activity causes a severe yin/yang imbalance, blockage of qi in the meridians and impairment of vital organ function.

This leads to damage of the organs and allows disease to enter from outside, or a minor weakness from inside to develop. The seven emotions are:

- Joy
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Concentration
- Grief
- Fear
- Fright.

Once physical damage has occurred, by whatever cause, it will need more than emotional factors to cure it and herbs will be used. There are a few other causes which are not emotional or external excesses. These are the exception not the rule, and include epidemics, insect and animal bites, worm infestation and hereditary diseases.

DIAGNOSIS

Various methods are used:

- **Examination of the tongue:** a very important aspect.
- **Pulse diagnosis:** more than one pulse will be taken, depending on the pressure exerted.
- **Palpation of internal organs:** carried out to determine consistency and tone.
- **Massage:** used to detect temperature and knotted muscles or nerves.
- **Interviewing:** vital; questions are asked about sleep patterns, tastes in food and drink, stool and urine quality, fever, perspiration and sexual activity.

TREATMENT

The purpose is to rectify harmony, restore qi and the yin/yang balance. For example 'cold'

diseases, such as cold in the lungs, coughs, vomiting and nausea are considered to be a deficiency of yang and treatment would be with a warming herb such as ginger. Once the prescription has been formulated, the patient may be given a crude herb mixture with written instructions on how to prepare it at home, perhaps as an infusion or tea. Pastes and pills are prepared by the herbalist and may take several days to complete.

Slow-release preparations are made using beeswax pills; tonic wines, fermented dough (with herbs in) and external poultices are also common.

Treatment of disease in traditional Chinese medicine according to the nature of disease and the remedy					
Type of Disease	Example of Disease	Nature of Disease	Nature of Remedy	Example of Remedy	Desired Effect
Cold	Nausea, vomiting	Yin	Yang	<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	Warming
Hot	Malaria, fever	Yang	Yin	<i>Artemisia annua</i>	Cooling
Empty	Fatigue, diabetes	Yin, yang, qi deficiency	Tonic	<i>Panax ginseng</i>	Nourishing
Full	Congestion in chest	Yang	Yin	<i>Scutellaria baicalensis</i>	Cooling
Internal	Weak pulse	Yin	Yang	<i>Aconitum carmichaeli</i>	Warming
External	Psoriasis	Yang	Yin	<i>Arctium lappa</i>	Cooling

ACUPUNCTURE

Practiced by ancient Chinese belief that there are patterns of energy (Qi) flowing throughout the body. Disease will occur if the flow is blocked or disrupted when thin needles laser energy are inserted into the body at specific points, each link to a particular organ network, the energy flow supposedly can be restored.

- Alleviates nausea after surgery, chemotherapy and pregnancy. >20% of all surgeries are done under acupuncture an anesthesia has 70-80% success rate.
- Also in treatment of headaches, asthma, stroke, rehabilitation and fibromyalgia.
- Acupuncture can be used for treatment of chronic pain. In Finland, 65% of patients either stopped taking pain killers drugs or reduced their dosage.

Research shows that needles prompt the release of natural painkillers (encephalins, endorphins). TCM has been expanded into conventional medicine.

AROMATHERAPY

Is the science of healing with natural essential oils from plants. Holistic approach considers the emotional physical and physiological may cure, prevent disease, infections and indisposition.

It can be used to combat insomnia, jetlag, pain, arthritis and rheumatism, stress related illness such as epilepsy, asthma, heart conditions, and toxemia in pregnancy.

Essential oils are divided into different groups.

1. **Top notes:** high volatility for uplifting and invigorating effects e.g. basil, thyme and sage.
2. **Middle notes:** affect general metabolism and the bodily systems e.g. chamomile fennel and lavender.
3. **Base notes:** have sedative and calming effects e.g. sandal wood, ylang-ylang (*canada odorata*) and patchouli (*pogestemon patchouli*).

Research results

- Chamomile and lavender for soothing qualities of emotions and mind.
- Rosemary, juniper to clear and revive the mind.
- Jasmine for brain stimulating effect.
- Rose oil has sedative effects.
- Peppermint oil has been shown to improve mental accuracy of students by 28%.
- Frankincense oil has high immune stimulating properties.
- 1, 8 cineole increases cerebral blood flow.

Preparation

- ✓ Usually prepared in sunflower oil or any other fixed oil. Preparations are never made as pure essential oils.

Diagnosis

- ✓ Medical history is important i.e. history of diabetes, blood pressure, pregnancy and state of mind.
- ✓ Rosemary is for good for hypertension but contraindicated in diabetes.
- ✓ Basil, cedarwood, juniper and fennel oils are contraindicated in pregnancy while citrus oil

and rosemary oils may cause skin irritation.