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## Traditional Chinese Medicine - Ancient Approach for a Modern World

As modern science and technology develop, Western medicine constantly discovers new techniques for diagnosis, new chemicals, and new drugs. With these advancements Western medicine theory has developed from one new stage to another - each one a higher technical stage. At the same time, the limitations of Western medicine have become more and more obvious.

Patients suffering from cancer, AIDS, multiple sclerosis, fibromyosia, depression, for example, are beginning to search for alternative answers for treatment. With a Western medicine diagnosis and treatment prescription many patients come to my clinic for help through traditional Chinese medicine. As many people say, they are looking for a different approach.

Traditional Chinese medicine has come a long way. Since the beginning of this year the media has been talking more and more about acupuncture becoming a part of the mainstream of medical care. For many people acupuncture is a new avenue of discovery. Quite a few of my patients ask me, "How old is acupuncture?" "When did the Chinese start to use acupuncture?" The answer to these questions is that acupuncture is almost as old as human history. When humans started to make and use tools with their hands there is evidence of the use of acupuncture. This evidence shows that even in the Old Stone Age there were stone needles in use. And in an early classical Chinese medical book, "bian shi" (a tool to press on the body) was described.

The system of traditional Chinese medical theory was formed 2,000 years ago. It was written about and approved in the textbook known in English as the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine. This classic text book has been in continuous use since then and is still the major source for Chinese medical students to study.

Ancient China. Ancient culture. One-fifth of the population in the world. Traditional Chinese medicine has existed and been used for so many people for so long. This fact itself tells us that this particular medicine has its own value for existence.

When I entered Chinese medical college to study Chinese medicine, I was 23 and faced this ancient and enormous system of medicine. The old culture and philosophy made me feel so young. There was such time and distance between our age and the beginning of traditional Chinese medicine. Eight years later, after I finished my study, I felt that I was 80 years old. Because of the knowledge I had learned, it made me feel the maturity of this original theoretical system.

Compared with modern high-tech Western medicine diagnosis, every time I put my three fingers on a patient's pulse I am proud of this ancient but comprehensive medical system.

## Ancient Concept - New Mind

We are all living in a modern society, living in the information age. Our minds have been trained to accept scientific concepts, so Western medicine's direct view is much more easy to accept.

If a patient suffers from stomachache accompanied by belching, heartburn, indigestion, diarrhea, etc., if he goes to the hospital and goes through gastric juice analysis, gastroscopy, x-ray, and more examinations, it is not difficult to find out if this patient suffers from acute or chronic gastritis, stomach ulcers, or some other illness. As a treatment, antacids, antispasmodics, or analgesic drugs will be prescribed to the patient. If the physical or chemical examination doesn't show any positive evidence, then the diagnosis is unclear, treatment is blind, and the clinical result is doubtful.

Same condition, same patient with a traditional Chinese medical exam. Gathering information about the digestive system, we will review the patient's whole physical condition including whether he/she favors cool or warm food or drink and whether or not pressure relieves abdominal pain. We also consider the condition of other systems and even emotional factors. No matter whether the patient's diagnosis is clear or unclear by Western medicine, traditional Chinese medicine is able to make a differentiation from all the information received from the patient along with tongue observation and pulse reading. Traditional Chinese medicine also provides a specific treatment for each individual patient. Generally speaking, the traditional Chinese medicine diagnosis and treatment principle is established on highly summarized information. The terms of traditional Chinese medicine are more literary, more abstract, and have their own specific meanings.

Twenty years ago I went to traditional Chinese medical school. We had 70% of our hours studying traditional Chinese medicine subjects, 30% of our hours studying Western medicine subjects. I still remember the first week when we sat in the classroom listening to the teacher talk about Yin/Yang theory and five-element theory. To be honest, I felt like I was living in a different age. I had doubts about what I was learning. What did this have to do with medicine? Compared with traditional Chinese medicine, Western medicine class seemed more interesting. Because we started with anatomy and medical chemistry, our young minds were working much better with this knowledge.

But as I studied deeper and deeper into the philosophy of traditional Chinese medicine, I understood better and better the wholistic view of traditional Chinese medicine. The view of the connection between organs, humans and nature is still amazing to me: how our ancestors dialectically viewed the human body, disease, and health; how this medical theory has directed thousands of years of medical practice; and how this medical theory has been proved, and improved, by thousands of years of clinical practice.

We are standing on the top of a mountain. We are seeing the whole picture: that's how traditional Chinese medicine views health. We can also be sitting in front of a

microscope looking into each cell, analysing numbers. I'm glad I learned two systems of medicine and that I chose to practice, mainly, traditional Chinese medicine. I also understand why some of my classmates, after graduation, chose to practice Western medicine.

The China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Beijing offers a two-year training course in traditional Chinese medicine to Western medical doctors. I was a major faculty member in this training program. From years of teaching, I found out how much resistance from the modern knowledge-trained mind we have to fight in order to accept traditional Chinese medicine concepts.

When a person has already had systematic knowledge in Western medicine, one is already used to picturing the human body and illness in one's original knowledge. One has a tendency to look for visual proof or statistical analysis. What is "chi" (energy)? Where are meridians? How is the kidney related to hair and teeth? They may already give up or even laugh at traditional Chinese medicine, or decide that traditional Chinese medicine is not science. My recommendation to my students is: at first you have to change your way of thinking from materialism to dialectics, and later you can think in terms of materialistic dialectics. I also ask them to change their attitude, to just pay a little more respect to traditional Chinese medicine. It is not only medicine. It is science. It is art.

I came to the United States three years ago. I have seen thousands of patients during my practice in Minnesota. I'm so appreciative of the understanding that my patients have for traditional Chinese medicine. I have seen that most of my patients can accept traditional Chinese medicine - this ancient concept - even though every person has his/her own cultural background and different knowledge contexts. I'm also very glad that the clinical results of my treatments for various illnesses makes people convinced that traditional Chinese medicine works. Clinical result is always the proof and the answer.

I remember the best comment I received from one of my patients this year. After an initial consultation and initial treatment, the patient, who is a veterinarian, told his wife, "She (Dr. Ren) is a scientist."

The next issue will continue this article with "Achievement of Understanding," and "A Sure Path to Future Health".