

Traditional Chinese Medicine: A Review

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Abstract

The traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) approach is fundamentally different from that of Western medicine. In TCM, the understanding of the human body is based on the holistic understanding of the universe as described in Daoism, and the treatment of illness is based primarily on the diagnosis and differentiation of syndromes. TCM has been systematized and theorized in practice and therefore to keep health, many methods were developed during thousands of years. TCM emphasizes that the most important thing is to prevent disease and treat ailment in time so as not to let it become a serious one. TCM has become the academic medicine instead of experimental medicine. For this review of literature, various search engines like pubmed were used. But due to paucity of the literature available, it is intended to produce the best extract of the available content and serve the community.

Keywords: Chinese traditional medicine; Complementary and alternative medicine; Dentistry; Qi concept

Introduction

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has formed a unique system to diagnose and cure illness. The TCM approach is fundamentally different from that of Western medicine. In TCM, understanding of human body is based on holistic understanding of universe as described in Daoism, and treatment of illness is based primarily on diagnosis and differentiation of syndromes.[1] For this review of literature, various search engines like pubmed were used. But due to paucity of the literature available, it is intended to produce the best extract of the available

content and serve the community.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is promotion, maintenance and restoration of health and prevention of a disorder, imbalance or disease based on TCM theory by utilization of primary therapies of: Chinese acupuncture (Zhen), Moxibustion (Jiu) and Suction cup (Ba Guan), Chinese manipulative therapy (Tui Na), Chinese energy control therapy (Qi Gong), Chinese rehabilitation exercises such as Chinese shadow boxing (Tai Ji Quan) and prescribing, compounding or dispensing Chinese herbal formulae (Zhong Yao Chu Fang) and Chinese food cure recipes (Shi Liao).[2,3]

The word "Tao" is usually translated as "way", "path" or "principle", although the word also means "nature" as in nature of all the things as well as the nature world. Taoism had not only a profound influence on the culture of China but also on neighboring countries.[2,3]

History

Chinese medicine, a comprehensive form of health care has been in continuous use of or more than 23 centuries. With development of Chinese nation, theory of TCM is also than 23 centuries. With development of Chinese

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nation, theory of TCM is also improved constantly. Codified during the Han Dynasty in second century BC, the “Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen” articulates fundamental philosophical, diagnostic and therapeutic concepts that still form the basis of clinical practice today. “Zhang Zhongjing of Han Dynasty” and others were considered to be greatest physicians of China. “Wen Bing chool” was founded in the Qing dynasty.[2]

TCM has taken a unique shape by having its own system and theory in practice, which develops its own way according to internal theories. Over the last millennia, this system has been carried throughout Asia, Europe, India, Africa and America. Records from mid 19th century indicate TCM doctors in Oregon and Idaho had successfully treated respiratory, digestive and reproductive infections as well as arthritis and symptoms of cardiovascular disease. Because Chinese achieved such a success with their “Bare Foot Doctor” programme in 1960’s, World Health Organization (WHO) has supported dissemination of TCM in developing countries.[3]

Major Concepts of TCM

Life arises from magnetic interplay of polar forces Yang and Yin, Heaven and Earth, Heat and Cold, Sun and Shadow, Dryness and Wetness and Summer and Winter. Just as these divisions are relational, so all living process are seen as a mosaic of connected relationships and conditions. In short, human body is viewed as an ecosystem, and the language of TCM is based on metaphors from nature. Each person has a unique terrain to be mapped, a resilient yet sensitive colony to be maintained. TCM doctors use acupuncture, herbs, food, massage (Tui Na) and exercise (Tai Chi and Qi Gong) to recover and preserve health.

The categories of classification in TCM are interdependent, exist along a continuum, and are neither fixed nor absolute. The body is viewed more as a functional entity than a structural one.[3]

The Philosophy of TCM

TCM is a medical practice that is both an art and a science of healing, and of well being, based on the harmonious coexistence of Yin and Yang. Yin is passive, feminine principle of nature and Yang is active, masculine principle. Despite many scientific development and innovations, TCM philosophy and principle are deeply rooted in Yin and Yang theory, handed down through many generations of theories and practices.

TCM is holistic and focused on unity with environmental or harmony of Yin & Yang. It identifies the nature and location causing disease through understanding of individual’s environment, emotional life and lifestyle. Thus restoring Yin and Yang balance achieve harmony in individual.[3]

TCM and Conventional Medicine

There are two significant differences between conventional medicine and TCM. The first is that TCM sees body as an integrated whole. Disease may originate locally or in another body caused by an imbalance in whole system. The aim of TCM in treating whole person is to restore equilibrium between the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of individual.

Secondly, TCM does not treat specific disease as such, but regards each patient as having a unique pattern of signs and symptoms that constitute a clearly identifiable syndrome or pattern of imbalance. The distinctive diagnosis means that each patient is treated on an individual basis.[3]

Five Elements Theory

Nature can be further differentiated beyond the duality of Yin-Yang, into five primal powers (wu-xing) *i.e.* Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. Correspondingly body is divided respectively into five functional systems known as Organ

networks: Liver, Heart, Spleen, Lung and Kidney. These networks regulate basic constituents i.e. Shen, Qi, Moisture, Blood and Essence organizing them into complex life of body.

a. Shen and Mind: The integrative quality known as mind, spirit, intelligence and the capacity for self awareness psyche. It represents the non-material expression of the individual.

b. Qi: It is the animating force that is expressed through all living processes movement, warmth, thought, sensation and emotion. It is considered to be both ethereal and substantive.

The Concept of Qi

Without Qi (pronounced Chi) there is no respiration, no circulation, no physiological or emotional function, no consciousness, no memory, no life.

In Chinese medicine, which respects and reflects this cyclical nature of life, Qi is the substance of material in its finest form, which carries this vital natural energy, not only in our bodies, but also throughout the universe.

Forms and Functions of Qi:

In circulation, Qi collects and distributes energy to every part of the human system. The flow of Qi can be disturbed by a number of factors. These include emotional states such as anxiety, stress, anger, fear or grief.

(c) Moisture: It is the liquid medium that lubricates membranes, sheaths, joints, body cavities and it is the source of all body secretions.

(d) Blood: It is the material out of which tissue (bones, nerves, skin, muscles and organs) forms the vehicle of the mind.

(e) Essence (Jing): It is the fundamental material matrix that engenders and sustains reproduction, growth, maturation and regeneration soma.

(f) Zang-fu: It considers organ as core of the human body. Tissue and organs are connected

through a network of channels and blood vessels inside human body. Pathologically, a dysfunction of zang-fu organs may be reflected on body surface through the network mean while disease of body surface tissue may also affect their related zang-fu organs. Affected zang-fu organs may also influence each other through internal connections.

Traditional Chinese medicine starts with analysis of entire system, focuses on correction of pathological changes through readjusting the function of zang-fu organs.

Evaluation of a syndrome not only includes cause, mechanism, location and nature of disease, but also confrontation between pathogenic factor and body resistance. Treatment is not based only on symptoms, but also on differentiation of syndromes. Therefore, those with an identical disease may be treated in different ways, and on the other hand, different diseases may result in same syndrome and are treated in similar ways.[4]

Diagnosis

Diagnosis seeks to determine the prevailing balance within the ecosystem of an individual by assessing quantity and quality of Qi as it affects channels and organs. The physician uses himself as an evaluative instrument, using sense modalities to glean essential clinical information necessary to formulate a diagnosis and treatment.

Pulse diagnosis involves palpation along radial artery at six positions and two depths. The positions reveal the state of Qi and Blood within each Organ Network. Variable rates and qualities of pulse provide information such as depletion or congestion of Organ Networks and presence of pathogenic factors such as Wind or Heat. Inspection of the tongue observing its size, shape, and texture as well as quality reveals severity, nature and location of illness.

Feeling temperature, tone, and moisture of skin and muscles, testing flexibility of joints, and probing sensitivity of acupuncture points and channels provides further information

about the state of organ Networks and presence of pathological conditions.[5,6]

Treatment

The clinical treatments in traditional Chinese Medicine are based on Zang-fu and five Elemental theories (Shen, Qi, Moisture, Blood and Essence). These theories apply phenomenon and laws of nature to the study of physiological activities and pathological changes of human body and its interrelationships. The typical TCM therapies include acupuncture, herbal medicine, and qigong exercises. With acupuncture, treatment is accomplished by stimulating certain areas of external body. Herbal medicine acts on zang-fu organs internally, while qigong tries to restore orderly information flowing inside the network through regulation of Qi. These therapies appear very different in approach yet they all share the same underlying sets of assumptions and insights in nature of human body and its place in universe. Some scientists describes treatment of disease through herbal medication, acupuncture, and qigong as an “informational therapy”.[7]

Acupuncture

Acupuncture means an act of stimulation, by means of needles, of specific sites on skin, mucous membranes or subcutaneous tissues of human body act to promote, maintain, restore or improve health or to prevent a disorder, imbalance or disease or to alleviate pain and includes: administration of manual, mechanical, thermal and electrical stimulation of acupuncture needles, use of laser acupuncture, magnetic therapy or acupressure and moxibustion (Jiu) and suction cup (Ba Guan).[2]

Traditional Chinese Medicine teaches that Qi in our bodies circulates through Meridians or Energy channels, and is the power or force that fuels and drives all physiological and organic functions. Chinese medicine identifies 12 internal organs, each having a corresponded meridian or channel through which the Qi of organ flows. We need to

understand that Qi and energy are not same but a component of the other. The flow of Qi can be disturbed by a number of factors. These include emotional states such as anxiety, stress, anger, fear or grief. Other factors include poor nutrition, climate, hereditary factors, infections, toxins or injuries. By inserting very fine sterilized disposable needles into meridians (the channels of energy) an Acupuncturist can stimulate body's own healing response and help restore its natural balance homeostasis. As energy of each organ travels to and affects different areas of body, an acupuncturist may needle an area apparently unrelated to the location of symptoms. By leaving needles in for approximately 20 minutes, a circuit of energy will be created which could help to correct any imbalance, thereby bringing relief to patient.[8]

Moxibustion

A therapy using moxa or mugwort herb. Suppliers usually age the mugwort and grind it up to a fluff; practitioners burn fluff or process it further into a cigar-shaped stick. They can use it indirectly, with acupuncture needles, or burn it on patient's skin. Practitioners use moxa to warm regions and acupuncture points with the intention of stimulating circulation through points and inducing smoother flow of blood and Qi. Practitioners considered moxibustion to be especially effective in treatment of chronic problems such as, “Deficient conditions” (weakness) and “Gerodontology”.

There are three methods of moxibustion:

1. Direct scarring,
2. Direct non-scarring and
3. Indirect moxibustion.

Direct scarring moxibustion places a small cone of mugwort on skin at an acupuncture point and burns it until skin blisters, which then scars after it heals. Direct non scarring moxibustion removes burning mugwort before skin burns enough to scar, unless burning mugwort is left on skin for too long. Indirect moxibustion holds a cigar made of mugwort

near the acupuncture point to heat the skin or holds it on an acupuncture needle inserted in the skin to heat the needle.[9]

Massage Therapy

It is the manipulation of superficial and deeper layers of muscle and connective tissue to enhance function, aid in the healing process and promote relaxation and well being. The word comes from the French word "Friction of Kneading" or from Arabic word "massa" meaning "to touch, feel or handle" or from Latin word "mass" meaning "mass dough".

Massage Therapy involves acting on and manipulating the body with pressure structured, unstructured stationary or moving tension, motion or vibration done manually or with mechanical aids. Target tissues may include muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia, skin joints or other connective tissue, as well as lymphatic vessels or organs of the gastrointestinal system. Massage Therapy can be applied with the hands fingers, elbows, knees, forearm and feet. There are over eighty different recognized massage modalities.

In professional settings massage involves the client being treated while lying on a massage table, sitting in a massage chair, or lying on a mat on the floor. The massage subject may be fully or partly unclothed. Parts of the body may be covered with towels or sheets. Those who practice massage as a career are referred to as "massage therapists". Most states in the US have licensing requirements for massage therapists.[9]

Herbal Remedies and Supplements

Western pharmaceutical drug capitalizes on a single biologically active ingredient that produces a specific physiological effect. This accounts for their potency but also for their secondary or side effects. Although drugs control symptoms, they do not alter the physiologic process. With herbs, active ingredients are enfolded within the whole plant and this tends to buffer their side effects.

Certain herbs are more nutritive foods than drugs and as such can supplement the diet as well as prevent or remedy ailments. Sometimes long-term herbal use is advisable, whereas extended use of pharmaceutical might not be healthy. Herbs tend to have greater concentration of non-nutritive compounds than do foods i.e., glycosides resins alkaloids, polysaccharides and terpenes, which contribute to their effectiveness in medicine, that is, a substance capable of promoting a desirable biologic processor altering a pathologic one. Chinese herbs are usually combined into formulas and made into tea, packaged pills or bottle liquid extract.[9]

Traditional Chinese Medicine and Dentistry

Currently, a number of TCMs has already been used in oral health-care products such as toothpaste according to their effects. *Rhizoma copiditis* and *Galla chinensis* extracts are shown to have antimicrobial activities against four common bacterial species presented in oral cavity which had been considered as important in biofilm formation (*Streptococcus mitis*, *Streptococcus sanguis*), or causing dental caries (*Streptococcus mutans*) or causing periodontal disease (*Porphyromonas gingivalis*). TCM also widely used in dentistry for treatment of periodontal disease, bone induction, antimicrobial effect, anti-cancer effect, anti inflammatory effect, orthodontic tooth movement and pain control.[10,11,12]

Conclusion

TCM has been systematized and theorized in practice and has developed many methods to keep health during thousands of years. TCM emphasizes that the most important thing is to prevent disease and treat ailment in time so as not to let it become a serious one TCM has become the academic medicine instead of experimental medicine. TCM has developed a set of practical and advanced, universal, thorough and systematic health care

system, which is notably characterized by simplicity, convenience, affordability, safety, efficacy and effectiveness. TCM is thriving and prosperous in nature and it could make "Health for One" true!!

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