

An Introduction to Chinese Medicine
or
An Owner's Manual for Anybody Who Has a Body

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If you are already familiar with Chinese medicine as it is currently practiced then you may not be very comfortable with much of what you are about to read. If you are new to the field or have an open inquisitive mind you are in for a treat.

This introduction to Chinese medicine purposely breaks away from the styles of previous attempts to explain Chinese medicine which present the Chinese concepts and then remanufacture them into something else that fits into a familiar Western paradigm. This has never worked, nor will it ever.

Chinese medical concepts are nothing like Western medical concepts and the criteria and modes of cognizance of the latter will never offer any insight into the understanding, apprehension, or comprehension of Chinese medicine.

The Daoist method of knowing which is responsible for the formation of classical Chinese medical science is so alien to Western culture that even many experts in the field have little access to the perceptions needed to grasp the guiding ideas.

This is not the fault of intellect, diligence

or sincerity. It is outrightly cultural. Much of Western science and thus, the “way” we “understand” is the direct product of the reductionism of Grecian origin. The scientific approach assumes that one must break a thing down into its smallest component parts or behaviors in order to understand it.

To explain further, Western science attempts to assess its cause and effect relationships in a linear or sequential fashion in order to measure, quantify, describe and hopefully predict phenomena. This method produces extremely accurate data describing about one half of observable natural phenomena. This method is also completely antithetical to an appreciation of the inductive, coercive, complementary and simultaneous relationships upon which Chinese medicine is based.

Since the third century B.C., Chinese medicine has used the method of inductive synthesis, recognizing the interrelatedness of phenomena (simultaneous events), to interpret and treat disease. This method is different from, yet no

less stringent and exacting than, the method of causal analysis (sequential events) employed by Western medicine, where cause and effect are the critical elements of diagnosis and treatment.

A science is by definition rooted in its system of philosophical beliefs: for Western science, it is the Greek-based philosophy of reductionism (separating into parts in order to understand the whole), as opposed to the unified theory of Daoist philosophy: the difference between observing segments as opposed to observing systems, molecules as opposed to universes. It was the early Greek philosophers who coined the term “atom”; and, ever since, Western science has pursued the nature of the universe by splitting it into smaller and smaller bits. The question in Chinese medicine is not, “what bug is causing this disease?” so much as “what weakness is causing this person to be susceptible to it?” This concept is not new even to Western medicine. The famed Louis Pasteur, who popularized the theory that germs caused disease, admitted on his deathbed that his rival, Claude Bernard, was correct in explaining that the internal strength of the host was the major factor in resisting disease.

Modern astro-physicians and subatomic particle-physicians are now having to develop modes of understanding that are identical to ancient Daoist physicians' modes of understanding, because this is the way the cosmos at large actually works. We shall use these par-

allels to coerce Chinese medicine into our minds.

What is Chinese Medicine?

Chinese medicine is the oldest known health care system still in practice, having been practiced continuously in China for 5000 years on one quarter of the world's population. It is, however, a completely refined, coherent, understandable and usable science in its own right, with procedures and protocols based on centuries of observation of how the universe works. Its poetic and symbolic language may seem mystical at first, but these metaphors are merely emblems for the basic laws of nature which all things from the smallest subatomic particle to the farthest galaxies must obey.

Chinese medicine arose out of the philosophy of Daoism, which simply observes the natural world and the balanced interrelationship of all of its components. It is no more necessary, however, to practice Daoism to benefit from Chinese medicine than it would be to practice the religions of ancient Greece or Rome to utilize Western medicine. The laws of nature which rule the actions of all things in the cosmos are in effect whether one “believes” in them or not. The pursuit of health is nothing more than participation in the natural world as it is, by learning how to live in harmony with both the internal and the external environment.

The goal of Chinese medicine is simply to restore balance. Its guiding principle is to define what health is. Then, as the sculptor said, “you carve away everything that it isn’t”. Chinese medicine does not treat disease, it treats individuals whose imbalances manifest in certain processes as the body attempts to regain balance. Illness is seen as an imbalance between internal influences such as diet, exercise, rest, and emotions; and external factors such as weather, trauma, microbes or poisons. Health is not just the absence of symptoms, it is a state of being in balance in body, mind and spirit.

How is Chinese Medicine Different from Western Medicine?

Chinese medicine is a science and medicine in its own right, with the same stringency or strictness of diagnosis and treatment as Western medicine; however, the ways of understanding the body’s relationship to health and disease are very different. Although the terms used in Chinese medicine may seem puzzling to us at first glance, this is because we forget that we have spent our entire lives learning one particular view of how our bodies work, what illness is, and how to treat it, a view which sees disease as an enemy, and health care as warfare against disease (“A new drug in our arsenal against ...”, “The war against cancer...” etc.). One must wonder if this is rooted in the history of wars and invasions which formed Western

culture, but this is not an historical dissertation, and it could be argued that China had its own share of wars and aggression. Chinese medicine does view the concept of health from an entirely different perspective, focusing on increasing health to unseat disease, and supporting the body’s inherent qualities to regain health.

Regarding the opinion of some, that Chinese medicine is “experimental”, we quote a Texas Supreme Court Justice. After reviewing evidence of its efficacy, he stated, “Chinese medicine, as a system of health care, is no more experimental than is the Chinese language as a system of communication.” A recent statement from the National Institutes of Health stated that,

Acupuncture as a therapeutic intervention is widely practiced in the United States. However, it is not generally accepted as an alternative or adjunct therapy by the medical establishment. There have been many studies of its potential usefulness. Unfortunately, many of these studies provide equivocal results because of poor design, inadequate numbers of patients, and other factors. The issue is further complicated by inherent difficulties in the use of appropriate controls, such as placebo and sham acupuncture groups.

“However, promising results have emerged, for example, showing the efficacy of acupuncture in adult post-operative and chemotherapy nausea and vomiting and in

post-operative dental pain. There are other situations such as addiction, stroke rehabilitation, headache, menstrual cramps, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, low back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and asthma where acupuncture may be useful as an adjunct treatment or an acceptable alternative or be included in a comprehensive management program. Further research is likely to uncover additional areas where acupuncture intervention will be useful.

“Findings from basic research have begun to elucidate the mechanisms of action of acupuncture, including the release of opioids and other peptides in the central nervous system and the periphery and changes in neuroendocrine function. Although much needs to be accomplished, the emergence of plausible mechanisms for the therapeutic effects of acupuncture is encouraging.

“The introduction of acupuncture into the choice of treatment modalities that are readily available to the public is in its early stages. Issues of training, licensure, and reimbursement remain to be clarified. There is sufficient evidence, however, of its potential value to conventional medicine to encourage further studies.”

What is Acupuncture?

Acupuncture is one aspect of what the Chinese call “Zhen-Jiu”, which roughly translates as “Needle (Zhen) - Burn (Jiu)”. This refers to just two of the forms of treatment which form the whole of traditional Chinese medicine. Acupunc-

ture refers to the practice of inserting fine metal needles into specific locations on the body in order to stimulate the body’s own natural healing processes. Chinese medicine in its entirety encompasses not only acupuncture and moxibustion but also herbal and dietary therapies, tui-na (a form of soft tissue and joint manipulation), and the Chinese exercise arts including taijiquan, (pronounced tie-j ee-chwan, sometimes misspelled t'ai chi) as well as qigong [ch'i kung], and wu shu (martial arts, sometimes called kung-fu).

There are pathways, or channels, throughout the body which are created by the energy that permeates the entire body. These pathways have been identified and utilized for centuries. Recent studies in France by Drs. Darras and De Vernejoul have revealed the existence of these pathways using irrefutable techniques of modern Western science. These pathways are separate from and independent of the nerves, blood vessels or lymphatic channels. There is a direct communication between these pathways and the associated internal organs and structures. Acupuncture stimulates the body's intrinsic healing abilities by activating or influencing specific points on these energetic channels, along the pathway of its circulation. Each acupuncture point is like a tunnel, or access route, to the deeper circulatory channels within. It is a point on the body where that energy surfaces, so that we are able to influence those energetics back towards health.

The other half of Zhen-Jiu, which we may translate as “burn”, refers to the practice of moxibustion, or Jiu, which is used to supplement the body's own energetic supply in case of deficient energies. Moxibustion is the burning of an herb, moxa, over specific acupunc-



ture points. The herb most commonly used is *Artemisia vulgaris* (left), or common mugwort, although other herbs are also used for specific conditions. It is commonly formed into sticks or cones for therapeutic use. When

burned and held 1 to 2 inches from the skin, it gently warms the energetic points, stimulating and strengthening them. The burning moxa does not touch nor burn the skin. While acupuncture works with the energy that is already there, and acts to redirect the body towards health, moxibustion actually increases its energetic strength. Moxa builds, acupuncture directs and balances.

Why Does Acupuncture Work?

First, it should be understood that acupuncture works according to the same laws that run everything in the universe. Without going into a detailed description of quantum physics, you should just know that something which has mass (structure, substance) also has energy, and mass erects a force (gravity)

which affects all of the other objects in its vicinity. The amount of force erected depends directly on the amount of its mass. Space tells matter how to move, and matter tells space how to curve. Mass here affects inertia elsewhere. The tangible expressions of these universal laws only change relative to scale. The shape of a galaxy is determined by the gravitational field erected by all its members and the massive

object at its center. It is speculated to be a black hole. This massive object erects a gravitational field effect on and in participation with all other stars, planets and other bodies in its domain, warping space and fashioning the shape of their respective orbits. (Galaxy M-100 photo courtesy NASA.)

Your entire body is made up of mass with its energy moving at different frequencies. The more solid appearing structures such as bones and muscles are made up of molecules which move at slower rates of speed than the liquids like blood and lymph, or the electrical impulses which flow along nerves. Your organs are the densest accumulations of mass in the body, and therefore contain the densest accumulation of stored energy. The fields of these organs attract the materials which become bones,

muscles, blood, lymph, or skin. Your body is shaped the way it is because the energetic fields of the organs are shaped that way.

In a planetary system, in which the planets all have gravitational influences on each other, the addition of another planet will change the orbits of all of the others influenced by this change. The insertion of the acupuncture needle has the same effect on the body by “changing the field” of the organ it influences.

How Does Acupuncture Work?

For 5000 years, Chinese philosophers have observed the natural world. They watched the rising and setting of the sun, the change of the seasons, the patterns of weather and climate, and the effects of wind, heat, humidity, drought, and cold upon the world around them. They noticed that the human body acts just like the natural environment in its response to the forces of nature. Just as water slows and freezes in the winter, so do body processes slow and tissues contract at cold temperatures. As temperatures rise, chemical reactions in the body speed up, as activity levels in nature increase as the temperatures rise. The application of cold to a fever can have the same effect as throwing water on a fire. The points and procedures of the acupuncture prescription are chosen to rebalance the body and give it the momentum to maintain that balance. A common misconception is that acupuncture works merely by stimulating

the body to produce its natural painkillers, called endorphins. While this is a good explanation of acupuncture’s powerful effect on pain control, it does not explain how it influences such conditions as allergies, colitis, or infertility. These mechanisms have yet to be explained, although they are conditions commonly addressed in clinical practice.

Americans are discovering what the European community has known for nearly 100 years: that Chinese medicine can treat a great deal more than pain, toothaches, smoking addiction and weight loss; that it is an entire system of health care which addresses the underlying causes of disease, and thus can facilitate improvement in nearly all conditions. After all, a system of health care that has endured for five thousand years, treating one-quarter of the world's population, proves its own merit through its longevity.

How Does My Body Stay Healthy?

When the egg and the sperm first combined to become you, there was an intelligence engaged, stored in and released from the DNA, which directed and choreographed the entire process of cell division and organization to create a perfect human infant. That intelligence continues operating today, regulating cell repair, reproduction, balancing all of your hormonal functions and much more.

Your body is designed to stay healthy and in balance. All of its mechanisms are programmed for survival. This process, called homeostasis, is operating at all times to regulate everything from the oxygen content of your blood to how last night's dinner is digested and eliminated. When you get sick or injured, this intelligence tells your immune system what cells to deliver to the area to fight the infection, and requisitions the correct materials to repair the damage. For example, a simple cut does not spread...it knits back together with a clot, then a scab, then a scar or healthy skin. When a woman becomes pregnant, it tells her body how to supply the materials to create that next perfect human.

Although your body has many elegant mechanisms by which to maintain balance, it constantly encounters things in the environment which can upset that balance. Extremes of temperature, physical or emotional stresses, microbes and toxins, can throw the body out of balance. But there are means which can oppose those upsetting forces and restore the natural balance.

The preferred ways of restoring balance and staying healthy are the simplest ones. A balanced healthy, nourishing diet, lots of clean fresh air, adequate rest and regular sensible exercise are all a healthy body needs to stay healthy. When we get further out of balance than normal internal mechanisms can restore, outside means may need to be employed to restore that equilibrium.

Whose Job is it to Keep Me Healthy?

In a classical Chinese medical practice, the doctor was paid as long as the patient stayed healthy, and if he became ill even despite following good medical advice, the doctor provided treatment free of charge. However, this assumed that the doctor was aware of what constituted true health and was willing and able to provide complete guidance on all of the ways the patient could maintain health, and that the patient diligently and faithfully followed that advice. Inherent to the success of application of Chinese medical principles is a partnership between patient and doctor, with the patient bearing ultimate responsibility for the choices which create and maintain health.

The patient came in four times a year, commonly around the change of the seasons, for a check-up and tune-up, with adjusted life-style recommendations, herbal prescriptions, or point treatment formulations applied appropriate to the patients' needs at the time. But it was still their responsibility to do what the doctor recommended, and clearly observe and report the results back, in order to achieve the optimum outcome.

Compare this with the typical Western model: the patient presents a mysterious conglomeration of symptoms to an all-knowing expert who performs some complicated procedure on them to re-

move the problem without any explanation or participation on the part of the patient. Disease is seen as something that just happens, with no connection to anything else in that person's life. Pain is something to be disconnected or cut out, like removing the battery in the smoke alarm without putting out the fire. Symptoms are something to be suppressed, and if the treatment causes other symptoms, well, we can suppress them or cut them out, too.

What Does My Doctor Need to Know About Me?

Your doctor can only help you to the extent that you are willing to help yourself. This begins with a process of you "telling your story", relating why you are seeking treatment, what you think contributed to the condition, and everything which led up to this point.

Do not leave out any details, no matter how long ago they may have occurred. The fact that you fell out of a tree 30 years ago and landed on your head might have significant bearing on why you are suffering from headaches today. Don't assume that a problem in one area of the body has nothing to do with another part. Chinese medicine sees connections between body systems not recognized by Western medicine. For example, it is quite common to see a patient with low back pain, frontal headaches, ringing in the ears, hair loss, arthritis in the knees, impotence, and

fatigue. These symptoms which seem to be in different areas all involve the same correlated system in the Chinese medical mode of understanding.

The better you are at observing and bringing an awareness of how your body is working at this present time, the more effectively can your doctor design your individual treatment. For example, where do you feel your pain? Does it travel or move, and if so, in what direction? Is there anything that makes it worse? Is there anything you have found that makes it better, even temporarily? Does it change at any particular time, does it get worse, say, at 3 AM? Have you ever had anything like this before? What happened then?

Your doctor also needs to know some general things about you. Where were you born and where have you lived? How was your health as a child? Have you had any traumas or illnesses? What is your diet like? How is your appetite, digestion, and elimination? How are your sleeping habits? When was the last time you really felt good?

Next your doctor will perform an examination to find the objective signs of what is going on with you, although by now it should be pretty clear what it is if your history has been sufficiently thorough. Your doctor may feel your pulses, look at your tongue, palpate along the pathway of certain channels, and look at your skin for various lesions, as well

as doing the more familiar Western examination procedures such as height, weight, blood pressure, listening to your heart & lungs, etc. Some doctors may order blood tests, X rays, or other tests if it is deemed appropriate.

Once all the information has been gathered, it will be decided whether Chinese medicine is an appropriate form of treatment for your case. It may be that lifestyle changes alone are sufficient to restore you to health; in that case, dietary recommendations or specific exercises may be suggested. Herbal medicines may be prescribed to supplement your diet or change nutrient status. Acupuncture or moxibustion may be performed to more emphatically influence the course of a more entrenched imbalance. Or in some cases the Chinese medical practices will be used in combination with Western approaches such as pharmaceutical medicines or surgery if that is the best way to restore your health. None of these treatments is mutually exclusive. Indeed, many of them increase or complement the effectiveness of the others.

What Can I Expect During My Treatment?

If it determined that Chinese medicine is the appropriate course of treatment for you, the treatment strategy will be developed from the treatment options mentioned above; acupuncture, moxibustion, herbs, diet, massage, exercise, etc. If acupuncture is to be employed, a group of acupuncture points will be se-

lected for your treatment.

These points, usually six to ten in total, are chosen from among many possible points on the basis of their individual effect and their ability to work harmoniously with the other points chosen. In this way, we choose the fewest points necessary to have the greatest possible therapeutic effect; in this instance, "Less is More". The stimulation of too many points in one treatment diminishes the effect at each. The treatment itself commonly lasts 20 to 30 minutes.

Made from extremely fine gauge (three times the width of a single hair), flexible stainless steel wire of surgical quality, acupuncture needles are nothing like a hypodermic injection needle or the needles which are used to draw blood, which cut their way through the skin. Acupuncture needles pass through the skin without cutting. There is nothing put on, or in, the needles. Their purpose is to stimulate the point just by their presence.

In general, when needles are inserted, you can expect to feel a light tingling sensation, a feeling of heaviness or distension at the acupuncture site, warmth, or a sensation of local numbness. Most acupuncture patients are surprised to discover that treatments involve little or no pain, and are usually quite relaxing. The most common sensation reported is a feeling of increased well-being and balance.

COMMON TERMS USED IN CHINESE MEDICINE

What is Qi?

Actually, there are many different forms of “Qi”. There are generally three types of biological Qi (force, momentum), that will concern you and your doctor. These sustain, protect and regulate your body.

These are:

- ◆ Nutritive energy, or Ying Qi
- ◆ Defensive energy, or Wei Qi (pronounced “way”)
- ◆ Ancestral energy, or Yuan Qi (pronounced “yoo-wan”)

Each of these forms of Qi has its own role in supporting and maintaining the organism, and although all forms are present in all tissues under healthy conditions, each is distributed through its own system of channels or vessels. Consideration of the function and supply of these forms of Qi figures into the process of diagnosis, determines treatment strategies, and affects prognosis.

Nutritive energy, or Ying Qi, is an alimentary or digestive energy which is produced from the foods we eat and the air we breathe. Its purpose is to supply the nutrients necessary to sustain life. Additional Nutritive energy can be produced by a healthy individual as long as adequate food and air are available.

Ying Qi is circulated in the 12 Principal

Channels, which are the channels commonly depicted in acupuncture charts.

Wei Qi is Defensive or immunologic energy. It is also produced from the renewable supplies of food and air, so additional Defensive energy is produced and distributed as needed to protect the organism from outside attacks by microorganisms or climactic extremes. Wei Qi is distributed in its own network of channels, which distribute immunologic energy to the body’s surface or the site of an external invasion.

Yuan Qi is Ancestral or genetic energy. This energy is a finite quanta bestowed at conception, representing the constitutional momentum contributed by each parent. This energy serves a regulatory function, directing and choreographing tissue specialization, endocrine function, and reproductive function. The finite nature of this energy demands that it be conserved, to be used only when needed. There are recycling pathways through which the unused regulatory energy is reclaimed, to be sent out into the circulation again as needed. It resides within its own set of circulatory vessels, called the Ancestral or Curious Vessels (occasionally misnamed as the Extra or Extraordinary Meridians).

What are Yin and Yang?

The inseparable and complementary terms yin and yang are relative expres-

sions of the duality inherent in all of nature. The phenomena was first observed in the action of the sun as it rose, shining on one side of a hill, progressing along its path until the end of the day when it illuminated the other side of the hill. Thus the opposites in nature are seen to oppose but also to convert into each other. Yin and yang are relative terms as well, with the waist being yang relative to the feet, but yin relative to the head. The common symbol for the yin/ yang relationship is the Taijitu (above), or “Supreme Ultimate Symbol”.

What are Meridians?

First of all, let’s clear up that the lines on the charts are not the same. The early explorers who encountered Chinese medicine translated its terms in the cartographic terms with which they were most familiar. They named the lines they saw on the charts after the imaginary lines on their maps marking latitude and longitude.

The lines on the acupuncture charts actually indicate the channels of rivers; rivers of energy which are the external pathway of the energetic field of the organ. That river has carved the contours of the body the same way a river carves its way around the rocks and obstacles in its path. The Chinese term for these pathways is “Jing”, which translates “channel” or “riverbed”.

The channels are referred to in English according to their associated organ; Lung, Spleen, Kidney, etc. The force they convey actually fills every cell of the body, certainly not the spidery lines drawn on acupuncture charts.

The Five Phases?

As the ancient Chinese observed the cycles of nature, it was observed that all things go through their own progressive seasons. These phases were observed to coincide with the seasons of the year and their common weather patterns, and bear strikingly coincidental relationships to the organs, tissues, and emotions of the biological organism as well. They were named Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water as emblems which represent the natural qualities of those seasons, but they were never intended to mean those actual material substances. They are called the “Wuxing” in which “Wu” means Five and “Xing” means to get from a “here” to a “there”, a state of transition. Once again, the Europeans misinterpreted these terms and named them “Elements” after the Four Elements which comprised the material world of Aristotelian philosophy.



The Five Phases are used in Chinese medicine to explain the relationships of the organs which make up the internal environment, and to address diseases which are primarily of internal origin. They are quite useful diagnostically in regards to colors of lesions, skin tones or body excretions, as well as seasonal illnesses, food cravings or aversions, or emotional components of internal illnesses.

The Six Energetic Layers

While the Wuxing expresses internal energetic relationships, there is another standard used to address the effects illnesses of external origin; the Liu Qi or Six Energetic Layers. The defense and protection of the inner vital organs is accomplished by the Wei Qi complement in the outer yang channels coupled to their phase associated yin organs.

This reflects the body's physical configuration as well as the layout of the channels on the surface of the body. It also represents the perimeters of defense through which any pathological energy invading from the external environment must pass before it can reach the inner vital organs. As an example, take the progression of symptoms of a common cold; starting with a frontal headache as the virus invades the Taiyang, then come the watery eyes and muscle aches as it progresses through the Shaoyang, then the nose stuffs up and starts to run as it invades the Yangming and the Taiyin.

Conclusion

It is extremely difficult to explain simply, briefly and in its entirety this ancient and comprehensive health care system. Chinese medicine can consume a lifetime's study, continually revealing greater power and elegance as a system of thought as well as a science of health care. The process of restoring the balance by mobilizing the intelligence which created the body in the first place will reveal elegance, logic, and order of the laws which all nature obeys. This is experienced firsthand as those forces are released during the course of one's own healing process.

The effective practice of Chinese medicine requires holding all these relationships in mind while considering each individual's unique energetic configu-

ration at the time. Each treatment is directed toward relieving the existing conditions at the time a patient comes for treatment as well as the contributing factors which led you to that state. There is no pre-set treatment plan: treatment progresses as you progress, and changes in response to your individual response to the treatment.

By treating disease at its origin, where health begins, Chinese medicine addresses the root of the problem and restores health by working with the body in the direction the body naturally wants to go... towards a healthy state of being.

*Health is the natural state of the body
Wisdom is the natural state of the mind
Happiness is the natural state of the spirit.
Day comes and the sun rises by its self.*

Glossary of Chinese

Characters

Dao - Way

Yin

Yang

Qi - impetus

ying -

nutritive wei -

to guard yuan

- original wu -

five

xing - to walk

jing - underground river

tai - great

shao - wee

ming - deep

jue - hinge

zhen - needle

jiu - burn

liu - six