

Preface

While food supplements, biological origin preparations and “off-the-counter drugs” are showing genuine rising trends of market sales in Europe and the United States, it is appropriate to point out that those items are not identical to preparations of Chinese medicine. We often hear compatriot Chinese herbal experts and users exclaim that, of the total sales, China owns only a 5% market share. Of course, this is a mistaken view, since botanical origin products outside of China are, most of the time, local leaves and roots traditionally consumed by the native people, not necessarily related to Chinese medicine. *Ginkgo biloba* from Ginkgo leaves, for example, is a European product of local consumption, almost unknown to the Chinese, who for centuries used the Ginkgo nut instead.

Although the bitterness of not owning bigger market shares of herbal medicinal products may not be justified, this fact does however reflect that products of Chinese medicine (which possess much more sophisticated records of clinical effectiveness) can enjoy a good future in the popular world of health promotion.

The 3000-year well-recorded history of the healing art in China has culminated in a comprehensive system of health promotion and maintenance. This system covers a wide range: other than being a special system of health philosophy, it is also a practical guide for healers. On the disease side, there are detailed descriptions on the clinical manifestations and symptomatology, treatment records which extend from case reports to general policies, and a vast documentation on herbal pharmacopaedia. What makes the Chinese system uniquely different from the other traditional healing arts outside China is the use of acupuncture

as an important modality of treatment (acupuncture is not utilised in any other ancient healing system), and the great emphasis on the maintenance and promotion of health, i.e. disease prevention.

With this rich background, traditional Chinese medicine will be able to gain international recognition. As there is increasing awareness that efficacy can be proven with modern methodology, we should expect more new herbal products to appear on the world market.

Hong Kong has introduced a system of recognition, from professional registration to educational requirements, for the Chinese medicine practitioners. While other countries are taking stock of the Hong Kong experience and are considering listing Chinese medicine as one of the recommended alternative medicine practices, there is a tendency to exaggerate the scope of efficacy of Chinese medicine at large. There are those, who in their enthusiasm, either as a user or a promoter, claim that Chinese medicine deals with all illnesses and can replace modern medicine. It is true that the comprehensive system of healing in ancient China covers nearly all aspects of human pathology, and accordingly offers treatment. However, in this modern world of advanced science and technology, the diseased should not rely only on the ancient art of healing and isolate himself from scientific investigations and technical treatments. On the other hand, there are those who have enjoyed the fruits of science and technology, and become absolutely convinced that only modern treatments can solve problems. They resist and reject any offer from the traditional factions. Qualified medical practitioners form the majority of the hard core who reject ancient medicine.

Torn between these opposing camps, the sick patient is guided by the more influential group. In the old days, however, we encountered individuals who refused clinical investigations and any form of modern treatment, relying only on herbal therapy till the very end. Such cases have been rare in the past 30 decades. On the contrary, the reverse of sticking firmly by modern medical treatment in spite of obvious failure is much more common today. The successes of science and technology are probably the reasons why modern medicine is being accepted as the mainstream. Specialisation further promotes the adequate and efficient application of scientific and technological advances to medicine.

Ironically, amidst the sweetness of clinical successes for a large number, bitterness and discontent have grown within a smaller group. This group is increasing in size, and is becoming more unsatisfied with the results of modern treatment, which has so far failed to meet the perfection it claims. They are also unhappy with the deterioration of human care, which is being eroded along with the holistic concept. In the haste to regain more independence in controlling one's own health, this group has started to look for alternative treatments and "off-the-counter" preparations.

One immediate result of this shift of demand for medical care, apart from the addition of cupboards and shelves at the supermarket for "off-the-counter" preparations, is the awareness among the modern practitioners (notably the family physicians) for the need to address alternative/complementary medicine. It is important for every modern practitioner to know something about the alternative form. The blind followers of Hippocrates who advocated that the "proper" healer should not involve in "improper" healing practices should evolve and begin exploring alternative solutions, especially in areas where modern science has failed us.

This book is ideal for the modern practitioners who wish to learn more about Chinese medicine. It can be used as a guide on the basic principles of Chinese medicine, the current situations and the research directions. Its content will enable the reader to be better able to collaborate with the Chinese medicine practitioners.

This book caters also to those trying to decide whether they should utilise Chinese medicine as a form of treatment, as an adjunctive treatment, or as a health promoter and/or for disease prevention. Every patient has a right to know what is good for his/her health and to know the logic behind the justification.

The strength of science and technology remains overwhelming. It does not allow the co-existence of other beliefs and practices. The popularity of "off-the-counter" preparations and apparent interest on alternative medicine, therefore, can be short-lived. Clinicians and practitioners, in their zeal to help their patients, should put in an extra effort to prove the efficacy of the traditional ways of healing. Their

success is the only genuine support to their patients who may be turning towards alternative medicine as a last straw. Their success is expected to bring alternative medicine closer to science and to make science less exclusive.

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