Health Humanity online Conference, April 2020

**Covid-19: Humanity and Health in TCM**

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**(Points-for-Discussion)**

**Personal health and humanity**

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is deeply influenced by Confucianism and Chinese culture. In the *Analects*, Confucius said: “Your physical body, hair and skin are inherited from your parents. Not allowing anything to do injury to you is where filial piety begins.” In this understanding, taking good care of your physical body and health is the beginning of filial piety.

In TCM, personal health and cultivation is the beginning of humanity. Five hundred years ago Chinese physician Gao Lian of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) already said: *“*It is man himself, not Heaven, who governs his life, and he who abuses himself dies young, while he who takes good care of himself enjoys a long life*”.* The self is the core of the family, the family is the core of the society, the society is the core of the state… Everything starts with the self, and it is also one’s duty to set an example for others.

However, this ethical value and obligation is not only confined to your own self, but also extended to others. Another Confucian philosopher Mencius said: “Care for one’s own aged parents and extend the same care to the aged parents of others; love one’s own young children and extend the same love to the children of others.” Care for the young and old thus became the responsibility and mission of the moral person in Chinese culture.

In this period of epidemic crisis, if everybody does his/her part and maintains personal health and hygiene, we will be able to win the war against the coronavirus. But that is not the end. Although countries are closing their borders to stop the spread of the virus, the rapid spread of Covid-19 that affects the supple chain all over the world demonstrates that we are living in the same boat. It is impossible that we just make our own house clean and expect the virus to vanish. The Confucian idea “developing oneself, and seeking also to develop others” is very much in need during this period of time.

**Living in harmony with nature**

There are wo basic principles in understanding TCM: 1. Living in harmony with nature; 2. Medicine and food are from the same origin. According to Chinese philosophy, man having evolved from nature, should continuously seek to understand, learn and live in harmony with the principles and laws of nature. Should we continue to fight with each other and exploit nature, it is only a matter of time that the earth will no longer be home to man. To live in harmony with nature, the ancient Chinese saw the four seasons as the great law of the world. Conforming to the right *Qi* (Breath of Nature) of the four seasons in order to suit the changes in Yin and Yang as well as the growth and degeneration of one’s internal organs, formed the basic considerations of health. Observing the changes in the four seasons and the Yin and Yang, making the best use of the situation, maximizing benefits and avoiding harm became an important guiding ideology of the ancient Chinese.

Chinese food and herbs therapy dates back to 4000 years and is based on the idea that the healing properties of foods can correct imbalance/disharmonies within the body and promote health. In traditional Chinese knowledge of health, food is viewed as medicine and is used to nourish and harmonize the body, mind, and spirit. All foods have a distinct energy and characteristic properties that either help to balance our bodies and make us healthy, or that create imbalances which ultimately result in sickness. Understanding food energetics system: how to enjoy food; how to heal your body through what you eat.

For example, during the Southern Song Dynasty, a TCM physician Zhou Shouzhong produced a two-volume TCM classic entitled “*Yangsheng Yuelan*” or “Monthly Handbook for Health Preservation”. Dividing his book into 12 monthly sections, he used each section to talk about health care matters unique to that particular month and came up with a total of 497 healthcare tips. Topics covered include hygiene in the home, how to prevent plagues, TCM medication and medicine baths for health cultivation and disease prevention, what kinds of food to eat and avoid during the various seasons and various healthcare tips etc. For example, the author suggested eating bamboo leaves porridge during summer to cool one’s body and reduce “heatiness”, eating mutton during winter as well as eating tonic food to boost one’s health.

One important aspect of health care is to plan one's daily diet according to the prevailing season and to choose the right foods that are in harmony with one's organs, in order to enhance one's health. During the different seasons of the year, especially when the *Qi* within one's body is still inadequate, one should choose foods that match the particular season, so as to enhance the *Qi* within one's internal organs. When it comes to choosing the types of food and beverage we consume, we need to take into consideration certain health norms as well as ecological laws.

Harmonizing our food with nature play an important part in TCM. For example, the “*Shijian Bencao*” (Food Material Medica) lists down the various kinds of food and their corresponding health effects. For e.g., sesame can cure debility and asthenia of the viscera; aid gastrointestinal movement, promote movement of *Qi* in one’s body, clear one’s arteries, get rid of “wind” within the brain, and moisturize one’s skin. Another example: barley can loosen one’s gastrointestinal organs, harmonise the *Qi* in one’s body, as well as strengthen one’s *Qi* and blood. Walnuts, on the other hand, are good for moisturizing one’s skin, and for promoting the growth of black hair. One can see that many ancient TCM books believe that good living habits are the key to maintaining good health. Hence many ancient TCM books try to show the connection between day to day living as well as one’s health and longevity.

Eating wisely to enhance your physical health and immune system will be the advice for everybody during this epidemic crisis.

**Reflections for Covit-19**

While the whole world is waiting for a vaccine that would protect the world against [Covid-19](https://www.standard.co.uk/topic/covid-19), researchers are also hoping to find a cure in TCM. In 2015’s Nobel Prize awards for Physiology and Medicine, a manuscript by fourth-century Chinese physician and herbalist Ge Hong, the *Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergencies,* which included a passage on how to treat malaria with an extract made from the sweet wormwood shrub *Artemisia Annua* was credited for providing a key insight into an anti-malaria drug. It was the uncovering of this ancient Chinese text that led Chinese scientist Professor Tu Youyou to the discovery of how to make useful quantities of the drug artemisinin, which has since saved hundreds of thousands of children who would have otherwise died from malaria. We certainly hope that we can find the similar miracle in ancient Chinese medical writings.

As far as I know, two Chinese herbal remedies that claim to prevent and treat Covit-19 are already in the market. The *Feiyan No.1* (Pneumonia No.1) was produced by the No.8 People’s Hospital of Guangzhou, China. Its clinical trial with 50 patients indicates that all patients’ body temperature returns to normal within a week; 50% of the patients’ cough disappear; 52.4% of the patients’ sore throat disappear; 69.6% of the patients’ fatigue disappear; and none of the patient’s situation deteriorated. As they are basically herbal drinks that for cough and heat, their effect remains to be seen.