

East and West: Comparing Traditional Chinese
Medicine and Allopathic Medicine

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In the United States, medicine generally refers to one type of experience: visiting the doctor's office for a scheduled appointment, receiving a basic checkup (heart rate, blood pressure, weight, height, etc.) by a nurse, then discussing with the doctor your concerns and symptoms, to which they diagnose and prescribe a method of treatment. However, this experience is not universal and in many countries, alternative medicine also exists as a major part of healthcare, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in China. The World Health Organization currently defines traditional medicine as "the sum total of the knowledge, skill, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness" (WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014-2023 16). TCM is no different, with its philosophy varying greatly with the more scientifically based western style of medicine due to various cultural/historical/philosophical differences. The increasing globalization of China and the increased attention by other countries have caused a spread of TCM as a recognized method of treatment especially in Europe that have led to possibilities of combination in use of TCM and allopathic medicine (AM).

AM and TCM are very different from one another due to their origins, which influenced their philosophy and tools for treatment. AM emerged during the Industrial Revolution through the leaps in technology during the time which allowed for deeper understanding about the sciences and subsequently medicine. While Western medicine has a strong scientific basis, Traditional Chinese Medicine developed gradually through China's long history, and is very strongly influenced by Taoist beliefs. For example, in TCM there are twelve major organs, six

“yin” and six “yang”. Each of the organs are then associated with one of the Five Elements: water, wood, fire, earth, and metal. For a Chinese medicinal practitioner, a disease would be caused by an imbalance of these twelve organs, and would say something like, “too much Fire in the Lungs” as a problem of imbalance. Straightforward interactions between doctor and patient would thus be more common in TCM in order to identify where the imbalance arose through life choices and the environment. The doctor is not limited to treating only physical illnesses, but also illnesses of the mind. The symptoms and differentiating the issue would arise during this step of communication with the patient, which is bolstered by examining the patient’s qi. Qi is believed to be spiritual energy, flowing through all twelve organs and includes yin and yang, and is a part of all movement, similar “the flow of the cosmos” (Kaptchuk). Qi itself can be divided into many different categories, with the Meridian qi being the most important for medicine. TCM thus views the body as a collective whole where “qi” flows through body, with an imbalance of qi leading to the disease in question.

The balance of ying and yang is important to how a TCM practitioner diagnoses a patient, referring to a “deficiency in fire” in a certain major organ, which is matched with “excessiveness” in another organ as a root cause of the disease. To cure a disease, one would try to restore the balance of qi and improve the patient’s life habits to keep balance consistent. An imbalance in the Meridian qi associated with a specific organ would be corrected by methods such as acupuncture, which is a method of treatment where a trained practitioner inserts very fine needles into specific points on the body. Each point inserted is meant to restore balance within the qi, and can be used to improve both mental and physical conditions. Specialized herbal formulations are used to reinforce the action of acupuncture. The more fixed or chronic the

condition, the more herbal medicine is given to the patient to moderate the balance of qi, with the selection of herbs tailored for the specific imbalance. Every ingredient used is classified according to its ability to influence energy channels and solid organs.

From the AM perspective, acupuncture points correlate to locations along the nervous system. However, TCM considers acupuncture points methods to resolve the imbalance within qi, highly different to being based in the nervous system. For TCM, as the treatment method is individualized to balance the body, there are only general guidelines on how to treat the patients such as certain acupuncture points to help a specific major organ, and there is no standard method of treating a patient (such as how acetaminophen would be taken immediately for pain in AM), to the point where even each treatment session can differ in TCM. In TCM, the same symptoms are not taken as evidence for a disease, but rather would try to solve why the symptom occurred. As such, treatment may differ widely between doctors, thus leading to patients generally depending on only one doctor for all of their illnesses.

AM deals with an illness by examining its symptoms, then analyzing the symptoms to deduce the illness (diagnosis), where it is then matched to a specific treatment procedure to lead to cure. As Allopathic medicine deals with each illness individually by its symptoms, and so each illness would be dealt on a case by case basis where each person would require multiple doctors (specialists) for illnesses. Over a lifetime, one may visit numerous AM doctors, each covering a specialty from primary care to internal medicine. However, for traditional Chinese medicine, one would frequently only see one doctor who would treat all illnesses. TCM deals with the emotional and spiritual state of well being, and the goal by the end result of the

treatment would be both an improved body and mind, and has individualized treatment to fulfill said goal.

However, in AM treatment is more mechanized, where one would be directed to different doctors specializing in a certain field to receive treatment. The basic branches of AM include human anatomy, embryology, physiology, parasitology, pathologic anatomy, pathophysiology (study why diseases happen), and pharmacology (Fan). The emphasis is no longer placed upon the whole body, but rather the microcosm inside, with the field of medicine being split into many individual parts and require specialists for each disease. There is a distinct split between being healthy and having a disease, while TCM tends to view the two together. Western medicine, or “normal medicine”, is very procedural and tries to change the environment of the human body, while TCM tries to have the body adapt to the environment through treatment. In AM, physicians are trained mainly for detecting diseases and therapy while other professions take care of areas such as health promotion, disease prevention and rehabilitation, while in TCM, the doctor must take care of all aspects. While the patient may have increased longevity and prevention of disease through AM, TCM is more concerned with the mental state of the person itself. The two also differ in that Chinese medicine uses personal observation and experimentation as basis and will believe things such as the kidney being "the origin of five viscera and six bowels, and the root of twelve channels and network vessels, " and so is "the center adjusting all human viscera and bowels", “...the theory of Yin and Yang as well as five phases...where it is used to explain the tissues and structures, physiology and pathology of human body, and directs clinical diagnosis and treatment, and even drug classifying is also based on this intuitive world view.” (Fan).

Western medicine primarily depends on usage of surgery and drugs (including over the counter, prescription medicine) as methods of treatment. In a sense, Western medicine is the product of industry, science and medicine, especially considering its growth spurt in progress during the Industrial Revolution. Much of western medicine now is expanded upon in a laboratory handled not by the doctor (practitioner). For example, drugs are manufactured, with the chemical components of each drug being the primary concern. They also have many chemicals inside be from plants frequently used in TCM herbal medicine, such as the herb *Rhodiola* being used as a component of medicine to treat Pulmonary hypertension (Tian). Herbal medicines used in TCM are sometimes marketed in the United States as dietary supplements. In TCM, the doctor is required to be familiar with the various herbs needed to combine into effective medicine for the patient, whereas in Western medicine the doctor must be able to identify and prescribe treatments but will not handle the medicine, instead relying on pharmacists. Today medicinal herbs and botanicals remain the mainstay of TCM and form the foundation of the modern pharmaceutical industry. TCM features more than 5,000 different substances for herbal medicine, with some such as ginseng, peppermint and ginkgo being widely used. Others, such as ma huang (ephedra), have been adapted as pharmaceuticals. About 25 percent of modern medicines trace their derivations directly or indirectly to plants (Chen). Many drugs currently produced in laboratories are extracted from plants, such as the “antiarrhythmia drug digoxin (digitalis from the foxglove plant), the pain reliever aspirin (salicin from the bark of the willow tree), and the antimalarial drug quinine (quinaquina from the bark of the chinchona tree)” (Chen). TCM herbs are also usually combined in formulas--often a dozen herbs or more--

to produce desired effects without the toxicity or side effects that can result from too much of one substance, unlike the frequent distillation into a few substances that occurs with AM.

In American culture, TCM is more likely viewed as a placebo or a fraud due to the more spiritualistic aspect of TCM being harder to accept than the chemically based Western medicine. In TCM, the doctor will also often try to forge a connection with the patient by transforming the sickness into problems therefore make it legitimate to offer moderate advice in forms of personal experience and reflections that one may hear from one's trusted friends or relatives, much more like a counselor than the doctor stereotype. As such, patients of TCM will be much more likely to depend on the one doctor instead of the branching pathways common in Western medicine. Western medicine is more likely to be invasive to the body through methods such as surgery, whereas acupuncture leaves a much smaller and impermanent mark on the body. Despite not being as invasive, this does not mean that TCM is entirely ineffective, as experiments have proven TCM to have some effect. For example, "female infertility with Chinese Herbal Medicine can improve pregnancy rates 2-fold within a 4 month period compared with Western Medical fertility drug therapy or IVF. Assessment of the quality of the menstrual cycle, integral to TCM diagnosis, appears to be fundamental to successful treatment of female infertility."

(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22036524>). In a 2012 analysis that combined data on individual participants in 29 studies of acupuncture for pain, patients who received acupuncture for back or neck pain, osteoarthritis, or chronic headache had better pain relief than those who did not receive acupuncture (Vickers).

While TCM does suffer from a lack of scientific evidence and large scale, concrete - experiments due to little research upon the subject, much of TCM is intended to help the patient obtain a better lifestyle and does not have horrible repercussions for attempting so, such as massages, a part of TCM. A lack of standardization for herbal supplements also causes issue when describing the treatment administered. In American culture, TCM is looked more down upon than Western medicine, while in Europe it is common to see herbal medicine in line with prescription medicine, particularly with countries with longer history with Asian countries.. For example, in one experiment “only 22.4% of respondents informed their doctors about CAM use, which is similar to other studies. Reasons for that may reflect a fact that lack of acceptance by the Western doctor, as 10% of the respondents thought that Western doctor would discourage CAM and not believe the effectiveness.”

(<http://search.proquest.com/docview/205309795?accountid=1151>). Despite certain herbs and ingredients being used in common medicine such as the Bach flower or “Rescue remedy”, the raw form still remains questionable for many, despite the medicine occasionally being diluted to the point of only being a placebo (Thaler). For some complex chronic diseases such as diabetes or certain cancers, TCM has been proven in various cases to be useful in treatment and in the aftercare. Also, by identifying potent bioactives derived from TCM as discussed above, and tailoring formulations that encapsulate/incorporate them into cutting-edge drug delivery systems for parenteral administration one can envision overcoming the shortfalls that have prevented TCM being accepted by the West as a real adjunct/alternative to conventional cancer therapies (<http://www.molecular-cancer.com/content/8/1/21>).

Most complementary therapies integrate well with conventional treatments though some herbal remedies, such as products for nausea or relaxation, may interact with chemotherapy drugs, as such require more research. There is also a lack of knowledge about the subject, as unlike in Europe, alternative medicine is not so easily found in America and has not reached the step of being acknowledged as legitimate by the government

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1348150291/46481C796AE84580PQ/57?accountid=1151>).

In America, a sign of legitimacy is the education received. However, for TCM there is no such emphasis on education, leading to a stronger view that the TCM practitioner is not practicing “proper” medicine. In China, TCM is starting to gain more emphasis due to being recognized as fading due to Western medicine, leading to more clear cut education being provided on the subject. Some colleges, such as Johns Hopkins University, also are now holding their own classes on TCM. Currently for some locations, to become an herbal therapist requires three to four years of master's-degree-level education in Chinese medicine and a series of certification exams in Oriental medicine, herbology and biomedicine (Chen). Certain objects believed to be effective, such as rhinoceros horns, also create ethical issues over their use. In some countries, herbal medicine and other tools of Chinese medicine are viewed not as medicine, but rather health products and non-medicinal foods, only allowed to be sold as such.

However, in common TCM treatments such objects are not used due to being cost ineffective and hard to obtain, so if just integrating TCM treatments into Western medicine, herbal medicine would still primarily be herbs. Another issue would be the taste of herbal medicine in its most traditional form of being the remainder of boiled herbs, which can be incredibly bitter. The higher cost of time and money and the time to grow the plants to produce

individualized herbal medicine in comparison to the mass produced medicine common to western medicine is also a factor when considering the use of TCM. The perceived danger in having many needles stuck into a human body can also be deterred. The incidence of adverse effects is substantially lower than that of many drugs or other accepted medical procedures used for the same conditions. Years of experience have demonstrated acupuncture to be safe when performed by qualified practitioners, with very few disciplinary or malpractice cases on a state or national level in over 20 years in the U.S. The National Institutes of Health on Acupuncture found from basic research that there is sufficient evidence of its potential value when compared to conventional medicine and encourages more studies. While the specific chemical events that occur in response to needling a series of acupuncture points are unknown. Preliminary research suggests that acupuncture may provoke tissue specific responses via the stimulation or inhibition of discrete biochemical messengers

(<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=b9c2f3b7-132b-45ef-86fb-ab8212444364%40sessionmgr115&vid=0&hid=123&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=f5h&AN=1902277>).

The lack of research on the subject of TCM makes it difficult to judge clearly the effects of TCM, however if TCM becomes accepted, research on the subject would be more prevalent and allow better judgements on its efficacy. The successful integration of TCM into western medicine is not impossible. For example, in Europe TCM and other alternative medicine is much more accepted than in America. In the first WHO congress on medicine, the “Beijing Declaration”, a declaration to “promote the safe and effective use of traditional medicine, and to call on WHO Member States and other stakeholders to take steps to integrate TM/CAM into

national health systems”, was created, a crucial step in rescuing the future of not only TCM, but many other fading traditional medicine styles (WHO). Acupuncture is slowly gaining legal status in many states in America. Fusion of TCM with allopathic medicine in the United States should eventually be possible in the not so distant future and create a more comprehensive medical care structure.

Works Cited

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<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=f5h&AN=1902277&site=ehost>

-live>. This article discusses key reasons for why Chinese medicine has continued to survive until today, with facts from both its cultural and historical significance in China and from its scientific benefits. To ground this evidence and give explanation to the reader, the key points of Chinese medicine are clearly stated and given elaboration to its significance in TCM's endurance, causing the article to be not only a good introduction to the history of Chinese medicine, but also TCM and its significance itself. The article also describes some of the core beliefs of Chinese medicine, which are then compared to western medicine and provides good analysis. At the bottom of the article, the authors have provided some references that seem useful for further research, and so can serve as a useful springboard to new directions. The article is credible as it is published in a journal about health, and has been peer reviewed, without a biased perspective.

Chen, Keji, and Hao Xu. "The integration of traditional Chinese medicine and Western

medicine." *European Review* 11.2 (2003): 225-35. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 29

May 2014. <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/217327079?accountid=1151>>. This

article provides a brief history of both western and Chinese medicine, including how the

two medicinal styles integrated with its summation of the history. The article also provides a summary of the differences in treatment between the two philosophies, and discusses how the aspects are meshed together, effectively providing background information and analysis over the state of TCM and allopathic medicine, from the beginning of the interaction of the two to their future potential. The article also provides a long list of references for further research and some tables for visual evidence, helping the reader lead to other sources and is a good introduction article. The article itself is also credible as the first author is an expert in TCM and holds high positions in many sources of information and treatment on TCM, while the second author specializes in treatment using integrated western and Chinese medicine.

Chen, Xiuping. "Filling the gap between traditional Chinese medicine and modern medicine, are we heading to the right direction?" *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*: n. pag. *ProQuest*. Web. 15 Jan. 2015.
<<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1348150291/46481C796AE84580PQ/57?accountid=1151>>.

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Fan, Ruiping. "Modern western science as a standard for traditional Chinese medicine: A critical appraisal." *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 31.2 (2003): n. pag. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 29 May 2014.
<<http://search.proquest.com/docview/223509550?accountid=1151>>. This article

discusses how China is currently trying to integrate TCM and allopathic medicine; however TCM suffers from a "monostandard" that it must be "scientific" while effective, when TCM is observational and based on inquiry, causing TCM to fade into Western medicine's shadow in the attempt for integration and stifles under little room to develop. The article argues against the problems in the integration, and provides some historical background as evidence. The article is useful in providing a Chinese view on western medicine and the status of the two medicinal practices in china, however does not mention the status of the two in the western world. The article itself provides an extensive list of statistics and references, with examples littered around the article. As such, the article is a good tool when discussing the Chinese point of view of the interaction between the two styles and a reference point for more sources. The article is credible as the article is published in a journal specifically discussing the legal measures about medicine and ethics, with the author writing many articles on medical philosophy and ethics.

Gold, Richard. "Health before Dogma." *World & I* 11.4 (1996): 60-67. *EBSCO MAS Ultra*. Web. 29 May 2014. <<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=3&sid=003374cb-514d-4592-8410-2d87faf5217f%40sessionmgr113&hid=120&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=ulh&AN=9603293172>>. This article discusses the differences in approach and treatment between western medicine and TCM, as well as how the medicine is viewed by the other. The article gives a brief argument on how to reconcile the two medicinal philosophies as well as the major opposites between the two medical practices. The article itself serves as good background information on the differences between the

medicinal practices both theoretically and in practice, however serves more as an informational text for someone unfamiliar with TCM and only using western medicine as a reference point to amplify the differences, and so has little analysis toward the two styles. The article is credible as the author is a practitioner of TCM as well as on the boards of colleges that specialize in teaching TCM, but treats the two medicines without bias, admitting both TCM and allopathic medicine have their faults.

JSTOR. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Jan. 2015.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3406613?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents>.

Kaptchuk, Ted. *The Web That Has no Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*. 2nd ed. N.p.: McGraw Hill, 2010. Print. This book serves as a comprehensive guide to traditional Chinese medicine, covering many aspects of TCM including its philosophy and techniques, with diagrams to accentuate the explanations. The book also provides many comparisons to Western medicine, including how it differs in treatment of the body and philosophical differences. The book is written in a clear and easy to understand style, with many references and notes that are useful for further research. It serves as a good source of background information, however does not mention western methods of treatment much due to its nature as a book on TCM and so lacks mentioning the integration of the two medicinal styles. The book itself is credible as the author is a professor of medicine at the Harvard Medical School as well as associate director of the Center for Alternative Medicine Research and Education at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, with the book itself a required reading in many courses teaching TCM.

Li, Tao. "Philosophic Perspective: A Comparative Study of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western Medicine." *Asian Social Science* 7.2 (2011): n. pag. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 29 May 2014. <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/849233324?accountid=1151>>. This paper compares the "paradigms" of Traditional Chinese Medicine and western medicine (Li). He compares the differences in key parts of both the medicinal philosophies, such as the treatment of the body. Li also highlights key problems in integrating the two medicinal practices, where western medicine is experiencing rapid evolution while TCM is going through very little change in its core treatment methods, and speculates the eventual disappearance of TCM. The paper provides a clear introduction to the differences between the two types of medicine and provides some analysis for the differences. While the paper serves as good background information on the differences between the two, the paper neglects to mention why western medicine was so reluctant to accept TCM, nor does it mention specific examples of a successful mix of the two medicinal practices. The paper itself is credible as it is published specifically in a journal discussing the social nature of sciences and medicine, with the author educated in social science, and seems to be relatively unbiased.

Lu, Huanhua, et al. "The Eastern Cultural Signature of Traditional Chinese Medicine: Empirical Evidence and Theoretical Perspectives." *Chinese Medicine* 4.3 (2013): 79-86. *ProQuest Research Library*. Web. 6 June 2014. <<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1444014140?accountid=1151>>. This article discusses how chinese medicine was influenced by the culture and history of China, and gives discussion into the holistic nature of TCM. The article has multiple references given at the end of its paper, and has statistics and experiments used frequently to back

up the information given about the link between culture and Chinese medicine. The article also has a clear and concise description of multiple aspects of Chinese medicine, from both a scientific point of view and a cultural point of view. This article serves as a good springboard onto different sources and quantitative data referring to the heavy link between TCM and Chinese culture, however does not discuss the link between Western medicine and its culture. The article not only is peer reviewed, but is also published in a journal specifically on Chinese medicine, and is factual and objective.

Martha, Benedict. "The Enduring Elements of Traditional Chinese Medicine." *Total Health* 21.2: n. pag. EBSCO. Web. 9 Dec. 2015.

<<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?sid=a0d2282f-8e76-439c-9264-f596f572a7d5%40sessionmgr4005&vid=0&hid=4206&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=f5h&AN=1902277>>.

"Medicinal Drugs." *The Facts On File Encyclopedia of Health and Medicine*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. N. pag. Health Reference Center. Web. 29 May 2014.

<<http://www.fofweb.com/activelink2.asp?ItemID=WE48&SID=5&iPin=EHM1647&SingleRecord=True>>. This entry describes a brief history of pharmaceutical medicine, with a brief discussion of TCM as well, and the workings of pharmaceutical medicine and regulations. The entry gives many examples, including statistics and what is included in a drug and how drugs work. The article is useful in giving a concise and detailed explanation on pharmaceutical medicine and drug use and regulations, as well as some analysis on the potential state of medicinal drugs. The article serves as a good summary of pharmaceutical medicine, from its past to the future, however the entry lacks a more thorough discussion of TCM herbal medicine and how it is implemented into

allopathic medicine. Although the entry is very detailed, it also lacks explanation on the use of TCM herbal medicine in many drugs, only briefly mentioning it. The entry itself is credible as it is from an encyclopedia specifically on health and medicine, and is unbiased in content.

"Modern western science as a standard for traditional Chinese medicine: A critical appraisal."

Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics: n. pag. *ProQuest*. Web. 5 Jan. 2015.

<<http://search.proquest.com/docview/223509550?accountid=1151>>.

Parker, Linette A. "Legal Standards for Drugs." *The American Journal of Nursing* 22.10 (1922): 809-11. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 June 2014. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3406613>>. This article discusses legal acts passed about drugs, as well as a history of drugs in America. The article also discusses how "drugs" are considered by legal standards, and so serves as a good source describing how one of the main treatments of western medicine, pharmaceutical drugs, are considered, by law. However, the article is dated, as it was published in 1922, when traditional chinese medicine had not become popular. As such, this article provides an interesting look at pharmaceutical drugs before the implementation of chinese herbal medicine and the analysis of the effects of herbs used by TCM. The article is a good source of an introduction to the legal side of drugs. The article is credible, as it was published in an American journal specifically about medicine, and contains many statistics, without a biased perspective.

Pickstone, John V. "Sketching Together the Modern Histories of Science, Technology, and Medicine." *Isis* 102.1 (2011): 123-33. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 June 2014.

<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/657506>>. This article discusses the closely linked relationship western medicine has with science, with the increase in scientific technology

simultaneously benefitting medicinal advances. The article also gives a comprehensive history of both medicine and science, with many examples littered about the article. It also discusses the link between industry and science, which in turn influenced Western medicine and how they produced technology for western medicine. The article also provides many references at the bottom, most being from major universities. As such, this article is a good descriptor of the link between science and western medicine as well as a springboard for more useful sources on the topic. However, the article does not talk about Chinese medicine at all, nor does it talk much about the structure of medicine, instead focusing its attention of technological innovations in medicine. The article is credible as it was peer reviewed as well as being published by the University of Chicago.

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