

Key Concepts in Traditional Chinese Medicine

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PREFACE

TCM, short for traditional Chinese medicine, is a classical medical system with Chinese characteristics that are closely integrated with astronomy, geography, and humanities. Based on traditional Chinese culture, classical philosophy, and humanistic thoughts, TCM, in combination with the various schools of thought and their exponents during the period from pre-Qin times to the early years of Han Dynasty as well as the theories and practice of natural sciences and social sciences, constitutes the unique theoretical system, way of thinking as well as diagnosis and treatment methods. TCM has a high regard for the harmonious coexistence of man and nature. It emphasizes consistent cultural inheritance, advocates the harmonious development between man and society, and opens broad prospects for local medicine development, cultural dissemination, and the progress of human civilization. As promulgated in the white paper “Traditional Chinese Medicine in China” by the State Council in 2016, TCM is “a representative feature of Chinese civilization,” which “produces a positive impact on the progress of human civilization,” “represents a combination of natural sciences and humanities,” and “embraces profound philosophical ideas of the Chinese nation.”

TCM is at the present time the most comprehensive and the most widely used traditional medical system in the world with the longest history, the most profound culture, the most distinctive effects, and the fastest development. Early in the pre-Qin period, TCM had been gradually introduced into the neighboring areas such as the Korean Peninsula. During the Han and Tang dynasties, it had been brought into Japan and Southeast Asia. After the eighteenth century, TCM was introduced into

Europe and it gained wide dissemination in the mid-nineteenth century. After the 1970s, TCM quickly spread all over the world along with the success of acupuncture anesthesia, contributing substantially to the development of world medicine, the wellbeing of all nations, and the dissemination of Chinese culture. Due to its advanced theory, profound cultural basis, natural therapy, and remarkable effectiveness, TCM has survived and prospered throughout the ages. It has blazed a unique path for the prosperity of the Chinese nation, the development of Chinese civilization, and the spread of Chinese culture.

Four TCM classics—*Yellow Emperor's Internal Canon of Medicine*, *Canon of Difficult Issues*, *Agriculture God's Canon of Materia Medica*, and *Treatise on Cold Damage and Miscellaneous Diseases*—not only represent the core of TCM theory and method but also contain the essence of thought and spirit in Chinese culture, among which *Yellow Emperor's Internal Canon of Medicine* is the landmark. It involves almost every aspect of natural sciences, social sciences as well as language and culture in ancient China. Its worldwide spread has become a great way for Chinese culture to go global. The transliteration form of the important concepts of Chinese culture such as yin, yang, and qi has been adopted in Western languages. This is a great contribution made by TCM to the “going out” of Chinese culture, and it has laid a solid language foundation for Chinese culture going out.

Chinese culture is going to spread to the West, to the world. Naturally, there is a need for attention from various academic, cultural, and civil sectors. In the Han and Tang dynasties, the Buddhists in Xiyu (the Western regions) traveled all the way to Central China to promote Buddhism, whereas in the Ming and Qing dynasties Western missionaries worked their way to China to spread Christianity. For both of them, medicine has been an important means to rally public support. As an integral part of traditional Chinese culture, TCM not only plays an important role in rallying foreign support to stimulate Chinese culture to go global but also serves as a bridge to disseminate and promote traditional Chinese culture directly. It is an international consensus that anyone desiring to learn, understand, and draw on TCM theories, methods, formulas, and herbs shall first of all learn and acquire the basic theories and thoughts of traditional Chinese culture, for example, the theory of yin and yang, the theory of five elements, and the theory of essence and qi.

It can be seen that the international communication of TCM is undoubtedly an ideal, unique, and solid approach if Chinese culture is to go global in a comprehensive and systematic manner and to gain the heartfelt understanding and acceptance from the people worldwide.

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