

Exploring the Connection between Traditional Chinese Cultural Thought and the Prevention and Treatment of Epidemics: A Study of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

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ABSTRACT

The essay explores the relationship between Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and the prevention and treatment of epidemics, emphasizing its historical roots and modern applications. It discusses how traditional Chinese cultural thought, including Confucianism and Daoism, influences public health ethics and preventative health approaches. The study highlights both the historical and contemporary roles of TCM in epidemic response, offering examples from classical texts and modern integration with public health practices. Additionally, the document analyzes the complementary strengths of TCM and modern medicine, such as TCM's holistic approach versus the precision of modern methods, and provides insights into future challenges and directions.

KEYWORDS

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM); Epidemic prevention; Holism; Confucianism; Public health

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is one of the most ancient components of the Chinese healthcare system and shares numerous similarities with Chinese philosophy and practice. Its conception of health, especially in epidemic conditions, is as much a physical and social construct as preventive and ecological. According to Confucianism, Daoism, and other aspects of traditional Chinese culture, TCM applies Chinese philosophy and medicine to treat diseases based on corrective changes in diet and other habits, natural remedies, and spiritual harmony. The cavity of treatment that TCM assumes in epidemic prevention and treatments is extensible from Chinese history, where emphasis on rebalancing the body and immune system was the critical sustainable measure in lessening the effects of diseases. With the help of the Shang Han Lun as a base and applying TCM during SARS and COVID, applicative relevance is proven across centuries. Today, it combines with modern science, providing a new dimension in its epidemic management where traditional management is stifled with modern biomedical sciences. Against this backdrop, the paper discusses traditional Chinese cultural thoughts' role in shaping TCM's strategy for preventing and combating epidemics. At the same time, it also explores the historical and contemporary evolutions of TCM. It systematically discusses integrating TCM and modern medicine to form a new bridge for future epidemic prevention and control and cure of epidemic diseases.

2. TRADITIONAL CULTURAL THOUGHT: INFLUENCES ON EPIDEMIC PREVENTION

Chinese cultural indigenous knowledge, especially the Confucianist, Daoist, and traditional Chinese medical culture thinking mode, has significantly contributed to epidemic prevention. These philosophies have been characterized by balance, reciprocity, ethical considerations, and standards that apply personal and societal outlooks to disease control.

2.1. Confucianism and Public Health Ethics

Confucius started Confucianism in the 6th century BC and has the significant principle ren, which means benevolence that practices moral obligation and common good. From the Confucian point of view, there is an emphasis on community protection, that is, both government and personal initiatives in preventing diseases. The Ming dynasty established previous public health measures like quarantine, and the reasons were stated under the Confucian ethic of benevolence, which is to refrain from causing harm to others (Unschuld, 2010). Furthermore, particular behaviorisms emphasized in Confucian thought include essential grooming as part of ethical self-cultivation and temperance. Some of these measures, intended to preserve health on the level of the individual and society in general, were employed in epidemic cases. For instance, in outbreaks, health campaigns such as hygiene in the community and regulation of food and water were encouraged (Zhan, 2020).

2.2. Daoism: Harmony with Nature and Preventative Health

Daoism is in defense of the natural environment and the acceptance of the qualities present in the natural periodicity of health and illness. An essential concept of Daoism is yin-yang; it is an opposition in pairs, in man's body and the world. To Daoists, epidemics are upset internal-external harmonies that interfere with the body's circulation of qi (Kaptchuk, 1986). It has been mentioned that regarding epidemic prevention, Daoism upholds celibacy besides practicing qigong, tai chi, and a balanced diet, all of which help enhance the physical immune system and seek harmony in the yin and yang. According to traditional concepts, during historical epidemics, people were admonished to avoid activities that, by exciting the body, disturb its equilibrium. For example, too much exposure to heat or cold disrupts body harmony, making it easy for pathogenic factors to overwhelm the body (Zhan, 2009). Daoism impacted the development of the TCM because it pointed to the role of environmental factors in disease causation as vital to understanding epidemic diseases.

2.3. Traditional Chinese Medical Thought: Balance and Holism

Traditional Chinese medical thought subprocesses are rooted in Confucian and Daoist beliefs, especially reciprocity and equilibrium. According to TCM, it is proposed that epidemic diseases occur when exterior pathogenic factors such as wind, cold, or dampness affect the body. These factors fit within the theorization of yin-yang or the Five Elements, which describes how different forces in the natural and human body either maintain good health or result in disease (Kaptchuk, 2000). In Chinese medical writings that go as far back as the Huangdi Neijing or the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon, the term epidemic is viewed more as a disturbance in the body's relation with its surroundings. As mentioned above, prevention strategies were inclined towards achieving balance by changing everyday practices like diet, exercise, and rest. Another dimension of health, according to TCM, is also WHO's physical, mental, and social well-being since emotions were considered to reduce individual resistance to diseases (Unschuld, 2010). Prevention is emphasized so much in TCM, with the main principle stating that the path becomes manifest when health is already disrupted. Pre-emptive behaviors in disease prevention manifest from consuming protective amulets, burning herbs, special diets, and other measures that build up the body's immune system immunity against diseases (Zhan, 2009).

3. EPIDEMIC PREVENTION AND TREATMENT: THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

For a few millennia, TCM has supported epidemic prevention and even treatments. The explanations of TCM consider the principles of wholism, which tend to use a combination of therapeutic means when treating diseases, especially during epidemics. This section discusses how TCM has been used in outbreaks, provides examples from early literature, and discusses its use in today's scenario in epidemic control.

3.1. Historical Applications of TCM in Epidemic Response

TCM has been used in epidemic response in history, for example, during the flu pandemic in 1918. As a result, TCM's epidemic response has been mainly based on its founding principles of the existence of Yin—Yang, and Qi in human beings and the environment. For instance, during the plague pandemic, such as the plague of 1642 and pneumonia and influenza in 1918, the TCM approach to treating the diseases was through herbal treatment, needling, and dieting therapies. A prestigious source would be the *Shang Han Lun* (Treatise on Cold Damage), which dates back to the Han Dynasty and was written by Zhang Zhongjing. According to Weizenbaum (2019), this text also addresses methods of diagnosing febrile illness' and states that treatment should be customized based on the time the symptoms are recognized. The text also suggests where to use various herbal formulas, many of which are used today in modern TCM practice.

3.2. Case Studies from Classical Texts

The *Shang Han Lun* and other classical Chinese medical texts describe many herbal prescriptions to treat epidemics. For instance, Ma Huang Tang, Ephedra Decoction has been used in the past to address illnesses associated with upper respiratory tract complaints, which are primarily manifested during epidemics of certain diseases, such as fever, chills, and coughs, among others, according to Weizenbaum (2019). Another prominent example is the application of Honeysuckle and Forsythia Powder, called Yin Qiao San, during the SARS epidemic 2003. This herbal formula dispels pathogenic heat and purges interior wind pathogenic factors used in respiratory infections. Its parts, like Honeysuckle and forsythia, were used in line with guidelines provided by TCM, where the root cause of the disease is duly treated (Song & Chen, 2020). Some clinical reports from the SARS epidemic pointed out that patients who took TCM treatments enjoyed better symptom relief and shorter recovery periods, which supports WHO's view that TCM has potential in epidemic management.

3.3. Integration of TCM in Modern Public Health

As with many recent global health crises, modern interest in TCM proves its usefulness for epidemic prevention and treatment. In 2020, the Chinese government incorporated TCM into China's national emergency management plan to improve its treatment plans for COVID-19 using the amalgamation of TCM and WM. Organs such as the liver, kidney, respiratory system, lungs, and immune system thus needed support, says TCM practitioners, who then developed formulations to address the symptoms and support recovery. Some studies have been conducted recently to evaluate the role of TCM during the COVID-19 outbreak, and their findings are encouraging. Liu et al. (2020) scoped a systematic review study that showed the number of hospital stays and complications were significantly lower among patients who were administered TCM along with conventional treatment. This review outlined that TCM's integrated approach to health included diet, exercise, and mental health, which are all essential during an epidemic. Moreover, the appeals to oral hygiene, correct diet, and immune enhancement generally correlate with the anti-epidemic measures considered

components of TCM. The general approach of TCM may be compatible with biomedical approaches regarding health promotion and increasing community resistance (Tu, 2011).

3.4. Challenges and Future Directions

Despite being known for many years, TCM is an inadequate form of complementary medicine that experiences some difficulty integrating with the WW modern system of medicine, which requires clinical research on its practices. Further study on the action mechanisms of TCM herbs in epidemic diseases and clinical trials is needed to promote TCM as a secure and effective treatment regime. The cooperative relations between TCM practitioners and biomedical researchers allow for creating an integrated treatment approach based on the synergistic activity of the two schools. Thus, TCM has a long history of preventing and controlling the epidermis in its specific approach to managing epidemic situations. Referring to the sources and analyzing the historical usage of TCM in approaches towards public health, we must remember that it will contribute to following epidemics.

4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE: HISTORICAL AND MODERN CONTEXTS

Timelines and transformation of traditional Chinese medicine: facets of history, culture, philosophy, and sciences. Therefore, TCM remains a set of significant fundamentals learned from its history about current health issues and how it was enhanced in epidemic prevention and cure.

4.1. Historical Context of TCM Development

The founder of TCM can be traced back to over 2,500 years ago in China. Of psychophysical origin, it had its antecedents in folk and spiritistic healing and proto-philosophical paradigms, as were the ‘Huangdi Neijing’ (Yellow Emperor’s ‘Inner Canon’) and the ‘Shang Han Lun’ (Treatise on ‘Cold Injury’), which provided its initial template (Unschuld, 2010). Most of today’s TCM principles, such as the concepts of yin-yang, qi, and the Five Elements written in the book Huangdi Neijing, are believed to have been compiled in the period of Warring States, around the 3rd century BC. The Han dynasty began 2000 years ago with formal medical education and acupuncture and herbal medicine becoming part of the therapy. This period was characterized by concern for health and disease control through the recognition of state-sponsored medical institutions (Zhan, 2020). As we move through different dynasties, TCM develops by integrating new knowledge and practice. The period of the Ming and Qing dynasties was the time of the appearance of complex medical works and the most severe growth of the processes in the field of education. These periods saw concepts of herbal formulas combined with other traditional medicine practices, while traditional acupuncture was made more formal in TCM practice (Kaptchuk, 1986).

4.2. Modernization of TCM

As a treatment and preventive health care system, TCM has faced new opportunities and challenges in the twentieth century. After the decline of the Qing dynasty, China began its modernization processes. Therefore, the Western way of medication prevailed. With the emerging Republican success in 1912, minimalistic measures to regulate TCM practice were adopted, which incrementally culminated in the structural development of training programs for practitioners and the formation of professional associations (Tu, 2011). The Chinese government first realized TCM’s usefulness in the 1950s and attempted to blend TCM and WM during the “Great Leap Forward” and the “Cultural Revolution.” During this period, TCM established hospitals and integrated the employment of TCM therapies into public health services. The Chinese government contributed to popularising TCM as a part of a health improvement drive that sought to decrease the country’s dependence on biomedical systems (Zhan, 2020).

4.3. TCM in Contemporary Health Care

Currently, TCM is not only in China but also in other countries where it is gradually incorporated into complementary and predicate medicinal systems. Many aspects of TCM can be helpful in the modern world, including its focus on the integrated approach concerning physical, psychological, and environmental aspects of a patient's condition, evidence for the value of which is strengthened by actively developing tendencies towards individualized medicine and preventive interventions.

Recent research has, therefore, encompassed efforts to use scientific approaches to confirm the use and efficacy of TCM, identify the pharmacological actions of TCM herbs, and determine the clinical utility of TCM remedies. For example, research on artemisinin, which comes from the sweet wormwood plant, has enhanced the management of malaria and is an example of TCM's benefit to present-day chemistry (Tu, 2011). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced the understanding of TCM and its applicability to contemporary medicine: Different herbal mixtures were combined with conventional approaches to improve outcomes and strengthen the body. A cross-sectional survey made when COVID was at its worst demonstrated that TCM therapy assisted patients in healing and lessened the impact of the illness (Zhang et al., 2020).

4.4. Challenges and Future Directions

Since it has an intensive historical need and current applicability, TCM is still concerned with integrating conventional medicine. Problem areas still exist, including questions regarding the treatment algorithms, the quality of plants used in herbal products, clinical trials, etc. Solving these issues can be best done by the cooperation of TCM practitioners and biomedical researchers so that the practice of TCM can contribute to public health. The evolution of TCM should be seen as a way to address new healthcare issues while at the same time strengthening its foundations. Further studies and application of TCM theories and acceptance of new scientific methods can lead to the recognition of TCM's effectiveness and create a new approach to teaching an epidemic with the combination of ancient knowledge and contemporary tools.

5. COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: INTEGRATING TCM AND MODERN MEDICINE FOR FUTURE EPIDEMIC PREVENTION

Integrating TCM and Western medicine, which possess different theoretical systems, provides excellent potential for exploration in future epidemiotherapy. Each system has its peculiarities and strengths, and assimilating both could be a more practical approach to population health.

5.1. Complementary Strengths: Holism and Precision

This means that while TCM is leaning towards more preventative care and has a global perception of health, which may be expected, it can augment modern medical practice's accuracy and particularized treatment methods. For instance, vaccines and antiviral remedies are very effective in combating similar diseases; however, TCM can supply immunity and healing for the constant or chronic manifestations linked to viral illnesses. Including TCM and conventional medicine is essential, especially in addressing the current issues of AMR. Herbal medicines have been used to treat infectious diseases and can be used to find other means of treating diseases other than using antibiotics. Moreover, not mentioned in the article but presumably beneficial effects of TCM, its emphasis on enhancing the body could decrease the number of secondary infections, a particular problem in epidemic situations.

5.2. Practical Applications for Future Epidemic Prevention

The integration model of TCM and modern medicine demonstrates that integrating the two systems can significantly reduce the risk of epidemic, and future epidemic prevention will require integrating the two. Therefore, TCM's treatment approaches complement those of governments and health organizations, which may include biomedical practices that focus on personal hygiene, regulation of diet, and Harley ecology. He also indicated that lifestyle practices associated with TCM, which seek to establish tags, such as tai chi and qigong, could beneficially contribute to undergraduate education and health preservation. Furthermore, more studies of the effects of herbal formulas used in TCM on epidemic treatment contribute to the prevention or treatment tool set. Randomized clinical trials and other pharmacological evaluations should determine which part of the formula works for any given TCM treatment and acknowledge the pulse/Creeping/ questioning diagnostic approach that underpins constitutionalized approaches to the individuals' signs and symptoms.

6. CONCLUSION

The research shows that TCM and traditional Chinese cultural thought are deeply related, and the historical perception and practice of epidemic prevention and treatment are deeply influenced by it. The principles of TCM can be traced to ideas developed in the earliest philosophical thoughts, including yin-yang and qi, and are based on the guiding principles of thinking holistically on body, mind, and surroundings. This research has helped in developing the principles of prevention and treatments that have given TCM a contribution towards public health, especially in periods of disasters. As presented in this paper, TCM has been used explicitly in epidemics events, as evidenced by classical texts, in addition to the recent SARS outbreak and the current COVID-19 pandemic. Including TCM in the current health management systems can increase the rate and the quality of recovery and decrease the intensity of side effects, hence revealing the possibility of using the union of TCM and the latter medical practices. They present a reference model for how TCM combined with modern medicine can be incorporated for a detailed study, providing direction for future anti-epidemic approaches. Thus, by enhancing collaborative working based on more rigorous scientific inquiry and policy-making, education, and outreach, the assets of both delivery systems can be better aligned to ensure enhanced public health capacities.

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