

Chinese Healings

Chinese healing is as ancient as Chinese language. Since its publication in the Han dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD) two thousand years ago, Neijing 内经 or “the Yellow Emperor’s Internal Medicine” has become a classic for later generations of practitioners in traditional Chinese medicine. Among his many accomplishments, the legendary Yellow Emperor (2697 – 2597 BC) has been credited with the invention of the principles of traditional Chinese medicine. Although other physicians wrote masterpieces throughout the history of China, any serious discussion of Chinese healing must start with Neijing, for the whole history of Chinese medicine may be stated to be nothing more than a series of footnotes to it. This ancient classic is still being referred to by many practitioners of Chinese healing.



Why do we continue practicing this “old-fashioned” healing when man has achieved to walk on the Moon and orbit around the Earth? Why do we still rely on roots and herbs when modern medicine, with cutting edge technology of molecular biology and genetic manipulation, has been able to solve many problems our ancestors dared not even to dream of? Haven’t those mega-pharmaceutical companies developed powerful antibiotics for bacterial infections, potent chemotherapy for cancer treatments, and endless cures for many once incurable diseases? Why do we still promote more than two-thousand-year-old remedies when modern surgeons can successfully transplant vital organs? Because Chinese healing is ancient but not out of date, still works!

Chinese healing involves body, mind, and nature in ONE integrated system based on the two great cosmic forces, Yin and Yang. The healing forms include food cures, herbal cures, acupuncture, moxibustion, Tuina – a manipulative therapy like massage, and breathing exercise like Tai Chi and Qi Gong. Some deal with a disease from the outside – acupuncture and Tuina, while others treat a disease from within – food and herbal cures. From a holistic approach, traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes on the unlimited healing resources of Mother Nature, the equilibrium of Qi, and the theory of Five Elements (this is another cultural letter on its own). The strength of Chinese healing is its whole body approach which can provide long-lasting results with much less side effects. The goal is to restore the balance within us and the harmony of our body with the world around us.

In America, many times we go to a doctor, after running through all kind of lab tests, the results come back “normal” even though every inch of our body feels wrong. Chinese healing does well in these “grey” areas, especially in certain chronic conditions, which Western medicine seems to have little to offer. So often we are told that a certain individual, who has been “in great shape” all through his or her life, suffers a major health issue out of the blue. According to Chinese medicine, the Yin/Yang balance can be tipped off *long* before it evolves into a serious problem. Western medicine began to realize this “sub-normality”, which is why many screenings are recommended to be done early and regularly.

The key is prevention. “上医治未病” means the best doctor treats a disease when it is yet developed. We are living in an environment much more toxic and detrimental to our health than at the

time our grandparents lived. What are the best ways to take care of our body? Sun Si Miao 孙思邈 (581-682 AD), a renowned Chinese physician in Tang dynasty (618 – 907 AD), lived a healthy vibrant life of 101 years, once said ‘*Anyone over 40 years old should try to avoid laxatives, which will weaken his body, and begin to take **tonics**. Anyone over 50 years old should take tonics all year round; such are the secret of nourishing life to enjoy longevity.*’



What is a tonic? A tonic can be an herb, a root, a food item or combination of any of these. Tonification is used to tune up the deficiency and increase our body’s natural immune ability to fight diseases. The deficiencies in our body are categorized into four types -- Energy, Blood, Yin and Yang. Sometimes, more than one type like energy and blood deficiencies can occur at the same time. A tonic may be prepared by making decoction in water. However, Chinese often add tonics into their cooking, such as soup, which is a delicious way to build up our body and excrete harmful wastes. The most famous energy tonic is ginseng.

Recently I came across a fascinating book depicting the ginseng boom in America during the 1800s and 1900s, “Ginseng, the Divine Root” by David Taylor. Although there are some functional differences between the America ginseng and the ginseng in China, the huge demand for it from the East led to the rapid growth of ginseng business in America. From collecting the roots from the wild to its sale to the Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911) in China, its main market, many people profited from each step of the business.

I was not surprised to discover the Native Americans using ginseng as a medicine, and this magical root existing in North America for 70 million years. Neither was I astounded to learn that America had been exporting it to China for about 300 years; the amount of its sell eventually reached a level that American ginseng was not a luxury supplement just for the Imperial family, but widely available to common citizens – it made its way to my grandmother’s soup. What did shock me was most of the ginseng hunters and dealers never bothered to try ginseng! They combed the woodland for one purpose – to find and sell those roots to the Chinese, never even considered benefiting from this tonic for themselves. Not until the seventies – thanks to President Nixon’s visit to China, two hundred years after trading with the Chinese, ginseng finally received its long-deserved attention. Today it is on every health supplement store and the counter of alternative medicine.

In this letter, I’d like to introduce another tonic, “Ought-to-Return” 当归 (pronounce as Dang Gui, *Radix Angelicae Sinensis*), a household tonic for the Chinese even though it is not nearly as well-known as ginseng here in the US. There is an interesting story regarding how the herb got its name:

Once upon a time, there was a young man who lived with his aging mother. He was dared by friends to collect precious herbs from the mountains. When he shared the strong desire to journey to the mountain, his mother was very worried because she knew the mountains were treacherous, too dangerous to climb. After many pleas, the mother reluctantly agreed, saying ‘you are my only son, since you are already engaged, at least get married before you go, so I may not be too lonely and have no heir’. Fully aware of the danger ahead of him, he told his newlywed to remarry had he not be back in three years. As

the days went by since his departure, his weary bride grew increasingly pale and frail out of anxiety. Long story short, he did not come back in three years. Eventually the mother told her daughter-in-law to remarry. Tragically, only a few days after the wedding, the young man returned home! On the news of her ex-husband's return, the wife fell seriously ill. Regretting his failure to return earlier, the young man went to see his ex-wife, and gave her the precious herbs he picked from the mountain. Drinking the decoction from the herbs, she was cured in a few days... Later a Chinese poet wrote, "He ought to return a little sooner but failed to return; she ought to wait a little longer but failed to wait".



So, don't wait for too long to try this tonic "Ought-to-Return"☺. You can get it at Asian drug store, sometimes at Asian grocery store along side with ginseng, dates and other tonic spices for nourishing soup. In according with the traditional Chinese medicine, "Ought-to-Return" can tonify and activate the blood, protect the liver, benefit blood deficiency and coagulation. It can also regulate menstruation – taken by women after menses, boost the immune system, nourish the body and give your skin the healthy glow. The following is a simple soup with "Ought-to-Return":



You need the following ingredients:

- 2-4 thighs or drumstick without skin (1-2 pounds)
- 2 oz "ought-to-return" slices
- 5 dates (carrots if you don't have dates)
- 4 slices of ginger
- 2-3 green onions (cut into 2-inch pieces).

For cooking:

1. Bring water (enough to cover the meat) to a boil in a pot; put only the meat to the boiling water and cook for 5 minutes or until no more scum floats up.
2. Then, dump the water and rinse the meat thoroughly. Return the meat to the pot adding fresh clean water together with other ingredients.
3. Bring the mixture to hard boil with high heat, then turn the heat to low, cover and cook for 2-3 hrs.
4. Add salt and pepper to taste, cook for additional 5 -10 minutes, serve hot.

As the days get shorter and colder, Chinese start to add tonics to their soups since autumn and winter are seasons to nourish and replenish. I hope you try this tonic soup as often as you can, and it is OK to substitute with ginseng; then, you will have renewed energy in the next spring.