

The characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine and its global implications

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AUTHOR BIO

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ABSTRACT

Based on the background of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the paper aims to illustrate the characteristics of Chinese traditional medicine and analyze the value of traditional Chinese medicine to the world. The paper uses textual analysis to examine the value of traditional Chinese medicine and how it can be applied to treat affected patients during the 2020 pandemic. Compared to allopathic medicine which is widely used around the world, traditional Chinese medicine plays its part in immunity as well as homeostasis. It shows its value in the COVID-19 treatment. Looking into the future, it can also contribute to rehabilitation, body and mental health. Also, it can be widely applied in the Western world as it has already attracted public attention, including social media platforms. In conclusion, although allopathic medicine plays a fundamental role in the medical world, traditional Chinese medicine can act as a helper and messenger.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; allopathic medicine; traditional Chinese medicine: value; Lianhua Qingwen; health; implication; treatment

BACKGROUND

2020 saw great changes in the world with the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following years, doctors and scholars tried to find a better treatment to cure the virus. Boasting thousands of years of history, the Chinese Traditional Medicine (TCM) may offer a new insight into treating the virus. Throughout Chinese history, China has witnessed at least more than 300 pandemics, and Chinese medicine has always played a critical role in treatment (Huang et al., 2002). Moreover, the ancestors' experiences can still contribute to modern treatment, such as the book *Shang Han Lun* (伤寒论). As for the treatment of COVID-19, it is asserted that the treatment should focus on the harmony of the body instead of each organ. Such a method differs from allopathic medicine, which targets a small part of the body. Thus, studying a new path to cure infected patients can be worthwhile.

There are several reasons to study the future of traditional Chinese medicine and its effects during the pandemic: First, Chinese medicine is made from ordinary plants and insects; these resources ensure that the medicines are typically inexpensive and environmentally friendly. Second, Chinese medicine has treated countless people in China for thousands of years, proving that the effect of it is undoubtedly. Third, until now, the scientific research has been lacking in number, making many international academics unable to discover the value of traditional Chinese medicine.

In 2020, the pandemic affected millions of people around the world; many medicines used did not handle the virus well because of the limitation of efficiency or cost. However, Lianhua Qingwen played an essential role during the battle against COVID-19. It is a traditional Chinese medicine performed with significant success in helping patients recover with both good quality and acceptable cost. In this case, as the potential advantages of TCM are displayed, the more profound research of it can probably contribute to more illness treatments and benefit more people.

AIMS

The paper aims to illustrate the characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine and analyze the value of Chinese medicine to the world.

METHODS

This paper uses textual analysis to examine the value of traditional Chinese medicine and how it can be applied to treat the affected patients during the 2020 pandemic. I will gather information about traditional Chinese medicine and Western chemical medicine from websites including news, journals, and other materials.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Among the research on traditional Chinese medicine, many scholars have studied it in various aspects, including the interpretation of the human body (Liu et al., 2021), its current state, challenges, and applications (Wang et al., 2017).

To dig deeper, some scholars have studied the value of Chinese herbal medicine for COVID-19 treatment in China (Chu et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021) and other countries such as South Africa (Zhang, 2024). However, fewer papers further discuss its value besides COVID-19 and how to better promote traditional Chinese medicine to the world in the future. Thus, this paper will first conclude the essential functions of traditional Chinese medicine and its applications during the 2020 pandemic. Then, it will elaborate on its value in rehabilitation, body, and mental health to better facilitate a human's wellbeing in the long run.

FINDINGS

Allopathic Medicine

Allopathic medicine is based on quantifiable biological processes that underpin illness, treatment, and health. People often refer to it as modern medicine as those who work in

allopathic medicine base their treatment decisions on scientific data. In other words, they would request a few diagnostic tests and adhere to the most recent recommendations in the medical literature before settling on a treatment plan. Such a scientific method uses cutting-edge technologies to treat disease and its symptoms (Knowledgewharton, n.d). Surgical procedures, radiation treatments, and allopathic pharmaceuticals are all examples of therapy techniques.

Traditional Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese medicine diagnosis based on the patient's symptoms, appearance, skin, tongue, and eye colors. It then aims to treat the underlying systemic issue while avoiding potential negative consequences.

There is a principle of traditional medicine called “Jun-Chen-Zuo-Shi” which covers four functions (Cleveland Clinic, n.d.). First, denominator or key element: A medication or chemical that specifically combats or targets the disease's pathogenic component (ie. an interferon or antiviral drug that can kill tumor cells or viruses). Second, assistant or Enhancer: A medication or a substance that can improve the medication's functionality (ie. An adjuvant which can enhance the function of an antigen). Third, corrector or addresser of adverse effects (limiting factor): A medication or chemical that limits aberrant reactions by preventing side effects associated with the enhancer or denominator. At last, messenger: A drug or a molecule that can bring the function of the denominator to the intended site.

Working Principles of Chinese Medicine

Immunity

Traditional Chinese Medicine can be an alternative natural method for increasing white blood cell count without side effects.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the spleen is an important component of immune function in the body. In TCM, the spleen takes nutrients out of food and then uses them to build up blood. Fatigue is

common in patients with low blood cell counts. Regular acupuncture treatments can counteract this by increasing immunity and promoting the production of new blood cells.

Herbs and herbal formulations are an essential to traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Some herbs and formulae can enhance the body's immune system and white blood cell count. For instance, there are at least three ways to employ peony root to strengthen the blood. Peony root is called Bai Shao, Chi Shao, and Shao Yao when it is a single herb. It is known that all of these kinds ultimately boost immunity.

Among the TCM treatments that can aid in raising the white blood cell count is acupuncture. In actuality, acupuncture is supported and advised by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a treatment for leukopenia. Studies have shown acupuncture to boost immunity and improve red and white blood cell counts (Art of Wellness, Acupuncture & Traditional Chinese Medicine. n.d.).

Homeostasis

Qi, or Chi, is a vital life force energy that is the focus of traditional Chinese medicine (Liangyue et.al., 2001). Chinese medicine practitioners hold that sickness results from an imbalance between yin and yang. A typical syndrome is Qi stagnation and blood stasis, which causes blood stasis and slowed blood flow. Heart Qi is the governor of blood. Clinical manifestations of "Qi stagnation and blood stasis" include palpitations, pericardial pain and tightness in the chest, hypochondrium and chest fullness, and mental disturbance. In order to do this, traditional Chinese medicine proposed a treatment that promotes blood circulation and Qi regulation (Xu, 2007).

Traditional Chinese (Eastern) medicine practitioners focus on restoring homeostasis and proper energy flow. They may use a combination of methods, including acupuncture (the application of needles and pressure to your skin), cupping (the placement of warmed cups to your skin), herbal remedies (the use of plant-based teas, pills, ointments, and

other herbal supplements), moxibustion (the burning of dried herbal plants on or near your skin), and tai chi (a non combative martial art that focuses on breathing techniques and slow movements).

Advantages of Chinese Medicine

Eastern medicine emphasizes the connection between the mind, body, and spirit, employing a different methodology than allopathic medicine. This practice, also referred to as "alternative medicine," can involve a range of spiritual pursuits like tai chi, acupuncture, and meditation. Eastern medicine uses natural resources, including teas, herbs, and essential oils made from fruit, vegetable, and spice extracts, instead of pharmaceutical medications, tests, and surgeries.

Eastern medicine's primary benefit is its efficacy. Herbal medications and essential oils can treat physical aches and pains, skin issues, heart issues, and help with weight reduction.

The effectiveness of acupuncture in treating conditions like depression, joint pain, and nicotine addiction has grown over time. The reason the practice has gained such popularity is that anyone can participate without worrying about harmful combinations with other medications, foods, or drinks—something to be wary of while using allopathic pharmaceuticals (Vandegrift, 2017).

Application of Traditional Chinese Medicine During the COVID-19 in China

At the beginning of the pandemic, there were few effective Chinese medicines for the virus. Several months later, more and more medicines came under the spotlight and played a significant role in treatment. Xuanfei Baidu decoction is one example. It is a Chinese herbal medicine comprising 13 Chinese medicinal herbs such as Ephedra Herba (Mahuang). Several clinical trials have been conducted to test the efficacy and safety of it by recruiting patients diagnosed with COVID-19 in Henan Province and dividing them into three groups (Li et al 2023). Group A members were treated with

Xuanfei Baidu combined with conventional treatment. Group B members were treated with Ganlu Xiaodu combined with conventional treatment, while group C members were treated conventionally. After seven days of treatment, the disappearance rates of fever (100%) and other related symptoms were higher than those in Group B and C (Li et al., 2023). To conclude, Xuanfei baidu decoction has proven effective in treating the virus during the pandemic. Thus, this kind of traditional Chinese medicine can be used as an effective way of treatment.

Another example is Lianhua Qingwe, an effective Chinese medicine for treating COVID-19 in China. It is composed of orsythia, honeysuckle, roasted ephedra, fried bitter almond, gypsum, isatis root, Mianma Guanzhong, Houttuynia cordata, patchouli, rhubarb, rhodiola, menthol, licorice, etc. This product can release heat from the lungs, an interior syndrome that might be caused by illnesses that last for an extended period or by very severe ones. It is mainly used to treat influenza, which is characterized by heat poison attacking the lungs. Also, it can treat patients with symptoms including fever or high fever, aversion to colds, muscle aches, nasal congestion and runny nose, cough, headache, dry and sore throat, red tongue, yellow or greasy coating, etc (Fang et al, 2022).

Apart from these traditional Chinese medicines, many other traditional medicines can provide effective treatment. As for clinical effects, it can alleviate symptoms: it has the effect of improving fever, cough, fatigue, dry and sore throat, sputum production, dyspnea, myalgia, diarrhea and other symptoms; it can effectively shorten the time for nucleic acid to turn negative, speed up the recovery of symptoms, and prevent the condition from getting worse. Additionally, it will play a positive role in lung recovery. It helped to promote the absorption of lung inflammation, improve CT images, reduce lung damage, enhance lung function, and increase the oxygenation index (Lyu et al., 2021).

Also, according to Zhang Wei, the deputy officer of the Center for Disease Prevention and

Control of Shandong, traditional Chinese medicine decoctions or Chinese patent medicines regulate the human body as a whole, thereby mobilizing the enthusiasm of human body functions to fight against viruses. The use of traditional Chinese medicine can, on the one hand, reduce the risk of patients infected with the new coronavirus developing from mild to critical illness. On the other hand, it can improve the body's physical condition. When patients who are infected enter the recovery period, it can also play a role in replenishing qi (to restore energy) and nourishing yin (to restore yin-yang balance) (Affiliated Hospital of Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2022).

Spreading Chinese Medicine

Approach to Complementary Medicine Treatment

In China, given the serious side effects of some Western medications, practitioners may use TCM as an option for specific illnesses.

TCM is beneficial for a few minor ailments, such as colds and coughs. Additionally, it is thought to be more effective at "clearing" the illness. Chinese medicine is frequently taken in addition to allopathic medicine; that is, after seeing a Western physician for a speedy recovery, Chinese medicine is taken to "cut the tail of the illness," "clear the root of the disease," or "completely cure the disease."

Chinese medicine is occasionally used as an "alternative." It is used when allopathic medicine does not work or you are desperate to try anything. It is also effective in treating "the bitterness in the mouth," "the sputum," and "the wind," which are adverse effects of using allopathic medications (Lam, 2001, pp763).

Thus, although TCM may not replace conventional or allopathic treatment, especially for serious conditions, it may be beneficial when used as complementary therapy.

Application of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the West

Until now, TCM has been accepted and adopted in some parts of the West. In Canada, Australia and some states in the United States that have passed legislation on traditional Chinese medicine, the treatment system of traditional Chinese medicine has continued to develop. Moreover, among the public, guasha (scrapping) became popular online. The topic (guasha) has attracted several hundred million views on TikTok.

TCM can play a valuable role in the Western world. According to the research team of Yunnan Chinese Medical University (Han, 2022), many Western TCM researchers are not simply copying TCM. Instead, they adapt and innovate it to meet the needs of local people. What is more important is that it provides an opportunity for mutual communication and cultural exchange, thus enhancing mutual trust between the West and the East.

Bright Future

Rehabilitation

TCM rehabilitation uses holistic concepts and thinking to diagnose and treat patients, informed by fundamental beliefs cultivated over the millennia-long history of Chinese medicine. The goal is to create a balanced approach to healing that balances "yin and yang," focuses on organ function, makes use of the body's natural circulatory meridians and pressure points, and prioritizes the prevention and treatment of disease using time-tested methods (Beijing United Family Rehabilitation Hospital, n.d.).

Rehabilitation is essential for those with chronic illnesses and the elderly. It is essential for general health and well-being and lessens the detrimental effects of aging and disease-related physical dysfunction.

An increasing number of people worldwide are coping with long-term illnesses and physical disability as the population ages. The suffering

has a severe financial cost on individuals, families, and society as a whole, as well as a significant negative influence on their quality of life.

One intrinsic benefit of rehabilitation in China is the integration of modern and traditional Chinese medicine. The need for rehabilitation strategies that facilitate healing and lessen financial strain has increased dramatically. China's stroke rate among those over 65 may treble or possibly triple by 2050 (Nature Research Custom Media. (n.d).

Research groups are looking into the potential therapeutic benefits of practices with solid roots in traditional Chinese medicine, like acupuncture and tai chi. Additionally, they are utilizing both medical traditions to create a wide range of interventions for the older generation, those suffering from degenerative joint diseases and other chronic conditions, and those with post-stroke conditions, including both physical and cognitive impairment (Nature Research Custom Media. (n.d).

Body/Mental health

Traditional Chinese medicine unites the body and the mind without treating the two independently. It is predicated on the idea that physical and mental health are closely related. These mind-body therapies recognize that emotional, mental, social, and spiritual elements can directly impact health and consider the relationships between the brain, mind, body, and behavior (Morone & Greco, 2007).

According to practitioners, the five elements of fire, water, earth, wood, and metal, as well as the complementary energies of yin (passive) and yang (active) and a person's qi (vital life force), must all be in balance for optimal health (Lee et al., 2017). Therefore, to address a particular health issue, the body and mind may be assessed and addressed.

The WHO has been encouraging and strengthening the insertion, recognition, and use of traditional, complementary, and integrative medicines (TCIM), products, and their

practitioners in national health systems at all levels of activity: Primary Care, Specialized Care, and Hospital Care, through the recommendations of the WHO Strategy on Traditional Medicine 2014-2023 (World Health Organization, 2013). Therefore, Traditional Chinese Medicine is expected to be valued on the world stage.

CONCLUSION

Chinese medicine aims to treat the biosystem as a whole rather than focusing on particular molecules on certain targets. The goal is to alter the body's environment (the immune system) to produce long-lasting results (Qiu, 2007).

Employing one treatment procedure over another to treat an illness is not intrinsically good or harmful. Chinese medicine can be used as an alternative to treat a variety of disorders. Chinese medicine can be used to stop disease recurrence, while allopathic medicine can be used to treat existing symptoms. Allopathic medicine is a fundamental component of this strategy, while Chinese medicine acts as a helper and messenger.

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