

Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Female Body

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When Henry Lu arrived in British Columbia from his native Taiwan in 1971, traditional Chinese medicine was widely considered a form of quackery.”¹ It took quite some time for this practice to be recognized and respected in Western civilization. Western physicians were uneasy permitting this tradition at first, but gradually time proved that it is full of valuable therapies and treatments. Henry Lu comments that the province [British Columbia] now “boasts an estimated 600 traditional Chinese medical practitioners and even some Western-trained doctors are using acupuncture in their practices.”² James Knights, who is a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner in Victoria and President of the Association of traditional Chinese medicine of British Columbia, believes that this tradition should not be criticized because it is foreign. “Knights says medical doctors should simply respect the professional judgment of qualified traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, even if their methods seem alien.”³

Chinese medicine is most known for its traditional belief that the body consists of a network of channels or meridians upon which vital *qi*, or energy force, must flow through to reach the organs. This theory quickly recognizes that any imbalance found internally can lead to illness. Thus, physicians are taught to treat the patient by strengthening *qi* and harmony in the body. This is the only possible way for equilibrium to be reached and for the body to function properly. Chinese treatments and therapies are often implemented to encourage the body to heal according to nature with the help of natural remedies.

This paper specifically focuses on two main aspects related to Chinese medicine: the flow of *qi* energy in the body and the balanced state of *yin/yang*. These two elements are necessary in defining the traditional theories and beliefs of Chinese culture. Another aspect of the paper is directed towards the female body and the health conditions that women face. Two scholarly

¹ Terry Johnson, “MDs Skeptical as BC Gives Stamp of Approval to Chinese Medicine,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 161:11 (1999): 1435.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

books, in particular, were helpful in describing the complexities of this medical practice including the operations of the systems, channels, and organs of the body, as well as, diagnosis and treatment procedures. The first book was by Liu Yanchi, titled *The Essential Book of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, vol. 1: *Theory*. This book examines in detail the art of Chinese medicine and its effects on the body. It also specifies how Chinese medicine and disease rely heavily on nature and the healing process involved through natural environment interaction. Yanchi expands on the importance of restoring the balance, the Five Elements, pathology, *yin* and *yang*, and causes of disease. Another book, *Between Heaven and Earth: A Guide to Chinese Medicine*, by Harriet Beinfield and Efrem Korngold, distinguishes the approaches to Eastern and Western medicine, in regards to how the body is viewed and its functions. These two books are crucial in providing a foundation to the Chinese view of health and healing.

Two additional books concentrated on the female body and its functions in Chinese medicine. Marie E. Cargill's book, *Well Women: Healing the Female Body Through Traditional Chinese Medicine*, details each section of a woman's life as her body grows and ages and the changes that occur over time. The last book that expanded on the conditions of the female body was *Chinese Medicine for Women: A Common Sense Approach* by Bronwyn Whitlocke. Both Whitlocke and Cargill's research on menstruation, infertility, pregnancy and childbirth, and menopause play substantial roles in the body maturation process of women.

These sources suggest important questions to reflect on while reading this paper: How does the body function? What effects do Chinese elements have on the body? What causes the conditions that women face with and what are some helpful treatments according to the Chinese?

Nature and Cosmology

It is necessary to start with nature and cosmology when describing how Chinese medicine came to be. Nature and cosmology shape the framework upon which this traditional medicine is

practiced. Within the cosmology lies the greater universe known for keeping everything running consistently and orderly. Humans are considered only a small portion of the large universal system. Nature and the human body have a very close relationship. What occurs in the outside environment greatly affects the inner-workings of the body. Nature plays a critical role as a contributing force that affects and disrupts the unity in the body. If it becomes imbalanced, then the body will suffer, bringing forth illness. The change of seasons is an example of how the body is affected by external factors. “In winter, people were prone to colds and joint pains; in summer, the heat seemed to cause fevers.”⁴ After studying the effects of outside weather conditions, it became clear that the inner body has its own climate, upon which the body is constantly growing and developing. It is the natural way for the inner body’s organs, called *Zang-fu*, and systems to work together to keep peace and equilibrium within. Steps must be taken to protect the body against any such circumstances that can cause harm to the inner self. This explains why the body must sustain harmony and integrity for the mind, body, and soul.

The idea of harmony and unity in the body is an essential component to understanding Chinese medicine. An equal balance helps promote good health for the human body systems. The theory of nature’s importance in cosmology also reflects the religious practice of *Taoism*. *Taoism*, often referred to as ‘the way’, is the main force that keeps nature pushing onward, similar to the flow of the universe. Each person who practices *Tao* strives to find harmony with his or her body. *Tao* believers mainly stress a healthy lifestyle and harmony with body and nature. Three main harmonies are associated with this practice: harmony with nature, internal harmony, and mental and physical harmony. All three greatly affect the performance of the body functions. In harmony with nature, the body must keep up with the change of the seasons. For example, in spring, more exercise is needed to stay healthy as the days grow longer, and in

⁴ Sheila McNamara, *Traditional Chinese Medicine*. (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 26.

winter, plenty of rest is required as the weather becomes colder. Eating a proper diet also helps to build strength in the body immune system. In internal harmony, the *Zang-fu* organs are necessary to work together to maintain an equal balance. “According to theory, the *Zang* organs are solid organs that perform major functions including production, transformation, regulation and storage of the vital substances: *qi*, blood, body fluids and essence.”⁵ The *Zang* organs consist of the heart, lungs, spleen, liver, and kidneys, and the *fu* organs consist of the stomach, gallbladder, large and small intestines, and the bladder. Together these *Zang-fu* organs cooperate with each other to create harmony. The last component of harmony rests in the mental and physical aspects of the body. “If the physical condition is out of balance, the mental condition is wrong also.”⁶ Without harmony and unity, the human body cannot survive and fight off illness.

***Qi* Energy**

The main compositions in the body are made up of three vital substances: *qi*, blood, and body fluids. “... *qi* was the fundamental substance that made up everything in the world and that all things came into being through the movement and flux of *qi*.”⁷ *Qi* is the primary force that promotes activity in the body, similar to the natural flow of the universe. “... *qi* is regarded as a yang force, the source of growth, and the prime mover and consolidating force of the blood. It organizes the whole body, repels attack from outside and promotes the functioning of the internal organs.”⁸ *Qi* is the powerful energy force that flows throughout the body and keeps the processes in working order. *Qi* works with the *Zang-fu* organs to create unity. Two types of *qi* found in the body consist of congenital *qi*, beginning at birth, and *qi* acquired after birth.

Humans acquire *qi* through the consumption of food and water and from breathing air in the

⁵ Ping-Chung Leung, Charlie Changlia Xue, and Yung-Chi Cheng. *A Comprehensive Guide to Chinese Medicine*. (London: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2003), 66.

⁶ McNamara, 28.

⁷ Leung et al., 63.

⁸ Richard Craze and Jen T'ieh Fou. *Traditional Chinese Medicine*. (Chicago: NTC Publishing Group, 1998), 25.

lungs. “The acquired *qi* is constantly replenished, and is a fundamental substance maintaining the life activities of the human body.”⁹ Chinese physicians claim that without this *qi*, human life is incomplete. It is the responsibility of both the congenital and acquired *qi* to work together to ensure harmony and proper functioning in all the body systems. The ability of *qi* to grow, develop, and sustain from within is critical to proper functioning in the body. “*Qi* is capable of producing and controlling blood, warming and nourishing the tissues, building up resistance against disease, as well as activating the physiological functions of the *Zang-fu* organs.”¹⁰ *Qi* protects the inner body and resists the entry of negative pathological agents, further proving the importance of care and harmony in the body.

Any imbalance can lead to four patterns of disharmony associated with *qi*. Deficient *qi* is the most common found in the body. An example of this type of disharmony is deficient protective *qi*, which can lead to frequent colds. The second pattern of disharmony is collapsed *qi* which “implies that the *qi* is so insufficient that it can no longer hold organs in place.”¹¹ The third pattern of disharmony is stagnant *qi*. This signifies that *qi* is not engaging in normal movement throughout the body. It is crucial to have a smooth and orderly flow of *qi* and if not cared for, can cause impairment of vital organs. The last disharmony consists of rebellious *qi*, in which *qi* is moving in the wrong direction. “For example, Chinese medicine says that Stomach *Qi* should go downward; if it rebels and goes upward, there may be vomiting and nausea or explosive forms of mania.”¹² It is unhealthy and abnormal for *qi* to move in the wrong direction.

Qi has the capabilities of bringing forth positive and negative influences within the body. Theory states that everything in the universe has both positive and negative aspects with the

⁹ Shen Ziyin and Chen Zelin. *The Basis of Traditional Chinese Medicine*. (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1994), 40.

¹⁰ Ziyin and Zelin, 40.

¹¹ Ted J. Kaptchuk. *The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*. (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 2000), 51.

¹² *Ibid.*, 52.

negative *qi* often referred to as *sha*. The following is an example of how positive and negative qualities can influence everyday activities:

Just as the steam from a cooking pot has positive qualities... so it also has negative qualities... The steam can be seen to continue its upward journey and become clouds which bring positive rain; but too much rain causes flooding which has a negative quality... Too much or too little of anything becomes negative. Chinese medicine strives to find the right balance- just the right amount to bring good health.¹³

This example demonstrates how positive and negative qualities affect the daily lives of humans, therefore, it is critical to monitor the reactions of the body in helping to keep a constant balance all throughout.

Essentially, traditional Chinese practitioners view the body as a garden associated with nature. If one part of the garden is not functioning properly, then the whole body is affected by it. In order for the body to grow, it must receive the right amount of nutrients, similar to how any garden would need water and sunlight to flourish. The theory of correspondence “states that in order for a larger system to be in balance as a whole, each small system within it must itself be balanced.”¹⁴ This contributes to how harmony plays a significant role in the body. *Qi* is equally important in that it is the vital substance of living beings and acts as a medium connecting all these systems and harmonies together. “Not only does it interlace the structures and functions of the human body, it connects the body with the natural environment and the social and cultural structures in which humans actually exist.”¹⁵

Qi brings together all aspects of life into a unified whole. *Qi* is found everywhere and much of the society is strongly *qi*-based. It is present in the form of air, blood that pumps in

¹³ Craze and Fou, 25.

¹⁴ Harriet Beinfield and Efrem Korngold. *Between Heaven and Earth: A Guide to Chinese Medicine*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 35.

¹⁵ Zhang Yu Huan and Ken Rose. *A Brief History of Qi*. (Massachusetts: Paradigm Publications, 2001), 102.

bodies, and food that is consumed. “*Qi* gives them life, and when they lose their *qi*, they die.”¹⁶ Without *qi* the body will slowly disintegrate and wither away.

It is hard for many Western physicians to acknowledge *qi* due to that fact that it is an invisible substance that cannot be extracted for examination. “It cannot be seen, which is why Western medical science tends to reject its existence.”¹⁷ Harmony, balance, and *qi* continue to influence this practice. In addition, it is essential to understand the important philosophy of *yin/yang* in Chinese medicine.

***Yin/Yang* and the Five Elements**

“The early Chinese saw a material world that was constantly evolving as the result of the antagonistic movement of two opposing material forces.”¹⁸ These two forces make up the *yin/yang* theory. As philosophers began to study their relationship with one another, the connection to nature became clear. Nature plays a large role in diagnosis and its link to behavior has been critically studied and analyzed. Through the study of nature, the five fundamental elements were discovered: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. “By analogy, the characteristics and behavior of these elements further explained the principles by which natural phenomena evolved.”¹⁹ These two theories of *yin/yang* and the five elements were examined to find the cause and basic ideas of change that occur in the natural environment. *Yin/yang* and the five elements have become the two philosophical systems that form the foundation of Chinese medical thought and practice.

The theory of *yin/yang* consists of two opposing forces that reside within a single object. Even though these two forces are of complete opposites, they are both interdependent and

¹⁶ Huan and Rose, 174.

¹⁷ McNamara, 27.

¹⁸ Liu Yanchi. *The Essential Book of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, Volume I. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

necessary to achieve equilibrium. “Every phenomena- whether the motion of the sun, moon, and other celestial bodies; the alternating of day and night; the change of seasons; the variation of cold and heat; or even the variation in functional conditions of the body- is the result of the interplay of these two aspects.”²⁰ It has been discovered that objects in a state of rest have *yin* qualities, while those that are in motion have *yang* qualities.

Yin has distinct characteristics, while *yang* has its own. “Dynamic, positive, bright, warm, solid, and functional attributes are defined as *yang* while static, negative, dark, cold, liquid and inhibiting attributes are characterized as *yin*.”²¹ The aspects of *yin* and *yang* are not absolute, but rather in a state of constant movement. This concept is often described as the waxing (supporting) and waning (consumption) of *yin* and *yang*. An easier way to think of it is the waning of *yang* leads to a waxing of *yin*. Another way to display this theory of waxing and waning is through the annual changes of the seasons. “The decrease of cold and the increase of warmth from spring to summer represent the waning of *yin* and the waxing of *yang*, while the decrease in warmth and the upsurge of cold from autumn to winter represents the waning of *yang* and waxing of *yin*.”²² It is necessary all the while for *yin* and *yang* to continue an equal balance of each other in preventing one from becoming excessive or insufficient. If the two aspects should undergo abnormal conditions, then the two opposites would lose their stability upon one another. “These concepts of a relative dynamic balance between *yin* and *yang* and of the possibility for excess or insufficiency of *yin* and *yang* are key concepts in traditional Chinese medicine: they explain human physiology and pathology, as well as the effect of climatic variations on the body.”²³

²⁰ Yanchi, 33.

²¹ Ziyin and Zelin, 10.

²² Yanchi, 35.

²³ Ibid., 36.

The main cause of disease is a result of the imbalance between *yin* and *yang* factors. “Therefore, the basic principle of therapy is to adjust yin and yang- to reduce the superfluous, make up the insufficiency, and thereby create conditions that will restore the balance of *yin* and *yang*.”²⁴ Restoring the balance between the two is fundamental in this ancient medical practice. To help combat the excess or deficiency of *yin* and *yang*, many Chinese physicians use herbal remedies. “Herbs of a cold nature are prescribed for diseases of the hot type while herbs of a warm nature are chosen for diseases of the cold type.”²⁵ Successful treatment is only reached when complete balance is restored in the body.

The five elements consist of fire, earth, wood, metal, and water. “In its most basic form, the theory of the five elements is this: All systems- objects or phenomena- have structural qualities that interact with each other.”²⁶ The five elements characterize the behavior of all that exists in nature, with each element containing a pattern of motion. “The elements were seen as symbolizing patterns of motion, characteristics or states of phenomena or kinds of processes, and it was believed that all things came into being because of the motion and change of these five elements.”²⁷ This belief was established as a means to describe the functions of the inner *Zang-fu* organs through the characteristics of the five elements. Similar to *qi*, the five elements can become unbalanced. “The five processes or patterns of motion within the body represented by the five elements interact, promote and control each other to maintain a balanced system.”²⁸ If one organ in the body is affected by disease, then the surrounding organs will become affected as well.

In order to treat the imbalance of the internal organs, it is necessary for the physician to use the theory of the five elements to observe a patient’s facial complexion, voice, and pulse.

²⁴ Yanchi., 47.

²⁵ Ziyin and Zelin, 15.

²⁶ Ibid., 48.

²⁷ Leung et al., 57.

For example: “a green tinge in the complexion, accompanied by pain and distention in the upper gastric region, a preference for sour food, and a taut pulse, indicates liver trouble.”²⁹

Understanding how a disease is passed from one organ to another is crucial in the treatment process. Chinese medicine treats not only the main diseased organ, but also the organs that are related to it. Preventing the spread of disease in the body is critical and physicians will often treat the related organ to fight off the disease. This is an example of a possible treatment:

The five element theory suggests that liver trouble may well spread to the spleen; the therapeutic strategy is thus to tonify the spleen to prevent transmission. Or the practitioner may directly treat one organ in order to influence the condition of the diseased organ.³⁰

Tradition has taught Chinese physicians to recognize abnormal symptoms in their patients and be able to administer proper treatment quickly to prevent the spread of disease. These physicians and practitioners know the appropriate methods and procedures to keep their patients’ body functioning correctly. An equal balance and distribution all throughout the body is key to a healthy flow of *qi* and *yin/yang*.

Harmony in all aspects of *qi*, *yin/yang*, *Zang-fu* organs, and the five elements will prevent the body from contracting illness. It is crucial for every human being to make healthy choices in their life that will ultimately affect the way their body functions. “A lifestyle that includes sufficient sleep, exercise, and regular eating patterns is necessary for good health to be maintained.”³¹ Care for the mind is equally important as proper care for the body. Physical exercises that relax the mind such as *taichi* can be influential in strengthening wellness in the body. It is important to achieve happiness in one’s life, and in order to do so, the body must sustain an equal and balanced state.

²⁸ Ibid., 58.

²⁹ Ziyin and Zelin, 61.

³⁰ Yanchi, 61.

³¹ Leung et al., 82.

Female Body

The female body is associated with certain conditions in Chinese medicine. The main health conditions concerning women consist of menstruation, infertility, pregnancy/ childbirth, and menopause. Chinese medicine views menstruation, commonly called menses, as dirty and a pollutant to the body. “Imagined as a source of contagion, liable to make crops wither and to offend the gods, it has been associated with female threats to forms of cosmic and social order managed and defended by men.”³² Due to the fact that women’s blood is considered unclean, men avoid them during the time of menstruation when they are seen as highly susceptible to injuring male *yang* balance in the body. “... women are regarded as both ritually unclean and dangerously powerful, and they are barred from certain activities because of the harm they threaten to inflict on others.”³³ Women who are menstruating are specifically not allowed to worship the gods because it is viewed as very disrespectful. Menstruation is made possible by two main meridians in the body: the spleen and the liver. The spleen creates blood through the consumption of food, and the liver, in turn, stores the blood in the body, preparing it for the monthly cycle. “A normal cycle is 28 days, and there should be no bloating or emotional highs or lows prior to bleeding.”³⁴ It is believed that all periods should be pain free, but this is not the case for majority of women. “The main problems encountered in the menstrual cycle are pain, bloating, mood swings, headaches, clots, breast distention and PMT (pre- or post-menstrual tension).”³⁵ These problems associated with menstruation are found to be common in most women.

³² Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom. *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 291.

³³ Emily M. Ahern. “The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women,” in *Women in Chinese Society*. eds. Margery Wolf and Roxanne Witke. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 193.

³⁴ Bronwyn Whitlocke. *Chinese Medicine for Women: A Common Sense Approach*. (Seattle: Seal Press, 1999), 37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

During the process of *menses*, or menstruation, the body becomes susceptible to other disorders that can weaken the natural flow of blood and *qi* and bring internal pain. “Women were expected- in fact taught- to experience all sorts of diffuse bodily distress as part of their monthly reproductive cycles and to be permanently weakened by childbearing.”³⁶ In Chinese medicine, women are prone to more illness than men and therefore are much harder to treat. Women’s bodies undergo significant change, especially during pregnancy and birth, causing their bodies to deteriorate faster than men. Another reason why women are more prone to illness, according to Chinese medical theory, results from their inability to control their emotional feelings. These feelings have great power to take over the mind and body causing internal sickness and imbalance all throughout. “Women are gripped by compassion and love, aversion and envy, melancholy and grief. Since they are unable to control these feelings, their illnesses are deep-rooted and cure is difficult.”³⁷ Despite the fact that women are harder to treat than men, practitioners view both the same in medical terms. Basic biological functions, such as blood flow and *qi* balance, are similar in both bodies, but illness is what varies between the sexes. Both sexes have their own subset of illnesses according to their specific body organs and functions. It is primarily due to women’s nature that they are more likely to catch disease than their male counterpart.

Symptoms of menstrual irregularity/-dysfunction include abnormal and inconsistent flows, a dark discharge color, painful cramps, and fevers. It is necessary for women to monitor these symptoms because they have potential to bring great harm to the body. All women need to take every approach to protect their bodies and stay healthy. “Healthy *menses* are pain-free, bright red, of moderate flow, and free of clots and unpleasant symptoms.”³⁸ Any cold properties

³⁶ Brownell and Wasserstrom, 296.

³⁷ Ibid., 297.

³⁸ Marie E. Cargill. *Well Women: Healing the Female Body through Traditional Chinese Medicine*. (Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1998), 37.

found in the body would result in blood stagnation and depletion. Pain during *menses* is an effect of exposure to cold external factors culminating in depletion. Women must take every step possible to prevent and fight off the external conditions they face in everyday lives. Chinese doctors strongly authorize women to particularly avoid any cold exposure while on their periods. “Chinese therapists expected women to avoid exposure to drafts, washing with cold water, doing laundry, and getting their feet wet.”³⁹ If these steps are not taken, the body is more likely to develop illness.

When the body is open it is much easier for cold to enter the blood stream, thus bringing forth the cold invasion effect. “Cold may invade the body, for instance, if you swim in cold water during menstruation. Cold and raw foods and cold drinks may also lead to a Cold condition.”⁴⁰ This is the reason why many physicians suggest and recommend consuming foods with warming qualities in them, such as hot teas and soups. Heat causes processes in the body to speed up in efforts to get the body flowing properly again, whereas cold slows it down. Coffee, however, is not a recommended food because the caffeine further dehydrates the body causing dryness. Pain can also be caused by stagnant liver *qi*, meaning that regular flow has decreased through loss of heat production in the body, only further promoting the cold invasion effect.

Prescription drugs administered by physicians to treat menstrual dysfunction contain warming properties to counteract the cold effect. These drugs are used to fight off stagnation and depletion through the revitalization of the blood. “Other drugs were used to disperse or break up stagnation, or to clear heat or phlegm.”⁴¹ Many women avoid cold foods and cold activities during their monthly *menses* to prevent any abnormalities in the blood. Menstrual regulation cannot be stressed enough in Chinese medicine. Women must tend to their bodies

³⁹ Brownell and Wasserstrom, 300.

⁴⁰ Whitlocke, 38.

⁴¹ Brownell and Wasserstrom, 301.

properly because fertility is highly valued in society. A woman who cares for herself appropriately will achieve a body capable of producing a healthy child. Children are highly valued, especially boys, specifically because boys will carry on the father's name. Amenorrhea, or absence of *menses*, is considered to be one of the worst disorders for women because it is more likely to cause infertility.

Infertility is defined as the inability to conceive a child. "In China today, it is defined as failure to conceive after over three years of marriage even though both parties are (otherwise seemingly) healthy, or failure to conceive for several years after the first delivery."⁴² Inability to conceive is difficult for any woman to cope with because there is no male heir to carry on the family name. "Without sons, there was no one to make sacrifices to the ancestors and so one's immortality was cut off or impoverished."⁴³ Treatment of female infertility is of great importance in Chinese society. If blood cannot flow freely through the uterus, then blood stagnation will result in infertility. If the uterus is too cold, it is virtually impossible for life to grow. Cold uterus disorder is one of the leading causes of reproductive problems and inability to conceive. Women who are trying to conceive need to focus their attention on menstrual regularity. They must also look for these signs in the body:

"In Chinese medicine, when a female patient's period is on time, painless, without particular premenstrual signs and symptoms, is of sufficient volume and duration, is healthy red color, and is free from clots, when her digestion and elimination are good, energy good, sleep peaceful and sound, and appetite and mood are all good, then this woman is healthy and, if she has not reached menopause, she should be able to conceive."⁴⁴

If a woman can take care of her body and seek immediate treatment once illness sets in, then she is taking every step possible to ensure a healthy lifestyle.

⁴² Bob Flaws. *Endometriosis, Infertility, and Traditional Chinese Medicine: A Laywoman's Guide*. (Colorado: Blue Poppy Press Inc., 1989), 75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁴ Flaws, 95.

Once a woman is able to conceive, her body will undergo significant changes as she prepares to house a growing fetus in her womb. The most common sign of pregnancy is the stopping of *menses*, however it is not uncommon for women to show spotting. Spotting is usually not serious unless other pain is associated with it or it starts to become heavier. During the first trimester of pregnancy, many women feel the effects of morning sickness. This is often associated with nausea and dizziness. Other symptoms of morning sickness consist of chest congestion, insomnia, ringing in the ears, and vomiting. A helpful way to reduce discomfort and pain is to engage in relaxation techniques. “Sometimes sitting quietly with the palms of the hands over the abdomen can help to alleviate anxiety.”⁴⁵ Food and liquid consumption must also be kept to a minimum due to increased vomiting and nausea during time of pregnancy.

During the second trimester, the mother’s abdomen is growing larger and feelings of morning sickness have come to a halt. It is at this stage in her pregnancy that the mother begins to feel her fetus move inside her. The mother must tend to her body appropriately by eating healthy because during this time she is preparing for her last trimester, culminating in the birth of the child. The mother should not let her emotions overcome her at this point and should engage in body uplifting exercises such as *yoga* or *taichi*. “The diet should incorporate foods to build Blood and Kidney *Qi* as well as to support Spleen *Qi*.” The spleen is the main organ used in the body to produce *qi* and it is necessary to nourish the human body with the right foods. What foods are considered to be the right foods to consume? This depends upon the individual through the problems that they experience and the external conditions that surround them. “People who are cold and dry need warm, moisturizing food; people who are hot and damp need cool, drying food; people with congestion need decongesting food; and people who are depleted

⁴⁵ Whitlocke, 55.

need replenishing food.”⁴⁶ Women, especially during pregnancy, should stay away from foods that have cold effects in them and focus more on warming foods.

The last trimester of pregnancy signifies the fetus’s preparation for birth. The expectant mother should not exert too much physical force; - she will need to maintain her strength for the childbirth process. “Regular exercise, relaxation exercises, correct diet, and plenty of sleep maintain a stable and smooth circulation of *Qi*.”⁴⁷ Like always, *qi* balance throughout the body is crucial to sustain a healthy lifestyle. Women who engage in regular acupuncture treatments can also contribute to a healthy pregnancy and delivery. “Routinely using acupuncture in a healthy pregnancy can help maintain an appropriate Energy balance, and adequate Energy and Blood are prerequisites for a normal delivery.”⁴⁸ If the mother monitors her body and cares for her body, then the labor and birthing process should run smoothly and on time.

Delivery is expected to take place within 280 days after conception. A woman will know she is ready when the intervals between contractions begin to get shorter and shorter. She will begin to experience very strong sensations in her lower abdomen as her uterus contracts and the fetus shifts downward. To ease the woman from her laboring pains, heat packs can be applied to the lower abdomen to minimize cramping. Raspberry leaf tea also proves to reduce painful cramps, as well as drinking warm liquids to keep body fluids circulating. Drinking cold liquids during this time will only worsen conditions in the body. “Ice or cold drinks slow Blood and Fluids down and so can depress or retard circulation, especially in the pelvic region, and reduce the strength of Kidney *Yang*.”⁴⁹ Building as much strength as possible before delivery and avoiding cold liquids will help labor run smoothly. A way to minimize pain during delivery is to

⁴⁶ Beinfield and Korngold, 324.

⁴⁷ Whitlocke, 57.

⁴⁸ Cargill, 86.

⁴⁹ Whitlocke, 62.

apply direct pressure to particular points on the legs, which causes the release of *qi* and a positive sensation to flow throughout in the body.

After childbirth, it is common for women to experience a loss of body fluids and *yin* due to overexertion during labor. It is most common after delivery that a woman becomes susceptible to illness and postpartum disorders. “According to Chinese medicine, the main causes of postpartum diseases are injury to the deep reproductive channels, exhaustion of Blood and Energy, and internal blockage by stagnant Blood.”⁵⁰ It is after delivery that a woman becomes most susceptible to cold invasion. Women should avoid wearing wet clothing and exposure to fans, while mainly focusing on replenishing the blood and *qi* in the body with warm foods and liquids. “Rest and warmth are the most appropriate course of action, although it may be necessary for some herbal intervention as well.”⁵¹

Poor milk production in breast-feeding, also known as insufficient lactation, can also result due to the loss of *qi* and blood during delivery. “Sometimes stress and anxiety resulting from a long and arduous labour may be reasons for the lack of milk.”⁵² Consuming hot liquids such as pea and ham or chicken soup, and herbal soups can cure this, as well as, resting and exercising to get the *qi* flowing. Acupuncture treatments have also been highly successful in promoting proper lactation. A study took place, - in which twenty-seven new mothers, - who had difficulty lactating, - were tested through treatments of acupuncture following delivery. Once lactation occurred, then treatment was reduced to only once every few days. Mothers with emotional issues such as depression were given a few extra treatments, and overall positive results were obtained. “The results of the investigation showed that acupuncture can be a valuable therapy for restoring adequate lactation.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Cargill, 95.

⁵¹ Whitlocke, 66.

⁵² Ibid., 66.

⁵³ Cargill, 97.

Menopause plays a significant role in the latter part of a woman's life, which signifies the end of her fertile, childbearing years. "In Chinese medicine, menopause is a natural ending to the childbearing years, involving a slow and gradual decline of Energy and Blood in the fertility meridians 'below the belt.'"⁵⁴ If a woman has maintained a healthy and proper lifestyle, then no pain should be felt during this time when her body can no longer produce children. The cause of menopause results from the shutting down of the reproductive meridians and the exhausting of their resources. The kidney is the most important organ in regards to menstruation and menopause. When the kidney *qi* begins to slow down so does menstruation in a woman's life. Spleen *qi* also slows down in the body and is no longer required to produce as much blood as it used to. "As the Spleen *Qi* slows down, it affects the digestion: many women find that they gain extra weight, even though their diet and exercise pattern have not changed."⁵⁵ It is only when the kidney energy stops that the menopausal symptoms begin to set in. Kidney *yin* and kidney *yang* is at great risk during this time when they are imbalanced and weak. "Most menopausal women fit into the kidney/liver *yin* deficiency pattern, which manifests as hot flashes and profuse sweating, emotional instability or moodiness, sleep disturbances, forgetfulness, and, at times, an inability to concentrate."⁵⁶ It takes a while for *yin* and *yang* to build back up their strength, but when they do, the menopausal symptoms diminish.

Acupuncture and the use of herbal remedies are a great way to treat menopausal symptoms and have been known to work properly and efficiently. Practitioners and physicians often suggest vitamin supplements such as vitamin E, vitamin D, and vitamin B. "The solution to maintaining an easy menopausal transition is ongoing treatment in the form of either acupuncture treatment every few weeks or months or herbal medicine taken daily indefinitely."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁵⁵ Whitlocke, 67.

⁵⁶ Cargill, 103.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 104.

Women who live rougher lifestyles, such as eating poorly, not exercising, and smoking have a more difficult menopause than healthier women. If a woman were to develop any conditions during menstruation, it is important for her to treat it quickly, otherwise it can lead to difficulties during menopause. Any imbalances with liver *qi* can also influence the effects of menopause. Liver *qi* can become imbalanced through strong emotions such as anger and frustration and through stress in daily lives. “Long-term stress can stagnate Liver *Qi* and, if not corrected, can lead to pathogenic Heat.”⁵⁸ If *qi* becomes stagnated in one place for a particular long period of time, then it can produce a stagnant fire in the inner body. It is essential for *qi* to move freely throughout the body to reach all the organs and meridians, and when a blockage is in the way, it continues to push against the blockage in an effort to break through. As the *qi* struggles to push through, it creates more heat in the body. “Excessive Heat dries out the Blood and Fluids; this allows *Yang* to rise to the surface, causing hot flushes, night sweats, headaches, irritability, dry eyes, vertigo and insomnia.”⁵⁹

If a woman can maintain a proper lifestyle and not allow stress to overcome her, then health issues will be little to nonexistent. Diet and exercise is, above all, the most important way to maintain a healthy body.

“Foods which support Spleen and Stomach include cooked and warm foods, grains and vegetables, with small amounts of red meat. Cautious use of warming herbs, such as ginger, nutmeg and cinnamon, can aid digestion... To avoid Liver calm, it is suggested you reduce or avoid coffee (both caffeinated and decaffeinated), alcohol, greasy, fried or oily foods, spicy foods, excessive amounts of red meat and preservatives.”⁶⁰

If a woman can take these precautionary measures to prevent disease or illness, then she will be doing all that she possibly can to keep her body healthy and working properly. Regular exercise

⁵⁸ Whitlocke, 69.

⁵⁹ Whitlocke, 69.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 74-75.

also helps to keep the vital forces of *qi*, *yin/yang*, blood, and fluids flowing and circulating in the body. A healthy lifestyle is a positive lifestyle, and with a positive lifestyle comes rewards. No human body can expect to be free of illness unless hard work and dedication are put into it. These healthy measures must take place within the inner self in order for positive effects to occur. If the body can maintain an equal balance all throughout, then it will strongly benefit and lead to a long and happy life.

Chinese medicine overall views women as beings that hold a great amount of power, especially when it comes to producing and bearing a child. Although men are highly valued in Chinese culture, it is important for women to also be respected. Women are often associated with gender roles of nurturing mother figures and loving wives in society, however most people do not realize how strong women are when faced with health conditions. A woman's responsibility to sustain equilibrium in her body at all times can become difficult when her body undergoes significant body changes, such as the beginning of menstruation to the end of childbearing years. Emily Ahern and Charlotte Furth address these female health issues best in their books about traditional Chinese medicine. Both believe that women are essential and necessary components to nature and life force.

Chinese medicine is highly valued in society with a historical background that dates over three thousand years. It is until recently that its therapies have started to gain widespread attention from around the world. Chinese medicine has increasingly grown in popularity over the last decade in the United States. More clinics have been built across the country with purposes to provide medical care to patients, care that is very foreign and sometimes hard to accept in Western practice. This form of medical treatment is more commonly referred to as alternative medicine in the United States. Countries, other than the United States, that use some

form of alternative medicine include Australia, Canada, Germany, France, and England. An issue to examine further would be why the implementing of this medical practice has spread to other countries by providing statistics of doctors and number of clinics to display the rapid growth and demand by patients for alternative medicine in these countries.

Another issue to address consists of how these two distinct medical practices differ from each other. Chinese medicine particularly differs from Western practice in regards to how physicians view and treat their patients' illnesses and disorders. Western practice focuses on treating the symptoms of a condition, whereas Chinese medicine focuses on what caused the condition and the process of taking steps to treat the cause itself in efforts to prevent reoccurrence. Both Eastern and Western medical practice have distinct characteristics and procedures to follow for providing care to a patient and both are very loyal and dedicated. The last issue that would be interesting to discuss further would be how professional physicians in different countries view Chinese medicine. What are their opinions or biases in regards to effectiveness of diagnosis and treatment procedures?

Much can be learned from the practices of traditional Chinese medicine and its effects on the human body just by studying gender roles in society and health conditions faced by the different sexes. It is important to understand how women are viewed in Chinese culture when developing a deeper sense of the medical practice. Chinese medicine and therapies help women by protecting their bodies from contracting illness and is crucial to sustaining health. Women must care for their bodies, which will result in body growth and a healthy lifestyle. Traditional Chinese medicine is the oldest medical practice around and continues to grow in popularity every year. Bringing alternative medicine to the West is a wonderful way to learn more about Chinese traditions and women in society, as well as, incorporating a unique and ancient cultural way of life to Western civilization.

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