

## MEDICINE IN ANCIENT CHINA

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is an integral part of ancient Chinese civilization. Diagnosis and treatment are based on knowledge acquired through long-term medical practice in combination with an assessment of natural conditions including climate, geography and phenology. The theoretical basis was laid down some 3000 years ago in the *Huang di nei jing* (*Huang di's Inner Canon of Medicine*), in Zhang Zhongjing's *Shang han za bing lun* (*Essays on Cold and Miscellaneous Diseases*) of the Eastern Han dynasty (202 BC–AD 220) and other medical classics. The system includes the *yin-yang*, five evolutionary phases and other theories such as those on channel collaterals, viscera, pathogenesis, etiology, and treating principles (Editorial Committee, 1985). TCM contributes to the health of Chinese people and to some extent to other Asian nationalities as well and, increasingly to people in the rest of the world.

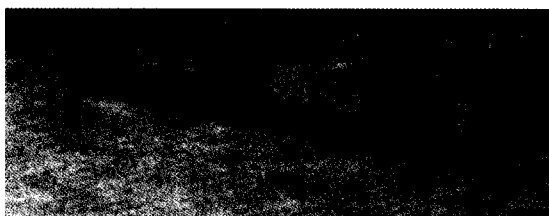
### ORIGIN AND FORMATION OF TCM

Through the long evolutionary process, as knowledge and experience developed, prescriptions for fighting diseases were accumulated and enriched. The use of fire improved hygiene and health care. The change from raw to cooked food, combined with being able to keep warm, greatly reduced the incidence of disease. Earthenware appeared during the Neolithic age in China (5000–3000 BC), and this paved the way for the manufacture of wine. Legend has it that Yidi prepared wine during the Xia Yu period (2070–1600 BC), which demonstrates the ancient origin of fermented liquor (Li, 1999). The *Shuo wen jie zi* (*Dictionary for Words*) states, “the Chinese character *yi* (medicine) refers to a man who treats disease ... with ‘liquor’ which cures disorders” (Xu, 121/1979). According to the *Jiu shi* (*History of Wine*), “during the end of the Western Han dynasty, Wang Mang’s imperial edict mentioned that liquor was viewed as the most significant medicine of all”.

Early in the Paleolithic age, stone knives were elaborately carved. By the Neolithic age, the knife had evolved into a stone needle (Figure 1). As early as 3000 years ago, bronze metallurgy enabled people to make bronze needles (Figure 2). About 2470 years ago, the Iron Age began and iron needles



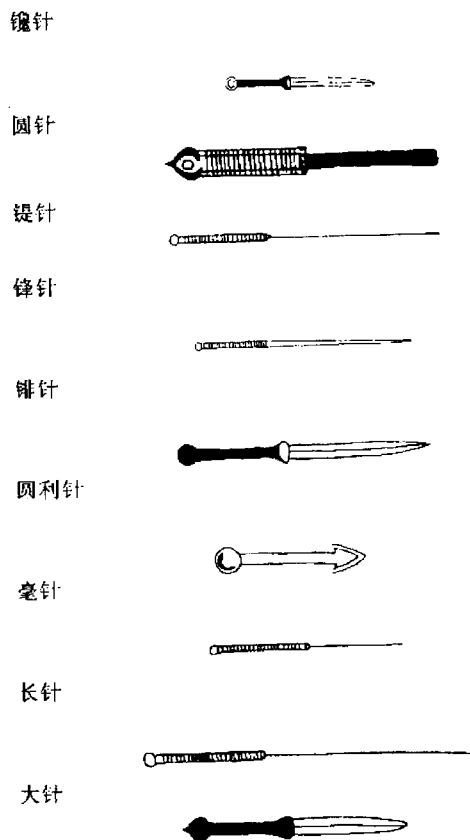
**Figure 1** Stone “needle” with bilateral blade, pointed end, 7×3 cm, used in the Paleolithic age for blood and pus letting, unearthed at Henan province. From Fu Weikang, *A General History of Chinese Medicine*, Vol. IV: *Illustration Album*. Used with the permission of the publisher.



**Figure 2** Bronze needle from 3000 years ago (Western Zhou dynasty) unearthed at Shaanxi, China, 9.2 cm long, triangle in cross section, used for blood-letting and acupuncture. From Fu Weikang, *A General History of Chinese Medicine*, Vol. IV: *Illustration Album*. Used with the permission of the publisher.

appeared. The book *Ling shu* (*Miraculous Pivot*) states that there are nine needles in different dimensions, lengths, calibers, and shapes with round, blunt or sharp ends, for different kinds of treatment (Figure 3). For instance, the minute needle is for dredging the channels to regulate the *qi*<sup>1</sup> and blood. This demonstrates that, at the time when the *Spiritual Axis* was compiled about 2000 years ago, the Chinese art of acupuncture and moxibustion had already reached a high theoretical level.

There is also an ancient tradition for herbal medicine in China. The *Huai nan zi* (*Book of Master Huainan*) says, “in ancient times, people ate plants, fruits from trees and grasses, worms, and clams. But diseases are bound to happen. Shennong teaches people to grow grains [and] ... to taste all herbs to be able to differentiate the good from the bad. He himself has encountered seventy kinds of poisons in a single day”. In ancient society, as agriculture developed, herbs were applied for treating diseases. Archeological materials show that in a Han tomb excavated in Gaocheng, Hebei province, there are apricot and peach stones from the Yin dynasty (1600–1046 BC). Many medicinal materials are recorded in ancient classics such as the *Yi jing* (*Classic of*



**Figure 3** Nine ancient acupuncture needles in different forms and lengths for use in different therapeutic situations. From a xylographic edition of *Ling shu jing* (*Classic of Miraculous Pivot*). Collection of the Library of the China Institute for the History of Medicine and Medical Literature. Used with the permission of the Institute.

*Changes*) and the *Shi jing* (*Classic of Poets*). The *Shan hai jing* (*Classic of Seas and Mountains*) describes some 130 kinds of medicines, including grasses, woods, animals, fish, worms and birds. The *Shennong ben cao jing* (*Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica*) lays down the foundation of Chinese materia medica (Anonymous, ca. 2nd century AD/1963).

Archeological investigation also found that inscriptions on bones and tortoise shells included characters dealing with diseases like headache, abdominal pain, dizziness, common cold, tinnitus, deafness, eye disease, and ulcers, as well as children's and women's diseases and dental diseases such as caries (Figure 4). They also included infectious diseases and parasitosis (Figure 5). The *Zhou li* (*Ritual of the Zhou Dynasty*) mentions that "diseases can be seen in all seasons, viz. head disease in spring, scabies and other itching diseases in summer, malaria and cold diseases in autumn, and asthmatic and coughing diseases in

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