

Traditional Chinese Medicine Is an Intangible Science

*My Medical Practice
and Reflections of TCM*

Boxin Guo



 World Scientific

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Boxin Chinese Medicine, China

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Published by

World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.

5 Toh Tuck Link, Singapore 596224

USA office: 27 Warren Street, Suite 401-402, Hackensack, NJ 07601

UK office: 57 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9HE

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Guo, Boxin, author.

Title: Traditional Chinese medicine is an intangible science : my medical practice and reflections of TCM / by Boxin Guo.

Other titles: Zhong yi shi wu xing de ke xue. English

Description: New Jersey : World Scientific, 2018. | Translation of Zhong yi shi wu xing de ke xue, originally published in Chinese by China Renmin University Press, 2013.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018014015 | ISBN 9789813239296 (hardcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: | MESH: Medicine, Chinese Traditional | Philosophy, Medical | Essays

Classification: LCC R601 | NLM WB 55.C4 | DDC 610.951--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018014015>

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

B&R Book Program

《中医是无形的科学》

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Published in Chinese by China Renmin University Press in 2013

English translation rights arranged with China Renmin University Press

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For any available supplementary material, please visit

<http://www.worldscientific.com/worldscibooks/10.1142/10965#t=suppl>

Desk Editor: Ling Xiao 萧玲

Typeset by Stallion Press

Email: enquiries@stallionpress.com

Printed in Singapore

Contents

<i>Foreword to the Chinese edition</i>	xi
<i>Preface to the English edition</i>	xiii
<i>Preface to the Chinese edition</i>	xv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xvii
<i>Note on Prescriptions</i>	xix
Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is an intangible science — The discussion on scientific attributes of TCM by taking the example of curing a tumor on the tip of the tongue	1
Theoretical knowledge is acquired through practice — Discussing that the intangible science is originated from the practice and talking about the misfortunes of TCM by taking the example of ‘contralateral collateral needling method’	10
Traditional Chinese Medicine belongs to Tao-like medical knowledge — The discussion on the theory of TCM treatment by taking the example of curing a patient with a history of superficial gastritis for 20 years	17
The goal of TCM therapy is to deal with the primary cause of disease — The discussion on scientific attribute of ‘treating disease should focus on the root’ by taking the example of curing pediatric hydrocephalus	25

Kidneys are not the therapeutic region for treating nephrolithiasis — Discussing that the goal of TCM treatment is to deal with the primary cause of disease by taking the example of curing a patient with a history of nephrolithiasis for 30 years	35
TCM is a medical science of meeting changes with constancy — The discussion on scientific attribute of TCM by taking the example of curing Kawasaki disease	47
TCM is a medical science of simple solutions to complicated problems — Discussing that TCM contains great wisdom and thought by taking the example of curing disease with <i>Poge Jiuxin Tang (Breaking the Rule and Heart-saving Decoction)</i> Appendix: A birthday speech for Lǐ Kě (李可) by Guó Guānghóng (国光红)	57 67
TCM is a medical science of handling difficulties with great ease — The discussion on the advantage of scientific attribute of TCM by taking the example of curing advanced prostate cancer with bone metastases	70
TCM is an intangible science, while Western Medicine is a tangible one — The discussion on the differences between the theories of TCM and Western Medicine by taking the example of curing complete deep venous thrombosis (DVT) of both lower extremities	86
It is valuable of curing a coronary artery disease patient without the heart stent implantation — Discussing that TCM cures the patient who is ill, while Western Medicine cures the disease of the patient by taking the example of curing coronary artery disease	101

TCM regards symptoms as ‘disease’	
— The discussion on the differences between the concepts of disease in TCM and in Western Medicine by taking the example of curing a patient with a history of abdominal pain for 15 years	113
The thinking of the development of integrating TCM and Western Medicine has been misled	
— The discussion on the mistakes of the development of TCM in the past one hundred years by taking the example of curing aplastic anemia	119
Disease differentiation and treatment has been mistakenly used for treating again and again	
— Discussing TCM practitioners must get out of the misunderstanding of disease differentiation and treatment by taking the example of curing bladder cancer	145
Never go astray in the combination of TCM and Western Medicine	
— The discussion on the reconciliation of TCM and Western Medicine by taking the example of curing severe rheumatoid arthritis	154
Syndrome differentiation and treatment is the key to solve difficult medical problems worldwide	
— Discussing that the way of revitalizing and developing TCM should focus back on the origin of TCM by taking the example of curing an 87-year-old colon cancer patient	172
There are only unknown diseases but no incurable ones	
— Discussing that TCM is the new approach of developing medical science by taking the example of curing myelofibrosis	180
What Chinese medicinals treat is to readjust imbalance	
— Discussing the TCM therapeutic theory by taking the example of curing a patient with a history of trigeminal neuralgia for 20 years	191

No fixed therapeutic regimes, formulas, or fixed dosages — Discussing the core of TCM clinic is the comprehensive analysis of the pulse and symptoms by taking the example of curing an 80-year-old cerebral thrombosis patient	196
Discussing that pulse diagnosis is more important than symptoms and prescribing should base on it	216
I. Prescribing should base on pulse when facing the same symptoms with different pulses	224
II. Prescribing should base on pulse when facing different symptoms with the same pulse	226
(1) The case of recurrently having the bad cold	226
(2) The case of recurrent coughing	226
(3) The case of recurrent geographical tongue	227
(4) The case of the aversion to cold in the back	227
(5) The case of recurrently having stomachache	227
(6) The case of frequent urination	228
(7) The case of erectile dysfunction	228
III. Prescribing should base on the pulse for the symptoms may have false appearance	229
IV. Prescribing should base on the pulse when facing rare diseases with complex symptoms	229
(1) The case of 10-year facial twitch	230
(2) The case of recurrent perspiring of one side of the body	230
(3) The case of having 4-year aphtha	231
V. Prescribing should base on the pulse when having no distinct symptoms	231
Treating serious cough with half dose of formula — Discussing that ‘thousands of medicinals cannot be equal to one correct pill’ by taking the example of curing intractably intense cough in half dose of the formula	233

Opportunity favors the prepared mind	
— Discussing that ‘treating fever without medicinals with sour flavor and cold nature is like fire fighting without water’ and that ‘TCM cures disease in coincidence’ by taking the example of curing bilateral bronchial pneumonia	243
If a patient coughs, the doctor shall not relieve the cough first; if a patient has phlegm, the doctor shall not dispel phlegm first	
— Discussing that the formula should be composed by the comprehensive analysis of pulse and symptoms by taking the example of curing intense nighttime cough by the therapeutic methods of ‘taking away firewood from under the cauldron’ and ‘treating incontinent syndrome with dredging method’	252
Toxic or not toxic	
— The discussion on the toxic side effects of Chinese medicinals	260
Poison or not poison	
— The second discussion on the toxic side effects of Chinese medicinals	274
TCM is deeply rooted among the people	
— The discussion on folk TCM by taking the example of ‘Wu Gen Tang’	284
The over-concern on the TCM education	
— The discussion on the problem of authentic TCM	301
Where are those fish in the sea?	
— The second discussion on the problem of authentic TCM	305
Appendix: Some hopes on TCM	308
Several inspirations from TCM study	313
I. Reading the classics carefully	313
II. Doing clinical work in a down-to-earth manner	314
III. Learning from the seniors in the TCM field with great respect	315

IV. Sincerely sharing medical experience with peers	316
V. Being an authentic TCM doctor	316
VI. Following the classic principles	317
VII. Progressing step by step	318
VIII. Working conscientiously in medical practice	318
Epilogue: The charm of Traditional Chinese Medicine	320

Foreword to the Chinese edition

Lǐ Kě (李可)

This book is about correcting the wrong diagnostic and therapeutic thoughts of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) doctors.

When there is something wrong with a doctor's physical health, he will harm no one but suffer himself. When there is something wrong with a doctor's thought, it is guilty for him to diagnose and treat patients with this incorrect thought, especially when he does not realize it or conceals this thought for the fear of being criticized, he will make the patient's condition worse and irreversible.

I therefore recommend my peers, the Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners, to read this book carefully. Recollecting your medical careers after reading this book, you may feel that everything has changed. Just as an old Chinese proverb goes, 'To err is human, to correct, divine.' If you've made mistakes in your medical careers, you correct them. Then you will still be the highly competent doctor.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is the unique life science created by the Chinese civilization. It is the collective wisdom of Chinese wise men dating back as far as 5,000 years. *Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica* (*Shén nóng Běn cǎo jīng*, 神农本草经), which was compiled by generations of people based on the theory of *Book of Changes* (*Yì jīng*, 易经), the masterpiece of Chinese culture, summarizes and elaborates the experience of prescribing Chinese medicinals. Based on the theory of *Book of Changes* (*Yì jīng*, 易经) again, *Huangdi's Internal Classic* (*Huáng dì nèi jīng*, 黄帝内经), which was accomplished in the Warring States

Period, constructs the theoretical framework of ancient TCM. In the Spring & Warring States Period, Qín Yuèrén (秦越人, well-known as Biǎn Què) further developed TCM in *Classic of Difficulties* (*Nàn jīng*, 难经). In the late Eastern Han Dynasty, Zhāng Zhòngjǐng (张仲景), based on the thoughts of *Huangdi's Internal Classic* (*Huáng dì nèi jīng*, 黄帝内经) and *Classic of Difficulties* (*Nàn jīng*, 难经), as well as the advanced thoughts of many famous medical ancestors, wrote *Treatise on Cold Damage Diseases and Miscellaneous Diseases* (*Shāng hán zá bìng lùn*, 伤寒杂病论). This book set up the integrated system of TCM from theory to clinical practice. TCM is also known as Qi-Huang theory. This is the course of development of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

The four great classics mentioned above are the core of TCM. *Treatise on Cold Damage Diseases* (*Shāng hán lùn*, 伤寒论) is the top one among the classics, because the syndrome differentiation of the six meridians formulated by Zhāng Zhòngjǐng (张仲景) is the living soul of TCM. Historically, when we follow the classics, TCM flourishes, otherwise it declines. Therefore, the judgment of a doctor's medical skills can only rely on the core theory of *Treatise on Cold Damage Diseases* (*Shāng hán lùn*, 伤寒论). Back to the classics is the only way to further develop TCM. I hope the book could help us get rid of the wrong diagnostic and therapeutic thoughts of TCM and put things right. I also expect that the book could move on from the classics and forge the future for TCM. May the book bring a new life to the ancient Traditional Chinese Medicine. As a result, I wrote the preface with pleasure.

June 21, 2012
Lingshi, Shanxi

Preface to the English edition

Traditional Chinese medicine is a unique science for human life, innovated by the Chinese nationality. Meanwhile, it is also a treasure enabling the Chinese nationality to defeat illness for thousands of years. Currently, there has been growing passion on traditional Chinese medicine worldwide, with more and more people recognizing and accepting this science. However, when referring to how to study and apply traditional Chinese medicine well, it requires a clear recognition on what kind of science it is, which is a significant premise. Under this premise, learners can have a specific goal in learning traditional Chinese medicine, from which they can avoid detours and master the essence of curing diseases as soon as possible. Therefore, they can help to solve the world's medical problems one by one.

According to this recognition, based on my own examples on treatment of diseases, I have systematically illustrated what kind of science the traditional Chinese medicine is in this book. It aims at providing answers to the relevant confusion and doubt in people's minds and carrying forward traditional Chinese medicine to bring benefit to all mankind.

Boxin Guo
New Zealand,
February 28, 2018

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Preface to the Chinese edition

Having been a medical practitioner for about 40 years, I am an old man now. The contents of the book are the practices and the reflections of my medical career for decades. I expect that the book will let more and more people know what Traditional Chinese Medicine is and what a treasure it is. I also expect that the book will inspire and benefit the TCM learners. That is the reason why I wrote this book.

After finishing the draft version, I presented it to Lǐ Kě (李可), my mentor. Although he was ill, he gladly wrote the preface. Meanwhile, he recommended my book to Zhū Liángchūn (朱良春), the mogul in TCM circle. Although Zhu was bed-ridden because of a waist injury, he still wrote an inscription for the book with good grace. As a learner who has been receiving education from them for many years, I am indebted to these two venerable elders for their encouragements.

Xiè Yībīng (谢一兵), deputy Editor-in-Chief of Shanxi Science and Technology Publishing House, and Zhōu Guāngróng (周光荣), desk editor for the book, had solicited contributions from me over 10 years ago. However, I was too busy with medical practice to write anything at that time. I really appreciate their recognition and encouragement when I was writing the book. Through their strenuous efforts in the edition and publication, finally, the book has been accomplished.

I express my gratitude to my wife, Huáng Yún (黄云). For a long time, she has never hesitated to encourage and help me learn TCM. When I was writing this book, she helped me revise the manuscript so carefully that she weighed every single word and sentence, just as *The Book of*

Poetry (Shī Jīng) describes, ‘I have not leisure to lie down even undressed.’ Without her endeavors, I can never finish the writing.

I express my gratitude to the civil Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner, Ān Tiěniú (安铁牛), because he not only shares his clinical experience with me selflessly, but also exchanges his understanding of Tao-like Chinese medical knowledge with me. He inspired and helped me a lot while I was writing the book.

I express my gratitude to Táng Qián (唐虔). Although he was fully occupied with business, he kept a watchful eye on my writing and provided many valuable suggestions on it.

I sincerely express my gratitude to all the people who helped me.

For my knowledge is limited and the time between writing and publication was relatively short, it is inevitable to find faults or errors in this book. If readers find any of them, please forgive me and let me know.

Guō Bóxìn (郭博信)
at the end of 2012

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my wife, Yun Huang, for her support and insights throughout the process of writing. Her continued support guided me towards the right path. Without her encouragement, I would not have been able to finish this book.

My sincere appreciation also extends to Mr. Pingwei Zhang and Ms. Yun Zhou for their contributions to the publication of this book.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to my step-daughter Xiaozhou Shen for her assistance in the medical case arrangements and proofreading work.

Special appreciation also goes to the translation team, namely Marcia Zhang, Hao Wang, Guanrao Nie and Yu Zhong for their professional and hard work in translating such a highly specialized book.

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Note on Prescriptions

The prescriptions in this book are for reference only. Readers are advised not to blindly follow the prescriptions in this book because the dosages were differentially prescribed by the author with the particular experience of syndrome differentiation and treatment.

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Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is an intangible science

— The discussion on scientific attributes of TCM by taking the example of curing a tumor on the tip of the tongue

In the 1980s, I met a male patient around 40 years old. Now I can only remember that he was introduced as a director general of Heshun County. There was a tumor as big as the size of a longan on the tip of his tongue, hanging out of the mouth every day. He suffered a lot for almost a year, which caused trouble for his eating and speaking.

He had sought for help from many experts from many large-scaled modern hospitals in Beijing and Shanghai. All the experts agreed that the only solution was the resection of the tongue tumor. He had no choice but to come to me for help. After feeling his pulse, I found that the pulse was surging and rapid on both hands, especially at his left Cun position. Meanwhile, his tongue color was deep red. There is a saying in TCM that ‘The tongue is the sprout of the heart’, which means the heart functions in governing the vessels or in controlling the mind can be analyzed through the color and shape of the tongue. The symptoms and the manifestations of pulse and tongue revealed that he suffered the syndrome of intense heat in the heart meridian, and the tumor was caused by the accumulation of heat in the tip of his tongue. In the TCM system, there is an internal and external relationship between the heart and the small intestine, so I composed modified *Daochi San (Redness Removing Powder)* to remove heart heat through the small intestine.

Here were the ingredients of the formula:

Shengdihuang (Radix Rehmanniae Recens) 60g
Yuanshen (Radix Scrophulariae) 30g
Mutong (Caulis Akebiae) 15g
Shenggancaoshao (Radix Glycyrrhizae) 20g
Sharen (Fructus Amomi) 5g
Zhuye (Herba Lophatheri) 6g
Shengjiang (Rhizoma Zingiberis Recens) 3 slices

All these medicinals should be decocted with water for oral administration.

After composing the formula, I exhorted him that the tumor was a kind of chronic disease and he should have a long treatment period of taking dozens of doses of the prescription. The confusion could be read from his triste face. He sighed and said: “there is no other good idea, I’ll try it whatever!” To my surprise, only a month later, he unexpectedly came to me with pleasure, showing me his tongue that the tumor had disappeared! He felt grateful and told me excitedly that 30 doses of the prescription had all been taken since then and the medicinals worked immediately.

Although the tongue is located in the mouth, a branch of the heart meridian ascends along the tongue. According to *Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold Pieces · Treatise on Heart and Meridian (Qiān jīn fāng · Xīn zàng mài lùn, 千金方 · 心脏脉论)*, ‘Tongue is the governor of heart. That’s the reason of heart qi circulating through tongue.’ Therefore, in Traditional Chinese Medicine, there are sayings such as, ‘the heart opens into the tongue’, ‘the tongue is the sprout of the heart’. Considering its functions in nourishing yin and clearing heat, I chose *Daochi San (Redness Removing Powder)* as the basic prescription. I added *Yuanshen (Radix Scrophulariae)* into the formula to clear away pathogenic heat located in the upper energizer and to keep downward flowing of pathogenic heat. Adding pungent-warm medicinals such as *Sharen (Fructus Amomi)*, *Shengjiang (Rhizoma Zingiberis Recens)* was to neutralize the harm of sweet-cold medicinals for the purpose of protecting stomach qi.

It is always said that TCM is an empirical medical science. In my opinion, such saying has both sides. I consider it right because experience

plays a key role in the diagnosis and treatment of disease. That is the reason why people always seek elderly TCM doctors. It does not mean a young doctor cannot cure patients. But the older the doctor is, the more experience he will get. Experience determines the diagnostic and therapeutic level of a TCM doctor. If a doctor has no experience, he will be unable to treat diseases and to save lives. There are thousands of theories of medical science, but doctoring a patient back to health is the absolute principle. Numerous people have accumulated extremely rich experience of TCM in previous thousands of years. The experience is precious. Without experience, no illness can be cured. Experience is contained with truth and real science. When learning TCM, besides learning the therapeutic and diagnostic principles, we spend most hours on learning experiences of the seniors in curing diseases. Only after absorbing the experiences of the seniors can we fundamentally understand the principles of the diagnosis and treatment. No one is willing to see a doctor who can just talk about the theories of TCM, but has no experience in the diagnosis and treatment. I consider it wrong because TCM is not merely a simple empirical medical science, but a medical science which contains a unique and complete theoretical system. Only when TCM experience is applied under the guidance of TCM theory can TCM treatment achieve peculiar curative effect.

For example, *Daochi San* (*Redness-Removing Powder*) is recorded in the book of *Key to Medicines and Syndromes of Children's Diseases* (*Xiǎo ér yào zhèng zhí jué*, 小儿药证直诀) which was written by Qián Yì (钱乙, 1032–1113), a famous pediatrician during the Northern Song Dynasty. He invented this prescription. The original only records: ‘This formula is used to treat the child in the syndrome of heat in heart meridian. The symptoms can be observed when the child is sleeping, such as the temperature of the breath from his mouth is high, lying his face down while sleeping, convulsion and gritting teeth. As the pathogenic heat is in the heart meridian so there is feverish sensation in the chest. In this occasion, the child can hardly talk, and is eager to touch cold things, so he lies his face down while sleeping. Under such circumstance, weighing an equal amount of *Shengdihuang* (*Radix Rehmanniae Recens*), *Mutong* (*Caulis Akebiae*) and *Shenggancao* (*Radix Glycyrrhizae*) and powdering them. Each time, 3 qian (1 qian ~ 3 grams) of these medicinals should be decocted with proper amount of *Zhuye* (*Herba Lophatheri*) and water

until half done for oral administration. Then the child should take the warm decoction after the meal.’ This formula does not mention the tumor treatment, but the treatment of intense heat in the heart meridian of the child. I composed the formula based on *Daochi San* (*Redness-Removing Powder*) because I was guided by the basic theory of ‘the heart opens into the tongue’, ‘the tongue is the sprout of the heart’ and, the therapeutic theory of ‘treating heat with cold’. How to explain such issue through the aspect of western medical theory? There’s no such concept in the modern human anatomy. Strictly speaking, modern human anatomy should be called as corpse anatomy. Modern human anatomy emphasizes the tangible aspect of human body, while TCM focuses on life phenomena of the living person which cannot be observed on corpses. In short, TCM observes the intangible aspect of human body.

Some people always criticize that TCM lacks knowledge of anatomy, but that is a great misunderstanding. The research object of medical science is the human being. No matter what category it is in, medical science at least should understand the human body structure, just as the saying goes, ‘anatomy is the basis and starting point of medical treatment arts’ which is recorded in *On the Fabric of the Human Body* written in 1543 by Andreas Vesalius who is praised as the founder of modern human anatomy. Both TCM and Western Medicine are included.

Miraculous·the Circulation of Qi and Blood of Meridians (*Ling shū·Jīng shuǐ*, 灵枢·经水), which has a history of over 2,000 years, records, ‘For living human being, we can measure the skin and muscle by using fingers to detect different parts of the body from the exterior. For dead body, we can observe the body via anatomy.’ The book also in detail introduces the positions, sizes and weights of five zang-organs (heart, lung, spleen, liver, and kidney), six fu-organs (gallbladder, stomach, large intestine, small intestine, bladder, and triple energizer) and extraordinary fu-organs (brain, marrow, bone, vessel, gallbladder, and uterus). It is obvious that TCM is less careful than modern human anatomy in observing the structure of human body.

However, it is the earliest book which records the human anatomy. According to the experts, what the book records is 1,500 years earlier than western anatomy, so it is believed that the first book about human anatomy was written by a Chinese.

Just like our attitude towards our Chinese ‘four great inventions’, we are only proud that we have the earliest inventions. But western people are proud that the development of western sciences has far exceeded our ‘four great inventions’.

Similarly, although only having a history of 200 years, Western Medicine has gradually gone deep in anatomy along with organs, tissues, cells, and molecules, far surpassing TCM. Therefore, people now only learn human body anatomy of Western Medicine, and no one learns the anatomy knowledge of TCM.

It seems that TCM has not made any progress in human body anatomy since 2,000 years ago. However, our ancestors crossed the tangible part of human body and focused on the intangible part, namely, the relationship between the human being and nature, the relationship among the functions of body organs and their mutual relationships. In terms of zang-fu organs, our ancestors invented *Zang Xiang* (the visceral manifestation theory).

Xiang (manifestation) means something is one of the different ways in which it can appear. The clinical application of *Zang Xiang* can be found in the book of *Miraculous·Zang-fu Organs Are the Root* (*Ling shū·Běn zàng*, 灵枢·本藏), ‘by observing a person’s external manifestation, we can predict the situations of his internal organs and further find out the cause of his illness.’

Miraculous·Inspecting Exterior to Predict Interior (*Ling shū·Wài chuǎi*, 灵枢·外揣) calls this diagnostic method as ‘inspecting exterior to predict interior’, which means inspecting external manifestation of the human to predict the internal causes.

All the theories of TCM, including not only *Zang Xiang* (the visceral manifestation theory), but also yin-yang, five elements (wu-xing), meridians and collateral, qì, blood, fluid and spirit, are all the results of ‘inspecting exterior to predict interior’. These results were achieved by our ancestors with their extraordinary wisdom and keen eyesight. Our ancestors presented the results in TCM way and turned them into a unique language which is TCM terminology. Only those who have deep learning of TCM can understand what the language means, that is to say, only people in the TCM circle could understand this language.

It is not because TCM cannot see the tangible part of human body, but because that TCM only focuses on the intangible part. For example, in

Miraculous (Líng shū jīng, 灵枢经), a large amount of texts are about the position, size, dimension, image, name of 365 bones of human skeleton. However, TCM emphasizes the kidney governing bones and considers that bone diseases should be treated from the kidney. The ‘kidney governing bones’ is intangible. In TCM, medicinals for tonifying the kidney are also applied during treatment of bone fracture patients, so as to facilitate healing the fracture.

I am not an orthopedist of TCM and I am unable to set a fracture. If a patient who only has fractures without dislocations, or a patient who has bone dislocations but has been treated by an orthopedist, the patient’s broken bone will be healed in 20 days through taking my bone setting medicinals. The patients natural healing process will last at least 100 days.

TCM observed the tangible part of human body, but it researches or emphasizes the intangible part, which is the brilliant part of TCM.

Taking blood for example. Both TCM and Western Medicine can observe it. In TCM, we considers qi as the commander of blood. Although blood is tangible to us, it is led and driven by qi, which is intangible to us.

I have treated many patients who have lost excessive amount of blood without using hemostatic medicinals. Through the using of *Ren Shen (Radix Ginseng)* which has no function of stopping bleeding but tonifying qi, I have cured some such patients.

In TCM, *Buyang Huanwu Tang (Decoction for tonifying Yang and Recuperation)* is used to treat paralyzed patients. In the decoction, adding 120g *Huangqi (Radix Astragali seu Hedysari)* to tonify qi. Adding 6g *Dangguiwei (tail of Radix Angelicae sinensis)*, 4.5g *Chishaoyao (Radix Paeoniae Rubra)*, 3g *Dilong (lumbricus)*, 3g *Chuanxiong (Rhizoma Ligustici Chuanxiong)*, 3g *Taoren (Semen Persicae)*, and 3g *Honghua (Flos Carthami)* to promote blood flow. We can see that the dosage of *Huangqi (Radix Astragali seu Hedysari)* is 40 times of other blood flow promoting medicinals, which fully embodies qi as the commander of blood.

The curative effect is remarkable and highly spoken of by the doctors; If we only use medicinals for promoting blood to flow and removing blood stasis without qi tonifying medicinals, positive effects can hardly be achieved. It is the reason why Zhāng Jǐngyuè (张景岳 (Zhāng Zhòngjǐng, 张仲景)) said that ‘there’s no basis for treatment if a doctor

cannot recognize qi (*Jing Yue's Collected Works (Jǐng yuè quán shū, 景岳全书)*). There's a saying that all theories of *Huangdi's Internal Classic* are based on qi-blood theory. *Miraculous·Nine Needles and Twelve Source Points (Líng shū·Jiǔ zhēn shí èr yuán, 灵枢·九针十二原)* states that, 'Inferior doctor cares about the form, superior doctor cares about the spirit.' That is to say, during the treatment, the inferior doctor only cares about the tangible form of the patient, the superior doctor cares about the intangible spirit of the patient. *Huangdi's Internal Classic* also records, 'treating disease should focus on the root.' That 'root' is also intangible.

For example, the tongue tip tumor I've treated is tangible, but the pathogen of this tumor, heart heat, is intangible. *Daochi San* was used to solve the problem of intangible 'heart heat', but the tangible tumor also disappeared then. This therapeutic course belongs to the theory of 'treating disease should focus on the root', and this is the wisdom of TCM.

When treating tumors, modern medicine advocates to remove them by using surgery and various sorts of medical apparatus and instruments. Although tumors can be removed, advanced medical science and technology will still bring huge pain and sequelae to the patients. Though it is advanced at the technical level, it is actually an inferior doctor's work from the perspective of *Huangdi's Internal Classic*. Because what it solves is the problem of 'form', not 'spirit'. That's the difference between TCM and Western Medicine.

Both of them are to solve the problem of form (tumor): one is to directly remove this 'form', regardless of 'spirit' problem; The other is to solve the 'form' problem by solving the 'spirit' problem. The purpose is the same but the thoughts are different, resulting in different consequences.

In summary, we can clearly recognize that studying either TCM or Western Medicine should include the human body anatomy. However with the development of science and technology, and the applications of modern testing instruments, Western Medicine has always been looking for organic disease along organs, cells and molecules. Western Medicine confirms diagnosis based on the tangible and visible object, therefore we might call it the tangible science.

However, under the guidance of 'All internal changes of the body must have the corresponding manifestations which emerge on the exterior',

TCM has always focused on the human life and disease phenomena of a living person which is intangible. Therefore we might as well call it the intangible science. Because both of their problems are researching and solving the same matter — objective existence of human body, both of them shall belong to human body science.

Both of them research the human body and treat the disease. But why are there two distinct scientific systems? This is determined by the particularity of the human body. All other subjects except the human body, such as astronomy, geography and even physics, chemistry, mathematics, are individual scientific systems. In these fields it will never be the case that the same matter is researched by two distinct scientific systems.

The reason is simple enough: all human beings have their lives, so there are two forms of existence, one is the living person and the other is the dead one. The modern human anatomy studies the structure and morphology of human body, which is called science. However, TCM studies the biological phenomena of a living human body. Shouldn't we call it science too? Both of them study the objective existence of human body, or to say, the truth of the matter. It's only that one observes the structure of the human body that is exact to the cellular, molecular and even genome level, with the help of advanced instruments and test methods. It is still the tangible side of human body no matter how exactly it observes. Therefore, precisely speaking, it shall be called the tangible science. However, TCM observes the 'changeable' biological phenomena of living human body. It is a very mysterious intangible side of human body which cannot be detected by advanced scientific instruments. Therefore, precisely speaking, it shall be called the intangible science. Albert Einstein, the great physicist and thinker who was famous for his 'general theory of relativity' in recent history, had proposed two standards to judge the truth of scientific theory: one is 'Internal completeness', the other is 'External authentication'. However, the classic of TCM, *Huangdi's Internal Classic* had already explained the theories of TCM in all aspects since two thousand years ago. How 'complete' the 'internal' is! Famous doctors and medical schools are enduring from Zhāng Zhòngjǐng (张仲景) to successive dynasties. What kind of 'external authentication' it is! Is there any reason to doubt that TCM has the 'truth of scientific theory'?

The great scientist Sir Isaac Newton had a famous saying: “I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”

Although modern science is quite developed, as a part of modern science, modern medicine almost gets to the most detailed point only in the tangible side of human body and disease. It is still utterly ignorant of the intangible side of human body and disease, which is the blind spots in modern science.

However, Chinese people have already formed an independent, complete and systematic theoretical system in this field since two thousand years ago, and it also has the extremely rich and solid clinical foundation. What a miracle in the world this is! Not only Chinese people, but also all mankind will be proud of TCM! TCM is not only the wisdom of Chinese people, but also the wisdom of all mankind.

We can't treat human body science with the viewpoints and methods used for researching other subjects. We can't measure and judge the intangible science of human body with the standard of tangible science of human body either. We can't say only the one observed by eyes (or seen by virtue of instruments and assays) is scientific, and treat the one unable to be seen by eyes (or unable to be seen by virtue of instruments and test) as not scientific. If one only knows the tangible side of human body but doesn't know the intangible side of human body, one just has a one-sided view. Making TCM to be modernized and scientific is equal to making TCM to seek advice from one who can offer none, that is the ignorance of TCM. The ignorance of TCM, after all, is the ignorance of human body science. As the old saying goes, ‘People who sail in the sea don't know mountains; people who drive on the land don't know water (by Hé Xiánmíng (何贤明), Ming Dynasty).’

If a doctor of TCM learns western medical knowledge blindly by getting outside of the thought of TCM, it shouldn't be called as ‘seeking advice from one who can offer nothing’, it should be regarded as ‘following advice from one who can offer nothing’, leading him astray and nowhere. As a result, one sets foot on the road of no return to what looks like ‘science’ but actually is very confused westernization of TCM.