

My experiments with TCM paid off - for now

by Dave Feickert (President, Whanganui branch, NZCFS) - Aug 3, 2011



Illustration: Liu Rui

My first encounter with traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) came last winter. I had returned to freezing Beijing from the equally cold Yinchuan, the capital city of Northwest China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, with a badly sprained ankle. I did not know how it had happened but I must have twisted it during a high fever I had while out there.

The fever was a real shocker, suddenly taking me over in my hotel room, with eruptions from every orifice. Fortunately my partner, who was negotiating risk assessment contracts in the city, turned her TLC toward me and got me through. Stumbling around, delirious, I must have twisted my ankle.

It was the worst sprain I have ever had, much worse than the many I have had playing sport or hiking. After a few days it became so painful I could not walk on it; so on Christmas day I went to a Western clinic. They X-rayed it, cast it and gave me a pile of pills to take.

"Come back in two weeks," the young Portuguese doctor said, handing me a pretty large bill.

After two weeks it was still hurting like a really bad tooth, but this was a whole ankle.

"Use these," my partner, Jing, said, handing me some patches, "They will solve the problem."

I wrapped the two patches around my ankle, with the brown pad against the skin and went to bed. The next morning the swelling and pain had gone.

Like many Westerners, I used to be a sceptic about TCM. This was partly from being trained in a scientific tradition that saw itself as superior, because of the rigour of its experimental testing. This did not seem to apply to medicines that were several hundred or thousand years old. I also knew people who believed in TCM and took it, but nothing much seemed to happen.

With my ankle, the experiment was clear-cut. My ankle had been painful and swollen. It had been so for two weeks, but now overnight both these symptoms had gone. I could walk on it without pain. It could not have been mind over matter, as I did not believe it would work and thought it would take months for the injury to really heal.

So when the Auckland Hospital Liver Unit took me off the liver transplant list last May and told me my cancer was inoperable, with only two non-curative treatments now available, my thoughts turned instantly to TCM.

I had been in China in April and Jing's boss had bought me some very expensive TCM.

[Pien Tze Huang](#) was developed a few hundred years ago for emperors with liver problems and the price remains imperial.

Even if you get it at the cheapest price, it still costs around \$30 a day. It is not specifically an anti-cancer medicine, but Chinese people swear by it.

"You can keep taking Pien Tze Huang," Dr Li Jie, one of China's leading tumor specialists, told me, "but it hasn't been tested as a cancer remedy."

He put me on his prescribed treatment for liver cancer, made up of more than 20 herbs.

"We are going to boost your immune system, so that the anti-cancer cells can do their job better," Li told me. "You can keep taking your Western medicine. Come back next week."

The south Beijing hospital where Li works is huge. In the mornings there are hundreds of people flowing through the registering halls and on up lifts to the clinics. It is both Western and TCM. The aroma of cooking TCM is all pervasive but you can hear the MRI machines working away, too.

TCM is very much a family affair, with sons, daughters, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers all in attendance and taking part.

My friends around the world are very concerned but also very curious. I keep a diary but my message is a simple one: I feel better in myself. It took two weeks to feel this, but I have more energy.

I know, too, that the Auckland team are keen to get me in their MRI tube again to assess the results in a few months time.

That day, Western technology will test TCM's effect.

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Dave has also posted a number of very interesting articles on the Chinese News website - **Global Times:**

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