

Chapter 1

History of Traditional Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is a branch of science that teaches how the body works by considering it holistically. TCM deals with the pathology and physiology, as well as the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease.

Using TCM, signs of deficiency or excess can be found by analyzing different aspects of the body, including the face, the tongue and the paths of energy that travel through the body (meridians). TCM uses treatments like acupuncture, Chinese herbs and dietary recommendations to bring the body back to harmony. In order to grasp the concepts of TCM, it is helpful to review its historical roots in classical Chinese medicine.

For more information on acupuncture, see chapter 13, *Acupuncture*.

Classical Chinese medicine (CCM) began about 5,000 years ago with the shamans, or medicine men. The medicine men not only treated

illness, but studied plants and herbs and classified them into different categories according to their energetic properties, such as hot and cold.

For more information on Chinese herbs, see chapter 8, *Chinese Herbal Medicine*.

The medicine men gained respect in their communities and started moving away from the spiritual aspect of healing as they concentrated more on the scientific aspects of how the body

becomes diseased. They looked to nature and discovered the five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal and water. The medicine men believed that man was a miniature universe and had these five

For more information on the five elements, see chapter 6, *The Five Elements*.

elements within him. Because the elements in nature transform into each other and work together and against each other, the elements must be in balance in order to maintain good health.

Early in the third century BC, as the medicine men were continuing to learn, two silk scrolls relating to the body's circulation and pathologic symptoms were unearthed from Han Tomb No. 3 in Mawangdui, Changsha, China. These scrolls were the basis for the current meridian system. Shortly after this discovery, the Warring States Period (approximately 476 BC - 221 BC) began. This period was a time of separation between the kingdoms resulting in the development of politics, economy, science and culture. While it was a period of great academic thought, it was also a time of war. Because there were so many injured in war during this period, the medicine men were able to actively study how the body works. They confirmed the existence of paths of energy (meridians) that flow through the body and discovered how to assist the body's healing by inserting thin needles into those paths of energy. The medicine men also found that if a patient had severe pain, inserting needles around the painful area decreased the amount of pain and encouraged the healing process by stimulating blood circulation in the injured area. Once the benefits of using needles was discovered, CCM started incorporating acupuncture as a means of healing.

For more information on meridians, see chapter 4, *Meridians*.

The results of these studies, as well as the other concepts of TCM, have been documented through the years. Many herbs have been