

Traditional Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese medicine has a history going back thousands of years. It includes medicine made from Chinese herbs as well as various methods for pain relief, health care, and disease prevention. Learn the theories behind traditional Chinese medicine and explore its more recent use within modern medicine.

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The audio for this reader is available for download at ELTNGL.com/csl

Upper Intermediate
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Traditional Chinese Medicine



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For Review Only

 Before You Read

This book is about Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and its influence on Chinese culture and customs. We will also look at TCM use across the world, as well as important, new medicines that have been developed, such as for **malaria**,¹ thanks to practices learned from it.



A. What Is Traditional Chinese Medicine? Read the sentences. Then complete the paragraph with the correct form of the underlined words.

Something that is not traditional or usual is often described as alternative.
A concept is a general idea.
A needle is a thin, pointed piece of metal.
The origin is the place or time at which something begins.
A remedy is an action to make an ill or injured person better.
We use specific to refer to something that is detailed and exact.



With (1) _____ going back as far as 5,000 years, Traditional Chinese Medicine is a broad (2) _____ which includes all the cures used for many years by the various cultures and ethnic groups of China. While there are many different kinds of medical practices that come under the umbrella of TCM, in its modern form, the most common TCM (3) _____ are herbal medicines, acupuncture, **moxibustion**, and **tuina**. Chinese herbal medicine is a broad category that contains more than 13,000 substances, including organic products and minerals. Acupuncture uses thin (4) _____ which are placed into the skin. Moxibustion is the burning of the herb mugwort on or near the skin. Meanwhile, **tuina** involves **massaging**² and applying pressure on (5) _____ areas of the body. These are all used according to theories and traditions that have been handed down through the centuries in China. TCM is now a popular form of (6) _____ medicine in many other countries.

¹ **malaria**: a disease that causes fever and shaking of the body
² **massage**: to press or move parts of the body for pain relief

B. Getting TCM. Read the letter and look at the photos in this reader. Then answer the questions below.

SEND MAIL

TO:

SUBJECT:

Dear Sis,

How are things back home? Everything's going great here!

Today, I had **acupuncture** for the first time! I woke up this morning with a bad backache, so I asked the hotel receptionists if they knew of any nearby hospitals. They gave me a list of some places I could go to, and it included an acupuncture clinic that was right next door, so I decided to give it a shot.

I was surprised when they started putting in needles, because I hardly felt anything at first. I thought it would hurt, but actually I didn't even know that I had any needles sticking in me. Then I started feeling a warm sensation in my lower back, and I became very relaxed.

I think it must have helped, because my back stopped hurting. Afterwards, I went to a shop next door that sells Chinese herbal medicines. I was amazed because there were huge glass jars full of all kinds of roots, leaves, and plants, and all sorts of things I cannot even describe. Then behind the counters was a large cabinet going all the way up to the ceiling, full of wooden drawers containing different kinds of ingredients. I didn't know what to buy, so I ended up buying two boxes of dried **ginseng**³—one for me, and one as a gift for you. I'll give it to you when I get back.

Love,

John

- 1. Have you ever tried TCM? What did you try and what was it like?
- 2. What do you know about TCM?
- 3. Do you think that TCM is an effective medical treatment? Why or why not?

³ **ginseng**: a plant root thought to have medicinal qualities



Around the world, Traditional Chinese Medicine is a hot topic. It seems that most health food stores have a section with TCM herbal remedies, and many cities have at least one acupuncture clinic. What is more, some Western doctors recommend TCM for certain illnesses. They may, for example, suggest acupuncture for back pain, or a Chinese herbal tea for losing weight or sleeplessness. Within China, TCM is widely used. All in all, 28% of drug sales in China are made up of medicinal herbs, and there are over 4,000 TCM hospitals in China. Despite this, many people outside China seem unsure about the details of TCM, and wonder whether it is even effective as a medicine. As such, let us take a look at how TCM started and what it involves.



Bian Que

In ancient times, many people around the world believed that illnesses were caused by evil spirits, and so spells and prayers were widely used to get rid of the spirits and thus bring relief. At the same time, some doctors in China recognized that many illnesses had various possible natural causes. The doctors believed that since illnesses were natural in origin, they could be cured through natural remedies. Perhaps the most important of these early doctors was Qin Yueren (died 310 BCE), who wandered from place to place providing medical care to those in need. He was so respected that people called him Bian Que, probably after a mythical doctor who was able to cure all ills.

Much of what has been passed down through history about Bian Que has a legendary quality. For example, he was supposed to have been able to see through the human body, allowing him to clearly **diagnose**⁴ diseases, and he was said to be able to raise the dead. However, Bian Que sought to set the medical profession on a firm basis of preventative treatment, observing symptoms, and offering natural cures without resorting to spells. He is credited with inventing the

Track 1

⁴ **diagnose:** to discover or identify a disease or sickness

TCM diagnostic method, which can be summed up as:

- Examine the patient—the face, tongue, skin color, etc.
- Listen to the patient's voice and breathing; check for any odd smells.
- Ask about the patient's symptoms, medical history, sleep, moods, etc.
- Take the patient's **pulses**.⁵

This method of diagnosis is not all that different from that used by Western doctors today, except that while in TCM people are thought to have many different kinds of pulses, in Western medicine there is only one pulse.

About 2,000 years ago, the knowledge passed on by doctors such as Bian Que was collected in the *Huangdi Neijing* ("The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine"). This book is the first medical text which describes blood **circulation**⁶ and the role of the heart in pumping blood, among other medical observations which would not be noted in European medicine until some centuries later. Basic to its approach is the idea that the human body should be understood in terms of natural processes. The book comes in two parts, one explaining the theories behind TCM and the other focusing on acupuncture and moxibustion.

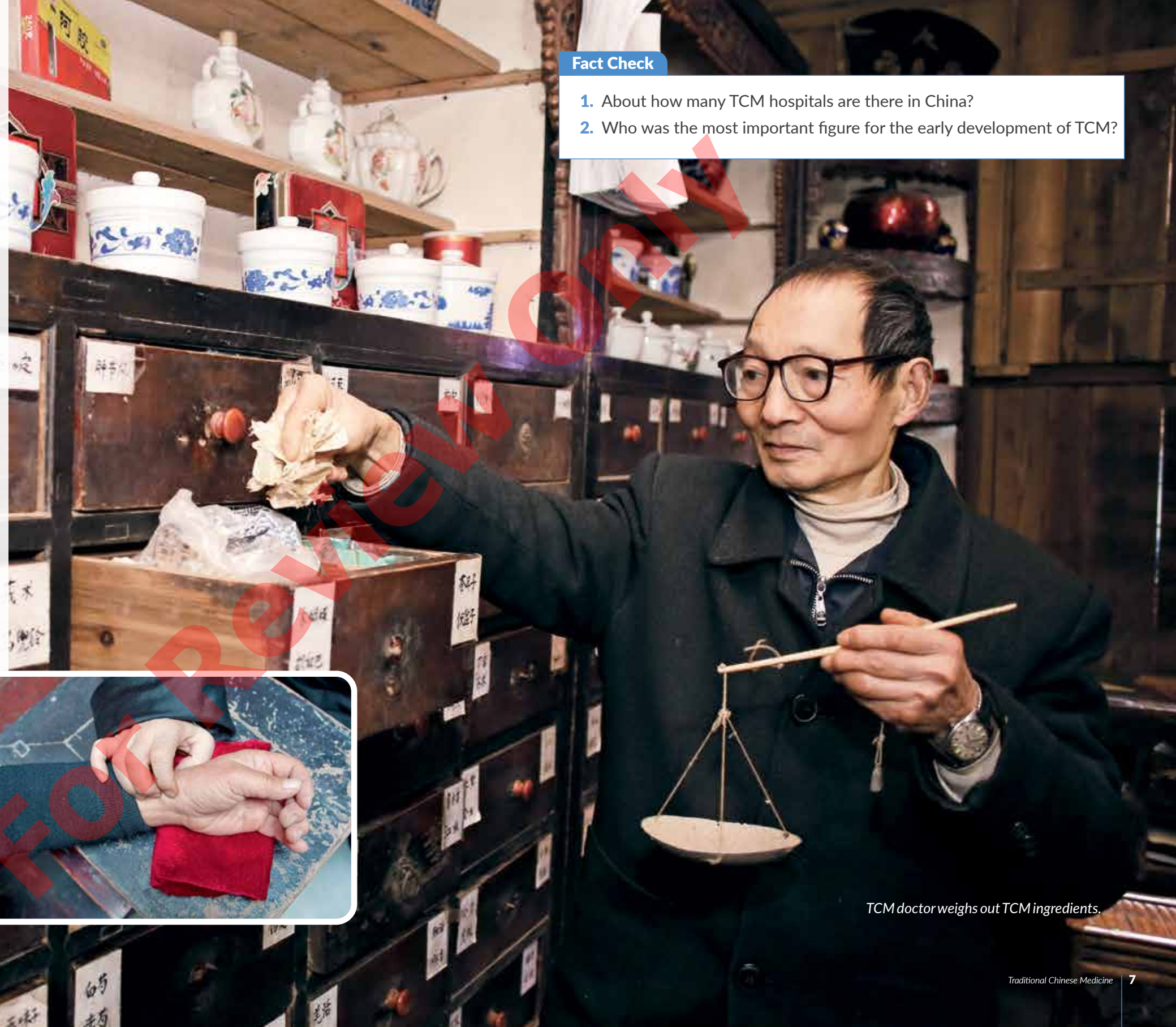
⁵ **pulse**: the rhythm of the blood pumping through the body

⁶ **circulation**: the motion of blood as it is pumped through the body



Fact Check

1. About how many TCM hospitals are there in China?
2. Who was the most important figure for the early development of TCM?



TCM doctor weighs out TCM ingredients.

Before looking at the theories behind TCM, it might be useful to remember that as late as the mid-19th century, most Western doctors used ideas that were similar to those in TCM. They believed, for example, that the human body was governed by four humors (or liquids), and that people became ill when these humors were out of balance. These humors could be put back into balance with the use of medicinal herbs and bleeding.

In the Chinese tradition, a vital force called *qi* flows through our bodies, providing the energy we need to function. Related to *qi* are the concepts of yin and yang. Broadly, yin contains the characteristics of weakness, darkness, softness, coldness, and wetness, while yang contains the characteristics of strength, light, hardness, heat, and dryness. Yin is thought of as a female quality, while yang is thought of as a male quality. Together, yin and yang are symbolized in the *taijitu*, two equal parts that together form a round circle, sometimes known in English as the yin and yang symbol. In TCM, *qi* is often thought of as being yang in quality, while other bodily liquids, including blood, are thought of as having a yin quality.

Another basic concept of TCM is *wuxing*, the Five Elements Theory or Five Phases Theory. In this theory, parts of the body are related symbolically to the elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, and these are related to different phases of bodily processes. As the elements and phases all interact with each other, understanding how to bring these into balance is essential for knowing the proper treatment which should be given to a patient.

All of these concepts are highly philosophical and abstract in nature and can be difficult to understand. However, in TCM, these concepts are most often thought of according to what they are believed to do and not according to what they are. That is, they are related to observable symptoms.



A. Multiple Choice. Answer the questions below by choosing A, B, C, or D.

1. The term *hot topic* refers to _____.
A. an issue dealing with the climate
B. an issue with strongly different opinions
C. an issue with one main opinion
D. an issue that makes people “hot” with anger
2. A *spell* is _____.
A. words with a magic effect
B. a period of time
C. a period of illness
D. when someone is allowed to rest for a time
3. In what TWO ways was medicine in the West similar to TCM before the mid-19th century?
i. Doctors believed that the human body was governed by humors.
ii. Doctors believed that a person became ill when things were out of balance.
iii. Doctors used medicinal herbs.
iv. Doctors used bleeding.
A. i., ii. B. ii., iii. C. iii., iv. D. i., iv.
4. Why might a person who has had moxibustion have small red marks on the skin?
A. Needles have been stuck into the skin.
B. Pressure has been applied to points on the skin.
C. A herb has been applied to the skin and the skin is sensitive to it.
D. Something has been burned near the skin.
5. A *blind test* is one where _____.
A. the people giving the test cannot see the results
B. the people giving the test do not know if the people taking the test are taking a medicine or a placebo
C. the people taking the test do not know if they are taking medicine or a placebo
D. none of the people either giving or taking the test know if the people taking the test are taking a medicine or a placebo

B. Complete the Chart. Complete the chart with words from the passage.

Traditional Chinese Medicine		
Theory	yin/yang	yin = (1) _____; female yang = (2) _____; male
	wuxing	the Five Elements Theory or (3) _____ parts of the body related to (4) _____; these are related to different phases of bodily processes understanding how to (5) _____ is essential for knowing the proper treatment for a patient
	meridian (Jingmai)	paths which <i>qi</i> uses to flow through our bodies <i>qi</i> = (6) _____ stored up in our organs and carried around the body to provide the energy we need to function
Diagnosis	examine the patient—the face, (7) _____, etc. listen to the patient’s voice and breathing; check for any odd smells ask about the patient’s symptoms, medical history, sleep, moods, etc. take (8) _____	
Treatment	Chinese herbal medicines	more than 13,000 substances, including plant roots, animal products, and minerals usually (9) _____ are mixed together based on a traditional recipe. This mixture is then soaked and boiled in water, and the water drunk as an infusion (10) _____—hot, warm, cool, or cold Five Flavors—spicy, sweet, bitter, sour, and salty
	acupuncture: thin needles which are placed into the skin (11) _____: the burning of the herb mugwort on or near the skin tuina: (12) _____ on specific areas of the body	

C. Answer the Questions. Use information from the passage to answer the questions below.

1. Why might there be so few studies on TCM remedies published in English?
2. What is the overall attitude of the author towards TCM?
3. Which kind of medicine would you prefer to use: TCM, Western medicine, or both? Why?

A photograph of Tu Youyou, an elderly woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a blue jacket. She is standing behind a podium with a blue cloth that features a circular portrait of a man. To her left, a man in a dark suit and glasses is partially visible. The background is dark.

New Hope in the Fight Against Malaria

Track 2

While most Chinese herbal medicines have not found a place in Western medicine, one great success story is artemisinin, which has become the primary treatment for malaria worldwide. Its discovery was the work of Tu Youyou and her team at the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Beijing.

Tu Youyou was born in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province. She graduated from Peking University Medical School in 1955, and then went to work at the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine. In 1967, the Chinese government started Project 523, which had the goal of finding a new treatment for malaria in order to help Vietnam where many soldiers were coming down with a strain of malaria that was resistant to traditional treatments. Tu was one of the first researchers chosen for this project, and later she became the head for the Chinese Herbal Medicine Group.

By 1971, researchers in Project 523 had tested more than 280,000 substances both from Chinese and Western medicine. They failed to find anything that worked effectively, causing Tu to start to doubt herself. It was at this point that Tu turned to ancient Chinese medical texts in order to look for a possible treatment. After going through more than 2,000

of them, she found the answer in a 1,600-year-old book called *A Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergencies* by Ge Hong, where an herb called *qinghao*—sweet wormwood—was suggested for fevers. Her team had some dried *qinghao* on hand, so they tried it, but found that it only worked in some cases. Later, they were able to get some fresh *qinghao*, but this also failed to have an effect. After rereading the recipe more carefully and looking at how Chinese herbal medicines were used in Ge Hong's day, Tu found the secret: Her team had boiled the *qinghao* to make the infusion, but this might have destroyed its properties. Rather than boiling the *qinghao*, they needed to soak it in cold water. They discovered that the infusion from this was effective for the treatment of malaria.

There was a long process between this discovery in 1971, the production of artemisinin as a medicine, and its acceptance and use worldwide as an effective treatment for malaria in 1979. Along the way, Tu took the lead in personally testing artemisinin on herself to make sure that it was safe. At the same time, many medical researchers and workers contributed to the drug's development. Today, it is thought that hundreds of thousands of lives are saved around the world through the use of artemisinin. Despite this success, Tu was almost unknown to the general public, and her contribution to the discovery and use of artemisinin went largely unrecognized. She first came to widespread attention in 2011, when she was given the Lasker Award for her work, but it was not until 2015, when she became the first Chinese researcher to win the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, that she became well-known to the general public.

Word Count: 508
Time: _____

