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# The Warriors of TCM

## Subduing the Brown Emperor

Text by Chuck Wheeler

Okay, I must first admit to my general ignorance about the details of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), but I do know it works and have relied on its low-impact holistic approach numerous times. It is said that between 2698 and 2596 BC the Yellow Emperor – Huang Di wrote the *Huángdì Nèijīng* 黄帝内经 known in English as *The Inner Canon of Huangdi*. In this work, the legendary Yellow Emperor established the tenets of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). TCM views the individual patient as a "microcosm within the macrocosm". The techniques of Traditional Chinese Medicine have been developed and refined over thousands of years.

In TCM, diagnosis is based on a holistic understanding of the inner kingdom of the human body, and the treatment of illness is based primarily on the differentiation of various syndromes. In a metaphorical sense, the elements of TCM are like warriors or sages, invited into your kingdom to rid it of troublesome invaders. Recently my inner kingdom suffered just such an invasion, and it was surmised that perhaps my Spleen Qi was sinking and I had a deficiency of Kidney Yang. Imagine my surprise and I just thought I had the runs.

Numerous expats have a supply chain of items which they believe are essential to their everyday survival. These may include mundane items such as favorite deodorant and dental floss to much needed prescription medications and disposable contacts. When traveling to China tourists are urged to bring, along with an electrical converter, common toiletries such as cold and digestive medications, lip balm, and other medicines. But these supplies are quickly depleted if you are a foreign expert or long-term resident. Just how many packages of Imodium A-D and Tylenol can you squeeze into two suitcases when packing for a move to China?

Most of you are unfortunately familiar with the affliction of travelers' diarrhea, which goes by many names, depending upon the country recently visited. To the best of my knowledge this common ailment has no corresponding colorful name in China, so after an exhausting siege of my inner kingdom I coined the bowling guts affliction – the "Brown Emperor" due to its merciless domination of my every waking minute. The Brown Emperor has a small but crucial domain – your bowels and digestive tract, and when he is in residence you suffer mightily from his abdominal tyranny. The cure can be far from simple when your supply of western medications has been depleted. When the Brown Emperor ascended, neither Pepto nor Kaopectate had I. The time had come to enlist the help of TCM.

To paraphrase Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*, the time has come to talk of many things, of Five Elements, Yin-Yang and Inner Heat. The goal of Chinese Traditional Medicine is to restore balance



to the human body. Just as the physical world is composed of land, sea and air, in TCM the human landscape is composed of Qi, Moisture and Blood. Qi is the animating force that flows through all things (defining Qi can take thousands of pages – but this is a magazine). Moisture protects and lubricates all tissue (water is wet). Blood is the basic underpinning of bones, nerves, skin, muscles and internal organs (blood is thicker than water).

I will just say that Taoism is the primary metaphysical foundation of TCM. And we can spend a lifetime learning of the Tao. So I will quote Lao Zi.

*The farther you go, the less you know.*

*An integral being knows without going,  
sees without looking, and accomplishes  
without doing.*

To avoid a misdiagnosis, I will not use the names of the medicines I used to put down the reign of terror of the Brown Emperor, because each individual needs to consult with a physician in order to have a proper analysis of their system. The TCM store is probably where most of you will purchase your medicines as they offer a large supply and consultation as well. These medicines are produced in many places throughout China. Doctors formulate a prescription based upon an elaborate system of observations. In a sense the entire body is used as a guide to finely tune the treatment for each individual. In this way, Chinese doctors take not only a holistic approach but are also more compassionate and willing to spend more time with their patients than their western counterparts.

The medicine needs to be taken regularly, and just like in America, some medicines are taken with food and some before bed. I took the small packets of TCM twice a day and the effect lasted longer and longer each time until after three days, the symptoms disappeared and the problem was solved. Many medicines may have an unfamiliar or unpleasant flavor – sorry no bubblegum, cherry or grape flavored medications like back home, but the flavor is more natural and has a certain magic of its own.

In the end (pun not intended – no really), I discovered the path to good health begins with the mind. To subdue the Brown Emperor took not only the mythical warriors of TCM but also a focusing of the mind and more than a fair share of faith in the curative powers. Just as in any martial struggle, the victor is the one who keeps a cool head and focuses his energy on victory. Traditional Chinese Medicine works wonders, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, and it has few of the possibilities for side effects of western medicine. From now on at the first sign of sickness or return of the Brown Emperor, I will start the fight with my ever increasing supply of TCM and use it to summon the warriors of Traditional Chinese Medicine.