Chinese and Western methods of Health cultivation

Talk on the occasion of the Opening of Camellia

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Yangsheng 养生 is a culture

Chinese yangsheng is unique to Chinese culture.
It is intimately and inextricably intertwined with all aspects of living including:

- Literature and philosophy of life
- Cuisine
- Meditation and qigong exercises
- Development of character
- Art and music
Yangsheng 养生 is the Cultivation of Life

- *Yangsheng* is about cultivating life to enjoy its full richness, with physical health, a peaceful mind, and a fulfilled spirit.

- In the *narrower* Chinese medical (TCM) sense, *yangsheng* is about achieving health and longevity, also known as “health preservation.”
Western Culture

There is no real equivalent of *yangsheng* in Western culture. Western medicine promotes health through diet, exercise and recreational activities.
Maslow: Western perspective of man’s needs

- In Western thought, a person’s needs are typically represented by Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs”
- There is a sixth dimension above self-actualization: “Transcendence” (has to do with religion and ethical altruism). Idea is not fully developed.
- Chinese *yangsheng* offers an alternative, more complete model which balances the needs and aspirations of the body, mind and spirit.
Yangsheng philosophies of ancient China

- **Taoists**: harmony with nature: “Go with the flow” 顺其自然
- **Confucius** prescribed character development 养性
- **Ji Kang** 稽康: cultivate the spirit 养神
- **Buddhism**: tranquility by eschewing earthly desires 空
- **The *Huangdi Neijing* (The Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Medicine)** integrated various approaches to yangsheng
Yangsheng culture 养生文化:
7 sages of the bamboo grove 竹林七贤
Ji Kang (嵇康)："I can live without food for one day, but not without music"
The ancients knew the *tao*, understood
The methods of *yin* and *yang*, and
Practised qigong exercises
Observed *moderation* in food and drink,
*Regularity* in living habits, and
Avoidance of *over-exertion*. They
Maintained *harmony* of body and spirit,
therefore enjoyed good health and a long life of 100 yrs.
Yangsheng Activities

Qigong and Taijiquan

琴棋书画
*qin qi shu hua:*
Music (zither)
Mind games (chess)
Calligraphy
Painting

Meditation
Are Western medicine and TCM compatible?

**Different emphasis**
- TCM emphasizes balance, smooth flows, and harmony with nature;
- Western medicine focuses on physiological functions
- TCM emphasizes mind and spirit;
- Western medicine pays attention to emotional stress without high emphasis

**Diets**
- TCM diet and habits are tailored to individual constitutions and environment: 应人天地.
- Western medicine tends to prescribe balanced diet applicable to all (“one size fits all”)
“Diseases of civilization”  
(Stephen Ilardi)

1. Many chronic diseases, including depression, cardiovascular disorders, diabetes and cancer, are the result of modern lifestyles.

2. After The Industrial Revolution man changed from hunter-gatherers to manufacturers and farmers (“radical environmental mutation”).

3. The brain’s “runaway stress response” (short-term) was replaced by long periods of stress (months, years).

4. Processed foods, limited exercise and lack of intimate social interaction) contributed further to decline.

5. **Solution:** Recapture good aspects of old lifestyles.

*The prescriptions of yangsheng lead us in the very much the same direction.*
Treating diseases that have not yet occurred
治未病

Sub-clinical illness (yajiankang 亚健康) No clinical indications of disease, but the person does not feel totally well. 80% of people are in this category (WHO). TCM regards the person as being unwell, having one or more syndromes

Yangsheng addresses this issue at two levels:

Avoid developing syndromes (e.g. avoid developing deficiency of yin in hot sweaty weather)
“Blue zone” lifestyles have uncanny similarity to those prescribed by *yangsheng*

**Blue zones:** Sardinia, Okinawa, Loma Linda, California, Costa Rica, Icaria, Greece

- Physically active but not necessarily with vigorous exercises
- Strong sense of community and belonging
- Low stress levels
- No magic diet.

**TCM *yangsheng***

- Qigong exercises emphasize, not cardiovascular fitness, but nurturing *qi* and its smooth flow
- Simple needs and regularity in living habits; this encourages closeness with community
- Avoid ambition for high office; reduces stress levels
- Diet must fit constitution and environment: no common right diet for all
Thank you!