



Pathways to Pregnancy Partner

THE ZHAI CLINIC

# UNDERSTANDING TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

The first of two articles by Dr Xiao Ping Zhai MATCM



**T**RADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE (TCM) is one of the world's most ancient medical systems. Still widely practiced, TCM encapsulates anatomy, physiology, preventive medicine and diagnosis. For thousands of years this distinctive, independent system has played a major role in maintaining the health of the Chinese people.

The Western world first came into contact with TCM during the 17th century when it was introduced by the Jesuits. The eminent English physician Sir John Floyer (1649-1734) was so impressed with a translation of an ancient Chinese work on the art of taking the pulse that he made a thorough

study of the subject: the earliest study of its kind on Chinese medicine in the West. He went on to devise the first ever pulse watch and also published two volumes of books based on his findings.

Chinese herbs such as Smilax China-Root were in vogue in 16th century Europe, but acupuncture didn't become known until the 17th century. In 1821 J M Churchill FRCS published the first account relating to acupuncture in Britain, marking one of the Western world's earliest contacts with TCM.

However, TCM tended to be looked upon unfavourably by many Western trained doctors who introduced modern Western medicine into China during the 19th century. In 1929 even the Chinese government tried to abandon TCM as unscientific. However, traditional Chinese medicine was firmly established and far from ceasing to exist, its practice continues to be disseminated throughout China and the world by way of associations and societies, books, journals, correspondence and teaching.

## MODERN TIMES

In 21st century China, official policy encourages TCM and modern medicine to work together. Clinicians and scientists continue to research the mysteries of TCM and explore its scientific worth. To this end, the 'development of traditional Chinese medicine and pharmacology' was written into the constitution of the People's Republic of China in 1982.

The development and achievements of TCM have drawn the attention and support of the World Health Organisation. In recent years, seven cooperative centres have been set up in China by WHO. In addition, China is cooperating with several Western countries in the research of TCM.

## WHAT DOES TCM OFFER TO REPRODUCTIVE MEDICINE?

Traditional Chinese herbs are rich resources worth exploring. Some have been found to be good for enhancing the body's own resistance and are of immunological significance, which is particularly valuable in reproductive medicine.

As a result, TCM has a long history of success in treating both male and female infertility problems. Apart from therapeutic measures such as acupuncture and other remedies already in use in the UK, some of its principles and theories such as its holistic approach and its way of treating certain kinds of infertility – including unexplained and degenerative condition infertility – are well worth while studying. The healing powers of herbs and acupuncture offer an effective route to improving chances of conception, whether used alone or in conjunction with modern assisted fertility treatments.

The second article in this series will examine the role of TCM in reproductive medicine, including diagnosis, treatment, potential side effects and the important interface between TCM and modern assisted fertility treatments. Dr Zhai will draw examples from a number of male and female case studies treated using herbal medication and/or acupuncture.

Meanwhile, Dr Zhai is happy to answer any questions you might have relating to the use of TCM in the treatment of male and female fertility problems, simply write to her at the address below.

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## FACTS AND FIGURES

- In China, there are now over 480,000 traditional medicine and pharmacology professionals in China, serving a population of 1.3 billion.
- There are 28 TCM universities and colleges in China, and the number of faculties has increased to 36.
- In the past 30 years, more than 70,000 professionals have been trained, together with more than 100,000 intermediary level staff.
- 11 higher education institutions and 79 medical schools are involved in the training of TCM.
- There are 61 independent research institutions in China and for the last 30 years more than 400 successful projects of scientific and technological achievement have been given recognition at Health Ministry level and above.
- The number of TCM hospitals above county level has reached 1500 in China, with 95 per cent of the 8000 county-level general hospitals having TCM departments or wards.