

The Four Golden Physicians of the Jin and Yuan Dynasty

In the time and realm of Jin and Yuan Dynasty (12th until 14th century A.D) four doctors who substantially influenced the further style of TCM appeared.

These four doctors came to different ideas why diseases would emerge in the body and which treatment therefore should be applied to cure the patient.

劉完素, *Líu Wánsù*, lived in the early Jin Dynasty and developed 'The Cooling School', 寒涼學派, *hán liáng xué pài*.

He seems to have witnessed a lot of febrile diseases and therefore had come to the conclusion, that no matter which climatic factor would attack and enter the body, it would eventually transform into heat.

These pathogenic factors, namely wind, dampness, summer heat, fire, dryness and coldness do not necessarily have warm properties. Obviously, coldness has not. Anyhow, it is mostly the case, that even after an attack of cold in winter a febrile disease breaks out and a heat syndrome appears. This counts even more for the other pathogenic factors and makes sense, when we think about the most typical febrile reaction of the immune system after it has been attacked by germs or viruses.

So *Líu Wánsù* would focus on the final development of the pathogenic factor, which would be heat and fire. Therefore, he primarily worked with cool and cold herbs.

張從正, *Zhāng Cóng Zhēng* (1156-1228 CE) assumed the nature of pathogens to be more complicated, but also believed that the most important aspect of treating a disease is to get rid of the intruder. He carefully stressed the difference between the upright, physiological *qì*, 正氣, *zhèng qì*, and the perverted (regarding the harmonious body functions) pathogenic *qì*, 邪氣, *xié qì*.

Contradicting those practitioners who claimed that one has only to strengthen 正氣, *zhèng qì* and it will then eject the intruder by itself, he believed that this would not work because tonifying drugs would never solely act on 正氣, *zhèng qì* but also on 邪, *xié qì*. Therefore first *xié qì* should be expelled.

Depending on the nature of *xié*, different ways to expel it were defined. *Xié* could be pathological fluids, phlegm, fire and heat, wind or coldness, which could reside in the upper, middle or lower *jiāo*. His style to remove these pathogens would be called 'The Attacking and Purging School', 攻瀉學派, *gōng xiè xué pài*.

汗法, *hàn fǎ*, literally meaning sweating method, would include all the methods to bring out the pathogen through the skin, mostly with sweat inducing herbs.

The emesis method, 吐法, *tù fǎ*, which mainly works through the stomach also includes sneeze inducing, hyper-salivation and tear inducing, which all apply to the upper burner.

Finally the draining method, 下法, *xià fǎ*, would include all methods which move down and out. Most important method of *xià fǎ* is purging but also draining water, inducing menstruation and moving *qì* downward.

A younger temporary of *Zhāng Cóng Zhēng* was 李东垣, *Lǐ Dōng Yuán* (1180 – 1251 CE). After a fatal illness of his mother he decided to become a doctor and study medicine. As a descent from a noble and rich family, *Lǐ Dōng Yuán* was able to follow one of the most famous doctors of the time from the start of his training, who's name was 张元素, *Zhāng Yuán Sù*.

Zhāng Yuán Sù was an unconventional spirit of the time. Most doctors would prescribe ancient formulas without touching the composition of herbs and would be only looking out for the symptoms passed down in the ancient books. *Zhāng Yuán Sù* instead, would try to understand each case individually.

Lǐ Dōng Yuán as well seemed unwilling to just copy somebody else, even his own master. Beside the fact, that he was a dedicated and gifted student, he came up with his own theories, which became known as 補土派, *bǔ tǔ pài*, 'The Earth Tonifying School'.

The Tonifying Earth School would develop around the idea, that the organs of the element earth-spleen and stomach-are the center of all functions of the body. When earth is strong, all other organs benefit.

As growing up during the Mongols conquering his dynasty, he witnessed his fellow people become sick and die of malnutrition, overwork and suffer mentally from hopelessness. Therefore, the most urgent task for him was to tonify the hurt organs of the earth element and soothe the mental pain of his patients. Treating first and foremost the earth element was a revolutionary idea then. Nowadays his school is very popular amongst modern practitioners.

朱丹溪, *Zhū Dān Xī* (1281-1358 CE) as the last of the four preceding doctors, integrated all perspectives which his predecessors provided into another fundamental school. While he saw the need to expell pathogens and the importance to tonify the middle he emphasized, that as a general rule, *yīn* is getting depleted and then unable to hold *yáng*. After some time, *yīn*, as the natural passive element, will always be dominated by active, striving *yáng*. The older a patient gets the more severe this problem becomes.

Because the deficiency of *yīn* is in the center of his school it is called 'The Yīn Nourishing School', 滋阴派, *zī yīn pài*.

Zhū Dān Xī considered the influence of emotions on physical health as very important and developed strategies to transform stuck emotions. He also made the case, that weird and complicated diseases tend to be caused by phlegm.

Nowadays, for application of TCM in our western society we can learn and benefit from all the insights of the four great doctors. We do not see that much acute infections any more in our TCM practices, because of the strength of western medicine in this field. However, often pathogens do not get completely removed or transform and dwell in the bodies of our patients. The chronic diseases which might follow out of this are very much calling for treatment in the style of *Líu Wánsù* and *Zhāng Cóng Zhēng*.

Lǐ Dōng Yuán's Earth School is very common in the western practice, as is *Zhū Dān Xī*'s Yīn Nourishing School. Usually after leaving the basic training in a western school for Traditional Chinese Medicine we are very much looking out for syndromes of *zàng* and *fǔ*. This makes us very open to the idea to tonify, when we see a chronic disease in our practice.

However, as popular *Lǐ Dōng Yuán*'s school is, by comparing the problems his patients had with those of ours, I doubt the comparability. *Lǐ Dōng Yuán* saw famine and despair. Our patients usually never starve and have all fundamental physical needs fulfilled. However, we study much and tend to overthink, which weakens the earth element. So I suspect our earth element to be overtonified by sweet and energy-rich foods, while simultaneously being exploited on a subtle level through mental overstrain. I would define this more a disharmony of the earth element than a weakness and therefore would tonify less, but try more to regulate the qì by means of herbs, acupuncture, physical activity and psychotherapy. Treatment of rheum and phlegm seems to be very promising in this case too. Which leads to *Zhū Dān Xī*'s methods.

Due to progress in nutrition and medicine, our patients become older than ever before and therefore prone to yīn-deficiency. *Zhū Dān Xī* has offered strategies and prescriptions which are perfectly suited for this problem. And indeed, they are used very much in our western TCM-clinics.

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Date:

24th of October, 2018

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