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FAR EAST REPORTER \$3.00 PER YEAR MAUD RUSSELL PUBLISHER

PO BOX 1536 NEW YORK NEW YORK 10017

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Reporter

CHINESE
TRADITIONAL
MEDICINE

Conversations And Observations

By

Rewi Alley

And

An Old Chinese Doctor



FAR EAST REPORTER

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Conversations
And Observations

on

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

BY

Rewi Alley and an Old Chinese Doctor

FAR EAST REPORTER INTRODUCTION

In 1973 Rewi Alley, in his book "A Highway And An Old Chinese Doctor", writes about a long overland trip he made in 1941, during the Japanese War against China. This was a trip from Kunming in the south-west province of Yunnan to Northwest China. Many people were then fleeing from the Japanese-occupied coastal areas to unoccupied areas in inland China. On this trip Rewi met a Chinese doctor whose family had fled from Nanking; the doctor was taking four of his grandchildren, three boys and a girl, ages six to twelve, from their uncle's (the doctor's second son's) home in Kunming to their own family's (the doctor's eldest son's) home in Lanchow, Kansu Province.

This FAR EAST REPORTER presentation consists of excerpts from the book, excerpts solely confined to some of the conversations and observations on Chinese medicine. These conversations give background to Chinese medicine as it is now being practiced in the People's Republic of China; they illuminate the growing Western interest in Chinese medicine -an interest which began with (or was stimulated by) the popular excitement over acupuncture and tai-chi-chuan, but is extending to serious professional observation and study by increasing numbers of Western doctors, and even to cooperative study by Western and Chinese medical and scientific personnel.

The details of how Rewi happened to meet this doctor and his grandchildren, how their paths during many eventful days crossed, broke and resumed, are delightful glimpses of travel in unoccupied China during those war-time days.

Rewi writes, "I had been looking over Industrial Cooperatives in Yunnan and was proceeding to Kweiyang and then on to Chungking. In those days when one set out to travel from one part of unoccupied China to another the process that brought the best, and sometimes the only, results was to go to a trucking station and from the crews of the trucks parked around, loading up, undergoing repairs or just waiting cargoes, make enquiry as to how much they would charge for taking to the required destination. Sometimes, at irregular intervals, there were public busses running; these, as a rule, were simply over-crowded trucks...If commercial trucks were relatively new and their crews looked efficient, they were usually a much better proposition. So I went and strolled up and down a line of trucks of different makes and ages, making preliminary estimates of the chances.

"Alongside one of these trucks stood an old man and four children; and as I passed I heard the one word, 'Chungking' mentioned several times.....When the old man and his children had concluded their bargaining I stepped in and asked if I could get a passage too. The driver agreed to take me."

Rewi had many conversations about Chinese medicine with the doctor and days of observing the health-building, character-forming relations between the grandfather and his four grandchildren.

The doctor said that he had always wanted to visit Kansu and see the many medical herbs that came from there. He had already seen many in Yunnan that were very good; and, a traditional-style doctor could always support himself - there certainly would be many people in Lanchow who would call him in professionally; and then, the war would be ended so that he could go back to his shop and practice in Nanking.

The old doctor was sure he would go back. Rewi asked him why he was so sure. He laughed and said

that he was afraid that Rewi as a foreigner would only smile at his explanation - for most foreigners thought they were more scientific than to believe in the positive and negative in everything - the "yin" and the "yang", the interchange of forces, balance, physical vibrational forces like electricity, telegraphy, radiology, or what you would. The Kuomintang Government was out of tune with the people. China was working up to become a really new and resurgent people. The 8th Route Army, he mused, - yes, they understood theory and practice. They were a part of the people and brought balance to them. No theory could really be understood without practice, and they practiced what they preached.

The doctor spoke much of the difficulties that the refugees, coming into the interior, had in trying to find ways of keeping themselves - especially when so many of them were intellectuals without a trader's ability to get along. But, he said, his own doctoring prospered reasonably, for, as he modestly said, "People paid by results, and I make them well!"

To this Rewi said he knew nothing about Chinese medicine and would be very grateful if the doctor would explain something of it to him. "I rather thought at that time it was mostly just so much superstition and should not be taken seriously. Only Western medicine was science to me then. Yet I thought it would be interesting to hear what he had to say."

The doctor's background of study in England and practice in his family's pharmaceutical and traditional medical profession served to give Rewi an informed, in-depth view of China's then traditional medical practice as it was being affected by Western medicine.

This old doctor was not only aware of and knowledgeable about Western medicine, but could be objectively critical of aspects of China's traditional medicine. "In the past our traditional doctors have been part of the prevailing economic system. Selfish gain has made

them fool people with superstitious thought, incantations that people fear. It has always been better to have a patent cure of one's very own that is a dead secret and which folks have to pay dearly to get; then again, many old doctors were intellectuals of the prevailing type, too often divorced from practice, so that it was easy for them to go on to quite irrational paths a long way removed from the straight, broad way forward - to wander over the hills of sheer illusion."



Rewi Alley
1974

Conversations
And Observations
on
TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

The Old Doctor's Observations in General

The old doctor was quite indignant that Chinese medicine should have been called a system of philosophy rather than true medicine. "They don't know its true nature - we try to work in accordance with known physical laws. We cannot explain them any more than you can 'explain' electricity - we too know that there are positive and negative values and that they must be in the right harmony before there is health or any other good thing. But some modern medicine men think that their pills are the beginning and end of all. I am not saying that pills are of no use; they may often be of very great value. But we have to understand what we are trying to do with people, why they are well or sick, what controls their nervous systems and how."

Rewi asked the old doctor, "Did you ever feel that you got to understand England?" The doctor answered, "No." "England was not easy to understand. There seemed to be a great desire to hide everything under a mask of conventions - everything unpleasant and sick safely hidden away in hospitals, jails, lunatic asylums, institutions - people so shut off from each other. To me at that time they seemed heavily clothed in dull, ugly clothing and ever wearing an inscrutable mask of calculated politeness or bored indifference. Yes, inscrutable is the word to describe

how they appeared to me. Faces of old and young in public places seemed set, solemn and a bit grim. In our Chinese country life it has not been like this. Surely we have evolved different standards in many things - with us here everything is out for inspection - the happiness, the misery of our people can be seen easily. We can know each other so easily."

He went on: "Kipling was the the favorite upper-class poet when I was in England, and I remember what he said about herb doctors in his so superior way -

'Anything green that grew out of the mould
Was an excellent drug for our fathers of old.'

And I immediately thought of the cures our family found from mould. There are many principles of conflicting opposites followed in Chinese medicine. As one scientist has said, 'We just have to look into nature around us and discover them in it. Much will be found from moulds if we look into them. There are probably cures for most of our diseases spread out all around us'."

Once when Rewi asked him if he had ever been consulted medically in England, he steered the conversation around to Chinese medicine again. "Once there was a man who came to see me when I was a student in England. His son had a mental disease. The family was rich and the man asked me anxiously if I remembered anything that my father did to help such cases. He was quite prepared to take his son to China to try. I said I could remember but one case - where my father had told the young man to go back to a village, and with bare feet, go and attend slow-moving buffaloes, and learn to play a flute. I don't know if he gave him medicine too; but anyway, the young man came back a year later, quite well again. Then I tried to explain the theory of balance to him, but he could not understand and went off shaking his head."

The doctor snorted a bit, and went on "Really, we all, doctors of every kind, know so very little about real medicine, that it is idle boasting to say we do. The more we find out, the more do we realize how much we do not understand. Some treatments bring good results - some doctors understand more than other doctors do; but there is too much arrogance and pride. We shall never properly understand it until we face life as a whole. Medical research is excellent and we need more of it, but it must broaden out. I am sure that there are many great truths just around the corner. Chinese medicine has discovered much, and even cured many millions of Chinese people of sickness down through the generations. But a great deal of science must be combined, the vision of a great many people widened, if we are really to get to the bottom of things. In order to get to the root of the problem of health our doctors have to have the kind of training that gives them more ability to think, understand and analyze, that assists them to like people and want to help. I have seen so many professional people, in China and in the West, who are just like puppets going through life without a single creative thought except ideas on how to make money - doctors who are nothing more than patent medicine agents, people simply being taught to love money and grab it, or to love power and seize it. We cannot say that these are really healthy people. They have shut themselves away from the sun and the wind, the hills and the waters, and have built prisons for themselves and others too. They keep prisons closed with a grim fanatical intentness.

"It is a wonder, really, how they manage to keep alive as long as they do. I am quite sure that if people understood better the powers that are latent within them, they would master all sickness, old age, and even death. They could live just as long as they wished in health and in strength. When we understand the human mind better we shall understand this. If we wished, we could conquer the world."

"'Chinese' and 'Western' Medicine"? or just "Medicine"?

The old doctor tells Rewi, "I know that you will smile at me, in the same way that I would smile at some of the beliefs that strike me as being amusing when I hear people who are so very sure of all their Western ideas of medicine talking together. Maybe this is because the Chinese doctor has had such a long tradition. Western medical concepts change very rapidly, so they cannot all be right. Surely, I know that certain metals have an influence on certain diseases, but I do not believe in the making of metallic compounds for each and every ailment.

"Chinese medicine teaches that the various organs have different natures akin, say, to the different natures of fire and water. The harmony of the 'yin' and the 'yang' elements, the proper balance of the nervous system, that is to say 'between excitation and inhibition' is always the thing to be sought after. So depending on where the disease is, the prescription must be written and the treatment applied. We say in general for the prevention of disease, do not allow continual mental upsets, take food and wine in moderation, plan the work and physical exercise for each day, find the right environment with sun, water, air, and get all the rest the body needs. These surely are about the same ideas that modern Western medicine has; yet they were given to us in very early Chinese medicine by those who had dug deep down into the origins of things. Do not forget that it was the old alchemists in early Han times of over two thousand years ago who first made gold from mercury. Not a very simple thing to do, even in our day. So, you see they actually did much research and there was a scientific basis for much of their method. What they learnt went over the old Silk Road to, and enriched itself from, the Arab world, helping to form the basis for Western medicine also. So I am forever saying there is really only one medicine."

The Doctor Talks About Children

"It seems to me that there are a few firsts to be observed, for we have to begin with children. If we put any nagging tabu strain on children - especially regarding natural, functional things - we immediately start producing a mentally unhealthy condition. A child is so very close to nature, and it is easy to make a distorted picture in the mind which will soon have its effect on boldily functions. The nervous system will be thrown out of balance and the vicious cycle of disease started which prematurely ages and tires so that by the time a person should be using his life's experiences in the best possible way, he is foolishly and gloomily preparing to die.

"Parents and teachers should, in the interests of good health all around, keep the curbing of children down to those things that make them able to understand that they are not the centre of everything, but are working members of a group that has to get on together. For the rest, let them express themselves as naturally as they can. Mental slaps are usually much more lasting and hard to take than just physical ones, so they should be used sparingly and with some thought."

The grandfather's basic philosophy about healthy attitudes toward children came out beautifully as he watched his grandchildren react to their experiences of war-time travel.

The family stopped for a few days with relatives in Chengtu - well-to-do bourgeois relatives Lao Da, the twelve year old, the eldest, of the grandchildren, was badly influenced by this association with his rich city cousins; he became boastful, critical, and show-off. Rather than admonishing this growinly unsocial lad, the doctor watched, patiently and knowingly - watched the boy get interested and then creatively involved in repair jobs as trucks broke down on the road - par for the course for trucks of ancient vintage in war-time

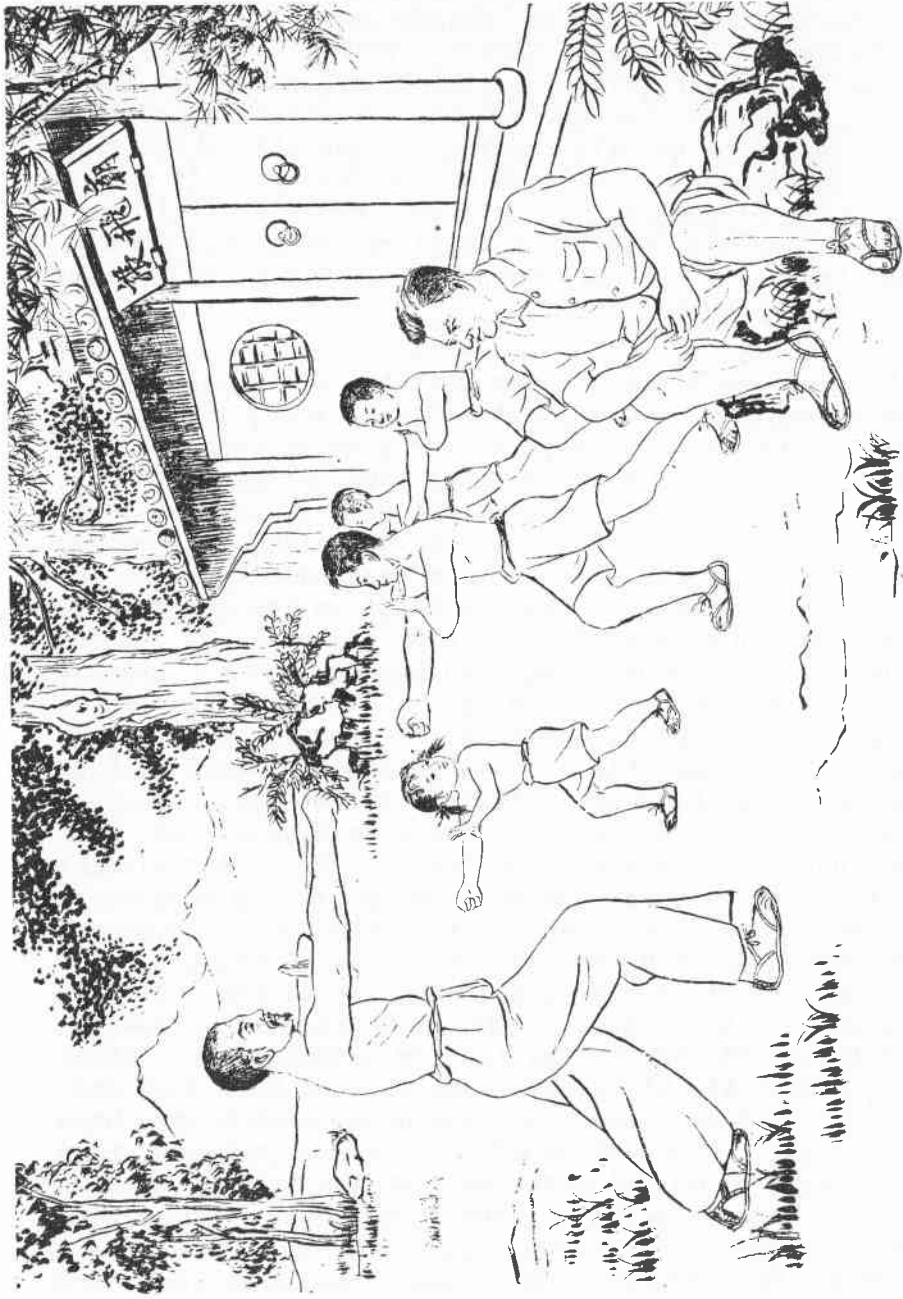
China. One one such occasion Lao Da so gloried in helping the repairs that he deliberately smeared himself with oil - he was now a mechanic's aid! And he found a new friend in the driver's assistant who explained things to him and gave Lao Da a general idea of the principles of a broken crank shaft that had to be extracted and filed true. The old man watched approvingly and said, "This is just what Lao Da needed - a friend like that. Youth learns quicker with other youth just a bit older than himself."

One day the grandfather's patience with Lao Da got thin as the boy, forgetting to look after the other 3 children near a river, began showing off by swimming in the rapids, enjoying being egged on by some soldiers standing on the shore. The old doctor called him out and soon Lao Da was standing in front of his grandfather, his satisfied smile dying from his face as he met his grandfather's steady eye. "You should have been looking after your young brothers and sister instead of swimming in the swollen river." Then the grandfather took him and put him over his knee and gave him a good, old-fashioned spanking. When Rewi tried to comfort him later as he started to cry, the boy said "No, it did not hurt, but what is bad is that grandfather is getting weaker as he gets older, and I am afraid that he will not live long; when he spanked me last year it really hurt - now today..."

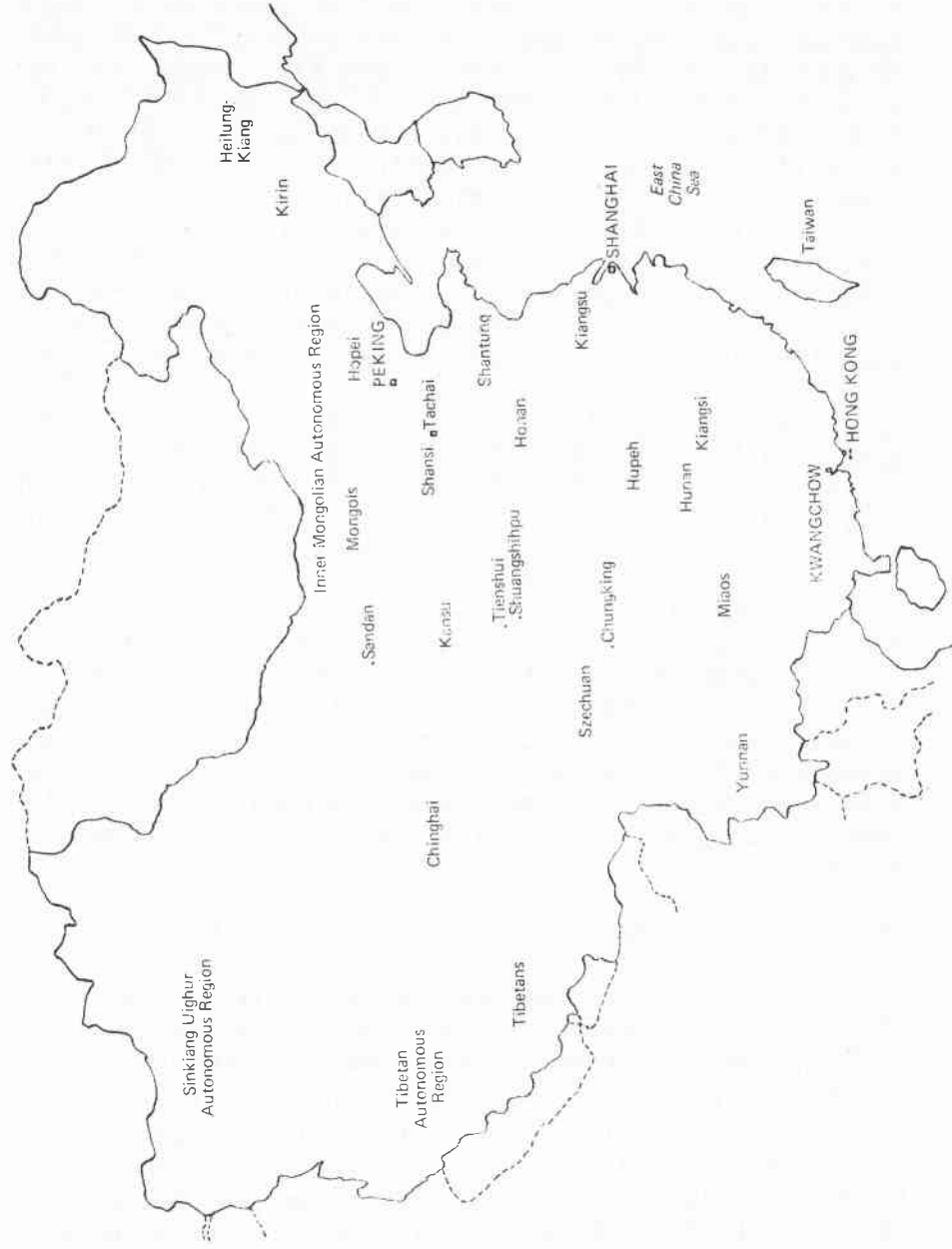
Later the old doctor said to Rewi, "It was good for him and good for me. That is one thing you have learned about Chinese medicine; it is the principle of release of tension. We had been getting too tense in Chengtu, and Lao Da was being led around by some cousins who filled him with a whole host of bad ideas.... That is the next thing about medicine - there is a positive and a negative chart - as it were - for every child. A child's friends' charts have to fit in with his somehow. The Chengtu boys, to put it mildly, had more 'yang' or positive over-balance even than our Lao Da. Chinese medicine always aims at balancing the opposing forces and bringing in harmony. You see, that boy had to have some of the over-balancing 'yang' taken off him; he was becoming too anti-social to live with.

"The younger, the second grandson, is different. It would be no use ever to spank him; he must be built-up, talked to quietly and encouraged. They are all different. They have different values of 'yin' and 'yang', in their different stages, and naturally these also change with the environment. In each stage they need opposites to help them; and especially while they grow up, they need the love of the family. If Lao Da did not feel assured in his heart that I had full affection for him, and if he hated me, this last dose of medicine would not have helped him. Nor would it have done me any good either!"

Rewi asked the old man whether in his view as a doctor children should be heavily clothed, or whether they should be encouraged to run without clothes. The doctor pointed to a beach where some refugee children were playing. "Well, you see those! if they had been clothed like the rich people of the cities clothe their children, they could never have been able to stand the hardship they have. The sun helps to keep them alive. They grow up more healthy in body and mind by being able to run together like that through their early years. No child is mentally healthy if he is self-conscious without his clothes on. Our country people intuitively know this. These children of ours will be healthier, with fewer colds and better chests through the Lanchow winter we are going into because of the good sunning we are getting here. The old Confucian people of the upper-classes have brought up more weedy, tubercular children than enough, with their incessant over-dressing, the real motive for which was to show they were different from and superior to the ordinary people. But I know that the pressures on middle-class people can be very heavy, and few families can stand out against its silly fashions, decreed with much narrow-minded fanaticism. All the same, when I have been able to get the clothing off my children and see them playing, with an old straw hat for the tiger-heat days only, I have felt that I have been doing my best for them as a doctor. They look good and civilized to me. So very often patients were brought to me covered with rash which was simply due to being so heavily clothed that neither sun nor air could ever get at their skin."



Tai-chi-chuan for the children



One day the doctor asked Rewi, "What do you think of split pants for children? Do they shock you?" Rewi answered that he thought them very scientific and nice to look at - "every one likes to see all they can of children, anyway; and then they do not smell of stale urine like the ones in the sewn-up pants do." The doctor evidently liked the answer, saying that he asked the question because of some mission women who had said that they were "disgusted" because they showed the "parts" of children. He had gotten a great deal of fun listening to conversations in English from the prim and proper old maids who traveled on trucks, never thinking that the old man in his homespun would understand them.

The doctor went on, "It is good for children to grow up without stupid religious superstitious tabus. It is just too easy for simple child minds to absorb such, and very bad for their health if they do. Fancy telling a child that he loses face if someone sees his body! How disgusting a mental state! There is a curious opposite here - if we think too much of our bodies and everything concerned with them, then it becomes an obsession. Often the rich try to grab health like they grab gold - there is nothing else in life but ministering to the body, worrying about it incessantly, pampering it, and finally dreading that it be touched or even seen by any one else. - making a sacred cow of it, Such thinking is the father and mother of disease, mental and physical."

What Makes For Healthy People

"Any doctor who has been trying to cure people knows that it is the power of the mind which can control much sickness; and the power of the mind over bodily functions in a natural and easy way is perhaps one of the secrets of good health. Speaking broadly and generally, if one can keep his interests, work and produce, get to like as many people intimately as possible and make their problems something he has an interest in helping to solve, he usually keeps pretty healthy. When he worries over how much money he has to make, then he and every one around him is sick. One silly thing leads to another. People pile layer on layer of expensive clothes they

do not need; they shut the air away from their bodies, they never condition their children to any kind of hardship, they take away struggle from them, never let them do anything for themselves or expect them to do things for others. To hold that kind of thing together they even work themselves to death. They fight desperately for power and trample the flowers at their feet. Every glutinous feast they attend is with the object of seeing someone, or influencing some one to help them to make more money - trying to do the other man down. There is no right relation between them and the people around them, especially the people who produce wealth - for the rich are frightened that the poor will want to take from them. And they look at other people with money to see how they in turn can make money out of them. Doctors are prostituted - for an old medical doctor like me must get some of their money to keep alive; the little the poor people can give does not help so much with the style a doctor is expected to keep up."

"When people have the right way of looking at things they will live much longer. Really there is no need to get old so quickly, but so many have become prematurely so through backbiting, jealousy, and other emotional stresses, and above all through the hunt to live better than their neighbors by making profit from the misery of others, and, by the mass of anti-social things we see around us."

The old doctor went on: "You know everything vital in our world passes on some of its vitality to others around. The more selfish a man becomes the more he reduces his body to become a passive instrument. To be whole people we must live in our environment and in each other's hope for better things."

The doctor said that the obtaining of mastery over one's self was a combination of letting one's self go, and holding one's self; tension and release coupled with an interest in what could be done with life, an overriding interest that would not permit halting, and which had challenge ever before it.

The Doctor Treats Sick Travelers

Sweating and Fasting As A Cure. At one village where the truck stopped to recharge a battery there was a sick worker who had not eaten for a couple of days; he was lying in a corner of a dark room. The doctor looked at him and said, "The sickness has already gone. He has cured himself. Get some one to wash his bedding - it is wet with sweat - and give him some more bedding for tonight and move him out under the tree outside tomorrow. He will certainly want to eat so give him some rice gruel then. Do not bother him today. Just rub off all the sweat with a hot towel and rub him with a little alcohol I will give you; give him plenty of boiled water to drink, with a little of this in it" - and he wrote down a prescription for the local medicine shop to fill. "Actually," he said, "the fasting and sweating cured him. He automatically did the best thing possible for himself. The medicine I have given him will just reduce his fever and assist toward the appetite he will have tomorrow. The rub down his friends will give him will probably help a good deal more; then the sun and fresh air of a summer's day will do the rest." He was right, for when Rewi enquired of him, the next time he came to the place, he found that the cure had been complete, but that the patient was still persisting in his belief that it was entirely due to the medicine the wonderful doctor had handed out to him.

Pulse-Taking Acupuncture Tai-chi-chuan. Rewi asked about the pulse-taking. The doctor said, "The truck has a pulse - you ask the driver" - for the driver had been saying, just before some bearings burnt out, that he felt something was going to happen. "The earth has its pulse too, if you could register it. You cannot know much about Chinese medicine unless you can get in tune with the patient's vibrations and see where the trouble is."

A refugee student from a once well-to-do Peking family was found lying in a guest house, sick, and with his foot twisted as a result of a truck accident. The doctor felt his pulse - old Chinese doctors think that there is a pulse for various parts of the body, that

the vibrations of every organ need to be balanced. The young student had worked himself into a good deal of nervous excitement and could not sleep well. So the doctor took out his needles and after sterilizing them properly, inserted them, one on each side of the back of the neck, and two on each side of the lumbar region, and used moxa, which burnt against the needles, heated them. A plaster was put on the patient's twisted foot while the old man took two big wax-sealed balls which enclosed herbs stuck together with peach tree gum; he removed the encircling wax and dissolved the herbs in a mug of hot water; this was for the sick man to take for the influenza he had contracted. After removing the needles and rubbing the patient down with hot towels, he left him lying under his mosquito net and left word to have a bowl of hot rice congee given him when he woke up.

For four days the needles were used - with the patient sleeping soundly each night. The old man said, "Yes, needles do produce a very deep sleep in many people. A lot can be done with the expert use of needles by those who have the experience and the feel of how to use them intelligently."

On another truck was a sick man whose son asked the doctor for help. The old doctor did some pulse feelings, and ran his hands over the patient's body; then he gave the patient a mixture of herbs, telling him to rest, keep warm at night and to have his son rub his hands and feet. He said he would do some acupuncture in the afternoon which would adjust matters and make for a deep sleep.

Needles and Arthritis. The doctor said he had much success with his needles in treating many arthritic patients - entailing much patience for both doctor and patient. He did not feel that cold or wind caused arthritis - they only made it more painful.

The doctor asked Rewi what he thought of acupuncture; Rewi replied that he had a bad build-up against it; the supercilious Westerners he had first lived with

in Shanghai were always laughing at it, quoting it as evidence of crass superstition; and using it to demonstrate how degenerate the Chinese were with their medicine, pointing to a human figure in a Chinese drug store with points for needles as proof of such debasement. The old man laughed and said that surely there was little understanding; He went on to say that of course there were some people who played at being doctors, for gain, and who knew little about acupuncture; they used dirty needles and had bad practices which did harm; this was as quacks do with any medical practice - they do not try to understand it. But there is sound science in the effort to tone up the nervous system and make it operate better; and there are many diseases, especially rheumatism and lumbago, which usually respond swiftly to the treatment. It is inexpensive and has brought relief to countless millions of people through the years.

Tai-chi-chuan. This is a form of Chinese boxing which is a series of exercises designed to bring all movements, slow as a rule, under a coordinated mental control. The doctor was a great believer in it, as a help toward health, especially for young-old people who lead a pretty active life and need to relax their muscles, and get a grip on themselves afresh. He thought the Swedish exercises of foreign schools were alright perhaps if people were young enough and were living too sedentary a life, needing exercise, but for strengthening the nervous system, for people of both sexes and all ages, he recommended tai-chi-chuan.

Tai-chi-chuan, the doctor said, was something that some day would be discovered by the West and then all around the world people will be doing it just as they will be having acupuncture. It appeared from his description that movements went in circles of various kinds. Balance must be maintained and the strength that goes with the slow movement, likened, he said, to the "chewing of food". Heads must be kept erect and buttocks in, when balance is taken on one leg, almost like that of a ballet dancer; then sweeping movements from the waist - long and free. He thought it a valuable treatment in many diseases, especially high blood pressure. He recommended it especially as a

remedy against boils and skin troubles of children; he thought that children should learn it because it helped a lot in controlling effort, and when they became middle aged the habit would be with them. In fact, as he went on, there seemed almost nothing that it would not help if it was done regularly. It was like a piece of music played by members of the whole family together; and he felt that the people who had originally thought out the system had found some really fundamental truths.

Some Medicine Sources: Panthers Tigers Deer Foxes

When they saw some people carrying a dead panther the doctor said that panthers, like tigers, are valuable for medicine. "Every part of the tiger or panther is useful, though I do not think all are equally so. Certainly some parts of the bone are good for rheumatism when steeped in alcohol with other herbs; the testicles are good for scrofula. With regard to other animals - deer give good medicine, as do foxes; deer horn is good for tonic, especially for the heart. Of course Western medicine has given liver for vitamin A and knows too about the vitamins in eggs; old Chinese medicine has been using them to cure vitamin-lacking sicknesses for a long time. So, by our old methods we have discovered a great deal; and now as we come into the world of electronics we shall see, perhaps, that our ideas of a balanced vibrational make-up, positive and negative, do have some significance."

"Many animals, fish and reptiles, minerals, herbs, as well as the seasons, environment and so on, have something that could be used to deal with different varieties of diseases. It was easy to laugh at the grinding up of dried scorpions mixed with some mineral and perhaps different kinds of herbs. Such selections originally were not made in a haphazard way. The values of the various ingredients had been carefully worked over by the observant doctors of the past, tested and compounded. The main thing always was to bring the opposing forces into harmony, especially in the nervous system, which of course, governs all. If this was done properly and completely, the control over health was sure and certain."

Chinese Vitamins Contribution to the West. The doctor pointed to a conscript soldier lad resting by the roadside with enormous legs swollen with oedema. "He has beri-beri, a vitamin BI deficiency. At the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, a thousand years ago, Chen Tsang-chi wrote on the dangers of polished rice. Then there are things like licorice, rhubarb, ampor, aloes, cinnamon, epjedra (Ma Huang), Kaolin and so on that have come to Western medicine from the Chinese for so long that their origin is perhaps forgotten. Surely, many of our old vitamin-bearing substances are outlandish as compared with a nicely bottled extract. But they have cured a lot of people for a very long time." It was something for those early scientists to find that Chaulmoogra oil was useful in leprosy, that kaolin was good for dysentery, and so on. And, they invented smallpox inoculation.

Rewi Questions The Old Doctor

About Surgery. Rewi asked the old doctor why it was that so many branches of medicine, for example, surgery, had not been developed at all - when in the Han times, two thousand years ago, surgery had no doubt been the most advanced in the then known world. The doctor answered, "Greedy militarists, and their scholarly gentry flatterers, together with bureaucratic officialdom, halted the march of science. Old tabus grew and new ones were invented. The thing froze especially after Han To was killed when he wanted to perform an operation on Tsao Tsao, the King of Wei. The idea took hold that medicine should not run the risk of harming, even if it did not cure. Medical families found it easier to get paid by their clients for keeping them well rather than coming in when they broke a leg or got shot with some projectile."

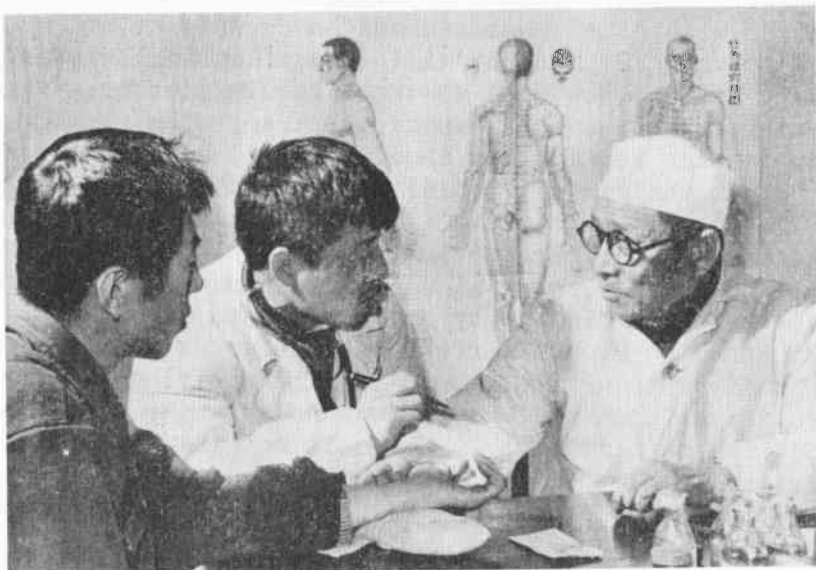
Later Rewi wrote, "We do not know what was the anesthetic Han To used when he carried out his spectacular operations - the operations that later-day Confucianism banned. It was a white powder that frothed when put with the wine with which it was administered orally.

About Freud. Rewi asked the doctor if he had ever heard of Freud. "Yes, truly. Our home was for many years a place my sons have brought back the currents of new thought that have made impact on college life, and we have had much discussion. There was a period when the ideas of Freud were very much argued about. Then came Marx and Lenin and other great social thinkers. None of these seemed strange or foreign to us. The ideas of Marx and Lenin fitted well into our understanding. The genius of the Chinese people lies in their collective ability to do things. With regard to Freud, we felt that most old Chinese intuitively understood the basis for emotional things; but they did not have the same fear of sex as the tabu-ridden West had." The various narrow interpretations of Freud that followed, with all their labels, did not seem to make much sense to him. "After all, the Chinese people down through all their generations have found out a great deal about living."

Positive and Negative Principles. Rewi asked the doctor to "Tell me more about these positive and negative principles you say control us." "Living," said the old man, "if taken rightly is simple enough. There are many combinations of opposites that go to make up a person. Such a person develops best if he or she fits in with other combinations necessary to them at each stage. Environment will change combinations. All boldly make-up responds to these two influences, so cunningly interwoven. Working out a proper combination is like working out an algebraical equation; never forget that in all positive there is negative, and in all negative, positive. I may be a good doctor and get a cure simply by putting my hand on a person, massaging a little, so that he will at once say that he feels better. Massage by another person may have no good effect. By another who has the power of giving off that particular element - confidence plus vibration, maybe that the sick person needs - the result may sometimes be immediate. There is nothing mystical or spiritual in it. It is just plain naturalistic science. No real science can be developed without an un-

derstanding of what constitutes the underlying forces, or at least some recognition of them, - of the fact that 'yang' is in 'yin' and 'yin' is in 'yang', in varying degrees in every one. If we could understand these two forces correctly, we would surely be complete masters of life in all its forms. There would be no sickness. And I feel always that the key to true understanding lies in some very simple things we have overlooked. It entails a completely new approach. The way religions develop, codes, tabus - these are all too often creations of undeveloped, greedy or cunning minds, their sickness. We have to try to think past all of these."

And the old man went on: "Maybe the human body contains the essentials for the cure of all diseases, and maybe, even of regeneration of life itself. We will discover this only when we have such regard for the sufferings of man, that the creative minds of not a few thousand doctors, but maybe a million or two, will discard old ideas and build on a more scientific foundation than we have ever tried to use in the past. There are a host of things in Western medicine, but perhaps it will be from the angle of Chinese medicine that the most startling breaks will be made."



A western-trained doctor (center) and a traditional Chinese doctor (right) discuss a patient's pulse in diagnosis.

From CHINA RECONSTRUCTS, July 1973

CONCLUSION

These random conversations between Rewi and the doctor give an enlightening picture of traditional medicine in China. Here was a traditional practitioner, not unfamiliar with modern Western medicine, demonstrating something of the wealth of China's long-accumulated medical wisdom. "After all," he said, "the Chinese people down through all their generations have found out a great deal about living." In many respects Chinese medicine was far ahead of ancient and medieval Western medicine and made many now recognized contributions to Western medicine. But, says the old doctor, "We have a lot to learn from Western medicine just as they from us. There is very much to be collected in China on this subject, for the good of all people. Surely, our terminology is different; this makes mutual understanding not so easy. But the good brains will get together despite this."

"Yin" and "Yang" may sound outlandish to Westerners - until one realizes how utterly modern is the content of these terms as applied by the old doctor-- "positive and negative", "tension and release", "balance of forces", "opposing forces", "harmony". Is there not revealed a scientific kinship in these two approaches to medicine and health?

Among China's 400,000 to 500,000 traditional doctors this old doctor was not unique. There were thousands whose medical philosophy was akin to his; doctors who practiced in terms of balancing of forces, in terms of the whole of life, in terms of harmony, in terms of using the natural environment as a healing factor. Otherwise, how explain the ease with which the People's Government, coming to power in 1949, so smoothly integrated the traditional medicine of China with modern Western medicine?

"There is no such thing as 'Chinese' Medicine and 'Western' Medicine". There is just Medicine."

POSTSCRIPT

Thirty years after this 1941 trip with the doctor and his grandchildren Rewi Alley writes, "Since then there has been the liberation and a new China has emerged. With liberation great stress has been laid on the health of the people, while medical science has looked around China and at the achievements of old Chinese medicine as an ally in meeting popular requirements... Things the old man dreamed of have actually come into being already. The undoubted values of acupuncture for many ailments have been demonstrated. The liaison between the two schools of medicine is going ahead fast and the whys and wherefors examined with a great deal of intensity, so that it can confidently be foretold that much in the way of the new methods will evolve swiftly as a result. As the old man would say, 'This means much to world medicine as a whole.' The really thoughtful research into the whole business of Chinese medicine will probably bear increasing results. The scientific organization of society, and the stress on analysis and basic understanding will clear away, into the dustpan of the past, the unscientific attitudes which have halted so many branches of medicine. The true understanding of the whole man that the doctor with the bigger all-around vision will have, will surely make for happier generations to come, not only in China, but throughout the whole world of tomorrow.

NOTE

The quotations from "A Highway And An Old Doctor" in this Far East Reporter issue are less than a fourth of the material in the book. In addition, Rewi Alley has lengthy historical details on traditional medicine and much significant information about current medical practice in the People's Republic of China.

The book "A Highway and An Old Chinese Doctor" can be purchased from China Books & Periodicals' stores in San Francisco, Chicago and New York. 100 pages, 7 illustrations. Price \$2.50

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May 1974

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