

Folk and Traditional Medicine: Terminology Problems

In our days three types of medicine are known: folk healing, traditional medicine and scientific medicine. But sometimes understanding of distinctions between folk healing and traditional medicine and their nature are rather different: from the opinion that it is a distinction without a difference up to certainty that it is scientific medicine that is really ‘traditional’ (because it is habitual), that’s why all other kinds of medicine should be refer to ‘non-traditional’.

However every one of these three types of medicine has specific peculiarities — different philosophical bases and sources, methods and remedies, features of development and spreading, figures and training.

Folk healing is the earliest historically. It emerged alongside the emergence of humans. Folk healing has no any philosophical bases and includes a combination of means and methods, developed on the basis of empirical experience throughout the history of mankind. It was a collective activity of a wide range of clan members — a truly folk healing, and absorbed both rational knowledge and irrational ideas based on a distorted worldview upon powerful and incomprehensible Nature.

Folk medicine is a universal phenomenon that existed across nations and throughout all periods of mankind history. Proven over time rational methods and vast empirical experience, folk healing gave grounds for traditional medicine and, ultimately, for scientific medicine.

The concept of traditional medicine is more specific and historically younger. There are three systems of traditional medicine that have survived to the present day: Chinese, Indian (*Ayurveda*) and Tibetan.

Any type of traditional medicine has at its core a philosophical or religious doctrine, organically intertwined with empirical experience of folk healing of a particular ethnos. No traditional medicine is possible without a philosophical vision of man (microcosm) in the surrounding world (macrocosm). Traditional medicine develops along the lines of a well-established national tradition; it makes it stable, with little or no change throughout centuries and even millennia. This is not to say that traditional medicine is unable to spread to other parts of the world, yet it is always more effective and viable at home. Far from the cradle of ethnic tradition it may undergo certain transformation and, ultimately, is doomed to perish.

Scientific medicine rests on a scientific experiment, the one that tests empirical knowledge, scientific and philosophical ideas by means of scientific experiment, and creates experimentally verified concepts and theories.

Scientific medicine with its methods is not traditional, and not stable, — it is changeable and international. Consequently, its modern alternative (for example, zhen-jiu method) cannot be referred to as ‘non-traditional’ one; — it is these so-called ‘non-traditional’ methods (acupuncture, moxibustion, massage, hypnosis, phytotherapy, etc.) are the parts of traditional medicine.

What then is the non-traditional medicine? In the first place, it is scientific medicine. In China there are both traditional Chinese and non-traditional scientific medicine. They are taught in different medical schools, but are practiced in close interaction. Medicine in China stands today ‘on its both feet’.

Fruitful interaction between folk healing, traditional and scientific medicine paves the way to more effective treatment and prevention of diseases, keeping the balance of man and the environment.

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