



## Short Paper

### Psychotherapy concept as revealed in Chinese traditional medicine

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**Abstract.** *The basic concepts and principles for healing of the mind as revealed in Chinese traditional medicine are reviewed. The basic principles emphasized are: maintaining tranquilization and calm; keeping the spirit inside of the mind, allowing vitality (qi) to flow smoothly; adjusting mood by regulating excessive feelings and transferring the feeling, desire, and ambition properly; encouraging adequate relations with others; adjusting one's mental state according to the seasonal change, and following the principle and rhythm of nature.*

**Key words:** traditional medicine, concept of healing, healthy mind, Chinese.

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**INTRODUCTION** Chinese traditional medicine is developed under an ancient Chinese cultural background. Therefore, its concept of health and illness and treatment for sickness reflects Chinese thought. This includes the concept of how to heal mental problems.

Chinese traditional medicine recognizes a person's mental activity as a reflection of *qing-zhi* (emotion and will), a comprehensive reaction manifested by a person when he encounters and deals with the objective reality and interpersonal interaction. As early as 2000 years ago, it was recognized that a person has seven basic emotions: happiness, anger, worry, anxiety, sadness, fear, and terror. There was a view that excessive emotions would cause sickness, mental disease, and the disease of feelings. Chinese therapy for such illnesses emphasized maintaining balance among these seven emotions to win a healthy mental state.

**BASIC CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES** Regarding the therapy of mind, there are several basic concepts and principles that are emphasized:

**Tranquilization and calm are better than fidgety.**

It stresses the importance of a calm and tranquil mental condition, and asks one to minimize any worry and excessive concern. It suggests keeping the mind empty of the contamination of irritating thought and excessive desire. It recommends avoiding overwhelming external stimulation, regulating the function of seeing and hearing, and reaching the condition of a stabilized mind with calmness. It is believed that: "cultivating the mind will consolidate the spirit; consolidated spirit will concentrate the vital energy (*qi*); and concentrated vital energy will

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maintain the body in its perfect condition.” As a practice, it urges one to perform “quiet mental exercise” (*jing gong*) to obtain the effect of clarifying the mind.

**Keep the spirit inside of the mind, allowing the *qi* (vitality) flowing smoothly, then sickness will heal accordingly.**

To “keep the spirit inside of the mind” means to inspect one’s mind by regulating and controlling emotions in a harmonious balance with the environment. Excessive discharge of emotion will damage the energy and vitality of the body, causing physical and mental illness. Therefore, it is important to learn how to regulate feelings and maintain good health by preventing sickness. It is vital to keep harmonious attitudes in dealing with the environment, and it is vital to comply with nature. Avoiding excessive and undesirable external stimulation can prevent disturbing functions of the nervous and immune system.

**Adjust mood, to win (regulate) excessive feelings through other feelings, and transfer the feeling, desire, and ambition properly.**

According to the *Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine*: “Anger will hurt liver, and sorrow will win anger; (excessive) happiness will hurt heart, and fear will regulate (excessive) happiness; worry will hurt spleen, and anger will combat worry; sorrow will hurt lung, and happiness will diminish sorrow; fear will hurt kidney, and worry will decrease fear.” As mentioned, this is a system to regulate feelings by another set of feelings. Therefore, as a method of treatment, it is useful to induce certain feelings to combat excessive feeling. For instance, recommended techniques include inducing fear to control excessive happiness and excitement (in over euphoric state), or inducing joke and pleasure to combat excessive sorrow and depression.

**Maintaining a happy and proper spirit, encouraging adequate relations with others, and keeping humor.**

In general, it is considered desirable to keep an optimistic attitude in life, to maintain suitable social relationship with others, to enjoy humor, and to maintain a healthy mind. To be able to enjoy humor, to be happy, and to hold a generous view towards life is important in order to have a pleasant life. This, in turn, is good for health.

**Regulate mental conditions all the time, adjust ones mental state according to the seasonal change, and follow the principle and rhythm of nature.**

Chinese traditional medicine is very much concerned with regulating life in accordance with the environment and the seasons. Regulation of ones emotions is suggested in accordance with the four seasons. For the spring, one is encouraged to keep ones mental function alive, with desires and emotions active, and not to over suppress emotions. For the summer, one is suggested to keep the mind happy without becoming angry, or having one’s mood impacted by the hot weather. The fall is the time to keep desires and feelings stable inside and be concerned for the stability of one’s moods. As for the winter, it is recommended not to expose one’s feelings and desires carelessly, and to reserve your vitality and health. Therefore, emotions need to be regulated according to nature and the seasons.

**COMMENTS** For Chinese traditional medicine, there are no clear cut divisions of the mind and body. Rather, the body and mind are viewed as the combined part of the whole system. There are no specific and systematic methods of psychotherapy that have been developed. However, there is strong emphasis on the function of the mind and there are many basic concepts of how to regulate the mind and body together, and such fundamental concepts and principles are useful to enhance the health of a person as a whole.

## PSYCHOTHERAPY CONCEPTS IN CHINESE TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

The above described concepts and suggestions that are reflected in the thought of traditional medicine are useful in providing psychotherapy for people, particularly for the Chinese who are familiar with and perceptive to such traditional medical concepts. Not only are the principles emphasized but it the philosophical ideas about health and illness, and the way of human life, particularly mental activities.