A Brief Evolutionary History of TCM Culture in Hubei—
From the Pre-Qin Period to the Qing Dynasty

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Abstract: This paper tries to analyze the rules of evolution and development of TCM culture in Hubei in history. By exploring the rich materials from the authentic history books and local annals and interpreting the great medical thoughts of representative TCM masters lived in Hubei, we find that TCM culture has been well inherited and carried forward in Hubei and Hubei enjoys a respected position in the holistic development of TCM culture in China. The results suggest that regional development and national development of TCM culture are interdependent and inter-promoting. It’s of great importance to do some research on the development of TCM culture in history in other regions to better develop and transmit TCM culture both at home and abroad.

Introduction
Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is deeply rooted in the profound traditional culture of China, which is believed to be closely connected with Chinese philosophy, religious studies, ethics, linguistics, logic etc. in history. Understanding of TCM should be based on the core of TCM culture, namely, the value system of TCM, mode of thinking and reasoning and pattern of behavior. As a totally different medical system from other medicines, TCM has fairly evident cultural attributes. China’s President Xi Jinping once said, TCM, embodying the profound philosophical wisdom and the health preservation concept and experience of practice of the Chinese nation for thousands of years, is the treasure of ancient Chinese science and the key to opening the treasure-house of Chinese civilization. The Vice-premier Liu Yandong also speaks highly of TCM, she believes TCM reflects China’ five significant resources, one of which is an excellent cultural resource. From the current situation of development, reviving TCM culture contributes a lot to the rejuvenation of TCM and great rejuvenation of Chinese nation.
Hubei province, with superb natural endowments, rich in medicinal plants and animals, has a rather long history of TCM culture compared with that of other provinces in China. From the famous legend of Shennong’s Tasting Medicinal Herbs and then Discovering the Edible Herbs to Zhang Zhongjing’s performing medical practice in Jingxiang region in the Eastern Han Dynasty, from the international dissemination of Li Shizhen’s masterpiece *Compendium of Materia Medica* to the emerging of outstanding TCM talents after Li, TCM culture in Hubei province, as a main thread throughout the history of cultural development, is a dazzling pearl both in China and all over the world.

**Connotation and Denotation of TCM Culture in Hubei Province**

The recent ten years has witnessed the greater concern being given to TCM culture. With the great improvement of its overall national strength, China is paying more and more attention to the soft power of traditional Chinese culture, including TCM culture. In 2009, in *Opinions on Supporting and Promoting the Development of TCM Cause* issued by the State Council, Chinese government for the first time mentioned the importance of TCM culture during the course of TCM development. In 2011, the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine of the People’s Republic of China (SATCM) issued *Instructions on Strengthening the Construction of TCM Culture*, which clearly states that TCM culture, including ethno-medicine culture in nature reflects the whole picture of the spiritual and materialistic civilizations with TCM characteristics and strength, and it is the part and parcel of the sustained system of excellent Chinese culture. This is a high appreciation of the connotation of China’s TCM culture. SATCM in 2011 and 2016 then separately decreed the *12th Five-year Plan of the Construction of TCM Culture* and the *13th Five-year Plan of the Construction of TCM Culture*, which highlights the importance of research on TCM culture in China. The famous scholar Mr. Zhang Qicheng from Beijing University of Chinese Medicine argues that TCM culture is the total of the intrinsic value system and mode of thinking and extrinsic pattern of behavior and instrumental images in TCM, whose core value can be generalized into Benevolence, Harmony, Proficiency and Sincerity. According to Professor Hu Zhen and Wang Hua, TCM culture can be further divided into TCM spiritual culture, TCM behavioral culture and TCM materialistic culture, which covers a broad scope of denotation, taking TCM classics, TCM scholars in history, TCM cultural heritages and TCM history as subjects and carriers, while the philosophical foundation and cultural root, the thoughts of TCM scholars and classics, TCM ethics, TCM behavioral patterns, inheritance and innovation of TCM culture as its research content.

TCM culture in Hubei province represented by Emperor Shennong and Li Shizhen is a bright star in the galaxy of Chinese TCM culture. Besides, growth of the famous TCM scholars Zhang Zhongjing and Ge Hong etc. has special relationship with Hubei, while Sujing, Pang Anshi, Wan Mizhai, Yang Jitai etc. in later history have all done their unique contributions to the development of TCM culture both at home and abroad. Rich in connotation and broad in denotation, Hubei TCM culture well sustains and develops the whole TCM culture. We hold in this article, that Hubei TCM culture is the total of the spiritual civilization and cultural civilization with characteristics and strength of TCM in Hubei province in nature, which epitomizes the essence of traditional culture in Hubei and includes the thoughts of the scholars in history from Hubei and their academic schools, medical experience, growing backgrounds, works, the cultural heritages and influence they have left for people in the later times. In this sense, the study of Hubei TCM culture is, in the long term, of great importance to enlarge the international influence of Hubei traditional culture, improve the integral knowledge of Chinese TCM culture, strengthen the recognition of own cultural identity and advance the soft and discourse power of Chinese traditional culture.
Evolutionary Stages of Hubei TCM Culture in History

The Pre-Qin period—the seed of Hubei TCM culture planted

Hubei is a south-central province in China, located in the middle reach of the Yangtze River and north of Dongting Lake, rich in rainfall, with many mountains like Mt. Wudang, Mt. Dabie, Mt. Wuling and Forest Shennongjia, which provides advantaged conditions for wild medicinal plants and animals to inhabit. In history, Jingchu (mainly includes Hubei today) is one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilization and one of the important origins in the formation of TCM culture in China. *The Book of Rites* records that Yan Emperor is born at Mt. Li, for which he was surnamed Li. Today, Lishan Town of Suizhou City, Hubei province is recognized as the hometown of Yan Emperor or Shennong, whereas Shennong Valley in Xiangyang City and Shennong Stream in Yichang City indicate the life track of Shennong in Hubei in his times. *Huai Nan Tzu* records that to start educating the ignorant, Shennong tastes the different kinds of medicinal herbs, he discovers seventy poisonous herbs in a day, and from then medicine booms here. *Si Maqian* in the *Records of the Grand Historian* has recorded similar things. So it’s reasonable to say, the legend of Shennong’s Tasting Herbs is the symbol of how TCM culture originated in history. From this perspective, Hubei province plays an irreplaceable role in the evolutionary history of TCM culture.

Among other things, the unearthed relics of japonica rice, fowls, livestock and stone arrowheads from archaeological sites at Qu Jialing, Shi Jiahe etc. within the territory of now Hubei Province are an indication of our ancestors’ farming life and their primitive medical activities here in the Neolithic Age. Moreover, the Chu bamboo slips unearthed from Mt. Wang during 1965 and 1966, Tianxing Taoist Temple in 1978 in Jiangling County, Yichang City, as well as Mt. Bao at Shi Lipu town of Jingmen City, Hubei Province all contain the recorded materials about wizardry and questioning of diseases. In addition, the famous patriotic poet Qu Yuan in the Warring States Period, then from State Chu, referred to dozens of medicinal plants in his world-renowned work *Sorrow after Departure (Li Sao)*, such as mugwort leaf, Sichuan pepper; Cassia Twig, wild ginger and chrysanthemum etc. for which Wu Renjie, a scholar in the Song Dynasty wrote a book entitled *Research on the Herbs in Li Sao*. In this sense, some scholars hold that Qu Yuan was ever a famous TCM practitioner. In fact, *Li Sao* also mentioned Wizard Peng and Wizard Xian, the two great doctors recorded in the Jingchu legends. From the above-mentioned recordings we can see obviously that TCM culture in Hubei Province is long-standing and well-established.

The Qin-Han-Three Kingdoms Period—the root of Hubei TCM Culture Primarily Laid

The comparatively more abundant and powerful relics unearthed after the foundation of People’s Republic of China in Hubei Province well proves that from the Qin Dynasty to the Three Kingdoms Period medical activities and culture have greatly advanced here. In 1975, the unearthed Qin bamboo slips from Shui Hudi, Yunneng County, Hubei Province contains materials about Yin-yang, the essential theoretical base of TCM in history and at present. Zhang Jiashan Mountain, which belongs to Jiangling County, Yichang City had unearthed during 1983 to 1984 many Han bamboo slips, some of which was recompiled as *Book of Pulse* and *Book of Health Exercise*. *Book of Pulse*, according to textual research, consists of five ancient medical works, *Syndromes of Diseases*, *Moxibustion Canon of Eleven Channels of Yin-yang System*, *Fatal Pulse Syndromes of Yin-yang System*, *Six Pains*, *Pulse Methodology*. Among which, *Moxibustion Canon of Eleven Channels of Yin-yang System*, *Six Pains* and *Pulse Methodology* are quite close to the silk manuscripts unearthed from Ma Wangdui Tomb in Changsha, Hunan Province. Some scholars say *Six Pains* and *Syndromes of Diseases* may be among the earliest medical works in Chinese history. *Book of Pulse*, however, has mentioned the names and simple symptoms of 67 diseases, covering internal medicine, surgery, gynecology, pediatrics and ENT, which is the earliest treatise on the symptoms of diseases in human history so far. The other masterpiece, *Book of Health Exercise,*
however, had discussed the causes of diseases, prevention and treatment of diseases and health
cultivation, and paid attention to the influence of social status, emotions, overstrain etc. on human
health. In 1975, Mt. Phoenix at Jiangling unearthed a male body, whose body and viscera
remained complete so many years later, which indicates the great skills of Chu people in preserving
human bodies at that time.

In the Qin and Han Dynasties, Jingzhou and Xiangyang were already quite rich and civilized
places in China, that’s why many great TCM practitioners trudged and chose to live here, including
then most prestigious two great doctors, Zhang Zhongjing and Hua Tuo. Zhang finished his writing
of the classic Treatise on Febrile and Miscellaneous Diseases, Hua performed an operation on
Guanyu, another hero at that time. This was recorded in Annals of Xiangyang Prefecture. According to Li Jinyong’s research, the most famous classic in TCM, Yellow Emperor’s Inner
Canon of Medicine, has used the Chu dialectics. During the same period, Shennong Classic of
Herbal Medicine has recorded quite a few medicinal herbs from Chu. So it can be concluded that
Chinese TCM civilization as a whole has in history absorbed some nutrient elements from Hubei
TCM culture.

The Jin-Sui-Tang period—Remarkable Progress in Development Made for Hubei TCM
Culture

In the Western Jin Dynasty, the well-known scholar in TCM Wang Shuhe recompiled Zhang
Zhongjing’s classic Treatise on Febrile and Miscellaneous Diseases, because parts of it had been
lost during wars and parts mistakenly passed on. Wang also wrote the famous classic Pulse Classic,
which has exerted far-reaching influence on medicine in his later times. Although Wang was not
born in Hubei, according to historians’ findings, he had lived here for many years, Yao Wanchong
in Macheng City, Hubei Province is believed to be the place where he spent his seclusion years and
he completed his classic. There are Wang tombs both in today’s Jingzhou City and Xiangyang City,
which also reveals the close relationship between his great medical achievements and Hubei.

In the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Ge Hong, the famous thinker and master of TCM, had travelled many
places in Hubei, that’s why now people can find places like Gedian, Mt. Ge etc. in Hubei.
According to the Book of Jin, another TCM expert in the Eastern Jin Dynasty Yin Zhongkan had
been the prefectural governor in Jingzhou. Yin’ disciples later compiled his medical thoughts into
one volume classic Prescriptions of Jingzhou Governor Yin. Additionally, Book of Zhou has
recorded another governor and TCM doctor Yao Shenyuan in Jingzhou. It can be imagined that the
lives of these great TCM doctors in Jingxiang should have contributed to the wider dissemination of
TCM culture in Hubei.

During Sui and Tang Dynasties, Chinese civilization has reached a new high level in history, and
TCM culture in Hubei has made huge progress too. Su Jing, the actual director together with his
colleagues revised the previous classics in Materia Medica and compiled into an absolute
masterpiece Materia Medica of Tang, which is the first pharmacopeia promulgated by the central
government of a country. Su is from Hubei. More than 100 years later, Lu Yu, another outstanding
figure from now Tianmen City, Hubei completed his Tea Classic. It is not a TCM classic, but it
records many details about how tea soothes eye strain and limb fatigue etc., which greatly improves
the later generations’ knowledge of health cultivation. Wang Chao, also a great TCM expert from
Tianmen, according to historical materials, is adept at acupuncture and moxibustion. He is
considered as the founder of the pediatric diagnostics with infantile fingerprints.

In the Tang Dynasty, anesthesia with medicated wine and tibial fracture operation had also
witnessed great progress. General Annals of Huguang keeps a record about how Zhang Shizheng
performed an operation on the King-to-be with medicated wine and plaster. According to
Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang (You Yang Za Zu), a famous book in the Tang Dynasty, the
great Taoist doctor, Wang Boyan, from Jingzhou, Hubei was good at identifying different pulse manifestations.

To sum up, different sections of TCM culture in Hubei Province at that time had made remarkable progress in this period.

**The Song-Yuan Period—Breakthroughs Made for the Development of Hubei TCM Culture**

From the Northern Song Dynasty, as China’s economic center shifted from north to south, the southern part of China came to play an increasingly important role in China’s politics and culture. On the other hand, the Song rulers, including the emperors and princes attached great importance to the development of medicine. They took a sequence of measures to promote medical practice and boost medical culture, including revising the national pharmacopeia, establishing Office of Revising Medical Books, emendating and rearranging TCM classics, carrying out reforms on medical education, etc. Based on the above factors, TCM culture in Hubei ushered in a new age in the Song Dynasty.

In the Song Dynasty, Pang Anshi is one of the most prominent TCM masters in China. Pang, from now Xishui County, Hubei is honored as the Medical King of the Northern Song. It’s recorded that born at a medical family, he is a general practitioner, proficient at the theories of exogenous febrile diseases, familiar with warm diseases, and he has also done in-depth studies on other subjects in medicine, like the internal medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, etc. according to *History of Song*, Pang has finished writing more than 20 kinds of medical works, including *General Treatise on Febrile Diseases, Illustration of Medical Difficulties, Book of Empirical Formulas, Classic of Pulse, Supplement to Materia Medica*. The only one left complete in history is *General Treatise on Febrile Diseases*, in which he concentrates himself on elucidating the warm and hot diseases, for he firmly believes that febrile diseases and warm diseases are different, that they should be separated from each other. This is a giant step forward for studies on the externally extracted diseases in Chinese history. His medical thoughts have exerted profound influence on later TCM academic community, especially the theories of warm diseases in the Ming and Qing Dynasties to come.

Pang is also a great educator in medical science at that time. In his lifetime, he has cultivated many students, many of whom are quite famous later. Interestingly, Pang forms great friendship with literati in his times, like the famous poets Sushi and Zhang Lei, the great calligrapher Wang Tingjian, etc. We can believe that his community of friends does good to transmitting his medical thoughts. Professor Li Jinyong argues that Pang has done great contribution to development of TCM in history, no matter in terms of his medical skills or his medical practice or his medical thoughts or his medical works. TCM masters have emerged in his neighboring counties in the Ming and Qing Dynasties- which may have something to do with the influence of his medical practice and thoughts. In the Song Dynasty, another master in the field of febrile diseases Guo Yong, though not born in Hubei, spent his later years in the now Yichang City. He finished writing of the medical classic *Supplement to Treatise on Febrile and Miscellaneous Diseases*. Other TCM doctors like Xie Yuquan are from Hubei too. Hubei is really a fertile piece of land in the Song Dynasty in promoting TCM culture.

In the Yuan Dynasty, the most famous TCM doctor at that time is Ye Ru’an, who closely followed Zhang Zhongjing’s and Pang Anshi’ medical thoughts. He is the author of *Easy Reading of Treatise on Febrile and Miscellaneous Diseases*. Also according to *General Annals of Huguang*, Fan Zijin, another famous TCM doctor in this time, comes from Hubei. It can be seen that, during this period, TCM masters from Hubei Province then have passed down the similar academic interests from one generation to another, which predicts greater prosperity of TCM culture here in the upcoming years.
The Ming-Qing period—Hubei TCM Culture Reaching its Summit of Development

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, with rapid increase of population, economy in Hubei region had substantially developed, cultural and education undertakings tremendously advanced, and the comprehensive strength of Hubei in the country was on the palpable rise. Together with the solid foundation laid in the previous dynasties, great prosperity of TCM culture had been achieved in this period in Hubei—different sections of TCM here had seen great improvement, the most impressive thing is that hundreds of TCM experts emerged in the eastern part of Hubei, mainly represented by Li, Shizhen, Wan Mizhai and Yang Jitai.

Li Shizhen in his lifetime has written many great works in diverse fields of TCM. Without any doubt, he has done great contribution to the inheritance and innovation of China’s TCM culture. In pharmacology, the colossal *Compendium of Materia Medica* has recorded 1892 kinds of medicinals with 1109 vivid illustrations. In the book, he divides medicines into 16 sections like Water, Fire, Earth, Gold Stone, Herb according to their natural attributes, each section further divided into 60 categories. *Compendium of Materia Medica* epitomizes the essence of TCM culture in the previous times, which is hailed as the great encyclopedia of ancient China’s knowledge in the realm of natural science. In TCM diagnostics, his *Binhu’s Pulse Science* collects and advances the ancestors’ knowledge. In the theory of meridians and collaterals, his *Textual Studies of Eight Extra Meridians* is a systematic rearrangement and elucidation of the eight extra meridians’ running routes and governance of diseases, that is, the Conception Meridian, Governor Meridian, Thoroughfare Meridian, Belt Meridian, Yin Heel Meridian, Yang Heel Meridian, Yin Link Meridian, and Yang Link Meridian. This further promotes the theoretical development and clinical practice, in the field of TCM acupuncture and moxibustion particularly. His medical thoughts are so popular that *Compendium of Materia Medica*, right after its arrival, has been spread to the neighboring countries like Japan, Korea, etc. and so far has been translated into so many foreign languages like English, French, German, Russian, Italian, Latin, Japnese, Korean. It is taken as a milestone in the cross cultural communications all over the world. In 2011, coupled with *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Cannon of Medicine*, *Compendium of Materia Medica* was successfully listed on UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register. This is an important signal that Hubei TCM culture represented by Li’s medical thoughts is more and more widely recognized and appreciated on our earth, which to some extent, is beneficial to accelerating TCM cultural exchanges and communication, and elevating the soft power of traditional Chinese culture originated from Hubei globally. 13

Wan MiZhai, another master of TCM, born a little earlier than Li Shizhen, is also from Hubei. He is the author of many influential medical works, such as *Four Essentials of Health Cultivation*, *Excerpts from Gynecology Classics*, *Wan’s Treatise on Gynecology*, *Pandect of Wan’s Medical Thoughts*, etc. His academic diversity gets him involved in different fields of medicine, pediatrics, gynecology, internal medicine, surgery, Pox Studies, Health Cultivation and so forth. Wan is also a Confucian scholar, he has created in his life many other literary works. He also opens up a medical school to impart his medical theories, which is rarely done in other regions in his time. Liang Xuemeng, another TCM doctor from now Tianmen City holds that human bodies are subject to fire syndromes. For which, he publishes in 1610 his great work after 20 years of painstaking struggle, *Treatise on Phlegm Fire*, which is believed to be the first systematic summarization of phlegm fire in TCM. Besides, according to the records of *Annals of Huguang*, *Annals of Yunmen County*, *Annals of Mianyang* and other annals of counties and cities in Hubei, there are many other famous doctors from Hubei Province at that time, Luo Lian, Zhao Mengbi, Wan Gong, Wu Feng, Zhen Wenxian, Zou Likun, Wang Aixi, Zhang Dong, Huang Shen, just to mention a few. Medical practice and research have been developed into an inseparable part of people’s lives on this land.

In the Qing Dynasty, the most honored TCM master from Hubei is Yang Jitai. Yang is also born at a medical family. He spent more than 30 years completing the book of great medical value, *Gist*
of Medicine, which involves in four diagnostic methods in TCM, eight therapeutic methods, pulse theory, febrile diseases, warm disease, surgery, gynecology, obstetrics, internal impairment, ENT, etc. Other big potatoes in medicine from Hubei in the Qing Dynasty include Tu Daohe, Zong Han, Bao Hui, Xiong Ting, Zhang Shanpu, Fang Changying, Li Lansheng, etc. They are all productive. In the Qing Dynasty, unprecedentedly, there is an influential Yang family in Wuhan, whose 15 generations continuously were pursuing a medical career. In the late Qing, Ke Fengshi from Daye County, Hubei opened up the Wuchang Medical School. Ke also revised and inscribed a series of medical books.14

What cannot be ignored in this period is that pharmacy industry also witnessed advances in Hubei. In the late Ming, there was already some pharmacy market along Zhi Maling and Cai Yuanpo in Wuchang and distribution centers of medicinal materials in Hankou. More important is the development of the famous drugstore, Ye Kaitai. Ye Kaitai was founded by Ye Wenji in 1637 when he came to Hankou to practice medicine. Rapidly, it ranked among the four most prestigious drugstores in Chinese history, the other three are Tong Rentang in Beijing, Hu Qintang in Hangzhou and Chen Liji in Guangzhou. Hubei also initiated the cross medical communication. In 1984, the famous TCM doctor Yang Gongfu was then practicing medicine in Wuhan. For saving Gong Zhaoyuan with his excellent medical skills, then China’s ambassador to Great Britain, he was later chosen to be a company of Gong and travelled around Britain, France, Italy and Belgium. Yang is the first TCM doctor who has such a great opportunity. He learned a lot about western medicine and later combined it with TCM, which promotes the integration of TCM and modern medicine in the future. 15

Conclusion

From the Pre-Qin times to the Qing Dynasty, TCM culture in now Hubei Province has gained great achievements in ancient Chinese history. As the birthplace or the place for practicing medical activities, Hubei has nourished many epochal figures in TCM, Emperor Shennong, Zhang Zhongjing, Wang Shuhe, Sujing, Pang Anshi, Wan Mizhai, Li Shizhen, Yang Jitai, just to mention a few. The great medical skills, thoughts and ethics they showed and the large number of masterpieces they completed in history adequately manifest that Hubei is an important place for conceiving and sustaining traditional Chinese culture in China. The rich legacies they have left will lead TCM culture to a higher level of development in the future and make greater contribution to people’s health and spiritual life in the world.

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