

Exploring the Balance of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Wellness through the “Health Preservation Chapter” of Huangdi Neijing

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Abstract: *With societal progress and era development, people increasingly value wellness, recognizing its importance. The wellness philosophy of TCM primarily emphasizes disease prevention, health maintenance, and longevity. Huangdi Neijing, the theoretical foundation of TCM, profoundly reflects ancient understandings of natural laws, human physiology, and societal development, encapsulating unique insights into life phenomena, essence, and rhythms. By investigating its wellness content, we gain novel perspectives for modern life and medical advancement, offering valuable references for contemporary wellness practices.*

Keywords: Huangdi Neijing, Wellness Pathway, Balance.

1. Introduction

The balance of TCM wellness integrates multiple equilibrium factors—physical-mental harmony, bodily homeostasis, and external adaptation—to achieve vitality cultivation, constitution enhancement, disease prevention, and longevity. Huangdi Neijing explicitly states, “When Yin is balanced and Yang is sealed, the spirit thrives” (Neijing Suwen), defining health as the dynamic equilibrium of Yin-Yang. The text further prescribes a natural lifestyle: “Harmonize with Yin-Yang, align with therapeutic methods, regulate diet, maintain regular routines, avoid overexertion.” Seasonal rhythms dictate distinct practices: “Nourish Yang in spring-summer, nourish Yin in autumn-winter.” Dietary principles follow “Cereals for nourishment, fruits for support, meats for benefit, vegetables for completion,” emphasizing balanced flavors to nurture the spleen-stomach system. Emotional regulation advocates “Tranquility and emptiness, Qi follows smoothly,” avoiding extreme passions to preserve inner peace.

Modern research corroborates these principles, offering new wellness paradigms. This paper synthesizes Huangdi Neijing’s wisdom to provide contemporary applications.

2. Manifestations of Balance in Physical-Mental Wellness

2.1 Emotional Equilibrium

Spiritual cultivation constitutes one of the core tenets of wellness theory in the Huangdi Neijing. It primarily encompasses three aspects: “The Heart Governs Mental Acuity,” “Tranquility and Emptiness,” and “If Spirit is Guarded Internally, Whence Comes Disease?” The concept of “Tranquility and Emptiness” advocates that individuals should maintain serenity and composure in spirit to achieve inner peace and tranquility. Specifically, emotional and spiritual regulation involves the following practices: Maintenance of Emotional Equilibrium: One must cultivate a positive mindset and avoid excessive emotional fluctuations.

The spiritual consciousness (Shen) and the essential vitality (Shen) of the human body are fundamentally unified. The functional expression of this unity relies not only on the physiological foundation of the body but is also influenced by subjective cultivation. Objectively, the activities of the spirit are closely related to nutrient essence, and the functions of the internal organs—particularly the Heart governing blood circulation and the Lungs governing respiration. Furthermore, they depend on physiological mechanisms such as the brain, as well as nourishment derived from diet and respiration. Subjectively, through cultivation methods such as “Tranquility and Emptiness” and “Guarding the Spirit Internally,” including breath regulation (diao xi), meditative stillness (du li shou shen), and the accumulation of essence to nourish the spirit (ji jing yang shen), the governing spirit can be integrated and harmonized with the essential spirit.

Maintenance of Physiological Rhythms: One must maintain regular daily routines and avoid overexertion. Regulated Living and Dietary Habits: One should strive to “moderate diet, maintain regular routines, and avoid undue labor.” The concept of “Body-State Analogy” (Shen Guo Tong Gou) views the human body as an ordered and controllable life system, endowing it with intrinsic organizational logic and the possibility of regulation. The concept of “Unity of Heaven and Humanity” (Tian Ren He Yi) situates individual life within the overall operation of the natural universe, endowing it with rhythmic laws that synchronize with heaven and earth. The integration of these two concepts elevates TCM theory beyond mere analysis of physiology and pathology, shifting the focus toward the coordination of relationships, dynamic processes, and overall unity. This mode of thinking emphasizes not isolated entities, but the continuous interaction and interconnection between humans and themselves, and between humans and nature, thereby constructing a unique medical wisdom grounded in holism, dynamism, and relationalism.

Social Engagement: One should actively participate in social activities and maintain positive interaction and

communication with others. Emotional Regulation and Stress Management: One must learn to regulate negative emotions, utilizing methods such as listening to music, reading, or walking to alleviate psychological distress. For patients suffering from disorders caused by emotional factors (Qi-Zhi), emotional counseling should be implemented alongside conventional pharmacotherapy. Seasonal Adjustments: Spring: As Yang Qi rises, patients with metabolic disorders should focus on smoothing emotional flow, maintaining a cheerful mood, and dredging Liver Qi to ensure the healthy transformation of the Spleen, preventing stagnation of nutrient essence and fluid retention. Summer: With abundant Yang Qi, one should maintain a peaceful and pleasant mental state, ensuring smooth Qi activity. When the heart-spirit is nourished, all other spirits can be regulated, leading to the tranquility of the five Zang organs and harmonized metabolism. Autumn: Emphasis is placed on astringent; one should gather the spirit inward, gradually returning emotions to a state of moderation, ensuring mental tranquility and comfort, and harmonizing the five Zang organs. Additionally, one must observe a proper balance of work and rest to prevent excessive fatigue. Cultivation of Noble Sentiments: Attention must be paid to cultivating noble sentiments and engaging in refined hobbies and interests.

2.2 Integrated Body-Spirit Cultivation

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) places great emphasis on the integrated cultivation of body and spirit. The term “Body” (Xing) refers primarily to the human physique, encompassing the organizational structures of the limbs, sense organs, and internal viscera. Body Cultivation: In terms of nurturing the body, one must focus on a rational diet to ensure the body receives adequate nutrition to sustain normal physiological functions, such as consuming more whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables. Simultaneously, moderate exercise is crucial; activities such as Tai Chi and Baduanjin can mobilize the muscles and bones and promote the circulation of Qi and blood.

Spirit Cultivation: The term “Spirit” (Shen) refers primarily to human mental activities, consciousness, and thought. In ancient Chinese philosophy, both “Essence” (Jing) and “Spirit” (Shen) are fundamental to the generation and transformation of all things in the universe. The transformative power of Essence is Spirit, while the material basis for the nourishment of Spirit is Essence, reflecting the ontological and functional relationship between the two.

To nourish the Spirit, one must maintain inner peace and ease, avoiding adverse emotions. This can be achieved through meditation, calligraphy, or painting to soothe the emotions and calm the mind. The Integration of Body and Spirit:

The concept of Integrated Body-Spirit Cultivation emphasizes the mutual dependence of form and spirit. A good physical state has a positive impact on mental state; conversely, mental peace and pleasure benefit physical health. Guided by this concept, the interaction between emotional states and physical conditions is inseparable, giving TCM a unique advantage in the understanding and treatment of psychosomatic diseases. In clinical practice, TCM is not rigidly bound by fixed methods but focuses on the normal movement of Qi. By

regulating Qi activity and harmonizing the functions of the five Zang organs, it achieves the integrated cultivation of body and spirit and treats both the mind and body simultaneously, thereby restoring the harmonious state of the whole life system [4].

2.3 Dietary Regulation

The Huangdi Neijing asserts that dietary regulation occupies a significant position in wellness, advocating that people should adhere to the principle of “Harmony” (He) in their daily lives through the rational combination of foods. “Harmony” refers to the proper pairing of foods to achieve the goal of benefiting human health through nutrition.

The Huangdi Neijing states: “Cereals nourish, fruits assist, meats benefit, and vegetables complete.” This means that these five types of food—cereals, fruits, meats, and vegetables—are essential nutrients for the human body. Only when these five foods are properly combined can they play a health-preserving and protective role.

The five flavors of diet have a dual function: they can nourish health, but excessive preference for any one flavor can damage the body. Therefore, daily diet should follow the principle of “cautiously harmonizing the five flavors” (Jin He Wu Wei). Furthermore, the Huangdi Neijing proposes dietary principles such as “Tonify the Deficiency” and “Treat Cold with Heat.” This means that if a person exhibits deficiency syndromes or cold syndromes, they should tonify the body; if they exhibit heat syndromes, they should clear heat and reduce fire. Only in this way can dietary nutrition be reasonably balanced.

3. Bodily Homeostasis

3.1 Yin-Yang Balance

Yin-Yang balance represents the fundamental law of natural and human vital activities and is the key to maintaining human health. Imbalance between Yin and Yang leads to the onset of various diseases, whereas balance enables individuals to maintain a healthy physique and a sound mental state. Therefore, achieving the state of “Harmonized Yin and Sealed Yang” (Yin Ping Yang Bi) is of paramount importance [5]. Ancient people, through production and daily life, became aware of the phenological laws of “growth in spring-summer and storage in autumn-winter.” Guided by the philosophy of the “Correspondence between Heaven and Man,” they proposed the wellness principle of “Harmonizing with the Laws of Nature and the Methods of Regulation.”

To harmonize Yin and Yang, one should live in accordance with natural laws, ensuring regular daily routines and dietary discipline. As stated in the Huangdi Neijing: “By regulating life according to the Yin-Yang principles, aligning with therapeutic methods, eating and drinking in moderation, maintaining regular daily routines, and avoiding overexertion, one can thus maintain the coexistence of physical form and spirit.” Daily Routines: Maintain a regular sleep schedule, avoiding late nights and excessive fatigue. Diet: Ensure dietary balance and nutrient intake, avoiding binge eating and partiality in food. Emotional Regulation: Emotional

fluctuations impact the body's Yin-Yang balance. One must maintain inner peace and tranquility, avoiding excessive joy, anger, sadness, and happiness. Meditation, yoga, and similar practices can be utilized to stabilize emotions. Exercise: Physical activity is a significant means of harmonizing Yin-Yang and strengthening the constitution. Moderate exercises, such as walking and Tai Chi, are recommended to promote Qi-blood circulation, enhance physical fitness, and boost immunity. Therapeutic Intervention: If Yin-Yang imbalance is severe, TCM methods can be employed for regulation. Traditional therapies such as acupuncture, massage (Tui Na), and cupping help unblock meridians and harmonize Yin-Yang. Herbal medicine can provide personalized 调理 based on individual constitution and pathology.

3.2 Qi-Blood Balance

The Huangdi Neijing posits that Qi and Blood are the fundamental substances that constitute the human body and sustain vital activities. Qi-Blood balance is critical for wellness.

Generation of Qi and Blood: The Spleen and Stomach are considered the "foundation of the acquired constitution" and the "source of Qi-Blood production." Food is transformed by the Spleen and Stomach into nutrient essence (Gu Wei), which is then converted into Qi and Blood.

In wellness, protecting Spleen-Stomach function is vital. One should maintain regular eating habits and avoid excessive consumption of raw, cold, greasy, or spicy foods that damage these organs. As the Huangdi Neijing notes, "Excessive diet injures the intestines and stomach," advocating moderate eating to ensure sufficient Qi-Blood generation [6].

Circulation: Meridians serve as the channels for Qi-Blood circulation. External TCM therapies such as massage and moxibustion, when used to stimulate acupoints, can promote Qi-Blood circulation and regulation, achieving health preservation. For example, applying moxibustion to the Zusanli (ST36) point can strengthen Spleen-Stomach function, promote Qi-Blood production and circulation, enhance constitution, prevent disease, and maintain the balance and health of the body's Qi and Blood [7].

3.3 Daily Routine Regulation

The Huangdi Neijing emphasizes adapting to nature, maintaining spiritual conservation, and having regular daily routines. Regarding the regularity of daily life, the text proposes "In all these five aspects, one must not depart from them," highlighting the importance of sleep, as well as the principles of "Nourishing Yin in Autumn - Winter" and "Nourishing Yang in Spring-Summer" [8]. The text also specifies appropriate times for sleeping, waking, and clothing taboos. For instance: Winter: Sleep early and rise late. Summer: Rise early and sleep late.

Spring: A time of Yang Qi effusion, rise early and sleep late. Autumn: A time of Yang Qi astringent and Yin Qi generation, sleep early and rise early. The principles of "Regular Daily Routines" (Qi Ju You Chang) and "Avoiding Overexertion"

(Bu Wang Zuo Lao) are also emphasized. Regular Daily Routines: This means adapting to the laws of natural change. For example, in spring, one should not rise early and sleep late excessively; in summer, one should not sit in air-conditioned rooms to seek coolness; in autumn, one should not wear too many clothes too early.

The Huangdi Neijing states: "During the three months of spring... sleep at night and rise early; during the three months of summer... sleep at night and rise early; during the three months of autumn... sleep early and rise early; during the three months of winter... sleep early and rise late." This implies that daily routine should vary with the seasons: "Nourishing Yang" in spring-summer suits a late sleep and early rise, whereas "Nourishing Yin" in autumn-winter suits an "early sleep and early rise" or "early sleep and late rise." Adjustments can be made according to individual circumstances. Avoiding Overexertion: This means avoiding excessive fatigue and the overconsumption of physical strength and mental energy [9].

Only by maintaining spiritual conservation, regular daily routines, a proper balance of work and rest, and a combination of movement and stillness, can one truly achieve the goals of health preservation and wellness.

4. External Balance

4.1 Human-Nature Symbiosis

The core characteristics of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) are its holistic concept and treatment based on pattern differentiation. The holistic concept is a fundamental principle for understanding the human body and disease in TCM.

The primary medical implication of the "Unity of Heaven and Humanity" (Tian Ren He Yi) theory in the Huangdi Neijing encompasses the concepts of "similarity, connectivity, correspondence, and harmony" between the macrocosm (nature) and the microcosm (human). Manifestations such as "identical structure," "identical phenomena," "identical Qi," "corresponding responses," and "mutual peace" between heaven and man provide theoretical and clinical guidance for wellness practices and disease treatment [10]. One key aspect is that humans and nature form an integral whole, where changes in the natural world directly impact the human body. For instance, seasonal and climatic variations influence both physiological and pathological states [11]. The Huangdi Neijing states: "During the three months of spring... this is called 'sending forth the old and bringing forth the new.' Heaven and earth give birth together... This is the correspondence of spring Qi and the way of nourishing life." It advocates that human daily routines should coordinate with the seasonal changes: Spring: As Yang Qi rises, one should sleep late and rise early, spend time outdoors (e.g., walking in nature), and allow the body to absorb the generative energy of nature. Winter: One should sleep early and rise late to protect and store the body's Yang Qi and avoid overexertion.

General Practice: Moderate outdoor exercise, such as jogging or Tai Chi in areas with fresh air, allows the body to fully contact the natural environment. Utilizing natural elements like sunlight and air promotes metabolism and strengthens the

constitution. This requires humans to adapt to changes in the natural environment, emphasizing the Unity of Heaven and Humanity and living in accordance with nature [12]. The human body and the natural environment are inseparably linked; the changing of the four seasons is one of the crucial factors for the growth, development, and storage of all things.

4.2 Human-Society Balance

The social environment also significantly impacts physical and mental health. Good interpersonal relationships and a harmonious social environment are conducive to well-being. For example, actively engaging in social life and maintaining healthy relationships with family and friends are vital components of maintaining external balance in wellness practices. From the perspective of social relationships, good interpersonal connections are essential. Maintaining close and harmonious bonds provides emotional support, which is extremely beneficial for wellness, as negative emotions such as anxiety and depression can adversely affect physical health.

Regarding social roles, one must arrange work and life rationally: Work-Life Balance: Avoid overexertion and prolonged periods of high work pressure. For instance, plan working hours rationally and take appropriate breaks to relax. Social Participation: Actively participate in social activities, such as public welfare events or interest groups, to find a sense of self-worth and belonging. This helps maintain psychological balance and health.

To adjust personal bodily balance and adapt to individual development, reflecting a state of personal harmony, the individual must live according to the laws of nature. One should adapt to natural changes and formulate a wellness plan that suits their specific constitutional characteristics. Furthermore, adaptation to the cultural environment is important. Every society has its own cultural customs and values. Respecting and integrating into these cultures reduces the psychological burden caused by cultural conflicts. For example, celebrating traditional festivals with others according to customs and feeling the festive atmosphere can enrich the human spirit.

5. Conclusion

In summary, through an in-depth investigation of the wellness principles found in the Huangdi Neijing, we have gained a profound appreciation for its unique theoretical framework and practical methodologies, and their significance for modern wellness practices. This study highlights that effective wellness requires a holistic approach that addresses both the root (Ben) and the branch (Biao), integrating movement with stillness. It involves nurturing the internal organs, tendons, bones, and muscles internally, while externally avoiding pathogenic factors such as “empty evils and thieving winds.” Furthermore, it necessitates the appropriate practice of guiding techniques (Dao Yin) to strengthen the body and calm the mind. By adhering to these principles, the body can achieve supple tendons and strong bones, abundant Qi and blood, and a spirit that is guarded internally. This ultimately leads to the state of “Harmonized Yin and Sealed Yang” (Yin Ping Yang Mi). This ancient

medical classic not only reveals the mysteries of human life but also provides invaluable wisdom for health preservation. In the modern era, characterized by an accelerated pace of life and increasing stress, physical and mental health face unprecedented challenges. The wellness philosophy advocated by the Huangdi Neijing — emphasizing Yin-Yang balance, conformity to nature, and equal attention to body and mind — provides a clear and correct direction for health preservation. It enriches TCM philosophical thinking, enhances clinical diagnostic and therapeutic standards, strengthens the innovation of TCM theory, promotes interdisciplinary integration, and drives the modernization of TCM thinking, thereby holding substantial practical and realistic significance. Future research will continue to focus on these areas, aiming to further excavate and inherit the wellness wisdom of the Huangdi Neijing. By integrating these ancient principles with modern technology and continuously innovating, we can make greater contributions to the cause of global human health.

Fund Project

Scientific Research and Innovation Platform of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TZKN-CXPT-05).

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