

Sydney Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine

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What is TCM – Studying TCM in Sydney Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

Interview with Yifan Yang, principal of Sydney Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine
(Australian Chinese Daily, Nov, 2007)

I: Interviewer, Y: Yifan Yang

I: As TCM being taught in many university of Western countries, why is the formal scientific medical academy paying such attention to a field that seems so old fashioned?

Y: The rapid development of TCM in Australia in the last 2 decade has drawn the attention of mainstream medical practice and academia. With more and more cases of successful TCM treatment, the benefits of TCM should not be dismissed by Western medicine society in Australia.

I: There has been a long debate that TCM lacks of scientific evidence. How could it be accepted by the Australian medical community, which only accepts evidence based medicine?

Y: This is a good question. From the perspective of modern science, TCM is far from a scientific medical system. I think this is well acknowledged by medical academics. But the key point is that more and more Australians seek TCM services for their health problems, and are finding satisfactory results where conventional medicine has not been effective. This has been the feedback received by many GPs and hospitals from their patients. From the perspective of medicine, clinical effectiveness is more important than scientific evidence. Western medicine could not ignore the development of TCM practice in Australia, and has thus commenced clinical evaluation of TCM with scientific researches. It has been reported that the majority Australians are seeing non-medical practitioners and are receiving natural or herbal treatment. Thus it is important for future medical doctors to have an understanding of what their patients are taking. Medicine is mainly for public health and diseases, in this sense, scientific evidence comes second.

I: You mentioned that TCM is developing rapidly in Australia?

Y: Firstly, the registration of TCM in Victoria has been the first TCM Act outside China. Now the nation-wide registration is on its way, producing a legal basis for practicing TCM in Australia. Many universities set up courses of TCM at bachelor, masters and Ph D degree levels. Currently there are 6 universities with this degree course in Australia. Many pharmaceutical research organizations and hospitals are also doing TCM researches. The government has also started funding for the TCM researches. More and more health funds are accepting TCM and acupuncture. In China, TCM doctors and Western doctors enjoy the same treatment and work together in hospitals. This has become a trend in the development of health systems in many western countries.

I: What about your school, there are many universities around, how can your advanced diploma school survive?

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Y: Our institute has been established for 21 years. At the beginning, many Australians went to China to study Acupuncture and TCM, who came back to practice and started the school. In the 1990s, many Chinese TCM graduates migrated into Australia and joined the teaching, which strengthened the TCM education quality. Currently we have developed into Advanced Diploma of TCM course (and Diploma of TCM remedial massage) which has enjoyed very good reputation with a large number of graduates opening their clinics around Australia. They are accepted by complimentary or TCM associations and are recognized by health funds. Our single unit certification courses also attract interests. We provide practical course with a flexible timetable. Our students are mainly adults or practitioners from other modalities. We also have some overseas students who came from European countries, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea and other Asian countries, about 70% are Caucasian and 30% with Asian background. We have been doing what the universities can not do with competitive tuition fees. The interesting thing that should be noted is that in Korea and Taiwan, enrolment into Medical schools in TCM requires a higher entrance score than in Western medicine.

I: The Australian health system is the Medicare Card health system equipped with a modern western medical system. What do you think about the future of TCM in Australia?

Y: It is a very interest fact that people would choose to pay to see TCM practitioners rather than going to a GP where they just need to swipe their Medicare card. Looking at the last 20-30 years in major western countries such as the USA, UK, Germany, Australia and Canada, it has been reported that the practice of TCM has expanded more than 100 times with more than 100,000 medical acupuncturists who mainly practice acupuncture. Australia and UK has about 3000 TCM clinics, and in USA, registered TCM practitioners has reached 17,000, with Chinese Herbal Medicine being approved by the FDA for use in hospitals for clinical trial and for medical use as "Drugs". It has also been found that people are using more herbal medicines than pharmaceutical drugs, 4 times in Australia and 5 times in Germany. The US governments' funding for complementary and TCM increased to \$120 millions in 2006 comparing to \$50 Million in 1996. every medical graduates is required to pass a TCM examination to become a licensed medical doctor in Japan starting in 2007 and the Hehuang group in Hong Kong allocated \$US 5 billion to establish an TCM empire. In Australia, many education and research organizations set up TCM courses or research organizations. The government, for the first time, has also allocated \$4 million specific for TCM researches... At this stage, we are still in the early stage of TCM development. Our graduates might be working in hospital as normal doctors in future, as what they have been doing in China.

I: Even I want to learn! But I am already 40.

Y: Even though long term practices are required to become good TCM practitioners, many famous TCM doctors in history started learning TCM during middle age. We saw so many TCM professors still seeing patients in their 80s even 90s. It is puzzling why I could hardly find western doctors practice in this age.

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I: What can I learn in your course?

Y: We offer an Advanced Diploma of Traditional Chinese Medicine 91133NSW (4 years course) and a Diploma of TCM Remedial Massage HLT50107 (2 years course)

I: Thank you.