



EDUCATION & SEMINARS

A Rose By Any Other Name

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In his July column, Will Morris asks "[What's In A Name?](#)" Rather more than [Shakespeare's Juliet](#) would imagine; indeed, more things than are dreamt of in her philosophy, to invoke [Hamlet](#).

Confucius teaches us the importance of names. One of the central tenets of his teachings is *zhèng ming*, the "rectification of names." He says: "If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success." Consequently, the naming or renaming of a thing is a grave and serious matter, and not one to be undertaken lightly or for trivial reasons.

To rename traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) as "Oriental medicine," "Asian medicine" or any other term is to obscure the richness, depth and unity of humanity's first and oldest continuously practiced system of health care. Our profession is traditional, it is Chinese, and it is medicine, What other name should it have but "Traditional Chinese Medicine?"

When I first came to the United States, I was surprised to find Chinese restaurants everywhere. While the food was, by and large, similar to what I was accustomed to eating in my native land, there were many compromises made to Western tastes. Sometimes, a dish was sweetened a little more than it would be if prepared for Chinese customers or certain pungent ingredients were omitted or reduced, to better accommodate the Western diner's palate.

Looking over a menu one day, I came across a dish I had never heard of before. Even its name seemed foreign to me. Thinking that perhaps this was some rare regional delicacy, I ordered a plate, from curiosity if nothing else. From the first bite, it was obvious to me that this was not Chinese. The choice of vegetables was odd, and the meat did not pair well with the sauce. In fact, it tasted distinctly American to me. When I finished eating, I asked to speak to the manager, to see what I could learn about this strange dish.

The manager, a Chinese man, was glad to explain it to me. There have been Chinese restaurants in America for a long time, he said, serving authentic Chinese food to an exclusively Chinese clientele.

In the late 19th century, it seems there was a sudden interest in Chinese cuisine here in the States. Restaurant owners, good businessmen that they were, knew that they would have to adapt to their new customers' tastes to take advantage of this trend. Their cooks, using Chinese ingredients and techniques, produced a dish that was "Chinese" enough for an American, but too American to be Chinese. The result was "[chop suey](#)," a purely American form of Chinese cuisine, appearing on menus alongside more traditional dishes. It was not the real thing, but was close enough to satisfy the inexperienced and unlearned.

In Asia, one encounters a number of systems of healing based on the principles of traditional Chinese medicine. One does not, however, encounter "Oriental medicine" or any similar term used anywhere in Asia. Simply put, there is no such thing as "Oriental medicine" outside of the West. These terms are, in fact, little more than a Westernized abstraction, a sort of intellectual shorthand, to refer to the varieties of healing arts and sciences developed, primarily in East Asia, from the foundations established by the great scholars and practitioners of the Chinese medical tradition.

This is not to deny that syncretic or eclectic practices, based however tenuously on TCM, have developed here in the West. One may apply any label one chooses, without doing harm, to these truncated, reductionist, and ersatz versions. Possessing no content or character that is not borrowed from elsewhere, they lack the unity and coherence of TCM; they are the "chop suey" version, as it were.

Disregarding these later and lesser imitators, and returning to the authentic, we find that throughout Asia, practitioners pride themselves on their solid foundation within the classical texts of TCM, and openly acknowledge their intellectual debt. As an example, the Japanese refer to the practice of herbal medicine as *kampo*, or "the Chinese method." Korean acupuncturists, with their highly-developed systems of hand acupuncture, always take care to ground their variations in practice solidly in the canonical texts of TCM. For centuries, nothing was so highly-prized among Asian practitioners as the *Yellow Emperor's Canon*, the foundational text for TCM or the *Shang Han Lun*, the primary clinical text. This is not ethnocentric puffery; it is a simple statement of fact. TCM is the first, oldest and most widely-practiced system of health and healing in the world. Although a citizen of the modern world, it is still Chinese and traditional in its origin.

Consider a mountain spring, a small, cool trickle of the purest water. Although the flow is apparently limited, we can see that a short distance from the spring, there flows a small stream, which itself feeds into a river, which, as it descends down the mountainside, empties into a deep lake. From the source, everything downstream draws its essence and even its existence. The character of the spring determines the qualities of the river and the lake. The river is an expansion and increase in the force of the qualities of the spring; the river quantifies, as it were, the qualities of the spring. These two elements, quality and quantity, find integration and reconciliation in the wholeness of the lake, which contains the qualities of the spring and the quantities of the river, without loss or diminution of either. The lake does not suggest the river, nor does the river suggest the spring, but the spring contains and directs the river and the lake.

TCM is an integrated, living body of knowledge, flowing without cease from its pure sources, through its active channels, to the depths of its integration. Even as the spring does not dry up, the river does not cease its mighty flow, nor does the lake ever overflow its banks; perfect harmony, perfect concord, perfect order. This is the essence of the intellectual tradition of TCM; nothing comes later that was not there at the beginning, and nothing from the beginning is lost at the end.

With the passage of time, and with greater exposure to the authentic theories and practice of TCM, we can safely predict that "Oriental medicine" and kindred terms will go the way of chop suey, and

will be remembered as purely Western creations, an amusing footnote in the great history of the world's most ancient form of medicine.

SEPTEMBER 2010

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