

Ten Suggestions for Reading [Shang Han Lun]

Preface from Assembled Odes for Chang Sha¹ Formulas

By Chen Xiuyuan (1753-1823)

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Suggestion #1

Whenever there is a long ingrained practice, if one suddenly remove what people are used to, then everyone in the world will become frightened and suspicious.

Today, let's touch on it and discuss.

The clarity of herbal properties first originated from Shen Nong Ben Cao ("Divine Husbandman's Materia Media"). The discussion of pathology began with Lingshu and Suwen. The treatment of diseases with medicinal started with Yi Yin's Tang Ye Jing Fa ("Strategy and Classic of Decoctions").

When Master Zhang Zhongjing emerged, he collected Classical Formulas from the sage Yi Yin and from the ancient past. He authored two works: Shang Han Lan and Jin Gui Yu Han Jing. Wai Tai Mi Yao ("Arcane Essential of the Imperial Library") noted that he had another work called Xiao Pin ("Small Work"), which is now lost.

These works of the profession's founders are the same as those of the Four Great [Confucian] Masters. For those who still have doubt, are you to say that you also should not read the works of the Four Great Masters?

Read the works of Master Zhang Zhongjing. This is Suggestion #1.

Suggestion #2

In the works of Master Zhang, the writing and meanings are ancient, profound, and difficult to read. Even the Four Great Masters, Mr. Liu, Mr. Zhang, Mr. Zhu, and Mr. Li, although they claimed to pay tribute to Master Zhang, they did not develop much [from his works].

Then there were the mediocre and preposterous ones, who distorted facts. They claimed that Master Zhang only specialized in Cold Damage, that Gui Zhi and Ma Huang could only be used in the Northwest region and only in winter. They utilized formulas containing Chuan Xiong, Zi Su, Qiang Huo, Du Huo, Jing Jie and Fang Feng for external invasion. They used formulas such as Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang, Gui Pi Tang, Ba Zhen Tang, and Liu Wei Di Huang Wan, as the stable strategy to treat miscellaneous illnesses. When they were faced with hundreds of disease, they did not seek the root cause. Whenever they saw heat, they concluded Yin Vacuity. Whenever they saw cold, they concluded Yang Vacuity. They bragged that they

¹ Zhang Zhongjing, the author of Shang Han Lun, allegedly once held the position of the Grand Protector of the Chang Sha region. Thus many refer to him as Mr. Zhang of Chang Sha in respect. In this title, it refers to Zhang Zhongjing.

have clenched the essentials and grasped the principles. In the end, they are swindlers who pretended to be masters, could they even treat any major illness?

There is still time left. Ask yourself with an impartial heart, of all [the patients] you have treated in this life. You should know when you have to make changes.

Always correct yourself whenever you become aware of your mistake. This is Suggestion #2.

Suggestion #3

The effect of Classical Formulas is like hitting the battle drum (once you hit it, it produces sound in an instant).

It is nothing like the contemporaries, who nourish Yin with Di Huang, tonifies Yang with Ren Shen, regulate Qi Mu Xiang and Sha Ren, regulate blood with Dang Gui and Chuan Xiong... these are vague and abstract practices. It is basically waiting for the pathology to wane and the body to heal itself.

Neijing stated, “In one serving, one knows the effect; in two servings, the illness is over.” It also stated, “one takes a cup [of medicine], then falls asleep immediately.”

Shang Han Lun stated, “For those whose illness is cured with one serving, don’t finish the whole dose.”

Hence, we know when the ancients treated with herbs, unless it was chronic or deeply lodged illness, it was effective in half, one or two doses

As for later practitioners, such as the case study of Xue Lizhai², who said the patient took 30 doses or 100 doses, then it was effective. Or the case of Li Shicai, who asked patient to prepare 5 jin (2400 g) of Ren Shen, and it was effective after 3 months.

Are these really due to the effect of consuming medicine? I think this is due to the natural waning of the pathology and the body has recovered itself. These people simply stole the effort of the Heaven and claimed it as their contributions.

Whenever I read over these cases, I feel a deep compassion for patients who were stuck with their medicine, which were far worse than being in shackles.

Know the rapid effect of the Classical Formula. This is Suggestion #3.

Suggestion #4

The 113 formulas of Shang Han Lun rely on three words: “preserve Jin-Ye fluids.”

Let’s take a look at Gui Zhi Tang. It is balanced, neutral, and releasing the muscle. Every single one of the ingredient is an herb that nourishes fluids. As for Ma Huang Tang, it is light, pure, and traverses the exterior level. It does not employ the acrid hot nature of Sheng Jiang, or the stagnant and sweet nature of Da Zao. They both treat the exterior level from the exterior, thus they do not damage the Ying Qi. This

² Founder of the Mingmen School, author of the influential Yi Guan (“Medical Linking”)

is what it means to preserve the fluids. This is why most doses are divided into three servings. [Sometimes] patients don't even need to finish the entire dose to be cured. And when they are cured, they don't have any other issue.

The contemporary practitioners widely utilize Chuan Xiong, Zi Su, Qiang Huo, Du Huo, Jing Jie, Fang Feng, Cang Zhu, and Bai Zhi. They are bitter, drying, acrid, and harsh. They greatly damage the Yin Qi. This is most unsophisticated.

It is the custom in my [hometown] Fujian region to see Er Chen Tang as a stable decoction to promote sweat. Chen Pi in the formula depletes Qi, Ban Xia exhausts fluids (*commentary: it has an astringent nature; for example, when bleeding cannot be stopped, grind the raw Ban Xia into paste and cover over the wound, then the bleeding will be stopped. Stopping bleeding and stopping sweat are the same*), Fu Ling drains and promotes urination too prematurely early (*commentary: allowing pathogen to sink into Taiyin*)... all of them dry the "source of sweat" (*commentary: this term which took me ten years of practice to understand*). This will retain the pathogen, which then generates heat, and then manifests in symptoms such as great thirst, vexation, restlessness, speaking gibberish, and dimness of Shen. This is what it means by mediocre practitioners harming the people.

As for the 143 formulas of Jin Gui Yao Lue, they mostly rely on four words: "regulate with sweet herbs."

The later formulas such as Si Jun Zi Tang, Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang, Si Wu Tang, Ba Zhen Tang, Shi Quan Da Bu Tang, Gui Pi Tang, Xiao Yao San... etc, they got the idea of regulating with sweet herbs. But they are predisposed in each of their regard and are hard to be tamed. They are also inflexible without creativity. This you certainly must know.

Understand that Classical Formulas are beneficial without harms. This is Suggestion #4.

Suggestion #5

Master Zhang is the sage of medicine.

Only the most ignorant would dare to insult the sage or doubt about his formulas. In the formulas, [they] don't find herbs that addresses specific symptoms, or [they] are terrified by the high dosages, so they don't dare to try at all.

They did not know that Materia Medica became chaotic by various authors in Song and Yuan dynasties, and reached its height by Li Shizhen in the Ming dynasty. For those who can read the Shen Nong Ben Cao and comprehend the herbal properties, they know the [composition of only] 3-4 herbs is already comprehensive in a miraculous way.

Also the weighing and volume scale of the Han dynasty, is only about 30% the quantity of today's scale (in Qing dynasty). Also each decoction is divided to three separate consumption. Each consumption only takes in about 7-8 qian (23-26 g) of herbs. This is a lighter dosage of the heavier ones of the contemporary formulas.

Today, we are going to calculate based on the scale of the ancient time, and explain it in details. So that people can know that Classical Formulas take the Way of the Golden Mean. Everyone can understand and walk this path. This is Suggestion #5.

Suggestion #6

First impressions are the strongest, this is a common flaw of men.

For Gui Zhi Tang and Xiao Chai Hu Tang: No matter what one has, Cold Damage or miscellaneous disease, located in Yang channels or Yin channels... etc, if there is the Yin-Wei disharmony, then there will be a miraculous result with Gui Zhi. Whenever the evil Qi cannot migrate outward through the pivot, then there will be a miraculous result with Chai Hu.

Today, people are confused by the claim in Lei Zheng Huo Ren Shu (“Pattern Categories to Revive Men”), which suggests that one should not use Gui Zhi in spring and summer.

Then they are also confused by the claims of the past physicians, which state that if one mistakenly use Chai Hu when the illness is in the Taiyang Stage, then you will lead the pathogen into the Shaoyang stage. Also there is the claim by Li Shizhen³ that deficient patient cannot use Chai Hu frequently. But at the same time, Zhang Jingyue⁴ crafted the Wu Chai Hu Yin (for those with Central Qi deficiency and with external invasion) in his Scattering Battle Array. So whether or not one should use [Chai Hu], [these different claims] have wronged countless people.

They did not know that the two herbs are listed as the superior herbs in Shen Nong Ben Cao. Their long-term consumption can abate one’s illness and extend his life. Today, people believe [the works of] others but do not trust Shen Nong Ben Cao. I honestly find this bizarre.

The practitioners of Fujian have observed me using Gui Zhi Tang. There is no danger of anything going wrong. In the past few years, [they have seen] the effectiveness [of Gui Zhi] in dosage of 3 qian (10 g) up to 8-9 qian (26-30 g). From this, they finally praised the contributions of the medical founder. As for Chai Hu, most do not prescribe more than 4 qian (13 g). In Zhejiang and Jiangsu regions, they would always process it with fresh-water turtle blood, and would never use more than 2 qian (6-7 g).

These are all due to the damage of the strong first impression.

They did not know that in the formulas of Chang Sha, Chai Hu was used to the dosage of 8 liang (24-120 g). This is done to utilize its pure and rich nature. There is no harm in consuming more of it, as its slow function needs to be reinforced with high dosage.

Ben Cao Chong Yuan (“Materia Medica to Respect the Source”) noted, “Chai Hu produced by the Yin Zhou province is great.” But today there is another variant of Chai Hu, I have no idea which plant it is from. [This variant] has done great harms to the people.

Furthermore, people do not use more than 1 qian (3 g) of Xi Xin and Wu Wei Zi, they don’t use more than 2 pieces of Da Zao, no more than 2 slices of Sheng Jiang... all these bad habits violate the teaching of the classical texts.

³ Author to the monumental work, or national treasure, of Ben Cao Gang Mu (“The Grand Materia Medica”), the most comprehensive Materia Medica there is, but with questionable clinical value

⁴ Author of the monumental Lei Jing (“Classics in Categories”), contributor of the “Eight Principle,” “New/Old Eight Battle Arrays of Formulas,” and “Ten Questions.”

I sincerely hope my colleagues to first depart from the common bad habits in the profession. So you can then ascend and transcend. This is Suggestion #6.

Suggestion #7

Return a patience from [expected] mortality to life, this is the Way of Medicine.

When other practitioners are helpless and their patient is simply waiting for his demise, and you notice that the patient has been mistreated by the messy treatments... You first explain to the patient, return his gift, and tell him that you won't accept any reward if he is cured.

Then you follow the strategy of Master Zhang: revive Yang with Si Ni Tang and Bai Tong Tang; preserve Yin with Cheng Qi Tang and Bai Hu Tang; assisting the rotation of the pivot, transporting its transformative mechanism, harmonizing the organs, these are all depending on the Stomach Qi. When there is a danger of fatality, you do not rely on Ren Shen.

Commentary: Classical formulas do not utilize Ren Shen for emergency purpose. Only Li Zhong Tang utilizes [Ren Shen] for malaria. Even when a person is sweating profusely, having counterflow, having a faint pulse that is about to cease, use the master formula Tong Mai Si Ni Jia Zhu Dan Tang instead, which does not employ Ren Shen. Do not ever listen to or read the works of Xue Lizhai or Zhang Jingyue.

When you carry on such grave responsibility, you can still at least save 2-3 out of 10 of them. I myself have been in practice for more than 30 years. Know the power of life and death of the Classical Formulas. This is the Suggestion #7.

Suggestion #8

The more you study classical formulas, the more flavors you get from it. The more you use them, the more miraculous they become. During the day time, you practice in clinic and craft your formulas. At night, you examine and match them with classical formulas – [If you do so,] you will certainly come to extraordinary enlightenment.

Gain new insights by reviewing the past knowledge. This is the Suggestion #8.

Suggestion #9

In the medical profession, Master Zhang is like the equivalent of Sage Confucius to the Confucians. For those who expound and propagate the sacred teachings, you should follow them with respect. For those who defy [the sacred teachings], you should condemn them. To allow this Great River to continue flowing eastward through all the barriers, this all depends on the efforts of our generation.

As for the Four Great Traditions [of the Jin-Yuan Period],

Although the works of Liu Wansu⁵ tend to employ bitter and cold [medicinal], there are still places where he demonstrated his unique understandings.

Although Zhu Danxi⁶ never fully understood the source [of medical teachings], his works do not deviate far [from them].

[The works of] Zhang Zihe⁷ are half with merits and half with flaws.

[The works of] Li Dongyuan⁸ are the most inferior. He established the teaching of focusing on the spleen and stomach. His formulas focused on first tonifying the Center. While he propagated this slogan, he lost all meaningful substance. [His strategy tends to be] drying, harsh, and robbing away the Yin substance. It is without any moral standard. If you investigate the Medical Discourses, you will see that this guy was rich and that he was in love of fame⁹. He was crafty with his practice. [Thus,] his heretic words propagated widely; to this date, it has not ceased. [His strategy] is the direct opposition to Master Zhang's method of nourishing Jin-Ye with sweet medicinal. You must know this!

As for the scattered-ness of Li Shizhen and Wang Yutai¹⁰, the shallowness of Li Shicai¹¹, the mediocrity of Xue Lizhai, the preposterous-ness of Zhao Yangkui¹², the boastful influence of Zhang Jingyue, Chen Yuangong¹³, and Feng Chuzhan¹⁴... don't even let a single word from them lodge in your eyes, so you may one day enter the sublime profoundness [of medicine].

Then there are the works of Wang Dao-an¹⁵ printed widely by the civilians. Although I see him as gullible, there are a few places where his understandings are shown adequate. But then he listed the unfounded speculations from the likes of Tao Jie-an¹⁶ as commentaries to the formulas of Master Zhang. There is no consistency in the quality of his works.

If you are influenced by them as you begin your training, you will end up being a village fool forever.

Focus on only one discipline and do not mix it up with others. This is the Suggestion #9.

⁵ Founder of the Cold and Cooling School

⁶ Founder of the Nourishing Yin School

⁷ Founder of the Attacking and Purging School

⁸ Founder of the Spleen Earth School

⁹ The accusation here is that Li Dongyuan once bought himself an official position through "donations" to the Jin imperial court. To Li's defense, at the time doing such was a common, *or patriotic*, practice as Jin court was in immense financial strains during its declining years – before the Mongols eventually conquered it.

¹⁰ Author of the influential collection of case studies by Ye Tianshi, Ling Zheng Zhi Nan ("Clinical Guidelines")

¹¹ Author of the influential work for herb preparation: Lei Gong Pao Zhi Yao Xing Jie ("Explaining the Herbal Properties of Lei Gong's Herbal Preparation")

¹² Founder of the Mingmen School, author of the influential Yi Guan ("Medical Linking")

¹³ Author of the influential Ben Cao Xin Bian ("New Edition of Materia Medica")

¹⁴ Follower of the Mingmen School, author of Feng Shi Jin Nang Mi Lu ("Feng's Secret Medical Records")

¹⁵ Author of the greatly influential Yi Fang Ji Jie ("Compiled Commentaries of Medical Formulas"), Tang Tou Ge Jue ("Mnemonic Odes for the Decoctions"), and Ben Cao Bei Yao, ("Essential Supplement of Materia Medica")

¹⁶ Author of Shang Han Liu Shu ("Six Works of Shang Han [Lun]"), which have said to "propagated, but also ruined Shang Han Lun."

Suggestion #10

[Mencius,] the Second Saint once said, “Am I really fond of debating? [But] I am compelled to do it”

Now there are many lineages and traditions in the medicine, which are all built on the contributions of the past sages.

“Traverse the river upstream through its bends, and seek its ultimate source.”

Do not ever stop saying it.

For those who have not been trapped [in their lineage] for long, and for those who are more brilliant and wise than others, they will find remorse [for their past learning], and get on with this study. If so, they will no longer be alone on their Way.

When one’s words are overly sharp, then there will be abhorrence that generates slanders. When one is in a high position, then others will become afraid, and they will avoid him intentionally. When he walks alone, how many people can he save?

If our colleagues can all treat one another with sincerity, then this will change things and allows our profession to thrive. Then you should speak without holding back, politely and amicably. This is the Suggestion #10.