

Observing the day-to-day behaviour of the majority of the Western world would easily lead one to conclude that so-called "civilized" man is bent upon self-destruction.

Typically we eat all the wrong foods to excess and consume potentially lethal quantities of addictive drugs such as alcohol and tobacco. At the same time we deny our bodies sufficient rest and exercise and subject ourselves to overwhelming self-induced stress and pressure.

When a weak link in our physiological plant finally succumbs, then and only then do we drag ourselves off to the doctor for a bit of repair work, usually expedited by sizeable doses of drugs and chemicals designed to get us right back into the whole perverse cycle as quickly as possible.

While Western allopathic medicine continues its headlong rush into the development of quick, aggressive "cures" to modern man's complex list of physical ills, some medical practitioners are finding that meaningful answers may exist not only in the future but in the past as well.

"For over 23 centuries acupuncture needles and ginseng have mended what is now one-quarter of the world's population," writes Harriet Beinfield and Efram Korngold in the forward to "Between Heaven and Earth," their book on Chinese medicine. "Yet it is only in the last two decades that most Americans have ever heard of them."

Though pushed aside even in China by worldwide acceptance of the Western allopathic approach, traditional Chinese medicine is being discovered by Westerners as both an attractive alternative and a meaningful supplement.

Perhaps the most important underlying aspect of the philosophy of Chinese medicine is the faith placed in the human body's ability to look after itself, albeit with a little help from a responsible owner.

Properly cared for on a day-to-day basis and with the help of a doctor working in partnership with his patient during times of crises, the body is a powerful self-healer.

Beinfield and Korngold employ an evocative image in their attempt to explain the difference in the two approaches. One chapter is titled "Philosophy in the West:

The Doctor as Mechanic"; the subsequent chapter, "Philosophy in the East: The Doctor as Gardener."

Allopathic medicine strives to locate the faulty component for repair or replacement while Chinese medicine is an ally to the overall wellbeing of the total body - tilling, watering and fertilizing the complete garden on an ongoing basis.

The "Huang Di Nei Jing" (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine), compiled between 300-500 BC offers this poignant observation: "Maintaining order rather than correcting disorder is the ultimate principle of wisdom. To cure disease after it has appeared is like digging a well when one already feels thirsty, or forging weapons after the war has already begun."

Apparently, however, even in the past not everyone paid heed to the sage wisdom of the day.



"In the old days there were often three separate doctors in a community," describes laser acupuncture therapist Gerald Boyle. "One treated trauma cases, another looked after healthy people, keeping them from getting sick, and the third was given the responsibility of tending to irresponsible folks who didn't look after themselves.

"These days, the last one would be making the most money," says Boyle. "People spend more time keeping their car tuned up than their bodies.

Boyle was trained at the New England School of Medicine in Boston, MA, practiced in Australia for two years and now works at the Hong Kong Health Care Centre.

"The essence of helping the body is to see it as a whole - totally interconnected," says Boyle. "For example, an acupunctur-

ist is able to take advantage of the knowledge that every major nerve branch in the body has a minor branch in the ear. Understanding and accepting that type of interrelationship is the basis of treatment in Chinese medicine."

Making the connection between seemingly unrelated areas of the body and interpreting widely ranging symptoms is precisely what facilitates the complex detective work.

"Chinese medicine addresses itself to the realm of 'functional' disorder," says Dr Troy Sing of Hong Kong's Vital Life Centre. "It attempts to find the reason for the lack of coordination somewhere in the vast, finely-tuned biosystem of the body.

"Diagnosis of the 'functioning' involves attention to the symptoms of the individual: what kind of pain or tension, where and when; the presence or absence of thirst, perspiration, dizziness, tinnitus, emotional upset and/or stress, food intake, functioning of bowels and urination; the menstrual flow to name a few.

"All construct the web of interaction between the environment as well as the intra-relationship of the individual components or organs that form the biosystem," says Dr Sing.

The notion that there are more basic, though less tangible factors at work in the functioning and malfunctioning of our bodies than we have been lead to believe is not easily accepted by Western society.

"The words Chinese use to describe the relationships and the problems do not translate well into English," says Eric Spain, cofounder of the Complementary Medicine Society in Hong Kong. "The language sounds quaint, perhaps almost humorous and not to be taken seriously.

"Many orthodox Western doctors think it's rubbish to talk about heated livers and cold stomachs. They don't realize that it is all part of the greater picture involving the body as a whole," says Spain.

Some ten years ago Spain's wife became seriously ill and he was distressed and frustrated that traditional Western attempts to help her proved fruitless.

His search for other answers led him to like-minded individuals and together they founded the Society as a forum and information network for those interested in alternate medical approaches.