

**Comments on the book written by Ming WONG on
“TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE (TCM)
AND METAPHYSICS”:
America House Book Publishers, 2010 (694 pp., ISBN: 9781451277357)**

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This bulky book (of approximately 700 pages) exposes several aspects of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). I will not discuss here the main contents of the book that sets to analyze singly TCM remedies, from one for migraine or insomnia to effects of TCM for menopause or for sustaining longevity all of which will certainly attract the interest and the attention of medical specialists on these alternative practices. Subsequently I will focus only on that which has been indicated in the title of book, in its prefaces and in the earlier part of its contents which is primarily: the relationship between TCM and philosophy.

The author, Dr. Ming Wong has done studies on TCM and on western medicine and he recounts how, to date, he has failed in his attempt “to find out the theoretical basis of the TCM under the view of the western medicine” (p. 6), as western medicine contains no possible equivalent of the balance between yin and yang which is so important in TCM. Furthermore, according to him, TCM cannot be fathomed by the application of the normal, traditional (materialistic) scientific approach, based on basic physics, chemistry or mathematics. However, he admits that he was profoundly influenced by propositions that were developed by Schrödinger in his book entitled “What is life?” that delves on negative entropy. He was also equally impressed by Prigogine’s description of “non equilibrium thermodynamics”.

Although Ming Wong had referred to these recent sources, he opted to steer from direct contradictions with the proponents of western medicine and therefore, clearly prefers not to assimilate TCM to the status of an accepted science. He is trying to advocate that beyond scientific explanations such as that expounded by Prigogine’s models, TCM offers space for a new metaphysical stance. According to this new theory “the human body is an organic, high order, high negative entropy and ‘compact’ non equilibrium thermodynamics systems (p. 8). The author goes as far as to say that TCM belong to a “non rationalist view” (p. 9)!

Throughout his medical practice in the west, Ming Wong acknowledges that he had resorted to TCM (such as herbal prescriptions) for his patients and recognises that “the treatment results turned better” (p. 9). But he holds fast to his conviction that these therapeutic successes do not fall in line with a rationalist point of view: “The TCM is not the knowledge of science, it is the knowledge of philosophy, it is a kind of metaphysics” (p. 10). “This book is about the knowledge of a kind of non rationalism” (p. 11).

I totally disagree on this concept. If TCM contains therapeutic value, which seems to be the case, then it can be classified under what is commonly called “scientific” or “rational” knowledge where, since the time of Aristotle, the same

causes have been found to give reproducible effects. Then TCM have to be called a rational systems, which means a system that can be described by a clear succession of arguments (similar to the ones listed in this book), even if the theoretical basis of TCM remains (up to now) different from the (present) basis of western medicine. This is not the first case in scientific history when a phenomena that appears “non rational” beside the state of science at a given time, finally had a proper (rational) explanation. Movements of the planets in space, epidemics like the plague during the Middle Ages, the reason why children resemble their parents, similarities between monkeys and human beings (I will revert to the Darwinian theory in the latter part) and the alchemy of transforming lead into gold, had all been considered, at a certain moment, as non rational observations or assumptions, before eventually given each, a logical, rational explanation.

Science acknowledges the observation of reproducible data, and thus TCM clearly has a place in science, whereas scientific theories, which can evolve (improve) along the passage of time, allot a larger space to metaphysics. But both movements – observation and theorization – are connected. The fact that TCM mimic some data of modern physics, such as Prigogine’s thermodynamics, leads us to consider that an explanation that is compatible to both western and eastern metaphysics, is probable. In his book, “La Methode”, Edgar Morin, a modern day French philosopher of complex systems, takes the example to the yin/yang balance in TCM as a theoretical model of order and harmony including antagonistic properties, which would perfectly fit a modern (western) description of complexity.

I thus reject the reference to “non rationality” as claimed by the author. Art, poetry, fantasy and dreams entail non-rational activities. TCM does not seem to belong to this non-rational manifestation. Indeed “the Chinese system is a system with profound wisdom” (p. 12). I believe that this profound wisdom is rational.

Besides this (important) reservation, the book does have a dual interest for readers: a detailed analysis of the different techniques of TCM, as mentioned earlier, and also an interesting description of the metaphysical framework currently underlining TCM. Provided however eastern and western metaphysics are conceived for what they are: two likely compatible stances which have yet to find common concepts.

I would like to conclude with another final and important philosophical criticism, based on Darwin’s theory. It would indeed be a mistake to refuse eastern points of views in the name of (present) western scopes, and, on this score, the author is right. But it would be also wrong and dangerous, in the name of eastern scopes, to suppress western stances, like what the author does.

Thus, in my conclusion, I would also like to evoke Darwin and his evolution theory. Ming Wong maintains that human beings are not (naked) apes, since, according to him, “the mankind was not evolved from the monkey” (p. 531). As Darwinian, I cannot accept that and the author’s refusal to consider the evidence of scientific observations. Evolution theory has been proven by so many facts and findings (fossils, physiological data, embryologic processes, genetic measures...) and therefore it is difficult to contest Darwin’s theory. And the fact that the human brain

contains a much higher level of negative entropy than the brain of an ape, does not change anything about the shared origin of human beings and apes.

Finally, without minimising the value of this book for its information on TCM and its metaphysical element, I would like to re-assert here, my conviction that human beings are closely linked to apes and monkeys.

