

Observations on Cross-cultural Experiences of Natural Healing

Celina Sangita Beck

Dr. Ruchi Mishra, Head School of Languages Humanities and Liberal Arts

Abstract- Four ancient Asian cultures - Indian, Japanese, Chinese, and Tibetan have a long tradition of practicing lifestyles in harmony with nature and adopting its healing elements to prevent and treat all kinds of ailments.

The knowledge and practice of natural healing have its earliest records in Vedic cultures in India and later in China its influence spread to other Asian countries of the modern day.

The observations of cross-cultural influences and popularity of natural healing in the present day are recorded here.

Key Words: Healing, Yoga, Tradition, Forest-bathing, Health, Diet, Ayurveda

AYURVEDA AND YOGA: ORIGINS OF NATURAL HEALING IN INDIA

India, the world's oldest and only surviving ancient civilization, evolved the most profound understanding of the impact and consequences of the Five Elements of nature: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space.

The study of the implication and impact of the five elements of nature on the human mind and body, and on cultures across Asia, and later the world, evolved from the holistic medicinal science called Ayurveda.

The earliest Vedic texts^[1] refer to Ayurvedic treatments focus on preventive care as the basis of using natural foods and herbs for preventive and curative healing.

Physical well-being and emotional balance are significant concerns in an increasingly stress-driven society across countries. As a result, there is greater awareness of the need to turn to natural healing as a lifestyle and natural foods and physical interactions with nature.

Other cultures absorbed this knowledge and blended it with their understanding of nature and acceptance of nature's powers to develop their respective approaches to healing. The Indian influence is seen in different

forms and practices in China, Japan, and the Tibetan region.

INCREASING GLOBAL INTEREST IN NATURAL HEALING

There is a greater awareness in contemporary times of the need to de-stress and temper the intrusion of technology in people's lives. Emotional well-being and preventive healthcare is attracting greater attention and driving research into natural foods, and living closer to nature, as it once was.

Yoga

A growing movement toward natural healing follows on from the Indian experience with the spiritual connection between body, mind, and nature discussed in Ayurveda. Yoga^[2], a holistic spiritual and physical healing system that originated in India, diversified into many schools of thought and practice in different forms across civilizations.

Yoga involves performing bodily postures known as Asanas to promote healing and rejuvenation of the human body. There are hundreds of asanas, but a set of twelve asanas called Surya Namaskar, dedicated to the solar deity, remains very popular and actively practiced in many parts of the world.

Surya Namaskar or Sun Salutation^[3]: This yoga style is based on a dynamic sequence of 12 yoga postures that target stretching, toning, and healing the body. This ancient yoga therapy is also about cleansing the mind through deep inhalations and exhalations in specific sequences.

The focus is not restricted to the preventive side of diseases but also on the curative side by healing ailments related to digestive problems, loss of appetite, obesity, poor metabolism, arthritis, and other chronic diseases.

Yoga is the first of the ancient recorded healing practices to recognise and harness the powers of the five elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space. The early practitioners of Yoga believed the human body is made with the five elements and shape our existence and connection with the cosmos. The five elements also provide the foundation for preventive and curative healing by regulating and balancing cosmic energy.

Yoga is not just a treatment but a holistic lifestyle. Yogic healing is the practice of detoxifying one's body by following a vegetarian diet called Saatvik that excludes meat, onions, garlic, and other irritants that cause gas or heat in the human system. The diet necessitates the consumption of specific healing foods such as fruits, vegetables, beans, and lentils.

Pranayama, the Yogic practice of controlling the breath and channelling it for healing and restoring the body to a natural equilibrium of healing hormones and chemicals.

The Chinese Tai-chi reflects influence of Pranayama in controlling the human mind and body through slow and focused movements to bring it into a state of harmony with nature.

The modern-day Japanese practice of Shinrin-yoku draws inspiration from aroma therapy or using the natural environment to improve emotional and physical well-being. The conclusions drawn by Japanese research in recent times coincides with those of early Yoga and Ayurveda and is further discussed below.

Sun (Surya): The ancient Indians recognized the power of the Sun, along with many other powers, as one of the most potent healers. The Sun's ability to metabolize food into spiritual energy or Ojas Shakti is cited as a method of purifying the body.

The Sun Salutation in Chinese Tai-chi draws strong influence from ancient Indian understanding of the benefits of the sun on the human body.

Earth is regarded as a healing planet because its minerals are absorbed into the human body and put back in balance by controlling energies (heat) and liquids (liquidity).

Water keeps the planet Earth alive by restoring soil with vital healing components and regulating temperature for the healing of living things.

Fire (Agni) is essential for healing because it controls metabolism and energy in the human body; Agni also burns out contaminants, making the healing herbs more potent.

Space is recognized for its healing properties as every living thing contains sound and light energy utilized to cure ailments.

The idea is based on the belief that human existence is a microcosm of Brahman, the macrocosm. This idea maintains that healing occurs when the powers of intellect within oneself are awakened and balanced.

Vedic era texts like the Taittiriya Upanishad^[4] and Sushruta Samhita^[5] cover healing and physical well-being through yogic practices involving cosmic energy (prana shakti) that flows through the healing pathways or Nadis, and it is this therapeutic power that unites the human mind, body, and spirit. According to Indian traditions, approximately 72000 nadis in the body control all healing processes and branch off from a central kundalini.

THE ROLE OF DIET IN EXTENDED LIFE EXPECTANCY

No other culture studied and harnessed the power of diet for extended healthy life as the ancient Indian civilization.

The ancient Indian texts like the Bhagvad Gita and the Chhandogya Upanishad highlight the healing process at three levels - physical, mental, and spiritual as practiced through the three Gunas and diet lifestyles of Saatvik, Rajasic, and Tamasic. Of the three diets, Saatvik^[6] is identified as the most beneficial.

The physical aspect of healing is addressed by adopting the Sattvik Diet. It is based on a preventive lifestyle comprising natural and fresh food consumption, including fruits, nuts and seeds, vegetables, sprouts, and whole grains. In addition, the use of specific healing herbs during the preparation of these foods enhances the therapeutic value and impact of the Sattvik diet.

Panchakarma^[7] is another of the healing diets, which involves detoxifying treatments with special herbal preparations to cleanse the human system. Herbal healing beverages cleanse the human body of pollutants, and herbs & spices like mint, turmeric, black pepper, ginger, and cloves are used for their therapeutic benefits on the digestive system.

The mental and spiritual levels of treatments include meditation (dhyana) which leads to acquiring wisdom (vignan).

THE JAPANESE APPROACH TO NATURE AND NATURAL HEALING

The Japanese practice a concept called "Shinrin-yoku,"^[8]^[9] or forest bathing. People go into the forest to take in the fresh air and respond to the forest environment's natural fragrances.

The sight and sounds of the forest impact the human immune system, as observed by Dr. Qing Li^[10] in his research paper "Effect of forest bathing trips on human immune function." He has also authored the book "Shirin-yoku, The Art and Science of Forest-Bathing." As part of his research on forest bathing, he investigated urban people who spent 3 days and 2 nights in the forest. Dr. Li studied the subject's physiological conditions collecting blood and urine samples on Days 2 and 3 during the trip and on Days 7 and 30 after the trip, and compared the results.

The numbers of natural killer (NK) cells, granulysin-producing, perforin-expressing, and granzyme A/B-containing lymphocytes in the blood, as well as urinary adrenaline levels, were assessed. Natural Killer (NK) cells are innate immune cells that fight cancerous cells in the human body. The presence of higher NK is beneficial to humans

This study showed that after 30 days, the NK activity in participants who went on a forest bathing trip was higher than before. Furthermore, the increased NK activity persisted for more than 30 days after the trip, suggesting that people could maintain a higher level of NK function by going for forest bathing trips at least once a month.

Forest bathing is outdoor therapy. You breathe in volatile chemicals called phytoncides (essential wood oils), antimicrobial volatile organic compounds derived from trees, such as α -pinene and limonene.

In the UK^[11], studies on forest bathing have shown that 57 percent of participants showed improvement in mood, reduction in rumination, enhanced nature compassion and connection, and increased heart rate variability.

The phytoncides help to keep plants healthy and protect people from disease. Essential oils improve the mood and immune system activity and lower blood pressure, heart rate, and stress. In addition, it also helps fight extended diseases like depression and cancer.

While technology has enabled a deeper understanding of the composition of the human body, interestingly, the science of Yoga long back recognized the benefits of maintaining a balance and harmony with nature.

The Japanese approach on using aroma therapy in forest bathing relies on using nature is similar to the Indian and Chinese approaches.

While the healing power of nature has been in practice since ancient times, the focus of research now must go deeper into understanding how nature can be better exploited in healing and preventing diseases.

THE TRADITIONAL JAPANESE DIET BEHIND THE HEALTHY LIFE EXPECTANCY

The Japanese people enjoy some of the most extended life expectancies globally. Several research studies have been conducted on the impact of diet patterns and compared the traditional diet with modern ones to observe the consequences and effects.

In a study conducted by food scientists in Japan, tests were carried out on mice fed human Diet as was prevalent in 1975, 1990, and 2005. Later, the experiment was extended to humans for a short duration of 28 days. The "1975 diet"^[12] was offered to one group aged between ages 20 and 70 years, and another, with modern urban foods influenced by American popular culture. The results were interesting though not surprising.

Both in mice and humans, the "1975" Diet showed lower levels of "LDL" or bad cholesterol and higher levels of "HDL" or good cholesterol than the other group that ate urban lifestyle popular foods. In other words, the "1975" group had lower chances of developing lifestyle diseases like diabetes, fatty liver, and obesity.

This modern-day observation in Japan arrives at the same observations as the ancient Indians who practiced Yoga and existed on Sattvik diets as part of remaining healthy and extending human life.

Ancient India experienced long life expectancies exceeding other cultures long before modern human civilizations understood the benefits of Sattvik diet.

The growing preference and shift towards natural foods in the west further strengthens the knowledge base and experience of India.

CHINESE MEDICINE AND THE APPROACH TO NATURAL HEALING

Traditional Chinese medicine has been utilized in the backdrop of natural cures since ancient times. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) [13] [14] [15] [16] [17], illness is seen as a disharmony between people and their surroundings.

TCM is a term that refers to the Chinese medical theory and practice, which has been evolving for a long time, originally derived from ancient Chinese medicine. TCM's healing methods are rooted in ancient Chinese therapy. The Shang Dynasty (1600–1046 BC) is the first time these therapies were recorded.

TCM therapies aim to restore balance in the yin and yang forces to cure disease. According to Chinese philosophy, Yin and yang describe how opposing or contradictory forces are complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world.

According to TCM beliefs, restoring a person's energy flow is meant to be accomplished by mending the body's meridians. When there is an excess or shortage of qi in particular meridians, disease occurs. Herbal medicines, tai chi chuan, Qi gong, Acupuncture, and moxibustion are just a few examples of healing techniques.

From the perspective of healing, the human mind and body are a single system that affects each other. Because they are linked, they cannot be separated. Under this form of treatment, the therapist discovers the reason for illness and offers suitable healing techniques.

Chinese medicine, in particular Acupuncture and herbal therapy, is the foundation of Taoist healing art. Therefore, Acupuncture and herbal medicine are the two primary healing modalities.

This therapeutic technique aims to restore a balance between the body's life energy, and "qi," which is constantly circulating through meridians and moving through organs. The Chinese thought looks at the human body comprising twelve meridians, each linked to a different organ. If one of these meridians does not have enough "qi," disease can result.

Qi gong healing art controls the breathing process, and therapeutic body postures and positions that help synchronize the breath with physical movement. The activity draws inspiration from the Indian Pranayama and later evolved as part of Chinese healing processes. Tai-chi or Tai chi chuan is the slow approach with deep breathing and gentle physical movements to

stabilize and regulate the metabolic activity. The benefits of Tai chi include lowering of stress and anxiety, improvement in strength and stamina, improvement in sleep.

SOWA RIGPA: THE TIBETAN SCIENCE OF NATURAL HEALING

In Tibetan healing science, Sowa Rigpa^{[18] [19]}, the healing practices have been around for centuries. Sowa Rigpa in the Tibetan language is one of the world's oldest known traditional medicines that began developing during the pre-Buddhist era in Shang Shung's kingdom.

In this art of healing, illness is seen as a disharmony between a person and their surroundings. Therefore, the fundamental point of this healing practice is to bring about a balance within an individual to cure them of their disease. The therapist tries to recreate this balance between mind and body to do so.

This healing practice is similar to Ayurveda because both involve healing therapies but exist within an entirely different cultural framework. The healing methods used in Sowa Rigpa are wholly rooted in Buddhism, while Ayurveda is deeply embedded to Hinduism and early Vedic era.

A variety of procedures diagnose disease and imbalances in Tibetan medicine. The first and most essential component in determining an individual's humoral configuration. Like the Ayurvedic Doshas, Humor may be determined as early as infancy. The Diet and behaviour of a child's mother during pregnancy determine a youngster's humor.

The essential elements of traditional Tibetan medicine are the three humors (wind), mkhris pa (fire), and bad kan. The physical body type, head shape, digestion, sleeping patterns, and emotional displays are just a few examples of differences between them.

Humor has a significant impact on the human body, both physiologically and psychologically. Humor predisposes people to various health problems. Individuals with the mkhris pa (fire) constitution are prone to skin disorders, rashes, and infections. Appropriately targeted prevention, as shown above, may be utilized to anticipate illnesses before they occur and then avert them.

During a Tibetan medicine examination, a doctor checks the patient's pulse and, if possible, their urine.

The pulse may indicate an individual's humor and, in particular, any organic imbalances.

Human urine has nine characteristics that may be observed and examined: colour, bubble form/formation, mud, film, and odour. Every component may be used to diagnose a patient. Finally, a physician will examine one's response to therapy and change as required. The treatments are individually customized and usually long-term in the application and effect.

In the past, natural healing techniques were neglected. However, medical science is now beginning to acknowledge healing therapies as a supplementary component of oncology and cardiac disease therapy. In addition, modern medicine employs new techniques such as psychotherapy and other treatments to cure physical symptoms, including anxiety and depression.

COMMON HEALING PRACTICES OF ALL THREE COUNTRIES

The similarities with ancient Indian concepts point to the knowledge flowing from the Indian civilization to the Chinese civilization before each followed their respective paths of evolution with local interpretations.

In Japanese healing science or Shamanism, which is comparable to Chinese Shamanism, the therapist collaborates with the patient in looking for causes of disharmony between nature and humans. The Ayurvedic approach too focuses on restoring the balance between mind, body and soul.

However, certain healing practices differ from one nation to the next. In Japan and China, for example, psychotherapy and hand therapy are used to treat illness.

In Japan, psychotherapy is central to healing and involves the therapist speaking with the patient about emotional aspects and state of the mind to reach a better level of the symptoms, illness, and the subsequent treatment. It helps the patients achieve a better understanding of themselves and the symptoms of ailments before applying the curative advice of the therapist.

Yoga, Ayurveda, Acupuncture, Qi gong, and Tai chi healing arts remain popular healing methods found in the sub-continental and eastern cultures. Despite their diverse ancestry, these therapies have been refined to

fit local requirements as they were handed down through generations.

Among standard healing practices in eastern cultures is Acupuncture, which uses needles to heal pain and illness. It is widely believed acupuncture originated in China as a medical practice. However, ancient texts are available in India pointing to the use of needles in healing procedures.

Therefore, it possibly spread to China subsequently where it attracted greater attention than in India and was further developed into a science that remained central to their traditional curative treatment.

The focus of breathing techniques in Yoga inspired the evolution of Tai-chi in China where slow movements and controlled breathing helped regulate the body's internal functioning. Today, Tai-chi is used to help improve body movement in people with Parkinson's disease.

The healing practice of Qi gong and Tai chi remains popular and widely practiced in Japan and China, but not so much elsewhere. Yoga, however, continues to grow in popularity and connecting across all genders and ages, worldwide.

CONCLUSION

The healing methods of the Eastern cultures have evolved from ancient healing disciplines to meet new demands and situations. The science of natural healing practices of Ayurveda and Yoga influenced other cultures as it spread through generations across Asia, including China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and other Asian countries.

Today, the traditional medicinal practices of all four cultures – Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan, is attracting greater attention for addressing lifestyle-triggered diseases like diabetes, anxiety, and heart conditions.

Traditional medical practices deserve greater policy recognition as legitimate components of medical treatments. Increased funding is required to research the benefits of traditional treatments.

REFERENCE

- [1] Thakar, V J. "Historical development of basic concepts of Ayurveda from Veda up to Samhita." *Ayu* vol. 31,4 (2010): 400-2. doi:10.4103/0974-8520.82024.

- [2] Concept of Health and Disease in Yoga <https://yoga.ayush.gov.in/blog?q=61>
- [3] Singh, Kritika. *Sun Salutation*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sun_Salutation Surya Namaskar Organization.
- [4] Sankaracharya, Sri; Sureshvaracharya, Sri; Vidyaranya, Sri. "The Taittiriya Upanishad" Book II Chapter VI: The Infinite and Evolution Pages 291-321: ISBN: 8185208115.
- [5] Singh, Vibha. "Sushruta: The father of surgery." *National journal of maxillofacial surgery* vol. 8,1 (2017): 1-3. doi:10.4103/njms.NJMS_33_17
- [6] What is Sattvik Diet: The Yoga Institute <https://theyogainstitute.org/what-is-sattvic-diet/>
- [7] Lad, Vasant. Adapted from "An Introduction to Panchakarma" Ayurveda Today, Volume VII, Number 1, Summer 1994.
- [8] Clarke, Fiona J., Yasuhiro Kotera, and Kirsten McEwan. 2021. "A Qualitative Study Comparing Mindfulness and Shinrin-Yoku (Forest Bathing): Practitioners' Perspectives" *Sustainability* 13, no. 12: 6761. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13126761>
- [9] The Healing Power of Nature: <https://time.com/4405827/the-healing-power-of-nature/>
- [10] Li, Q. Effect of forest bathing trips on human immune function. *Environ Health Prev Med* 15, 9–17 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12199-008-0068-3>
- [11] "New research compares forest bathing and mindfulness": <https://tfb.institute/scientific-research/>
- [12] Tsuyoshi, Tsuduki. The "1975 Diet" and the Secret of Japanese Longevity <https://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/d00482/the-1975-diet-and-the-secret-of-japanese-longevity.html>
- [13] Ratini, Melinda. 15 March 2021. <https://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/what-is-traditional-chinese-medicine>
- [14] Bystritsky A, et al. Complementary and alternative treatments for anxiety symptoms and disorders: Physical, cognitive, and spiritual interventions. <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/search>. Accessed Aug. 28, 2018.
- [15] Ma C, et al. The impact of group-based tai chi on health-status outcomes among community-dwelling older adults with hypertension. *Heart & Lung: The Journal of Acute and Critical Care*. 2018;47:337.
- [16] Tsai PF, et al. Tai chi for post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic musculoskeletal pain: A pilot study. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*. 2018;36:147.
- [17] Mayo Clinic Staff. Tai-chi: A gentle way to fight stress <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/tai-chi/art-20045184>
- [18] Roberti di Sarsina, Paolo et al. "Tibetan medicine: a unique heritage of person-centered medicine." *The EPMA journal* vol. 2,4 (2011): 385-9. doi:10.1007/s13167-011-0130-x
- [19] Sowa Rigpa Institute: <https://www.Sowarigpa.institute.org/>