



An interview with ...

Jörg Kastner LicAc, Naturopath, author of

Chinese Nutrition Therapy

Dietetics in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

1) What was your motivation behind writing this book?

I have had such good experiences with Chinese dietetics, both personally and as a practitioner, that I felt the urge to pass on the knowledge on dietetics that the Chinese have collected over several millennia.

2) Who is the target audience for your book? Practitioners of TCM, lay people, doctors of Western medicine, practitioners of complementary medicine?

The book is mainly directed towards TCM practitioners; however, it is basically of interest to anybody who cares about a healthy diet. I am sure a layperson will find it just as useful. In Germany, half the books were sold to interested laypersons, - and the response has been excellent.

3) While writing the book, did you have a specific audience in mind like students or practitioners of Chinese medicine?

I wrote the book with Li Dong Yuan in mind. He is one of the great masters of Chinese medicine and founder of the "Spleen Stomach School". I quoted him often in this book. His opinions and views had a great impact on TCM, and his knowledge is especially important today.

4) What distinguishes this book from other books on nutrition in TCM? What makes it so special?

The book is systematically structured and easy to understand. It is based on original sources and especially on my own personal experience, which is interesting to the Western practitioner. Dubious views were not included.

5) Which TCM key concepts and messages can the reader find in the book?

What you eat today will influence your health and overall well being tomorrow! To really stay healthy you have to find a diet that suits your individual make-up. In traditional Chinese medicine, an individual diet is seen as the key to long-term health and energy.

6) Many TCM diet recommendations are also found in Western medicine. Is there, nevertheless, a "big" difference?

TCM recommendations differ from their Western counterparts in the sense that they use the concept of "energetic effects." Western recommendations are very one-sided and often turn out to be short-lived fads. Chinese dietetics, on the other hand, is based on more than 2,000 years of experience and has the most holistic approach I know: Chinese dietetics looks at the energy in an individual and also takes into consideration the environment that the subject is surrounded by. This means that a diet is composed of different foods, depending on whether it is summer or winter. In this regard, Western theory still makes a lot of mistakes.

7) Can laypersons integrate the principles of Chinese dietetics into their daily life or do they need to consult a physician to do so? It seems that if you have become acquainted with these principles you have to watch what you eat all the time!

On the contrary! Chinese dietetics are easily integrated into your daily life regardless of where you live, the United States, Germany, or any other country in the world. All you need is a basic understanding of the principle.

Of course, it is best if a TCM specialist has assessed your personal energetic situation and has given a basic explanation. Then, re-adjusting your diet is quite easy. Assessing his or her individual yin, yang, and xue situation is definitely not easy for a layperson. But after one consultation with a TCM specialist, the food you surround yourself with will change - for the better. The most important thing is: Eating is supposed to be fun; it's supposed to be our energy supplier of choice.

8) How important are Chinese dietetics in China nowadays? Do the Chinese integrate the principles into their daily diet? Are those principles taught to children from an early age on? And if so, how?

Dietetics is common knowledge in China. Chinese people will look at the weather before cooking. Is it hot or cold? Is it raining? How do I feel? All these questions determine the ingredients for the next meal. And children grow up with this. Let us hope that the opening of McDonald's and other fast food joints does not have too many negative effects on the diet of young Chinese people. In this respect, the West should learn from the East - not the other way around!

9) Are Chinese doctors today trained in Chinese dietetics and if so, what kind of training is it?

In China, TCM is unthinkable without the aspect of Chinese dietetics. At all universities, doctors are trained in the methods and application of dietetics.

10) How important is a patient's nutrition to you?

Very important. For me, diet recommendations are always a part of the

treatment. A patient's diet is often a great part of his or her illness. If the patient does not change it in the long run, then even the best of treatments will only be partly successful. Once patients change their diet, a change in lifestyle will usually follow, and soon they won't need a doctor anymore. In China, patients receive dish-recommendations and take these to restaurants to "eat their way to health". In my opinion, that would be a great practice for the Western world.

11) In TCM it seems everything is about re-establishing balance in an imbalanced organism. However, such an imbalance can be very subtle and hardly have any symptoms. People who have such a slight imbalance might assume their condition is normal. How do you know if such an imbalance requires closer scrutiny?

First of all, you need a clear diagnosis by a TCM practitioner. The patient has to be just that - very patient and disciplined for good health to come about. Sometimes that takes months, and in extreme cases, even one or two years. But it will certainly work. People will feel the progress they're making, and that of course motivates them to continue the therapy.

12) Are there differences in how Chinese dietetics are applied in Asia and the West, or even in Europe and the USA?

Actually, no. The principles are the same everywhere. The only variables are the ingredients, which are different in each country. What fascinates me is that the result is the same, whether you're in Europe, North America, or Asia.

13) How do you find practitioners who are holistic in their approach and offer nutritional therapy? Are there organizations or websites where you can get that information?

Such practitioners should have good training. In Germany, this means that TCM practitioners need at least 300 hours of training. I am sure there are organizations and websites; however I can't supply such information.

14) Can laypersons or practitioners profit from a combination of the principles of Chinese dietetics with other Eastern principles, such as ayurveda or Tibetan medicine?

The principles are very similar, especially those of Chinese dietetics and ayurveda. They're simply called by other names. Maybe ayurveda is not as detailed as Chinese dietetics but they can be combined.

15) How can TCM and Chinese dietetics be introduced to a broader audience, especially in the established Western medical scene?

You need patience and positive experiences. Better literature, and more media presence. The growing health awareness will do the rest. Besides, the

wellness movement shows how big the demand for preventive treatment is. Good nutrition is the most important part.

16) What other books can you recommend to laypersons and practitioners if they want more information on the subject?

Bob Flaws' books on this subject are very good, but basically there are very well- founded books on the subject. Many of them are too vague, or they contain dubious information. Nevertheless, I believe that this will change in the future.

17) How do you plan to promote your book in the USA? Are you planning on teaching courses on the subject there?

Teaching courses in the US would be great. A book is never as inspiring and vivid as a lecture by a strong proponent of the method. I just need one or two days to teach beginners the principles and concepts of Chinese dietetics and to teach them the basics knowledge that they can then use at home. So, if I get any invitations I would be happy to come and teach anywhere!

18) Why is dietetics, which is one of the building blocks of TCM, not as important in the West as acupuncture?

Only ten years ago, acupuncture was regarded with a lot of skepticism, and only few practitioners used it. The effectiveness of this method and the demand from patients led to its success and established it in the medical system so that it is widely used in the West now. Also Eastern knowledge and theory has experienced a boom in the past years - yoga, qigong, tai chi and many others are very popular. We can only hope that Chinese dietetics will become part of that boom and that its benefits will become widely known. Anybody who has ever tried it and felt the positive results will never go back.

19) Are you planning to write any more books?

Chinese Dietetics for children and their parents is a subject that is very important to me, as this would be an excellent way of securing an energetic basis for life-long health early on.

Mr Kastner, thank you very much for this interview.