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Preface: Venerating the root part 2

Sun Simiao's texts are gems from a historical point of view. It is thrilling to see how advanced he was in putting down his ideas almost 1500 years ago, understanding the importance of treating children at a time when children were not as precious as they are these days. Today we have special hospitals with many wards for all kind of pediatric illnesses and we spend significant time and resources to take care of our children, pamper them, and keep them away of from any harm. However, in the old world, his approach for treating women and children first out of moral and practical reasons was considered revolutionary as he saw that treating children will create a healthier society. Interesting to note that it took the Western world another 1000 years to write the first book about pediatric care.

But what is the importance of his writings from a clinical point of view in a world that has such strong “tools” like antibiotics and paracetamol and where vaccinations are considered compulsory in order to prevent those disease that ruled the world 1500 years ago? And on the other hand, what can we learn from the medical Gentlemen (as he beautifully calls them) who used substances that today are perceived as toxics?

Well, first of all we see that when they had to deal with life-threatening situations without the strong drugs that we have today, it made them think and search for causes for the disease so that they could eliminate and prevent them. In order to do so they were not afraid to use materials and methods that were sometimes as dangerous as the disease itself. Today we use “safer” drugs that are more potent but make us ”sloppy” and therefore we may miss what is really going on in the body and what the causes for the illness are. Modern pediatric care is considered safer but is it healthier? Indeed one cannot ignore that children’s mortality rate is without any doubt better than it was 1500 years ago, but does it make our children healthier ? Reading these texts about “transformations and steamings,” for example, we see that in a less “comfortable” world children had different ways and reasons for being ill. This should make us wonder what is buried underneath the drugs and vaccinations we use today.

The second interesting observation relates to the fact that Chinese medicine is used today as a last line of treatment. Today we use Chinese medicine as a more gentle way to deal with or treat situations that are considered outside the focus of biomedical medicine or when parents have had enough of the symptomatic treatment of antibiotics and Tylenol. Sun Simiao’s text was written in times when Chinese medicine was used when a child’s life was at risk, situations that we rarely see today in our clinic as we count on the power of biomedical medicine to save the child's life. This is why his prescriptions are very strong and sometimes even much stronger than those we will use today in our clinic. This may suggest to us the potential of a good, well-diagnosed medicine that is oriented to treat the root rather than to treat the symptoms.

The last and most fascinating thing about Sun Simiao’s texts is when he mentions that these texts are there in order to teach us when to treat children and when to let them heal by themselves, when a situation is life-threatening and when it is part of their normal growth. Sun Simiao emphasizes what we know but tend to forget - that children have the power to heal themselves because their Yang is so clear and that all we, as parents and medical gentlemen and gentlewomen, need to do is to guard them and guide them in their own Dao.

I want to thank Sabine for bringing these texts to us, to help all of us who cover children's ears during thunderstorms to reveal a bit more of the great mystery of human life and the ways to nourish and cultivate a healthier life for ourselves and our society.

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