

# Simple analysis on the embodiment of golden mean (*Zhong Yong*) thoughts in tuina

## 浅析中庸思想在推拿学中的体现

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### Abstract

The concept of golden mean (*Zhong Yong*), i.e. moderation, is the highest principle of moral cultivation in Confucianism. It entails an exclusive methodology in addressing politics, philosophy and everything in the universe. This concept has permeated into all aspects of traditional Chinese culture. As an ancient therapy, tuina is an important part of Chinese medicine and has its characteristic theory and methods. Just like Chinese medicine, tuina has long been greatly influenced by the concept of golden mean. To better promote the development of tuina, it's necessary to investigate the historical evolution of tuina and the concept of golden mean as well as the influence of 'golden mean' idea on tuina manipulation, mechanism and treatment.

**Keywords:** Tuina; Massage; Science of Tuina (TCM); Doctrine of the Mean; Confucian School; Traditional Chinese Culture

**【摘要】**中庸思想是儒家道德修养的最高准则。它发散开来又是处理政治、哲学乃至天地宇宙万物运动变化的独特的方法论；它所提出的解决问题的思想影响渗透了我国传统文化的方方面面。推拿疗法自古有之，作为传统中医学的重要组成部分，发展至今，形成了自己特有的理论和方法，它和中国传统医学一样，自其理论形成之初就受到了儒家中庸思想的影响和渗透。为了推动推拿学的发展，对中庸思想和推拿学的历史沿革进行了追溯，对中庸思想在推拿学手法、机理以及治疗上的体现进行了探讨。

**【关键词】**推拿；按摩；中医推拿学；中庸；儒家；传统中国文化

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The concept of golden mean (*Zhong Yong*), i.e. moderation, is the core idea of Confucianism. Over the past thousands of years, the ideas of rectitude, moderation, harmony, objectivity, impartiality and 'one should never act in excess' have permeated into all aspects of people's life and become the highest criterion in dealing with life issues, and social discrepancies or disagreements<sup>[1]</sup>. Numerous Chinese medical literatures have been published in this regard, including the relationship between the concept of golden mean and *Huang Di Nei Jing* (*Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*)<sup>[2-4]</sup>, the relationship between the concept of golden mean and treatment strategy in Chinese medicine<sup>[5-6]</sup> and the relationship between the concept of golden mean and Chinese herbal formulas<sup>[7]</sup>. As one of the five therapies recorded in *Su Wen* (*Essential Questions*), tuina is an important part of Chinese medical therapies and its principle and practice are both greatly influenced by the concept of golden mean<sup>[8]</sup>. This paper aims to investigate the influence of the

concept of golden mean on tuina manipulation, treatment strategy and practice.

### 1 Historical Evolution of the Concept of Golden Mean

The philosophy of golden mean is the most influential idea in Chinese history. It has permeated and influenced all aspects of life through thousands of years. The concept of golden mean was first developed in the Western Zhou period (1046-771 BC)<sup>[5]</sup>. During that period, the first word '*Zhong*' was of methodological consideration. The golden mean (*Zhong Yong*) was first mentioned in *Lun Yu* (*Analects of Confucius*)<sup>[9]</sup>, believing that common people should follow the virtue embodied in the concept of golden mean. The book *Zhong Yong* (*Doctrine of the Mean*) symbolized the formation of the idea of golden mean. Out of political consideration, the Emperor Wu of Han (30 June 156 BC- 29 March 87 BC) made Confucianism the only national religion, which greatly promoted the concept of golden mean<sup>[5]</sup>. At that time, the idea of conception was believed to be the law that everything in the universe follows. In Song and Ming dynasties, the concept of golden mean was lifted to an extremely high position, thanks to the efforts of

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well-known scholars such as Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi<sup>[10]</sup>.

## 2 Historical Evolution of Tuina

Tuina is believed to be 'most primitive and instinct medicine' summarized by human being through long-term struggle with disease<sup>[11]</sup>. In ancient times, it was known as *An Mo* or *An Qiao*. According to *Su Wen (Essential Questions)*, tuina was one of the first 5 therapies, along with *Bian* stone, herbal medicine, moxibustion and acupuncture. Also in *Su Wen (Essential Questions)*, tuina was originated from the central plain of China. Tuina-related information was recorded in *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)*, which was compiled in the middle of Western Han dynasty<sup>[12]</sup>. A total of 29 chapters and 40 items are related to the origin, action mechanism, manipulation categories, auxiliary tools, indications and contraindications, which laid a solid foundation for the later formation and development of tuina. In this sense, *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)* is the theoretical source of tuina<sup>[13]</sup>. Seeing from the chapters and contents in *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)*, tuina was a key part of Chinese medicine. In addition, according to *Han Shu • Yi Wen Zhi (Book of Han-Treatise on Literature)*, *Huang Di Qi Bo An Mo Shi Juan (Ten Volumes of Massage by Huang Di and Qi Bo)* was the earliest book on tuina. Unfortunately, this book was lost. Tuina became one of the four major medical subjects in Jin, Sui and Tang dynasties and was used in traumatology and surgical problems. For example, *Zhou Hou Bei Ji Fang (Emergency Formulas to Keep Up One's Sleeve)* recorded the reduction of mandibular dislocation for the first time<sup>[14]</sup>. In Song, Jin and Yuan dynasties, *Sheng Ji Zong Lu (Comprehensive Recording of Divine Assistance)* organized by the government summarized and analyzed tuina manipulations. The Ming and Qing dynasties had witnessed a continuous development. Today, the tuina system includes pediatric tuina, adult digital-pressure tuina, *Nei Gong* tuina, *Yi Zhi Chan* tuina, Gun-rolling manipulation and orthopedic tuina.

## 3 The Influence of the Concept of Golden Mean on Tuina

The concept of golden mean has great impact on the theory and practice of tuina. As mentioned above, tuina was originally recorded in *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)*, which has been substantially influenced by the concept of golden mean.

The representative books of the concept of golden mean: *Lun Yu (the Analects of Confucius)* and *Zhong Yong (Doctrine of the Mean)* were compiled before 400

BC. The Emperor Wu of Han (30 June 156 BC-29 March 87 BC) made Confucianism the state religion of China. Most scholars believed that *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)* was compiled in the middle of Western Han dynasty, i.e., approximately 100 BC. Undoubtedly, this book has been greatly permeated and influenced by the concept of golden mean in Confucianism. Considering from the descriptions, the 'overdone is worse than undone' and 'impartiality' entailed in the concept of golden mean are basically consistent with 'yin-yang balance guarantees a peaceful mind' and 'yin-yang balance makes a man healthy' recorded in *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)*<sup>[7]</sup>. To sum up, the yin-yang theory runs through the theoretical system in *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)* and embodies the idea of golden mean. The concept of golden mean has played a guiding role in the core theory in *Huang Di Nei Jing (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)*, including tuina. This can be further explained in tuina manipulation, mechanism and treatment.

### 3.1 The concept of golden mean and tuina manipulation

Tuina is defined as a treatment method to treat disease by applying manipulation or using certain tools to points or specific areas on the surface of the body according to Chinese medical theory. Tuina manipulation is not only the key to treatment, but also associated with the treatment efficacy. Consequently, tuina manipulation is the most important part in the theory and practice of tuina. Technique requirements vary in different tuina manipulations. These requirements are more or less associated with the concept of golden mean.

There are two major types of tuina manipulation: relaxation and reduction. The former is mainly directed at soft tissue and acts to relieve muscle spasm, release adhesion, improve local metabolism and resolve edema or hematoma. In terms of technique requirement, relaxation manipulations are supposed to be lasting, forceful, even (rhythm), soft and penetrating<sup>[14]</sup>. The latter is mainly directed at bones and joints. In terms of technique requirements, the reduction manipulations are supposed to be stable (for the sake of safety), accurate (for the sake of efficacy), subtle (for the sake of exerting appropriate instead of violent force) and fast (controlled force). Both manipulation types are consistent with the idea of conception.

### 3.2 The concept of golden mean and action mechanism of tuina

Tuina action mechanisms involve warming meridians, dispelling cold, circulating blood, resolving stasis, alleviating pain, unblocking meridians, balancing yin and yang, tonifying qi, and regulating the mind. All these

mechanisms are associated with and influenced by the concept of golden mean.

3.2.1 Warms meridians, dissipates cold, circulates blood, resolves stasis, and alleviates pain

The *Ju Tong Lun of Su Wen* (Chapter 39 of *Essential Questions*) states, 'retention of cold qi in the intestines and stomach may obstruct the flow of blood and cause pain. Pressing manipulation moves qi and blood and therefore alleviates pain'; and 'retention of cold qi in the bladder meridian along the back...may cause referred pain. Pressing manipulation can warm the local area and therefore alleviate pain'. From the perspective of golden mean, retention of cold qi is an excessive state. Tuina warms meridians, disperses cold, circulates blood and resolves stasis. Consequently, tuina has remarkable efficacy in the treatment of neck pain, frozen shoulder and low back/leg pain due to wind cold.

3.2.2 Unblocks meridians and balances yin and yang

The *Xue Qi Xing Zhi Pian of Su Wen* (Chapter 24 of *Essential Questions*) states, 'fatigue, fear and fright may cause meridians to stagnate and result in numbness in the limbs. This can be addressed by massage and medicated liquor'. The *Yin Yang Ying Xiang Da Lun of Su Wen* (Chapter 5 of *Essential Questions*) states, 'Yin and Yang are the law of Heaven and Earth, the principle of everything in the universe, the parents of change, and the origin of birth and destruction'. In Chinese medicine, yin and yang are the general outline of syndrome differentiation by the eight principles: disease occurs as a result of yin-yang imbalance. From the perspective of golden mean, yin-yang imbalance may cause fatigue, fear or fright and result in numbness of limbs. Massage and medicated liquor help to unblock qi and blood, balance yin and yang, restore normal distribution of the nutrients to nourish the Zang-fu organs, limbs, bones and joints, and thus relieve numbness.

3.2.3 Tonifies qi and regulates the mind

The *Tiao Jing Lun of Su Wen* (Chapter 62 of *Essential Questions*) states, 'in case of insufficient spirit, press the deficient meridians to reinforce qi and blood'. The *Yin Yang Ying Xiang Da Lun of Su Wen* (Chapter 5 of *Essential Questions*) states, 'for people with a weak constitution, the strategy is to warm yang and tonify qi; for people with insufficient essence, the strategy is to supplement nutritious food', and 'for qi deficiency, the strategy is to reinforce qi by persistent tuina and superficial needling'.

### 3.3 The concept of golden mean and tuina treatment

As an important part of traditional Chinese medicine, tuina theory originates from *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine). Undoubtedly, its treatment strategy is also from the same classic. Since the concept of golden mean has greatly influenced the ideas in *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Yellow Emperor's Classic of

*Internal Medicine*), it is also closely associated with the treatment strategy of tuina.

3.3.1 Routine treatment and paradoxical treatment

The strategies of routine treatment are to dispel cold with heat, clear heat with cold, reinforce the deficiency and reduce the excess. For example, rubbing or scrubbing manipulations are applied to warm yang and dispel cold for cold-induced stomachache; and squeezing or swing manipulations are applied to clear heat for stomachache due to exuberant stomach fire. The strategies of paradoxical treatment are to treat heat with heat, treat cold with cold, treat blockage with blockage and treat diarrhea with purgatives. For example, patients having qi deficiency may present with constipation: a false excess, the treatment strategy is to reinforce qi instead of draining downward; patients having food retention may present with diarrhea, the treatment strategy is to drain downward instead of stopping diarrhea. The routine treatment and paradoxical treatment share a common goal: to achieve harmony and balance.

3.3.2 Treat directed at the symptoms (*Biao*) and treatment directed at the root cause (*Ben*)

As unique concepts in Chinese medicine, *Biao* (symptoms) and *Ben* (root cause) can generalize major symptoms and minor symptoms, primary disease and secondary disease, etiological factors and clinical manifestations, interior syndrome and exterior syndrome. The *Biao Ben Bing Chuan Lun of Su Wen* (Chapter 65 of *Essential Questions*) states, 'one will not make any mistakes in diagnosis and treatment as long as he knows the relationship between *Biao* and *Ben*; otherwise, one will not have correct diagnosis and treatment'. Clinically, it's advisable to deal with symptoms in acute conditions and address the root cause in remissive stage. For example, it's important to alleviate pain for acute attack of cholecystitis by heavy stimulation to Ashi points or Dannang (EX-LE 6); to open the mind and relieve convulsion for infantile convulsions by Qia-finger-nail pressing Shuigou (GV 26), Laolong (Extra) and Shixuan (EX-UE 11). These methods are based on the idea that the pathogenic process is dynamic. Although it's essential to seek the root cause for disease treatment, symptoms need to be addressed in special occasions. This can be explained with adaptability or flexibility in the concept of golden mean.

3.3.3 Reinforces anti-pathogenic qi and removes pathogenic factors

The *Tong Ping Xu Shi Lun of Su Wen* (Chapter 28 of *Essential Questions*) records, 'prevailing pathogenic qi causes excess syndrome, deprivation of essential qi causes deficiency syndrome'. Pathogenic process involves the struggle between anti-pathogenic qi and pathogenic factors. The *Zhi Zhen Yao Da Lun of Su Wen*

(Chapter 74 of *Essential Questions*) states, 'it is essential to identify pathomechanism of different medical conditions, understand the inherent connection between pathogenesis and differentiated syndrome. With an accurate diagnosis, appropriate treatment strategy, the blood and qi are smoothly circulated and a harmony or balance is thus achieved'. Clinically, the treatment strategy is to reinforce the deficiency and reduce the excess. For example, Mo-rubbing Dantian [around Guanyuan (CV 4)], Ca-scrubbing Mingmen (GV 4) and Rou-kneading Wailaogong (EX-UE 8) are used for deficiency; and reducing Liufu, clearing Tianheshui and *Shui Di Lao Yue* for excess syndrome. These methods are based on typical concept of golden mean.

### 3.3.4 Balances yin and yang

One of the essential principles in tuina treatment is to balance yin and yang. The *Yin Yang Ying Xiang Da Lun of Su Wen* (Chapter 5 of *Essential Questions*) records, 'yin preponderance may cause yang problem, yang preponderance may cause yin problem. Yang excess causes heat, yin excess causes cold. Extreme cold transforms into heat. Extreme heat transforms into cold'. Diseases occur as a result of yin-yang imbalance. Consequently, the treatment strategy is to reduce the excess of yin or yang. Clinically, it's advisable to apply reinforcing manipulation [Rou-kneading Yongquan (KI 1) or Taixi (KI 3)] to the Kidney Meridian for hyperactivity of yang due to yin deficiency; and to An-press and Rou-knead the lower Dantian [Guanyuan (CV 4)] or Shenshu (BL 23), Mingmen (GV 4) for early morning diarrhea due to yang deficiency of the spleen and kidney). These methods are actually based on the concept of golden mean.

### 3.3.5 Treatment according to time, place and individualized constitutions

Treatment methods vary in time, place and individualized constitutions/ages. For example, in spring and summer, mild manipulation is applied because of the loose skin pores; and in autumn and winter, heavy manipulation is applied because of the tight skin pores. This is based on the concept of golden mean. Since human physiology and pathology are influenced by natural environment, we should live in harmony with nature. The unity between human behavior/spirit and nature is the ultimate goal of balance and harmony.

## 4 Conclusion

In summary, the concept of golden mean has extensive and far-reaching impact on tuina. Today, along with its advance in systemic theory, tuina therapy has been used in the treatment of multiple subspecialties including internal, external, gynecological, pediatric and traumatological conditions. We need to continue with

further study on the concept of golden mean and tuina development.

### Conflict of Interest

There was no potential conflict of interest in this article.

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