Essential Oils and Chinese Medicine

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The purpose of this presentation is to familiarize readers with essential oils within a Chinese medical perspective and how it can be applied to the treatment of cancer.

Essential Oils and Chinese Medicine

The use of essential oils within Chinese Medicine dates back to its first documented herbal, Shen Nong Ben Cao, written in the 2nd century AD. Classifying plants within the categories of Upper Grade (for prevention), Middle Grade (for restoration), and Lower Grade (for treatment), the Shen Nong Ben Cao served as the main reference text to all generations of aspiring herbalists. Commentaries to the Ben Cao have notably outlined the specific parts of the plants that are used (among other descriptions as well) including their 'jing-essence'. In fact, the famous 16th century herbal, Ben Cao Gang Mu, by Li Shih-zhen details the therapeutic use of a number of essential oils - such as ginger, camphor, and rose.

Essence as Yuan-Original Qi

To the Chinese herbalist, the essence extracted from a plant represents its blueprint - containing the foundation of all energetic processes, ranging from growth to decline. Among Daoist cultivators, the extrapolation of the plant's aromatic essence was the liberation of its soul. This cire foundation is referred to as yuan-original qi. It is
contrasted with two other energetic layers - wei-defensive qi and ying-nourishing qi. In addition, these three layers also constitute the terrain of the external, internal, and congenital:

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<th>Qi Type</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wei-defensive Qi</td>
<td>external</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ying-nourishing Qi</td>
<td>internal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yuan-original Qi</td>
<td>congenital</td>
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As such, their dynamics reflect the qi-vibrational energy that confronts the pathogenic factors of life - ranging from climatic/environmental/ecological conditions (wei qi); emotional, dietary, and lifestyle 'choices' (ying qi); to inherited tendencies ('runs in the family') and inadequacies, congenital defects, and ethnic predispositions (yuan qi). Within the spectrum dynamics of qi vibrational motility (i.e., rate by which energy responds), wei qi is said to be the fastest while yuan qi is the slowest. (In Chinese medical terms, wei qi is said to be yang compared to yuan qi as being yin.) This threshold of responsiveness also represents the qi-vibrations that occur to quicken or slow down a pathogenic process. For example, slowing down a pathogenic process could be a way the intrinsic wisdom of the body is exercised to suppress an infection (known as li-pestilent qi) especially when the condition/illness cannot be adequately resolved given the body's current resources. Thus a disease can become 'latent' by the dense inertial vibrations of yuan-original qi. In the human body, this yuan original qi is represented through the hormones, marrow, sexual fluids precisely our growth factors, immunity, and the basis of procreation. Furthermore, as the yuan-qi is depleted through the 'incubation of a pathogen(s), there is gradual decline in its function.

Essential oils correspond to yuan-original qi. Interestingly, from the perspective of Western aroma therapy, the primary functions of essential oils are similar to that which has been discussed pertaining to yuan-original qi. In addition, since essential oils elicit an 'aroma' they resonate with the wei-defensive qi (which includes the energetic vibrations of sensory organs). This would also account for

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252
the intrinsic anti-microbial actions of essential oils and their ability to enhance our adaptive mode to ecological/environmental/climatic factors.

Wei-Defensive Qi's Pathology: Climatic/Environmental/Ecological Factors*.
Ying-Nourishing Qi's Pathology: Dietary/Emotional/Lifestyle Factors*.
Yuan-Congenital Qi's Pathology: Inherited Weakness and Predisposition.

(*Wei-defensive qi's pathology includes insect bites and vaccinations, while unresolved bacterial-viral-fungal-parasitic infections can afflict all three layers.)

Classification of Essential Oils

The general therapeutic classification of essential oils is based on their actions according to the Western medical perspective. Yet this approach is somewhat different from Chinese herbalism (though both often follow the principles of opposition - e.g., use of antipyretics for fever, use of antitussive for cough, etc. - namely the 'anti' method). The Eastern model cautions clinicians to be conscious that the 'signs and symptoms' can represent the response rather than necessarily the pathology. That is, a cough can be an attempt to 'reflux' stagnation in the chest or even abdomen and a fever can be utilized to increase metabolism for sluggishness. Treating these symptoms would be a suppression of the body's intrinsic response and can lead to further weakening of our immunity.

In the classification of plants, Chinese herbalism defines four basic criteria:

(1) nature: hot - warm - neutral - cool - cold
(2) taste: sour, bitter, sweet, spicy, salty, bland

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Harvest time and geography (factors of heaven and earth) are also considered in determining the therapeutic/energetic potential of a plant. (The variables of soil richness, weather/climatic conditions, and harvesting time from dawn to dusk or seasonally may account for the chemotypes of a plant.) For example, Peppermint Leaf (Folium Mentha Piperita) would be classified as cooling, spicy, and with an affinity to the Lungs and the Liver. (The Lungs include not only the respiratory tract but the skin and nose, while the Liver would include the neurological system as well as muscles, eyes, uterus - among others.) Therefore, Peppermint can be used for upper respiratory tract infections, acute rhinitis or sinusitis, menstrual cramping, acute dermatitis, muscle and gastric spasms, etc. Since it is cooling, Peppermint can also reduce fever.

**Cancer and Chinese Medicine**

First of all, it is important to state that Chinese Medicine does not treat diseases - but rather its art is involved with treating individuals with diseases. That is to say, two people with metastatic pancreatic cancer could be treated differently even though their Western medical diagnosis is the same. Yet the basic strategy used in Chinese Medicine for cancer evolves around fuzheng therapy (meaning to support (fu) the upright (zheng) qi. Fuzheng therapy translates into:

(1) bolstering immunity  
(2) clearing tumors (called du-fire toxins)  
(3) promoting elimination
Elimination can be exercised through the skin by sweating, intestines by purging, and/or the lymphs by transforming (which, in Chinese medical terms, would refer to transforming or dissolving phlegm). As for cancer, it would be viewed as a process by which the dormancy of a pathogenic process was maintained by yuan-original qi. As that latency is no longer kept under control by the density of yuanoriginal qi, the pathogenic process is released and 'spreads' (metastasis) through the body. As yuan-original qi refers to our congenital layer, there is damage to the blueprint (i.e., DNA) by the pathogen.

Essential Oils and Cancer

As essential oils resonate with the yuan-original qi, it is the contention of the author that these oils will effect pathology (including cancer) that has injured or taxed the constitution. Thus essential oils can be utilized to maintain latency as well as for the resolution of the cancer (fire-toxins). Some examples of fire-toxin clearing essential oils include celery seed, helichrysum, lovage, mimosa, palmarosa, sage, atlas cedar, bay laurel, elemi, eucalyptus polybractea, grapefruit and orange. Again, to simply state that these essential oils treat cancer would be erroneous and irresponsible. These essential oils have to be selected appropriately based on each individual consideration. Cancer is not a disease, but a process that an individual is undergoing. To treat its pathology, we need to understand the client.