**Medicine and Alchemy** - a means to Tao via Ch’i

- Theories of traditional Chinese medicine assert that the body has natural patterns of ch’i associated with it, that circulate in channels called “meridians” in English. Symptoms of various illnesses are often seen as the product of disrupted or unbalanced ch’i movement through such channels (including blockages), deficiencies or imbalances of ch’i in the various organs. Traditional Chinese Medicine seeks to relieve these imbalances by adjusting the flow of ch’i in the body using a variety of therapeutic techniques.

- Some of these techniques include herbal medicines, special diets, physical training regimens (ch’i gong), massages to clear blockages, and acupuncture, which uses fine metal needles inserted into the skin to reroute or balance ch’i. Taoists experimented with herbal medicine and pharmacology, greatly advancing these arts. They developed principles of macrobiotic cooking and other healthy diets. They developed systems of gymnastics and massage to keep the body strong and youthful.

- Some Taoists searched for herbs or chemical compounds that could ensure immortality - an alchemy route. Alchemy was already an ancient science in China before Taoism. Lao Tzu said: “The ancient masters were profound and subtle, their wisdom was unfathomable.”

- The Chinese name for alchemy is “Green Dragon White Tiger,” which neatly sums up procedure and philosophy behind it - dragon is the yang force and tiger is the yin force

- **Theory**: In Taoism alchemy, the universal energy, ch’i, is created in the body and purified by proper nutrition and life habits. Ch’i circulates up and down twelve psychic channels in the body and goes through many circulations before it is distilled and rarefied.
- **Method:** Taoist practitioners would take the “souls” of various substances, not the actual metal or physical chemical, and apply it to various bodily parts or functions.

  - Among the key pharmacopoeia are cinnabar, gold, silver, the five mushrooms, jade, mica, pearl, arsenic. In the instance of mercury, it represents the dragon (yang) and is associated with semen and blood. Lead is the tiger (yin), who represents breath and physical power.

  - Before plunging into alchemy, certain preparations are made. Among them, fasting for a week, and bathing in scented water during the day. Purification rituals were often called “fasting from the heart.”

  - In the distant past, it was not only the “souls” of these material properties that were combined to effect *chì*, the chemicals and metals themselves were applied and digested, following Taoist practice and procedure. Unfortunately, such endeavors usually had the reverse effect on the person, and several Chinese emperors, seeking immortality, found only an **early death**.