

## A Few Words on the Ancient Chinese Wisdom

It is a key philosophy in the Chinese classic *Da Xue* (*The Great Learning*) that ultimate knowledge comes from a thorough investigation of things, or *gewu zhizhi* in Chinese. *Gewu* means, according to Chinese Confucian scholar philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200), to go to the root of things. By observing and categorizing things, to put it simply. *Ge* or 格 is a pictophonetic character explained in an early Chinese dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi* (*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*) as the one with 木 for meaning (wood) and 各 for sound (pronounced as *ge* at the fourth tone). The character 格 pronounced as *ge* at the second tone indicates long branch of a tree, and refers to wooden railing as an extended meaning. A Chinese medicine cabinet is a perfect example to illustrate the character 格; that is, the drawer in every single compartment of the cabinet is dedicated to a medical herb. Categorization is a crucial approach of research. People in ancient China categorized and wrote down astronomical and meteorological phenomena, earthquakes, plants, and many other things they observed, to construct preliminary yet scientifically significant studies. We're applying ancient records of astronomical phenomena to the study of supernovae, cosmic evolution, and solar activity, and those of Chinese medical herbs to modern medicine. The traditional approach of investigation for knowledge is no contradiction to modern scientific ones.

Imagination is key to science. Chinese culture has been historically known for its correlative thinking to establish correlations between things to understand them. In the image-based approach of categorization and association, similarity must be drawn before anything else. *Xing*, a means of evocation or association used in the Chinese classic *Shijing* (*Book of Poetry*), maybe best illustrates how one thing is associated with another. For instance, a cooing osprey couple at a river islet evokes the idea that a quiet, graceful young lady would be a gentleman's ideal mate. Correlative thinking was seen in the ancient Chinese cosmic schema of heaven, earth, life, and man. Rhymes, seasons, yin and yang, and all the things in universe are categorized,

associated, and studied. Similarity is drawn in term of pronunciation, shape and form, or essence, through observation, imagination, and expression in the framework of universe. Sciences of ancient China cannot be understood without a good understanding of the Chinese correlative thinking, out of which sciences germinated in ancient China.

Traditional Chinese philosophy also cherishes the harmony between universe and man, who is thought to be an integral part of the other. A disharmony would result in disorder unlivable, unknowable, and unpredictable. Man lives in universe and has universe's imprints. Music, aesthetic values, and human body itself connect with universe. The harmony between universe and man stresses a corresponding similarity in structure, function, and pattern between macrocosm and microcosm. Both man and nation are a smaller representation of the universe. According to *Huangdi Neijing (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine)*, human body runs, as a microcosm, as macrocosm does. Sound health goes with yin-yang balance and functioning viscera. That is the fundamental theory for traditional Chinese medicine. The same theory is applicable to a nation: A powerful nation is like a man in rude health, and a weak nation a man in poor health. A nation is thus governed the same way the human body is nursed, only to macrocosm's law.