

# Traditional Culture: Eliminating Serious Problems When They First Appear

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(Clearwisdom.net) Fang Xiaoru was an eminent scholar of Song dynasty neo-Confucianism, and a writer in the early Ming dynasty. He was very knowledgeable and talented. In the era of Hongwu, he served as tutor for the crown prince. Later he was summoned to the Inner Court as academic advisor to the Emperor. Fang Xiaoru wrote a famous article titled, "Zhi Yu" to explain, "in worldly matters, minor things can develop into major calamities," which uses illness as an analogy in cautioning people to prevent serious problems before they occur.

In his article "Zhi Yu," Fang Xiaoru describes the following story:

*In Fuyang, there was a man named Mr. Zheng who was healthy and strong. He had a rosy complexion and had never been ill. One day, he found a red papule the size of a grain on his left thumb. He suspected he had fallen ill, so he asked others for their opinions. People who saw it all laughed at him, saying his concern was over nothing - it was such a small mark. Three days later, the red papule had grown to the size of a coin. Mr. Zheng was worried and asked around again. People still mocked him. Another three days passed, and his thumb had swollen to four-inches thick. The pains were very sharp, as if being pierced by needles, and he had aches all over his body.*

*Mr. Zheng was alarmed and went to see a doctor. The doctor took a look and was taken aback, saying, "This is an unusual disease. Although it first appeared on your finger, it is in fact systemic. Your life could be in danger if you are not treated in time. However, if it were treated when it first appeared, you could have been healed in one day; if it went on for three*

*days, it would take over ten days to heal. Now that the disease has evolved to this state, it will take at least three months to heal. If it were seen on the first day, it could be treated simply with herbs; if seen after three days, it would need medication. When it spreads to the liver, it is not simply a matter of one finger or one arm. If it is not treated systemically, it will be difficult to keep its spread in check. If it is not treated locally, it will also be difficult to affect a cure."*

*Mr. Zheng then followed the doctor's prescription. He took herbal preparations internally and applied medication externally. Just as expected, he was much better in two months and completely recovered after three months.*

Fang Xiaoru came to the realization that all major problems start small. At the beginning, the illness might seem insignificant and warrant no treatment, but it could eventually become incurable. At the initial stage, it is also very easy to treat, but most people ignore it. They wait until it becomes serious. Then it will take a long time to cure, and after lots of effort and worry, and it can only be suppressed. There are many people like Mr. Zheng. Only when one discovers it early can it be treated most easily and in its entirety. Therefore the conditions might be grave but not hopeless. Only those who are nonchalant at the beginning and do not see the potential danger, or who after being ridiculed neglect their conditions, are of particular concern.

The article "Zhi Yu" uses illness as an analogy and simple common language to explain the following idea: Looking at life, haven't conflicts or shortcomings arisen because we neglected small things along the way? Therefore we need to pay attention to the minor problems and be strict with ourselves. At the first manifestation, mistakes can be corrected easily. Yet if they are allowed to develop unchecked, it will be not so easy to correct them.