



FROM MYTH TO SCIENCE: The Healing Power of Chinese Herbs

by Shoshanna Katzman

Chinese folklore from centuries ago tells of a farmer who severely beat a snake with a hoe intending to kill it. A few days later he was surprised to find it back in his yard and attempted to kill it once more. This same scenario happened again a few days later; however this time he waited and observed the wounded snake crawling away to a clump of weeds from which he ate. The next morning, the farmer found the snake once again with its wounds all healed. According to this legend this was the original discovery of Panax Notoginseng, the main ingredient in a famous Chinese herb formula called Yunnan Bai Yao used in treatment of both internal and external bleeding.

Chinese herbal medicine has since become one of the most highly developed, time-proven methods of herbalism in the world. It is a system that is used alone or in combination with other Chinese medicine techniques such as acupuncture and

Chinese dietary therapy. Thousands of classical herbal formulations have been created and used for centuries to promote health and healing. These are combinations of individual herbs, put together according to how they interact with each other for desired results. Throughout these years, these formulations have been tested and perfected accordingly through application within the clinical setting.

Just twenty months ago the Cleveland Clinic established a Chinese herbal medicine department for its patients. During this time, over 500 patients have been treated with Chinese herbal therapy with overwhelming results according to Daniel Neides, MD, the Medical Director of the Cleveland Clinic Wellness Institute. One noted success being a patient with recurrent chest pain for six months with no evidence of cardiovascular disease. After determining that it may be due to heartburn, none of the over the counter and prescription medications brought improvement. However, after several weeks of herbal therapy the symptoms were completely eliminated. The next success story at the Cleveland Clinic was a patient suffering from neuropathy of unknown cause. A battery of western medicine tests ruled out diabetes and thyroid disease. After several months on herbal therapy the nerve pain was gone and quality of life restored.

These positive clinical results



have been commonplace within the walls of Chinese medicine wellness centers. Fortunately, more and more people are realizing the profound healing benefits possible through this age-old method of herbal therapy. As further stories of this kind become known and as research studies continue to prove its efficacy – Chinese herbal medicine is gradually attaining its deserved status as a powerful and effective alternative medicine method for achievement of health and wellness. In the meantime, it is constantly growing and helping thousands as a specialty within the United States, just as its predecessor acupuncture has attained notoriety as a viable, powerful holistic therapy within the mainstream for years.

A key example is Youyou Tu, the traditional herbal medicine pharmacist who has recently been awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine for her discovery of the malaria drug Artemisinin. Tu has shared that her inspiration for this research was drawn from the medical text of a fourth-century Chinese physician and alchemist named Ge Hong (circa 283-343). As a result of her discovery many of the approximately 200 million people per year infected by malaria will gain help with their disease. The drug Artemisinin is a derivative from the Chinese herb *Annua* traditionally used to treat fever. The Chinese medicine pharmacopeia includes hundreds of other individual Chinese herbs in the form of roots, barks, seeds, flowers, leaves, stems, minerals, and animal parts. Some are used individually to treat specific energetic imbalances



and physical symptoms, but most are combined together and traditionally known as “a formula” - preferred due to the increased effect the individual Chinese herbs have in combination whereby their interaction leads to desired results.

Thousands of classical Chinese herbal formulas have been created, tested and perfected for centuries through application within the clinical setting. Several individual Chinese herbs have gained mainstream appeal and are readily available at health food stores and on the internet. The most commonly known are Ginseng taken to strengthen vital energy, Dong Quai to increase blood flow, and Astragalus for immune enhancement. However, seeking herbal recommendations from a health professional licensed in Chinese herbal medicine is essential to ensure safety in terms of constitutional appropriateness as well as quality, dosage, and possible drug interactions. Each herb, each formula is chosen carefully and recommended by a Chinese herbalist according to an individual's precise energetic and physical constitution taking into consideration a multitude of factors to arrive at the appropriate choice.

There are approximately 45 colleges in the United States that offer 3-4 year training programs in Chinese herbal medicine and national certification is available as well as licensing is available in many states. The state of New Jersey includes Chinese herbal medicine as a specialty that they license dependent on an acupuncturists qualifications, so it should be easy to find a practitioner to help you in integrating Chinese herbs into your life. Remember that overall Chinese medicine not only helps relieve symptoms of a disease but also works to alleviate the underlying causes – this is precisely the goal of Chinese herbal application as a viable and reliable treatment for a multitude of conditions.

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