

International Expert Blasts "Mystique" of Chinese Herbs, Insists Solid Research Data Supports Their Medical Value

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The notion that Chinese herbs are some kind of magic potion from the mysterious Orient is a myth which damages the credibility of a proven medical alternative to drugs which has been used to treat some of mankind's major illnesses for thousands of years, asserts at least one international expert on Chinese herbal medicine.

According to Pi-Kwang Tsung, Ph.D., former research scientist at New York Medical Center and assistant professor of pathology at the University of Connecticut Health Center, and holder of degrees from Tokyo University and the University of Kansas, the American health food industry is partly responsible for allowing this "hogwash" to obscure the true medicinal value of Chinese herbs

"This utter nonsense about the so-called Oriental mystique makes it very difficult to inform the public about extensive scientific evidence that Chinese herbs really work, and as plants, without the sometimes drastic side-effects caused by some of our highly-touted wonder drugs," Dr. Tsung said.

Compounding the problem, he admits, is lack of information. In its April 1990 issue, Health Foods Business stated, "The biggest barrier to Chinese herbs is that (research) literature is not available to American researchers."

The reason for this paucity of information, Dr. Tsung pointed out, is that nearly all research on herbal medicine done by leading scientist in Japan and China is recorded in their native languages. To translate this material with absolute accuracy requires a skilled translator with a thorough knowledge of medicine and the nuances of medical terminology.

Dr. Tsung, who reads and writes both Chinese and Japanese, is the only qualified research expert currently translating this valuable data into English. Some of this research information is printed in English for the first time in his recent book, Immune System and Chinese Herbs, published in 1989.

In his book, Dr. Tsung discusses documentary evidence that Chinese herbs have been used with positive results in the treatment of AIDS, cancer, arthritis, diabetes, allergies, aging, stress, sexual dysfunction, female problems, various types of pain, and children's diseases.

"Even after Chinese herbs win general recognition, it will be awhile before they are fully accepted in U.S. medical circles. Very few of our medical schools have a branch of pharmacognosy, which concerns medical substances in their natural or unprepared state, while all medical schools in Europe and Asia have such departments," Dr. Tsung said.

Another centuries-old medical technique originating in China has suffered from the "Oriental mystique" syndrome. Acupuncture was long considered the stuff of voodoo and black magic and only began to gain limited acceptance after President Nixon's visit to China in the 1960s.

Today, acupuncture is considered a legitimate form of medical treatment in the United States, prescribed alone for some ailments, or, like physical therapy, as a supplement to pharmaceutical drugs or medicine.

In China, acupuncture supplements herbal medicine, and the Japanese have fully adapted herbal medicine and acupuncture to their medical system, allowing patients to choose between herbal preparations and Western drugs when both are deemed effective for treatment.

"This Oriental mystique business might have been a great gimmick to promote Charlie Chan movies and exotic perfumes, but it has been a serious deterrent to the dissemination of medical information for the benefit of mankind," Dr. Tsung said.

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