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"With the current popularity of natural health products and remedies, there is a plethora of products on the market to choose from. How will you help to set traditional Chinese herbal medicine apart from the rest and make it a household remedy?"

The boom of the natural health product industry is a reflection of the growing desire people have to take their wellbeing into their own hands and to heal in ways that are gentler and more thorough than those offered by many conventional approaches. This is an exciting impulse that we as TCM practitioners can harness to help people access better health outcomes. Through educating those seeking natural healing and becoming allies on their path to deeper balance, we can clearly delineate the ways in which the foundations of TCM make Chinese herbal medicine stand out from other choices. Taking the time to inform patients and friends about the emphasis on healing the root of disease, the ability to personalize herbal formulas to each unique individual, and the centuries of research that have gone into the practice of Chinese herbal medicine can help people see how it's an indispensable tool on the path to lasting health.

TCM herbal medicine is based on the concept of balance. The Huangdi Neijing outlines this emphasis through stating that "the law of yin and yang is the natural order of the universe...the root of life and death. In healing, one must grasp the root of the disharmony" (Ni, 1995, p. 17). I would explain to patients that this foundational focus on deep equilibrium in the classics led to a tradition that addresses disease at its source, as opposed to only symptom-based approaches that provide surface-level solutions. I would point out how this concept of deep balance contributed to the "root and branch" methodology in TCM herbal practice, the root being the underlying cause of disease and the branch being the currently experienced symptoms; an approach that treats the primary cause of imbalance in addition to the outward manifestations.

One example of the "root and branch" philosophy that I would share with those seeking natural healing solutions is that of different possible approaches to acid reflux. There are many natural products that can treat the symptoms, and a simple internet search reveals such suggestions as baking soda and apple cider vinegar, both of which are said to alter the levels of acid in your stomach (Goodall, 2016). While these solutions may provide temporary relief, they do not address the underlying cause of the imbalance. TCM herbal remedies on the other hand, would address both the symptoms and the underlying cause of the disharmony based on what pattern led to the reflux in the first place. I would explain that from a TCM perspective, there are many possible underlying causes of acid reflux, some of which involve heat, some damp, some deficiency, and others excess (Flaws & Sionneau, 2001, p. 482). Each of these patterns would call for a dramatically different herbal approach, even though the symptoms might look the same on the surface. This pattern differentiation allows for greater efficacy at both the root and branch levels, meaning that the Chinese herbal approach provides relief from the uncomfortable symptoms while at the same time preventing their future recurrence through restoring a deep constitutional balance. This distinction between the root and the branch can therefore be a

helpful concept to explain how the Chinese herbal approach distinguishes itself from other methods.

The ability to differentiate various potential root causes of symptoms also permits a greater level of personalization in Chinese herbal formulation, allowing for the creation of herbal prescriptions that complement the constitution and presentation of each person. The temperature of herbs and formulas is an accessible way to conceptualize and explain this important aspect of the medicine. Since people usually have a clear idea of whether they tend toward overheating or feeling cold, this can be a great entry point of discussion to explain how herbs that make them hotter when they're already hot, or colder when they're already cold are not a good match, and that Chinese herbal formulas are created with this in mind. The herbs chosen match each person's specific make-up. This explanation of the temperature of herbs can connect the concept of personalization of formulas to people's experiences in a way that's relatable, and is thereby one way to demonstrate why TCM herbal practice is uniquely suited to adapt to an individual's needs.

A final way to help Chinese herbal medicine stand out from other products is to point out that the herbal uses have grown out of centuries of practice and refinement. The oldest Chinese herbal text that has been discovered, the *Wu Shi Er Bing Fang*, dates back to the third century B.C. (Bensky, Barolet, Scheid, & Ellis, 2009, p. 4). Since then, Chinese herbal tradition has undergone thousands of years of use and has been rigorously studied by practitioners and scholars throughout the centuries. These herbs and formulas have thus been refined, tested, debated, and augmented until the present day, giving us access to an herbal pantheon that has been winnowed down to the most effective approaches. Explaining this depth of tradition, inquiry and debate can demonstrate that traditional Chinese herbs have stood the test of time and remain in our *Materia Medica* because of the efficacy they have displayed throughout centuries. This long tradition of investigation sets it apart from some of the new health products that often turn out to be passing fads.

In essence, the adaptability, longevity, efficacy, and emphasis on treating the root found in Chinese herbal practice allows these herbs to be in their own league despite the plethora of products available. When explained from this perspective, Chinese herbal medicine cannot help but stand out. Through being the ally of those seeking greater wellness through natural approaches, I look forward to helping educate people as to how they can use Chinese herbal practices to benefit themselves and their loved ones throughout their lives.

WORKS CITED

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