Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage



The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring

The folklore of “The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring” has its roots in the Han Dynasty (202 BC -220 AD). Recorded in “Su Xiangong Zhuan” (The Biography of Su Dan), a chapter in *Shenxian Zhuan (The Biographies of the Deities and Immortals)* by Ge Hong in the East Jin Dynasty, it is said that when Su Dan, a famously pious commoner, ascended to heaven, he left his mother a powerful recipe for treating plague – tangerine leaves and well water. Since then, these two terms become synonymous with Chinese medicine practitioners in ancient times. Today, as we explore the centuries-old legacy of Chinese medicine culture in Hong Kong, we draw inspirations from this story of strength. Hence the title of this volume: *The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring - Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage*.

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Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage

The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring

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FOREWORD

Passing on the Culture, Techniques and Spirit of Chinese Medicine: Telling Good Stories of Chinese Medicine in Hong Kong

Mr. Leung Chun-ying, Vice-Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

I have enjoyed gardening since I was a child. One can find satisfaction in observing the order of the seasons, or the differences in soil and water. Naturally, I have also been interested in Chinese herbal medicine and the theories of Chinese medicine. The wisdom of Chinese medicine lies in the inner balance of the human body and the outer balance between man and nature, and this wisdom is reflected not only in the diverse methods and functions of medicine, but also in the richness and depth of the culture. As a Chinese proverb says, "Medicine is the practice of benevolence". Benevolence, as in people's compassion for their fellow human beings; as in a society built on altruism.

Chinese medicine dates back to ancient times. In Hong Kong in particular, Chinese medicine has flourished for hundreds of years and developed its own unique history. Since the early days of Hong Kong, Tung Wah Hospital, the first Chinese medicine hospital for the Chinese people, has provided free treatment and medicine to the poor and needy. Such altruism has always been at the core of Hong Kong's social spirit. Since reunification, the HKSAR government has actively promoted the standardisation and professionalisation of Chinese medicine, and today, in a place with a population of just over 7 million, we have three tertiary schools of Chinese medicine and over 8,000 registered Chinese medicine practitioners.

More importantly, with its East-meets-West background and booming trade and commerce, Hong Kong provides a unique and fertile ground for the development and innovation of Chinese medicine – be it scientific testing, medical research or integration of Chinese and Western medicine. In the 2014 Policy Address, I announced the reservation of land in Tseung Kwan O for a Chinese Medicine Hospital. In the 2015 Policy Address, I announced plans for a Chinese medicine testing centre to be administered by the Department of Health. Both these facilities will be operational in 2025, serving not only Hong Kong but our nation by promoting the heritage, innovation and development of Chinese medicine. This is also the thinking behind my proposal last year to establish a "Hong Kong Centre for Traditional Chinese Medicine Industry Chain".

A good story about Hong Kong cannot be told without a good story about Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. I am therefore delighted to see the launch of the Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage Project, which will allow us to draw strength from traditional wisdom.

Sun Simiao, in the chapter "Lun Zhenhou" (On Consultation) of his book *Qianjin Yaofang (Essential for Emergency Formulas Worth a Thousand in Gold)*, said, "The ancient people classified doctors according to their competence: great ones who can heal a country, adequate ones who can cure people, and unexceptional ones who treat diseases." It is the responsibility not only of the profession but also of every person of Chinese heritage to pass on the culture, techniques and spirit of Chinese medicine. I hope that each generation will embrace the vision of helping the world and strengthening the nation, and work together for the great revival of the Chinese nation.

Leung Chun-ying
Spring 2023

FOREWORD

Towards a Hong Kong-based, Pure Chinese Medicine Healthcare model: Building a "One Health" Chinese Community

—— Tong Xiaolin, Academician, Chinese Academy of Sciences

In early 2022, when Hong Kong was ravaged by the fifth wave of COVID-19, I had the opportunity to participate in the work of the Mainland Chinese medicine expert group of Central Authorities, and witnessed the positive role of Chinese medicine in the prevention and control of the pandemic in Hong Kong. I have also seen the trust and confidence that the HKSAR government and the public have in Chinese medicine. I firmly believe that Chinese medicine has a very promising future in Hong Kong.

Chinese medicine in Hong Kong enjoys a long history, a strong public base and close ties with the mainland. Since reunification, Chinese medicine in Hong Kong has gained legal status and embarked on a path of legalisation and standardisation, making positive contributions to safeguarding public health and promoting Chinese medicine globally. In particular, developing towards a pure Chinese medicine healthcare model in Hong Kong is unique and an integral part of the nation's efforts to revitalise and develop Chinese medicine.

I have known Professor Feng Jiu for many years. I know that she has spent her whole life promoting the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. This time, with the support of the Chinese Medicine Development Fund, Professor Feng and her team have compiled data and conducted research on the heritage and development of Chinese medicine culture in Hong Kong into a book entitled *The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring - Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage*. I trust that the material will provide a valuable historical record of the development of Chinese medicine culture in Hong Kong and draw the attention of more interested people to the heritage, innovation and development of Chinese medicine culture.

At present, our nation attaches great importance to the development of Chinese medicine. Chinese medicine plays an increasingly important role in building a healthy China and promoting the nation's economic and social interests. I also look forward to more exchanges and cooperation with my colleagues in the Chinese medicine sector in Hong Kong. Together, we hope to usher in a brighter future for Chinese medicine that will benefit communities far and wide.

Tong Xiaolin, Academician
April 2023

FOREWORD

The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring: A Century of Chinese Medicine in Hong Kong

Professor Feng Jiu

The folklore of “The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring” has its roots in the Han Dynasty (202 BC -220 AD). Recorded in “Su Xiangong Zhuan” (The Biography of Su Dan), a chapter in *Shenxian Zhuan (The Biographies of the Deities and Immortals)* by Ge Hong in the East Jin Dynasty, it is said that when Su Dan, a famously pious commoner, ascended to heaven, he left his mother a powerful recipe for treating plague – tangerine leaves and well water. Since then, these two terms become synonymous with Chinese medicine practitioners in ancient times. Today, as we explore the centuries-old legacy of Chinese medicine culture in Hong Kong, we draw inspirations from this story of strength. Hence the title of this volume: *The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring - Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage*.

Chinese medicine in Hong Kong has grown and flourished against a unique socio-cultural background, shaped by factors such as the escape of renowned practitioners to the south during the war, the climate and diet of the Lingnan region, a Chinese-meets-Western society, and the impoverished living conditions of the post-war period. All these factors have combined to create an incredibly rich reservoir of folk wisdom unique to Hong Kong, a precious cultural heritage that must be preserved and passed on.

We would like to thank the Chinese Medicine Development Fund for their generous support of our Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage Project. Through interviews with key figures from the local Chinese medicine industry and academia, we produced a book in both Chinese and English and several topical videos to showcase the dedication and perseverance of Hong Kong's Chinese medicine practitioners. We also explored existing efforts and threats to the preservation of Chinese medicine culture in Hong Kong, with an outlook on future developments.

Based on the “three etiological factors in treatment”, a fundamental principle of Chinese medicine, this book presents the history of Hong Kong’s unique Chinese medicine culture in three main chapters: “Perfect Timing”, “Geographical Advantage” and “Human Harmony”. “Perfect Timing” chronicles the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong over the past centuries and the various opportunities made possible by the passage of time. “Geographical Advantage” begins with the story of incense – after which Hong Kong is named – and goes on to tell a fascinating story of local culture from fire dragons, incense shops, herbal teas, medicinal cuisines to the development of Chinese medicine retail and wholesale brands. “Human Harmony” features interviews with leading figures in Chinese medicine clinical practice, herbal medicine, professional education and scientific research, showcasing the humanistic heritage and spirit of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong.

The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring - Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage is a book written for the general public. It aims to promote the development and transmission of Chinese medicine culture through a candid, accessible telling of profound human stories, disseminated to the world through various channels. The English and Chinese versions of the book will be donated to Hong Kong Public Libraries, universities, colleges and Chinese medicine education institutes in Hong Kong, as well as distributed to Chinese medicine organisations worldwide through the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies. Our video series is now also available to the public online, free of charge. We have taken a small step today; we look forward to sharing more stories of Chinese medicine in the future and spreading the fragrance of Chinese culture around the world.

The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring -
Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage
Professor Feng Jiu, Editor-in-Chief
July 2023

PERFECT TIMING

Persevering through Times of
Fortune and Ordeal

Serving the Community with
Duty and Professionalism

PERFECT TIMING

This section traces the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong over the past century. As the course of history gave birth to opportunities in different eras, the stories of hardship were testament to the silent dedication and determination of Chinese medicine practitioners, who vowed to protect the health of the Hong Kong public through good times and bad. The history of Chinese medicine since the founding of Hong Kong is first revealed by Professor Chow Kai-wing, Professor Emeritus of the Department of History at Hong Kong Baptist University, who delves into the historical background of the local Chinese medicine industry. Su Yau-on Albert, Chief Executive of Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, follows with the story of the rise and fall of Hong Kong's first Chinese medicine hospital in the 19th century. Lo Sun-ho, Chairman of Sik Sik Yuen's Medical Services Committee, explains how the faith and perseverance of a Taoist religious institution contributed to a century of charitable medical services and fostered a culture of Taoist medical practice.

In the 1940s and 1950s, war and social unrest created opportunities for renowned Chinese medicine practitioners to move south to Hong Kong. Professor Chan Wing-kwong, President of the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association, describes the productive culture of exchange and the vibrant education scene within the Chinese medicine industry at the time. Chan Kong-sang, Permanent President of the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association and Editor-in-Chief of the *Hong Kong Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, also recalls how local Chinese medicine practitioners defended their professional status through toil and hard work in the grassroots communities.

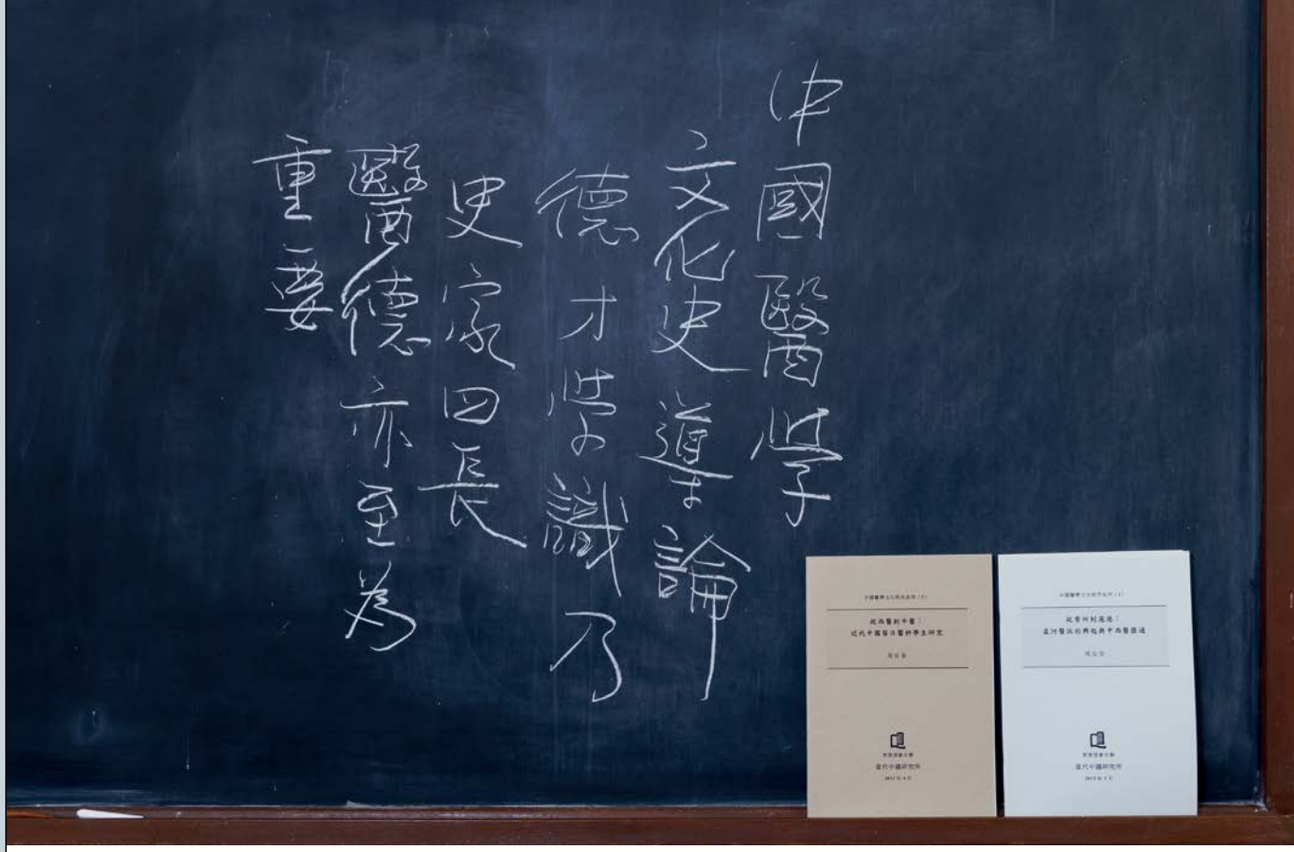
The reunification of Hong Kong with China has brought new opportunities for the recognition of the profession of Chinese medicine. Meanwhile, the standardisation of Chinese medicine training has greatly enhanced the status of Chinese medicine, but it has also affected the tradition of apprenticeship and the folk culture of the bonesetters. Ho Kwok-wai, a Chinese medicine practitioner who comes from a family of bonesetters, discusses the pros and cons of the changing educational model and suggests from personal experience that traditional Chinese medicine practitioners must keep up with the times and learn from both the East and the West; while Kong Pui-wai, who is both a master of Chinese martial arts and a Chinese medicine practitioner, explains how the "unity of medicine and martial arts" gave Hong Kong's bonesetter culture its unique flavour.

In the 2000s, with the threat of the SARS epidemic, the benefits of Chinese medicine came under renewed public scrutiny in Hong Kong. Dr. Ko Wing-man, then Acting Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority, and Professor Vivian Taam Wong, a staunch advocate of the integration of Chinese and Western medicine, together made a number of breakthroughs in introducing Chinese medicine into the public healthcare system, laying the foundation for Chinese medicine to play a role in Hong Kong during the COVID-19 epidemic. Today, the development of integrated Chinese and Western medicine has become a new trend in healthcare, and Dr. So Tsz-him, representing a new generation of integrative medicine talents, believes that patients can be better served by integrating the best strengths of Chinese and Western medicine.

1840s-1930s
1940s-1980s
1990s-2000s
After 2003
2020 to present

The River of History and Culture: A Review of the Development of Chinese Medicine

—— Prof. Chow Kai-wing, Professor Emeritus,
Department of History,
Hong Kong Baptist University



1840s-1930s

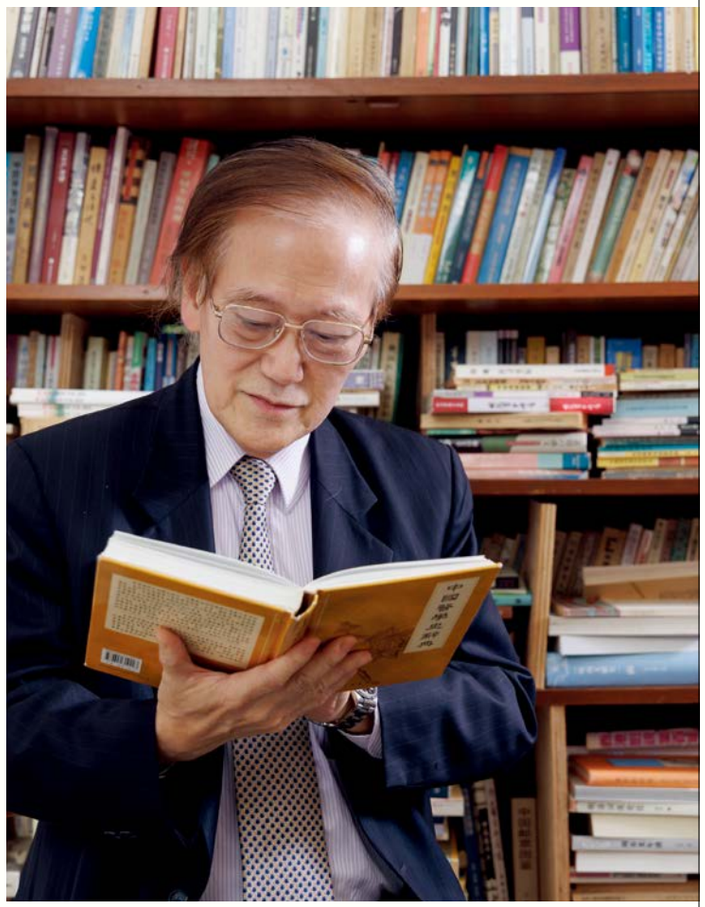
Prof. Chow Kai-wing, Professor Emeritus of the Department of History at the Hong Kong Baptist University, documented the history of Chinese medicine and conducted a course “Chinese Medical History” he has designed for the first group of Chinese medicine students trained in Hong Kong. Many young Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong were his students. “Studying medicine and history are alike. ‘The four merits of a historian’— techniques, knowledge, insights and virtuous practice — are the requirements of a medical practitioner too.”

The Plague a Century Ago: Turning Point for Chinese Medicine

In its long course of history, Chinese medicine has long become a part of the Chinese daily living and what the grassroots would resort to maintain their health. Chow explains, “In the early years of Hong Kong as a port, Chinese medicine had just started developing and was offered to the public through Chinese medicine shops and herbal tea shops. There was a great demand for herbal tea and dampness-relieving tea to quench the thirst and regulate body functions as most common people did

labour work at the time and summers in Hong Kong were hot and damp."

Western medicine was introduced when Hong Kong became a British colony. It was not only foreign to the local people, but also at odds with certain Chinese traditional values in some of its treatments. Therefore, the public preferred Chinese medicine despite the government's vigorous campaign. The development of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGH) offers a glimpse of the medical demands of the Chinese of early Hong Kong. The establishment of the TWGH can be traced back to the founding of Tung Wah Hospital in 1870. To relieve the health issues arising from Kwong Fook I-tsz, a temple in Sheung Wan, the then Governor Sir Richard G. MacDonnell enacted the Chinese Hospital Incorporation Ordinance and granted a piece of land to build a Chinese medicine hospital which became Tung Wah Hospital.



Tung Wah Hospital was founded as a hospital for the Guangdong Chinese that adopted Chinese medicine treatments and prepared decoctions for patients. The hospital charged little and provided occasional free medical consultations. Unfortunately, the growth of Chinese medicine took a turn for the worse when the plague stroke Hong Kong in 1894. Chow points out, "The outbreak of the bubonic plague caused a surge in patients and an overload on the public hospitals. Many thus turned to Tung Wah Hospital for treatment. The surge in patients in Tung Wah Hospital also resulted in a relatively high death rate, which was ascribed to the hospital's poor management by the government." In 1896, the government convened an investigation committee and appointed Dr. Chung Boon-chor, a Chinese trained in Western medicine, chief of the hospital as well as the first resident doctor to provide Western medical service. The operation of Tung Wah Hospital had changed since then with Chinese medicine services gradually taking second place.

After Western medicine had gained more credibility from the plague, the status of Chinese medicine underwent a further decline in Hong Kong during the Japanese occupation. "The Japanese troops found decoction preparation too time-consuming and unfit during wartime, so they ordered the complete replacement of Chinese medicine services by Western medicine, sending the former to the scrap heap even in the post-war time."

Chinese Medicine Revered Abroad

With Western medicine considered the mainstream medical care in Hong Kong, Chinese medicine is often used to treat minor illnesses. Chow laments that most people in Hong Kong think of Chinese medicine as general knowledge and lack the will to learn about it. On the contrary, some foreigners find it captivating, "Many foreign countries have great respect for Chinese medicine. For instance, Western medicine programmes in Japan always entail knowledge of Chinese medicine; their graduates often use Chinese medicines alongside Western medical treatments in clinical settings."

Chow studied in Japan and observed a profound influence of the ancient Chinese culture on the Japanese culture. For instance, when monk Jianzhen of the Tang Dynasty was promoting Buddhism in Japan, he shared much knowledge



of the Chinese culture with the Japanese. The Japanese not only still attach great importance to the Chinese medicine formulas introduced at the time, but also carefully preserve the Chinese medical books brought into Japan in different periods. "There was a medical book titled *Ishinpō* in ancient Japan. It had much historical value as it contained ancient records already lost in China. Japan still uses some medical jargons from ancient China, like かぜ (kaze) for cold, which is written in kanji as 風邪. Apparently, the Japanese prefer traditions in their original style." Apart from Japan, countries like Australia and Germany also offer professional courses on Chinese medicine, which shows that the appreciation and recognition of the discipline are on the rise overseas. Such courses in Germany even require students to take the prerequisite course on Chinese culture and history. Chow finds such curriculum planning insightful.

In-depth Study of Chinese Medicine and Cultural History

Since the handover of Hong Kong, three of the local universities have begun to offer their own Chinese medicine programmes. Chow recalls, when Hong Kong Baptist University launched Hong Kong's first bachelor's degree in Chinese medicine and determined to encompass Chinese culture and history in its curriculum, he immediately engaged in the planning of the syllabus of "Chinese Medical History" as the then Head and Professor of History .

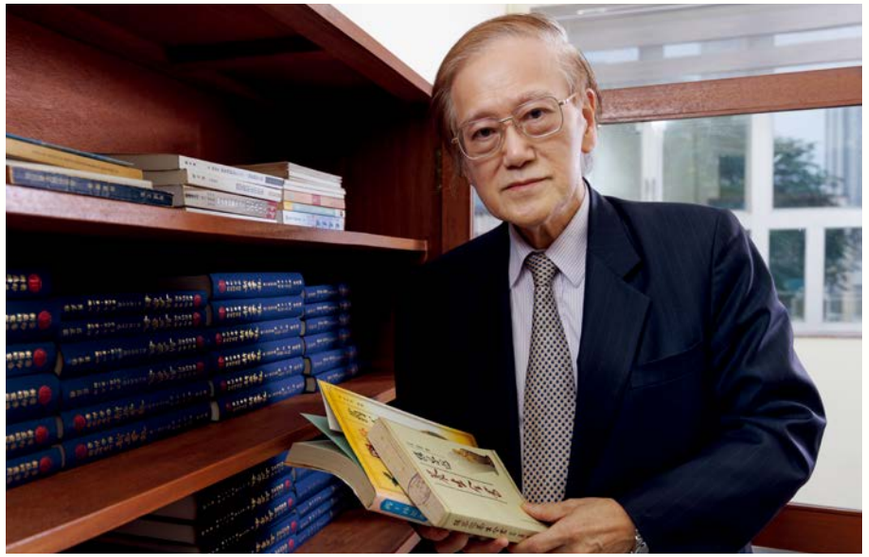
"It's not easy to teach Chinese medical history in Hong Kong. First, the duration of a university course is short. With each course spanning half a year in general, it's indeed rather intensive to cover a history that's a few thousand years long. Second, the cultural knowledge of Chinese medicine over the past 3,000 years was recorded in ancient texts. For instance, Sima Qian's *Shi Ji (Records of the Grand Historian)* covers the biography and techniques of Bian Que, the first physician recorded in Chinese history. Students of Chinese history would come across such information and Chinese cultural knowledge more readily than students of Chinese medicine from the science stream."

To fill the gap, Chow and other professors continued to augment their course materials. Chow edited the *Zhongguo Yixue Shi Cidian (Dictionary of Chinese Medical History)*, which became the first reference book in the domain in Hong Kong. "It's quite difficult to teach a large amount of knowledge from the books comprehensively in a limited class time. I hope the reference book would facilitate the students' self-learning."

Studying historical materials helps us review past learning, absorb new knowledge and learn from the past thousands of years. Chow explains with an example, "There're certainly advanced treatments in modern medicine for cataracts, but in his writings *Waitai Miyao (Arcane Essentials from the Imperial Library)*, Wang Tao of the Tang Dynasty has already described the symptoms in the different stages of cataracts and recorded the treatment called Jin pi shu or Jinzhen bozhang shu (curing cataracts with a golden needle), which was undoubtedly an advanced invention in the history of ophthalmology in the world.

Mishap and Fortune Follow Each Other
Chinese Medicine's Turnaround after a Century

Due to the bubonic plague, Chinese medicine's standing declined and Hong Kong became dominated by Western medicine. However, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 gave Chinese medicine a chance to shine and redeem itself. Chow believes, "While courses offered by the local universities have acknowledged the standing of Chinese medicine practitioners and reassured Chinese medicine students of their job prospect, the future for students of Chinese medicine pharmacy is less certain since no professional qualification is required to dispense Chinese medicines. But as a whole, the completion of the Chinese medicine hospital will bring the sector better development and a brighter path ahead."



Tung Wah as Founder of Hong Kong's First Chinese Medicine Hospital and its Role in the Local Development of Chinese Medicine

——— Su Yau-on Albert, Chief Executive, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals



1840s–1930s

While the concept of a "Chinese medicine hospital" may seem novel to today's young people in Hong Kong, Chinese medicine services have been providing essential healthcare at the grassroots level and have taken root in Hong Kong communities for over a century. In fact, Hong Kong's first Chinese medicine hospital – Tung Wah Hospital – was established in 1870.

"Tung Wah Hospital provided Chinese medicine services and marked the beginning of a relatively established Chinese medicine-based medical service for the Chinese community in Hong Kong." Albert Su, Chief Executive of the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, emphasised the importance of the establishment of Hong Kong's first Chinese medicine hospital, as its origins are closely related to the needs of the underprivileged in Hong Kong.

"People's Temple" Hygiene Issues Prompted the British Colonial Government to Address Local Medical Needs

In the early days of Hong Kong, the local working class was largely impoverished. As Albert summarises, "The majority of the population lived in cramped squalor

around Tai Ping Shan Street. Hygiene was poor and medical facilities were lacking." Quarters were overcrowded, with little ventilation, and urine and faeces from livestock and poultry overflowed. As the population grew, conditions worsened, disease spread and the need for medical care increased.

The British colonial government provided only Western medical services at that time. Albert explained that "the Chinese had little knowledge of Western science and medicine, and people were fearful of Western medicine at that time." The local Chinese were particularly averse to surgery and autopsies, both essential aspects of Western medicine. In addition, Western hospitals would charge a daily fee of 50 cents to $1 for hospitalisation, so the Chinese community tended to go to Chinese medicine practitioners for treatment.

In 1851, 14 local Chinese representatives, including Tam Choi, petitioned the Hong Kong government for land to build Kwong Fook I-tsz (commonly known as the People's Temple). "Many patients would come to stay at the temple in the last hours of their lives." As patients would come to the temple in their last hours, it housed both the living and the dead, and the sanitary conditions were appalling. In 1869, Acting Registrar General Alfred Lister's inspection report was widely reported in Hong Kong and British newspapers, and the colonial government was forced to address the issue of hygiene and health care among the local Chinese. "It was then that the government became concerned about the need to provide basic medical services to the local Chinese." This led to the idea of establishing the Tung Wah Hospital.



Collection of Tung Wah Museum 東華三院文物館藏



Collection of Tung Wah Museum 東華三院文物館藏

Answering the Call of the Times by Helping the Impoverished

In 1870, the colonial government promulgated the Chinese Hospital Ordinance, paving the way for the establishment of Tung Wah Hospital. The 13 members of the founding Board of Directors were all public-spirited compradors, merchants and scholars who ran the affairs of Tung Wah on a voluntary basis. They included the Chairman, Leung Wan-hon, then a comprador of Gibb, Livingston & Co; Li Suen, founder of the Wo Hing Hao (a trading company); and Wong Shing, a scholar of the Anglo-Chinese College.

"Tung Wah Hospital was officially opened in 1872 on a hillside next to the government-owned Cemetery Street (later renamed Po Yan Street) in Sheung Wan," Albert continues. At that time, Tung Wah Hospital had a capacity of 80 to 100 patients. It was a hospital where patients were treated entirely with Chinese medicine, with a doctor's room, a consultation room, a pharmacy and a decoction room. The out-patient clinics were run on a free basis, and in-patient admission was also free for impoverished Chinese patients.

In the early days of Tung Wah Hospital, several Chinese medicine practitioners were mainly responsible for treating patients. The decoction room had dozens of braziers and teapots for decoction. After the medicine was decocted, the workers would pass the whole pot to the nurses in charge of the ward, who would divide it among the patients. Compared to Western medicine hospitals, local Chinese were more receptive to Chinese medicine. In 1876, for example, 1,422 people were admitted to the Tung Wah Hospital, while only 230 Chinese were admitted to its Western medicine counterpart, the Government Civil Hospital (GCH).



Collection of Tung Wah Museum 東華三院文物館藏

Bubonic Plague Epidemic Threw the Status of Chinese Medicine into Question



"In 1894, the bubonic plague hit Hong Kong. By then, the Tung Wah Hospital had been operating for some time, and employed Chinese medicine to treat infected Chinese patients. Unfortunately, the treatments were ineffective." The plague had a 95% mortality rate and claimed 1,900 lives in the first month of the outbreak. The Chinese community in the Tai Ping Shan Street area of Sheung Wan became the epicentre for the epidemic, prompting government intervention in the management of Tung Wah Hospital. With the introduction of Western medicine at Tung Wah, the long-standing role of Tung Wah as a provider of Chinese medicine treatments gradually dwindled.

To contain the plague, the government took harsh measures, including forcibly removing patients from Tung Wah Hospital and making it compulsory for patients to be sent to the Hygeia, a maritime medical ship, for Western medical treatment. "It was a time of great discontent and panic among the residents, and many people complained why the Chinese management of Tung Wah Hospital allowed the colonial government to do such things." The public began to lose faith in Tung Wah, seeing the hospital as an accomplice to oppression for allowing the government to take away patients.

At the time, the Chinese still did not trust Western medicine, and many patients chose to stay at home as the epidemic spread. The colonial government had to agree to set up a temporary Chinese medicine clinic for epidemic diseases at Tung Wah Hospital, which treated about 100 patients from Hygeia and the GCH. Within a month, however, Dr J. A. Lowson, a medical officer of the colonial government, criticised the hospital for mismanagement and blamed Chinese medicine for failing to cure the patients. In 1895, Lowson submitted a report severely criticising the effectiveness of Chinese medicine treatments at Tung Wah Hospital. The survival of Tung Wah became a matter of widespread concern.

Chinese Medicine Marginalised as Medical Reforms Embraced Western Medicine

"In 1896, the colonial government set up a five-member committee to review the operation of Tung Wah Hospital," Albert said. The members were unable to reach a consensus on Tung Wah's future and later produced three reports with widely differing views – two of which proposed abolishing Tung Wah and redeveloping the hospital. In order to avoid additional funding, the government eventually adopted a more moderate approach, deciding to keep Tung Wah Hospital but to introduce Western medical services instead of Chinese medicine.

Since then, all Chinese hospitals funded by the colonial government have stopped treating patients exclusively with Chinese medicine. For example, the government-funded Kwong Wah Hospital, built in 1911, was positioned as a Western Chinese hospital. In 1929, Tung Wah took over Chap Sien Hospital and renamed it Tung Wah Eastern Hospital. The hospital used advanced Western medical equipment and paid doctors of Western medicine more than twice as much as their Chinese medicine counterparts.

In the 1930s, the Great Depression and the Japanese invasion of China in 1937 led to an influx of refugees into Hong Kong, leaving Tung Wah, which had already been amalgamated into a group of three hospitals, with a deficit of $150,000. In 1938, Tung Wah's Board of Directors had to petition the government for a subsidy, which was granted on condition, among other things, that Chinese medicine would

be phased out for in-patient treatment. The then Board Chairman made it clear that the abolition of Chinese medicine was contrary to the founding principles of Tung Wah. While the government accepted the retention of Chinese medicine for in-patients, it also demanded that all medical matters in the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals be decided and supervised by the Medical Council, meaning that Western doctors would preside over the future development of the hospital.

Chinese Medicine Services Shrunk Further During the Japanese Occupation

During the war against Japan, medical services in Tung Wah again came under siege. In 1944, the Japanese Occupation Government ordered Tung Wah and Kwong Wah Hospitals to close their free Chinese medicine clinics and to maintain only their free Western medicine clinics. In 1945, after a general meeting of the community and Consultative Directors, the Board had no choice but to agree that all medical patients receiving free treatment at Tung Wah and Kwong Wah Hospitals should receive Western medicine. This marked the forced end of over 70 years of Chinese medicine in-patient services at Tung Wah.

After the end of the Second World War, medical development in Hong Kong became heavily focused on Western medicine. While Tung Wah continued to provide small-scale, high-volume Chinese medical out-patient services, the development of Chinese medical services stagnated until after 1997.





Chinese Medicine Developments Soared After Hong Kong's Reunion with China

The development of Chinese medicine has grown by leaps and bounds since Hong Kong's reunification with China in 1997. "In 2001, we started to set up a consultation room, a Chinese medicine pharmacy and a Chinese medicine warehouse." In 2006, a Chinese medicine testing centre was opened to ensure the quality of Chinese medicines, and Chinese medicine clinics with training and research centres were also opened in collaboration with the Hospital Authority and local universities. In 2015, Tung Wah established a central decoction centre and set up a number of integrated Chinese and Western medicine treatment centres to promote collaboration between Chinese and Western medicine. "Since 2006, we have been trying to integrate Chinese and Western medicine in the treatments provided in our hospital wards."

In the 150 years since its establishment all through, Tung Wah Hospital has remained true to its core mission of providing free Chinese medicine services to the impoverished and needy. Despite the many challenges and tribulations, the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals has never lost sight of its original mission as a Chinese medicine-focused medical institution and is committed to continuing to serve the Hong Kong public with quality Chinese medicine services. "In the future, we will continue to make greater efforts and focus on the diversified development of our Chinese medicine services."

A Century-long Culture of Medical Philanthropy: Taoist Medical Practice Took Root in Wong Tai Sin District

—— Lo Sun-ho, Chairman of Sik Sik Yuen's Medical Services Committee



1840s-1930s

Back in the post-war years a century ago, social resources in Hong Kong were scarce, making it difficult for ordinary people to access medical services. In desperation, many resorted to Chinese fortune telling or praying to deities for help. Many Chinese organisations and religious groups have responded by providing health services to local communities. Among them is Sik Sik Yuen (SSY), a Taoist charity with roots in Wong Tai Sin district, whose free Chinese medicine services have benefited the community since 1924.

"Taoist Medicine": A Unique Combination of Taoist Beliefs and Medical Philanthropy

SSY was founded in 1921. Embracing the teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and following the motto of "Acting Benevolently and Teaching Benevolence", SSY established the Wong Tai Sin Temple in the then barren Chuk Yuen area. It was a time of political turmoil in China and many migrated from Guangdong to Hong Kong to escape the war, and some of them settled under the Lion Rock, next to the Wong Tai Sin Temple.

Taoism is an indigenous Chinese religion that originated in the late Eastern Han Dynasty. It was preceded by the practice of witchcraft and sorcery. The practice of divination to predict one's fortune and the use of talismanic water to cure illness were once widespread in Chinese history, both among the royalty and the commoners. The Taoist practice of "life cultivation" is not unlike the concept of "preventive treatment" in traditional Chinese medicine, in that it is based on the idea of pre-emptive health care. Taoists believe that health comes from inner purity and simplicity, and emphasise the "vital energy" of the human body – and this has led to a unique medical practice within Taoism and resulted in the intertwining of Taoism and medicine.

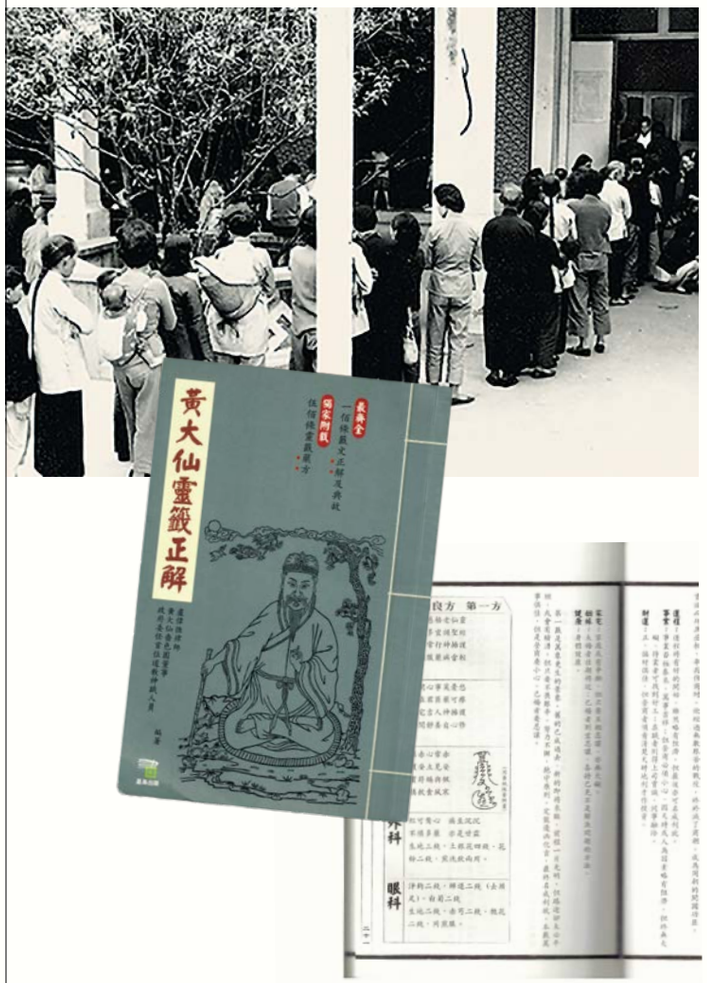
Lo Sun-ho, Chairman of the Sik Sik Yuen Medical Services Committee, explains the three levels of "Taoist medicine". The first is physical healing, using herbs, acupuncture and moxibustion to treat and prevent disease – in much the same way as Chinese medicine. The second is health maintenance, using methods such as daoyin (body-mind exercise), tuna (breathing and exhalation), neidan (internal alchemy) and bigu (grain avoidance) - the last of which coincides with the modern trend of "fasting". The third is spiritual healing, also known as the ancient practice of blessing and praying, which uses charms and religious beliefs to treat illness. "By communicating and confessing your grievances to the deities, your bad mood is alleviated and your spirit lifted. By treating spiritual ailments, you'll be cured naturally."

It is a popular Chinese custom to predict one's fortune by drawing lots in temples. In addition to fortune telling, some temples also offered "medicine lots" to treat illnesses. By drawing a lot, SSY's worshippers could obtain a "divine medical prescription" for their ailments. These prescriptions covered five medical specialities: men, women, infant, external medicine and ophthalmology. By bringing a medicine lot to SSY's Herbal Clinic, the faithful can receive the corresponding Chinese medicine prescription. However, with the regulation of the Chinese medicine profession, the medicine lots and divine prescriptions are now just historical relics, displayed in the Cultural Centre for Wong Tai Sin Belief and Customs built in 2021.

In Witness of Changing Times: A Century of Medical Philanthropy

In 1924, SSY set up the Herbal Clinic in Sai Kung Road, Kowloon, to offer free medical services daily. "In the old days, the standard of living of ordinary people was so low that they couldn't even afford a doctor. Many Chinese medicine traders donated medicines to us, so we started giving them away." In 1981, the Herbal Clinic was renovated and became part of the current premises, Po Chai Hall. The pharmacy was equipped with a large "hundred-drawer" Chinese medicine cabinet and a waiting area with seating so that patients no longer had to queue outside. In addition to Chinese medicine services, the renovated clinic was expanded to include Western medicine consultations, which led to an increase in the number of beneficiaries.

Over the past century, the Herbal Clinic has relied on donations and support from the faithful and has never stopped providing medical services to the community. As Lo points out, "Flu and cough were the most common ailments among our patients, followed closely by pain symptoms caused by overexertion, as we have a fair number of service users from the working class." Despite the general rise in living standards over the past decade, many older people were still living in poverty because they had no income from work. "One of the main focuses of the Herbal Clinic is the elderly. We help treat diseases that are common among the elderly, such as joint degeneration, memory loss, frequent urination, insomnia and constipation."



Over the past three years, the COVID-19 pandemic has swept the globe and changed the way people live in Hong Kong. As Lo has observed, many emotionally distressed patients suffering from depression and insomnia have sought medical advice from Chinese medicine practitioners. "In order to respond to the public's healthcare needs after the pandemic, we hope to promote the idea of 'preventive treatment' to the public. We have developed a range of health maintenance treatments, such as Tian Jiu therapy to strengthen lung qi. During the pandemic, we continue

to offer our twice-yearly Tian Jiu therapy, and the number of beneficiaries has reached a record high."

Modernising the Herbal Clinic in Keeping up with the Times

Despite the government's push to standardise and professionalise the Chinese medicine profession, the status of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong is still not on a par with Western medicine. "Chinese medicine is the nation's cultural treasure. Many patients come to our Herbal Clinic for our medical services, be it today or a century ago. This proves that Chinese medicine is a reliable and effective form of medical treatment for the public; otherwise it would have been phased out." Lo believes that creating and enforcing regulations is key. "It not only recognises practitioners, but also protects patients – both of which are essential for the development of the Chinese medicine industry."

The Herbal Clinic has proactively complied with the regulatory requirements by recruiting qualified practitioners, paramedical staff and assistants, and by



conducting regular tests on the Chinese medicines it procures. "All these measures have significantly increased our operating costs. However, as long as they can help improve the quality of services, we will do our utmost to comply. Providing quality services for the public always comes first"

The Herbal Clinic uses concentrated herbal extract medicines in granules form because "preparing decoction is a lot of trouble for most people. It takes time and you've to be careful not to overboil the herbs. It can even be dangerous for the elderly. That's why we switched to concentrated herbal extract medicine." The dispensary is also computerised, with barcode readers and electronic scales linked to the computer system. The operation of the dispensers is also checked by the computer to ensure that the herbs and dosages match the prescriptions, contributing to safety and reliability.

Expanding Services in Response to Elderly Needs

In addition to free medical consultations, SSY has been developing a wide range of high quality and affordable medical services covering Western medicine, dentistry and physiotherapy. Since 2007, the Herbal Clinic has been working with SSY's elderly centres to provide outreach medical consultation services. Lo stresses, "The aim is to help the elderly access quality services without creating additional financial burden."

To make it more convenient for service users, the Herbal Clinic has introduced stage by stage online registration and telephone booking system since 2011. "A decade or two ago, the elderly had to queue up at 5 or 6 in the morning to seek medical treatment," recalls Lo. "To save them the trouble, we introduced electronic booking services." Teleconsultation services were also introduced in 2022 in face of the challenges raised by the COVID-19 epidemic.

In recent years, SSY has also partnered with the academia to provide scholarships to local Chinese medicine schools, using its unique social standing to help nurture outstanding talents and further promote the standard and status of Chinese medicine.

SSY's century-long history has many parallels with the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. Today, SSY continues to uphold the spirit of "Acting Benevolently and Teaching Benevolence" in its many acts of social philanthropy – including caring for the underprivileged and providing free medicine – while seeking change and innovation within the boundaries of a regulated Chinese medicine profession. Lo believes, "This is the very definition of 'keeping up with the times' – to seek change is to progress."

Master Practitioners Came South for Knowledge Exchange: Private Schools Passed on Chinese Medicine Traditions

—— Professor Chan Wing-kwong,
President of the Hong Kong Registered
Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association

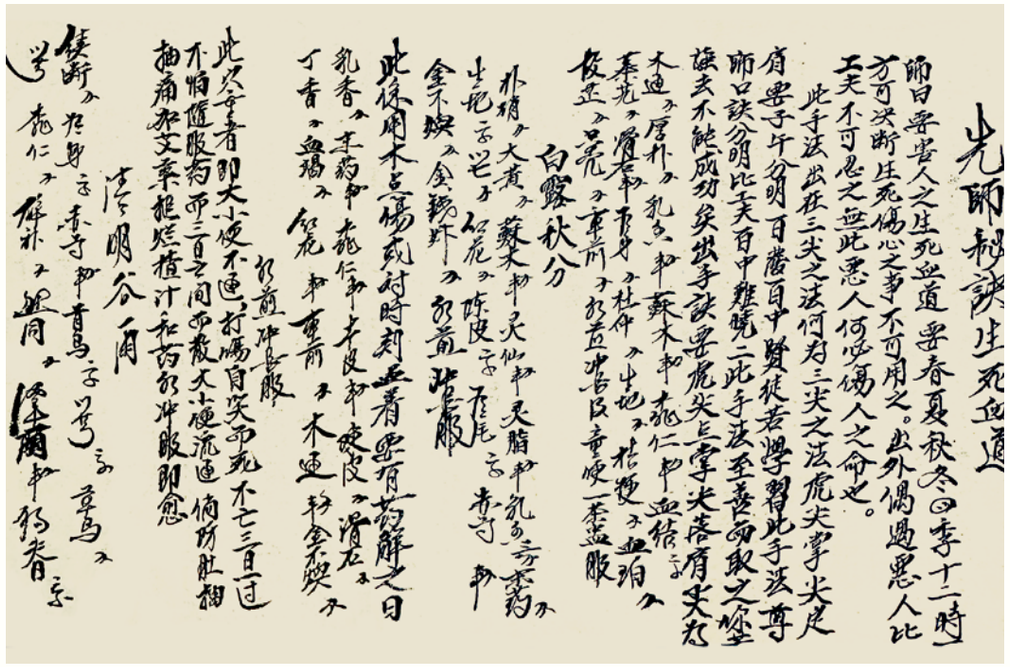


1940s-1980s

"Looking back at the last century, I'd say the high point in the development of Chinese medicine was in the 1950s and 60s." Looking back at the vicissitudes of history, Chan Wing-kwong, president of the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association, identifies the post-war period – a period usually marked by its barren stagnation – as the brightest opportunity for Chinese medicine in Hong Kong.

"Hong Kong was special because of what it was." Its colonial history created a blend of Chinese and Western cultures, but because the British colonial government excluded Chinese medicine from the formal medical system, the Chinese medicine profession was left without support for years. However, it was precisely for this reason that the purest form of Chinese medicine culture has been preserved. A wide variety of Chinese medicine practitioners flourished here: herbalists in herbal medicine shops, bonesetters, acupuncturists....





The Southward Migration of Master Practitioners Accelerated Chinese Medicine Development

As early as the pre-war 1930s, a group of Chinese medical practitioners from mainland China moved their practice to Hong Kong. There were frequent exchanges between practitioners of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong and Guangzhou, which brought vitality to the study of Chinese medicine. Among them were Lu Jueru and Lu Jufei from Dongguan and Fei Zibin, a master practitioner from Menghe City. Later, in the post-war 1950s, they were joined by a number of renowned practitioners from the Shanghai School, including Ding Jiwan and Chen Cunren from Shanghai, Chen Yu from Chenzhou in Hunan, Chan Yeung-ng – renowned in both Shanghai and Guangzhou– and Zhu Hegao, the second son of Zhu Nanshan, a master practitioner from Shanghai. “As a result, the Lingnan School of Chinese medicine practitioners and the Shanghai School of Chinese medicine practitioners came together in one place - Hong Kong.”

As Chan Wing-kwong explains, Chinese medicine prescriptions take into account seasonal and regional factors. Northern masters were used to colder climates and their prescriptions were “warmer” in nature, while Lingnan practitioners tended to use local herbs. “Northern practitioners had fewer patients when they



first came to Hong Kong because they were unfamiliar with the local climate and herbs, or the constitution and lifestyle of the local people. They weren't able to use their skills in the best way." For this reason, practitioners from the north tended to have frequent exchanges with local counterparts.

Preserving Chinese Medicine Culture while Ushering in an Era of Academic Freedom

According to Chan Wing-kwong, in the 1950s and 60s practitioners in Hong Kong banded together to fight the flu pandemic and protect the public. "Scientific research wasn't as advanced as it is today, but practitioners got together and shared their methods and experiences, even printing them in pamphlets for distribution." While the government did not interfere in the development of Chinese medicine, it also meant that there was no official investment. "Without government regulation, practitioners had to get together, and that was how the associations came about." And there were many: The Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association and the Hong Kong Chinese Herbalists Association, both founded by You Lie in 1919, as well as the Kowloon Chinese Herbalists Association, the Society of Practitioners of Chinese Herbal Medicine and the Association of Hong Kong & Kowloon Practitioners of Chinese Medicine, all formed after the war. By providing a professional network, these associations have enabled the Chinese medicine profession in Hong Kong to continue to develop despite being marginalised.

A Foothold in the Community Helped to Preserve Chinese Medicine Traditions

For decades, Chinese and Western medicine were practised in parallel in mainland China. As a result, Western medicine was used exclusively in certain hospital departments, preventing the full use of Chinese medical techniques. In Hong Kong, although the government considered only Western medicine to be orthodox, the general public still tended to believe in Chinese medicine, giving it a chance to flourish. "The methodology of Chinese medicine can be summed up in simple terms: 'treatment based on pattern differentiation'. "Differentiation" involves examining minute details, from the dryness of the patient's mouth, to the pulse pattern, to the glint in the eyes. All these subtle signs can reveal what is happening in the body."

In the 1950s, a new wave of learning came to Hong Kong as private schools of Chinese medicine were established by renowned practitioners who had arrived from the north. "In addition to passing on the practice of Chinese medicine from master to apprentice, there were teachers, family practices and private schools that continued to train students. These included the Hong Kong Acupuncture and Moxibustion College founded by So Tin-yau James, the Tang Kun-ming Acupuncture College founded by Tang Kun-ming, the Guangzhong College of Chinese Medicine founded by Deng Wuyin and the Fudan College of Chinese Medicine founded by Xie Liqing. Amongst these founders was Chen Cunren, who came to Hong Kong from Shanghai in 1949." After his arrival in Hong Kong, Chen continued to write and teach about Chinese medicine and founded the Cunren College of Chinese Medicine to train practitioners of Chinese medicine and develop acupuncture techniques. Although the qualifications of these courses were not officially recognised by the government, the knowledge imparted was sound and played an important role in establishing the status of the Chinese medicine profession.

Master Practitioners Gathered to Spearhead Chinese Medicine Education

"One of the more respected and long-established community schools in the early days was the Chinese Medical Institute, headed by Tam Po-kwan." A graduate of the Central Academy of National Medicine, he came to Hong Kong in the 1940s and founded the Institute in 1947. He donated his private residence on Hillwood Road as a school building to provide a better learning environment for his students. He enlisted the help of renowned practitioners, including Ng Cheuk-ki as registrar and Yang Richao, Lee Yu-ting, and Lai Wing-wo as lecturers.

"When first offered, it was a two-year course, but eventually became a five-year course. Many of its graduates went on to become renowned practitioners in Hong Kong." Among the graduates were Kwan Chi-yee and Chan Wing-kwong himself. The curriculum was designed to meet community needs, and in 1949, an academic system with fixed subjects were introduced. There were foundation and applied subjects, the former including medical history and pharmacology; the latter internal medicine and paediatrics. Later, three charitable clinics were set up to provide clinical practicum opportunities for students.

Community efforts could only go so far in promoting the development of the Chinese medicine profession. In the 1980s and 90s, the Working Party on Chinese Medicine recognised the need to establish full-time schools of Chinese medicine. Meanwhile, the industry successfully lobbied for the inclusion of an article in the Basic Law to protect the development of Chinese medicine. With these new developments, higher education institutions finally began to offer courses in Chinese medicine.

Recognition Earned after a Century of Blood and Tears

Chan Wing-kwong believes that Chinese medicine could never have developed before the reunification. "Traditionally, the knowledge of Chinese medicine is passed on from parent to children. But among the older generation of masters I studied, none of their children chose to become Chinese medicine practitioners. It pains me to see this." He believed it had to do with the social status of Chinese medicine practitioners, as the children of many renowned practitioners have chosen other professions, such as accountancy and Western medicine, over Chinese medicine. "In the past, Chinese medicine practitioners were not respected. It was understandable that they didn't want their children to suffer the same."



The change in the status of Chinese medicine practitioners had much to do with Article 138 of the Basic Law, which provides that "the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall, on its own, formulate policies to develop Western and traditional Chinese medicine and to improve medical and health services." In 1999, the government passed the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, which finally recognised the rights of registered and listed Chinese medicine practitioners and provided protection for the profession. "I'm glad that with the promulgation of the Basic Law, the profession of Chinese medicine is now properly regulated. In the past 20 years, the industry has seen immense development thanks to the support of our government and our motherland."

"Nowadays, if you want to study Chinese medicine at university, you have to score well in public examinations," says Chan. He is optimistic about the future because many talented young people are now considering Chinese medicine as a future career. This shows that the status of Chinese medicine has been greatly enhanced. "I hope Chinese medicine will continue to develop and play to the strengths of Hong Kong's traditional Chinese culture."

Vicissitudes of a Past Era: United to Protect Professional Status of Chinese Medicine Practitioners

—— Chan Kong-sang, Permanent President of the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association, Editor-in-Chief of the *Hong Kong Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*



1940s–1980s

Chan Kong-sang is the Permanent President of the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association and editor-in-chief of the *Hong Kong Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*. He has witnessed the incredible evolution of Hong Kong's Chinese medicine community, from being cliquish and conservative to coming together as a united front. This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when practitioners braved the risks to treat patients on the frontline, providing valuable protection to grassroots communities. Chan believes that only by "gaining support of the motherland" can Chinese medicine practitioners move from being mere "herbal tea masters" to professional doctors. And he has held to this unwavering belief throughout his 58 years of practice.

Answering the Call: Joining Chinese Medicine as a Top Western Medical Specialist

Chan's parents were both Western medicine practitioners, and he naturally aspired to become a Western doctor as a child. As expected, Chan passed the National College Entrance Examination and was admitted to a Western medical university.





After graduation, he worked as a surgical doctor, believing that he would dedicate his life to Western medicine like his parents. However, in the 1950s, under the banner of “uniting the old and new Chinese and Western medicine health personnel”, Chairman Mao Zedong proposed that around 100 to 200 graduates from medical universities or medical schools should undertake a clinical internship where they could learn from Chinese medicine practitioners. Chan was chosen as one of them.

Coming from Western medicine, which is based on empirical and anatomical science, Chan admits that he found it difficult to adapt to Chinese medicine, which is based on abstract concepts such as “yin and yang”, “the five elements” and “meridians and acupuncture points”. “Western medicine is easier to grasp; Chinese medicine has many abstract concepts and relies heavily on reciting classical texts – which can be boring. But once you understand the underlying principles, you can get better.” In the process of learning Chinese medicine, Chan gradually realised the strengths of Chinese medicine and the effectiveness of integrating Chinese and Western medicine. For example, Chinese medicine treats “night crying” of babies and young children as a condition, which can be treated at the root based on its different causes such as weakness in the spleen, heat in the heart, or a panic attack.

Chan is one of the first university teachers in China to hold degrees in both Chinese and Western medicine. He oversees the integrative treatment of acute abdominal diseases such as gastric perforation, gallstones and kidney stones. In

the case of a stomach perforation, for example, an integrative treatment would involve a Western doctor first inserting a stomach tube to reduce the pressure on the bowels, followed by Chinese acupuncture theory to enhance the self-healing capacity of the greater omentum to close the perforation. At a later stage, Chinese medicine may also be used to promote recovery, or Western antibiotics may be used to reduce inflammation.

However, in order to integrate Chinese and Western medicine, Chan believes that the first step is to raise the standard of Chinese medicine practitioners. The reason is that abdominal diseases are incredibly complex and if the doctor does not have a good grasp of the condition, there is always a risk of shock, at which point surgery would be extremely dangerous.

Chinese Medicine Groups Unite to Protect the Profession

Chan arrived in Hong Kong in the 1980s. Despite his background in integrative medicine, he was saddened to see that Chinese medicine was regarded only as a folk custom, and that Chinese medicine practitioners were neither given legal status as medical professionals nor regarded as doctors. He lamented, "There was a case where a Chinese medicine practitioner was sued because he had the title "doctor" on his business card. People don't recognise you as a doctor, they just call you 'sifu' (master)."





Hong Kong's first Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa, invited five practitioners of Chinese medicine to join him in the "Delegation of Hong Kong Professional Groups to Beijing". Chan was one of them. This was the first official invitation for Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong to participate in such an event. He was received by then-Premier Li Peng at the Great Hall of the People, which was "an important endorsement of the Chinese medicine profession in Hong Kong". Such recognition was an important milestone for Hong Kong's Chinese medicine practitioners in their first step towards professionalism. This difference in the official attitude towards the profession, before and after the reunification of Hong Kong, reinforced Chan's belief that "gaining support of the motherland" was the way forward.

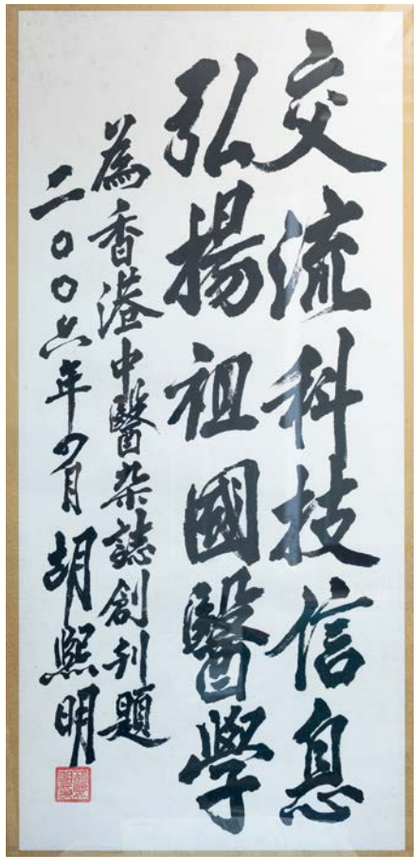
By the time of the 1911 revolution, there were many evening schools of Chinese medicine offering courses to train future talents. Five major associations, including the Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association, the Hong Kong Chinese Herbalists Association, the Kowloon Chinese Herbalists Association, the China Society of Practitioners of Chinese Medicine and the Federation of Chinese Medicine Practitioners of Hong Kong, were formed. However, a merger was necessary to combine their strengths.

Three such mergers took place. In 1948, Chinese medicine practitioner Lai Siu-wan called a meeting of representatives of each association, where they moved to abolish the five major Chinese medicine associations and unite them under the name "Association of Hong Kong & Kowloon Practitioners of Chinese Medicine". It was the first time in Hong Kong's history that Chinese medicine groups had united under one banner. In 1989, Dr. Leong Che-hung, then a member of the Legislative Council, proposed the formation of a territory-wide federation of Chinese medicine practitioners' association to provide a central point of contact. He hoped to bring about a second merger, but negotiations failed.

Following the enactment of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance in 1999, which established a registration system for Chinese medicine practitioners, a number of officials, including the then Director of Health, Dr. Margaret Chan, urged the formation of the "Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners

Association". Two leaders from each of the 11 Chinese medicine associations in Hong Kong were involved, who were also among the first registered Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong. "Building a society is hard. The roots of Chinese medicine are in the motherland, and its support and guidance are essential for a successful association. That is why I took the initiative to contact the Coordination Department of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. We prepared a draft of the constitution of the association for the review of the Coordination Department." The Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association was registered in 2003 and has since become the most representative Chinese medicine association in Hong Kong, with over 7,000 members.

State Support to Found the Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine



The Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association produces and publishes an academic journal that facilitates academic exchange in Chinese medicine in Hong Kong and internationally. Founded in 2006, the *Hong Kong Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine* provides a platform for academic exchange between local academia and the professional community, helping to raise the standard of the profession. "The standard of local Chinese medicine practitioners varies widely, so it is important to improve academic standards and promote a culture of learning." By creating a representative Chinese medicine journal, Chan hopes to showcase Chinese medicine in Hong Kong to the international community and promote a culture of research in Chinese medicine.



A New Era, A New Status

The Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association enjoys the largest membership, which also makes it the most representative Chinese medicine body in the city. Some of its members also participate in the work of the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong and the Chinese Medicine Development Committee, which advise the government on decisions relating to Chinese medicine and play an important role in promoting the development of the profession.

Having practised Chinese medicine for nearly 60 years and witnessed a sea change in the status of Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong, Chan was selected by the National Health Commission and the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine as the second cohort of "National Famous Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners" in 2022, making him the first Chinese medicine practitioner in Hong Kong to receive this honour. With Hong Kong's first modern Chinese Medicine Hospital set to open in 2025, Chan is pleased that this will not only benefit the public, but also provide necessary resources for Chinese medicine education. He has a word of advice for the new generation: "The Chinese Medicine Hospital is the result of years of hard work by those who came before. Young practitioners must remember that the roots of Chinese medicine are in the motherland, so they should play a role in promoting the development of the Greater Bay Area as they strive to improve their professional standards."

Modernising the Family Business: A Synthesis of Chinese and Western Medicine

—— Ho Kwok-wai, Chinese Medicine Bonesetter and Orthopaedist



1990s-2000s

In the past, Chinese medicine practitioners were not subject to standardised professional training, making it difficult to obtain objective certification. As a result, slogans such as "expertise passed down through three generations" are often used by Chinese medical clinics on their signs in an attempt to convince patients. But Ho Kwok-wai, who is actually the third generation to run his family's renowned bone-setting business, has broken with this tradition. The clinic he ran with his father in Sai Wan was known only as "Ho Chung-sing and Ho Kwok-wai Father and Son's Bone-setting Clinic". Ho Kwok-wai has been practising medicine for half a century and believes in the value of professionalism, not family reputation.

To Learn is to Sail Against the Currents – One Must Never Stop

"When my grandfather lived in the rural areas, he was something of an expert in medicinal herbs and spent his spare time treating fellow townsfolk. Later, my father also became interested in medicinal herbs and accompanied my grandfather on his trips to the hill. When my father came to Hong Kong, he continued to sell

medicinal herbs and run a Chinese medicine clinic, while also attending evening classes. As a kid, I didn't have much to do, so in my spare time I would be my father's assistant. I would learn to dress wounds, mix medicine, clean the clinic and learn tui-na." Like his father, Ho later turned his interest in bone-setting and medicinal herbs into a lifelong career. He and like-minded friends travelled around China to find renowned experts and study under their guidance, including enrolling in the Beijing College of Acupuncture-Moxibustion and Orthopaedics and the Guangxi College of Traditional Chinese Medicine. As Ho continued his studies and clinical practice, he became even more "obsessed" with bone-setting and medicinal herbs. Bone-setting and orthopaedics became the obvious – and only – choice for his career.

His studies on the mainland inspired Ho to think about the integration of Chinese and Western medicine. "In the 1950s and 60s, China began to adopt integrative medicine. I drew on the concepts of both Chinese and Western medicine; for example, if there is a fracture, I will first set it with a splint. If the internal damage is severe, I would advise the patient to have an operation. This has taught me to be flexible in choosing between Chinese and Western medicine, or even a combination of the two, depending on the condition."

The bonesetters of yesteryear have become the orthopaedist of today, and the types of illnesses they deal with are also vastly different, as the lifestyle and social habits of the people in Hong Kong change significantly. The economic model of the society has shifted towards white-collar jobs, with trade and finance being the mainstays. Patients are of slight build and their physical condition is not as strong as before, so the strength of the tui-na needs to be reduced. The techniques have to be gentler.

Homemade Medicine: Pills are the Hardest

The older generation of bonesetters usually make their own medicines, such as bone-setting liquor, ointments and pills. Ho, who learned to collect herbs and make medicines from his father when he was a child, says that the process of making medicines is painstaking and requires great attention to details in each steps. Time and climate also need to be taken into consideration. It takes up to 10 months to make "ointments". There are two types of topical ointment in Chinese medicine: "soft" ointment and "hard" ointment. They can be classified according to their therapeutic functions, such as the treatment of sores, orthopaedic injuries or rheumatism.



"The type of solvent used to soak the medicinal herbs would affect the therapeutic effect. If a bone-setting ointment needs to have a softening and smoothing effect, lard is used to make the soft ointment. Tea seed oil is used for sores and sesame oil for Rheumatic diseases. Herbal ingredients are mixed according to the recipe, soaked in oil for at least three months, then rinsed and stir-fried, dried and set aside for use. The lead-containing huang dan (minium) is then used as a coagulant to solidify the ointment." According to Ho, bone-setting liquor is easier to make because it only requires the herbs to be steeped for a sufficient amount of time – which can vary depending on the type of herb. Herbs like vine, for example, need to be steeped longer, as their "essence" is harder to extract. Herbs such as flowering plants and Herbaceous plant only need to be steeped for about three months.

Of all the different dosage forms of Chinese medicine, pills are the most difficult to produce. Ho explains that pills are for internal use, so he cannot simply use a grinder to grind the raw herbs and combine them into pills. Each herb has to be processed in an appropriate way. "For example, Chinese angelica needs to be steamed in Chinese wine to cook it thoroughly and enhance its effects on improving qi and blood flow. Astragalus and pilose asiabell root also require pre-steaming. When





processing rehmannia root, we steam it at least three times with villous amomum fruit , as the latter helps with qi flow and can reduce the stickiness of the former, otherwise the patient will easily have bloating after taking the pill. However, not all medicinal herbs can be steamed in wine; for example, common monkshood mother root and kusnezoff monkshood mother root, which are used to dispel wind-dampness, should be steamed in vinegar."

How Should Bonesetters Position Themselves in an Age of Modern Medicine?

As times change, so do treatments. Outdated treatments are phased out, leaving room for the new generation to innovate. In recent years, for example, Yunnan Baiyao, a well-known proprietary traditional Chinese medicine, has evolved over time into a number of new dosage forms, including sprays and patches, in addition to the traditional powder form. The patches are also being updated, with water-based patches replacing hard ones. Water-based patches dissolve and penetrate more quickly, making them less likely to irritate the skin, less odour-intensive and more suitable for allergy-prone patients.





As the pace of life accelerates in modern society, patients are looking for quick and convenient treatments. Western painkillers and physiotherapy are now competing fiercely with traditional bone setting. How does Ho position himself in these fast-moving times? “I think Chinese medicine has an advantage in treating soft tissue injuries, such as stiff necks and frozen shoulders. Chinese medicine treatments for these conditions are more meticulous and thorough, emphasising tendon relaxation.”

Challenges to the Transmission of Chinese Medicine: A Microcosm of Inter-generational Issues

In order to keep the bone-setting culture alive and prevent the profession from dying out, it is as important to improve one’s own skills as it is to pass the baton on to the next generation. With the enactment of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, the apprenticeship system has been replaced by a tertiary curriculum and registration system. Although Ho’s son has studied with him since childhood, he can no longer practise in the name of an “ancestral tradition”; rather, he must graduate from a recognised programme and pass a professional examination to become a registered Chinese medicine practitioner.

“The sense of touch is difficult to describe verbally or in writing. Knowing the theory well is not the same as having a good sense of touch. For example, when treating the neck, how can we tell the difference between “cervical 1, cervical 2 and cervical 3” (i.e. the first, second and third cervical vertebrae) by touch? The younger generation knows the position of the vertebrae from anatomical studies, but in reality we have to feel with our hands which part of the vertebra is bent to the left or to the right. Even X-rays cannot show everything clearly, and sometimes we have to feel the soft tissues with our hands to know why a section is bent in a certain way. These details cannot be understood from book descriptions alone, as there is no way to measure the strength to be applied. The only way is to gain experience by treating different cases.”

Ho is frank about the lack of new talent to take up the torch of traditional Chinese medicine including bone-setting. “Aging is common in many long-standing Chinese medicine societies. There is a general lack of participation from the younger generation, while others, eager to revitalise these societies through change, pay little heed to the history and rules laid down by their predecessors. Meanwhile, older practitioners, lacking communication skills, have little idea of how to work with the younger generation. Looking ahead, we should seize the opportunity to improve this situation so that the whole profession has great scope for development.”



Of One Family: The Inter-connectedness of Traditional Chinese Martial Arts and Chinese Medicine Orthopaedics and Traumatology

—— Kong Pui-wai, President, Hong Kong Chinese Martial Arts Dragon and Lion Dance Association



Martial Arts and Chinese Medicine Complement Each Other

One of the key cultural elements of Hong Kong martial arts is that "medicine and martial arts are one family". Sparring often leads to injuries, so martial artists also specialise in medicine at the same time, with a focus on orthopaedics and traumatology. This has gradually led to the formation of the "bone-setting" school, which is prevalent in the Lingnan region. The theories of martial arts and Chinese medicine also have much in common, as they both emphasise the way of nature and the balance of yin and yang, The ultimate goal for practitioners of both martial arts and medicine is thus the same: virtuous practice.

A respected Hung Kuen master, Kong Pui-wai also inherited the "one family" culture of medicine and martial arts. "I have two identities: Master Kong, who promotes the culture of Chinese martial arts; and Dr. Kong, a registered practitioner of Chinese medicine." And although Kong no longer directly teaches medicine to students as he once did, he still stresses the importance of strengthening the body and cultivating the mind through martial arts.



Martial Arts Training Optimises the Skeletal Structure

In the old days, when medicine and martial arts were one family, many martial artists also studied medicine. However, those who studied medicine did not necessarily practise martial arts. Therefore, the trend of "one family" culture in Hong Kong originated from mainland martial arts masters who set up rooftop martial arts studios and practised medicine simultaneously. These studios were particularly common in Hong Kong in the 1960s and 70s.

"In the past, martial arts studios were popular because there were many martial arts enthusiasts. Also, there weren't many places for entertainment and leisure. People who loved sports also loved martial arts." In the 1960s and 70s, there were many martial arts studios, mostly in tenement buildings, and Kong was trained by Chan Hon-chung, a student of the famous Hung Kuen master Lam Sai-wing, making him the third generation successor of martial arts legend Wong Fei-hung. Martial arts studio was filled with weapons, sandbags and the smell of bone-setting liquor and herbal medicine.

"When I first started learning kung fu, I thought I would become a superhuman "fighter". The training was hard, but later I was happy to see myself improving in many ways: my techniques, my body conditions and my reflexes – which are much faster than normal people.

Learning the "Horse Stance" before Learning to Throw Punches

When we talk about martial arts training, the "horse stance" naturally comes to mind. "Anyone who learns kung fu in the traditional way must start with the horse stance. It is also the most important and difficult aspect of learning Hung Kuen. Practising horse stance builds the core of the body, strengthens balance and coordination, and enhances leg strength." Kong likens the horse stance to laying the foundation of a building; if the foundation is sound, the building will not topple over and water and air will flow freely through it.

The best-known horse stance is called "Sei ping ma" (Four levels horse stance). It is the most stable position and a state in which the mind is calm and the body is upright. When "Sei ping ma" is done correctly in conjunction with breathing exercises, the spine is in its natural form and the circulation of blood and qi can be strengthened. This stance promotes the movement of qi and blood, as prescribed by Chinese medicine. "To practise martial arts is to practise optimising your

skeletal structure. The skeletal structure affects your sparring stance. Therefore, a crooked sparring stance must be corrected because it will cause damage to the internal organs, tendons and veins or meridians."

Strengthening One's Physique with Martial Arts; Tonifying One's Health with Medicine

As Kong puts it, the relationship between medicine and martial arts is "from the outside in, then back to the outside. Martial arts are about helping people realise their potential, not about getting them into the ring to fight. It is about holistic strengthening, not just lifting dumbbells and throwing heavy punches. Chinese martial arts trains not just raw strength, but inner strength; it strengthens not just the muscles and skeleton, but the functioning of the internal organs. From the point of view of health care, there is no way to separate medicine from martial arts."

"Humans are animals, and they need to move in order to be healthy. But indiscriminate movement hurts them. Sometimes patients ask me why they're prone to illness. As well as body constitution, the skeleton can be the cause. The theories of medicine and martial arts have a lot in common. For example, if you often have trouble breathing, you may have a problem with your breastbone; if you have a cold or flu from time to time, you may have a problem with your neck bone." The fundamentals of internal strength training is about breathing exercises and using internal breathing to strengthen the organs. When the body is weak and the qi and blood is not flowing, the first thing to do is to practise breathing and then do basic exercise to strengthen the muscles and bones.

Martial Arts and Medicine as a Way to Realise the Natural Potential of Humans

Punches and kicks can lead to injury, which is why many martial arts masters choose to study orthopaedics, traumatology and Chinese medicine. This culture has led to the development of martial arts studios that double as medical facilities. Bone-setting, which originated in Guangdong, is a branch of Chinese medical orthopaedics and traumatology. As well as the basic techniques of inspection, listening, inquiring and palpation, diagnosis also involves treatments such as the eight methods of bone-setting described in the *Yizong Jinjia (Golden Manual of Medicine)*, namely "touching, lifting, tilting, connecting, pressing, massaging, pushing and manipulating". Clamping and traction therapy can also be used, and



medicines are prescribed according to the patient's body constitution. The aim is to treat both internally and externally to speed up healing.

A common saying among practitioners is that they not only treat the body, but also heal the mind. For Kong, treating orthopaedic injuries is just as important as nurturing the mind through martial arts. "Human beings have the potential to restore the body to its normal state. Faith has a healing effect. This is something that many people don't understand: the mind also plays a role in healing the body, in addition to taking medicine. A good doctor also treats the mind; if the mind is pacified, the disease is already 70% cured, especially in chronic diseases."

His dedication to his patients stems from his pursuit of virtue. "The way of nature is at the heart of both Chinese martial arts and Chinese medicine. If you deviate from it, there will be disharmony in the five elements, leading to imbalance in the body and disease. It is therefore best to cultivate the mind, let go and

embrace. Virtue is the ultimate goal of all training, especially that of the heart. Thus, both Chinese martial arts and Chinese medicine focus on cultivating the virtues of the heart."

The Future of Chinese Medicine Practitioners: Apprenticeship or Academy?

A master who is virtuous in the practice of medicine and martial arts would discriminate in his teaching, passing on important skills only to the virtuous students. The influence of the apprenticeship system is particularly evident in the profession of Chinese medicine, and in the past it was not easy to become a Chinese medicine practitioner. "We had to learn orthopaedics and traumatology the hard way. Our master wouldn't teach us as we would in a classroom; we had to rely on imitation. We learn by observing the master's techniques, and each of us, as students, gains different insights."

When the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong was set up in 1999 to standardise Chinese medicine, bonesetters had to be registered before they could continue to practise. An apprenticeship system and a systematic university programme have their own advantages over the other in terms of training in Chinese medicine. "Institutionalisation has its advantages in the development of modern society.





In the past, apprentices needed years of practice and the master's permission to go out on their own. This shows that practice was an important part of learning. To pave the way for the future of the Chinese medicine profession, the government should start by setting up Chinese medicine departments in various hospitals in Hong Kong. Experienced Chinese medicine practitioners can then act as consultants to maintain a high quality of treatment, so that we can integrate the benefits of old-school training while giving new cohorts of Chinese medicine students the opportunity to practice."

Kong hopes that the status of Chinese medicine will be raised to that of Western medicine, so that the benefits of integrating Chinese and Western medicine can be fully realised. "Nowadays, if a patient has a broken bone, the first step is to ask the patient to go to the hospital for an X-ray. Treatment by touch and manipulation alone can be risky and challenging, but the advantage is that recovery is possible without surgery. Medicine is moving with the times, and the future should be the mutual acceptance and integration of Chinese and Western medicine. The important thing is to help the patient heal while reducing the risk and ensuring the patient's safety. This is at the heart of virtuous medical practice."

SARS Gave Rise to Firsts and Laid Groundwork for Chinese Medicine Development in Hong Kong

—— Dr. Ko Wing-man, Executive Council member



After 2003

To many people, Ko Wing-man is a Western medicine doctor, orthopaedic surgeon, former Secretary for Food and Health and current Executive Council member. In fact, he is also a champion of the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong all through, making quiet contributions since joining the Working Party on Chinese Medicine in 1989. Of his many efforts, the most impactful is arguably the bold attempt he led as Acting Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority during the outbreak of SARS.

The 2003 SARS epidemic was undeniably a deep trauma to the people of Hong Kong. Nonetheless, it was also a milestone in the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong, laying the groundwork for its great leap.

Becoming a Recognised Profession

Ko first encountered Chinese medicine in the Chinese gentian root poisoning incident in 1989. “In 1989, three patients received from a Chinese medicine practitioner a prescription meant to clear their heat, which included Guizhou gentian. However, they became poisoned after taking the prescription. It was later found that they

were actually given Chinese mayapple root and rhizome." As the two herbs look alike, accidental ingestion can cause poisoning of the nervous system.

As a result, the authority convened the Working Party on Chinese Medicine and appointed Ko, the then Senior Manager, a member of the working group. "Since then, I've watched how Chinese medicine develops in Hong Kong with government support." He also witnessed the enactment of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance by the HKSAR Government and pushed for a recurrent funding worth 100 million dollars from the government to the Hospital Authority to develop Chinese medicine healthcare services.

Turning a Crisis into an Opportunity

Ko remembers distinctly how he was entrusted with the critical task of tackling the SARS epidemic as Acting Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority. He and his team made a multitude of "firsts" with Chinese medicine. "Many people thought Western and Chinese medicines first joined hands during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In fact, there were already attempts during the SARS outbreak."





The first "first attempt" was a Hong Kong healthcare delegation's visiting the Mainland for field studies. Another "first attempt" was inviting Mainland experts to Hong Kong for an exchange. Ko proposed to the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine that Hong Kong invite experts from provincial Chinese medicine hospitals to cooperate and fight in the battle. Professor Yang Zhimin and Professor Lin Lin became the first two Mainland experts to share their Chinese medicine experience in Hong Kong.

Regular Visits by Mainland Experts to Strengthen Academic Exchange

Ko recalls, the then Director of the Hospital Authority, Dr. Vivian Taam Wong, called upon the Chinese medicine professors of all the local universities and SARS experts to work with the two Mainland professors. The impactful experience from the clinical study created a foundation for future collaboration between Chinese and Western medicines. "We built our discussion upon common ground and reached a consensus on a clinical procedure that can be followed in any hospitals when doctors of Chinese and Western medicines work together to provide suitable integrated treatments for our patients."

In late 2003, Ko visited Guangdong Provincial Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine again. With Health Minister Zhang Wen-kang as a witness, he signed a cooperation agreement with President Lu Yubo of the hospital. The agreement stipulated that the provincial Chinese medicine hospital and key academic Chinese medicine institutes would send professors to the 18 district clinical teaching and research centres under the Hospital Authority to provide healthcare services together with local doctors of Chinese and Western medicines.

Unanimity: Patient's Interest First

Despite the decision to develop integrated healthcare in Hong Kong, implementation was onerous as there was a huge divide, or even hostility, according to Ko, between the two regimes of medicine in the early days. "It wasn't easy to nurture mutual respect between them as they had no understanding of each other, let alone finding any foundation for collaboration."

Foreseeing this problem early in 2001, orthopaedic expert Dr. Chow Shew-ping suggested establishing the Hong Kong Association for Integration of Chinese-Western Medicine which would organise foundation courses in medicine to foster understanding between the two streams. Both registered Chinese medicine and Western medicine doctors would be eligible to join. Ko, Dr. Vivian Taam Wong

and Dr. Yu Chau-leung Edwin supported the idea and even served as president at different times.

Later on, local universities developed their Chinese medicine programmes in a similar direction with a certain proportion of fundamental knowledge of Western medicine integrated into the syllabus. “We encouraged Western medicine doctors in the Hospital Authority clusters to collaborate with the teaching and research centres on clinical research on topics of their choice. I believe doctors and therapists from different regimes can all use evidence-based medicine to analyse cases to rule out conflicting views and discord brought by systemic differences so as to provide integrated medical care that fits the patients’ needs.” This string of measures and concepts had opened the door for Chinese medicine to the formal healthcare system.

Setting Up Chinese Medicine Hospitals Introducing Integrated Chinese-Western Medicine Trial

To the Chinese medicine sector, development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong had always been slow. “Undeniably, there was a void, especially in student training and clinical research, as there wasn’t any Chinese medicine hospital.”

Thus, when the government set up the Preparatory Task Force on the Chinese Medicine Development Committee, Ko, the then Secretary for Food and Health, decided to promote the setting up of a Chinese medicine hospital at the government level. He proposed reserving the plot of land at Pak Shing Kok in Tseung Kwan O for a Chinese medicine hospital.

Ko also proposed the “Integrated Chinese-Western Medicine Pilot Programme” which was implemented in stages starting from 2014. The programme was to provide integrated Chinese-Western, illness-specific treatments. For instance, a cancer patient would receive radiotherapy of Western medicine and complementary treatment of Chinese medicine to relieve the discomfort chemotherapy may bring.

Another achievement during his tenure was pushing for the establishment of a Chinese medicines testing centre. “I noticed a strong interest in Chinese medicine globally. Many countries had already participated in the research and development of Chinese medicinal products and taken them to a more international level than Hong Kong or the Mainland had.” Ko took the matter to Leung Chun-ying, the then Chief Executive of HKSAR. It was decided that the government would take the lead in setting up the Government Chinese Medicines Testing Institute.



A Heart toward Chinese Medicine An Eye toward the Global Stage

Twenty years have passed since the breakthrough Ko strove for Chinese medicine in Hong Kong during the SARS outbreak. The local Chinese medicine sector has become more prosperous, gained a good number of talents trained locally and made considerable achievements in clinical research since then. Ko sees the next step as advancing to the global stage. The many proposals he has made in recent years include promoting the applications of clinical research results in the market and striving for global market recognition for local Chinese medicinal products by riding on the founding of centres for evidence-based Chinese medicine in China. Whatever phase or position he is in, Dr. Ko never forgets his promise to the Chinese medicine sector: “I’ll continue to strive for the development of local Chinese medicine regardless of whether I’m in the government.”

A Tireless Trailblazer: Building Up the Scientific Basis of Chinese Medicine

—— Professor Vivian Taam Wong, Honorary Professor, School of Chinese Medicine, The University of Hong Kong; Honorary President, Hong Kong Association for Integration of Chinese-Western Medicine



After 2003

With professional qualifications in gynaecology, internal medicine and public health, as well as extensive experience in clinical administration and teaching, Professor Vivian Taam Wong has been a pioneer in promoting the integration of Chinese and Western medicine in Hong Kong. Early in her career, she conducted the world's first randomised controlled study on the use of acupuncture to induce labour at Tsan Yuk Hospital, which showed that either acupuncture or oxytocin had the same effect. This not only confirmed Vivian's faith in the efficacy of Chinese medicine, but also became the driving force behind her efforts to promote collaboration between Chinese and Western medicine in Hong Kong.

Despite the fact that Hong Kong's public healthcare system is dominated by Western medicine, Vivian took every opportunity to promote exchange and collaboration between Chinese and Western medicine. When she was a senior executive in the Hospital Authority, she and Dr. Ko Wing-man arranged for Chinese medicine experts from Guangdong Province to come to Hong Kong for consultations during the SARS epidemic. Later, Tripartite Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres were established in all the 18 districts in Hong Kong to promote the development of Chinese medicine through a three-pronged



approach of clinical practice, education and research. She also led the establishment of pilot clinical service centres to treat specific diseases such as stroke and pain syndrome using integrative medicine.

Sowing Seeds of Faith in Chinese Medicine in the Soil of Integrative Medicine

Vivian's mother was a nurse trained in Western medicine. As a child, however, Vivian had ample exposure to Chinese medicine. Her belief in the efficacy of Chinese medicine stems from a childhood visit to a bonesetter with her father. She witnessed how the bonesetter was able to set her father's broken bones with a splint, and then advised him to do exercise by swinging the affected limb with a bucket of water. She was puzzled at the time, but only after taking a course in Western medicine did she realise that the technique was a traction one and did not require a cast to hold the injury in place or a steel nail to join the bone. "If a cast is used, the patient will not be able to use the muscle and will have to see a physiotherapist once the bone has healed." She is truly convinced that Chinese medicine, which is based on the body's physiological rhythms, has its own advantages.

Western Medicine Supporters of the Integration of Chinese and Western Medicine

"There are diseases that Chinese medicine is more effective in treating, such as pain syndromes, skin diseases, the three highs (high blood pressure, high cholesterol and high blood sugar), cranial nerve diseases, or depression and anxiety." Vivian shares that over the years, many have been persistent in promoting the integration of Chinese and Western medicine and are committed to modernising Chinese medicine. For example, Professor Cheng Yung-chi of Yale University discovered that a concoction of huang qin (baikal skullcap) can enhance the effectiveness of chemotherapy for terminal cancer while reducing the side effects. Professor John Leong Chi-yan, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and Professor Shi Qi, former president of the Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, together established an animal model for cervical spondylosis caused by wind-damp painful obstruction syndrome (bi syndrome) for experimental research into anti-inflammatory treatment of intervertebral disc degeneration. Their research was published in the international medical journal *Spine* in 2006 and has helped to promote the theory of Chinese medicine.

As Western medicine is based on clinical research and evidence-based treatment, Vivian also advocates the development of evidence-based Chinese medicine research and the establishment of standardised clinical practice guidelines for Chinese medicine based on scientific evidence. "If there are no guidelines, doctors will choose treatment options based on their own judgment. But if you want others to listen to you, to have confidence in your treatment plan, you need evidence to back it up." She then set up a group to study the issue and took it to an international medical conference. Although more resources and manpower are needed before the guidelines become widely available, she has taken the first step.

Vivian has also led a number of medical research projects that have gained international recognition. Her discovery of the mother-to-child transmission of Hepatitis B over 50 years ago has made her one of the world's leading medical experts, and her 1978 study on acupuncture having the same effects as oxytocin in inducing labour is one of the earliest innovations in Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. This study proves that the use of acupuncture to stimulate acupuncture points during labour can help contract the uterus and dilate the cervix, providing an alternative means of pain relief for women in normal labour. "I often tell my younger peers: 'There are three requirements for choosing a research topic: the burden of major diseases, the advantages of Chinese medicine and the shortcomings of Western

medicine.' Wait for the right time, look for opportunities, try to be innovative and put in the effort - be precise, accurate and rapid."

A Multi-disciplinary, Multi-channel, Multi-institutional Approach to Bringing Chinese medicine to the International Stage

Vivian says that when it comes to bringing international attention to Chinese medicine, having a background in Western medicine and a history of successful research is a great help. "The biggest reason why I can promote the integration of Chinese and Western medicine is that I am a Western medical practitioner with research achievements. I have also studied Chinese medicine, so I can easily gain the trust of Western medical practitioners." Vivian firmly believes that collaboration between Chinese and Western medical practitioners can produce "precise, accurate and rapid" results, but only if there is mutual understanding. Over the years, she has used her network to invite Western doctors to teach their specialities to Chinese medicine practitioners. She has also encouraged them to learn the concepts of Chinese medicine in order to strengthen the basis for cooperation.

Vivian has used her influence to drive health reform in a number of areas, most notably the use of Chinese medicine to provide timely help during the epidemic. Her team at the University of Hong Kong analysed the use of Chinese medicine in the treatment of viral infections and published "COVID-19: An Update on the Epidemiological, Clinical, Preventive and Therapeutic Evidence and Guidelines of Integrative Chinese-Western Medicine for the Management of 2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease" in the *American Journal of Chinese Medicine* in March 2020. The article was cited more than 350 times and ranked as the top article in the world in the field of Integrative Chinese and Western Medicine. The article was again ranked top in July along with "Potential Targets for Treatment of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): A Review of Qing-Fei-Pai-Du-Tang and Its Major Herbs".

Turning a Crisis into an Opportunity to Democratise Science

Vivian believes that this change has many benefits. "The modernisation of medical services is a irresistible big trend. Inspection and inquiring can be done through



online consultations, and we can also ask patients to take pictures of their tongues for evaluation. The images can be stored in a database and analysed using AI and big data tools. This will facilitate the collection of medical data, offer convenience to patients and greatly improve treatment efficiency." With the recent launch of ChatGPT, there is even a more powerful tool that can be used in clinical treatment and research.

Vivian believes that public education is essential, as it is only through the dissemination of correct medical knowledge that Chinese medicine can be popularised. She therefore actively participates in television and radio programmes and writes columns to educate the public about Chinese medicine and the integration of Chinese and Western medicine.

"Not only we, but also scientists and even online KOLs (key opinion leaders) can help promote the democratisation of science through various channels. Heritage and innovation are equally important for Chinese medicine. We need to modernise and internationalise Chinese medicine to educate the public about the benefits of Chinese medicine treatments. At the primary healthcare level, Chinese medicine can even reduce hospitalisation and medical costs through constitution-based 'preventive treatment' and food therapy."

Integrated Chinese-Western Medicine: Complementary Treatments Turn a New Page

—— Dr. So Tsz-him, registered Chinese medicine practitioner and Specialist in Clinical Oncology



Practising in both Chinese and Western medicine, Dr. So Tsz-him believes integrated Chinese-western medicine is the big trend in medicine. He walks the walk quietly, striving to find the key to the doors of the two worlds.

Chinese and Western Medicine to Work in Tandem for Complementary Effects

Of all academic disciplines, medicine takes the longest time to complete: a bachelor's degree in Chinese medicine takes five years, while Western medicine, medicine and surgery included, takes five; besides, there are intensive examinations and internships all the while. It truly requires extraordinary stamina, dedication and resolution to devote oneself to the medical profession. With a bachelor's degree in Chinese medicine with outstanding performance from the University of Hong Kong and encouragement from his professors, So decided to pursue Western medicine as well and also graduated with stellar results. The double amount of time and efforts he invested made him one of the few medical professionals in Hong Kong to hold academic qualifications in both streams. Later, he fought relentlessly to



earn his title as a specialist in oncology and has continued to work in both clinical and teaching settings.

So points out that both Chinese and Western medicine have their own merits and can work complementarily. Sadly, Hong Kong has long been dominated by Western medicine and has a poor understanding of Chinese medicine. The two streams are even antagonistic towards each other. So agrees that the two streams hold different medical principles. Western medicine focuses on data, research, alleviating illnesses and tackling the cause of a disease. For instance, Western medicine doctors would use specific medicines, such as antibiotics, to kill bacteria in a human body to treat an infection. Meanwhile, Chinese medicine practitioners centre on balancing yin and yang, take a holistic perspective when analysing a patient's constitution, base their clinical treatment determination on disease identification, and use medicines to treat both the root and the branch. It aims at achieving disease resistance by restoring the balance and boosting immunity in the patient. Even though the two streams hold different medical principles, it is still possible for them to collaborate, So opines.

Many clinical cases are worried about the compatibility between Chinese and Western medicine and hazardous side effects of combining the two; some surmise that Chinese medicines are toxic and would damage the liver and kidney. So explains that there is currently no research to support such speculations; furthermore, as doctors will exercise professional judgement in issuing a prescription according to the types of medicines, dosages and time of use, patients need not to worry as



long as they follow their doctors' instructions. In addition, legal regulations on Chinese medicines in Hong Kong have improved gradually to promote its safety. So explains, "Registered Chinese medicine practitioners possess a certain degree of knowledge about the standard dosage of a type of medicine and whether it is suitable for long-term use. The Department of Health also collects samples of Chinese medicinal materials and powders for testing to ensure they comply with the limits of heavy metals and microbes in order to be sold in Hong Kong."

So conducted a study at Queen Mary Hospital to track and compare more than 180 patients; some of these patients took both Western anticancer medicines and Chinese medicines, while others took only Western medicines. He observed the liver toxcity levels between the two groups to find no difference at all. He subsequently published the research results at the European Society for Medical Oncology Asia Congress.

Putting Patients First and Selecting the Most Suitable Treatment Plan

So considers integrated Chinese-western medicine a big trend in future. Chinese medicine practitioners have already begun to incorporate modern technologies into their diagnosis while some Western medicine doctors also refer to principles in Chinese medicine; for instance, while Chinese medicine practitioners have always emphasised how the spleen and stomach are strongly connected to body functions

and emotions, in recent years, Western medicine doctors have also started regulating intestinal probiotics which will benefit the overall immunity, gastro-intestinal functions and emotions of a person. Therefore, combining the merits of both streams will unquestionably bring complementary and larger effects.



"Chemotherapy led to severe vomiting and thus difficult ingestion in some young patients, which no antiemetics could help. Chinese medicine practitioners believed it was caused by the upward counterflow of liver qi and stomach qi; as such, they solved the problem by using medicines to relieve qi stagnancy in the liver, directing the qi downward and harmonising the stomach." So adds that, even though Chinese and Western medicine can complement each other, patients are advised to stop consuming Chinese medicines one to two days before and after receiving chemo injections. Besides, Chinese and Western medicine should be taken two to four hours apart to reduce drug interactions and secure drug efficacy.

As a Chinese medicine practitioner and a Western medicine doctor in one, So would make the most suitable treatment plan according to a patient's type of illness, state and needs. If radiotherapy produces the best effect on prostate cancer, then he would opt for Western medicine treatment; for eczema, he would use Chinese medicines predominantly while dispensing a small amount of steroid cream for use when needed. So points out that as the amount of time for each medicine, whether it be Chinese and Western, to take effect varies, it is hard to make direct comparison; it is best for a doctor to select a treatment plan most suited and effective for a particular patient.

A Platform for Chinese-western Medicine Collaboration: An Epoch-making Mission

The new Chinese Medicine Hospital soon to be completed will be used as a base for clinical trials, which will require the participation of medical professionals who are interested in combined Chinese-western medicine treatments and research. So envisions the new Chinese Medicine Hospital linking up all the private Chinese medicine clinics spread out in the 18 districts of Hong Kong and acting as a point of referral where patients can be referred to either one of the two streams or to different departments. "In the past, Western medicine doctors found it difficult to refer a patient to a Chinese medicine practitioner because they couldn't decide who's reliable and safe, so they would just give up. With a public Chinese Medicine Hospital, doctors will be able to give advice or make referrals according to a patient's needs."

Currently, a number of medical organisations have already been practising joint consultation, such as the Tumor Boards. Doctors from the two streams collaborate and conduct discussions to tackle complicated cases.

Aware of the significance of popular science, So is proactive about writing articles about principles in both Chinese and Western medicine regularly on his personal website to educate the public about healthcare. "I hope the public will start to see Chinese medicine beyond the soups and acupressure. People thought Chinese medicine lacked theoretical basis, based its treatment on experience or was all about herbs. In fact, it's strongly rooted in professional medical theories. There have been cases in which patients with hyperthyroidism responded to neither Western medicines nor radioactive iodine and were advised to undergo thyroidectomy. They were then referred to Chinese medicine by endocrinologists of Western medicine and were cured after taking Chinese medicines for two to three months."

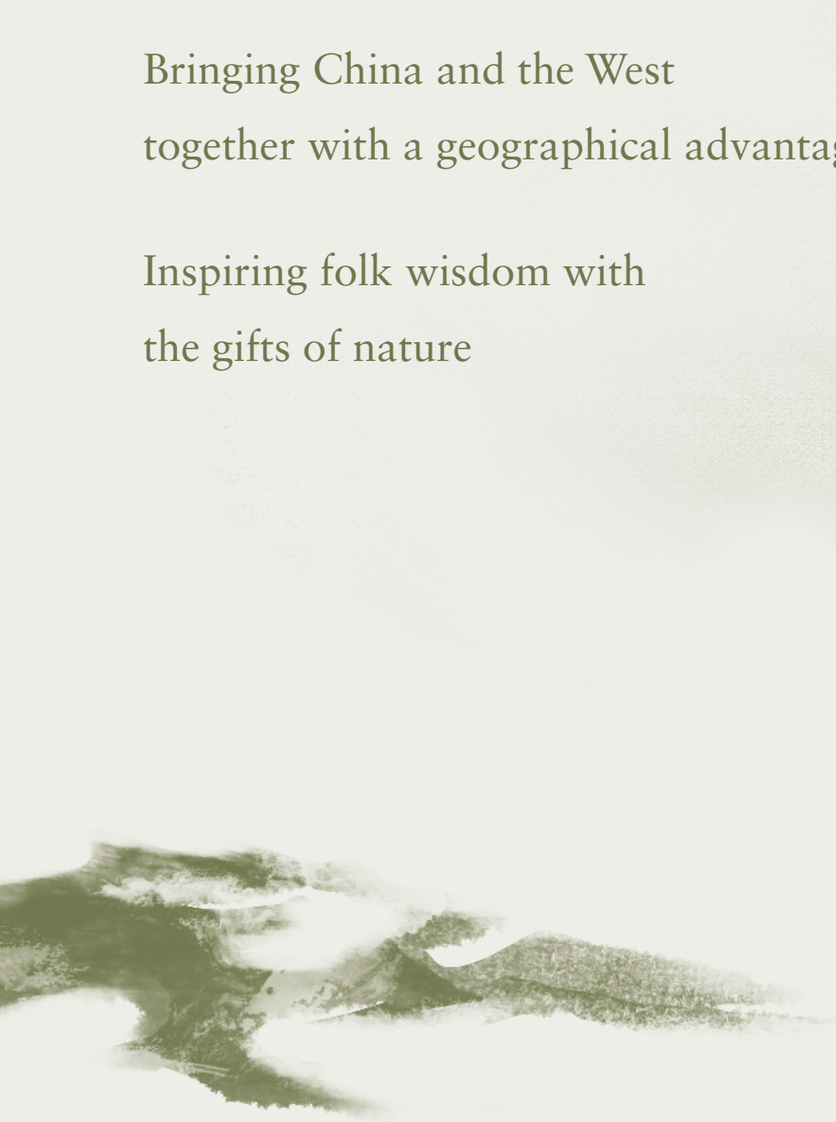
So co-wrote the book *Zhongxiyi Hezou (Integrated Chinese-Western Medicine: A Duet)* with Dr. Yu Chau-leung Edwin, apart from authoring *Zhongxiyi Zhiaishouji (Notes on Chinese-Western Integrated Oncology)* by himself. Both publications discuss practical cases and health issues and explain complicated medical ideas in a friendly and straightforward style. So walks the walks to promote the integration of Chinese and Western medicine. He admits that the effort of one person is scant, so he hopes the authority would allocate more resources to integrated Chinese-western medicine education so that both the medical profession and the public can learn more while patients will be encouraged to try the integrated approach. He also hopes that the approach will be included in the treatment protocol and gradually become a popular treatment solution.



GEOGRAPHICAL ADVANTAGE

Bringing China and the West
together with a geographical advantage

Inspiring folk wisdom with
the gifts of nature



GEOGRAPHICAL ADVANTAGE

This section focuses on Hong Kong's regional culture and describes the distinctive cultural phenomena related to health care and their historical development. The story begins with the fire dragon dance, a tradition that has been rooted in Hong Kong for 140 years. Cheung Kwok-ho, Commander of the Fire Dragon Dance, and Lo Wing-sze, Executive Vice-President of the Tai Hang Fire Dragon Heritage Centre, share their experiences in preserving and passing on this cultural heritage. Aaron Tang, an incense artist, delves into the role of agarwood in the development of incense art in the local community and the history of "incense as medicine", while hoping for a revival of traditional incense culture.

An integral and distinctive element of health care in Hong Kong is the tradition of medicinal cuisine, which is rooted in the local culture of living off the mountain and the sea. Dr. Szeto Wing-fu Ricky, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of the modern herbal tea shop chain Hung Fook Tong, describes herbal tea as "imbued with health wisdom, humanistic care and the bounty of nature". Dr. Tung Shong, Deputy Head of the College of Life Sciences and Technology, HKU SPACE, and students from the Chinese Medicine Nutrition Studies Programme share the philosophy and methodology of Cantonese double-boiled soups and various types of food therapy, and emphasise their healing effects on body and mind that they have personally experienced. Many of Hong Kong's oldest shops are associated with Guangdong and Hong Kong health care traditions, and among them is the family snake stew restaurant run by "Snake Queen" Chau Ka-ling, who shares how she, through a process from selecting ingredients to cooking the soup, has kept this culinary heritage alive. Yeung Siu-wah, founder, and Yeung Yan-chung, Jess, General Manager of Tai Lai Ginseng Hong Limited, describe how American ginseng – a "hybrid" Chinese medicine – took root in Hong Kong and became a staple in every household.

Hong Kong's unique geographical location has made it home to many century-old Chinese medicine shops, including Chan Fun Kee. Chan Ping-him, the fifth-generation successor to the shop, tells how his family's small business persevered through the challenges of business while maintaining its ancestral traditions of selling only the highest quality herbs. Wong Kong-hui Kenlay, Managing Director of Chuan Chiong Company Limited, recounts the rise and fall of the Nam Pak Hong industry, the importation of proprietary Chinese medicines into Hong Kong, and the mainland's support for the city's efforts to combat COVID-19. Tang Wai-man Vivian, the new generation head of Wai Yuen Tong, is committed to exploring the youth market. Her enthusiasm and commitment to innovation give us hope for the boundless potential of proprietary Chinese medicines to advance with the times.

Tai Hang Fire Dragon Cultural Centre

Snake Stew Restaurant

Herb Tea Shop

Nam Pak Hong

Sheung Wan Ginseng and Seafood Street

Long-standing Chinese Medicine Shop

Deeply Rooted Tradition in Hong Kong for 140 Years: The Heritage of Fire Dragon that Blesses People's Safety

——— Cheung Kwok-ho, Commander of the Fire Dragon Dance and Lo Wing-sze, the Executive Vice-President of the Tai Hang Fire Dragon Heritage Centre



Performing the fire dragon dance is nothing easy. Many young people just showed up for a day or two for a taste of the event, or simply came for a check-in on their social media.



Chinese medicine practitioners believe that aromas constitute a natural gift with therapeutical effects, as they can remove odours and calm the mind and spirit. For example, the Tai Hang fire dragon dance, which originated from the legend of wiping out the plague, has been deeply rooted in Hong Kong for 140 years. It not only protects the health of residents in the community, but also serves as an important connection in the local neighbourhood. With the successful launch of the "Tai Hang Fire Dragon Heritage Centre", the fire dragon dance, a representative cultural heritage of Hong Kong, will be carried on with the efforts of the community.

Every Mid-Autumn Festival, a pyrotechnic fire dragon will appear in the streets of Tai Hang village, Causeway Bay, bringing blessings via incense. The late traditional bearer and commander-in-chief of the fire dragon dance, Chan Tak-fai once said, "It is an honour to participate in performing the fire dragon dance".

The Appearance of Fire Dragon in Tai Hang Village: Dispelling Plague and Ensuring Safety

According to oral history, a python appeared in the Hakka village of Tai Hang in 1880. The villagers killed the python and placed its body at the Causeway Bay Police Station. The next day, the dead body disappeared and a plague broke out in the village. The villagers followed what the Bodhisattva told them in a dream – they crafted a straw dragon with longevity incense inserted all over its body and danced with it around the village to dispel the disaster. Finally, the plague was successfully eradicated and the fire dragon dance has become a traditional custom in Tai Hang since then. The fire dragon dance demonstrates not only the power of spirituality but also the medical principle of warding off the plague, removing odours, and purifying the environment with aromatic herbs.

The fire dragon dance lasts for three days, on the 14th, 15th and 16th of the eighth lunar month. During the first two days of the event, the fire dragon parades through the streets and alleys in Tai Hang in a clockwise direction. When the parade ends at Wun Sha Street, the team will deliver a performance. On the last day, the team parades in an anti-clockwise direction around the village and finally throws the fire dragon into the sea at the typhoon shelter, completing the ritual of "dragon returning to Heaven".



Cheung Kwok-ho, born and raised in Tai Hang, grew up under the protection of the fire dragon. “In the past, everyone living in Tai Hang knew how to perform the fire dragon dance.” Cheung and Chan have a close relationship. Chan is a family friend of Cheung’s father, and has known Cheung since he was a kid. At the age of 12, Cheung was able to learn the skill of the fire dragon dance under the guidance of Chan.

The Grand Mid-Autumn Festival: Performing Fire Dragon Dance Together

The fire dragon dance is a grand event in Tai Hang every Mid-Autumn Festival, and it takes more than a month to build up the dragon. The fire dragon is altogether about 220 feet long, divided into 31 sections, with 22,000 longevity incense sticks inserted. Cheung shares that it takes about three weeks to construct the head bracket of the dragon, and incense sticks are used to shape the dragon’s head. As the process is highly skilled, it is usually done by senior masters. The process of “stuffing the dragon body with straw” requires certain physical strength. The longevity incense, which is used to construct the fire dragon, has to be selected carefully, with a length of 12 to 13 inches, to meet the required performance duration of 45 minutes.

To allow the fire dragon soar into the air vividly, the performing team needs to master the skills. Cheung admits that body build and physical strength are the main considerations when selecting members of the team. The dragon head weighs about 120 pounds after being stuck with incense sticks. To keep the head lively, only one person can wave it at a time. “We have to brandish the dragon head in a relay, and usually we have to switch after every six to nine steps.” 20 to 30 people are arranged to take turns for the dragon head and tail respectively, and an average of four relays are needed to take care of each of the 31 sections of the dragon body. The spectacular scene of the fire dragon dance is created by the combined effort of more than 300 people.

Cheung shares, “When I was a kid, I was most afraid of performing the dragon dance. When performing the stunts, especially “dragon-twining makes pyramids”, I would get incense ashes all over my body and often got hurt.”

Even an experienced member like Cheung could hardly avoid having the head and both arms scalded with ashes. Nevertheless, even though the incense sticks fall on the body during the performance, team members will grit their teeth and keep going on to never let the fire dragon fall to the ground.



Historical Changes of Tai Hang: Strengthening Community Bonding with Fire Dragon

In the past, anyone who was a resident of Tai Hang could perform the fire dragon dance at any time. “Even residents who wore sandals after work could join the team.” However, with the successful declaration of the Tai Hang fire dragon dance as National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2011, now there are more regulations on its preparation and implementation. The team members are no longer limited to the residents of Tai Hang and the organiser needs to provide uniforms for team members to make their appearance more eye-catching and consistent.

Cheung laments that lots of team members who joined in recent years neither took the dance seriously nor were physically capable of completing the three-day performance. Some only attended the first day and gave up halfway. “Performing the fire dragon dance is nothing easy. Many young people just showed up for a day or two for a taste of the event, or simply came for a check-in on their social media.”

Cheung has gathered a group of young enthusiasts through cooperation with schools, hoping to develop their endurance and perseverance through practising the fire dragon dance. "It's fortunate that the team's been collaborating with schools during the last 10 years, thus bringing in new blood for the fire dragon dance. Our priority is to engage the younger generation in the dance and we hope they'll have their heart set on doing a good job."

Although Cheung has moved away from Tai Hang for many years, he still comes back every year. Since lifting his first fire dragon at the age of 12, the fire dragon dance has become the centrepiece of Cheung's Mid-Autumn Festival every year. "Over the past 20 years, all of my annual leaves have been dedicated to the fire dragon dance."



The Establishment of Tai Hang Fire Dragon Heritage Centre: Seeking a Breakthrough in Tradition

In 2013, the government launched the "Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme". Tai Hang Residents' Welfare Association seized this opportunity, submitting the tender to apply to convert No.12 School Street into the "Tai Hang Fire Dragon Heritage Centre ("the Heritage Centre")."

Lo Wing-sze, the Executive Vice-president of the Heritage Centre, states that this revitalisation project aims to promote the culture of the Tai Hang fire dragon dance so that the general public can learn about the history and paper crafting techniques. Tai Hang used to be a Hakka village. When planning for the Heritage Centre, the team deliberately made the first floor a Hakka restaurant in the hope visitors will deepen their understanding of the Hakka food culture when they come to relax and enjoy.

According to Lo, the three-storey building used to serve as "Hung Shing Yi Hok" (Confucius free school for the poor) in 1909, but was destroyed during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. It was not until 1949 that Mr Li Wai-tong, the head of Tai Hang Residents' Welfare Association at the time, and the neighbours raised funds for reconstructing the building. After revitalisation, some structures of historic value, including the wooden floors, iron window grilles, balustrades, stone tablets, and staircases of the tenement building, have been preserved.

Lo hopes to keep the spirit of the fire dragon which connects the Tai Hang community alive. "Hong Kong is an international metropolis that advances with the times. However, neighbourhood bonds are rather weak. The dragon dance has been rooted in Tai Hang for years and become a spiritual force that connects the community." She hopes to promote the culture of the fire dragon dance to the outside world to show the different sides of Tai Hang.

Lo adds that, starting some years ago, children of ages six through twelve were allowed to participate in the "Little Fire Dragon" project. This project breaks the tradition that only males can perform the fire dragon dance and invites both boys and girls to enjoy the fun. "There was once the big and little fire dragons performed together at Tai Kwun in Central, and the scene was spectacular." Both Lo and Cheung look forward to seeing young and energetic faces being involved in traditional culture and arts in the future, allowing the flames of the fire dragon to continue to glint in the streets and alleys in Hong Kong.

Incense and Medicine are One and the Same: The Revival of Traditional Incense Culture

—— Aaron Tang, Incense Artist



Apart from being used in medicine and creating perfumes, incense also constitutes a form of etiquette. Both the fragrance released by incense and etiquette symbolise respect.





Incense culture is of long history. In the past, incense was used for worshipping the deities and purifying the air. Later in the Tang Dynasty, trade with foreign countries brought more exotic incenses to China. Incense culture plays a significant role in traditional Chinese medicine. Incense has been used in aromatherapy for external treatment, in which most of the incenses are made of aromatic herbs, such as agarwood and sandalwood. Therefore, burning incense itself becomes "herbal medicine".

Just as many traditional cultures, incense culture has become less known in this technology advanced modern society. However, Aaron Tang, the founder of Hong Kong Incense Company, has an affection for incense since his childhood. He has been promoting traditional incense culture with great enthusiasm. By producing incense, he promotes a Chinese medicine concept – "incense and medicine are one and the same" – adapting its use to the fast-paced life of modern society. "In recent years, I have had many students, who are Chinese medicine practitioners themselves, learning the traditional tao of incense. They have been routinely using the same medicinal herbs such as patchouli, calamus, sand ginger, and costuswood for prescriptions. What about using these herbs for incense?" Along with the prevalence of naturopathy, incense culture starts to revive in Hong Kong.

The History of Agarwood in Hong Kong: The Journey to Find Incense as an Incense Artist

"Back in the Song Dynasty, Hong Kong was a port for selling agarwood. Incense trees, where agarwood comes from, were planted in Hong Kong in places like Lek

Yuen (Sha Tin) and Sha Lo Wan. After collection, agarwood was transported to Tsim Sha Tsui and eventually to Aberdeen. Aberdeen at that time was actually referred to as 'Hong Kong'." Incense has accompanied Aaron as he moved through different life stages and brought many benefits to his body and mental health. By producing and teaching about incense, Aaron hopes that the local people can know more about Hong Kong and incense.

Aaron once visited Chi Lin Nunnery when he was a child. He smelled an unfamiliar scent, and had been searching for its source everywhere. He then tried different incenses from markets and incense shops, and finally discovered that the aroma came from agarwood.

"At first I had no idea about incense. I found the scent too strong and even felt dizzy after smelling it for some time. I therefore bought better quality incenses – which cost more – and I found them fresh, delicate and elegant. After I entered university, I taught myself how to make incenses."

It is not easy for a consumer to turn into an incense artist, as the market is flooded with cheap incense made with chemical additives and incense shops do not offer classes in incense making. The only way is to learn by studying documentaries and ancient books, and by trial and error.

"Human bodies are actually very sensitive, and synthetic fragrances can be very strong and pungent sometimes. Prolong inhalation of the smoke released from incenses made with chemical additives can worsen our sense of smell. When people switch to natural incense, they may first feel that the scent is very faint, and then find its smell of medicinal herbs odorous. The quality of incense is very important, which will directly affect our body. Proper incense can have a positive impact on the body. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the properties and meridian tropism of traditional Chinese medicine and ingredients when making incense. In fact, incense making and traditional Chinese medicine are so closely related that they are inseparable."



Incense and Medicine are One and the Same: Emphasis on Properties and Meridian Tropism

There are many therapeutic methods in traditional Chinese medicine, including external treatment and internal treatment. Internal treatment is to concoct herbal medicines by decocting them which will be taken orally and absorbed through the intestines. Incense is inhaled through the nose, and hence belongs to external treatment. This approach is more effective than oral medication in terms of refreshing the mind.

"In ancient times, there were four most well-known incenses: agarwood, sandalwood, forest musk abelmosk and borneol. Borneol is very important and is added to almost every formula of traditional incense, such as *Chenshi Xiangpu (Material of Chinese Incense by Chen)* or *Xiang Cheng (History of Incense)*, given that most fragrances are acrid and warm, and burning them for a long time can cause dryness and heat. The cool and refreshing sensation of borneol, like mint, can arouse the spirit, open the orifices, and relieve nasal congestion. Moreover, its slightly cold nature can counterbalance the acrid and warm nature of other incenses."

Sandalwood and agarwood are the most popular and practical herbal medicines. "Sandalwood returns to the lung and stomach meridian, and heals stomach distension. Take my own experience as an example, if you feel very full after a meal, you can burn some sandalwood. After around 10 minutes or so your stomach will feel better."

Making incense requires a fundamental understanding of traditional Chinese medicine theory. One has to be familiar with the properties and meridian tropism of the ingredients so as to ensure that the incense mix will not be incompatible, cause body discomfort or even become toxic. Pregnant women are very sensitive to smells, especially the strong smell of basil and forest mush abelmosk. These herbs may cause miscarriage due to their effects on uterine contraction, so I advise pregnant customers not to use them."



Adapting Incense to Modern Life: Body, Mind, and Spirit

In recent years, along with the rise of the "New Age" culture and upsurge of caring for body, mind, and spirit, frankincense and myrrh have become more popular. Aaron says that if users abuse these herbal medicines without knowing their own physical condition, they can hurt their body.

"Frankincense and myrrh are good for strained muscles and bones because they activate qi, promote blood circulation and granulation, remove blood stasis, relieve pain, and reduce inflammation. They are often used in bone-setting medicinal herbs and potions but must be exercised with caution if one's stomach is weak, since they may aggravate the symptom."

Modern life is full of stress, and people increasingly suffer from mental stress and mood disorders. Certain types of fresh and delicate incense become particularly popular in this case. "In fact, spicy and warm incenses will make people feel happy; sandalwood and cypress can bring excitement; and benzoin can help relax the body, cure depression and anxiety, and ensures a good night's sleep."

The Increased Prevalence and Popularity of Herbal Medicines

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, herbal and fragrant sachets have gradually been receiving more attention in recent years. The fragrance of sachets helps purify the air, and therefore more Chinese medicine practitioners are making anti-epidemic Chinese herbal or anti-plague fragrant sachets. Aaron also makes herbal sachets that are suitable for modern daily use.

"Well-formulated herbal sachets can serve many purposes. They can defend against epidemic diseases, insects, and reduce virus infections, including flu. Many studies have found that various incenses, such as clove, have bactericidal properties."

Aaron says that, depending on the climate and national character, different places feature different herbal medicines that are compatible with the local customs. "Incenses are used for medical purposes in all local healthcare systems. In line with the concept of 'a hedge between keeps friendship green', traditional Chinese incense usually has a fresh and elegant scent which is not as strong as Indian or Tibetan incense. Strong fragrance is thought to disturb the mind."

The Advances of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Hong Kong and the Promotion of Incense Culture

The regulatory restrictions on traditional Chinese medicine should be considered when promoting incense culture in Hong Kong. "It's no picnic," Aaron admits. "Every traditional incense ingredient is a Chinese medicinal herb. So is an incense made from Chinese medicinal herbs be regarded as a proprietary Chinese medicine? The Department of Health once informed me that frankincense and myrrh should be taken off the shelves. After explaining that they were not for medical use and were often used by religious groups, the department finally confirmed by email that aromatherapy and religious uses of incense would not be regulated."

Therefore, to promote incense culture, Aaron suggests that local universities should strengthen research in this field. "Most reports and books on aromatherapy in Hong Kong draw on Western scientific research. In the healthcare system in Hong Kong, Chinese medicine is regulated under the system of Western medicine. Legislative requirements on Chinese medicine are also much more stringent. I hope that universities in Hong Kong can conduct more research on Chinese medicinal herbs in the future, and the reports on these research findings should be published in English so as to establish international connections. This is of vital importance to the promotion of Chinese medicine and traditional incense-making."



Herbal Tea, a New Household Item and a Gift from Nature to be Valued by All

—— Dr. Szeto Wing-fu Ricky, Chief Executive Officer cum Executive Director of Hung Fook Tong Group Holdings Limited





South China is marked by its hot and humid weather which can cause fatigue, heaviness and discomfort. To clear the dampness and heat and to generate body fluids to quench the thirst, herbal tea was invented. In 2006, it was listed in the first lot of national intangible cultural heritage. Herbal tea shops in a neighborhood would be the hubs for community socialisation. The prevalent herbal tea culture in the 1950s is arguably a collective memory of the time.

As the culture seemed to wane, a brand adopted modern concepts of marketing management to not only breathe new life into the traditional industry, but also promote the health-conscious food culture called “medicine and food are one and the same”. The brand is known as Hung Fook Tong. Dr. Szeto Wing-fu Ricky, who has a background in business and finance, partnered with Mr. and Mrs. Wong, who ran Hung Fook Tong Herbal Tea Shop in Kwai Chung. Together, they expanded the small community store into a listed company with over 100 branches in Hong Kong. “We want to make herbal tea a popular, common and everyday item, blending it into the people’s life while maintaining the expertise and quality involved,” says Ricky.

The First Sip of Herbal Tea
The Taste of Mom’s Cooking

Ricky is captivated by the wisdom in herbal tea. “The plant-based herbal tea is a gift from heaven that provides us with self-sufficiency.” Without any rare ingredients, the herbal tea costs less than 10 dollars, which is affordable for even the grassroots people.

“Though cheap, it has a profound wisdom of ‘disease prevention’. When I was suffering from Hepatitis A, I drank Canton love-pea vine tea made by my grandma daily. The numbers in the follow-up medical check took a dramatic plunge.” Encouraged by his own experience, Ricky felt an urgency to bring the tradition of herbal tea into the modern time.

Ricky’s first impression of the herbal tea was his mom’s homemade recipes of common selfheal fruit-spike tea and five-flower tea. As he went home less frequently for dinner as he grew up, he also got to drink his mom’s herbal tea less. “Although life is hectic and large family life is rare nowadays, the young people would remember vividly the herbal tea their moms made in their childhood. Hoping to sustain this sentiment, we came up with the catchphrase, ‘almost as good as what your mom made’ to promote our products as humble alternatives to our moms’ tea.”

Hung Fook Tong has continued to develop new products since the founding of “Herbal Tea & Soup Square”. “Nature is the greatest of all. Apart from leaves, other parts of a plant like roots, stems and fruits are all gifts from the earth, so besides traditional herbal tea, we can also make mandarin lemon drink, pear tea, a mix of them both, and apple and osmanthus drink, etc. All our products are inspired by nature and have their own bases and benefits.”





Herbal Tea in Bottles: A New Way of Therapy

Creativity opens up possibilities. Hung Fook Tong invites the people of Hong Kong to join the brand to make herbal tea more popular. "The key to making herbal tea an everyday and popular item is to make it a household item — preferably storable in the fridge." Learning from bottled beverages sold in supermarkets, Hung Fook Tong came up with the idea of putting herbal tea – which used to serve fresh in bowls – in bottles. The execution was, however, laborious. "Herbal tea is alkaline, but we insist on not using any additives. We refuse to use any chemicals in our bottled herbal tea." Ricky and his team then spent two years to find a way to put herbal tea in bottles. "The first design had very thick walls. We kept researching and experimenting to land the current version which has overcome the alkalinity issue of the herbal tea to meet the expiry date."

"All our formulas are monitored by Chinese medicine experts and nutritionists. We even own the honors of 'National Intangible Cultural Heritage' for eight formulas, including the Canton Love-pea Vine Tea and Common Selfheal Fruit-spike Tea." The excellent sales of these eight formulas prove that traditional herbal tea is exceptional at preventing diseases and able to contribute to the public health. Ricky recalls, "The people of Hong Kong were desperate to get indigowoad root (banlangen) during the outbreak of SARS in 2003, so we made the bold attempt to make bottled indigowoad root drink, which became a hit. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, we introduced two lung-cleansing formulas that were built on formulas issued and approved by the National Health Commission and further endorsed by Chinese medicine experts."

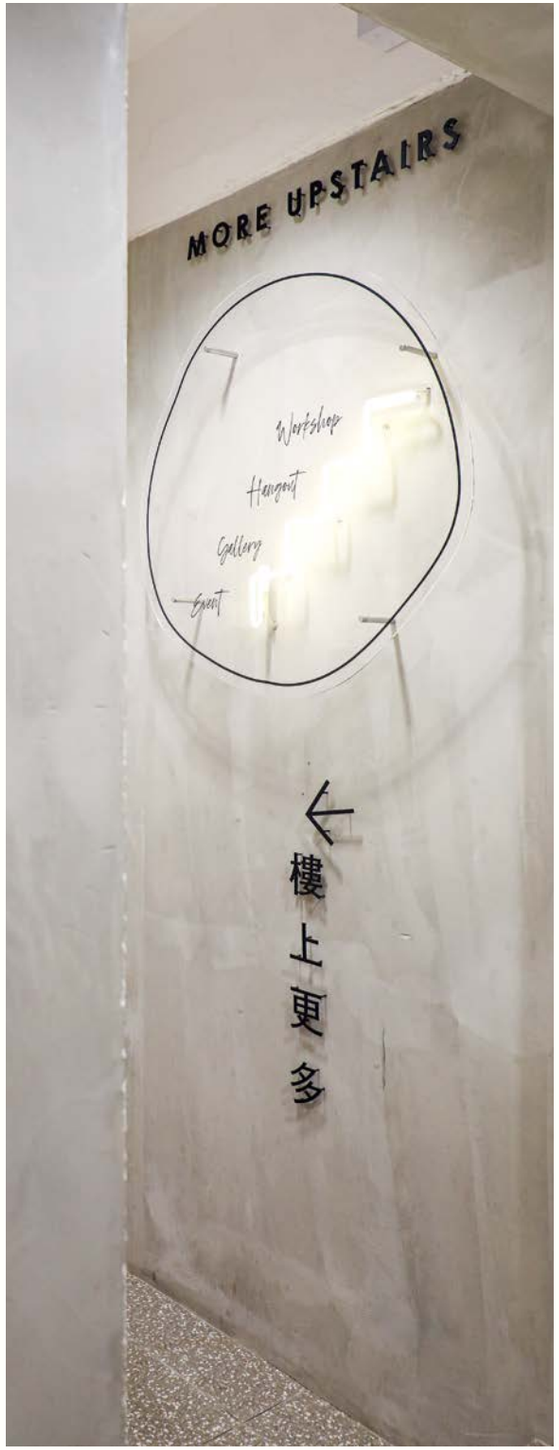
Preventive Treatment and Self-care

Herbal tea embodies the concept of "medicine and food are one and the same" in Chinese medicine. Hung Fook Tong therefore promotes self-care by incorporating the concept into other food options. "Whenever I got a sore throat when I was little, my grandma would make me eat congee with preserved egg and lean pork. And in fact, dried oyster can relieve internal fire. In the Chinese culture, food also serves therapeutic purposes, so being particular about food means respecting and caring for one's body."

Ricky explains that the "Homemade Series" combines food therapy with daily life by including nourishing soups, rice, noodles, congee and sweet soups that also use ingredients from nature without any additives.

Knowing well the difference between medicine and food therapy, Ricky and his team insist on defining their products as preventive measures and daily care. “Herbal tea, such as cold relieving tea, has therapeutic functions to a certain degree for sure, but one with obvious symptoms should consult a doctor. Since the enactment of the Chinese medicine Ordinance, we have to be cautious when making a function claim. It is conducive to maintaining public food safety.” The brand and the whole trade have been working hard to adapt to the change, which Ricky sees as an opportunity for the trade to raise the bar to better safeguard public wellbeing.





When Hemp Fruit Meets Coffee

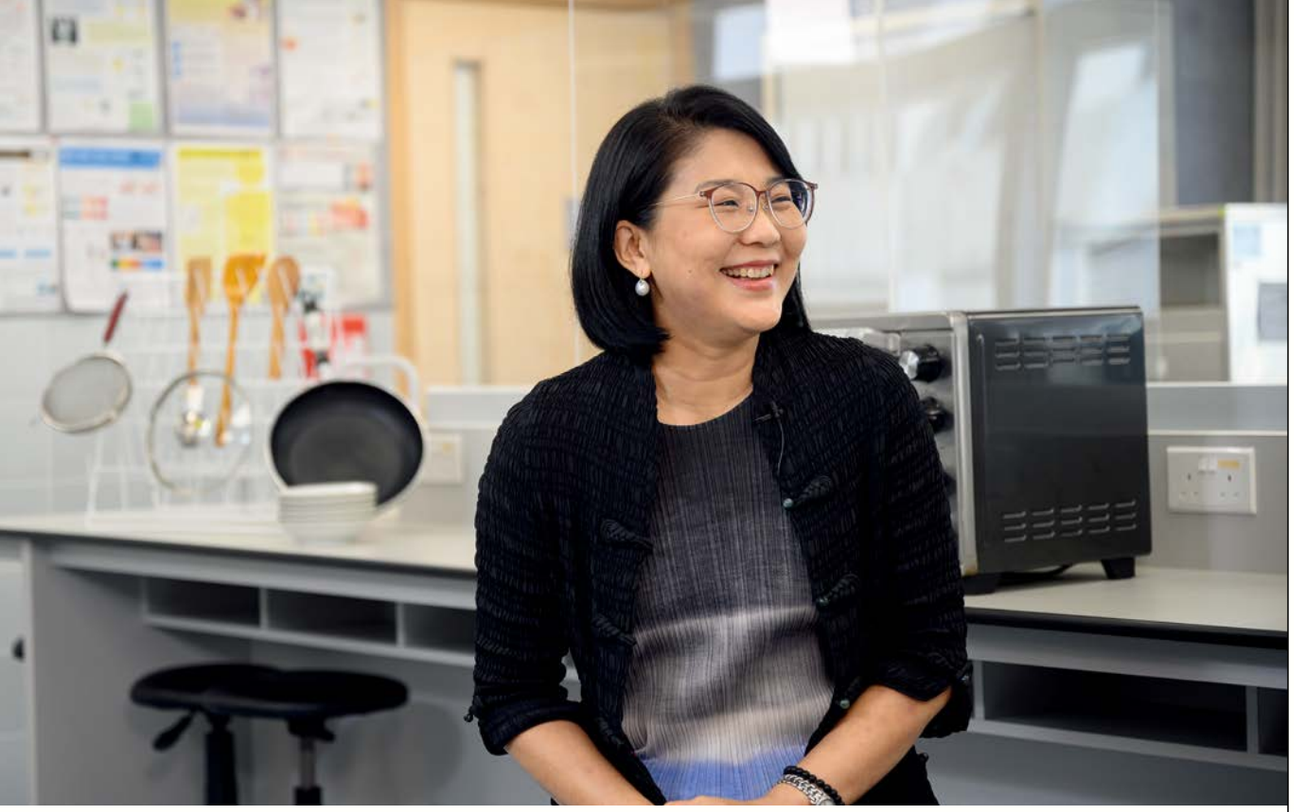
To cater for the taste of the modern people and to take the tradition further by modernizing it, Ricky and his team coupled herbal tea ingredients with coffee to make hemp fruit coffee, and transformed their herbal tea shops into HFT Life, which resembled coffee shops. “The society keeps changing. More people have become self-employed or started to work from home since the epidemics, so we set up HFT Life with more seats to meet the needs while advocating slow living and self-care.”

Ricky wishes to make herbal tea the young people’s choice, “Young people are more responsive to peer influence. If they see a bottle of herbal tea on their classmate’s desk, they will be interested in trying. We also support their activities often by sponsoring beverages on request.” Instead of the hard sell approach, Hung Fook Tong makes the effort to offer new healthy, delicious street food. “Many young people like our street food and sweet soups. Like a small stream, time runs long. Young people will gradually grow to like herbal tea or feel a need for it.”

Medicine and Food are One and the Same: Putting Food Therapy into Practice

—— Dr. Tung Shong, Associate Head of College of Life Sciences and Technology, HKU SPACE, and students of the Chinese Medicine Nutritional Studies Programme





Cantonese double-boiled soups embody the love and care that Lingnan people have for their families. In Chinese medicine, soup is one of the most palatable forms of medicinal preparation which puts the Chinese medical concept of "medicine and food are one and the same" into practice. By incorporating different seasonal ingredients, soups can also be imbued with different healing benefits, both spiritual and physiological.

"Ingredients in soups are often very similar to prescriptions of Chinese medicine," explains Dr. Tung Shong, a registered Chinese medicine practitioner and Associate Head of College of Life Sciences and Technology of HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE). She adds that because the concept of "medicine and food are one and the same" in Chinese medicine, both Chinese medicine and food are categorised according to "four qi and five tastes". The four qi are cold, hot, warm and cool, while the five tastes are pungent, bitter, sweet, sour and salty. According to Chinese medicine, the judicious selection and use of food ingredients can regulate the body's yin, yang, qi and blood.

According to Tung, Chinese medicine treats food ingredients differently from modern nutritional science. The latter focuses on analysing the composition of food while Chinese medicine focuses on the nature of the ingredients and applies them according to a person's body constitution. As Tung puts it: "Tonify for deficiency and purge for excess. Warm medicine suits people with cold body constitutions, as does food." She gives lamb, ginger and chilli as examples of warm ingredients that, when consumed by those with a dry heat body constitution, can cause excess heat, nosebleeds and constipation. "Food ingredients are also medicine in a way," says Tung. "Learning to analyse food using Chinese medicine concepts can definitely help prevent diseases, promote health and even treat diseases."

The Unity of Nature and the Human Body Helps Nourishing Body and Mind

Double-boiled soups are soups made by simmering ingredients in water for an hour or more. Tung says the "double-boil" cooking method is one way to extract the essence of ingredients. The underlying principles and logics are similar to that of decocting herbal Chinese medicine. According to Tung, double-boiled soups are a crystallisation of the vast experience and wisdom of the Cantonese people. "The cooking time for soup varies. By boiling the ingredients for a long time, water-soluble components and nutrients such as proteins, vitamins and amino acids can be completely dissolved. Those who drink the soup can clearly feel the effects, such as feeling warm and rejuvenated. Experience tells us that double-boiled soups are the way to go."

Chinese medicine believes in the "unity of nature and the human body". This means that the physiology of the body changes with natural cycles, and the ingredients and cooking time for soup will vary accordingly. Tung explains that in the spring, there is "spring qi" rising, and if there is insufficient nourishment of yin during autumn and winter, sudden and excessive tonification in spring can easily cause high blood pressure, restlessness and sleep disturbances. Therefore, "moderate tonification" is



suitable for spring. According to Tung, double-boiled soups have a tonifying effect and they are most effective when consumed in winter.

To increase the therapeutic effect of the soup, many would add herbal medicines during cooking. The selection of these medicines must be based on their “toxicity”. There are three classes of Chinese medicinal materials: upper, middle, and lower. Lower class herbs are the most toxic, the middle class less so, and the upper class is mild and can be used for health promotion and soup making purposes.



A Soup Culture that Connects All Households

“Double-boiled soup occupies a unique place in Hong Kong’s domestic culinary culture,” explains Tung, adding that while the Cantonese lifestyle is modest, “they are extremely demanding when it comes to food. They're willing to spend money on ‘yum cha’ every day and insist on fresh food for every meal. And soups are indispensable.” The popularity of soup in Hong Kong is linked to the city’s economy, as “soups require fresh ingredients. Ordinary stews and stir-fries are less demanding in terms of freshness, as you can take care of that with seasoning. But with soups, if the ingredients aren’t fresh, they will affect the overall taste.”

The climate in Guangdong region is also hot and humid. Chinese medicine believes that dampness can damage the digestive system especially spleen and stomach, slowing down the digestion. By concentrating nutrients in a soluble form and making the ingredients soft and easily absorbable, soups are well suited to the needs of people living in southern China.

Tung says that long-boiled soup can be found all over the world. In Western cuisine, we have boiled stock, and in northern China we have chicken soup, which is mainly used to nourish the sick and weak. “Only in Cantonese families, the young and old get used to drinking soup regularly.” The homemade soup, which mothers spend hours making, is a symbol of family love.

Bringing Food Therapy to Campus: An Academic Approach to Soups

Tung has brought Chinese medicine food therapy to the campus by explaining soup to the public in an academic setting. She has been coordinating and teaching the Advanced Diploma in Practical Chinese Medicine (Chinese Medicine Nutritional Studies) at HKU SPACE for over a decade. She hopes that by the end of the course, students will be able to analyse body constitution and ingredients, and improve their health knowledge and awareness. “I hope they will be able to identify and use food therapy to treat patients and help them recover."

A Willingness to Change Adds New Colour to Life

Former Miss Hong Kong Charlene Tse and her husband Wong Tak-wai are both graduates of the course. Charlene, who now owns a cookie store, shared how she has been able to incorporate Chinese medicine concepts into her recipes, including red date cookies and tangerine peel cookies. She also shared her medicinal food recipes on television shows and in magazines. “For example, for steamed eggs, people usually mix water or chicken broth with the egg mixture, but I use a medicinal soup base. I want to spread the message that medicinal dishes aren't difficult to prepare and help promoting medicinal food culture.”



Fellow alumnus Wong Tak-wai has also made a gradual change in his life as his understanding of Chinese medicine has grown. “For example, he brings a bottle of ginseng honey when he plays football, and he knows the benefits of the dishes when he eats,” said Charlene. She adds that the course also made her

husband aware of the problems with his diet and lifestyle and encouraged him to make changes. “These changes were made voluntarily, not forced by someone else, like me – his wife.”

It was Like Having a Chinese Medicine Practitioner in the Family

Connie Leung and her daughter Nora are among those whose lives have been changed by the course. Connie, who has been a culinary instructor for 10 years, was curious about the properties of different food ingredients. “There are lots of ingredients to choose from at the wet market, but I didn't know what their benefits were.” Not wanting to simply parrot what others said, Connie became a student again to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of food ingredients. “I had doubts about things people said, like why we have to cook kudzu for three hours. Now I have a solid explanation for these things and I can share the knowledge with my students and enrich my teaching.”

Although Nora did not take the course, she learned a lot about Chinese medicine by being Connie's teaching assistant and listening to her classes. She jokes about how once her mother completed the course, it was like having a Chinese medicine practitioner at home: “Whenever I was sick, I could just tell my mom and







she would prepare the right soup for me to drink. For example, my mom makes soups to soothe my frequent sore throats.”

Being Choosy about Food is a Way of Life

Hedy Wong, who works in postnatal care, describes how the academic approach of the course enabled her to better understand Chinese medicine food therapy and different ingredients. She now understands the importance of being choosy about food: “The course taught me that a single phenomenon is not enough to analyse a person’s health. We need to identify a number of factors. By eating right, we should be able to prevent a lot of diseases.”

Having internalised the knowledge and applied it to their daily lives, the students practise the philosophy of “medicine and food are one and the same” in their own way. The theme of all their stories is one and the same – passing on the culture and heritage of Chinese medicine from one to another. Tung points to the unique symbolic meaning that underlies the Cantonese culture of soup and food therapy: “We all know that it is important to come home for mom’s soups. It’s the way to bring the family together. I believe this cultural phenomenon is worth promoting both in Hong Kong and overseas.”

The Five Snake Stew: A Nourishing Culinary and Medical Treasure of Guangdong and Hong Kong

—— Chau Ka-ling, “Snake Queen”



Snakes can be intimidating, but the Chinese have experience of using them as valuable medicines. Li Shizhen, in his *Bencao Gangmu (Compendium of Materia Medica)*, gave a detailed description of the taste and main therapeutic effects of various snakes. As Chinese medicine makes extensive use of the dried bodies, skins and gall bladders of snakes, gourmands treat snakes as a tasty ingredient that can tonify and nourish the body.

There is a Cantonese proverb that goes: "Three snakes fatten when the autumn wind blows". The three snakes – the Indochinese rat snake, the banded krait and the Chinese cobra – are the main ingredients of snake stew, a popular delicacy that the Cantonese use to keep warm in winter. To this day, snake stew restaurants with "Snake King" – the Chinese term for veteran snake handlers – in their name remain a unique part of Hong Kong's culinary scene. There are few "snake kings" left in Hong Kong, and even fewer women in the business. Chau Ka-ling (Ling), who inherited her father's snake stew restaurant, deals with snakes on a daily basis. The many times she has been bitten and escaped death have not only not deterred her, but have equipped her with valuable experience.



A Well-loved Neighbourhood Name in Sham Shui Po

Ling's snake stew restaurant is located in Sham Shui Po, the district with the highest density of similar restaurants. In 1965, Ling's father and a dozen like-minded friends set up "Shia Wong Hip", a snake restaurant, in Sham Shui Po to sell snake stew, snake gall bladders and wild game, which included ducks, partridges, owls and eagles, as well as bears and leopard cats. Later, when the government banned the sale of wild game, the restaurant spent the next 60 years specialising in snake cuisine. "Why did we choose Sham Shui Po? I heard people here were mostly from Sze Yap, a county in Guangdong province."



Cantonese people love eating snakes because traditionally "snakes are mild and don't induce heat evil."

Ling started working at the snake restaurant in 1971. She started by sweeping the floor and feeding the wild game in the shop. Gradually she moved on to working with dead snakes, non-venomous snakes, and later venomous snakes that had had their fangs removed. Eventually, Ling graduated to removing fangs from venomous snakes. "I started learning how to remove the fangs of venomous snakes after two years in the business. At that time, my father had forbidden me to learn. Later, the shop hired a snake handler to remove the fangs of venomous snakes, and I asked him to teach me while my father was away on procurement trips. That's how I learned."

Taishi's Five-snake Stew: Real Ingredients and Real Work

When Ling's father passed away in 1991, she inherited the business without hesitation. Ling says the traditional Taishi's Five-snake Stew is made from the Indochinese rat snake, copperhead rat snake, Chinese cobra, banded krait and long-nosed pit viper. "Our masters told me: the banded krait is for foot pain; the Chinese cobra dispels wind; the copperhead rat snake helps circulation throughout the body; the long-nosed pit viper treats skin allergies as well as headaches and headwinds; the Indochinese rat snake dispels headwinds and is a medicinal usher because it also helps circulation throughout the body.

Once the ingredients have been selected, the preparation of snake stew requires meticulous attention to detail. The first step is to remove the fangs, butcher the snake and carefully remove and bottle the gall bladder. The second step is to cook the snake, which is time sensitive as it depends on the type of snake and the texture of the meat. The third step is to remove the meat and simmer the soup. Tear the meat into strips, then add old chicken and pork bones with the snake bones and simmer for four hours. "A good snake stew has to be made with snake bones – if you use other types of bones, it won't taste the same." Aged tangerine peel, ginger



and ham are then added to the broth, which when rich enough, is strained to remove bones and chunks. The fourth step is to cook the stew. The snake meat is added to the clear broth until it is tender, then shredded chicken, wood ear, ginger and Yunnan ham are added. The final step is to add cornflour to thicken the stew and season to taste. Each bowl of snake stew takes five to six hours to prepare.

Ling is most proud of the feedback she gets from her regular customers: after eating a bowl of snake stew, their bodies are warmed and they feel rejuvenated the next day. Each time she makes the stew, she uses 30 catties of snake bones, 20 catties of pork bones and two old chickens, and the most important thing is that "of course the stew must contain snake meat, and the amount used must be generous. With this amount of ingredients, I am not ashamed to take any criticism."

Snake Gall Bladder & Wine: A Family Recipe and a Family Pride

Ling is strict when it comes to selecting snake gall bladders – only the best quality. That means studying the snake's diet and food chain. "King cobra gall bladder is

the most valuable because it is relatively rare. Also, this snake eats only its own kind and only live food." This is why the snake's gall bladder is the most valuable, because the food it consumes is of good quality.

In recent years, fewer people are willing to eat raw snake gall bladders, so Ling has refined the way she sells them. Chinese medicine considers snake gall bladders to be cool in nature, bitter and slightly sweet in taste, with the effect of clearing heat and removing toxins, dispelling wind and clearing the eyes. So in Ling's shop she adds medicinal herbs to make "snake gall bladder and tendrilleaf fritillary bulb". She says, "Tendrilleaf fritillary bulb dissolves phlegm. By adding eight-to-ten year old tangerine peel, it can effectively sooth the qi; the effect is even more pronounced when snake gall bladder is added to the mix."

Ling also makes snake wine from her family's secret recipe. The process is incredibly laborious, but Ling is meticulous. She says, "People with poor circulation can benefit from drinking snake wine." Ling explains that her homemade snake wine is fortified with Chinese medicinal herbs, making it suitable for people prone to numb hands and feet. The restaurant also makes a variety of herbal wines, some less palatable than others, but there is really something for everyone. In fact, snake wine and herbal wines still have a following as a traditional way of maintaining good health.



A Snake Feast Inspired by A Narrow Escape from Death

Running a restaurant is never easy, and running one where snakes are the main ingredient proved to be even more difficult. As well as the usual challenges of running a business, there is the deadly risk of being bitten. Years ago, Ling was bitten by a viper and left bedridden. "As I lay there, I thought about how I've been dealing with venomous snakes for

over two decades. The older I get, the slower my reaction is; I may not have the strength to handle them anymore."

Ling then came up with the idea of transforming her business to take advantage of the growing import of frozen snake meat. She wanted to start a "snake feast" business to create new business opportunities. Ling teamed up with her younger brother, who was a chef, to create a special snake feast. The snake feast gradually attracted a group of regular customers, increasing her steady income and reducing the risk of snakebites for her family.



Procurement Difficulties Worsened by Epidemic

Looking back to the 1980s, when the economy was booming, Ling says that although profits were not huge, there was a huge demand for snake meat. "Connoisseurs were coming to us for wholesale snake meat by the tonne." However, importing snake meat was much more difficult than importing other types of meat, "because there was less supply of snake meat for export, probably because of the increased domestic demand." At that time, Hong Kong manufacturers were starting to set up factories in the north, so the socialising and consumption of wild game meat naturally took place on the mainland. There was less supply coming into Hong Kong.

Later, as the price of snakes skyrocketed, Ling started sourcing from Southeast Asia. "The year after the earthquake, the price of a tonne of snake meat went from over $100,000 to $350,000. How could we afford that?" Snake meat from Southeast Asia was much cheaper and gradually became the main source of supply: "Selling snake stew is a community business; we can only charge a few tens of dollars per bowl. To control costs, our supply must have a stable price, otherwise it is impossible for customers to enjoy affordable snake stew that is rich in ingredients."

In spite of the difficulties, Ling has been working hard to protect her family's long-established restaurant and insists on selling nothing less than properly made snake stew with rich ingredients. "I am elated when people praise my snake stew for being delicious!" Behind her dedication is the sense of heritage that runs in the blood of all Chinese sons and daughters. "One day when I pass away and go to heaven, I will be able to tell my father that I have done a great job with your snake restaurant! I can live up to him, I have zero regrets," Ling says with a smile.



Bringing Western Herbs to China: A Cross-Generational Effort to Develop the American Ginseng Market

—— Yeung Siu-wah, Founder, and
Yeung Yan-chung, Jess, General Manager,
Tai Lai Ginseng Hong Limited



Those of us in the industry naturally want to learn more about the benefits and efficacy of American ginseng so that today's consumers, especially the younger generation, can choose their preferred mode of consumption.



Originally from North America, American ginseng has been well received by the Chinese since its introduction to China. It has gradually been accepted as a modern Chinese medicine and is now even a popular ingredient in many Cantonese soups. This widespread use of American ginseng has much to do with Hong Kong, a city that has played an irreplaceable role in promoting the use of this Western herb.

Owing to the Chinese habit of using ginseng and dried seafood as a tonifying ingredient in dishes or soups, Hong Kong's famous "Dried Seafood Street" and "Ginseng and Bird's Nest Street" were born. Shops selling these products were clustered around Bonham Strand West and Des Voeux Road West in Sheung Wan. Yeung Siu-wah, founder of Tai Lai Ginseng Hong, speaks of the heyday of the trade, "In the early 1940s, many ginseng and dried seafood traders came to Hong Kong to escape the war in China. Many of them settled in Sheung Wan. At its peak, there were up to 60 shops specialising in American ginseng on Wing Lok Street." As Hong Kong's economy evolved, some of the traditional ginseng shops have been transformed into new-style pharmacies. While the younger generation may be unfamiliar with traditional tonic herbs, American ginseng still has a place in many Chinese families.

From Father to Son: A 40-year-old Business Thriving in Sheung Wan

Although several generations of his family have been involved in the ginseng industry, Yeung's entry into the business was not easy. As a teenager, he came to Hong Kong from the mainland to work as an apprentice, holding spit jars, serving rice and washing dishes for his master. His contact with American ginseng was either limited to standing and watching his master from the sidelines, or sneaking around to handle the ginseng while his master was having meals. "If you told your master you want to learn, he would be reluctant. He wouldn't want me to be good enough to take his place. The only way was to learn by observation and trial and error." In 1984, Yeung founded Tai Lai in Wing Lok Street, specialising in the retail and wholesale of American ginseng. At that time, American and Canadian-grown American ginseng was very expensive. "In the past, market information was not as easily accessible as it is now, so if you could secure a supply, you could easily make a fortune."

After almost 40 years in business, the shop has added a young face: Jess, Yeung Siu-wah's son. Yeung never asked his son to succeed him. Jess studied and



worked in the United Kingdom before returning to Hong Kong in 2012 to join the family business. "The first thing my father said to me when I joined the business was: 'I'm only 50 and fully capable of working. Don't try to take my job, go and do something you like.'" Jess jokes that he had the advantage of "nepotism", as experience and skill are key in the American ginseng wholesale business, and having a master to learn from – in this case his father – is key.

Tonifies without Creating Heat Evil: Opening up the Asia Market with a Western Herb

American ginseng, as the name suggests, comes from the United States. Jess explains, "After arriving in China, missionaries from Europe realised ginseng is prized among local Chinese. Meanwhile, missionaries in the Americas found that the Indians also consumed a similar plant, namely American ginseng." Although ginseng and American ginseng belong to the same botanical family and genus, they are two different species with distinctly different properties: "Ginseng is warm in nature, while American ginseng is cool in nature. American ginseng thus tonifies without creating heat evil."

American ginseng nourishes yin and clears heat evil which is suitable for those who sleep late and live a hectic



life, and thus has long been prized by hard-working Chinese. As much as 99% of American ginseng is exported to Hong Kong from the United States and Canada, and is distributed to other regions as well as sold locally. In the early days of wholesaling, the main source of customers came from South East Asia, including Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan," says Yeung.

"In the 1950s, the price of wild ginseng was comparable to that of cultivated ginseng because of the high cost of cultivation. However, in the 1980s, as the supply of wild ginseng dwindled and cultivated ginseng became more widely available, the price difference between the two gradually widened. Wild ginseng can cost over a million dollars per picul, while cultivated ginseng remains at $20,000 to $30,000. Currently, wild American ginseng is an endangered species and is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which imposes strict import and export controls, making it even more valuable.

Although the Chinese are the largest customers in the American ginseng market, the consumption of American ginseng is not exclusive to the orient. Universities in the



United States have conducted scientific research on the benefits and active ingredients of American ginseng, and have now identified 21 ginsenosides that are beneficial to the human body. “More foreigners are consuming American ginseng in the form of capsules or soluble powder. Many teas and energy drinks also contain ginsenosides,” says Jess.

Meticulously Hand-picked for Strict Quality Control

American ginseng in retail packages look neat and tidy, as opposed to the varying shapes and sizes of ginseng harvested from the fields. This is the result of careful selection by wholesalers. Ginseng imported from overseas are categorised by the length and size of the rhizome, and the process is done by hand and performed by experienced workers. “In the past, traditional American ginseng could be sorted into 100 to 200 different types, with different lengths, sizes, colours and textures.”

The quality of American ginseng depends mainly on its age and place of origin. Currently, American ginseng comes mainly from the United States, Canada and mainland China, with the best from the state of Wisconsin in the United States. “The quality of North American products is more consistent. There is a distinct difference in flavour between Chinese, American and Canadian stocks, with Chinese stocks having a grassier flavour, US stocks being rich and bitter, and Canadian stocks having a slightly sweeter flavour. American wild ginseng has the most natural and original flavour.” According to Yeung, consumers are very picky about the quality and origin of American ginseng, which is why Tai Lai handles American, Canadian and wild American ginseng through three separate companies to prevent the mixing of different stocks.

Every year Jess visits and inspects farms in the United States and Canada. To make a thorough assessment of the ginseng produced, he starts with the “ginseng



washing” process, “because the whole production line is right in front of you. You can see in detail how the ginseng is grown at different times and in different areas.” For wild American ginseng, which grows mainly in the Appalachian Mountains, the sourcing process is even more arduous. Jess once went on a one-man sourcing trip, driving from New York to Pennsylvania, then along West Virginia to Georgia, using three tanks of petrol a day.

Emerging Business Opportunities during COVID: Giving Tradition Products a New Life

While father-son bickering is inevitable in a family business, the combination of the experience and strengths of two different generations has breathed new life into the traditional shop. Jess has worked with various companies to develop new products, including American ginseng drinks and American ginseng sweets, and has encountered many operational difficulties. The high cost of products made from raw American ginseng and the high shelving fees charged by retailers led Jess to create his own retail brand. Today, the father and son duo have opened more than a dozen stores and this business is still expanding.

Throughout the COVID-19 epidemic, public demand for American ginseng has continued to grow, as Chinese medicine practitioners in both Hong Kong and on the mainland have advocated the use of American ginseng for recovering COVID patients as a tonic to clear heat and moisten the lungs. This gives Yeung and Jess even more reason to be optimistic about the future of the industry.

“Those of us in the industry naturally want to learn more about the benefits and efficacy of American ginseng so that today’s consumers, especially the younger generation, can choose their preferred mode of consumption. This will be achieved through product development, scientific evidence and marketing. I hope we can do this well.”

Searching throughout China for Native Medicinal Materials: A Century-old Guardian of Quality Medicines

—— Chan Ping-him, Fifth-generation Successor of Chan Fun Kee Company





The vicinity of Sheung Wan is well known for its clusters of retailers and wholesalers of Chinese medicines, ginseng, hairy antler and dried seafood. Standing among them is a store with a relatively small facade, simple interior design and a signboard that reads “Chan Fun Kee” in large Chinese words and “Founded in the 2nd year of the Tongzhi period, Qing Dynasty (1863)” in smaller characters. The time-honored 160-year-old shop has been a witness to the development of Chinese medicine wholesale in Hong Kong.

Chan Fun Kee was a key player in the true sense of the term. In its prime, it had more than 10 employees to handle its medicine production and wholesale business that were unmatched by that of its peers. As time passed, the store shrank and relocated three times until it became settled at the current address on Queen’s Road West. The fifth-generation successor continues to uphold the family ethos by serving the neighbourhood and supplying quality medicinal materials to Chinese medicine practitioners in a low profile. The story of the brand will now be told by Chan Ping-him, the fifth-generation successor of Chan Fun Kee.

Reborn after Calamities: Restarting in Hong Kong

The Chans used to reside in a luxurious mansion in Qingyuan of Guangdong. After some kidnapping incidents, part of the family left their hometown to escape from the calamities, including Chan Fun. He arrived in Hong Kong in 1863 with a limited amount of capital to found Chan Fun Kee in Sheung Wan.

“The main business of Chan Fun Kee was importing medicinal materials from China for wholesale into Hong Kong.” The business grew steadily in Hong Kong. The first property of Chan Fun Kee’s - a six-storey building at No.40 Ko Shing Street - became a symbol of the company in its heyday. The front of the building served as a business while the back as a residence. “The Chinese medicine business of Chan Fun Kee at the time encompassed everything from retail, processing, wholesale, import and export. We exported a hefty amount of medicinal materials to the United States and Canada, including ginseng and low-end herbal teas. Business was extremely strong and we were the only merchant exporting Chinese medicines to the United States.”



Into the Mainland: In Search for Medicinal Materials from their Places of Origin

Chan was told by his father that wholesale prices climbed year by year in the 1960s and 70s due to market monopolization by state-run corporations that brought distress to their business. His father, Chan Hou-cheung, the fourth generation successor decided to seek other sources to replace the dealers. “For the sake of Chan Fun Kee, my father found it necessary to go to the places of origin on the mainland himself to buy medicines. In the end, he sourced them from individual suppliers.” It was quite a challenge for Chan Hou-cheung to acquire medicines on the mainland as neither transportation nor quality

control was adequate. Chan remembers each of his father's trip would span a few months.

Chan Fun Kee is selective about the origin of their medicinal materials with no room for compromise. "Chinese medicines are plants. They absorb different nutrients and moisture if they are grown in different places as the compositions of the soils are different. For example, a soup would typically require common yam rhizome from Henan as the place has relatively drier soil to grow firmer and tougher yam." As such, Chan Hou-cheung travelled throughout China in search for Chinese medicinal materials from their places of origin. The quality of their goods reinforced the reputation and credibility of Chan Fun Kee, making it an unshakable brand. Chan Hou-cheung's adaptability also became an example for other Chinese medicine wholesalers.



Ancestral Precepts: Be Honest and Conscientious

In the 1990s, Chan Fun Kee was faced with another challenge posed by an increase in exports from the mainland and the fierce competition among Chinese medicine exporters in Hong Kong, In 1997 during the family division, Chan Hou-cheung's sub-lineage was the only one determined to sustain the business of Chan Fun Kee. They began to change its marketing strategies and achieved a successful overhaul by shifting the focus to retail, dispensing medicines and preparing decoctions for customers.

Over the past 20 years, Chan Ping-him has started a routine of starting his work at 9 a.m. every day. "It's often quite busy in the morning when customers come to get their medicines and ask us to prepare their decoctions. We start receiving stock or processing medicines after lunch." Chan Fun Kee insists on using traditional methods to process their medicines. "Chinese medicines are to save lives, so they are broiled, steamed or handled the way they ought to be, or else they won't be effective and curative. It's a business with a conscience." Chan has been taught so since his childhood. "We sell processed medicinal materials so they are all prepared and processed before sale."

Chan talks about medicine processing effortlessly. "Take Chinese taxillus herb as an example. Although we can acquire ready-made products from the mainland, we insist on making our own so we are sure they're properly processed instead just boiled with plain water. There're no shortcuts to the processing of Chinese taxillus herb!" At Chan Fun Kee, Chinese taxillus herb is boiled with black bean and other medicinal materials until it is fully infused with the excipients. It is then steamed before sale.



Challenges Posed by New Generation of Medicine

Although driven by passion, traditional businesses like Chan Fun Kee struggle for survival again unavoidably. “There’re fewer and fewer traditional herbal shops like us,” Chan laments.

He explains that new dosage forms have become increasingly popular. “For instance, the introduction of Chinese medicines in granule,” which is easier to be used by busy modern people who have no time to prepare decoctions, “has led to a drop in shops that sell decoction pieces of Chinese medicines.” Another factor in the reduction of these shops is storage space. Rent is always proportional to the size of the storage space. Despite so, Chan Fun Kee will not compromise as they, as well as some Chinese medicine practitioners and patients, believe in the unique curative effects of traditional medicines decoction pieces.

As a small supplier of traditional Chinese medicine, Chan Fun Kee are also faced with another challenge that comes with progression. "The Hong Kong government has imposed more regulations on Chinese medicines that further reduce the space for survival for the sector," says Chan. The tightening of regulation on the residue levels of sulphur dioxide, heavy metals, and toxic elements in Chinese medicines has the most profound impact on the sector. For better storage, some herb farmers in the past used sulphur to process traditional medicinal materials to kill insects and mildew, and to bleach and preserve the herbs. “It benefits the consumers, but makes it more difficult for the sector.”

Being Adaptable and Accepting Challenges

Chan Fun Kee has been focusing on the processing and sales of medicinal materials in recent years. Chan admits that it is time for changes again. “We are planning to attempt the path of health food by developing health food or soup packs.” He has also considered producing pre-processed ready-to-cook soup packs of fresh meat and medicinal materials to meet the market demand for soup.

It is now the most thriving and robust time in the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong and the professional status of Chinese medicine practitioners is improving. However, medicine merchants, as another key stakeholder in the sector, are facing imminent adversities. Over the past 160 years, Chan Fun Kee has weathered many storms and witnessed the rise and fall of the Chinese medicine sector in Hong Kong. As the fifth-generation successor, Chan Ping-him is rising to the occasion like his ancestors with the same hope, “To keep the legacy alive and keep passing it on!”



Nam Pak Hong Connects Chinese and Hong Kong Trade: Medicines from Mainland Eased Epidemic in Hong Kong

—— Wong Kong-hui Kenlay, Managing Director of Chuan Chiong Company Limited





Bonham Strand West in Sheung Wan, aka Nam Pak Hong Street, was Hong Kong's foreign trade hub that began to thrive in the mid-19th century. It gradually became a distribution centre of goods from the North and the South due to its proximity to Triangular Pier (Wing Lok Pier), where most of the merchants from Southeast Asia and the West landed. Local trade companies also congregated here to not only wholesale and distribute goods from mainland China (the North line), but also act as agents for trade between the East and the West, extending their businesses to Southeast Asia and the West (the South line).

North-South Freight Transport Junction Channelling Chinese Goods Overseas

At the time, much of the commerce was dominated by Westerners. To become self-reliant, Nam Pak Hong merchants founded the first Chinese chamber of commerce in Hong Kong, Nam Pak Hong Association, in 1868. Chuan Chiong Company Limited, established in 1931, is a member of the association. Its third-generation successor, Mr. Wong Kong-hui Kenlay, was even the president of the association in 2019.

Wong's grandfather, founder of Chuan Chiong, was one of Hong Kong's first distributors of goods from China. He imported, exported and wholesaled food products, tea leaves, grocery items, craftworks, etc.

Chinese goods were shipped via the entrepôt of Hong Kong to regions around the globe, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Japan and South Korea in Southeast Asia, and as far as North America and Europe, Wong recalls. "In the old days, only a few coastal cities on the mainland, including Tianjin, Shanghai, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Guangzhou and Qingdao, could handle trade and export. As such, tea leaves from Zhejiang must pass through Shanghai, and products from Yunnan and Guangxi must go through Guangdong. Since there was transport links between these coastal cities and Hong Kong, smaller cargo ships would dock at Triangular Pier."

In 1949 when the People's Republic of China was established, Chuan Chiong became the sole agent of Beijing Tong Ren Tang in Hong Kong, making it the very first distributor of proprietary Chinese medicines from the mainland in the city.





From Beijing to Hong Kong: A New Market of Proprietary Chinese Medicines

Tong Ren Tang has deeply rooted in Wong's memories since his childhood. "Wanying Ding (Tablet for Ten Thousand Maladies) impressed me most. It was a pill that can be used on all sorts of illnesses, pains and swelling. It's small and long, so we kids called it 'rat poop'." Wong put in tremendous effort into bringing Tong Ren Tang's proprietary Chinese medicines from the North to the South because he saw the needs of the grassroots people. "People were used to curing common illnesses with over-the-counter medicines and herbal tea. Proprietary Chinese medicines are valuable remedies to the common people."

He recalls, Hong Kong people were unfamiliar with the products of Tong Ren Tang when they were first brought in. Over-the-counter medicines from the South and the North often differ too; some share the same name but vary largely in their formulas. For instance, in making their Qili Powder, Tong Ren Tang adheres to a conventional formula targeted at bone-setting, internal and external injuries while Qili Powder in Guangdong is a paediatric medicine. As such, traumatological uses must be clearly indicated on the packaging of Tong Ren Tang's Qili Powder to avoid confusion.

As a pioneering distributor of proprietary Chinese medicines from the mainland, Chuan Chiong has been instrumental in the modernization of Chinese medicines in Hong Kong. The company also continues to develop new products and introduce new dosage forms of these medicines into Hong Kong's Chinese medicine market. "At first, Chinese medicines were mostly made into decoctions. Gradually, other forms appeared, including pastes, elixirs, pills and powders, with pills being the most plentiful. Tong Ren Tang was the first in China to make Chinese medicines into tablets. Modern forms of proprietary Chinese medicines such as capsules, sublingual tablets, granules and sugar-coated tablets then followed."

The new dosage forms brought a breakthrough to the development of modern Chinese medicine by popularizing proprietary Chinese medicines markedly. "Dosages of proprietary Chinese medicines are large because they are all made of tree roots and bark; for example, a single dose of Anemarrhena, Phellodendron and Rehmannia Pill would contain 30 pills." To make consumption easier, honey pills are now made into tiny spheres and the concentrations of water pills have been greatly enhanced too.



Mishap and Fortune Follow Each Other Opportunities Arise from Epidemics

During the SARS and COVID-19 outbreaks, Chuan Chiong contributed to the supply of Chinese medicines in Hong Kong. With a leap in the great demands of Chinese medicines during the SARS outbreak in 2003, the company served the community by maintaining a steady supply without raising prices despite a surge in the costs of medicinal materials. When COVID-19 swept the city in 2020, Chuan Chiong brought new forms of Chinese medicines recommended by the Chinese government into Hong Kong to meet the demands, including the well-known Lianhua Qingwen Capsule.

Lianhua Qingwen Capsule was an anti-virus proprietary Chinese medicine produced by Yiling Pharmaceutical in 2003 during the SARS outbreak. Its registration was approved by the Department of Health of Hong Kong in 2018. Wong says, "More than a year after its registration, COVID-19 hit and people began to snap Lianhua Qingwen Capsule up, putting it in short supply. We had to urge the pharmaceutical factory to speed up its production. Luckily, we were able to provide timely supplies eventually."

Survival of the Fittest: Evolution and Enhancement of Proprietary Chinese Medicines

The Hong Kong government eventually passed the Chinese Medicine Ordinance in 1999. The regulation regime and standardization opened up a new era for the local Chinese medicine sector. Regulated by law, registration procedures of proprietary Chinese medicines were also gradually standardized, posing a critical challenge to small-scale, conventional pharmaceutical companies or proprietors.

As a representative of the Chinese medicine sector, Wong finds the change essential for long-run growth. "Whether they are prescribed or not, Chinese medicines are therapeutic drugs that ought to be regulated appropriately. 'Every medicine is somewhat poisonous'. Although Chinese medicines are not actual poisons, they can't be casually consumed as rice."

Wong remarks, "Chinese medicines and proprietary Chinese medicines came from the mainland. Since its liberation, the mainland has been developing its Chinese medicine industry systematically and improving its regulation of Chinese medicines in stages. Despite so, Hong Kong had no relevant regulation until the enactment of the Chinese Medicine Ordinance in 1999, which demanded the sector to adapt



quickly to the modern and standard way of management. Immense though the change was, it reflected the government's will to turn Hong Kong into a global hub of Chinese medicine."

He explains that the epidemic had earned unprecedented limelight for proprietary Chinese medicines. "Proprietary Chinese medicines had never gained so much attention. The fifth wave of the epidemic was truly a key opportunity for Chinese medicine. The Treatment Centre for COVID-19 at AsiaWorld-Expo adopted treatments of Chinese medicine, while the Hong Kong government allocated part of the Chinese Medicine Development Fund to help the Chinese medicine sector provide remote treatments and precision care for long COVID. It was unprecedented for the government to distribute proprietary Chinese medicines as one of the anti-epidemic items."

The epidemic has changed the impression of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong people, arousing their interest and urging increasingly more people to regard proprietary Chinese medicines as an essential medical option. With a flexible mentality, the local Chinese medicine sector will certainly continue to find opportunities for better development and brighter future.

Making Chinese Medicine Healthcare a Youthful Trend: The New Wave in Health Maintenance

—— Tang Wai-man Vivian,
Executive Director of Wai Yuen Tong



Pastes, elixirs, pills and powders are the forms of Chinese medicine that are easy to store and do not require decoction. In 20th century Hong Kong, it was popular for local Chinese to take Chinese medicines to treat and prevent illnesses. Traditional Chinese medicines such as Hou Tsao Powder, Bo Ying Compound and Young Yum Pills were once stocked in many Chinese households. This is how Wai Yuen Tong, a Chinese medicine company founded in Hong Kong over 125 years ago, made its fortune.

Young Millennial Takes Over Family Business, Commits to Promoting Proprietary Chinese Medicine

The Tang family took over Wai Yuen Tong in 2001. Executive Director Vivian Tang, the second generation of the family to run the company, is a true millennial. Growing up, she was accustomed to the aroma of Chinese herbs at home and took the family's own Chinese medicines when she was unwell. In her spare time, she would accompany her parents on their visits to the shops, and during the summer holidays she would also work in the company's factory. With a childhood literally inseparable from Chinese medicine, she gradually developed an interest in Chinese medical theory, the classification and identification of medicinal herbs, and the production of proprietary Chinese medicines. For many years, Western medicine was the mainstay in Hong Kong, where "most people choose Western medicine when they are sick. For many, Chinese medicine was the stuff of the older generation." The "old-fashioned" stigma, coupled with a lack of channels for people to learn about the effects of Chinese medicines, has been a major obstacle to the expansion of the market for proprietary Chinese medicines.

After graduating from university in the United Kingdom, Vivian decided to return to Hong Kong to run her family's business. She used her marketing knowledge to reposition the company and develop innovative strategies to move away from the traditional Chinese medicine customer base. Vivian believes in the medical and cultural value of Chinese medicine and is keen to use the brand value and her own skills to promote proprietary Chinese medicine. She believes this is the mission of Wai Yuen Tong, which has been in existence for 125 years.

Vivian started at the bottom when she joined the company. She first worked in the production department to understand how the old masters selected and prepared the herbs and the techniques they used to enhance their effectiveness. She also learnt that in order to promote or sell proprietary Chinese medicines as one must be familiar with the effectiveness of different herbs and their combinations to meet the needs of customers with different body constitutions and health conditions. She also had to catch up quickly by learning on the job: "It was difficult at first, so I attended Chinese medicine dispensing classes with my colleagues after work. Many of my customers expect professional answers to their questions about Chinese medicine, and I needed to have that knowledge. So I had to keep learning," she says.

Turning a Challenge into an Opportunity: Tapping into Younger Consumers

Vivian is determined to make the brand more appealing to younger consumers. She first tried to describe the characteristics of each proprietary Chinese medicine in layman's terms, then explained its uses and effects in clear, accessible language. "Concepts such as deficiency cold and yin-yang are vague and difficult to understand. We need to translate them into a language that younger consumers can relate to in order to appeal to them. For example, many people misunderstood that Young Yum Pills, our flagship product, was only for women. We repositioned it as a Chinese vitamin that balances yin and yang and strengthens the basic essence of the body, thus breaking the gender and age barrier."

Popularising the wisdom of Chinese medicine and increasing the brand's appeal to young people have been Vivian's main focuses since she took over at Wai Yuen Tong. She has also started to collect data on the brand's products, increasing transparency in the manufacturing process and boosting customer confidence by revealing, for example, that each product undergoes 600 tests throughout the manufacturing process and that the entire production chain is based in Hong Kong. "Our internal testing and quality assurance processes are stricter even than the government's, ensuring that pesticides and heavy metals are within limits."

Leveraging Professionalism and Innovation to Meet Market Needs

In 2020, Wai Yuen Tong assembled a team of 85 Chinese medicine practitioners and transformed three of its outlets into Wai Yuen Tong Chinese Medicine Specialists Centre, offering clinical consultation services. After visiting the centre, patients can take advantage of one-stop services from Chinese medicine decoction to medicine delivery, making Chinese medicine consultations much more flexible and convenient.

To meet the diverse needs of customers, Wai Yuen Tong has also launched new product lines such as simmered soups, embracing the concept of preventive



care to provide Hong Kong people with daily health tonics. In recent years, as pet health has become a major concern for many, Wai Yuen Tong has also launched a range of Chinese herbal supplements for pets, formulated by experts according to the age and health needs of dogs and cats. “For example, there are products with anti-aging effects, as well as for dogs with liver, kidney or bone problems. We also have products that target different organs, such as the eyes and bones.”

While Vivian has brought many new changes to the business, she has not forgotten its heritage. All Wai Yuen Tong stores feature a classic “hundred-drawer” Chinese medicine cabinet. The company has insisted on developing and producing decoction pieces of Chinese medicines in order to promote decoction, the traditional preparation method which can maximise the efficacy of Chinese medicines. They have also kept alive traditional Chinese medicine processing techniques such as roasting herbs and processing herbs by hand. Vivian explains that talents are the company’s indispensable treasures and must be protected. “The herbs are all natural and the quality of each batch can only be judged by experienced masters. Different herbs are processed differently and their effectiveness is enhanced by different techniques, such as honey roasting and sand roasting.” To preserve the craft, Wai Yuen Tong has set up a master-apprentice system, whereby an experienced herbalist takes on two or three apprentices to personally pass on the traditional craft.

Chinese Medicine Accepted during COVID as a First Choice for Healthcare

Over the past three years, the community’s medical needs have skyrocketed with COVID-19. Faced with a shortage of medicines at the peak of the epidemic, Chinese medicine practitioners in the community took the initiative to fight the epidemic, and Wai Yuen Tong did the same. “When the epidemic broke out, the clinics were closed, but we kept our doors open.” Many diagnosed patients who took Chinese medicine had their symptoms alleviated, giving them a better understanding of the effectiveness and characteristics of Chinese medicine. After recovering, they continued to use Chinese medicine to tonify their bodies and alleviate the symptoms caused by “long COVID”.

Vivian has noticed that since the epidemic, many young people have become more health-conscious and are using Chinese medicine to maintain their health. “In the past six months, many of our customers have gone from never having tried Chinese medicine to becoming our regular customers. More young people have chosen to use She Dan Ultimate Powder to nourish their lungs, relieve coughs and remove heat and toxins. Some young mothers have also used our Hou Tsao Powder to help their children clear up phlegm.”

An International Expansion

Vivian has a bold and far-reaching vision for her company: "The Greater Bay Area is gradually opening up and topical medicines registered in Hong Kong can be imported into the Greater Bay Area. I look forward to governments on both sides of the border easing restrictions on the import and export of oral medicines. We also want to sell our products to Southeast Asia, the United States and Canada,” Vivian says. She hopes that the government will provide more support for the development of the industry, such as training professionals and encouraging young people to join the industry, as well as putting more effort into promoting proprietary Chinese medicines with unique historical and cultural value.



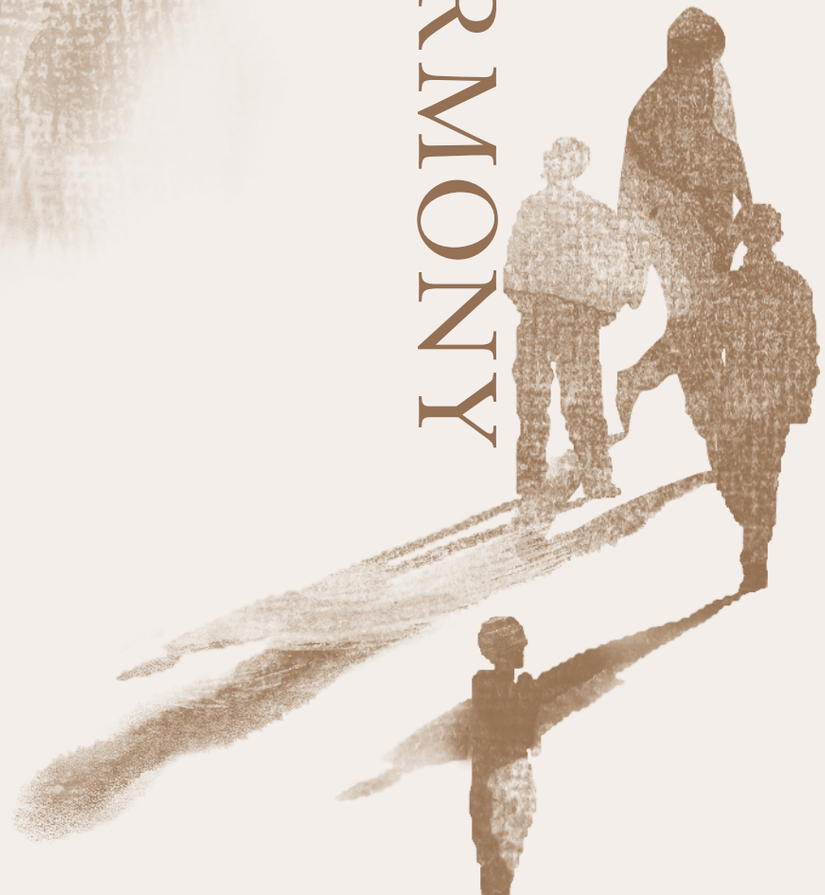


Celebrating the harmony of people,
of virtue and knowledge

Collaborating toward
medical research and teaching

HUMAN HARMONY





HUMAN HARMONY

This section features interviews with leading figures in the fields of Chinese medicine, Chinese pharmacology, professional education and scientific research, illustrating the humanistic foundation and heritage spirit of the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. Of particular note is Professor Feng Jiu, Permanent President of the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association, who has not only brought her mainland experience to Hong Kong, but has also participated in and led the development and reform of the city's Chinese medicine industry for nearly two decades. Ha Tak-kin, the third generation leader of the Ha Kwok Cheung Dragon & Lion Dance Team, has contributed much to the advancement of his profession behind the scenes. More importantly, he has also taken it upon himself to perpetuate two precious gems of folk tradition – dragon and lion dance culture, and bone-setting treatments – by training up young successors.

Herbal medicines are an integral part of the overall development of Chinese medicine as a discipline, and in the field of education. Zhao Zhongzhen, Professor Emeritus of the School of Chinese Medicine at Hong Kong Baptist University, deserves special mention. Not only did he pioneer an undergraduate course of pharmacy in Chinese medicine from scratch, but his focus on the safety and efficacy of medicines led him to drive the development of quality standards for Chinese medicines in Hong Kong. In the equally important field of local herbal medicine, Dr. Lau Kai-man, Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*, and Dr. David Lau Tai-wai, curator of the Shiu-Ying Hu Herbarium of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, have followed in the footsteps of local eminent herbalist Professor Li Ning-hon, combing the hills and countryside of Hong Kong to search for, identify and provide detailed records of local herbs.

In terms of professional education and research, three universities in Hong Kong now offer undergraduate programmes in Chinese medicine, training a new generation of Chinese medicine practitioners, and these universities have made many achievements in scientific research in the field of Chinese medicine. Professor Feng Yibin, Director of the School of Chinese Medicine at the University of Hong Kong, has made it his mission to promote Chinese medicine research internationally by articulating Chinese medicine theories with modern medical language and demonstrating clinical results with scientific evidence. Professor Lin Zhixiu, Director of the School of Chinese Medicine at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, also has an international perspective and is determined to promote the development of the integration of Chinese and Western medicine and to nurture high quality Chinese medicine talents to provide high quality patient care. Professor Bian Zhaoxiang, Associate Vice-President (Chinese Medicine Development) at Hong Kong Baptist University, is actively involved in establishing the first modern Chinese medicine hospital in Hong Kong and is committed to leading the tripartite development of "practice, teaching and research", linking the past and the future.

With Hong Kong's first modern Chinese medicine hospital set to open in 2025, the outlook for the development of Chinese medicine education, research and clinical practice in Hong Kong is certainly bright. There is little doubt that Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong will work together, as they have in the decades past, to seize the opportunity and turn a new page of glory for the profession.

Chinese Medicine Development

Chinese Medicine Standards

Bone-setting Culture

Professional Education

Local Herbal Medicines

Scientific Research

Picking up the Baton to a Traditional Legacy: A Winding Path to Reforms

——— Professor Feng Jiu, Permanent President of Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association





With a passion for Chinese medicine since childhood, Feng Jiu, now permanent president of the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association, learned from the best: Liu Chunpu, nationally renowned for his medical knowledge and virtuous practices. While she started out as a practitioner, Feng is now one of the leaders of the Chinese medicine profession in Hong Kong, and has contributed to the local development of the industry from behind the scenes. For more than a decade, she has led and participated in efforts to integrate Chinese medicine into public healthcare, envisioned the construction of Chinese medicine hospitals, and helped establish a fund for the continuous development of Chinese medicine research and talent.

Chinese Medicine Marginalised before Reunification

The first turning point in Feng's life came in 1994, when she had the opportunity to move abroad with her family. Believing her roots were in China, her motherland, she resolved to continue her career on Chinese soil. She decided to make Hong Kong her home, as it was a place full of opportunities for development.

Feng worked in a hospital when she was in Beijing. After coming to Hong Kong, she found that most Chinese medicine practitioners here worked in herbal medicine shops, where they gave consultations at a small table in a cramped corner. They also carried the title of "herbalists" on their business registration certificates. "At that time, Chinese medicine practitioners had little social status and were not regulated. They did not even have private consulting rooms – something I found hard to accept. I spent the first few years in Hong Kong looking for a suitable job, first teaching Putonghua and then gradually setting up a private practice."

Faced with the marginalisation of her profession, Feng refused to back down. "It wasn't all doom and gloom. Precisely because Chinese medicine wasn't taken seriously, there was a precious opportunity to develop the profession from scratch."





A Reputation Born of Benevolence

Feng went on to join a Chinese medicine association in Hong Kong and eventually set up her own clinic. A believer in paying it forward, Feng made it her personal mission to support the Chinese medicine industry in Hong Kong. She used her experience and contacts from her practice in Beijing to promote the sharing of skills and knowledge with the local Chinese medicine community. She also began to explore ways to promote the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong.

In 2004, with the trust and support of the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the 6th Workshop on Academic Thinking and Clinical Experiences of National TCM Masters and Famous Veteran Doctors of TCM was held for the first time in Hong Kong, with Feng Jiu as a key facilitator. The event invited 13 national Chinese medicine masters to share their experiences and academic achievements, "drawing not only local people, but also Chinese and Western medical practitioners from Southeast Asia, Australia and even Europe and the United States. This intensive international exchange created a boom in the study of Chinese medicine," Fung recalls.

Fung outlined the requirements for the development of Chinese medicine: more medical resources, institutional reforms and legal protection. It was an arduous process for her to negotiate with the government on behalf of her profession. "Don't falter in the face of difficulties! I was used to being self-taught, self-sufficient, tireless in my learning and practice. There is a solution to every problem and the key is to keep a positive attitude and never give up. There is nothing you cannot overcome."

Success after Over a Decade of Striving for Reforms

In 2013, after years of discussion and lobbying by Feng and her industry peers, the government established the Chinese Medicine Development Committee. Unsurprisingly, Feng became the chair of the Chinese Medicine Practice Subcommittee. "Almost every year for the past decade and more, I've submitted proposals to the government outlining my suggestions for the development strategy of Chinese medicine. The government has finally taken an important step forward by establishing an official consultation platform involving the Chinese medicine industry, the academia and the community."



In 2018, the government began subsidising designated Chinese medicine services for public, formally affirming the status of Chinese medicine. In addition, two flagship institutions – Hong Kong's first modern Chinese medicine hospital and the Government Chinese Medicines Testing Institute (GCMTI) – which had been in the pipeline for years, were taking shape and would drive the institutionalisation of the Chinese medicine industry. The GCMTI would pool expertise to focus on scientific research in Chinese medicine and promote quality control and standardisation of Chinese medicinal products.

Chinese Medicine Prized for Efficacy under COVID-19



Feng Jiu hopes to bring Chinese medicine to the world stage and raise global awareness of its efficacy and benefits. She has served in different posts such as an advisor to the Exchange Centre for Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau of the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, and an ExCo member of the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies (WFCMS). "Before COVID, I attended WFCMS international conferences every year, which were hosted by organisations from all over the world. We witnessed not only the rich academic exchange in Chinese medicine, but also the proliferation of Chinese medicine around the world."

In the face of a life-disrupting pandemic, the limitations of Western medicine became apparent – but so did the flexibility of Chinese medicine. "The Hospital Authority embedded Chinese medicine practitioners at the COVID-19 Treatment Centre (AsiaWorld-Expo) and the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre to run a "Special Chinese Medicine Programme for COVID-19 In-patients", bringing out the strengths of collaboration between Chinese and Western medicine. Many Chinese medicine practitioners actively joined the fight against COVID, providing thousands of voluntary consultations to help recovering patients alleviate physical and mental discomfort.

As Feng points out, the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association has been tirelessly leading the fight against COVID. At the two major international conferences on Chinese medicine it hosted, the Hong Kong International Summit on Chinese Medicine in 2018 and the 18th World Congress on Chinese Medicine in 2021, "experts from Hong Kong and Beijing hosted virtual keynote sessions that were uploaded to the web and accessible worldwide. The videos received over three million views in total, a historic record. This is another example of how every problem has a solution."

In addition to addressing the global challenge of an ageing population, Feng Jiu believes that Chinese medicine, uniquely blessed with centuries of heritage and experience, has an important role to play in safeguarding public health.



A "Licorice" Heart of Gold

Liquorice root is one of the most widely used Chinese medicines, so much so that the Chinese have a popular saying: "nine out of ten herbal formulas contain liquorice". Its popularity and ubiquity attest to its importance in Chinese medicine, and as such it is valued as a national treasure. Feng Jiu's contributions and central role in tirelessly promoting the development of Chinese medicine are comparable to this gem of a medicine, just as liquorice is the "mainstay" of all prescriptions.



Island Fragrance

In the 17th century, incense trees were widely grown in Hong Kong. These trees were a valuable source of a Chinese medicine called "agarwood", the resin secreted by the plant in response to climate, pests and injury, which then condenses over the years through wear and decay. The profession of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong used to be largely neglected, but in recent years it has begun to gain social recognition and to serve the community properly. In a way, it is comparable to agarwood – although buried in the wood for years, it eventually emerges, fragrant and shining with value.



The Lion Dance Culture: Combining Medicine and Martial arts to Perpetuate Two Great Chinese Traditions

—— Ha Tak-kin, the Third Generation Leader of the Ha Kwok Cheung Dragon & Lion Dance Team



With a family history of nearly 100 years, the Ha Kwok Cheung Dragon & Lion Dance Team has been passed down through four generations. Having pioneered a unique "Southern Lion, Northern Dance" style and trained lion dancers in local schools, they have expanded their performance to the overseas in recent years. Ha Tak-kin, the third-generation leader of the dragon and lion dance team, comes from an illustrious lineage – his grandfather, Ha Hon-hung, is a master of the Yau Kung Moon martial arts discipline; his father, Ha Kwok-cheung, is widely respected in Hong Kong as a grand master of three different professions: lion dance, martial arts and Chinese medicine orthopaedics. Under his family's guidance, Ha Tak-kin grew up practising lion dance and martial arts and learning all about Chinese orthopaedics from his father.

Lion Dancing and "Self-treating" of Bone Injuries since Childhood

Having practised martial arts and lion dance since childhood, Ha Tak-kin spent most of his childhood in the bonesetter clinic of his father, Ha Kwok-cheung. He admits that he loved watching his father at work, diagnosing and treating injuries, and from this gradually grew his passion for Chinese medicine. He was particularly fascinated by his father's skilled techniques for treating bruises and injuries, such as bone-setting and acupressure. "Learning martial arts was popular in Hong Kong in the 1950s and 60s. We'd get bruises during training, but these could be treated by rubbing with bone-setting liquor. Then you could resume training." At the time, Ha was also learning lion dance, which involves doing acrobatics on high poles. He would fall and break his arms and legs if he was not careful. Also, when Ha was the "tail" dancer, he had to lift the "head" dancer over his shoulders, and this could easily lead to sprains or torn ligaments if he didn't warm up properly. What Chinese medicine does is to treat the root cause of the injury, not just temporarily relieve the pain. "We would use bone-setting liquor to disperse blood congestion and apply hot compresses with sanchi. We can also use heat therapy, acupuncture and moxibustion or fire cupping to speed up the recovery."

Chinese-Western Integration: The First Bonesetter Clinic to Introduce X-ray Machines

The Ha family still runs a local bonesetter clinic, where they make bone-setting liquor based on the family's secret recipe. Ha Tak-kin remembers accompanying



his grandfather to Taoist temples as a child: "He treated over 100 patients a day!" All kinds of treatments were used, including medicines for internal use, bone-setting liquor for external use and bone-setting techniques. An X-ray machine was purchased to provide a reliable diagnosis, a first in the integration of Chinese and Western medicine.

As a teenage boy, Ha loved to learn taking X-rays photos with his seniors. At the age of 16, when he was still an apprentice, Ha volunteered to perform his first bone fracture treatment. The patient had a fracture, and the broken ends were overlapping; the pain was excruciating. He took an X-ray to confirm the injury, used the techniques he had learnt to correct the broken bone, then fixed it with a small splint after bandaging. The practised ease of the treatment earned him praise from the patient and his father, giving him confidence to continue pursuing the Chinese medicine profession.

Ha Tak-kin said the X-ray machine was a great help in treating bone injuries in Chinese medicine: "You may be able to detect a broken bone by touching it, but you can't feel a mild fracture and crack. You need an X-ray to determine the extent of the injury. Later, the authorities tightened regulations on medical equipment,



restricting the use of X-ray machines to facilities with dedicated radiotherapy rooms and licensed operators. The cost was so high that the clinic had to sell the entire set to a hospital."

As a first-generation athlete of the Hong Kong Wushu Team, Ha Tak-kin won numerous awards and represented Hong Kong in many mixed martial arts competitions in China, Japan and other countries. He was also the team's "field surgeon", providing medical assistance to his team-mates and even their opponents without hesitation.

Pioneering the "Southern Lion, Northern Dance" Style: A Determination to Reverse the Stigma on Martial Arts

The "Southern Lion, Northern Dance" style, a trademark creation of the Ha Kwok Cheung Dragon & Lion Dance Team, is a unique blend of the fierce and supple footwork of the Southern Lion, the agility and finesse of the Northern Lion, as well as the use of stools, high poles and terraces. Despite its popularity, it was difficult to change entrenched social perceptions: "Back then, lion dancers and martial artists were associated with gangsters. But the abuse of force was never our aim; we wanted to pass on traditional Chinese culture, good manners, a sense of morality and respect for elders. Through the four generations of the lion dance team, we have seen a dramatic change in many misbehaving youngsters; they have become well-behaved and responsible adults after learning lion dance."

He admits with a smile how he trains his students like in a "military boot camp". If a student is too energetic in class, he will first ask the student to do 50 push-ups or 100 japs. Whether it is lion dance or martial arts, he believes goals are an essential motivator. "If only adults were willing to talk to young people. For example, we can tell them that the International Dragon and Lion Dance Day is coming up and they are invited to perform in the lion dance team. Would they want to achieve that goal? Once their goal is set, then practising lion dance is not just for fun, it's their duty to make contributions to the Hong Kong's dragon and lion dance community. We can't force young people, they must first develop an interest, and then they will be motivated to excel."





Youthful Efforts Recognized by Thunderous Applause

Ha Tak-kin is a stalwart of the dragon and lion dance and martial arts community. His eldest son, Ha King-man, will keep the family legacy going by being the fourth generation to lead the Ha Kwok Cheung Dragon & Lion Dance Team. Ha Tak-kin advocates freedom and autonomy in education. He does not impose or make demands, but gives his children space to explore their interests and try different things. "We once chatted about the future when they were young, all of us with Coca-Cola in hand. The next day, my second son

happily told me: 'Brother likes lion dance, so he's in charge of the performances. I'll take care of the customers.'" Ha King-man has inherited his father's athleticism, but what drives his determination is the satisfaction he gets from performing. "I felt the audience's approval during the dance, for example, when I performed difficult dance moves on the high poles, the whole audience would be in an uproar. I remember one time the audience gave me a standing ovation for over a minute after the performance. It was like a concert and it stays with me!"

Students of the Ha Kwok Cheung Dragon & Lion Dance Team have spread wide and far. They have been very successful in bringing Chinese lion dance culture to the world, with over 100 lion dance teams in China and dozens in the United States. They have performance in various countries, including the United States, the UK, Australia, Turkey, Doha and Saudi Arabia. In 2011, the Ha Kwok Cheung Dragon and Lion Dancing Development Foundation was set up to promote charity work. Free lion dance classes taught by nearly 20 instructors were offered to young people.

Adhering to the teachings of their ancestors, the Ha family continues to teach the martial art Yau Kung Moon, runs a bone-setting clinic to help the public, and is also actively involved in social work, including raising funds and helping to build hospitals and schools on the mainland. New chapters are still being written in this century-old story, opening up ever wider horizons, generation after generation.





Dragon and Lion Dance Culture

The lion dance is a form of celebration and tribute to the deities, and is often performed at festivals and celebrations. Lion dance has a long heritage in Hong Kong. It began in the 1940s when a great number of martial artists from China moved to Hong Kong and set up martial arts schools to pass on their skills, such as martial arts, bone-setting, and dragon and lion dance. As a result, the dragon and lion dance culture flourished in the city, and was listed on the first Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory of Hong Kong in 2014.



A Tireless Pioneer – Helping Chinese Medicine Blossom Around the World

——— Zhao Zhongzhen, Professor Emeritus, School of Chinese Medicine, Hong Kong Baptist University



"As a doctor of western medicine, I've spent most of my life treating patients, and there were many diseases I couldn't cure. Why don't you study Chinese medicine instead?" With these words of encouragement from his father, Zhao Zhongzhen, Professor Emeritus of the School of Chinese Medicine at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), began a lifelong association with Chinese medicine. Zhao came to Hong Kong where he has spent the past 24 years, first opening the city's first university course of pharmacy in Chinese medicine then establishing a Chinese medicine herbarium - also a first for the city. His mission to promote Chinese medicine worldwide has taken him to over 40 countries around the world, sowing the seeds of Chinese medicine culture and nurturing its growth.

Concerted Effort to Offer Hong Kong's First Chinese Medicinal Pharmacy Course



When Zhao came to Hong Kong in 1998 to speak at an academic conference on Chinese medicine, the then President of HKBU, Daniel Tse, invited Zhao to join the School of Chinese Medicine. At that time, Zhao's impression of Hong Kong was: "There are three things in abundance in Hong Kong: banks, which make it a financial centre; journalists, which make it an information hub; lawyers, which make it a place governed by the rule of law. We, as scholars, should make full use of these advantages to develop Chinese medicine."

When Zhao first moved to Hong Kong, there was no School of Chinese Medicine but only a Chinese medicine course with 30 students. "To develop Chinese medicine as a proper discipline in Hong Kong, we need to study pharmacology in addition to clinical practice – and education is the key." 4 January 2000 marked a historic milestone in the development of Chinese medicinal pharmacy in Hong Kong. On that day, Daniel Tse and five professors of Chinese medicine spent half a day at the Education and Manpower Bureau in a heated debate with government officials. They successfully lobbied the government to support the offering of Hong Kong's first undergraduate course of pharmacy in Chinese medicine. "The Education and



Manpower Bureau finally gave us 'conditional' approval to run the course. We called it 'funded but no fund', meaning we had to find the money to run it ourselves."

Zhao admits that many people do not understand the nature of work of the profession. Common folk often describe Chinese medicine herbalists as "five-clawed golden dragons", a graphic depiction of how herbalists use their five fingers to grab handfuls of Chinese herbs in herbal medicine shops. "If 'grabbing' Chinese herbs is all we do, we don't need to study for four years – we can learn it in less than four months. What is it exactly involved in the practice of Chinese medicinal pharmacy? In short, everything except counterfeit medicine." Zhao points out that the practice of Chinese medicine includes teaching, scientific research, clinical practice, production, trade and management, etc. It was the research in Chinese medicine that China was first awarded its Nobel Prize.

A Chinese Medicine Herbarium to Preserve Precious and Rare Herbs

Zhao has pioneered many projects for the Chinese medicine industry in Hong Kong, and the Chinese Medicines Centre is one of his masterpieces. "If you asked

me how long it took us to build this place, I'd say it could be three months or 30 years. The reason is that I've been practising Chinese medicine for 30 to 40 years. Despite its small size, the centre houses an impressive collection of over 10,000 specimens."

In the 20 years since its establishment, the centre has received over 150,000 visitors and over 6.5 million visits to its website. In addition to serving HKBU students, the centre also hosts visits from elderly care centres and kindergartens. "Compared to universities on the Chinese mainland, HKBU is dwarfed in terms of student numbers and campus size; we don't even have a herb garden. But just by opening our minds, we can expand our classroom to Hong Kong's country parks, where we can find over 1,000 species of medicinal plants in the hills. That's enough learning material for us."



Chinese Medicine Authentication – Weeding out Unsafe and Counterfeit Medicines

The sole purpose of Chinese medicine is to cure the sick and save lives. However, the quality and authenticity of the medicines dispensed in pharmacies have a direct impact on their efficacy. Zhao points out that there are three main standards for Chinese medicines: "safe", "effective" and "controllable". "Chinese medicine has a history of more than 2,000 years. Today, people are more concerned about its safety than ever before. That's why authentication of Chinese medicine is key."

"There was a case where citizens became poisoned after drinking Five Flower Tea, so I once asked the audience at a public talk: 'What herbs are in the Five Flower Tea?' Some gave the names of several different flowers, and some even said 'any flower will do'. Later, when I was researching the cause of the poisoning, I found that it was due to a confusion between the Chinese Trumpet creeper and the poisonous Datura Flower. The misuse of the latter can be life-threatening." Later, Zhao and his HKBU colleague Professor Chen Hubiao subsequently published *Chinese Medicine Identification: An Illustrated Approach*, which provides a modern scientific interpretation of the traditional experience of Chinese medicine. The book has been translated into local languages in Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, Korea and Vietnam.

In 2013, Hong Kong established the Chinese Medicine Development Committee, and Zhao, one of the founding members, proposed the establishment of a Chinese medicine testing centre in Hong Kong at the committee's first meeting. In 2015, the government finally announced plans to establish what would be formally called the Government Chinese Medicine Testing Institute (GCMTI). The institute would be dedicated to scientific research on Chinese medicine testing and authentication of Chinese medicines for safety and quality.

Travelling the World to Study the Origins of Chinese Medicine

Over the past 40 years, Zhao has been to the production regions of medicinal herbs of more than 30 Chinese provinces and visited nearly 50 overseas countries to study Chinese herbal medicine. "How do we define Chinese medicine? Some would say 'it's whatever medicine that the Chinese take'. But we Chinese also take western

medicines. Some say that Chinese medicine equates 'China-produced medicines'. The truth is whatever the origin, medicines used under the guidance of Chinese medical theories can be classified as Chinese medicine."

Zhao notes that many Chinese medicines require field studies to understand their origins. "Many people think that Rhesus Macaque Bezoar is the stones in the stomach and intestines of monkeys. But under the guidance of industry veterans, I traced the roots of the medicine all the way back to central India. It was then that I realised that the medicine was actually the appendicular stones of Indian black goats, the result of indigestion after the goats had swallowed Albizia plants."

Zhao believes that Hong Kong can play an instrumental role in the import and export of Chinese medicines. "Hong Kong used to be the 'incense entrepot'. Cultivated and collected in Guangdong, the Chinese medicinal herb agarwood was the cargo, shipped here from Dongguan. Incense was also shipped in both directions - to and from overseas." His advice for the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong: "I believe that by adopting an open attitude – both as Hong Kong, China, and as Hong Kong, a global city – we can do great things for the research, development, trade and exchange of Chinese medicines."





Great Ambition

Thinleaf Milkwort Willd, a Chinese herb that calms the mind, clears phlegm and opens the orifices, is called "yuanzhi" (遠志) in Chinese, meaning "great ambition". It is also a pseudonym used by Zhao to show his determination to follow in the footsteps of Shennong and Li Shizhen, the great Chinese herbalists of old, searching the mountains and fields of his homeland for herbal medicines. "Yuanzhi" has an alternative name of "xiaocao" in Chinese (小草, meaning "small herb"), which further demonstrates Zhao's humble and down-to-earth attitude as he advances the profession of Chinese medicine one step at a time. His message to the Bachelor of Chinese Medicine graduates is: "Be the pioneers of Chinese medicine in the world and the successors of the profession in Hong Kong." Let's work together to advance the development of Chinese medicine!



In Nature's Company: A Lifetime Study of Herbs and Plants of Hong Kong

—— Dr. Lau Kai-man, Co-editor-in-Chief, Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong; Dr. David Lau Tai-wai, Curator of Shiu-Ying Hu Herbarium, The Chinese University of Hong Kong



Picking herbs in the hills used to be a daily routine for medical practitioners, but it has become largely obsolete as the supply of Chinese medicine has become more normalised and regulated. Nevertheless, there remains a group of herbal medicine enthusiasts in Hong Kong. With unbounded passion and a spirit of exploration, they often explore the verdant hills to see the actual herbs for themselves and experience the wonders of nature. Dr Lau Kai-man, co-editor-in-chief of *Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong*, is one of them.

Lovers of Medicinal Herb from Wide and Far

Li Ning-hon, a professor at the Ching Wah College of Traditional Chinese Medicine and a respected herbalist in Hong Kong, has been teaching a course on local medicinal herbs early on, with the aim of training local experts in Chinese medicinal herbs. He also used to organise exhibitions of medicinal herbs, which attracted large audiences, including Lau Kai-man. “I wasn’t a practitioner of Chinese medicine, nor did I study botany. When I returned to Hong Kong from abroad in the 1970s, I came across an exhibition of Chinese medicinal herbs organised by Professor Li at City Hall. I enrolled in his course on the spot – I remember it was the sixth cohort. Every Tuesday evening there was a three-hour class covering





herbal theory, Chinese medicine theory, laboratory tests and more. I also had to study the names of the plant species, as well as their Latin names.”

Li Ning-hon has led 33 cohorts of his course on medicinal herbs, and his students have come from far and wide. “I joined the course in 1994, and it was a six-month one with hundreds of hours of classes. The final exam was particularly interesting. To pass, you had to search the hills for plant specimens and identify more than 100 herbs,” says David Lau, who originally studied environmental science but enrolled in the course on the recommendation of his seniors. Despite the age difference, he and Lau Kai-man became friends.

“Balanophora hongkongensis” – The Plant that Sparked a Global Debate

As well as teaching about Chinese medicinal herbs, the course also provided an opportunity to discover new herbs. “Balanophora hongkongensis” became a media sensation after it was first discovered and documented during an herbal excursion in the countryside.

Balanophora is not a type of mushroom, but flowering plants with scaly leaves at the base. They are parasitic plants that have no chloroplasts or roots of their own, relying entirely on the roots of other plants for nourishment. In the 1980s, when Li Ning-hon, Lau Kai-man and the renowned botanist Professor Hu Shiu-ying went into the hills to photograph plants, they accidentally discovered that the species resembled the “Balanophora” described in textbook. After taking specimens back for study and comparison, they finally confirmed that this was a new species.

“Some thought that Balanophora hongkongensis was Balanophora laxiflora, the latter being a long-discovered species. After discovering Balanophora hongkongensis at Castle Peak, we studied it for years and even went to Wuxi County in China to find the original Balanophora laxiflora, which we found to be similar to the species in Hong Kong. Later, after the Hong Kong Herbarium sent a letter to Kew Gardens in the UK to borrow a Balanophora laxiflora specimen for comparison, we found numerous discrepancies in detail between the Hong Kong specimen and the photos we took in Wuxi. We cannot rule out the possibility that climate change in the last century may have caused the original Balanophora laxiflora in Wuxi to become extinct, and that a new species similar to Balanophora hongkongensis may have developed in the meantime.” After repeated comparison, verification and clarification, Li Ning-hon, Hu Shiu-ying and Lau Kai-man jointly published the new discovery, naming it “Balanophora hongkongensis”.



A Comprehensive Record of Hong Kong's Medicinal Herbs

According to the Hong Kong Herbarium, Hong Kong is home to about 30 species of indigenous plants unique to the city. To document these botanical treasures, Professor Li Lin-hon put together a team to compile a catalogue of Hong Kong's medicinal herbs, with Lau Kai-man as one of the members.

The compilation work was challenging. The botanical information was extensive, and each herb had to be compiled according to its proper name, scientific name, alias, growing environment, methods of collection and processing, nature, flavour and function, treatment and usage, sample prescriptions, Chinese herbal components, notes, morphological features and more. Photographs were also taken, and more importantly, the information is presented in both Chinese and English. "The book is important to the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. There are 2,000 species of plants indigenous to Hong Kong, and nearly 1,500 to 1,600 of them have medicinal value. That is why *Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong* provides a wealth of knowledge to the medical sector, especially in regard to plants unique to Hong Kong."

Plant Specimens: A Timeless Legacy of Knowledge

As the current curator of the Shiu-Ying Hu Herbarium at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, David Lau has inherited Li Ning-hon's passion for botanical research and is determined to bring to life the specimens Professor Hu has collected over the years. Professor Hu is one of Hong Kong's foremost researchers of Chinese medicinal plants and an internationally renowned botanist. Oligostachyum shiuyingianum and Hedyotis shiuyingiae, both native to Hong Kong, are named after her. Nicknamed the "mother of holly", she and her team's holly-based cold and flu remedy – "Trilex Tea" – is a household name in Guangdong and Hong Kong. She also collected over 40,000 sets of plant specimens, which are invaluable for research.

The collection of plant specimens is a key step in plant classification. When a researcher sees a plant in the wild in a state of flowering and fruiting that is sufficient to produce a specimen of scientific value, he or she will collect it without disturbing the natural environment and turn it into a dry-pressed specimen. "Over the past two to three decades, we've been able to add value to these specimens as DNA genetic identification techniques have matured. Today, it's easy to create DNA barcodes from dried samples. Compared to DNA barcodes that contained only



1,500 base pairs of data, we can now obtain 150,000 base pairs of data, giving us a more comprehensive view of a plant's evolution, adaptation, medicinal value, toxicity and relatedness."

The new information we learn and discover from the specific genetic codes of the specimens is not only useful for scientific research, but can also be adapted into educational materials. In this way, the next generation can better understand plant species and how they relate to ecological conservation, medicinal value and us humans. "There is a lot of insight and knowledge in Chinese medicine that can be passed on if the general public and students are made aware of it."

Following in the footsteps of their mentor, David Lau, Lau Tai-wai and a group of senior graduates of the course on medicinal herbs now regularly take enthusiasts out into the wild to observe and learn about plants. Participants are no longer limited to students of the course, but also include primary, secondary and university students. They also organise seminars to share their knowledge of plants and Chinese medicinal herbs, with the aim of passing on knowledge and allowing the new generation to experience the wonders of Chinese herbal medicine.





Chinese Medicinal Herbs of Hong Kong

The book, co-edited by Li Ning-hon and Lau Kai-man, was published in 2014. It is an expansion of an earlier edition of the same name, which was published in a series of eight volumes in the 1980s and 1990s. This new edition adds several species discovered in the last decade and is reissued in two volumes. This two-volume edition showcases 800 common herbs in Hong Kong with medicinal value. It provides, in both Chinese and English, detailed information on the properties, pharmacology and sample prescriptions of each herb, with macrophotographs showing the herbs in their original form.



From Saving Lives to Nurturing a New Generation: Bringing Chinese Medicine Research to the World

—— Professor Feng Yibin, Director of School of Chinese Medicine, The University of Hong Kong



Professor Feng Yibin, Director of the School of Chinese Medicine at the University of Hong Kong (HKU), dedicated himself to bringing modernized Chinese medicine to the international stage during his 40 years of medical practice. In the 20 years since he settled in Hong Kong, he has actively promoted the integration of Chinese and Western medicine, the modernization and internationalization of Chinese medicine, and has trained up generations of Chinese medicine practitioners.

Born into a Family of Doctors: 20 years of Practice, Teaching and Research

Although Feng's parents practised Western medicine, he had found Chinese medicine particularly useful for pain relief, rehabilitation and relapse prevention after surgical and gynaecological procedures, and therefore dabbled in acupuncture, moxibustion and Chinese medicine prescriptions. Feng has involved in medicine since childhood. He journeyed across rural China after graduating from high school and found satisfaction in bringing much-needed acupuncture and Chinese medicine treatments to desolate villages.

In the first batch of university students after the Cultural Revolution, Feng chose to study medicine. After graduating, he worked in various departments of a general hospital, including infectious diseases, emergency medicine, internal medicine and Chinese medicine, treating both infectious diseases and critical illnesses with Chinese and Western medicine. This experience reinforced his belief in the value of integrating Chinese and Western medicine. He went on to earn a doctorate in medicine in Japan, which set him on a tripartite career of "practice, teaching and research". He considers himself very fortunate to have joined the School of Chinese Medicine at HKU at a critical juncture, when the pace of development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong was picking up.



Feng was involved in three distinct phases of the School's development. From the outset, reference was made to the Chinese medical education practices on the Chinese mainland to establish a standardized and formalized curriculum. Later during teaching reforms, an integrated model of Chinese and Western medicine education was developed. Today, the School actively collaborates with the Chinese medicine profession and academia on the Chinese mainland and overseas countries to promote the modernization and internationalization of Chinese medicine. Since joining the Joint University Programmes Admission System in 2002, over 1240 HKU graduates have joined the Chinese medicine profession in Hong Kong. A significant number of them have gone on to promote the culture of Chinese medicine overseas.

Informing Practice through Research: Integrating Chinese and Western Medical Theories

Feng finds that many cancer patients choose Chinese medicine for complementary and palliative treatment and many of them also suffer from metabolic diseases. He has therefore focused his research on this hot topic: the application of Chinese medicine to the prevention of cancer and metabolic diseases. He points out that, pathologically, inflammation, fibrosis and carcinogenesis are all closely related to immune dysregulation and metabolic





disorders. Feng's team has therefore studied the efficacy of a number of compound formulas derived from the Chinese Goldthread Rhizome, such as Coptis Toxin-Resolving Decoction and Pueraria, Scutellaria, and Coptis Decoction. These have been proven to be effective against tumour growth in liver, lung, pancreatic and colorectal cancers.

Feng believes that the basic principle of clinical cancer treatment in Chinese medicine is to treat both the symptoms and the cause. This involves a combination of "supporting good qi" and "eliminating bad qi". He explains that "good qi" refers to the normal functioning of the body's immune and disease-fighting capabilities, so the concept of supporting good qi in Chinese medicine can be translated in modern medical terms as strengthening the body's overall immunity.

Feng admits that the traditional basic theories of Chinese medicine, including the theories of five elements and yin-yang, are obscure and mystifying to most foreigners. Thus, foreign scholars studying Chinese medicine are more receptive to standardized treatments such as acupuncture, moxibustion and manual therapy.

With Risk Come Opportunity: Chinese Medicine's Scientific Basis Challenged

Feng is among the top 1% of HKU researchers in terms of citations in international journals, and his published research has been widely applied to clinical treatments for chronic diseases caused by obesity, including type 2 diabetes, hyperlipidaemia, cardiovascular disease and cancer. He and his team demonstrated the association of the SBP2 protein gene with obesity and type 2 diabetes, and were the first to discover that the SBP2 protein could provide new targets for the prevention and treatment of these diseases. This technique has been widely adopted on the mainland.

Feng believes that data and standardization are keys to making Chinese medicine more competitive globally. For example, the four basic methods of diagnosis (inspection, listening, inquiring and palpation) need to be supported by modern science. The efficacy of Chinese medicine should also be verifiable through scientific data on composition, effects, pharmacology and safety. However, the complexity of the chemical composition of Chinese medicine and the many interactions between its ingredients make research into Chinese medicine extremely challenging. That said, Feng and his team believe that with risk comes opportunity, and that much has already been achieved in modernizing Chinese medicine: "In the treatment of complex diseases, the compound herbal formulas of Chinese medicine can have an integrated effect through multiple targets. This gives us an advantage over single-target chemical drugs."

In Keeping with the Times: Seizing Opportunities to Advance Chinese Medicine in Hong Kong

Although Western medicine remains the mainstream in Hong Kong, Feng believes that there is still plenty of room for Chinese medicine to develop, especially in areas such as infectious and viral diseases. In 2015, the Nobel Prize was awarded to Tu Youyou, a pharmacologist from the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences, for her discovery of artemisinin, which can reduce the mortality rate of malaria patients. This discovery was inspired by an ancient book on Chinese medicine: *Zhouhou Beiji Fang (A Handbook of Formulas for Emergency)*.

The unprecedented spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 disrupted the lives of many around the world. But it also served to demonstrate the efficacy of Chinese medicine and the value of Sino-Western collaboration in medicine. According to Feng, in addition to the use of Western vaccines and antivirals

targeting the pathogen to control the spread of the pandemic, combination therapy with Chinese medicine can greatly mitigate the severity of symptoms and the risks of long COVID near recovery, as well as reduce public anxiety.

Feng has witnessed the significant development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong over the past 20 years, with the establishment of three schools of Chinese medicine and 18 Chinese medicine teaching and research centres. The administration, during the previous terms and the current one, has kept on boosting the development of Chinese medicine, with key bodies ranging from the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong, the Chinese Medicine Development Committee, to the Chinese Medicine Development Fund. Government-led Chinese medicine flagship projects – the Chinese Medicine Hospital and the Government Chinese Medicine Testing Institute – will also be operational by 2025.

Feng has high hopes for the new generation of Chinese medicine practitioners who will drive the modernization of Chinese medicine, contribute to medical development and bring socio-economic benefits. “The new generation of Chinese medicine practitioners must not only take up the baton of tradition, but also keep abreast of the latest medical knowledge and lead the development of Chinese medicine in the world.”





Chinese Goldthread Rhizome: An Upper-class Medicinal

Chinese Goldthread Rhizome (Huang Lian) is a bitter and cold Chinese medicine. But having spent most of his life studying it and its compound formulas, Feng has a deep understanding of its precious value. According to the *Shennong Ben Cao Jing (The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica)*, there are three classes of medicinal herbs: upper, middle and lower, and Chinese Goldthread Rhizome is in the upper class. Feng explains that it has the curative effect of clearing heat and detoxifying the body, ideal for countering inflammatory responses caused by diseases. Feng says that in the Song Dynasty, when the standardization of medicines was at its peak, more than 1,400 prescriptions for Chinese Goldthread Rhizome were recorded, indicating its remarkable efficacy and widespread use. To this day, he drinks a glass of water with Chinese Goldthread Rhizome every week as a way of maintaining good health.



A Scholar Returns: Advancing the Development of Chinese and Western Medicine Integration with an International Perspective

——— Professor Lin Zhixiu, Director,
School of Chinese Medicine,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong





While studying in the UK, Professor Lin Zhixiu, now Director of the School of Chinese Medicine at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), witnessed the rose to fame of a Chinese medicine practitioner from mainland China for his effective treatment of eczema. This experience strengthened his determination to promote Chinese medicine around the world. Since arriving in Hong Kong, Lin has made it his mission to nurture local talents in modern Chinese medicine and has set himself the goal of promoting the development of the integration of Chinese and Western medicine in Hong Kong.

Perseverance, Diligence and a Vision for the World

Having lost his father as a child, and with the family's elders in poor health, Lin was expected by his family to study medicine and become a doctor so that he could look after their health. In the 1980s, he graduated from a secondary school on the mainland and entered the Guangzhou College of Chinese Medicine, where he began his journey in Chinese medicine.

As well as teaching the basics of Chinese medicine, such as yin-yang and five elements, qi and blood, internal organs and meridians, the college's undergraduate curriculum also covered extensively modern medical physiology and pathology, as well as diagnosis and treatment. "Therefore, the five years of study focused mainly on Chinese medicine, but also involved a lot of western medicine." Upon graduation, Lin became a clinician, but his passion for modern medical research never waned and, with the support of his family, he decided to continue his studies in the UK.

After arriving in the UK, Lin soon found part-time work at a Chinese medicine clinic in London, thanks to his specialisation in Chinese medicine. He began to prepare for his PhD studies. A practitioner at the clinic was impressed with Lin's passion and diligence, and soon recommended him for a postgraduate place in biomedical sciences at King's College, University of London. However, Lin had to take and pass three undergraduate courses to gain admission. "My English was mediocre, and I struggled to understand the terminology used in chemistry and pharmacology classes." Lin passed all three courses and was assigned a research project by a professor in the department. He only took five years to complete his PhD, and he received a graduation present of which he was incredibly proud – the "Best Thesis" award.



Effective Chinese Medical Treatments for Eczema Gained Popularity in the UK

When he first came to London to practise medicine, Lin practised tuina, acupuncture and moxibustion, and also wrote prescriptions. During his stay in the UK, the most well-known impression of Chinese medicine among Britons came from a local practitioner specialising in eczema. Dr. Luo Dinghui's Chinese medicine clinic was so effective in treating persistent eczema that it drew the attention of British skin experts, who conducted a tracking study on Dr. Luo's patients and proved the efficacy of

Chinese medicine treatments. The incident was widely reported in the mainstream media. By treating both the symptoms and the cause, Dr. Luo's herbal formulas cured many in the UK. Many more came seeking treatment, which also served to bring the profession of Chinese medicine to public attention in the UK.

At the time, there were around 2,000 Chinese medicine clinics in London – you could find one in every borough. "There was no legislation to regulate the Chinese medicine profession in the UK in those days and the quality of clinics varied. We often say that this was a "failure of its own success": Dr. Luo's success attracted many to set up Chinese medicine clinics there, but as a result of the black sheep among us, the whole profession started to go downhill."

Leading Chinese Medicine Research in Hong Kong via High-end Technologies and a Novel Perspective

Having witnessed the dramatic ups and downs in the acceptance of Chinese medicine in the UK, Lin became convinced of the need for modern research methods to validate Chinese medicine. He began to consider where best to conduct research into Chinese medicine. In 2003, Lin joined the School of Chinese Medicine at the CUHK as an assistant professor, focusing on the identification and quality control of Chinese medicines. Later, the school offered more resources and space for his team to conduct research on bioactive pharmacology. "A major research focus was to find the active ingredients in Chinese medicine to make extracts, or to extract



pure compounds, i.e., pure chemical monomers, from Chinese medicine for further testing. The bioactivity in Chinese medicine can then be proved."

Lin admits that the School of Chinese Medicine at the CUHK is not large in scale, with only four principal investigators currently responsible for numerous research projects. "Mine is mainly on the use of Chinese medicine to treat common diseases such as eczema, as well as cancers such as pancreatic and prostate cancer. We've also studied the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease with Chinese medicine and have published over 20 high quality papers on the subject."



Integrating Chinese and Western Medicines to Maximise Patient Wellbeing

Lin, who is also President of the Hong Kong Association for Integration of Chinese-western Medicine, believes that the integration of Chinese and Western medicine will be one of the trends and key areas of future development for Hong Kong's healthcare system. The advantage of such integration, he believes, is that it brings out the strengths and complements the weaknesses of the two medical disciplines, thereby maximising patient wellbeing.

Over the past three years, the COVID-19 pandemic in Hong Kong has been a key stage for the integration of Chinese and Western medicine in Hong Kong. Lin points out that while Western medicine, with its antibiotics, is effective against bacterial infections, there is little in its arsenal to treat viral infections such as COVID. "Although we have antiviral drugs, they only work to reduce the viral load in the body and may not be effective against the inflammation caused by the virus." He adds that Chinese medicine has good anti-inflammatory effects and can quickly remove free radicals from the body. Clinical symptoms such as fever, sore throat, phlegm and cough can also be treated quickly. "More importantly, Chinese medicine can effectively counteract long COVID by regulating the body's immune system and reducing inflammation."

Nurturing Talents and the Development of Specialisation of Chinese Medicine

Lin admits that CUHK's School of Chinese Medicine is small in scale, but it is dedicated to training clinical Chinese medicine practitioners. "Our founding Director, Professor Kong Yun-cheung, has already set out a clear mission for our School – to train up high quality professional Chinese medicine practitioners, who will lead the profession with knowledge and ethical practices. This is why we call ourselves the School of Chinese Medicine, not School of Chinese Medicine and Pharmacology."

As for the long-term development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong, Lin believes that specialisation in Chinese medicine is the way forward. "At present, Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong are registered as general practitioners. They can add their speciality in a bracket after their title, such as "general practice", "acupuncture and moxibustion" or "orthopaedics", but they cannot call themselves "specialists". Advancing the development of specialists will lay a good foundation for the establishment of Chinese medicine hospitals in the future, as hospitals will have to be divided according to medical specialties." Lin believes that with the hard work and support of his peers in the profession, specialisation in Chinese medicine is far from an unattainable dream.





Steadfast and Down-to-earth

Lin likes to describe himself as "down-to-earth", as he has always been hardworking and steadfast throughout his career as a practitioner of Chinese medicine. Although he has considerable influence in the education and medical fields, he continues to carry out his duties without wavering or pretension, working behind the scenes to serve the public and contribute to the education and research of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong.



The Way of a Healer is to Save Lives: The Way of an Educator is to Influence Lives.

——— Professor Bian Zhaoxiang, Associate Vice-President (Chinese Medicine Development), Hong Kong Baptist University



As practitioner and educator of Chinese medicine, Professor Bian Zhaoxiang, Associate Vice-President of Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU), wears many hats. But whether it is treating patients, giving lectures, or strategizing the development of Chinese medicine at the university, he never forgets to put people first. He believes that "in addition to knowledge and technique, a healer must be empathetic and have a patient-first attitude. Medical treatment is primarily aimed at 'people', and the only way to be a good healer is to combine empathy with knowledge on social science and other fields."



A Healer's Path Leads to Key Role in Hong Kong's Chinese Medicine Development

With more than three decades of clinical experience in Chinese medicine, Bian recalls that he originally intended to study chemistry. By a stroke of fate, he received a surprise offer from Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine (NJUCM), which set him on this exciting path. "I had a remarkable experience with Chinese medicine in the second of my five-year studies at NJUCM. My mother was admitted to hospital with an acute back sprain, and I was able to heal her with acupuncture when I rushed there!" This personal experience further motivated Bian. After completing his undergraduate degree, he spent another three years in Beijing to pursue a master's degree. He then went to the Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine for another three-year doctoral course.

In 2001, Bian came to Hong Kong under the government's Quality Migrant Admission Scheme and joined HKBU. At that time, reunification had recently taken place, and the discussion about the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong was heated. A formal Chinese medicine programme was established at HKBU in 1998, and after Bian joined, he became the founding director of the Clinical Department of the School of Chinese Medicine. HKBU has been at the forefront of the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong, and Bian admits that this has been made possible by a key figure who is a passionate supporter of Chinese medicine. "President Daniel Tse, a physicist and the first chairman of the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong, was determined to develop Chinese medicine during his 30-year tenure."

The SARS Epidemic: A Turning Point in the Development of Chinese Medicine in Hong Kong

With risk often comes opportunity. One such opportunity for the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong came in the form of the SARS epidemic in 2003. "We actively demonstrated the efficacy of Chinese medicine to the public and popularised its applications in the treatment and prevention of SARS, as well as in the treatment of its sequelae, such as avascular necrosis."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bian and his team once again drew on the strengths of Chinese medicine. "COVID-19 took an even greater toll on Hong Kong's healthcare system. The situation was particularly serious during the fifth wave, when the number of infections spiked. The public health system was overwhelmed with a large number of patients, and many more were quarantined at home. At that time, various institutions in the Chinese medicine community, including HKBU, immediately stepped forward to provide support. We quickly set up a Chinese medicine team to fight the pandemic, coordinated by the vice-chancellors of the universities. I was the leader of this team, which included practitioners, pharmacists and receptionists. We were also the first medical unit to use telemedicine to help patients in quarantine, providing free treatment and Chinese medicine delivery services."

Later, Chinese medicine practitioners from HKBU also participated in providing medical services at the Kai Tak Community Isolation Facility, which lasted 57 days.

"During these days, not only did we help patients with Chinese medicine, but we also had the opportunity to work with medical personnel from other healthcare system. It was the first time that seven teams, all from different backgrounds, came together to serve patients in one place."

Severe COVID-19 Threat Brought Chinese Medicine Closer to the Public

Bian believes that statistical data from clinical practice is key to justifying the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong.

"Firstly, we compared patients who received Chinese medicine treatment with those who didn't. We found that Chinese medicine significantly reduced their clinical symptoms. Then we found that after taking Chinese medicine, patients took significantly less time to get a negative result on a rapid antigen test. We've also looked at the effectiveness of Chinese medicine in preventing COVID infections. We have done two studies - the first to see if a daily dose of Chinese medicine can prevent infection in healthcare workers in quarantine facilities; the second was a large community study to see if a daily dose is also effective in preventing infection in close contacts, those who have infected family members."

While the fifth wave of COVID-19 helped to boost the public's confidence in Chinese medicine as a viable option, Bian believes that people remain underinformed about the safety of taking proprietary Chinese medicines, which may lead to misuse. As a result, he advocates for more effort and care toward the education and promotion of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong, especially as over-the-counter proprietary Chinese medicines are easily available on the market.



The New Chinese Medicine Hospital: A Culmination of Heritage and Modern Developments

The Chinese Medicine Hospital (CMH) is scheduled to officially open in 2025. "The CMH will take the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong to the next level, from outpatient to inpatient. It will also serve education and research functions. We hope the CMH will raise the standard of medical teaching and scientific research of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong, serve the local community and bridge the existing gap between Chinese and Western medicine – bringing the two disciplines together," said Bian.

Among the planned 400 beds at Hong Kong's first modern Chinese medicine hospital, 20 of them will be dedicated to research purpose, making it the fourth hospital in Hong Kong to have a research ward. "The concept of setting up a research ward is to demonstrate – through clinical practice as well as rigorous scientific research – the efficacy of Chinese medicine, not just within the Chinese community, but also on a global scale."

"The future development of the Chinese medicine profession in Hong Kong hinges upon the nurturing of a new generation of practitioners, so I look forward to witnessing their accelerated growth," Bian said. "Our original intention as healers is to positively influence the next generation of healers through clinical and research practice. Today's students will be tomorrow's healers and educators."

Bian saw the potential and skills in the younger generation that made them ready to take on frontline healthcare roles. "Of the 16 practitioners in our medical team at the Kai Tak facility, only four are over 40. The other 12, all under 40, are our graduates. This fills me with pride."





Linking the Past and the Future

"The formula for Da Cheng Qi Tang (Major Purgative Decoction) comes from a classic of Chinese medicine: *Shanghan Lun (The Treatise on Cold Pathogenic Diseases)*. The Purgative Decoction has a major and a minor variant, and though there's nothing extraordinary about the formula, its effectiveness and efficacy are widely recognised. It's my ambition to be something similar: although I'm an insignificant member of the Chinese medicine profession in Hong Kong, I'm actively working towards a shared goal with my colleagues with the support of the university framework. I want to fulfil the function of the Major Purgative Decoction – to be the link between the past and the future."



Perfect Timing, Geographical Advantage and Human Harmony: Ushering in A New Chapter of Chinese Medicine in Hong Kong

Mencius said, “Opportunities of time vouchsafed by Heaven are not equal to advantages of situation afforded by the Earth, and advantages of situation afforded by the Earth are not equal to the union arising from the accord of Men.” (Translated by James Legge)

Through two centuries of social change and upheaval, toil and hard work, a group of steadfast individuals have always been there for Hong Kong: Chinese medicine practitioners. Not only have they taken on the responsibility of protecting the lives and health of the people, but they have also helped to pass on an important cultural heritage. As guardians and torchbearers of tradition, the Chinese medicine profession has persevered through trials and tribulations, passing on the culture and knowledge of Chinese medicine from generation to generation, keeping the torch burning brightly. The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020 has exposed the limitations of healthcare systems around the world and given us much to reflect on the nature of preventive medicine. In this context, Chinese medicine, with its philosophy of “treating diseases before they occur”, will certainly have immense room for development.

The four editors of this book, all registered Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong, are united by a shared passion for Chinese medicine and a belief in serving the community with our profession. We were honoured to have participated in and witnessed key moments in the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. Despite coming from different backgrounds and hometowns, we were all inspired by the unique Lingnan culture of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong; we worked hard and enjoyed the fruits of our work at our different roles and clinical and educational settings relating to Chinese medicine. Chinese medicine advocates “treating diseases before they occur”, and the more clinical work we did, the more we came to realise the importance of disease prevention. Seeing sparks of life snuffed out by late-stage illnesses, we cannot help but feel that the valuable experience left to us by our ancestors needs to be promoted, protected and passed on. The natural climate of Lingnan is humid and warm, as such Cantonese people are prone to qi deficiency and dampness. Their bodies are particularly sensitive to changes in the natural environment, such that they often feel out of sorts without falling critically ill. The strength of Chinese medicine is to regulate the human body through an integrated approach and to prevent and dispel diseases by tonifying the qi, blood, yin and yang. Ordinary Cantonese households are used to using herbal soups to promote the health of family members; this is why the Lingnan region provides fertile soil to the development of Chinese medicine and pharmacology.

Since a regulatory system for Chinese medicine in Hong Kong became effective in 1999, the standards of medical treatment, teaching and research in Chinese medicine have continued to rise; so has public confidence in Chinese medicine. There have been on-going attempts of collaboration and exchange between Chinese and Western medicine, as well much in Chinese medicine that we can continue to drill into, uplift, pass on and expand upon: the four methods of diagnosis (inspection, listening, inquiring and palpation), historically effective prescriptions and formulas, medicinal diets, methods of health preservation in our daily life, to name but a few. At present, there are 8,292 registered Chinese medicine practitioners in Hong Kong and 2,429 listed Chinese medicine practitioners. We have a wide range of talents, from young and old, most of whom are active at the frontline of primary healthcare while some have access to quality research facilities in universities. Together we form a strong force, driving forward the development of Chinese medicine. Through the compilation of this book, we hope to record this valuable history with real stories, so that Chinese medicine as a culture will gain attention and endorsement, and reach more or even torchbearers.

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We have taken a small step today; we look forward to sharing more stories of Chinese medicine in the future and spreading the fragrance of Chinese culture around the world.

