Hong Kong
Chinese Medicine Cultural
Scenes and Stories

# The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring 2

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The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring 2:
Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Scenes and Stories

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# FOREWORD

1

## The Pride of Our Nation: Hong Kong Demonstrates Exceptional Strength, Commitment, and Influence

In early 2023, I had the honour of writing, per invitation by the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association, the foreword for *The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring - Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage*. I later learnt that the volume was well received by the Chinese medicine industry and academic community, as well as by relevant government departments. It even won a Publishing Award in the "Lifestyle and Popular Science" category at the Hong Kong Publishing Biennial Awards.

Over the past three years, Hong Kong has lived up to the expectations of our nation and our people. We have continued to strive for the preservation and innovation of Chinese medicine, applying our unique strengths toward notable accomplishments. These include the completion and inauguration of the Chinese Medicine Hospital of Hong Kong and the Chinese Medicines Testing Institute. Meanwhile, TCM All-sector's Shou Chuang Chinese Medicine Trade Platform, launching on 9 April this year, strives to create a definitive market for transparent and fair trading of authentic medicines. These efforts have all contributed to telling good stories of Hong Kong, and of the practice and use of Chinese medicine.

Over the past three years, the GX Foundation – founded upon the principles of "sharing" and "people-to-people connectivity" set out in the Belt and Road Initiative – has formally included Chinese medicine as one of its eight key service categories. The Foundation has engaged in exchanges with Chinese medicine communities worldwide and partnered with two major Hong Kong film studios to produce an English-language documentary on Chinese Medicine, doubling down on efforts to promote Chinese medicine globally. The film's production is nearing completion and is set to be screened worldwide.

Over the past three years, Hong Kong has made an impressive showing of its strengths through unwavering diligence, responsibility and perseverance.

All that I have laid out to this point are grand narratives and major initiatives. This book, *The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring 2: Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Scenes and Stories*, takes a more accessible approach, exploring Chinese medicine landmarks, products and health therapies unique to Hong Kong through the prism of everyday life.

Professor Feng Jiu is of the belief that "Chinese medicine is life itself" – and she has my unequivocal agreement. The vitality of Chinese medicine lies in being part of everyday living, integrated into communities and families. In recent years, there has been a marked increase in Hongkongers' enthusiasm for growing potted plants. I would recommend everyone to try growing some simple Chinese medicinal herbs on their windowsills; I myself have quite a few fishwort at home. In short, to promote the knowledge and confidence in Chinese medicine across global communities, a multi-layered approach would be advisable, progressing from basics to the more advanced.

As I write these lines, I am delighted to learn that the Kwong Fuk Ancestral Hall, also known as Kwong Fook I-tsz, which features in this book's 'From the Winds' section, has been officially gazetted as a declared monument by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

I wholeheartedly recommend this book to you all.

Leung Chun-ying
Vice-Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
May 2026

# FOREWORD

2

## Chinese Medicine as a Way of Life: A Chronicle of Stories and of the Fragrances of Heritage

The culture of Chinese medicine stands as a vital treasure of Chinese civilisation and an essential element of Hong Kong society. In 2023, we published *The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring: Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Conservation and Heritage*. We were fortunate to receive recognition and support from the industry, academia, and all sectors of society, and were honoured to receive the Publishing Award in the Lifestyle and Popular Science category at the 5th Hong Kong Publishing Biennial Awards. This accolade not only affirmed our team's efforts but also provided powerful motivation to continue delving into Hong Kong's Chinese medicine stories.

With the support of the Chinese Medicine Development Fund, we have commenced work on the publication of *The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring 2: Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Scenes and Stories*. Structured around two main sections "From the Winds" and "Into the Wellspring", this volume documents Hong Kong's diverse Chinese medicine landscape while detailing the stories of century-old, locally rooted Chinese medicine establishments. The experiences of these pioneers form the bedrock of Hong Kong's developments in Chinese medicine, serving as both a model and beacon for future generations.

The "From the Winds" section is akin to strolling through Hong Kong's streets and alleyways, capturing glimpses of Chinese medicine culture in daily life. Here, one sees how Chinese medicine has long been interwoven into the community fabric – not as esoteric scholarship, but as everyday wisdom. The "Into the Wellspring" section focuses on Hong Kong's time-honoured brands, which are more than commercial entities; they are symbolic of the city's evolution and resilient vitality.

We believe in "Chinese medicine is life itself". The wisdom of Chinese medicine permeates daily sustenance, routines, and seasonal wellness practices. This cultural heritage transcends medical knowledge; it embodies a way of life, a philosophy of harmonious coexistence with nature. Thus, under the name "The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring", we established a charitable, non-profit organisation dedicated to disseminating Chinese medicine culture. Our aim is to promote comprehensive understanding of this heritage within our society.

Through *The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring 2: Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Scenes and Stories*, we cordially invite you to step into Hong Kong's Chinese medicine realm, hear its compelling stories, and apply its wisdoms in daily life. Let us keep this Chinese cultural heritage alive and thriving, and disseminate it globally. We welcome your interest in the work of Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring Culture, and we look forward to sharing more Chinese medicine stories with you!

*The Fragrant Tangerine & Wellspring 2: Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Scenes and Stories*.
Professor Feng Jiu, Editor-in-chief
May 2026

# 1 FROM THE WINDS

## Hong Kong's Distinctive Chinese Medicine Landscape

### 1.1

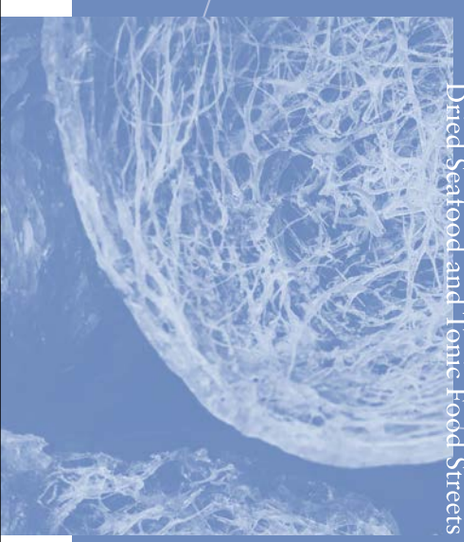
Chinese Medicine Hospitals
Bridging Tradition and Innovation



From the Rustic Charity Hall
To the Modern Chinese Medicine Hospital

### 1.2

The Sheung Wan Landmark of
Dried Seafood and Tonic Food Streets



From Independent Chinese Medicine Individual Enterprises
To the Full Industry Chain

### 1.3

Herbal Culture and Local Sourcing



From Fresh Wild Herbs
To Precious Specimens in the University Herbarium

### 1.4

Local Farmed Therapeutic Cuisine



From Seasonal Farm-to-Table Ingredients
To Nourishing Medicinal Dishes

### 1.5

Wellness from Movement and Stillness



From Martial Arts Training
To Restful Respite

# 1.1

## 1.1.1

## From Kwong Fook I-tsz to Tung Wah Hospital: The Dawn of In-patient Chinese Medicine Services in Hong Kong

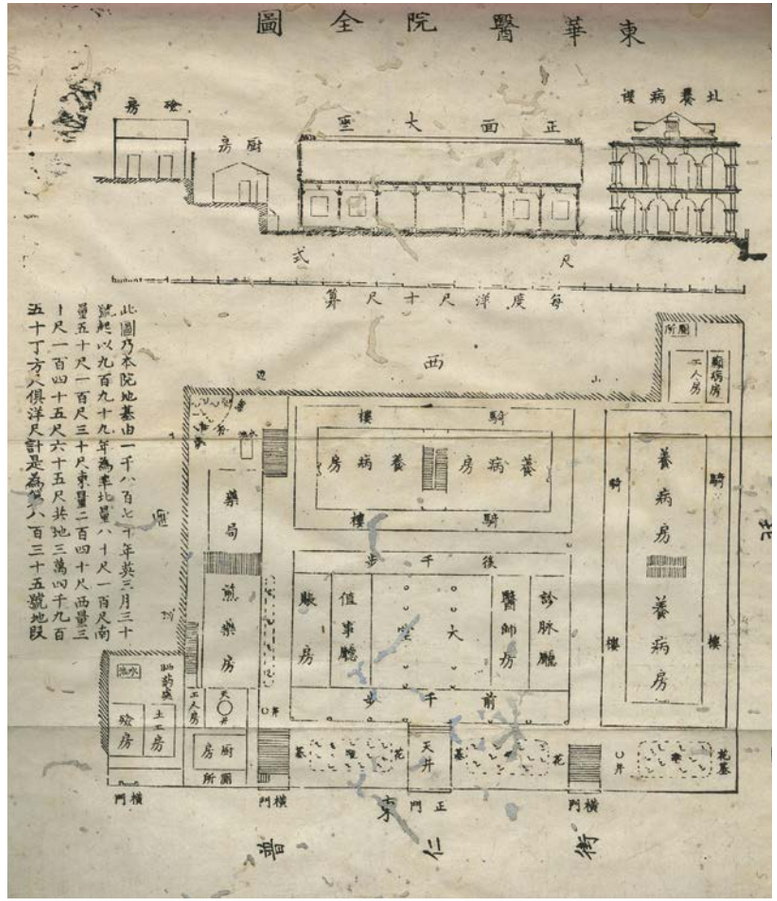


In the early days of Hong Kong's settlement, the Chinese community resided in the Tai Ping Shan Street area. They lived in poverty with poor sanitation and faced a severe shortage of medical resources. At that time, many destitute and ailing Chinese could only gather at Kwong Fook I-tsz, a shrine dedicated to ancestral deities. As it housed the sick, the environment was overcrowded and unsanitary, lacking basic medical care. Patients often lingered there in a state of prolonged suffering, and many passed away in solitude.

This dire situation drew the attention of Chinese community leaders and the colonial government, becoming the driving force for establishing a hospital for the Chinese. With the support of then-Governor Sir Richard Graves






MacDonnell, aided by fundraising efforts amidst the Chinese community, Tung Wah Hospital was formally inaugurated in 1872. It provided Chinese medicine out-patient and in-patient services to the public, marking the inception of Chinese medicine inpatient care in Hong Kong.

### Operations of Inpatient Services in the Inception Years

According to records in the *Annual Report of Tung Wah Hospital of 1873*, the hospital initially offered Chinese medicine diagnosis and treatment for impoverished and destitute Chinese patients. It featured wards where admission was granted only to critically ill patients following physician assessment; those with minor ailments were treated at the free clinic. The hospital maintained two tiers of accommodation: "upper rooms" and "lower rooms", differentiated by standards and fees. Upper rooms charged one mace and eight candareens per day, while lower rooms cost seven candareen and two cash. The impoverished and infirm were exempt from fees entirely, demonstrating that early in-patient services already exhibited rudimentary forms of tiered care.

The regulations detailed patient admission procedures, physicians' diagnostic responsibilities, medicinal

preparation protocols, and ward routines, reflecting a standardised operational management. Although the original *Annual Report* did not explicitly list physician numbers, regulations mentioned daily physician shift rotations, with patients assigned to specific physicians via lottery. There was also daily cross-checking of prescriptions to ensure efficacy. Additionally, clerks and labourers assisted with decoction preparation and patient care, indicating a rigorously structured system for traditional Chinese medicine in-patient care and diagnosis, supported by a division of labour among physicians.





## Quantification of Physician Resources and Services

Later documentation, for example from the September 1931 issue of the *Tung Wah Monthly*, provided more concrete figures. It clearly demonstrated the expansion of Tung Wah's medical services



in the decades that followed, offering a glimpse into its early foundations of development. Statistical tables in the monthly indicated Tung Wah Hospital then employed eight Chinese medicine practitioners, three Western physicians, and one female Western physician. The accompanying staff list confirmed Chinese medicine as an integral part of the hospital system, with practitioners outnumbering Western physicians by two to one. By the first half of 1931, the volume of patients passing through Chinese medicine out-patient services had become substantial. Statistics on "free medical treatment and medicines" recorded 23,464 free consultations by Chinese medicine practitioners at Tung Wah Hospital's main campus, alongside 22,727 instances of Chinese medicine dispensed.

The transition from the rudimentary facilities at Kwong Fook I-tsz to the institutionalised in-patient services at Tung Wah Hospital demonstrated that even over a century ago, Hong Kong already had a Chinese medicine hospitalisation system in place. Although the number of practitioners was limited at the time, a rigorous duty roster and patient allocation system ensured orderly medical care. The increasing number of patients admitted annually underscores the growing importance of Chinese medicine in-patient services within the Hong Kong society. Tung Wah Hospital serves not merely as a medical institution but as a cornerstone of charitable and social services, laying the foundation for the provision of Chinese medicine services in Hong Kong.



# 1.1



## 1.1.2

## A New Milestone in Contemporary Chinese Medicine Services: A Dialogue with the Architect and the Torchbearer of the Chinese Medicine Hospital

In the concluding chapter of volume one of *The Fragrant Tangerine and & Wellspring*, Professor Bian Zhaoxiang highlighted the shared dream of Hong Kong's Chinese medicine industry, academia, the general public to establish their own Chinese medicine hospital. Today, Hong Kong's first Chinese medicine hospital is no longer a plan on paper, but a fully operational institution, inaugurated in December 2025. The story of how the institution came to be cannot be told without having Bian, as the Hospital Chief Executive of the Chinese Medicine Hospital of Hong Kong, and Professor Feng Jiu, permanent president of the Hong Kong Registered Chinese Medicine Practitioners Association and quiet






proponent of the industry's advancement, recount the compelling narrative of their campaign.

## From Paper Plans to Operational Reality

Reflecting on the preparatory phase, Bian emphasises that this achievement represents the collective endeavour of multiple generations to garner considerable support from the city's government, the industry, the academia, and – most importantly – our nation. The greatest joy, he confesses, is witnessing Hong Kong finally having its first Chinese medicine hospital. The profound emotion he felt rendered words inadequate, making every hardship worthwhile. He reveals that the team drafted over 460 internal policies and operational procedures, covering every aspect from in-patient wards, out-patient clinics, to day services and much more. He quips that this was born from much "armchair strategising", and the true test would rest with real life implementation.

As a believer in "learning through practice", Bian understands that actual operations can best teach them which designs are viable and which requires



adjustment, ultimately transforming on-paper policies into functional operational systems. On the hospital's opening day, Bian personally attended consultations. He learned many patients had travelled considerable distances from places like Tin Shui Wai and Sha Tau Kok, drawn both by novelty and confidence in the hospital's high standards and standardised practices. Witnessing genuine trust and expectation in the patients' eyes, Bian felt the weight of responsibility to lead the hospital team forward and lay new milestones.







## A Two-decade Dream Realised

Professor Feng Jiu, who has long championed the development of Chinese medicine, described the opening as "a dream came true". Amongst all the recommendations she submitted to the government in the past two decades on behalf of the sector, she highlights this 2011 proposal that focuses squarely on the founding of a Chinese medicine hospital. Feng is especially chagrined at the government's discriminatory resource allocation and policy support between Chinese and Western medicine during the early post-unification years, despite having a regulatory framework for Chinese medicine in place. This has been the driving force behind her active advocacy.

A turning point came in 2012 when Mr. Leung Chun-ying assumed the role of the Chief Executive, after which the government significantly increased its

attention and support for the Chinese medicine sector. In 2013, the authorities established the Chinese Medicine Development Committee, appointing Feng as a committee member and the Chair of the Chinese Medicine Practice Subcommittee, which led to more positive responses to the sector's demands. In the 2014 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced the reservation of land in Tseung Kwan O for a Chinese medicine hospital, bringing the aspiration closer to fruition. Progress was hard-won at every stage: from the initial requirement for the hospital to be self-financing, to the government's subsequent provision of funds for its construction, and finally to the formal establishment of the Chinese Medicine Hospital Project Office in 2018.

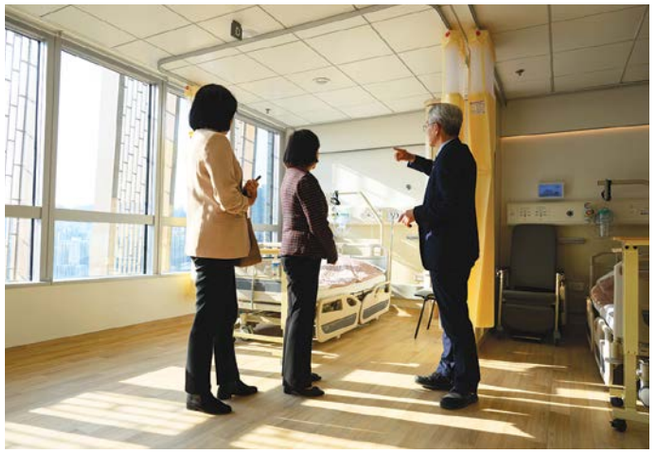
## Filling a Gap in the Public Healthcare System

With the dream of having a physical establishment realised, the real challenge now begins for the Chinese Medicine Hospital. Regarding the performance of the hospital in its first month since inauguration, Feng, acknowledging how many details still require refinement at this early stage, gives it a solid score of 80-plus with an expectation for continuous service improvement. Bian's focus rests more with the paradigm shift the hospital represents, and the pivotal role it would play in strengthening development in clinical services, education, and research.

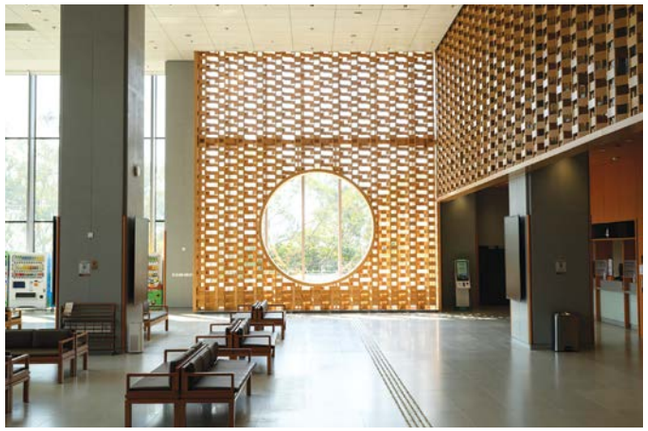
Bian emphasises that the hospital's significance extends beyond it being Hong Kong's "first of its kind". Crucially, it signifies the public healthcare system's formal recognition of Chinese medicine. He traces the development of Chinese medicine since the reunification: registration of practitioners marked the first step towards professional recognition; followed by piloting of the tripartite collaboration model in the 18 districts across the territory; and finally the establishment of the Chinese Medicine Hospital, signifying the formal integration of Chinese medicine into the public system and the fulfilment of an important gap in Hong Kong's healthcare landscape.

Bian finishes off by remarking how the Chinese Medicine Hospital's comprehensive clinical services across outpatient care, day wards, to in-patient facilities, provide more suitable services for patients who require continuous, intensive treatment. The hospital also provides a vital platform for collaboration between Chinese and Western medicines. He explains that previously, patients would consult Chinese practitioners

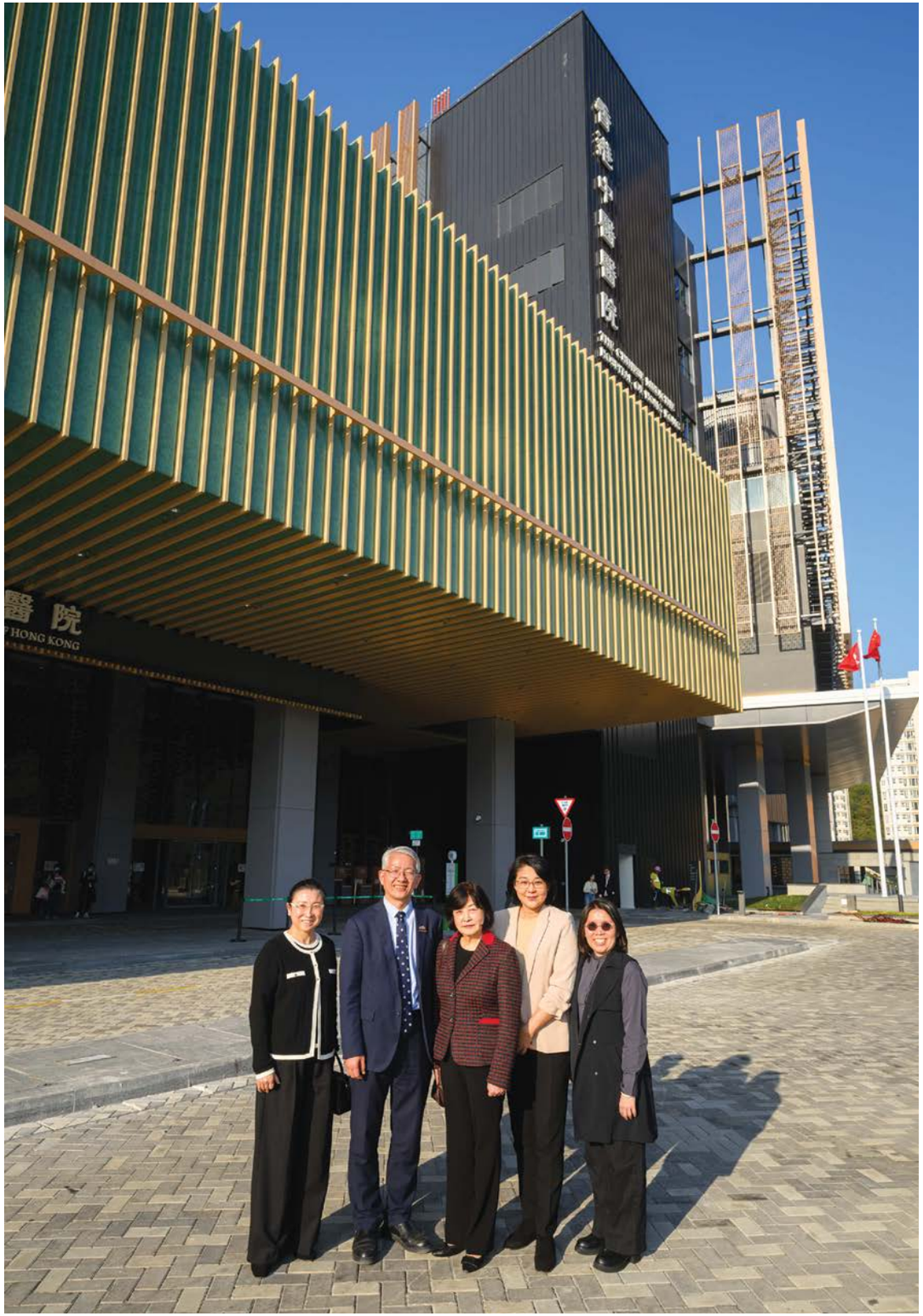












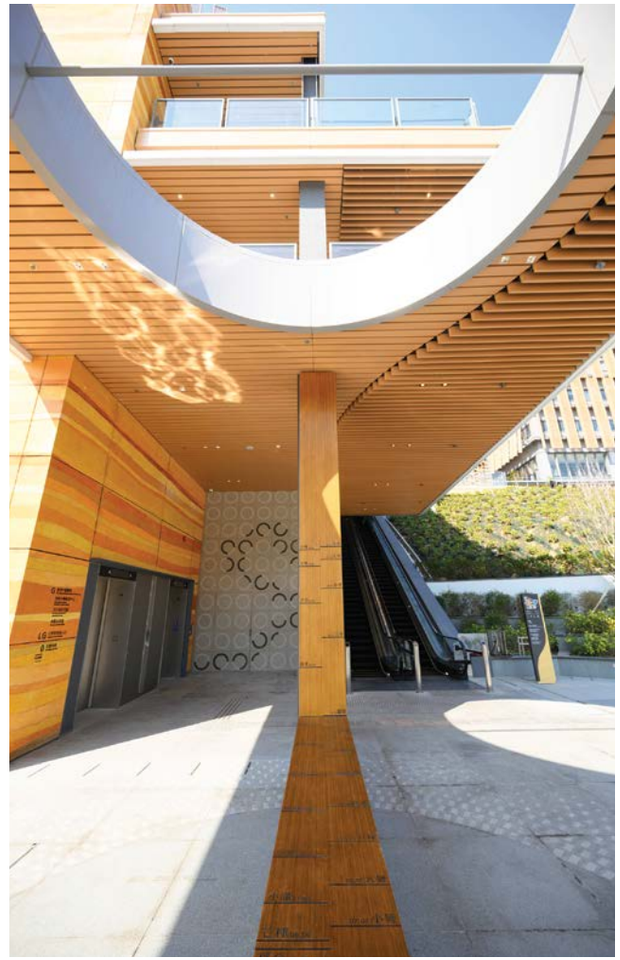

and Western physicians separately, with neither knowing the other's treatment plan. Within the hospital, through models such as Chinese medicine-led care and integrated Chinese-Western medicine collaboration, comprehensive treatment plans prioritising both safety and efficacy are formulated – a significant advancement in both healthcare policy and practice.

## Cultural Dissemination and Daily Practice

Discussing the hospital's design, Bian highlights its rich cultural dissemination philosophy, likening it to a museum. For instance, the lobby embodies the "River Civilisation" motif, narrating how Chinese medicine is rooted in China's 5,000-year historical heritage. He hopes that through the patient experience, Chinese medicine culture can be subtly disseminated, gradually realising the grand vision of "Chinese medicine for all". His aspiration is for every member of the public to receive Chinese medical care and integrate its wisdom into their daily lives.

Feng shares much of Bian's vision. She is now actively pursuing the preservation and promotion of Chinese medicine culture, and is exploring initiatives including "Chinese medicine immersion tours" and campus activities tailored to different age groups. "Chinese medicine is life; its culture permeates every aspect of our daily existence," Feng affirms. She believes popularising Chinese medicine knowledge is vital for societal literacy, and that efforts in this area will help to advance public health and lower healthcare expenses.

The Chinese Medicine Hospital of Hong Kong embodies the dreams and efforts of multiple generations. It stands not only as a landmark for integrating Chinese medicine into the public healthcare system; it is a platform for collaborative innovation between Chinese and Western medicine, a bridge connecting Chinese medical culture to the fabric of daily living. From on-paper planning to now serving the public, this hospital has established an important milestone, ushering in a new era for Chinese medicine. It will play an important role in popularising and enabling Chinese medical culture to permeate through all aspects of society, steadily advancing towards the "Chinese medicine for all" vision of healthcare. ■



# 1.2

## 1.2.1

## The Three Treasures of Vietnam: Witnessing the Blooming and Transformation of Hong Kong's Chinese Medicine Industry

Bird's nest clears and nourishes. Agarwood calms the spirit. Cinnamon warms and tonifies. These precious gifts from nature have long been regarded as supreme tonics, embodying Chinese medicine's philosophy of "medicine and food are one and the same". Hui Sang, a Chinese medicine industry veteran, shares the distinguishing characteristics and market dynamics of these "Vietnamese Treasures", reflecting the evolving landscape and commercial pulse of Hong Kong's Chinese medicine trade.

### Bird's Nest, Agarwood, Cinnamon

Hui is a respected veteran of Hong Kong's Chinese medicine sector and Permanent President of the Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Merchants Association. Since the 1980s, drawing on his Vietnamese-Chinese heritage, he has carved a niche by sourcing first-hand, premium-grade bird's nest, agarwood and cinnamon – collectively honoured as the "Three Treasures of Vietnam". And he speaks with the authority of a connoisseur on all things related to bird's nest. The nests from Hoi An, Nha Trang, and Quy Nhon each possess distinct characteristics: Nha Trang nests exhibit a whiter hue, Quy Nhon nests display a purplish tinge around the edges, while Hoi An nests present a greyish-white colour. True connoisseurs judge not only by colour, but also by texture, expansion rate (how much it swells when soaked), and aroma.









The value of agarwood lies in its oil content and aromatic essence. Vietnamese agarwood, prized for its dense texture and potent fragrance, is regarded as a treasure by Middle Eastern royalty. Hui emphasises that the key indicator of authenticity is whether the agarwood "sinks in water". While Hong Kong once had ample supplies, overharvesting has made natural agarwood increasingly scarce. Cinnamon, meanwhile, is considered supreme when sourced as "Annam cinnamon" from Hoi An, prized for its substantial thickness and potent fragrance. Hui quipped that, as a Chinese adage goes, "People need face, trees need bark" – cinnamon bark must not be stripped in its entirety, lest the tree perish. Thus, during each harvest, only one side is taken, leaving the other to sustain growth.

### The Turning Point in the Chinese Medicine Trade

Hui recalls that when he first entered the trade, Hoi An bird's nests cost over two thousand dollars per catty. Today, prices have soared to sixty thousand dollars. Annual production of wild bird's nests has also plummeted from five or six hundred kilograms to a mere fifty kilograms. The fate of agarwood is equally precarious, as it is now listed as an endangered species. Such scarcity is a testament to the dwindling natural resources. In the past, Hong Kong's Chinese medicine

merchants, with their networks and keen eye, controlled substantial supplies of rare medicinal materials. Container loads flowed through Hong Kong as an entrepôt, fuelling a thriving market where wealthy merchants routinely purchased over a million dollars' worth of bird's nest for personal use or gifts – a practice now rarely seen.

Hong Kong's status as a free port once established it as an indispensable transshipment hub between Southeast Asia, Europe, America, and the Chinese mainland. However, with China's reform and opening-up, ports like Guangzhou and Shenzhen gained direct access to international markets. Hui is candid about how the challenges facing the Chinese medicine wholesale trade reveals the fading influence of Hong Kong's entrepôt role. Yet, this shift in the old model has also catalysed new opportunities. Hui's passing the baton to his daughter, Jennifer Hui So-fong, represents not only the succession of a family enterprise but also an industrial upgrade and breakthrough.












## The Heritage and Innovation in Integrating Healthcare with Chinese Medicine

Having grown up immersed in Chinese medicine, Jennifer harbours a deep affection for it. Beyond inheriting her father's expertise in Chinese medicines, she has explored new possibilities for Chinese medicine within the modern healthcare landscape. After earning a doctorate in Chinese medicine, she has pursued a career in clinical practice. She observes that modern individuals often seek healthcare not solely for illness but increasingly for wellness and nourishment. At her clinic, she trials wellness concepts linked to the philosophy of "medicine and food are one and the same", through introducing more palatable products like soup ingredient packets and medicinal paste formulations. This approach transforms traditional Chinese medicine from bitter decoctions into a part of daily life.

In forging a new path of "medicine-healthcare integration", Jennifer has brought her father's wealth of premium Chinese medicine resources into her own clinical diagnostic expertise. On one hand, she can directly recommend and supply patients with reliably sourced, premium-quality medicines, particularly for specific needs like postnatal recovery and gynaecological wellness. On the other hand, she actively promotes the modern application of "medicine and food are one and the same", developing bespoke medicinal pastes and convenient soup ingredient packets to help Chinese medicine integrate into contemporary lifestyles.

From bustling transshipment trade to specialised medical services, the story of the Hui family is a microcosm of decades of development of Hong Kong's Chinese medicine sector. This generational evolution demonstrates the power of both heritage and innovation. When savouring a bowl of bird's nest, a wisp of agarwood, or a hint of cinnamon, we are not merely indulging in delicacies, but perpetuating cultural memory and wellness wisdom. ■



# 1.2



## 1.2.2

## Medicines and Medicinal Foods Converge on Dried Seafood Street: Generational Transition of Old and New Models



The mingled scents of medicinal herbs and the briny aroma of preserved seafood permeate the streets around Des Voeux Road West in Sheung Wan. Crates upon crates of abalone, shark's fin, bird's nest, ginseng, sea cucumber and other tonics are moved in and out around the day, cementing the area's status as Hong Kong's hub for Chinese medicines and dried seafood. Yet, as times change, this traditional trade faces mounting challenges, awaiting a new generation to breathe innovative vitality into these time-honoured establishments.

Ms. Lam Pui-ting, the young helmswoman of Chi Shing Hong, grew up accompanying her father, Lam Kam-ping, as he shuttled through the city's streets and alleyways. She witnessed as he built a wholesale business starting with a single box of bird's nest, bridging suppliers with herbal retailers. She recalls, "Back then, we didn't have a shopfront. We





went door-to-door, covering every inch of Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories." From a young age, she sensed the rustic hardship and integrity of their endeavour. With their hard work, the two stood witness to industry's rise into its golden age.

### Genuine Goods, Honest Dealings

When Lam first took the helm of the family business, she enjoyed a honeymoon period. Hong Kong still held its position as an entrepôt hub, attracting a flood of buyers from the Chinese mainland. Yet the industry hit consecutive roadblocks, including global economic downturns and the COVID pandemic. Compounded by shifting consumer habits, with people increasingly favouring online shopping for





convenience, traditional wholesale models struggled. Lam observed older customers dwindling, while the younger generation lacked knowledge about dried seafood and Chinese medicines and had little time for soaking and preparation. Traditional shops must embrace modern technology to endure.

With the spirit of a fearless newcomer, Lam met these challenges head-on. She upheld her father's principle of genuine quality and honesty in all dealings, refusing to compromise on standards even with the market downturn and a lull in profits. She continued to rigorously select authentic, premium products. She believed consumers would ultimately return to trustworthy establishments that prioritise quality control. She saw Chinese medicines as more than just commodities





but vessels of culture, an embodiment of the "medicine and food are one and the same" philosophy.

## The Shop's Prized Treasure: Sea Coconut from Africa

Amidst adversity, Lam actively developed new products such as wild American ginseng, cordyceps, deer products, seahorses, and sea dragons to attract new customers. She meticulously observed market trends to uncover genuine consumer needs. During the COVID pandemic, for instance, customers shifted their attention to respiratory health and lung care. Lam took this opportunity to introduce the rare African sea coconut. This seed, the largest in the world, is scarce and protected by African governments, making it exceptionally valuable. Its mildly sweet and cool nature clears heat and moistens the lungs, offering relief for persistent coughs, excessive phlegm, and even long-COVID symptoms.

Lam showcases the shop's prized possession – a substantial sea coconut specimen, exported to Hong Kong only with the permission of the African government. The market is flooded with counterfeits – including fresh specimens from Southeast Asia characterised by their smooth flesh – yet their efficacy pales in comparison to the genuine article. Authentic African sea coconut possesses a wood-like hardness. She insists on personally inspecting sources to guarantee quality, and supplying them to the market at a fair price. This principle of "'the genuine article" is inherited from her grandfather's business philosophy.

## Convenient Choices that Suit Urban Lifestyles

Lam actively seeks innovation by developing products tailored to contemporary lifestyles, such as herbal tea bags and ready-to-cook soup ingredient packets. These innovative products fit modern consumers' needs and enable busy urbanites to easily harness the benefits of Chinese medicine. On sales strategy, she shifts her focus to promoting more via social media platforms, where she can interact with customers and share about product knowledge and wellness culture. She believes educating consumers is more important than pushing one-off sales, as genuine trust and repeat purchases come from understanding a product's efficacy.

Through live-streamed promotions, Lam engages in real-time dialogue with customers, transforming dried seafood and Chinese medicines from mere commodities into cultural elements intertwined with daily life. From its traditional dried seafood shop model to navigating the global supply chain and digital marketing challenges, Chi Shing Hong epitomises the fusion of old and new, showcasing the confidence of traditional businesses in the future: "Wherever there are Chinese people, there will be a market for dried seafood and Chinese medicines." ■



# 1.2

The Sheung Wan Landmark of Dried Seafood and Tonic Food Streets

From Independent Chinese Medicine Individual Enterprises to the Full Industry Chain

## 1.2.3

## Quality Control and Market Development: Innovation Across the Chinese Medicine Industry Chain

Since Hong Kong's founding as a port, Chinese medicine has remained an integral part of its cultural fabric. The Dried Seafood and Tonic Food Streets of Sheung Wan, once the Triangular Pier, has evolved into an iconic landmark for the industry. Yet, facing various challenges including increasingly stringent food and pharmaceutical regulations, inconsistent quality standards for medicines, and high testing costs, the sector is now under unprecedented pressure forcing many long-established shops to the brink of survival. The TCM All-sector Hong Kong Centre is founded against this background – to tackle the lack of Chinese medicine testing certification and a unified national market, to respond to fierce competition from western medicine and international pharmaceutical giants, and to ride the favourable tailwinds of national policy and Hong Kong's unique advantages. It is dedicated to advancing the legacy, innovation, and development of the Chinese medicine industry and to consolidating its global influence.

### The Challenge to Modernise Traditional Industries

Dr. Lee Hon-hoey Simon, Director of the TCM All-sector Hong Kong Centre, pinpoints three major pain points in the Chinese medicine sector: lack of information transparency, inconsistent quality, and a branding gap. Importers must invest heavily in testing Chinese medicines to comply with Chinese medicine regulations, driving costs high. The unreliable quality and absence of transparent market mechanisms also lead





to price fluctuations, making building internationally recognised brands difficult. He offers a vivid comparison: "British tea brand Lipton generates billions in brand value. Chinese medicines, by contrast, lack such brand influence.'

Dr. Lee said the core purpose of developing a full Chinese medicine industry chain is to foster a healthy market environment where the flow of information is authentic, transparent, and real-time, where one can progressively resolve quality and branding issues. By leveraging Hong Kong's strengths in tandem with full industry chain integration and technological innovation, the city can forge a new paradigm for Chinese medicine development.

### Forging a New Paradigm for the Chinese Medicine Industry

Chinese medicinal herbs are not farmed in Hong Kong. However, the city has already established a robust foundation in trading, testing, and certification. The Hong Kong Standards and Testing Centre (STC), an internationally recognised certification body founded over 60 years ago, provides reliable quality assurance for Chinese medicines. As an international



trade hub with a global reach, Hong Kong is home to over 10,000 trading firms, making the city an ideal platform for exporting Chinese medicines. Hong Kong's cultural inclusivity also facilitates the promotion of Chinese medicine on the global stage.

The innovative trading platform, meanwhile, represents another significant breakthrough. Unlike traditional physical markets for Chinese medicines, TCM All-sector's Shou Chuang Chinese Medicine Trade Platform realises an online exchange via modern technology. Dr. Lee





emphasises the platform's neutrality, "We do not serve any single company, which helps us to earn market trust as a neutral facilitator." Currently, about 100 members recommended by local governments or political consultative committees have joined a pilot to trade via the platform. Initially, only a limited list of medicines is being trialled to gradually build trust; this list will be gradually expanded. This model reduces transaction costs, boosts transparency, and provides real-time information for the Chinese medicinal materials market.

## Technology-powered Industrial Transformation

Beyond market development, technology applications are vital to the modernisation of Chinese medicine. Dr. Lee, who is also Chief Strategy Officer of China Resources Group (Greater Bay Area) and Dean of China Resources Research Institute of Science and Technology, speaks of the numerous collaborative projects that China Resources has with Hong Kong Baptist University. These include application of artificial intelligence and big data to record and analyse Chinese medicine diagnostic cases and clinical medication patterns, to build a scientific case for compound Chinese medicines; as well as modernising Chinese medicine hospital operations via the use of smart systems that enhance dispensing efficiency and accuracy. In product innovation, the industry has seen a move from complex, traditional decoction methods to powdered or granular forms of ingestible Chinese medicine, which are not just more patient-friendly but can help to democratise Chinese medicine. This and other innovations testify to the scientific advancements in the field, while helping Chinese medicine better meet demands of a contemporary market.

Hong Kong's Chinese medicine sector stands at a critical juncture at its






transformation. Commenting on the many challenges lying ahead, Dr. Lee remarks, "Chinese medicine is a precious legacy handed to us from our ancestors. We should take responsibility not lose it in our generation." This sense of urgency is precisely the driving force behind the industry's reforms. Looking ahead, he has faith in the positive and productive development of Chinese medicine, but cautions against stagnation by tradition. The TCM All-sector Hong Kong Centre was established precisely to address these challenges – to offer support to industry players so that Chinese medicine will thrive not only locally but on the global stage.

In Hong Kong, a crossroads of Eastern and Western cultures, international testing standards, dense trade networks, cultural inclusivity, and policy support provide a uniquely fertile soil for advancing the modernisation of Chinese medicine. This positions Hong Kong as a potential bridgehead for Chinese medicine's global expansion, enabling the millennia-old wisdom of Chinese culture to continue to shine brightly in the contemporary world.

# 1.3

Herbal Culture and Local Sourcing

From Fresh Wild Herbs to Precious Specimens in the University Herbarium

## 1.3.1

## Fading Folk Wisdom: A World of Fresh Herbs in Shek Wu Hui

Around five in the morning, when the streetlamps are still on in Shek Wu Hui, Sheung Shui, Mr. and Mrs. Ko Siu-bo have already pushed open the metal gate to their vegetable stall, getting ready for work. The front of their stall is loaded with a variety of herbs: mugwort, abrus herb, Chinese fevervine, Chinese arborvitae leaves, Chinese lobelia, spreading hedyotis herb, fishwort, dragon-tongue leaves, Chinese wampi, St. John's wort and so on. This is not an ordinary greengrocer but one of Hong Kong's remaining fresh medicinal herb stalls. Inheriting the knowledge of herbs from the previous generation, the couple has already run the business for decades, serving the neighbourhood and witnessing the magical powers of fresh medicinal herbs found in Southern China.

### Herbal Scents in the Market

"The stall was founded by my father before the nation was liberated. Decades have passed in the blink of an eye," Mrs. Ko recalls while chopping some whole herbs on a board with a cleaver. At an unhurried pace, she has come all the way to today. She recounts that her father had acquired his knowledge of Chinese herbal medicine from the boss lady when he was working at her dispensary called Sei Si Ceon in Wanchai before he opened his own business. Inheriting her father's craft, Mrs. Ko has continued to learn while running the little stall in Shek Wu Hui Market with her husband for over half a century.

Thanks to its high humidity, the Southern China region is lush with vegetation and an abundant supply of fresh medicinal herbs. Mr. Ko explains his guiding principles while flipping through a yellowed illustrated guide to Chinese herbal medicine, "Work hard, practise to hone your skills, and read up on what you don't know. Your experience and knowledge will slowly build up." When asked how many kinds of herbs there are in the stall, Mr. Ko laughs, "We've added so many over the years that we've lost count. There must be over a hundred kinds!"

### Local Resources are Gifts from Nature

Mr. Ko insists on going up the hills himself to gather herbs. Herbs he uses most often, such as abrus herb, Chinese lobelia and Chinese wampi, come mostly from the hillsides and fields in the New Territories. "Some are grown by the grannies in the walled villages, and some are found on the hills." The arborvitae leaves in his hands are still wet with dew. "These were picked just this morning. These trees are not that tall, so they're fairly easy to harvest."

"Sourcing locally" is precisely the heart and core of the herbal culture in Southern China. Freshness of the herbs makes a huge difference to their effects. Mr. Ko points at a heap of mugwort and explains, "We use the fresh ones whenever possible. Mugwort dispels wind and cold, make delicious glutinous rice cakes and can be made into sticks for external use." He casually picks up some lemongrass, "This can be cooked as food or boiled in water for hair washing. It dispels dizziness, headaches and wind in the head." Fresh herbs not only have medicinal value, but







are also an integral part of everyday life in the culture of Southern China.

Pointing at some pomelo leaves, Mr. Ko says, “They are essential in weddings. Newly-weds feel renewed after using them to bathe and wash their faces. They can also be used to clean altars as they are auspicious!” Many other herbs have also found their way into daily food and healthcare. “Stink grass is cooked in mung bean sweet soup to clear heat and detoxify, and is effective against acne; dragon-tongue leaves and dried tangerine cakes make a soup to soothe the throat; Chinese wampi can be boiled in water or made into soup to dissolve phlegm. Fishwort is not only a soup ingredient but can also be eaten as it is crisp and tasty.”

## Folk Remedies: Humble Herbs Bring Great Effects

Mr. Ko stresses that he is not a Chinese medicine practitioner but merely someone who knows a bit about fresh herbs; yet, neighbours always seek his advice whenever they have tricky health problems. One of them was a man whose legs became completely dark from his knees down with oozing fluids and blood. Without a cure from any of the major hospitals in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, and after being told he might have to consider amputation, he eventually came to the Kos’ stall, where Mr. Ko suggested he soak and wash the affected parts in herbal medicine. “In about three months, his legs showed clear improvements. It cost him only 30 dollars per pack of herbs. I didn’t cure him. The herbs did.” Humble as they may seem, fresh herbs can often work wonders.

Unfortunately, these age-old remedies are facing a succession crisis. Mr. Ko has four children. One of his sons used











to help out at the stall at times before business worsened and traffic in the market dropped. To make ends meet, “he switched to selling electrical appliances. It is less exhausting than selling herbs and pays better.” As a father, Mr. Ko is pleased to see his son with steadier work.

## A Craft at Dusk without Successors

Lacking a successor, the elderly couple lament, “The key to this trade boils down to three words: perseverance, patience and diligence. It won’t work if you’re lazy. Once you’ve promised to find a herb for someone, you’ll go and look for it even in the rain. You’re prepared for snakes, rats and insect bites up in the hills.” A sense of commitment to the neighbourhood keeps the man opening his stall daily and going up the hills himself in his seventies. Although the precious folk wisdom and the craft of the herbal culture seem to be fading away with the ageing generation, Mr. Ko appears unruffled, “What will pass will pass. There’s no need to dwell on it. I’d rather take each day as it comes.”

The herbal culture of Southern

China is a crystallisation of folk wisdom, blending Chinese medicine theories, local knowledge and everyday experience. Watching the Ko couple busily at work and listening to them talk about all sorts of herbs they know by heart, one realises the stall is not just a business but a resting place for the neighbourhood. Neighbours coming to buy some stink grass and pomelo leaves for a few dollars often end up spending half the day chattering away. Mr. Ko insists on keeping their prices low to serve the neighbours. One can only wish that the next generation would still be able to enjoy the scent of fresh herbs and remember that there were once people who protected the health and wisdom of the folk in the simplest of ways.






# 1.3



## 1.3.2

## The Code of Life and a Legacy of Culture within the Shiu-Ying Hu Herbarium

Nestled within The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Shiu-Ying Hu Herbarium serves not only as a bastion of botanical research but also as a temporal conduit bridging past and present. From Professor Hu Shiu-ying's hand-prepared wax-preserved specimens to incumbent curator Dr. Lau Tai-wai David's technological reimagining of botanical documentation, this institution bears witness to the legacy and innovation of botanical scholarship. Importantly, its pivotal contributions toward the standardisation and proper nomenclature of Chinese medicines cannot be understated.

### A Lasting Tribute to Professor Hu

Professor Hu was an internationally renowned Chinese botanist who dedicated her entire life to plant taxonomy. Her passion in working on the nomenclature of the Aquifoliaceae family has earned her the title "Mother of Holly". In a marked contribution to Chinese medicine pharmacology, she led a team to develop the proprietary Chinese medicine Trilex Tea from three medicinal holly species – rough-haired holly root, Chinese holly,



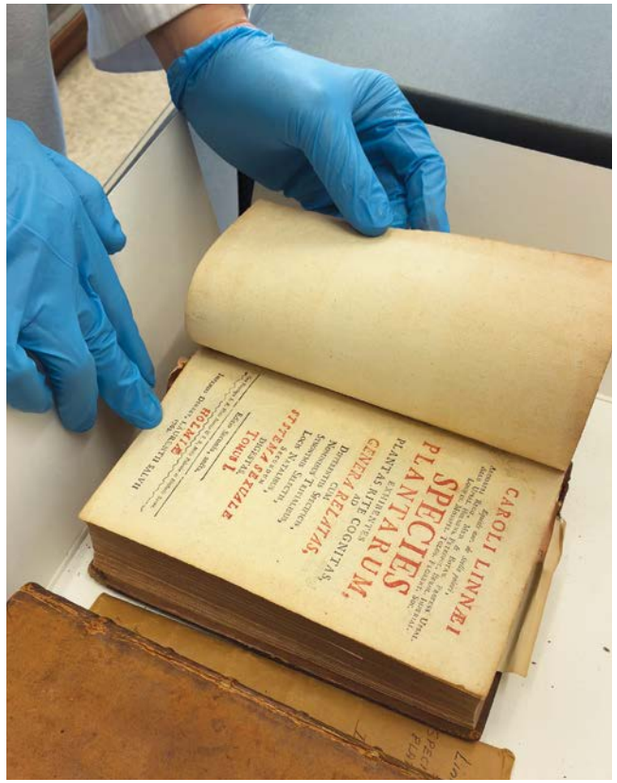


and redcalyx glorybower – an effective remedy for cold and flu.

The Herbarium used to be Professor Hu's research office, which she had used since the late 1960s. Following her passing in 2012, The Chinese University of Hong Kong formally designated the Herbarium in her honour. Naming a botanical herbarium after an individual scholar is exceptionally rare within academic circles, and this speaks to Professor Hu's esteemed standing and the University's will to keep her spirit of exploration alive – and perpetuate her work on plants and their medicinal properties.

## Timeless Testimonies of Antique Manuscripts and Specimens

The collection houses numerous precious manuscripts. "Check this volume out. It's published in 1762, arguably one of the world's earliest botanical compendiums," remarks Dr. Lau, the Herbarium's curator, as he dons gloves and leafs through the rare, antique botanical manuscripts bequeathed by Professor Hu. These texts document plant classifications and uses, with their Latin names serving as rich repositories of information – akin to each plant's "identity card". They form








crucial references for identification and research, while bearing witness to the historical development of botany.

Dr. Lau makes a special note of Hong Kong's abundant natural resources. Its suburbs are home to nearly 2,000 indigenous plant species, half of which have medicinal value. Speaking of over 40,000 specimens collected in the Herbarium, he pulls from the collection a perfectly preserved specimen of Hong Kong gordonia, with fully intact leaves and clearly distinguishable pistils and stamens. This specimen was collected from Wong Nai Chung on Hong Kong Island in 1968, and bears Professor Hu's own signature.

"This is more than a plant specimen; it's a crystallisation of time. It allows us to travel back to that autumn 57 years ago, and picture ourselves observing this plant's form and habitat alongside Professor Hu." He explains that these specimens documented plant growth across different eras and locations, serving as invaluable material for studying ecological shifts and providing clues about climate change and species distribution.

## The Path to Standardisation and Proper Nomenclature in Chinese Medicine

Dr. Lau has led the Herbarium in numerous studies of medicinal plants, building a scientific foundation for the modernisation of Chinese medicine. For instance, the spreading hedyotis herb, which is commonly used for detoxifying and clearing heat, has been found in modern research to possess anti-cancer properties. Dr. Lau consulted historical texts to uncover its Latin name from three centuries ago. After clarifying its taxonomic classification and pharmacological characteristics, he gave the herb its proper name and established its legitimate status in botany.

In the study of the whiteflower patrinia herb, the team collected samples from markets across China. Through morphological identification, chemical fingerprinting, and DNA barcoding techniques, they confirmed four major varieties available in the market and established identification standards. The results were published in an international journal and became the basis for the government's formulation of quality standards of Chinese medicine.

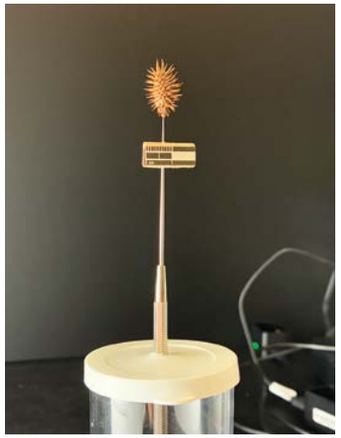
## Pioneering New Perspectives through 3D Imaging

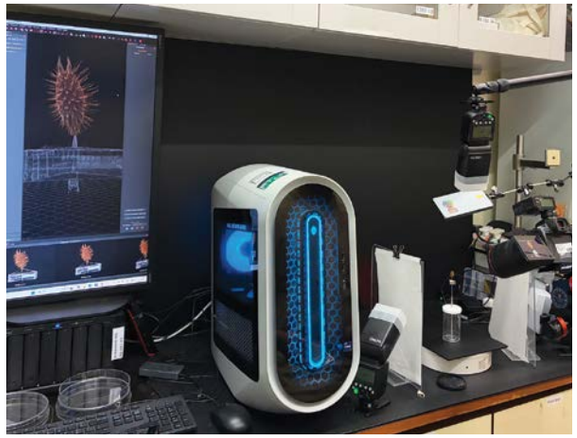
In the digital era, the Herbarium employs cutting-edge technology to reconstruct plant models. Wax-preserved physical specimens continue to be kept but detailed, in-depth digital records are now also produced. Dr. Lau proudly highlights that the team pioneered the use of high-resolution scanning and macro photography to construct multi-angle 3D imagery, fully preserving details such as seeds, fruits, and medicinal parts.

Taking a 3D image of fourstamen stephania root as an example, Dr. Lau explains, "We captured over a thousand photographs, combining them into a 360-degree rotatable stereoscopic image. This allows students to observe minute structures directly on their mobile devices." The public may too access such information on the Herbarium's website via mobile devices, placing plant specimens seemingly at their fingertips. The team was also commissioned by the Department of Health to develop a digital Chinese Medicine herbarium. They have now produced 3D herbal imagery for over 20 Chinese medicines, providing a new tool for herbal identification.

Dr. Lau emphasises that specimens are not merely research materials but ecological legacies for future generations. Advanced DNA mapping technology enables extraction of genetic data from specimens, which can be used to build up a genetic database for Hong Kong's native flora. He remarks, "We're unlocking the code for plants. Future research – whether in pharmacology, species identification, or ecological evolution – will depend on this database for answers."







## Cross-disciplinary Endeavours: Art Meets Science

To engage younger audiences, the Herbarium promotes botany through art, games, and relatable themes. Since 2019, its annual Botanical Art Competition have drawn participants from 17 countries to visually document botanical beauty. The team also publishes the *Botany by Your Side: Hong Kong's Seasonal Colours* series of plant guides, guiding the public to appreciate plant diversity through a colourful lens.

The Shiu-Ying Hu Herbarium bears witness to botany's evolution from paper archives to cloud-based platforms. Antique texts from 1762, specimens from 1968, and 3D imagery from 2025 coexist and mingle here. Humanity's reverence and curiosity for nature have inspired generations to explore the world of plants, to uncover the mysteries of nature, and to pioneer new horizons in plant conservation and Chinese medicine research.

# 1.4

Local Farmed Therapeutic Cuisine

From Seasonal Farm-to-Table Ingredients to Nourishing Medicinal Dishes

## 1.4.1

## Local Practices in Harmony with Nature: Human Ip's Life Notes from Lai Chi Wo




Just outside of Hong Kong's city bustles hides an ancient rural village–Lai Chi Wo Village. This is where writer, illustrator, and former city dweller Human Ip has decided to put down her roots. In evolving from transient visitor to local resident, she experienced the profound connection between humanity and nature. The five years she spent here were more than just a lifestyle shift; she lived out the Chinese medicine wisdom of life preservation – "harmony between nature and human".



### Choosing Countryside over City

Human Ip grew up in the city, accustomed to the modern conveniences and the brisk pace of life there. It was during a mural painting event at Mui Tsz Lam Village that she met Lai Chi Wo's farmers, who asked if she would join their farmland restoration project. With a "let's give it a go" attitude, she and friends jointly managed the farmland, which they later named 'Farm In-situ'. Still very much a city dweller then, she could not tend to the crops often enough so harvests were poor. Ultimately, she made a bold decision – to relocate to Lai Chi Wo.

Thrust out of her urban comfort zone, Human was confronted with the myriad challenges of rural life: no air conditioning, poor transport links, swarms of insects, and frequent encounters with wildlife. Yet what most city dwellers see as insurmountable has brought her quiet contentment, becoming a key avenue for her to deepen her understanding of nature.

### Rising and Retiring with the Sun

In Lai Chi Wo, Human's lifestyle is fully in tune with nature. Wary of the heat and vulnerable to heatstroke, she adjusts her schedule to rise naturally around five in the morning, doing a bit of writing when her mind is at its sharpest. When day breaks, she works in the fields, completing major farm tasks before nine to avoid the scorching sun. She takes a short nap at midday and attends to household chores, returning to the fields in the evening to water the crops and mingle with the cattle. This way of life allows her to truly appreciate the ancient wisdom of "rising and retiring with the sun".

The farmlands of "Farm In-situ" are cultivated organically, planting different crops each season. Among the harvests, lemons and roselle yield particularly well. Human looks at harvests differently than commercial farmers, in that profit is not her primary goal. She values the fields more as a classroom for observing natural cycles. Whether it is plant growth, insect appearances, or even wild boars trespassing to devour the crops, she gladly accepts these as part of nature.

### The Healing Powers of Nature

Human Ip's life aligns seamlessly with the principles of Chinese medicine. She frequently consults classical texts like *Bencao Gangmu (Compendium of Materia Medica)* and *Shennong Ben Cao Jing (The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica)* to learn to practise self-care using local plants. To treat cough, she boils ginger from her fields for a soothing drink. For minor eczema flare-ups, she makes an ointment by infusing calendula in olive oil. She sips roselle tea in summer, and makes mugwort foot baths to dispel cold and dampness during damp seasons.







These practices embody the interaction between the human body and its wider environment. Human discovers that by living in harmony with nature's rhythms, her body instinctively knows when to rise and when to rest, making alarm clocks obsolete. This tacit understanding between body and environment is precisely the manifestation of "unity of nature and the human body".

## From Personal Practice to Public Education

Human generously shares these experiences of coexisting with nature with the public through various channels. As the author of books like *In Search of Flora* and *In Search of Fauna*, she documents Hong Kong's ecological environment through writing and illustration. As an educator, she facilitates workshops, guided tours, and school activities to bring urban dwellers – especially children – closer to nature.

Human believes that modern disconnection from nature can be reversed. The key lies in exposure and understanding, "Not everyone will love nature. Many fear insects or sunburn, but we must at least offer the chance to engage, to realise Hong Kong is home to such beauty." This open, non-coercive approach lends her advocacy work greater inclusivity.





## Insights for Modern Living

As a resident of Lai Chi Wo, Human knows all about the toil of farming. "There is romance to be in love with nature and with working the fields. In practice, there is much sweat and dirt involved, which is decidedly unromantic," she laughs with characteristic radiance. She is also an embodiment of "eating in season", which to her is more than a saying, but a way of life in alignment with nature. "Farmers understand best what eating in season means – plants simply do not grow out of season." She points out that melons belong to summer, while greens belong to winter. Crops forced out of season inevitably require more human intervention; they are neither eco-friendly nor wholesome.

Human takes local agriculture seriously. "Hong Kong's agriculture has declined, but it shouldn't vanish." She argues that supporting local agriculture not only helps farmers but also preserves the possibility of a different way of life. She encourages city dwellers to support sustainable agriculture by choosing locally sourced, seasonal produce, even if they do not personally participate in farming. This reduces reliance on imports and lowers the carbon footprint.

Human Ip's life in Lai Chi Wo presents a profound transition from city to farm. Rather than an escapist seclusion, her way of life is founded upon an active dialogue with nature. Her experience shows that we do not need to negate modern civilization to reconnect with nature; rather, we need to carve out space for nature within our contemporary lifestyles. Only by learning to live with our land as residents rather than transient visitors, can we truly grasp the profound meaning of harmony between man and nature, and discover possibilities for balanced coexistence. ■



# 1.4



## 1.4.2

## Yip Tsz-shing's Agrivengers and 10,000 Catties of Local Winter Melon

Hong Kong is known as a "Concrete Jungle" for its skyscrapers. But here, a group of people refuse to live high in the air by diligently working the soil to stay close to the land. After receiving some winter melon seeds from his father, local farmer Yip Tsz-shing set a goal to grow 10,000 catties of the melons a year. Over the past 25 years, he has not just revived the local green-skinned winter melon species but also cultivated a wisdom that sees the indivisibility of health and nature.

### Seeds Handed Down from his Father

Yip worked as a teacher after university graduation, but decided to go against the tide by giving up his stable job for farming when he witnessed its near- extinction in Hong Kong. When asked why he took such a difficult path, he simply answered that he was only choosing a lifestyle suitable for himself as a farmer's son who enjoys toiling under the blazing sun. In 1999 when his father was retiring, Yip founded his own organic farm, seizing the chance to carry on both the seeds and experience from his father.

Yip founded Agrivengers, an organic farming organisation and proposed the "10,000 Catties of Melon" scheme, which led to the successful restoration of a local green-skinned winter melon species. "I'm used to eating this type of winter melon at home." According to Yip, the green-skinned winter melon was a mainstream species in Hong Kong in the 1970s and 80s but almost went extinct along with the decline of agriculture. It took Yip 25 years to hit the annual goal of 10,000 catties. Yet, the scheme is not only a matter of numbers but also represents local agriculture as well as the protection and preservation of local species.







### Revelation from the Winter Melon

To Yip, growing winter melon is a fundamental skill for farmers. As a climbing vine, the plant demands a more complex cultivation process than typical vegetables. From training the vines and cradling the melons to protecting the fruit, each step calls for patience and techniques. In addition, it takes 150 days to harvest, with each plant yielding only one fruit, so the weight of the fruit is a direct indication of the farmer's capability. "A melon counts as a quality product only if it weighs more than 30 catties." To the farmers, the straightforward standard is a challenge and, at the same time, a reward from the land for their labour.

To Chinese medicine practitioners, the winter melon is valuable from skin to seed: its seeds dissolve phlegm and relieve coughs while the rind clears heat and dampness, making it a perfect remedy for the humid southern summers. This special culture of treating food as medicine links agricultural production and health culture tightly together. However, Yip has observed a paradox in modern society: people spending long hours under air- conditioners with fewer and fewer outdoor activities are worried about the cooling effects in any vegetables they eat.

## Openness Brings Resilience, a Well-balanced Diet Brings Health

Yip has a keen insight into the dietary dilemma of modern life: when one's body loses touch with nature, it also becomes less receptive to food; one begins to fear all kinds of vegetables, but never reflects on the root. To Yip, the issue does not lie in the nature of the plants but in the body constitution of the person. The solution is not to stop eating vegetables, but to restore the harmony between man and nature by going under the sun, sweating and interacting with nature more frequently.

"A healthy body is like an ocean—it allows dirty water to enter along with clean water, taking all as nutrients." The statement is a summary of Yip's idea of health: vastness brings resilience—health is not about maintaining purity, but about a powerful ability to metabolise and transform. Conversely, when one's bodily functions decline, overly restrictive food choices or rigid "healthy" diets could lead to dietary imbalances.

This is a message Yip and his green-skinned winter melon have for us: agriculture is more than food production,





it is a practice of inheriting culture and bonding with nature; health is not just about what we eat but also how we live. When we learn to sweat again, to bask in the sun and embrace the diversity of produce from the land, we nurture our bodies as well as repair our long-broken relation with nature. This is the essence of "unity of nature and the human body" and "indivisibility of health and nature", the key to improving our health. ■

# 1.4



## 1.4.3

## Tailored Dietary Wellness Charlene Tse's Journey with Medicinal Cuisine

A hearty meal ranks among life's foremost pleasures. A bowl of warm soup or a table laden with home-cooked delights presents not just an enjoyable feast, but also a mother's expression of love. Yet, when cooking transcends mere sustenance and is elevated into a mission of wellness, this embodiment of love carries an added layer of responsibility and wisdom.

### Culinary Awakening: Simplifying the Complex

Charlene Tse is the working woman typical of our times. She has many roles: a mother, an entrepreneur heading a cookie business, and a master of medicinal cuisine weaving Chinese medicine principles into her culinary practice. In her youth, she held little regard for cooking until her father was hospitalised, compelling her to take charge of kitchen duties. Daily deliveries of soup and meals to her father spoke to her profound sense of responsibility and her dedication to family.

After marriage, Charlene's love for fine foods spurred her to delve into the culinary arts. A champion for no-fuss, practical cooking methods, she once wrote for a magazine's recipe column, where she distilled elaborate signature dishes into manageable steps, such that busy homemakers can prepare them with little effort. Gradually, her cooking drew a steady stream of friends to her home. Her culinary skills not just please her family and friends but have become a means of social networking. For her, cooking is both a joy and an expression of love. She believes that a table laden with fine dishes is the key to bringing families together.





### Evolving Therapeutic Cuisine through Wisdom

Charlene has an elder relative who is a Chinese medicine practitioner. For this reason, Charlene started giving Chinese medicine to her daughter as a child. This also led her to incorporate medicinal elements into soups and dishes early on. From her observation, Hongkongers are actually adept at preparing medicinal cuisine, even if they rarely describe it that way. "Ingredients like Chinese yam, goji berries, red dates, and dried tangerine peel possess medicinal properties," she says, naming examples. "Dishes made with them are all medicinal cuisine, though they are not often described as such."

Charlene contends that one should not have to go out of their way to prepare "medicinal cuisine". Applying the philosophy to daily meals would naturally bring about health benefits. She finds that the term "medicinal cuisine" itself can be off-putting. "At the mere mention of 'medicine', many become apprehensive and lose their appetite." Thus, she cleverly integrates Chinese medicines in her creations to preserve their medicinal









properties without imparting bitterness. Her Curcuma Rose Cookies exemplify this approach: the delicate fragrance of roses entices, while curcuma soothes the liver and alleviates gloominess. This harmonious blend delivers both flavour and wellness, delighting the palate and calming the mind.

## The Importance of Tailoring Soups to Individual Body Conditions

Charlene emphasises that medicinal cuisine cannot replace Chinese medicine prescriptions. "Don't expect it to cure ailments; one must still consult a doctor when unwell." The role of medicinal cuisine lies in long-term nourishment and health preservation. Having this understanding allows Charlene to promote wellness diets while prioritising safety. Studies in Chinese medicine nutrition have given Charlene a keener awareness of the principle of "tailoring to the individual". She points out that many mothers focus solely on preparing soups for their families, overlook how soups can bring harm depending on the body condition. "For instance, if your daughter is menstruating and you keep serving cooling herbal teas, that's a recipe for disaster. If your son has acne yet you force nourishing tonics on him, you're doing him a disservice."

Charlene encourages homemakers to study up on Chinese medicine dietary principles, as the responsibility of "soup-making" is not to be taken lightly. One needs to be prudent in ingredient selection, and consider weather changes, body condition differences, and even emotional states, so as to best serve the health of family members. She cites her own family as an example: her parents, in their old age, must avoid cooling soups; she and her husband, being active, require qi-tonifying nourishment; her two daughters each have distinct body condition needs. As such, her kitchen routine now revolves round tailoring daily soups to each family member.



## Traditional Principles, Innovative Approaches

Charlene practises medicinal cuisine principles in her cooking, while promoting it through various channels. On television programmes, she cooks medicinal dishes to demonstrate how Chinese medicines can be fashionable and approachable. Her cookbooks ingeniously incorporate medicinal ingredients into desserts and Western cuisines, breaking the stereotype that medicines are only fit for soups. Some of her recipes include pear rolls with almond juice, Basque cheesecake, four-nuts muffins, and cauliflower rice – all modern dishes infused with medicinal elements. She emphasises that promoting medicinal cuisine extends beyond culinary techniques, but was fundamentally a form of science education for the public. Through delicious food, she helps the public understand the efficacy of Chinese medicines and incorporate them into their daily diets.

From cooking for her family to promoting to the public, Charlene's journey with medicinal cuisine comes from a place of love and a cultural legacy. Upholding sound dietary principles, she safeguards her family's health with wisdom and meticulous care. She believes that one should not feel as though they are "taking medicine", but rather savouring a delicious meal. Only then can medicinal cuisine truly become part of everyday life. Her quest to spread wellness and warmth through medicinal cuisine perfectly illustrates that "eating is not merely about filling one's stomach, but about eating well and eating wisely". ■

# 1.5

## 1.5.1

## From Competition to Wellness Li Fai's Martial Arts Journey

Master Li Fai is a legendary figure in the martial arts world. Proficient in changquan, gunshu, qiangshu, jianshu, and taichi, she represented Hong Kong in numerous competitions and won honours in many. Yet her story transcends the narrative of an athletic competitor; it is a journey of transformation and exploration from competitive sport to health preservation. Through practising taichi and health-preserving techniques, Master Li came to understand that sport is not just physical exercise, but also involves the harmonisation of yin and yang, qi and blood, and the meridian system. This practice revealed to her the profound truth of life's ultimate harmony.

Upon entering the Kai Tak Arena, a subtle fragrance of agarwood greets visitors, leading them to the Li Fai Centre of Wu Shu, where Master Li guides her students through slow, deliberate movements in her taichi class. Among them are mothers recovering from postnatal weakness, sports enthusiasts with joint strain, and individuals seeking a path to health after severe illness. Unanimously, they share how persistent practice has gradually improved their physical constitution. This illustrates that this space is not merely a martial arts training hall, but a sanctuary for exploring the true essence of wellness.

### An Epiphany from an Athletic Career

As a martial arts athlete, Master Li Fai endured years of rigorous, demanding training. In her youth, no matter how exhausted she felt, she confidently believed recovery would come with a brief rest. Yet with advancing age, she now chuckled, "One cannot merely indulge in comfort." After giving birth to her daughter, she temporarily withdrew from competition, embracing a life of comfort and worry-free living. However, without the high-intensity exercise, old ailments started resurfacing, and her body was battered with discomfort.





By chance, Master Li Fai travelled to Beijing to study under renowned taichi master Men Huifeng. She admitted she initially held little interest in taichi, finding it "too slow". Yet after practising for a month or two, Master Li noticed a marked reduction in colds, even during Beijing's harsh winter, and found her body no longer feared the cold. She gradually understood that taichi's "slowness" was not inefficiency, but rather a way to synchronise the body with one's breathing, which can awaken the body's innate self-healing powers.

Later, Li Fai studied Daoyin Yangsheng Gong – also known as "Wellness Qigong" – with Professor Zhang Guangde at Beijing Sport University, an experience that truly opened her eyes. Witnessing students coming all the way from Europe and Africa to study, she began reflecting on Hong Kong's lack of regard for traditional wellness practices. She gradually recognised the profound benefits of ancestral wisdom on human health, concluding it deserved global promotion.

## Great Wisdoms through Storytelling

Li Fai has fond memories of Professor Zhang's storytelling sessions, through which she naturally internalised the concepts of yin, yang, and meridians. "Our teacher learned what he knew through old style Chinese private schooling. Every move in his Wellness Qigong exercises had a story behind it, such as the Yiqi Yangfei Gong moves 'One Arm Supporting the Sky' and 'Turn the Head to Look at the Moon'. Beyond their evocative imagery, he would explain the moves through the lens of yin and yang.





Take the taichi move 'Holding the Moon in Embrace' – why the 'moon' and not the 'sun'? It turns out the front side of the body, the chest and abdomen, is yin in nature, while the back side is yang. Such vivid descriptions gradually helped us grasp the principles of yin and yang."

Master Li has inherited her teacher's approach, demonstrating moves in class while using analogies to help students grasp abstract concepts. This engaging teaching method transforms taichi wellness from abstruse theory into accessible life wisdom. She emphasises that the key to taichi wellness lies in achieving "flow". When meridians are unblocked and qi and blood flow smoothly, the body naturally thrives; conversely, stagnant qi and blood stasis readily invite ailments. Through taichi practice, students progressively improve their constitution, moving away from cold extremities to unimpeded blood and qi circulation; away from breathlessness and fatigue to strong and steady breathing. These are the most tangible experiences.

## The Mission to Promote Martial Arts Wellness

Popular perceptions of taichi and Wellness Qigong characterise them as slow-moving activities, suited only for the elderly. Explanations from Master Li Fai, however, offered a fresh perspective. She emphasises that taichi's essence lies in "stillness within movement, movement within stillness", which constitutes a holistic form of exercise. Drawing from yin-yang theory, she summarises that "though the forms are myriad, they are fundamentally one," with all variations






stemming from the overarching concept of yin-yang interaction.

Master Li actively conducts classes to share her personal insights with the public. She pioneered Seasonal Wellness Qigong, enabling students to align their physical conditioning with the changing seasons. For instance, autumn is the time for nourishing the lungs, summer for clearing heat from the heart, and winter for tonifying the kidneys. These practices resonate with Chinese medicine's philosophy of "harmony between man and nature". She firmly believes martial arts wellness is a way of life, teaching one to converse with the body; to sense the flow of meridians through each move; and to experience the current of life in each breath. This wisdom not only improves health but also elevates the quality of life.

Master Li Fai's evolution from competitive martial artist to wellness mentor exemplifies martial arts' loftier dimensions. This journey reminds us that true strength lies not in overpowering others, but in surpassing oneself. Only by genuinely recognising and embracing the body's rhythms, and mastering the equilibrium between movement and stillness, can one attain the profound harmony and freedom that define the essence of life. ■

# 1.5

## 1.5.2

# An Ancient-modern Blend of Healing Melodies: Applying Yin-Yang Principles to Music Therapy

In a fast-paced city like Hong Kong, music offers an outlet for stress relief. The five tones of Chinese music – *"Gong, Shang, Jue, Zhi, and Yu"* – correspond to the five elements and the five internal organs respectively. Utilising sound to harmonise vital energy and stabilise emotions is part of ancient wellness wisdom. By integrating yin-yang principles with modern music therapy approaches, one can elevate music from mere art to a vital means to regulate emotion and promote physical and mental wellbeing in our daily life.

With over two decades of experience in music therapy, Dr. Ng Wai-man has witnessed the ground-up development of the profession in Hong Kong. He recounts how music therapy first emerged in the 1980s, initially serving children with special needs. As societal awareness of emotional wellbeing grew, its application expanded into elderly care, mental health support, and cognitive training.

### Cultural Resonance through Chinese Musical Elements

Dr. Ng's unique background in professional Chinese music performance





and teaching prompted him to explore integrating Chinese musical elements into music therapy. He discovered that for local elderly individuals, Chinese music carries profound emotional memories and cultural resonance. During sessions, he incorporates instruments like dizi (Chinese transverse flute) and suona (Chinese double-reed horn), even joining elders in beating gongs and drums during festivities to recreate traditional holiday vibes. This cultural familiarity evokes positive emotions in participants, while enhancing the interactivity and impact of the therapy.

During therapeutic music listening, Dr. Ng also breaks away from traditional frameworks of western classical music, selecting Chinese compositions rich in emotional depth such as *The Butterfly Lovers*, *Reflection of the Moon on the Water*, and *A Beautiful Night*. He observed that while some participants were indifferent towards Western classical music, Chinese melodies would evoke in them imagery of landscapes and pastoral scenes, facilitating smoother emotional expression. This phenomenon underscores the profound influence of cultural background on musical perception, demonstrating Chinese music's unique capacity to resonate emotionally within Chinese communities.

### Applying Yin-Yang Theory to Contemporary Practice

The research topic of Dr. Ng's doctoral thesis focused on applying yin-yang theory to therapeutic music listening. He categorised musical elements such as tempo, pitch, and volume into yin and yang attributes: slow, low-pitched, and gentle music belongs to "yin"; while fast, high-pitched, and intense music belongs to "yang". When exposed to music of differing attributes, participants undergoing Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) therapy visualised imagery and movements of corresponding nature. Yin music frequently evoked stillness, night-time, and solitude, whilst yang music prompted activity, daytime, and social scenes.

This classification holds not only theoretical significance but also clinical application value. Dr. Ng explains that during treatment, the ratio of yin to yang music is adjusted according to the individual's emotional state. For instance, patients experiencing severe depression may initially listen to yin music aligned with their mood to facilitate emotional release – akin to the "reduction method" in Chinese medicine. Afterwards, they are gradually introduced to yang





music to uplift their spirits and restore their energy. This dynamic adjustment embodies the Chinese medicine principle of "differentiating syndromes and administering treatment", emphasising strategies tailored to the individual and the progression.

In Hong Kong, where cultures east and west mix and mingle, music therapy represents not just the introduction of a technique but an innovative integration of cultural resources. Dr. Ng's attempts, weaving together culture, memory, and emotion, demonstrate the potential for adapting ancient wisdom to modern contexts and Chinese traditions to Western approaches. It is precisely out of this unique symphony of elements – local roots, international framework, cultural depth, therapeutic tones – that music therapy can become a true remedy of the heart in Hong Kong.



# 1.5



## 1.5.3

## One of the Seven Necessities: The Wellness Wisdom of Chinese Tea Culture

A famous Chinese proverb has it: "The seven necessities of daily living – firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, and tea". The first six are tied to the smoky warmth of the hearth, essential for sustenance and comfort. Yet the final element – tea – rises beyond mere material necessity into a form of spiritual nourishment, essential to the philosophy of Chinese living. Though last on the list, it holds an irreplaceable place in Chinese culture, connected both to the rhythms of heaven and earth and the Chinese wisdom of wellness.

It was recorded on *Shennong Ben Cao Jing (The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica)*: "The Divine Farmer tasted a hundred herbs, encountering 72 poisons in a single day, until he found tea to counteract them." Though mythical, this tale attests to tea's medicinal value. This



humble leaf journeyed from mountain wilds and fields into the imperial courts, then along the Ancient Tea Horse Road to distant lands, and ultimately found its way





into the homes of ordinary folk. To better appreciate this gift of nature, the ancient Chinese has devised an intricate system.

## Six Major Tea Categories, Each with Distinct Characteristics

Professor Eliza Liu, President of Teaism Alliance Hong Kong, explains that variations in fermentation levels and processing techniques have yielded six major tea categories: green, white, yellow, oolong, black, and dark. Each possesses its own unique "character" and "purpose", embodying health benefits that align with seasonal rhythms and harmonise body and mind. She illustrates that green tea, harvested during spring when all life awakens, is imbued with the essence of heaven and earth. Unfermented, it locks in diverse vitamins, tea polyphenols, and is characterised with a fresh and crisp flavour. However, its nature is slightly cold, so not everyone is suited for its consumption. Those with weak spleen and stomach should only partake sparingly. White tea, processed without pan-firing or rolling, retains more natural elements and antioxidants, and possesses a bitter-cold nature. Ancient texts record its efficacy in clearing heat and detoxifying during measles epidemics, saving many children suffering from high fever.

Black tea, being fully fermented, has a warming nature. With bright, crimson tea colour, black tea nourishes the blood and is suitable for winters or those with a cold constitution. Post-fermented dark teas like Pu'er, through ageing, lose their sharpness to become mellow and rich, promoting circulation. They are particularly beneficial for the elderly or those deficient in qi and blood. Though less common in Guangdong, yellow teas like Huoshan Huangya and Junshan Yinzhen possess distinctive flavours. As for floral teas, roses, chrysanthemums, and marigolds are regarded as medicinal herbs abroad, offering calming or stress-relieving effects.

## Tea Therapy and Wellness: Therapeutic Foods

Eliza specifically highlights that oolong teas, which are the middle ground between semi-fermented and fully fermented varieties, possess a richly floral and fruity aroma – Fenghuang Dancong tea would be such an example. This fragrance enters the nostrils and permeates through your entire being, uplifting the spirit and effectively alleviating nasal discomfort. It offers soothing relief for nasal allergies, nowadays a common ailment – a particularly relevant example of the delights that tea fragrance can bring.

Eliza emphasises that the essence of tea wellness lies in "knowledge" and "harmony". Knowledge means understanding one's own constitution – whether it tends towards cold or heat. Harmony means selecting teas that match one's constitution and the season. This philosophy is vividly embodied in her "Urban Herbalist" initiative launched years ago. Participants journey into the wilderness to understand the nature of plants, then return to tea gardens to find tranquillity in a pot of fine tea, paired with medicinal cuisine infused with tea flavours. This approach liberates wellness from dogmatic rules, allowing it to assimilate with daily life as a rich experience blending hiking, knowledge, and socialising.

In a cup of tea, we catch a glimpse into the Chinese art of living. It is not merely a thirst-quenching beverage, but a medium for regulating body and mind, and a ritual of hospitality. Eliza's journey from the art of tea to the art of cooking, and her subsequent dive into the realm of Chinese medicine, epitomises the inclusivity and practicality inherent in the art of tea. It goes to show that tea culture can be many things – a refinement of taste, a fount of wellness, and above all, a composed and conscious attitude towards life. ■





# INTO THE WELLSPRING

Stories of
Hong Kong's Prized
Chinese Medicinal
Products



24 Herbs Tea,
Tortoise-herb Jelly, Sweet Tea

2.1 The Culture of Herbal Tea: A Taste of Southern China

Hop Chai Tea,
Chut Lee Powder, Pills, Wax Pills

2.2 Household Remedies: A Tradition of Quality & Sincerity



2.3 Topical Remedies: For Muscle and Joint Relief and Improved Circulation



Medicated Balms, Medicated Oils



2.4 Heritage Medicinal Foods: Classic Everyday Delicacies

Pork Knuckle and Ginger Stew,
Preserved Dried Plums, Dried Tangerine Peels

2

# 2.1

## 2.1.1 The Culture of Herbal Tea: A Taste of Southern China

24 Herbs Tea

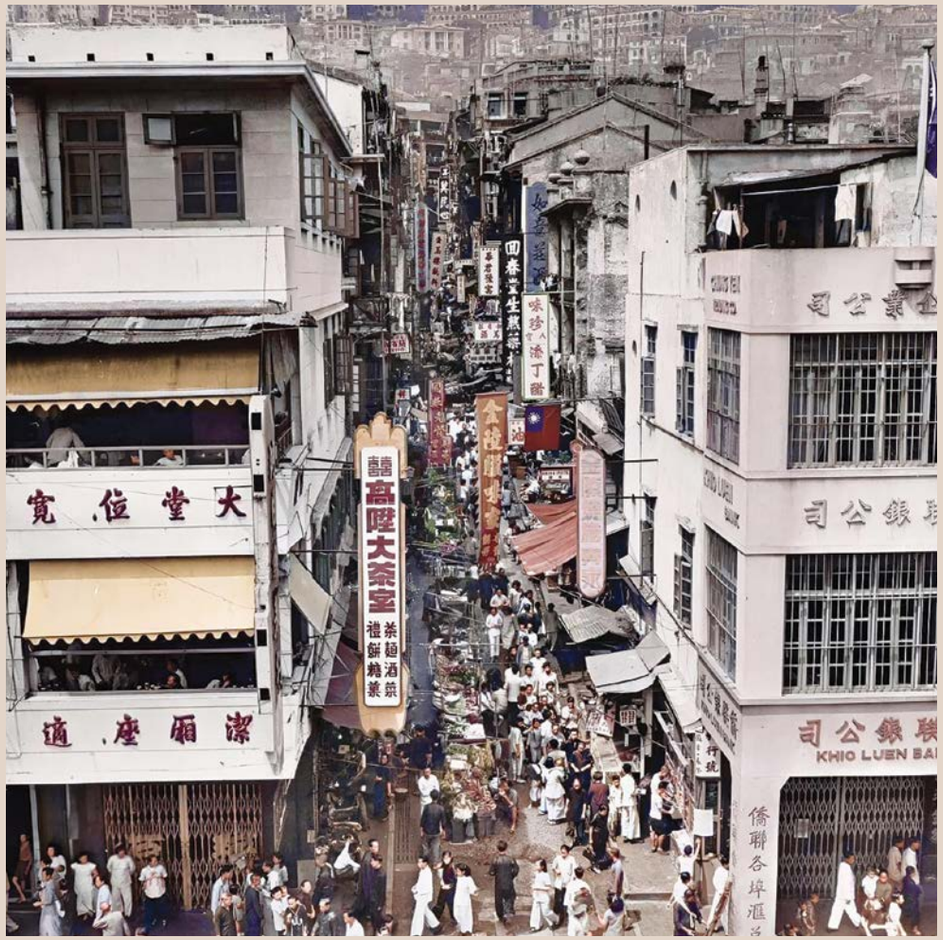
# The Warmth and Heritage of Herbal Tea

Herbal tea has long served as a primary form of medical defense against stomach discomfort and the common cold among the people of southern China, where the hot and humid climate often causes fatigue and a feeling of heaviness. Being one of the most prominent varieties of herbal tea in Guangdong, 24 herbs tea has for decades safeguarded the people of this region, provided that one is not put off by its dark colour and bitter flavour.

Located in downtown Central, the century-old Good Spring Company has witnessed Hong Kong's journey from post-war recovery to economic takeoff. The company started its business with herbal tea and, later, combined this with the founding family's expertise in herbal medicine to expand its service into Chinese medicine. Mr. Lam Wai-ching, the third-generation successor and himself a Chinese medicine practitioner, recounts how this century-old brand began. Mr. Lam's great grandfather used to be a herb gatherer in Panyu, Guangdong. After his grandfather moved to Hong Kong, he began selling herbal tea from a wooden cart in Central, laying the foundation for the family's future success.

The period from 1940s to 1970s was the golden age of the herbal tea industry in Hong Kong, during which countless herbal tea shops could be found throughout the city. "The living condition was much worse back then, making diseases easily transmittable in the crowded environment. That's why people would have a cup of herbal tea as soon as they start feeling unwell." Due to the scarcity of medical resources, herbal tea held a unique significance in the society. "Sometimes neighbours would knock on our door in the middle of the night, so we had a staff member staying in the shop to help the patients as much as we could," Mr. Lam describes a distinctive scene in those years.

To ensure the effectiveness of its herbal tea, Good Spring pays meticulous attention to the brewing process. Herbs are added to the cauldron in a specific order according to their characteristics, while the cauldron itself has measurement lines for quality control. Mr. Lam emphasises that every cup of herbal tea is a dose of carefully made medicine,







even a minor deviation from the recipe or neglecting the proper procedure can jeopardise the quality. “This’s why we insist on serving it hot. It’s the only way to ensure its effectiveness.” In Chinese medicine theories, hot beverage is believed to be more easily absorbed by the human body, which enhances the effectiveness of the medicine. Mr. Lam explains that even though the younger generation may prefer iced drinks, or tourists may be confused by this tradition, he and his staff always patiently elaborate the reason behind this practice. “What herbal tea cools is our body, not our mouth and tongue.”

The quality of the Chinese medicines is another point of emphasis for Mr. Lam. “Selling medicine requires a strong sense of ethics. Treating patients and saving lives are serious responsibilities that should never be taken lightly.” Following his father’s principle of “never prioritise revenue over of quality”, Mr. Lam reveals that while he insists on using only the finest materials, some of his industry counterparts might secretly choose a questionable path. For example, the best tendrilleaf fritillary bulb is significantly more expensive than the lower quality options, but it offers much greater effectiveness. Similarly, the best part of showy millettia is its root, yet the cost difference is three to four times higher. In the cases of snow fungus, greenish lily bulb and Chinese yam, some herbal tea sellers might use sulfur to smoke and whiten the ingredients, making the beverage less effective and sour in taste.

Mr. Lam explains that consumers can detect all these quality deviations by carefully inspecting the look and taste of the herbal tea. Now, with the help of internet, the public can also search for videos created by professionals for more detailed information. The key is to remember “good things never come cheap”. Counterfeit or unprocessed Chinese medicines only result in low quality product. In the case of herbal tea, it is like wielding a useless weapon against illness.

Since the economic transformation that began in 1980s, many herbal tea shops have succumbed to skyrocketing land price and rent pressure, leaving fewer and fewer businesses still standing. Good Spring overcomes the challenge by maintaining its traditions while implementing necessary changes, such as increasing its refrigeration capacity for






Chinese medicines, insisting on not using sulfur to kill insects and mildew and to preserve, introducing electric and gas stoves to replace smoke-heavy kerosine burners, purchasing stainless steel utensils and elevation equipment to improve the working environment. But one major issue remains, and that is the lack of young employees.

Mr. Lam acknowledges that due to the income disparity, many young people only aspire to become Chinese medicine practitioners and show little interest in labourintensive roles such as

Chinese medicines processing, dispensing or retail. As a result, the industry is likely to develop an imbalance in the future, with too many practitioners and too few workers in other essential roles. Good Spring is currently relying on retired colleagues who work part-time. In the years to come, the company might need to bring in labours from mainland China and offer food and lodging, much like in the old apprenticeship days.

In addition to being a widely trusted Chinese medicine shop, Good Spring is also a landmark in Central where tourists gather to experience the herbal tea culture. The friendly price of $15 per cup contrasts sharply with Central's expensive cost, yet it is another clear demonstration of Mr. Lam's commitment to serving the public.

From the huge kettle to the warm cups, round after round of herbal tea flows every day at Good Spring, infusing the air with its unique aroma and comforting the hearts of customers. This scene highlights both the shop owner's dedication to professionalism and Hong Kong's resilience in overcoming challenges.












## 24 Herbs Tea

Ingredients include rough-haired holly root, yine abrus, water banyan, microcos, ovateleaf holly bark, soapberry root and etc. With a bitter taste and cooling effect, the beverage helps clear heat and detoxify the body.

Different shops may have their own recipe for this herbal tea, and the ingredients can be adjusted based on weather, location, and other factors. Due to its cooling properties, individuals with a weak constitution, as well as pregnant women or those menstruating, should consult registered Chinese medicine practitioners before consuming this beverage.

# 2.1

## 2.1.2

Tortoise-herb Jelly

The Culture of Herbal Tea: A Taste of Southern China

# From the Royal Court to Commoners: A Century-old Tale of Tortoise-herb Jelly



The Tortoise-herb jelly is a delicacy known for its smooth texture and dark, glittering appearance that originated from the royal court of the Qing Dynasty. After being introduced to the plebeian world, this therapeutical snack has been refined over generations and has become a popular choice among ordinary people, particularly in Southern China, for its body-cooling effect. Each spoonful of tortoise-herb jelly encapsulates its medicinal efficacy, a spirit of meticulous craftmanship, and a cherished ritual of city living.



The legendary story of Tortoise-herb jelly of Kung Wo Tong dates back to the Qing Dynasty. Simon Chu Shek-ming, the fifth-generation owner, recounts that one of the founding family's ancestors, after retiring as a royal physician, modified the recipe of a therapeutic dessert served in court and transformed it into Tortoise-herb jelly, aiming to help his fellow countrymen prevent illnesses caused by the humid weather in Southern China. In 1904, Chu's grandfather and great-uncle moved to Hong Kong and established the very first Kung Wo Tong in Yau Ma Tei, a red-light district at the time. Chu recalls, "Lore had it that Tortoise-herb jelly helps cure sexually transmitted diseases." Due to the overall lack of medical resources, this restorative though bitter jelly was the only affordable option for general public.

The high quality of its products, especially its tortoise-herb jelly, set Kung Wo Tong on a path to success in the following century. Chu explains, "People at that time generally preferred Chinese medicine, because firstly, Western medicine was relatively expensive, and secondly, most people still maintained a strong cultural identity." As a result, herbal tea shops became essential in community healthcare, preserving the tradition of Chinese medicine while offering affordable alternatives for residents in the neighbourhood.









Tortoise-herb jelly is a testament to the concept of "medicine and food are one and the same" in Chinese medicine. Chu explains, "We adjust our recipe as the seasons change. The spring recipe focuses on removing excessive humidity from the body, the summer recipe emphasises on the body-cooling effect, the autumn recipe provides additional nourishment, while the winter recipe leans more towards body-warming." The approach of aligning with the nature in Chinese medicine has integrated into the daily life of the people of Hong Kong through Tortoise-herb jelly.

As Hong Kong becomes increasingly westernised, traditional herbal tea shops are facing tremendous challenges. Chu acknowledges, "Unlike the previous generations who gathered at herbal tea shops to listen to drama episodes on the radio, today's youngsters have many more alternatives." In the 1950s and 1960s, coffee shops were not yet popular, individuals with limited means would find simple leisure at herbal tea shops. Today, despite the changed environment, Chu continues to believe in the value of Tortoise-herb jelly. "People're paying more attention to their health nowadays, and that makes Chinese medicine and its soothing effect more attractive."

Over the hundred years of its existence, Kung Wo Tong once had 13 branches throughout Hong Kong. Confronted with soaring rents, an aging workforce and many other challenges, Chu once attempted to modernise his business operations by establishing a centralised facility for standardised production and delivery. Although the new approach reduced costs, it was unpopular with the customers. "We did our very best to maintain our standard and continued to make Tortoise-herb jelly every day, but customers still preferred the traditional way. They wanted the jelly made in the shop, believing it was fresher and more trustworthy." After the setback, Chu realises that the freshness of the product and the commitment to quality are essential to Kung Wo Tong's success. He has now returned to the traditional, albeit costlier approach, and insists on making the Tortoise-herb jelly at every branch.

Driven by a deep dedication to quality, Chu have safeguarded the family reputation by faithfully upholding the most traditional craftsmanship. In the early days, one of the ingredients in Tortoise-herb jelly was the shell of Chinese three-striped box turtle, which was precious to begin with and later became a protected species. The industry now widely uses the shell of Chinese pond turtle, which requires a complicated process to achieve the same therapeutic effects. As a new generation of staff starts to inherit the processing technique from the retiring old masters, Chu pays meticulous attention to the procedure, ensuring that the quality, taste, colour and texture remain consistent.

"The most important factor's the therapeutic effects. We believe that the quality will speak for itself." Because of Chu's unwavering commitment to the efficacy of the Tortoise-herb jelly from Kung Wo Tong, it is vastly different from the mass-produced, pre-made varieties in the market. "We focus on quality and health benefits for our customers, rather than on market share." This spirit is the reason generations of customers stay loyal to Kung Wo Tong. For some patrons who have emigrated overseas, visiting the shop is one of the first things they do when returning to Hong Kong. For Chu, this profound connection is a priceless treasure.

Since its establishment in 1904, Kung Wo Tong has witnessed Hong Kong's transformation from a tiny fishing village into a bustling international metropolis. The shop itself has also become a distinctive landmark in the commercial heart of Causeway Bay, reflecting the city's multi-cultural identity. What Chu runs is more than a business; it is a commitment to tradition. It is also a connection between community members, a collective memory, and a sense of belonging.

The longer the Tortoise-herb jelly is simmered, the purer its quality becomes. Every mouthful of Tortoise-herb jelly, bitter at first with a sweet finish, reflects its maker's dedication to craftsmanship and genuine care for customers, untainted by the business world.






## Tortoise-herb Jelly

Popular in Hong Kong, Guangdong and Guangxi, its major ingredients include turtle shell, glabrous greenbrier rhizome, liquorice, etc. Occasionally, Japanese honeysuckle flower bud, Mongolian dandelion herb, adhesive rehmannia root tuber, capillary wormwood herb and other Chinese medicines will be added to enhance its body-cooling effect. Tortoise-herb jelly can relieve symptoms of excess body heat and humidity such as skin sores. However, it is not suitable for pregnant women or those menstruating, as well as individuals with a weak constitution. Individuals should consult registered Chinese medicine practitioners before consuming it.



# 2.1

2.1.3 Sweet Tea

The Culture of Herbal Tea: A Taste of Southern China

## Sweet Tea and Bitter Tea: Herbal Teas and Their Mixture of Tastes

Most traditional herbal tea shops serve two major types of herbal tea: a sweet variety, which includes chrysanthemum tea that nourishes the body and quench thirst, and a bitter variety, such as 24 herbs tea that is known for its detoxifying and cooling properties. For customers, it is an experience akin to sipping from the cup of life, with a variety of tastes to be explored. However, for businesses, the drastically changing environment presents a significant challenge, leaving traditional shops like Wai Long Hou Herbal Tea Shop in Sham Shui Po to face the unknown.



Wong Kang-ming, the third-generation successor, recalls that his grandfather first ran a grocery store after coming to Hong Kong in the 1940s, selling cooking oil, food items and other merchandises. It was only later, when persuaded by a salesman to purchase a batch of Chinese medicines, that his grandfather moved into the herbal tea industry. Initially, the family sold only two types of herbal tea: the sweet chrysanthemum tea, which is suitable for daily consumption, and the bitter tea, which serves a therapeutic purpose and must be served hot. Today, Wong still adheres to his ancestors' principle, which is the very soul of the shop.

Speaking of the vibrant old days, Wong sighs and notes that Sham Shui Po used to be a bustling neighbourhood with a theatre, a bus terminal, and a ferry pier. These facilities, along with a night market, brought countless customers to their shop, which had to stay open until 1 a.m. every day. But as the city landscape changed, the ferry pier was replaced by reclaimed land, the bus terminal relocated, the newly constructed MTR station redirected foot traffic away from the area, and the closure of the theatre further worsened the situation. Additionally, after COVID-19 pandemic, the people of Hong Kong have developed a habit of staying at home at night, resulting in empty streets after 7 p.m. "Without people on the streets, who am I selling to?" says Wong with a bitter smile.










While selling herbal tea can be quite profitable, the high cost of rent and staff wages impose a heavy burden. In the past, the shop could generate $1,000 of income per hour, but now, with business reduced to one-third, it will be a struggle to reach that goal over an entire day. Wong admits that if he had not been heavily involved in the daily operation to minimise the wage cost, the shop would have closed a long time ago. Despite the challenges, he still insists on carefully simmering herbal tea according to its medicinal properties, without cutting any corners.

Wong states that it is too early to tell whether his young son will want to take over the business. "I plan to continue working for a few more years and see what my son thinks. If he is not interested, I'll simply retire." His tone reveals a concern about the break in succession, but he understands that the changing environment is beyond human control. To him, herbal tea is more than just a business; it is the continuation of the family legacy. All he can do is take things as they come, and persist in his craft amid the adversities. More than just a sensory experience, the sweet and bitter varieties of herbal tea mirror the joys and sorrows of life.

## Sweet Tea

In addition to the bitter variety, herbal tea shops also serve different types of sweet drinks, such as chrysanthemum tea, five-flower tea, chrysanthemum honey drink, ginseng with honey drink, etc. Most of these herbal teas are made of Chinese medicines with a mild and fragrant flavour, including Japanese Honeysuckle flower bud, chrysanthemum, Mexican frangipani flower, tree cotton, kudzuvine flower, American ginseng, etc. During the brewing process, crystal sugar, slab brown sugar or honey are usually added to achieve a nourishing and cooling effect.

# 2.2

## 2.2.1

Household Remedies: A Tradition of Quality & Sincerity

Hop Chai Tea

# Two Centuries of Hop Chai Tea: Tied to Hong Kong through Thick and Thin

In the resource-depleted time after the war, Hop Chai Tea (small-boxed tea) was a staple in every home, serving as an amulet against colds, flu, and damp stagnation in the stomach and intestines. Each small box of tea leaves and herbal aroma carries the compassion of a family that has safeguarded the community for two centuries and the city's shared memory across generations.

An ancestor in the 14th generation of the Yuen family served as an official in the Qing Dynasty. Witnessing the miseries the epidemic inflicted on the people, he worked with court physicians to develop a medical formula to help the public and founded Kam Wo Tea in 1821. In 1898, the tea was officially named Yuen Kut Lam's Kam Wo Tea, commonly known as Hop Chai Tea. As Yuen Lok-ming, the current person-in-charge of Yuen Kut Lam, recounts the story of his family, one is struck by how forward-thinking his forebear was, always putting patients and their needs first.




When an epidemic sweeps in, just like the COVID-19 pandemic we experienced, how do we rapidly fight it and treat patients? Yuen says bluntly, "Infected patients may not even be able to get out of bed. How could they find the energy to decoct Chinese medicine? That's why my incredible ancestor came up with the idea of brewing it as tea." Tea leaves are soaked in a concentrated decoction made from over 20 kinds of medicinal ingredients and allowed to fully absorb the juices before they are dried and packaged. This method is arguably a precursor of modern concentrated Chinese medicine.

Brewing tea made it much easier than boiling herbs for patients, sparing them the hassle of decoction. Hop Chai Tea boxes, distributed for free as charity in the beginning, were a godsend in the epidemic. When the epidemic became recurrent in the late 19th century, demands for proprietary Chinese medicines rose day by day. The Yuens started selling the tea at low prices without abandoning their charitable spirit. Yuen says Kam Wo Tea was sold in cardboard boxes as early as a century ago. The packaging not only made the tea a fancy item at the time but also reflected the value the family placed on quality and hygiene.





Kam Wo Tea, arranged neatly in boxes, gradually became synonymous with proprietary Chinese medicine as well as a collective memory for the post-war generation. Its success was intertwined with Hong Kong's growth in the 1950s and 60s, which was considered the heyday of Yuen Kut Lam. "We didn't need any doctors. Hop Chai Tea was our go-to whenever we were sick," Yuen recalls of his childhood. At the time, Western medicine was not popular, and proprietary Chinese medicines formed the core of everyday healthcare. Yuen Kut Lam was not only a household name in Hong Kong, it also expanded overseas to Southeast Asia, America and Europe, wherever there were Chinese. Its taste soothed people far




from home both mentally and physically.

Yuen Kut Lam also took an innovative approach to publicity by inviting leading film stars Linda Lin Dai and Diana Chang Chung-wen to represent the brand and putting advertisements on the radio. A calendar poster from the period is still on display at the shop on Jervois Street, Sheung Wan. At the time, Hong Kong's industry was booming, and Chinese business was also venturing into the global scene. Yet, every business has its ups and downs; the business of Hop Chai Tea has also waxed and waned along with Hong Kong's economic and social transformations.

Over the past decade or so, the situation has been difficult for Yuen. When he returned to Hong Kong from his trade overseas for his severely ailing father, he was unexpectedly thrust into taking over the family business. The age-old brand is hit on multiple fronts as the younger generations rely more on Western medicine, and the trade of proprietary Chinese medicines is not as strong as it was. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the surging costs of raw Chinese medicine ingredients, together with customs restrictions and high shipping costs, had left overseas orders close to zero. As Hong Kong's regulations on Chinese medicine are increasingly comprehensive, stricter registration requirements for proprietary Chinese medicines have also become a major hurdle for the industry. Yet, Yuen is relieved to finally see a silver lining after more than 10 years of effort in registering their products.

Yuen Kut Lam insists on manufacturing their products fully by hand. From compounding ingredients, processing, to packaging, every step goes through the hands of his veteran staff; even the tea leaves are dried by slow roasting with charcoal. The approach of "slow work makes fine goods" ensures consistent quality for Kam Wo Tea, but also limits yields and keeps costs high. Yuen strongly believes that fine quality is the key to enabling Hop Chai Tea to stand firm for two centuries. He has nothing to be ashamed of when he faces an ancestral picture because he has given his best to guard the family mission. Even when costs rise, he is unwilling to raise prices sharply as he has the needs and trust of his long-time customers in mind.

"As long as someone, even just one, in Hong Kong remembers the taste of our Hop Chai Tea, our persistence has a purpose." Yuen has taken a difficult path in an era of rapid changes. The helping spirit and commitment to traditions Hop Chai Tea embodies have left us a two-century sweet finish to savour and to revere.









## Kam Wo Tea / Hop Chai Tea

The list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Hong Kong was updated in 2024 to include "Traditional Chinese Concentrated Medicine Preparation Methods" with Kam Wo Tea/ Hop Chai Tea under the category. Made in Hong Kong, Kam Wo Tea, also known as Hop Chai Tea (small-boxed tea), is still largely prepared according to the recipe passed down from the predecessors. Infused with juices made from over 20 types of Chinese medicines, the tea leaves undergo nine rounds of steaming and sun-drying. When one soaks the tea leaves in hot water, they release the medicinal substance to make a remedial tea ready for use.

# 2.2

## 2.2.2

Household Remedies: A Tradition of Quality & Sincerity

Chut Lee Powder

# A Legacy of Compassion for Children: The Journey from Chut Lee Powder to an Empire of Proprietary Chinese Medicines

Chut Lee Powder was created during a time of severe scarcity in medical resources, when many children died from fever and other common illnesses. With the product's excellent effectiveness and affordable price, the manufacturer Ma Pak Leung quickly gained recognition for its caring and dedicated spirit. This laid the foundation for the company's other medicines, such as Pak Fung Pill and On Kung Pill. After two centuries of steady development, the company now offers a wide variety of proprietary Chinese medicines.

The history of Ma Pak Leung dates back to the Daoguang reign of the Qing Dynasty (1822) when Ma Chun-heng, the founder of Ma Pak Leung, was a medicine vendor in Foshan, Guangdong. After the family started their business, the second-generation successor realised that the high mortality rate among children was caused by a lack of access to paediatric medicine. Determined to save young lives, he tirelessly developed the Chut Lee Powder, ultimately saving countless others. This commitment soon blossomed, inspiring a full range of proprietary Chinese medicines.



At its peak, the collection featured over a hundred unique formulas to treat various illnesses. As the Qing Dynasty was coming to an end in the early 20th century, the Ma family relocated to Hong Kong. There, Ma Chung-yu, the third-generation successor, established a shop in Sheung Wan, and later expanded the business to markets in Shanghai, Shantou and Southeast Asia, demonstrating an international vision.

For 200 years, the Ma family has been strictly adhering to their ancestral principle of using only high-quality materials and following traditional processes. However, Mongkolchai Mavichien, the fifth-generation successor, states that when he took over the family business, he quickly realised that the company was facing challenges influenced by an entirely different era. With government regulation becoming increasingly stringent in proprietary Chinese medicines, market competition becoming exceedingly fierce, and brand recognition among younger generation declining, even the most historically well-known companies must transform. First, he began modernising the sales channel by expanding into chain drugstores and supermarkets, while also deploying strategic advertisements in











hopes of reintroducing Ma Pak Leung to customers. Then, he gained market insight, developing products that cater to the need of a younger generation, making Chinese medicine more accessible and daily to the new generation.

As the Chinese medicine industry transitions from family-run businesses to modern, standardised operations, Ma Pak Leung has experienced various changes, including the adoption of new equipment, an increase in productivity, and a revamp of management philosophy. Coming from a family that masters the knowledge of both Chinese and Western medicine, Mavichien firmly believes in the potential of combining these two approaches. He actively collaborates with universities and research institutes to conduct scientific studies on the company's signature products, such as On Kung Pill. The initiative not only provides clinical proof of the products' efficacy and boosts consumer confidence, but also improves the professional standing of the entire Chinese medicine industry.

The key to Ma Pak Leung's success lies in its marketing and management strategies, as well as a commitment to ethical practices. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company regularly distributed essential supplies, including medicine and face masks, to employees and their families. In more typical times, the company organises group tours, lucky draws and dinner parties to foster team-building and camaraderie among staff. This people-oriented management gives employees a sense of belonging and unity. Mavichien holds that maintaining and growing a company is often more challenging than starting one. Only through insisting on quality and showing respect for people can a brand endure.

From the young-life-saving Chut Lee Powder to a brand that now symbolises the Chinese medicine industry in Hong Kong, Ma Pak Leung has stood the test of






time for two centuries for its business with a conscience. Under the leadership of the fifth-generation successor, the company adheres to a philosophy that blends an insistence on quality, a spirit of reform, a care for the community, and an integration of science, enabling the time-honoured shop to endure and thrive in the modern business landscape. It is a legacy that inspires many of its peers in the Chinese medicine industry.




## Chut Lee Powder

In Chinese medicine, there are two types of Chut Lee Powder (also known as Qili Powder). One is for treating bone and soft tissue injuries, blood stasis, and open wounds. Its ingredients, among others, include dragon's blood, frankincense, myrrh, and safflower. The other type is for treating paediatric illnesses, such as the accumulation of internal heat, convulsions, and seizures. This variety contains ingredients like bile arisaema, sharpleaf uncaria stem with hools, cicada slough, amber, etc.

# 2.2

## 2.2.3

Pills

Household Remedies: A Tradition of Quality & Sincerity

# Protecting Families for over a Century: Tiny Pills with a Huge Impact




Pastes, elixirs, pills and powders are some of the most common forms of Chinese medicine. Among them, pills are especially popular due to their ease of consumption and storage. The maroon-coloured Po Chai Pills have been serving the people of Hong Kong for 130 years. Not only are they an effective remedy for stomach discomfort and common cold, but they have also become a symbol of local culture.

The story of Li Chung Shing Tong, the manufacturer of Po Chai Pills, began in 1896. The founder, Lee Shau-kee, started as a herbal tea vendor, selling his Po Chai Tea at marketplaces where he often offered the beverage free of charge to neighbours in need. Over time, he modified his formula and transformed the tea into pill form, making it easier for customers and travelers to carry along.










This innovation marked the birth of Po Chai Pills.

As a member company of the public listed JBM (Healthcare) Group, Alfred Chan, the Group's Strategic Development Director, emphasises that Li Chung Shing Tong still upholds its original mission of protecting people from illnesses while serving the society. Due to Po Chai Pills' remarkable popularity, the product has become a staple in areas such as Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and among Chinese communities overseas.

Since the transformation of Hong Kong's economy, many local industries have relocated to Chinese mainland to save costs. However, Alfred maintains that all Po Chai Pills' products are made in their factory within the territory. "We adhere to the principle of 'Made in Hong Kong', because this is the only way to ensure quality control, maintain the efficacy of the medicine, and preserve the reputation of the brand."

Wang Lin, Li Chung Shing Tong's General Manager, elaborates that Po Chai Pills are made only from high-quality raw materials. To that end, the company



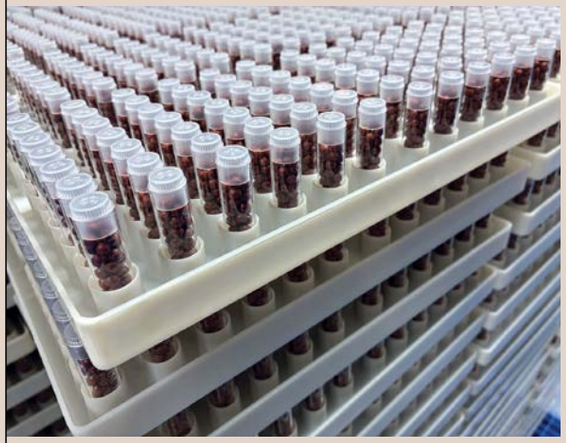


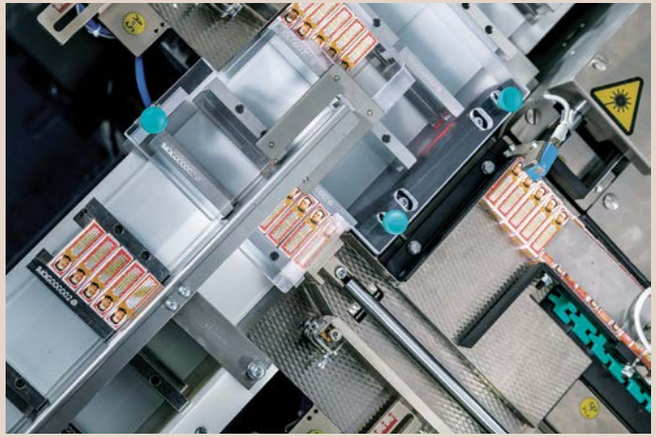
enforces strict guidelines regarding both the origin and the harvest time of the plants. Additionally, suppliers are required to meet standards set by the Chinese government and to provide safety reports that guarantee their commodities are safe in terms of heavy metal content and pesticide residues. Once the factory receives the raw materials, the company's laboratory conducts another round of testing to make sure "every batch will be examined". With these procedures in place, Po Chai Pills can maintain the quality, safety, and efficacy of the medicine, allowing this century-old formula to retain the trust of customers.

Wang explains that the company aims to balance "tradition" with "modern" requirement by implementing a series of reforms. The classic formula, which is the foundation of the medicine's efficacy, can never be altered. However, manual processes by veteran masters such as shaping the pills, coating them with powder, and drying them may lead to issues with product standardization, efficiency and hygiene. With the introduction of new machines, raw materials are now added in precise doses, and automated shaping and drying have greatly enhanced efficiency. "In the past, the process of manufacturing and drying could take up to two weeks, but currently it can be completed in just one day." Furthermore, the new approach significantly reduces the risk of microbial contamination, enabling the company to meet Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) standards that regulate the medicine industry.

Po Chai Pills has made significant advancement in scientific research and quality control as well. In collaboration with the Hong Kong Institute of Biotechnology, the company has introduced new technology capable of identifying counterfeit raw materials within minutes, reducing the previous detection time from several days. Meanwhile, Po Chai Pills (known as Pu Ji Wan on the Chinese mainland) has







also implemented a system that prints a barcode on every box of their product. This allows consumers to trace the origin of the medicine, thus enhancing product safety and helping prevent the purchase of counterfeit drugs.

With over a hundred years of history, Po Chai Pills recognises the importance of evolving to appeal to a new generation of customers. The company is committed to transforming its image to move away from the perception of being "old and traditional". In advertising, the focus gradually shifts from being a "family medicine" to the theme of "protecting your health". To achieve this, young artists are hired as advocates, new advertising songs are composed, and series of popular TV shows are sponsored to reflect the new image.

From its early beginning as a family-run business to its current status as a corporation guided by modern principles, Po Chai Pills has exemplified a successful model of transformation. It not only symbolises outstanding entrepreneurship but also serves as a testament to the doctrines of pragmatic spirit, resourcefulness, and ongoing pursuit of excellence that are often associated with "Made in Hong Kong".




## Pills

Pills are a common form of Chinese medicine, easy to consume and particularly suitable for treating long-term illnesses due to the slow release of their active ingredients. During the manufacturing process, raw ingredients are ground into fine powders, and then honey, water, rice cereal, or medicine juice are added to shape them into their final form. Depending on the additives used, pills can be further classified into honey pills, water pills, rice cereal pills and medicine juice pills, etc.

# 2.2

## 2.2.4

Household Remedies: A Tradition of Quality & Sincerity

Wax Pills

# Wax Pills with a Four-hundred-year Legacy: A Story of Commitment to Classic Formula and Traditional Craftsmanship

The technique of sealing medicine pills with wax to protect them from humidity and decay was first introduced four centuries ago by Chan Li Chai. Today, this unique method not only provides a solution for the long-term preservation of Chinese medicines, but also stands as a testament to the values of tradition, craftsmanship and entrepreneurial integrity.

Founded during the Wanli reign of the Ming Dynasty over 400 years ago, Chan Li Chai is recognised by the Guinness World Records as the "oldest operating pharmaceutical factory". Its development was closely intertwined with modern Chinese history. The Chan family set up its Hong Kong branch in 1922, known as "Hong Kong Chan Li Chai". This forward-looking decision enabled the passing on of the ancient pharmaceutical tradition in Hong Kong despite its Guangzhou entity later became a state-owned enterprise in 1952.

Tam Shing-kai, the Sales and Marketing Director at Chan Li Chai Medical Factory (HK), emphasises that although many of their industrial counterparts have moved production to the Chinese mainland, or use semi-products from north of the border, they are committed to keeping the entire process in Hong Kong. After importing the raw ingredients, every step—including washing, processing, grinding, and manufacturing—takes place in the territory without any outsourcing. The dedication to traditional craftsmanship is clearly reflected in the details. In the case of processed liquorice root, some manufacturers either purchase finished products directly from mainland, or simply blend liquorice root with honey if they choose to do it themselves. In contrast, Chan Li Chai meticulously follows the ancient recipe, starting from raw liquorice root, paying close attention to the proportion, cooking time, and temperature of the honey. Although this approach significantly increases the cost, it ensures the quality of the final product.



The pursuit of excellence is evident in Chan Li Chai's other products as well. Their Six Ingredient Pill with Raw Rehmannia uses raw rehmannia instead of the processed variety, making it suitable for women with weak constitutions or those experiencing menopause. Another signature product, So Hup Yuen Medical Pills, further demonstrates the company's unwavering commitment to quality. During the Qing Dynasty, Chai Li Chai received praise from the royal court for using this medicine to cure the emperor and was granted the prestigious title "Xing He Tang" (The Hall of Healing and Harmony). The preparation of this pill involves precious ingredients and spices that undergo multiple steps of careful processing, and the final product is sealed







with wax for long-term preservation. Tam reveals that at Chan Li Chai, quality always comes first. The company would rather decline orders or reduce production than use substandard raw materials or simplify the procedures for profit.

To continue his family's legacy, the latest successor, Alfred Chan, has volunteered to go through a series of frontline training due to his lack of medical background. After joining the company, he participated in various production processes, such as identifying and processing different raw materials, monitoring the cooking of honey, and manually shaping the pills, etc. This learning experience is crucial for him to reconnect with the memory of his ancestors and old colleagues, as well as to reaffirm his commitment to carrying on the tradition.

With a mission to modernise the family business, the young entrepreneur hopes to utilise his knowledge in business management to attract a new generation of consumers. Some of his ideas include creating mini versions of the pills for easier consumption and using social media to advertise the brand. However, he emphasises that traditional craftsmanship remains the heart and soul of Chan Li Chai. It is a principle that he will always be committed to preserving. As the company's signature product, the wax pills will continue to adhere to the traditions.





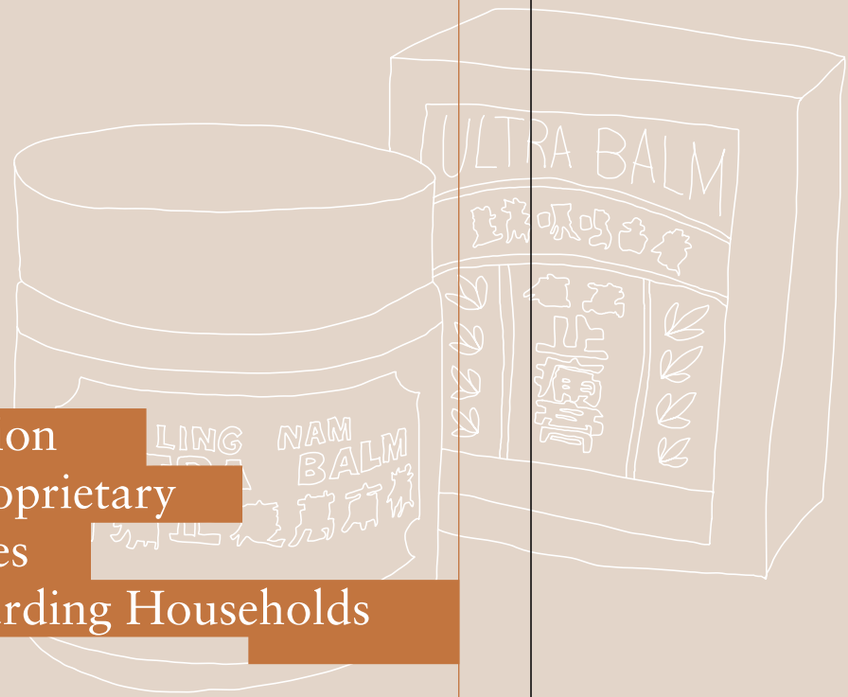
## Wax Pills

In Chinese medicine, there are two types of wax pills. The first type uses honey wax as a molding material to bind the powdered ingredients together. The second type features a wax outer shell that protects the pills from sunlight, humidity, and decay. This method is often used for the long-term preservation of delicate and valuable medicines.

# 2.3

## 2.3.1 Medicated Balms

Topical Remedies: For Muscle and Joint Relief and Improved Circulation




## Leading the Innovation in Proprietary Chinese Medicines While Safeguarding Households

Over a hundred years ago, many Chinese people migrated overseas in search of better livelihoods. When they experienced muscle pain, insect bites, fire burns, or other injuries, a bottle of multi-purpose medicated oil was often their only medical remedy. This history has made products like Hung Far Oil, Hud Kwai Oil, and Cajuput Oil symbols of the hardship endured by previous generations of Chinese labourers. Today, instead of disappearing in the torrent of time, these popular medicines also represent innovation in the field of proprietary Chinese medicines driven by a century-old topical medication brand.

The story of Ling Nam Medicine Factory began in 1919 when its founder, Lui Moon-cheong, emigrated from Nanhai, Guandong to Singapore. There, he developed the first generation of medicated oil using his family formula. The product quickly became a staple in the lives of ordinary folks who were troubled by the hot and humid weather of Southeast Asia or suffered muscle and joint discomfort from working long hours in water-logged fields. Later, the



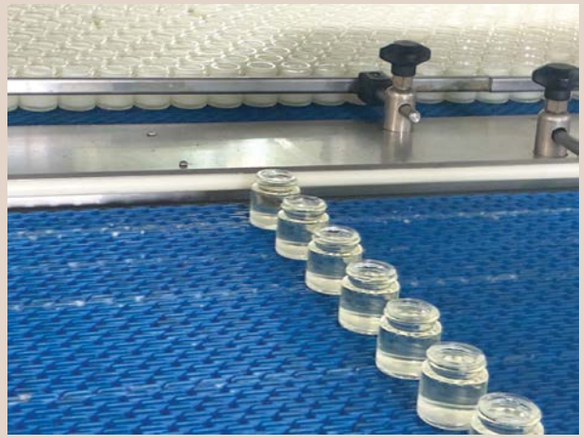




company gradually expanded its footprint to Malaysia, Vietnam, Myanmar and surrounding areas, becoming a necessity for the local Chinese communities. When Lui Wing-yan, the son of Lui Moon-cheong, took over the business, the family relocated production to Hong Kong and established their first shop on Wellington Street near Central.

Ling Nam entered the Chinese mainland market in the 1980s, becoming one of the first Hong Kong medicine manufacturers to gain sales approval there. However, its production has remained south of the border. Lui Wai-keung, the third-generation successor, explains that “made in Hong Kong” is more than just a geographical label; it represents a commitment to quality assurance. This





decision allows the management to ensure that products are safe and reliable, despite the higher cost associated with factory renovations and product inspections. Because of this dedication, Ling Nam has been able to maintain its unique role in a competitive market and continues to symbolise the quality of Hong Kong brands.

Lui reveals that he began introducing international manufacturing standards to the company's production since the 1990s, long before the Hong Kong government implemented its Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) policy. After studying similar cases in Chinese mainland, Japan, Australia and other countries, he decided to adopt the model of Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) from Australia to redesign his production line. "We were the first Hong Kong Proprietary Chinese Medicines company to gain recognition from the Australian TGA". This accreditation not only enabled Ling Nam to enter markets around the world, but also initiated a series of overhauls in the company's production processes. For instance, in its dust-free cleanroom, medicated oil is now bottled automatically instead of being manually poured from small kettles. These changes have helped Ling Nam shed its image as a "family workshop" and transformed itself into a modern enterprise that operates on a scientific and standardised model.

In many people's minds, medicated oils and balms are often associated with strong smells and are thought to be used "only by the elderly". To challenge this stereotype, Lui works hard to create a new market among young consumers, developing products such as medicine sprays, low-scent ointments, and easy-to-tear pain relief patches. In addition, Ling Nam frequently sponsors local sports teams such as women's football teams and basketball teams to increase the company's visibility, using athletes' positive feedback to demonstrate the effectiveness of its products.

As a dedicated learner, Lui eagerly participates in various Chinese medicine courses at universities to explore new uses for traditional ingredients and uncover new market opportunities. One of the results of his studies is the Nutmeg Balm. Based on Ling Nam Ultra Balm, a signature product known for pain relief, this new variety combines nutmeg to create a milder formulation for women and children. It is an innovation that stems from a deep understanding of market needs and medicinal knowledge.



From its origin as a street medicine in Southeast Asia to its current status as a modern brand with international accreditation, Ling Nam has found a successful balance between heritage and development. It preserves the tradition of century-old formulas with the latest scientific advancements. It also proves that time-honoured Chinese medicine brands can be integrated into the daily lives of younger generations, whether at gyms or sports grounds, continuing to serve the health needs of today's public.



## Medicated Balms as Topical Remedies

Medicated balms made with Chinese medicines can be classified into two types: one with a softer texture and another with a firmer texture. The softer variety is typically used to treat chronic or sub-acute skin conditions, providing protection and moisturisation. In contrast, the firmer variety is more effective for treating trauma, injuries, arthritis and similar conditions, helping reduce swelling, eliminating internal toxicity, and stimulating tissue regeneration. Both types of ointment are applied to the affected area, and they may be covered with a medical dressing. Different remedies are used depending on the specific conditions and needs of the patient.

# 2.3

## 2.3.2

Topical Remedies: For Muscle and Joint Relief and Improved Circulation

Medicated Oils

# Healing the Patients and Empowering the Community: The Philanthropy Story of a Medicated Remedy








In the streets of Sham Shui Po, there is a section of pedestrian arcade where passers-by are greeted by the refreshing aroma of the medicated remedy Wood Lock Medicated Balm. Wafting from a pre-war Chinese shophouse with a distinctive balcony design, the scent tells the story of a Chinese medicine practitioner who transformed his herbal tea shop into a philanthropic enterprise. Decades later, his caring legacy remains central to the community's memories.

Before the reclamation project at the old pier, Sham Shui Po was a residential hub for the working class during the 1950s and 1960s. It was in this neighbourhood that Wong To Yick opened his herbal tea shop Man Po Tong Yick Kee on Nam Cheong Street. Many of his customers were new immigrants from the Chinese mainland who worked as laborers, construction workers, or in textile factories during the day and returned to their humble wooden sheds at night. Because of the tough nature of their jobs and a lack of medical resources, aches and pains were common in the community. As a result, the herbal tea shop served both as a resting place and a de facto clinic. In addition to selling herbal teas, the shop owner also provided health advice to his customers, which eventually led to the development of Wong To Yick Wood Lock Medicated Balm.




The herbal tea shop was home to the entire Wong family. It was a shophouse where the front was for business and the rear served as the family's living space. Wong Tin-chee, son of Wong To Yick and the second-generation successor, recalls helping his father from a very young age, learning the intricate knowledge about Chinese medicine and watching his father teach patients self-massage. These memories, combined with his upbringing in the area, fostered a strong bond between him and the community, ultimately inspiring him to pursue a career as a Chinese medicine practitioner. Wong emphasises that the development of Wood Lock Medicated Balm was driven by the needs of the community instead of a desire for profit. "My father never intended this

to be a business. Rather, it was a way to help others. It was as simple as that."

During the development of the medicated remedy, Wong To Yick recognised a significant demand in the community for an affordable remedy that could relieve muscle fatigue and heal bruises and injuries. In addition to using his expertise to create a product, he embraced the principle of "helping others to help themselves". By teaching patients simple self-massage techniques, he reduced their need for frequent consultations, thereby helping them avoid unnecessary expenses. This approach exemplified his commitment to medical ethics and a spirit of community support.

After taking over the family business, Wong began to continue his father's legacy while incorporating his own insights, with a focus on the caring for children with special needs. By combining Chinese medicine theories with modern rehabilitation principles, he has developed integrated treatment regimens for conditions such as cerebral palsy and autism. Furthermore, his clinic offers free consultation for special needs children, bringing hope to both the young patients and their parents.

For two generations, the Wong family has dedicated to merging medical services with philanthropy. Wong reiterates that "medicine is for saving lives, not for making a profit." He believes that training in Chinese medicine involves more than the mere transfer of techniques; it must also instill ethics and values in future generations of practitioners. With this belief in mind, he established the charity organisation Community Medcare, which offers primary care for grassroots families, education in Chinese medicine, and support for children with special needs. The organisation not only facilitates clinical training for Chinese medicine practitioners but also promotes a mission of compassion in patient care.

Although Wong To Yick has long become a brand with household recognition, Wong has never stopped serving his home community of Sham Shui Po. His emotional connection to the neighbourhood and his unwavering commitment have transformed the medicated remedy from a mere product into a part of the community's history. His practice demonstrates his belief that medical services are an endeavour of using the technique to care for the people as well as fulfilling social responsibility.



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## Medicated Oils as Topical Remedies

The production of medicated oil made with Chinese medicines involves soaking, refining, or blending various ingredients. Common materials used in the process include mint herbs, camphor, and Szechwan lovage rhizome. Typically applied to the skin, medicated oils can stimulate blood circulation, remove blood stasis, relieve muscle stiffness, and ease muscle or joint pain. Due to their light nature, these products are easy to use and can be quickly absorbed by the skin, ensuring rapid therapeutic effects.

# 2.4

## 2.4.1

Heritage Medicinal Foods: Classic Everyday Delicacies

Pork Knuckle and Ginger Stew

# A Traditional Dish that Embodies Love and Caring: Pork Knuckle and Ginger Stew

Pork knuckle and ginger stew is an ideal dish that helps women recover after childbirth and is often a symbol of joy for Chinese families as they welcome a new member. Following the principle of "medicine and food are one and the same" in Chinese medicine theory, the dish features three key ingredients: sweet vinegar, which promotes blood circulation and removes blood stasis; pork knuckle, which is rich in nutrition; and old ginger, which dispels coldness and warms the stomach.

When it comes to pork knuckle and ginger stew, older generations certainly recognise the brand of Pat Chun. The company has been selling this delicacy, along with sweet vinegar and other products for nearly a century in Hong Kong, making it an essential part of the city's daily life.

Since its establishment in 1932, Pat Chun is currently operated by Trevor Ng, the third-generation successor. He reveals that the original purpose of pork knuckle and ginger stew was for self-consumption. "My grandpa made this dish for my grandma after she gave birth and shared it with relatives and friends. As it was immensely popular, it eventually became one of our signature products." Because of this history, Pat Chun to this day still pays careful attention to product quality, as if they are making the dish for their own family.

When customers walk into one of Pat Chun's shops, they can find over a hundred different products. In addition to sweet vinegar, all sorts of jams, pastes and sauces, there are also rice dumplings, festival cakes, various snacks, premade home dish packages and even sweet vinegar ice cream. Trevor explains that, from a business perspective, maintaining so many products is not cost effective. However, due to their commitment to the "family-oriented" principle, they continue to uphold the tradition.

"What inspires our products is the needs of family members," Trevor says. Whenever someone in the family comes up with an idea, he will try to follow through. For instance, when his nephew wished to enjoy home-cooked dishes while studying abroad, he created premade dish





packages. After his wife gave birth, he developed a tea for postnatal care. When his sister expressed craving for a nut jam, Trevor came up with a recipe for it. All these products are driven by Pat Chun's commitment to health and safety rather than profit, and the result is a unique trust between the customers and the brand.

The key to Pat Chun's craft lies in the "traditional method of fermentation", which occurs in enormous storage vats placed at the outdoor area of the brewery. In the case of soy sauce, Trevor explains that the soybeans must be sundried for six months, so the aspergillus oryzae can break down the bean proteins, thus releasing natural amino acid and creating a unique umami flavour. Trevor emphasises that modern technology can never adequately replace this process. Although chemical fermentation shortens the time, the traditional taste is also affected. Besides, government regulations have become increasingly stringent, enforcing various requirements on microbial count, shelf life and other standards, all of which present new challenges for the industry.







Trevor continues that his mother, who holds a doctoral degree in Chemistry, has provided the family with extensive knowledge about ingredients and additives in their pursuit of perfection. This expertise also helps him ensure the safety and quality of the products. Trevor acknowledges that, now the biggest challenge is achieving modern hygiene standards while keeping the traditional flavour. Although Pat Chun has optimised its sterilisation process with scientific methods, doing so inevitably has altered the taste as well. It is a dilemma shared by many traditional industries, yet, finding a balance between the competing demands is exactly how some of the companies thrive.

Drawing on his Ph.D. in Engineering, Trevor has implemented many innovations since taking over the family business, such as analysing production processes with a scientific approach, introducing modern technologies in packaging and testing procedures, and building a new assembly line to ensure product safety. On the other hand, he also recognises some traditional skills need to be preserved. For instance, his experienced colleagues can assess the degree of fermentation by touching the product, a technique that is difficult to replicate with data science. Therefore, it is essential to train a new generation of employees before the older staff members retire. It takes a mentality of "embracing change while maintaining tradition" to keep the business running.

To attract young customers and dispel the perception of "being an old brand", Pat Chun has been consistently developing new products that feature their signature sweet vinegar, including ice cream, coffee, salad, and even beer. Additionally, building on its sweet vinegar delivery service launched four decades ago, the company has also established an e-commerce platform in recent years, enabling customers to place orders through mobile devices.











From his grandfather's initial commitment to the third generation's innovative endeavour, the core philosophy of Pat Chun has always been "family-oriented". The enticing fragrance of pork knuckle and ginger stew, along with the jams, sauces, cakes, and snacks, reflects the Ng family's dedication to heritage. It is also the secret to the company's success in the modern society.

## Pork Knuckle and Ginger Stew

Recognised by the Hong Kong government as part of the territory's Intangible Cultural Heritage, this medicinal delicacy is especially popular in Guangdong and surrounding regions. It reflects the Chinese tradition of postnatal care, which involves not only the celebrating family but also the entire community. After preparing the dish, the family usually consumes it and shares it with their relatives and neighbours to spread the joy and blessing, thereby enhancing their bond with one another. Customarily, a woman needs to wait 12 days after childbirth for the postpartum lochia discharge to complete before having this dish.



# 2.4

## 2.4.2 Preserved Dried Plums

Heritage Medicinal Foods: Classic Everyday Delicacies

# From Food Preservation to Tasty Snacks, the Age-old History of Preserved Fruits

Before the days of refrigerators, salt and sugar were used as natural preservatives to pickle fresh produce, preventing rot and waste. This ingenious method of food preservation gave rise to unique "preserved fruits". Even with the overwhelming variety of modern snacks available today, these traditional treats still hold a special place in the market. Beyond their mouth-watering sour and sweet flavours, they carry memories of daily life across generations.

The craft of making preserved fruits has a long history that predates the Song








Dynasty. While the northern way mostly relies on sugar, the Cantonese use salt-curing and sun exposure to turn fruits like plums, ginger, lemons and citrus into semi-products that can be stored for years before they are seasoned with liquorice and sugar. To older generations, preserved fruits are everyday and travel essentials. Preserved dried plums (wah mui) stimulate saliva and quench thirst, while winter ginger dispels coldness and relieves coughs. These treats are more than just snacks; they are practical healthcare aids.

Leslie Wong, the fourth-generation successor of Wong Wing Kee Preserved Fruits Factory, proudly shares a magical encounter involving the family's preserved dried plums. Over a century ago, his great-great-grandfather sold handmade preserved fruits along Square Street in Sheung Wan to make a living after he had arrived in Hong Kong from Dongguan. A turning point came when a wealthy trader from a Nam Pak Hong (trading firm) came along. The trader had suffered from a painful, swollen tongue that doctors were unable to treat, but he gradually recovered by sucking on the salty dried plums made by Wong. The man became a loyal customer and supporter of the business. The episode not only proved the therapeutic value of the preserved fruits but also kickstarted the brand.

Since then, Wong Wing Kee's line of products, such as dried tangerine peel plums and candied ginger, continued to expand; they even travelled abroad along with Chinese emigrants as a comforting reminder of home. Dried tangerine peels and winter ginger even became remedies for those struggling to adapt to new environments. Wong Wing Kee broke into the international market, selling to Europe and America. Its candied ginger even won high praise from the late British queen. The history highlights the unique charm of preserved fruits on the global stage.

Wong Wing Kee has remained successful in the competitive market for a century by balancing quality with forward-thinking market strategies. As early as the 1970s-80s when Japanese department stores arrived in Hong Kong, Wong Wing Kee employed novel packaging designs with multilingual labels printed in Chinese, English, Japanese and French to promote its export and global image. It also brought in the barcode system for international supermarkets.
















These measures demonstrated the brand's ability to uphold traditions and embrace opportunities brought by technologies.

As a successor to the long-established brand, Wong strives to innovate while upholding the family legacy. He explored the combination of modern cooking and preserved fruits, like preserved dried plums and dried lemon ginger. He created new dishes such as kumquat fried rice and braised pork ribs with preserved dried plums. He published his experience to promote the use of preserved fruits in everyday diets. More moving still, he is dedicated to charity and elderly care, actively researching "soft meals" to help those with swallowing or chewing difficulties rediscover the familiar tastes of traditional preserved fruits. He believes the flavours from these people-oriented innovations will bring comfort and fun and evoke sweet memories for the elders.

Preserved fruits embody the Chinese wisdom of preserving health and cherishing resources. With salt and sugar, seasonal bounties are preserved and made into treats that cure homesickness in Chinese people all over the world. From traditional snacks to global commodities and ingredients in modern cooking, the transformation of preserved fruits is a record of survival wisdom, cultural adaptation and emotional inheritance.

## Preserved Dried Plums (Wah Mui)

Mature plums are put through a meticulous process of pickling, sun drying and processing with sugar to make preserved dried plums. Sour and sweet with a hint of saltiness, preserved dried plums are known for its ability to nourish yin and stimulate fluids and as a popular snack in the Cantonese region and Hong Kong. Legend has it that storytellers in ancient China would keep a piece of preserved dried plum in their mouths to quench their thirst during long performances, hence the name — wah (speech) mui (plum).



# 2.4

2.4.3 Dried Tangerine Peels

Heritage Medicinal Foods: Classic Everyday Delicacies

# Select Ingredients and Uncompromising Quality: Dried Tangerine Peel Plum's Global Journey




Preserved fruits' charm lies in the details. Every year, fleshy plums are harvested in May, followed by young ginger in July and August, and dried tangerine peel (chenpi) collected from tangerines harvested at year-end. As the texture, thickness and sugar content of the peel determine the final quality, strict standards are in place to meet both local needs and international regulations. These standards enable this tiny treat to go beyond Hong Kong, winning praise from the global market and becoming a food ambassador for Southern Chinese food culture.




The story of Tang Hoi Moon Kee began in the 1950s. Originally a fruit wholesaler in Sheung Wan, the Tang family had to relocate their fruit market due to the opening of the MTR. They decided to transform their business by beginning to outsource the processing of dried tangerine peel plums and then venturing into establishing their own brand. The two brothers worked with one heart. Elder brother Tang Hoi took charge of internal production and quality management, while younger brother Tang Wing-moon acted as a diplomat, travelling across Southeast Asia, America and Canada. Long before the Internet, he relied on his sincerity and stamina to open the doors to global markets.

Taking over the business from his father Tang Hoi, third-generation successor Tang Wai-yuen upholds his predecessors' values, insisting on quality as refined as that of a fine red wine. Yet, upholding a business is more challenging than starting one. From trips abroad, Tang realised the market had changed: younger generations enjoy preserved fruits as traditional snacks rather than something to recommend on their parts. To carry on the legacy, the family must actively venture new ways.

Heritage is more than just business; it is also a vessel for emotion and culture. Davy Tang, son of Tang Wing-moon, admits that he feels an intense sense of belonging and responsibility whenever he looks at their family name on the shop sign after his father passed away. Despite their individual careers, all the brothers decided to come home to guard the family legacy hand in hand. This strong sense of cohesion in the bloodline has kept the brand stable amid challenges from fluctuations in the global economy and tariffs, steadily expanding overseas and reaching as far as Europe and the Middle East.

The Tang brothers are now focusing on ways to rebrand and innovate their products to attract young customers. They work with local tea restaurants (cha chaan teng) and even Michelin-starred restaurants to introduce new products by infusing preserved dried plums and dried tangerine peels into specialty drinks and desserts, actively promoting these products on social platforms. These attempts aim to transform preserved fruits into a modern way of life that is perfect for social platform sharing and tagging.

Starting as a small family shop on Wing Lok Street, Tang Hoi Moon Kee has made itself a global brand through online marketplaces such as Amazon and witnessed the changes in the preserved fruits industry in Hong Kong. The family believes that preserved fruits and the food culture of Southern China it represents will endure as it provides both comfort to homesick overseas Chinese and a window on a feature of Hong Kong to the global market.












## Dried Tangerine Peels (Chenpi)

Refined dried tangerine peels are a traditional type of preserved fruit originating from the Guangdong region. They are manufactured from quality tangerine peels that go through an elaborate process of picking, soaking, cleaning, preserving, cutting, curing, draining, seasoning, repeated sun-drying and storage. While they can be enjoyed as a snack, dried tangerine peels are also a medicinal food that resolves phlegm, eases coughs, regulates the flow of qi and strengthens the spleen.

Persevering through Times of Fortune and Ordeal

Serving the Community with Duty and Professionalism