

# TONIC FOR THE AGES

## 煎一壺時代補帖：高雄 30 家中藥房裡的故事祕方

*Explore the emotive history and latest innovations of Kaohsiung City's iconic traditional herbal apothecary shops. Discover the unique charms of Taiwan's traditional Chinese-medicine culture and its modern legacy. Learn how this traditional, centuries-old industry is innovating to sustain its relevance and value in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

Despite herbal apothecaries in Taiwan having once outnumbered big-name convenience store outlets, social trends are no longer in their favor. With younger generations rarely patronizing these traditional healers, the fate of Taiwan's traditional Chinese medicine dispensaries is in jeopardy. In *Tonic for the Ages*, experienced writers, photographers, and illustrators join forces to curate the history, stories, and closely held secrets of 30 multigenerational herbal apothecaries in Kaohsiung City.

Herbal apothecaries, as part of the social and cultural fabric of Greater Kaohsiung, help safeguard the traditional medical wisdom and folk ways of southern Taiwan. In addition to showcasing the personal stories of owners, this work spotlights how shops are adapting to the times. Learn about Hui Chun Herbal Tea's rebirth as a youth-oriented herbal teahouse, Cheng Hsin Tang's new focus on herbal-based medicinal bath products for pets, and Yong Xing Traditional Chinese Medicine's launch of healthful ready-to-eat herbal entrées, snacks and soups for busy office workers and families. Each innovative step forward, drawing on the natural medical knowledge, effort, and wisdom of generations, upholds traditional Chinese medical heritage while making it relevant and relatable to new and future generations.

*Tonic for the Ages* is a book sure to be appreciated by readers interested in traditional Chinese medicine culture as well as those curious about the unique history and stories of southern Taiwan.



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### 《煎一壺時代補帖》採訪撰文團隊

This work is the culmination of the efforts of 12 Kaohsiung-based authors, including Su Fu-Nan, Lim Chi-Ki, Chu Pōe-Chin, Chu Yue-Ling, Jamie Jiang, Hsieh Hsin-Chia, Lin Pei-Ying, Tseng Yu-Fen, Ruth Yang, Lo Sha, Hsieh Pei-Ying, and Tao Yi-Wen. Their individual experiences as journalist and professional writers bring depth and storied interest to this work.

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# Tonic for the Ages

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With ports and harbors, a bustling metropolis, and forested foothills and mountains, Kaohsiung boasts a vast and variegated landscape. The Chinese herbal apothecaries that serve the inhabitants here through every phase of their lives have each developed a unique character as they’ve evolved in response to the environs in which they’re located. Although one might assume Kaohsiung’s mountains to be relatively limited in terms of resources, this area is actually a treasure trove from which most of the city’s fresh herbs are sourced. Out west, in the coastal port

region of “Takao”<sup>1</sup>, which became wealthy through fishing and mercantilism, well-heeled residents frequent herbal apothecaries to purchase medicinal foods used in lavish nourishing stews. Also, in the towns and villages that line the narrow highway corridor connecting Tainan in the north to Pingtung in the south, apothecaries still serve traveling merchants and businessmen as they have for generations.

Toiling in their shops and rummaging ceaselessly through their medicine chests, pharmacists apply the ancient wisdom of the Divine Farmer<sup>2</sup>, accumulated knowledge of formula prescription and a special human touch to serve and care for residents in their respective communities throughout Kaohsiung.

## **Seasonal Health Cultivation Guide**

### **Spring Growth, Summer Flourishing, Autumn Collecting, Winter Storage**

The Chinese herbal medicine concept of seasonal health cultivation is primarily governed by the principle of “Spring Growth, Summer Flourishing, Autumn Collecting, and Winter Storage”. In each of the four seasons, emphasis is placed on nourishment and protection of a particular organ. Spring corresponds to the liver, summer to the heart, autumn to the lung, and winter to the kidneys, while the last eighteen days of each season correspond to the spleen. The presence of the spleen in each season reflects the fact that digestive health should be a focus of health cultivation regardless of time of year. Following the rhythm of nature in the selection of the foods we eat cultivates both body and mind.

### **Spring Growth: Nourish the Liver**

In Spring, the body’s *qi* begins moving outward from the interior to the exterior of the body. Because the liver is thought to be the main organ guiding *qi* upwards (and outwards) in the body, it is recommended to eat foods in spring that nourish the liver such as garlic chives and jujube as well as herbs that regulate the spleen and stomach such as Chinese yam, atracylodes root and poria. Stewed chicken and spare ribs, pork belly and chitterlings with a four immortals decoction<sup>3</sup>, and brewed jujube tea with ginger slices help promote and maintain bodily health as outdoor temperatures slowly rise.

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<sup>1</sup> The old, indigenous name for Kaohsiung city which is still used in the Taiwanese language.

<sup>2</sup> A Chinese mythological ruler and deity who was believed to have taught humans about various aspects of agriculture and medicine.

<sup>3</sup> A common digestion-promoting formula composed of poria, atracylodes, Euryale seed and lotus seed.

## **Summer Flourishing: Nourish the Heart**

With summer comes the arrival of intense heat, triggering the outward effusion of qi and the opening of the pores. As such, herbs that effuse heat and promote sweating are highly recommended during summer months. Herbs with these actions are mostly acrid in flavor and have fragrant aromas. Common examples include mint, perilla and Chinese mosla. Popular cooling herbal drinks consumed by Taiwanese during the summer often include herbs from this category. When humidity levels turn particularly high, herbs that promote clearing dampness like wrinkled giant hyssop and pink frost joe pye-weed may be added to a spare rib and winter melon stew or a seafood stew with ginger slices. For a sweet soup, consider combining mung bean and job's tears seed. Mung bean clears heat, especially summer heat, while job's tears fortify the spleen and remove dampness.<sup>4</sup> These salty and sweet soups are all highly suited to summer's torrid heat.

## **Autumn Collecting: Nourish the Lungs**

In autumn, the weather becomes dry, *yang qi* recedes and *yin qi* gradually intensifies, while people are more vulnerable to coughs, sore throats and other respiratory-related issues. Similar to the surrounding environment, the lungs are susceptible to dryness and weakened yang qi during this season. As such, nourishing the lungs in autumn with yin-enriching and moisturizing foods is particularly important. Foods associated with these actions are often white in color. For instance, the white-colored lily root not only enriches yin and moisturizes the lungs, it also clears heart heat and calms the spirit. Combining Adenophora root, fragrant landpick, lily root and lotus seed in a chicken stew makes for the perfect dryness-combatting soup for the autumn season.

## **Winter Storage: Nourish the Kidneys**

With the arrival of winter, and the shift of seasonal energy shifts toward storage, conditions become ripe for the body to store and nourish the essence and qi of the five organs. What is commonly called "winter season dietary tonification" refers to the process of consuming nourishing foods in winter to supplement deficiencies in the five organs as the body draws essence and qi inward. In "Port City"<sup>5</sup>, the strong, cold winds in the depth of winter can feel like they penetrate to the bone, so residents place special emphasis on the consumption of foods and medicinal herbs that strengthen the sinews and bones. We recommend preparing several months in advance the Perfect Major Supplementation Decoction cooked with additional herbs like Eucommia bark, ox knee root, teasel root and Chinese yam or steep Tortoise Shell and Deerhorn

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<sup>4</sup> In Chinese medicine, the spleen is thought to govern water metabolism and digestion.

<sup>5</sup> A common moniker for Kaohsiung.

Two Immortals Glue in alcohol to have it ready for consumption in winter. Lastly, medicinal alcohols made by steeping strong tonics like deer horn, desert broomrape, tortoise shell and soft-shelled turtle shell make the perfect drink to stay warm while traveling the high seas!

## **Mountain Region Guide**

By Lim Chi-Ki

The towns and villages of the Kaohsiung foothills are populated by diverse ethnic communities, with each couched in pristine natural environments and backed by mountains, streams, and lakes. These unique characteristics contribute to a Chinese herbal culture marked by abundant variety and distinct apothecary applications. This region not only plays host to a fourth-generation pharmacy currently training their fifth-generation pharmacist but also is home to businesses that both farm and forage Chinese medical herbs. These herbs are not only for human consumption; neither are they only consumed as food or decoctions. There are also farmers in this region that use medical herbs as feed for chickens and new product lines featuring extractions of native plants in aromatherapy oils.

Tai Ho Herbal Pharmacy, originally located in Miaoli County, is a multigenerational apothecary that has operated in Liouguei for two generations. Because the fourth-generation descendant of the pharmacy's founder chose a career in public office, the pharmacy's multi-generational knowledge and skills have passed into the capable hands of his wife, Chang Mei-yueh. Although not working in the pharmacy, Chang's husband designed the shop's heart-themed herbal packages hoping to raise clients' spirits.

Huang Kuo-shu, Neimen-based Yong An Pharmacy's current head pharmacist, comes from a long line of pharmacists originally based in the Dajia district at the Taichung Yung An Tang Peng Chi Herbal Pharmacy. As Huang's father and grandfather felt high foot-traffic areas near temples to be the ideal location for pharmacies, when they moved from Dajia's famous Jenn Lann Temple, they established their new pharmacy next to Neimen's Zi Zhu Temple. Yong An Pharmacy provides specially selected herbs and spices for famous Neimen chefs and has developed several different spice mixes for use in banquet meals.

The walls of the Cishan-based Chien Yuan Herbal Pharmacy are adorned with painting and calligraphy that invest the store with a vibrant literary and artistic atmosphere. Be it their expertly mixed nourishing teas or wide selection of medicinal herbs, pharmacy owners Hsiao Chen-chung and his wife have made quality and taste their top priority.

The Meinong-based Ding Ku Tang Chinese Herbal Pharmacy features a bonesetting and traumatology clinic that once operated year-round for villagers in this remote region where medical services are relatively limited. Pharmacy owner Liu Hai-tsang has realized his long-held dream of keeping his own medicinal herb garden, which he calls "Emperor Tsang's Park".

Tucked in a lush river valley that slices deep into the heart of Taiwan's central mountain chain, Liouguei is a rare bastion of indigenous medical knowledge. The mountain region's Divine

Farmer Temple, for instance, possesses a large number of herbal formulas said to have been revealed in times past by Daoist gods. Descendants of the indigenous Tevorangh people living in Liouguei also have a deep knowledge of local medicinal plants. This community meets many of their medical needs in this otherwise underserved region using plants that they forage from the mountains or grow in their gardens.

Huang Chi-hsiang and his son own and operate “Wild Mountain Chicken” in Shanlin District. The regular chicken feed used at this poultry farm is enhanced with a blend of medicinal herbs including bitter leaf, Taiwanese ox knee root, chameleon plant, green chiretta and Mexican sunflower. This special herbal mixture not only serves as a tonic and a preventative medicine for the chickens but also increases the feed conversion rate.

Lin Chih of the Maolin-based agricultural cooperative Margi Mumu<sup>6</sup>, developed a line of herbal essential oils made from indigenous plants suitable for use in aromatherapy. Her business venture was inspired by the Aztec marigold garlands worn at weddings in her tribe. She has also developed a Southern Foothills herbal bath bomb that may be used for massage as well as for foot-soaks and baths. Some ingredients used in these bath bombs are sourced from local Chinese herbal apothecaries.

Over the course of our visits to these seven areas in Kaohsiung’s mountain region, we gained a strong sense of the tightly interwoven relationship between herbal medical knowledge and the mastery of both etiquette and social sensibility in the herbal culture of southern Taiwan. Chinese herbal experts are also masters of observation and will offer relevant health recommendations, inquire into daily habits and share personal remedies based on the slightest of cues, be it a slightly pallid lip color, the appearance of facial acne, a hand placed on the waist, or grasping at pain in the shoulder. We also learned that the right spice mix can introduce endless culinary possibilities to even the most novice of cooks. We invite our readers to find time to take a trip to the Kaohsiung mountain region and, using this book as your guide, embark on a journey that will nourish both body and soul.

## **Coastal Region Guide**

By Tseng Yu-Fen

Chinese medical herbs are an extremely unique component of Taiwan’s culinary culture, and Chinese herbal pharmacies are an indispensable part of our everyday lives. Before the development and spread of modern medicine, herbal pharmacies also served as clinics that prepared and distributed medicine and offered medical consultations. Over time, these pharmacies created strong bonds of mutual trust and support with their clientele. Insofar as these Chinese herbal pharmacies played a role in maintaining the health of their local communities, they served as a kind of neighborhood safety network.

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<sup>6</sup> Margi mumu means “hello everyone” in the Maolin Rukai dialect.

Kaohsiung's coastal region is home to several famous multi-generation herbal pharmacies. These include Yancheng's Chun Fa Chinese Herbal Pharmacy, Zihguan's I Fan Chinese Herbal Pharmacy, Lingya's Jen Te Pharmacy, Cijin's Mao Sheng Chinese Herbal Pharmacy, and Lin Yuan's I Shan Herbal Pharmacy. Every day, these pharmacies service crowds of regular customers, who come in to buy everything from common kitchen ingredients like pepper powder to medicinal formulas like Four Agents Decoction. The pharmacist serves as a community caregiver, accompanying local residents through their everyday lives.

The entry of a forward-thinking new generation of youth into herbal pharmacies has in many cases injected a much-needed dose of modernity into an otherwise traditional trade. Located in the fishing village of Chilou in Cieding District, De Hing Tang Pharmacy released a line of Hsing Ta Harbor fishing culture-themed medicinal foods, nourishing teas and other items with the help of the local government that earned rave reviews from the local community. The owner and his wife as well as his children, who returned to Chilou after working and studying elsewhere, are now developing an online platform to expand their business further afield. Yu Feng Chinese Herbal Pharmacy, originally based in Hong Mao Harbor, is now in Siaogang District and run by the family's daughter-in-law, who earned her Chinese medicine degree in China. Apart from continuing to sell the traditional prepared herbal mixes that early on established Yu Feng's reputation in Hong Mao Harbor, the pharmacy also offers a popular proprietary spicy soup mix and chili sauce, both of which use Chinese medical herbs as their base. The chili sauce, in particular, has become a big hit among spice-lovers.

Ever since it became illegal for Chinese herbal pharmacies to prescribe herbs, Taiwan's pharmacy owners have endeavored to transform their business model, break out of their comfort zone, and reinvent what it means to be a pharmacy in Taiwan. Zuoying's Cheng Hsin Tang Chinese Herbal Pharmacy, an establishment with over one-hundred years of family experience in Chinese medicine, garnered increased interest from potential consumers after they hired a famous designer to redesign their packaging, imbuing their brand with a new aesthetic while also incorporating elements of traditional Chinese culture. Cianjin-based Yong Xing Traditional Chinese Medicine Pharmacy has also developed a line of medicinal tonifying soups, dumplings, drinks and other prepared foods, elevating medicinal food culture to a fine culinary art. In our travels through the coastal region, we also witnessed the incredible diversity woven through Chinese medical culture. Dr. Liu Shui-mu of Yongan-based Liang Chang Chinese Herbal Pharmacy applied his knowledge of Chinese medicine and veterinary medicine in building a Whiteleg Shrimp hatchery business. While in Cianjhen, the granddaughter of the owners of Hui Chun Herbal Tea brought a new aesthetic to the Hui Chun brand, combining nostalgic and artistic design elements to attract a younger generation of tea-drinkers.

While visiting Chinese herbal pharmacies along Kaohsiung's Rt. 17 from the city center through the harbor district and out to the coast, our conversations with pharmacy owners gave us a taste of Chinese medicine's rich culture, and made us privy to countless local tales – some tragic, some comic. Having experienced both times of great prosperity and, more recently, economic uncertainty, the pharmacists we came across continued to profess an optimistic and

open perspective on the present and future. They are continuing to help people resolve difficult and intractable illnesses with professionalism and enthusiasm.

## **Highway Corridor Guide**

By Lim Chi-Ki, Tseng Yu-Fen

Rows of large wooden medicine chests with dense columns of drawers meticulously labeled with their herbal contents are invariably the first visual impression most patrons have of Chinese herbal pharmacies. Accompanying this scene of course is the fragrance of aromatic spices, conjuring visions of warm family meals served fresh from the kitchen; the redolence of braised pork, mutton stew, or braised beef spiced soup laid out on the kitchen table and a piquant hint of Four Agents Decoction or Four Immortals Decoction stored in the fridge. Together, these aromas tantalize the taste buds and, when discerned in isolation, they stir pangs of nostalgia.

Taiwan imports most of its Chinese medicinal herbs from China, and Kaohsiung, with its large port, is a major hub for the domestic trade in Chinese medicinal herbs. Located near the Love River, Sanmin District has an additional advantage from a distribution standpoint due to its proximity to both the highway and West Coast rail line. Apart from serving as a major distribution center for Chinese medicinal herbs, Sanmin is also a base of operations for Chinese medicine-related businesses, from upstream supply chain importers, merchants and whole-sellers to downstream retail vendors. Even the Taiwan Traditional Chinese Medicine Industry Association set up shop in Sanmin to facilitate communication and exchange between association members.

The two herbal pharmacies we visited on this trip to Sanmin District, Chi An Herbal Pharmacy next to Chung Tu Market and Ying Sheng Chinese Herbal Pharmacy in Hunei, both continue to meet the diverse and specialized needs of their clientele using traditional herbal preparation methods. Mao Sheng Chinese Herbal Pharmacy in Nanzih, Kao Sheng Chinese Herbal Pharmacy in Fongshan and Ho Chun Herbal Pharmacy in Gangshan are all famous and well-established pharmacies in their areas. After buying groceries from the neighboring traditional markets, many customers stop in to pick up tonifying spice mixes before heading home to prepare meals. Chung De Pharmacy located next to Daliao's Chung Chuang Market decocts herbal mixtures for their customers using traditional clay pots heated over a charcoal fire. Customers who call in advance can pick up their decoctions without having to wait. Gangshan is also home to Yu Lien Herbal Pharmacy, located inside the traditional food market. Yu Lien's owner's great-grandfather was an herbal forager of some repute in the area. Apart from herbs, one can also find traditional wedding presents like "double spring flowers" and makeup kits.

As a new generation takes the helm in Chinese herbal pharmacies along the highway corridor, their business strategies are being recalibrated and shaped by new and innovative approaches to herbs and herbal medicines. Ciaotou-based Rui Sheng Tang Pharmacy created a Chinese medicine culture DIY class that has garnered rave reviews from local children and adults alike. Fongshan-based Shun Chang Chinese Herbal Pharmacy has developed restaurant-grade

spice products for mass production and created freeze-packed spicy hot pot soup stocks to help integrate Chinese medicine into daily life. Shun Ho Pharmacy in Renwu opened up a new market for themselves by creating a line of medicinal herb spice packs designed to support the specific health needs of people in today's world. Inspired by vendors that deliver products to group buyers using cargo vans, Chang Ching-chih of Dashe's Hou An Pharmacy has launched a medicinal soup delivery service. Chang has also generated more business by bringing extra samples of herbs with him in the van to introduce potential customers to Chinese medicine.

Chinese medical culture is deeply rooted in the everyday lives of Taiwanese. Even though the market for Chinese herbs is not nearly what it used to be, the skill and knowledge transmitted through Chinese herbal culture and the principles of personal health cultivation it contains not only nurture and heal our bodies, but also provide emotional comfort and consolation in modern times. Indeed, the key to survival for Chinese herbal pharmacies in Taiwan is the mutual trust pharmacists have cultivated with their customers over time.

### **Culled From the Pharmacist's Archives: A Traditional Formula for Seasickness**

This formula, packing a minty, aromatic fragrance, is a go-to remedy for sea and car sickness!

Weary Traveler's Carsick Cure

Provided by Yu Feng Chinese Herbal Pharmacy

Text and Research by Liu I-Ching

The Kaohsiung City Administrative District is a long, narrow stretch of land. Driving Route 1 from Hunei in the north to Linyuan in the south takes over one and a half hours. In times past, residents here would regularly travel far and wide from Tainan in the north to Pingtung in the south to ply their wares. Sometimes they would even make excursions into the foothills, drive deep into the mountains, or take to the high seas. For an otherwise largely sedentary population, carsickness and seasickness was thus a common and difficult issue on these long trips. Next time you set out on adventure, consider taking along this formula with you. Just a small whiff of the formula is often enough to bring relief. Whether enduring a long ride down the north-south highway or winding through mountain switchbacks, this formula, a combination of costus root, menthol, cloves, wrinkled giant hyssop, mint, dahurian angelica, and villous amomum fruit, can alleviate carsickness and nausea in just a few sniffs.

The costus used in this remedy, a dried root in the asteraceae family known as *Dolomiaea costus*, is known to relieve abdominal distention and calm nausea. Menthol has a cooling and aromatic nature and can relieve headaches. Giant hyssop and mint have similar effects in terms of clearing summer-heat, transforming dampness, preventing vomiting, and promoting anti-inflammatory and analgesic effects. Cloves relieve gastrointestinal discomfort and bloating, while aromatic angelica directs the action of other herbs towards the lung and stomach meridians of the face (around the nose and forehead). Last but not least, villous amomum fruit is also

appreciated for its calming effects on nausea and alleviation of diarrhea. All of these herbs are ground into a fine powder and placed in an herb pouch that can be easily carried. Breathing in the aroma of the ground herbs relieves the nausea and dizziness associated with long car or boat trips.

Tip: Use 3-7grams of each herb and a small amount of menthol. After grinding the herbs into a powder, place into an herb pouch to carry with you, sniffing as needed. (Note: People with G6PD deficiency should not use menthol.)