

妹，吃饭了

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Vancouver, 2006
周晓卫 (*left*), 张筱媚 (*right*)

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介绍

introduction

This cookbook details ways in which food can act as a healing agent for pains more than simple hunger. Each of the three recipes are original creations by my mother, made for me in mind. They may draw upon classic dishes (e.g., chicken soup), but they incorporate elements of Chinese Herbal Medicine to address the health problems I've always had growing up: goji berries for poor eyesight, sweet fermented rice for poor blood circulation and digestion, dried lily buds for irregular menstruation, and so on.

Each recipe is accompanied by a brief explanation of its herbal ingredients' benefits. In addition to my mother's beliefs, the latter two recipes are supplemented with academic sources to "prove" the ingredients' potency. However, for my mother's original herbal tea, it was important to me that I leave the health benefits as is—as my mother's opinions. Given that this recipe, more than the other two, symbolizes *her* beliefs and *her* care for me, featuring the voices of strangers would have felt inauthentic and disrespectful.

Besides, in a way, Chinese Herbal Medicine is rooted in discourse (Gu & Pei, 2017). It's preserved not necessarily as scientific research, but as narrative and as faith. In other words, many people—my mother included—do not necessarily gravitate towards traditional herbs because of empirical experimentation, but because tales of these ingredients' healing properties have been passed from person to person, generation to generation. Therefore, Chinese Herbal Medicine may be characterized as a unique combination of philosophy, culture, ritual, and medicine, outside the constraint of pure science.

Unfortunately, under the Western lens, this can position Chinese Herbal Medicine as an alternative, substandard form of medicine (Zhu & Woerdenbag, 1995). Disregarding the fact that many herbal ingredients do, in fact, have scientific backing, this labelling can reinforce the positioning of Whiteness over non-Whiteness, and consequently dismiss the medicinal practices of an entire culture.

So, my hope is that as you read along to this recipe book, and perhaps even prepare these dishes yourself, you remember that there are more ways to protect our health than the ones pushed by the dominant Western discourse. After all, Chinese Herbal Medicine has existed for thousands of years (Gu & Pei, 2017). And even as mainstream medicine has become more popular and affordable in China, the majority of the country's population still have faith in traditional herbal knowledge (Gu & Pei, 2017). Now, I hope to share some of that knowledge with you.

As a final note, you may notice that the recipes lack precise measurements. This is, of course, because Chinese mothers cook based on feelings. As my mother jokes, “量太麻烦了” (“it’s too much trouble to measure [ingredients]”). Perhaps this has its own appeal: the same dish, a slightly different taste every time, but always with the same love, care, and intent on healing.

I hope you enjoy.

张筱媚 Sorella Zhang



菊花
(dried chrysanthemum)



焦米 (scorched rice)



山楂 (dried hawthorn)



陈皮 (dried orange peel)



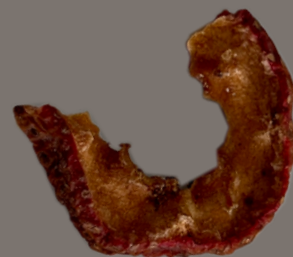
枸杞 (dried goji berries)



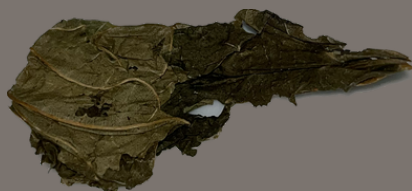
桑葚 (dried mulberries)

养生茶

herbal tea



红枣 (dried red dates)



桑叶
(dried mulberry leaves)



决明子 (cassia seeds)



桂圆 (dried longan)

养生茶, termed “*herbal tea*” in English for simplicity, directly translates to “*keep in good health tea*,” and for good reason. This unique blend is my mother’s original creation and each of its ten ingredients serves a purpose. According to my mother:

决明子 (*cassia seeds*), **菊花** (*dried chrysanthemum*), & **枸杞** (*dried goji berries*) = good for the eyes

焦米 (*scorched rice*) & **陈皮** (*dried orange peel*) = good for the gut

桂圆 (*dried longan*) = good for the heart and the eyes

红枣 (*dried red dates*) = replenishes blood

山楂 (*dried hawthorn*) = good for digestion; stimulates the appetite



桑葚 (*dried mulberries*) = good for the eyes and the immune system

桑叶 (*dried mulberry leaves*) = targets fat and water bloating

酒酿鸡蛋

eggs in sweet fermented rice

Two eggs, sweet fermented rice (酒酿), ginger sugar, & dried goji berries (枸杞)

1) In a small pot, add half a cup of sweet fermented rice and half a cup of water, as well as chunks of ginger sugar.

2) Turn on the stove and wait for the water to boil. Once boiling, turn to low heat, then cook for 1-2 minutes



ginger sugar



sweet fermented rice

4) Crack the eggs into the pot and cook for another 3-4 minutes

5) Turn off the stove, add a small handful of dried goji berries, and serve

Glutinous rice has always been one of my mother's favourite meals. She considers it particularly beneficial for women, as she believes it increases bodily warmth and replenishes blood, especially during one's menstrual cycle. 酒酿 is a type of cooked glutinous rice product that has been fermented to create a sweet, slightly alcoholic, porridge-like dish. It is full of health benefits, known in Chinese culture to relieve fatigue, promote digestion, and stimulate blood circulation (Huang et al., 2017).



Though it is a classic kitchen staple today, ginger also has roots in Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is a “Yang” herb that can decrease one’s “Yin”, and a “hot” ingredient that can warm one’s body (Shahrajabian et al., 2019). Both help the body maintain homeostasis, which is an important goal of Chinese healing (Gu & Pei, 2017).



Finally, dried goji berries are an important antioxidant found to boost eye, kidney, and liver health, among many other health benefits (Ma et al., 2019).

All together, this meal is believed to “补气养血” (“benefit qi and nourish blood”).

黄花菜鸡汤

chicken soup with dried lily buds

1 small (whole) chicken, dried lily buds (黄花菜), ginger, dried figs, & salt

1) Cut the chicken into pieces

2) Put the chicken, ginger, and figs into the pot (traditionally, a 砂锅/clay cooking pot)



clay cooking pot



dried figs

3) Add water until it covers all the ingredients

4) Cover the pot and turn the stove on high. When the water boils, turn to low heat and cook for ~1 hour

5) As the chicken, ginger, and figs cook, soak the dried lily buds in warm water. Once the hour has passed, add the dried lily buds into the pot and cook for another 45 minutes - 1 hour



dried lily buds

6) Add salt to taste, and serve

Chicken soup has built itself a reputation as the go-to Western remedy for a cold. However, my mother strongly insists that her Chinese version is better and healthier, partially due to the inclusion of dried figs (for sweetness) and dried lily buds (for health).

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, 黄花菜 (dried lily buds) are thought to benefit brain functions, help blood clots, cool one's blood, and aid in urination (Sun et al., 2019). But to my mother, it has always been primarily associated with women's health, as she saw it being served to mothers postpartum, in order to replenish their nutrients and rejuvenate their energy. She started adding this ingredient to chicken soup after having tasted my 姨婆's (grandmother's sister) version, and the recipe has since been passed down generationally.

