

# Facts and Fallacies of Chinese Herbal Medicine

Presented by

Tsun-Nin Lee, M.D.

Director, Academy of Pain Research

Address: 1790 26<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94122

Tel: 415-731-1330

E-mail: [sfpain@sfpain.com](mailto:sfpain@sfpain.com)





# Admiring the flowers on a galloping horse



# Chinese Herbal Medicine is not 100% Herbal

- ◆ **Botanical origin: roots, stems, twigs, leaves, flowers, seeds.**
- ◆ **Zoological origin: No legs to 100 legs.**
- ◆ **Mineral origin: Non-precious to precious.**



# Herbs

- **Renshen (Ginseng)      A Qi Tonifier**
- **Danggui (Angelica)      A Blood Tonifier**
- **Huangqi (Astragalus)      A Qi Tonifier**



# Animal Products

- Longgu
- Ejiao
- Lurong
- Niu Huang



# Minerals

◆ Zhusha (Cinnabar)

HgS

◆ Pishi (Arsenolium)

$As_2O_3$ ,  $As_2S_3$

◆ Mangxiao (Natrii Sulfas)

$Na_2SO_4 \cdot 10H_2O$



# Chinese Medicine is Slow Acting?

- ◆ **Onset of Action: minutes and hours (NOT SECONDS)**

because mode of delivery is unlike modern drugs.

- ◆ **Good for acute illnesses:**

- \* SARS

- \* MI

- \* pneumonia

- \* meningitis

- \* CVA

- \* trauma

- ◆ **Historically demonstrated efficacy**



# Chinese Herbal Medicine in Infections?

*Shang Han Luan* (Eastern Han Dynasty)

- ◆ Chinese herbs with anti-microbial activities
- ◆ Host vs Pathogens
- ◆ Peel Harbor and acute infections
  - Accelerated immunity:
    - Chinese Herbs = immune modulators
  - Coordinated defense
  - Turn-around C.E.O.
- ◆ TCM's Role in SARS





# East and West do not mix?

Chinese Herbs and modern drugs not to be used together?

- ◆ A popular belief by many Chinese and most physicians.
- ◆ Drug – herb interaction possible
- ◆ Stop all herbs days before surgery?
- ◆ No herbs during chemotherapy?
- Recommendations based on incomplete understanding.
- Herbal treatments improve outcome



# Western Herbs, modern drugs and Chinese Herbs are similar in usage?

**Modern drugs and Western herbs:  
Generally used singly**

- St. John's Wort
- Ginkgo Biloba
- NSAIDS
- Tricyclics

**Chinese herbs:**

- Team work required
- Characteristics depending on the company it keeps

- ★ Astralagus with Chinese Ginseng
- ★ Astralagus with Danguai
- ★ Astralagus with Baizhu
- Custom-made formulae



# Chinese Herbal Medicine ≠ Folk Medicine ≠ Oriental Medicine

- Based on a systematic and analytical approach
- Time-tested theoretical framework
  - ❖ Unique concepts: Yin -Yang, 5- elements, meridians not available in other systems of healing.
- ∴ NOT Folk Medicine!

**Oriental Medicine refers to  
Chinese Medicine!**



# Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine

- ◆ Substrates of both = meridian system, where Qi flows
- ◆ Meridians = Central neural pathways
- ◆ CNS controls various physiological and pathological functions
- ◆ Acupuncture = physical neuromodulation
- ◆ Herbal medicine = chemoneuromodulation



# Applicability of TCM in Modern Clinical Setting I

Improve understanding of modern medical therapies:

- SSRI's increase suicidal tendency in children
- Some inotropic agents increase mortality
- Ace inhibitors prevent cardiac remodeling, decrease proteinuria
- Treatment of SARS with steroids not appropriate



# Applicability of TCM in Modern Clinical Setting II

## Improve Clinical outcome:

- **Diabetes:** herbs in combination with modern therapy decrease insulin requirement
- **Treat conditions not manageable with modern drugs.**  
eg. **Viral infections, otitis medea, chronic fatigue syndrome, synergistic effect with antibiotics**
- **Reduce bacterial resistance**
- **Decrease surgical complications**



# Applicability of TCM in Modern Clinical Setting III

## Making predictions

- HRT
- Cholesterol lowering → long term use with high dosage probably detrimental.

Due to effects of dispersion → damage Qi



# Extra responsibility on Chinese physicians to understand Chinese Medicine

