

chinese herbal medicine materia medica

Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica: Unlocking Ancient Wisdom for Modern Healing

chinese herbal medicine materia medica is a cornerstone of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), representing a vast and intricate collection of natural substances used for healing and balancing the body. This ancient compendium is much more than a simple herbal guide; it encapsulates centuries of empirical knowledge, philosophy, and clinical practice. Understanding the materia medica opens a window into how Chinese herbalists diagnose, select, and combine herbs to create effective remedies tailored to individual needs.

In this article, we will explore the fascinating world of Chinese herbal medicine materia medica, its historical significance, key principles, common herbs, and the role it plays in contemporary holistic health. Whether you're a practitioner of TCM, a student, or simply curious about natural healing, this deep dive will offer valuable insights into one of the oldest and most respected pharmacopoeias on earth.

The Origins and Evolution of Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica

The roots of Chinese herbal medicine materia medica date back thousands of years, with the earliest written records appearing in texts like the "Shennong Bencao Jing" (Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica) around 200-300 AD. This text categorized hundreds of herbs into categories such as superior, medium, and inferior, based on their therapeutic effects and toxicity.

Over the centuries, many renowned physicians and scholars contributed to the expansion and refinement of the materia medica, including Li Shizhen, whose monumental work, "Bencao Gangmu" (Compendium of Materia Medica), compiled more than 1,800 substances with detailed descriptions of their properties, preparation methods, and clinical uses. This text remains a foundational reference in TCM herbal studies.

The materia medica evolved not only as a herbal catalog but also as a guide to understanding the energetic qualities of herbs—such as their taste, temperature, and meridian tropism—which are crucial to formulating balanced prescriptions.

Understanding the Core Concepts of Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica

One of the most intriguing aspects of the materia medica is how it integrates traditional Chinese philosophy with herbal science. Rather than focusing purely on chemical compounds, Chinese herbal medicine views herbs through the lens of Yin and Yang, the Five Elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water), and the flow of Qi (vital energy).

Herbal Properties: Taste, Temperature, and Direction

Each herb in the materia medica is characterized by its taste—such as sweet, bitter, sour, salty, or pungent—which influences its therapeutic action. For example, bitter herbs tend to clear heat and dry dampness, while sweet herbs often tonify and harmonize the body.

Temperature is another key factor, ranging from cold, cool, neutral, warm, to hot. This classification helps determine whether an herb will cool an overheated body condition or warm a chilled one.

Additionally, herbs are associated with specific organs or meridians, indicating where their effects are most pronounced. This meridian tropism guides practitioners in targeting treatment to the affected organ systems.

The Importance of Formulation and Synergy

The materia medica does not recommend using single herbs in isolation but rather emphasizes combinations that balance each other's properties. The art of Chinese herbal formulation involves selecting herbs that complement, enhance, or moderate one another to create synergistic effects while minimizing side effects.

In TCM, formulas are often categorized into roles such as Chief (main therapeutic herb), Deputy (supports the chief), Assistant (enhances or reduces toxicity), and Envoy (guides the formula to certain channels). This sophisticated approach ensures more precise and safer treatments.

Common Herbs Featured in Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica

While the materia medica lists thousands of herbs, several stand out for their widespread use and therapeutic versatility. Here are a few notable examples:

Ginseng (Ren Shen)

Ginseng is revered as a premier tonic herb that boosts Qi, enhances vitality, and supports the immune system. It is often prescribed for fatigue, weakness, and recovery from illness. Its sweet and slightly warm nature makes it an excellent adaptogen.

Licorice Root (Gan Cao)

Licorice is a harmonizing herb used to moderate harsh effects of other herbs and to relieve spasms and coughs. It is also known for its detoxifying properties and sweet flavor,

which helps tonify Qi.

Ginger (Sheng Jiang)

Fresh ginger warms the stomach, dispels cold, and alleviates nausea. It is commonly included in formulas to enhance digestion and reduce cold symptoms.

Rehmannia (Shu Di Huang)

Rehmannia is a nourishing herb that supports blood and Yin. It is frequently used in formulas addressing anemia, dizziness, and menopausal symptoms.

Angelica Sinensis (Dang Gui)

Known as "female ginseng," Dang Gui is famous for tonifying and invigorating blood, making it a staple in women's health formulas for menstrual irregularities and postpartum recovery.

How Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica Influences Modern Wellness

In recent decades, interest in Chinese herbal medicine materia medica has surged worldwide due to its holistic approach and natural origins. Integrative medicine practitioners often combine these ancient herbs with modern healthcare to enhance patient outcomes.

Safety and Quality Considerations

One challenge in the modern use of materia medica herbs is ensuring quality and safety. Because herbs can vary in potency and purity, sourcing from reputable suppliers and understanding proper preparation methods is essential to avoid contamination or adverse reactions.

Scientific Research and Validation

Modern pharmacological studies have begun to validate many traditional claims found in the materia medica. For example, research into ginseng's adaptogenic effects and licorice's anti-inflammatory properties helps bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary science.

Personalized Herbal Medicine

The materia medica's detailed system of energetic qualities allows practitioners to tailor herbal prescriptions to individual constitution and conditions, aligning with the growing trend of personalized medicine. This approach enhances efficacy and minimizes side effects compared to one-size-fits-all remedies.

Tips for Exploring Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica

If you're interested in delving deeper into this fascinating field, here are some helpful tips:

- **Start with foundational texts:** Reading translations of classic works like the "Bencao Gangmu" can provide context and depth.
- **Learn the basic properties:** Familiarize yourself with the taste, temperature, and meridian associations of common herbs.
- **Consult experts:** Working with a licensed TCM practitioner ensures safe and effective use of herbal formulas.
- **Keep a herbal journal:** Note your experiences and effects when trying new herbs or formulas to better understand their impact.
- **Stay updated on research:** Follow scientific studies that explore the pharmacology and clinical applications of Chinese herbs.

Exploring the Chinese herbal medicine materia medica is a journey into a rich heritage that continues to inspire and inform natural healing practices worldwide. With its profound understanding of nature, energy, and balance, it remains a vital resource for those seeking harmony between body and mind.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica'?

Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica is a comprehensive collection of information about various herbs used in traditional Chinese medicine, including their properties, functions, indications, and preparation methods.

How is Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica used in clinical practice?

Practitioners use the Materia Medica to identify appropriate herbs for treating specific health conditions, understand herb interactions, and formulate personalized herbal prescriptions based on patient diagnosis.

What are some common herbs featured in Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica?

Common herbs include Ginseng (Ren Shen), Licorice Root (Gan Cao), Ginger (Sheng Jiang), Astragalus (Huang Qi), and Rehmannia (Shu Di Huang), each with unique therapeutic properties.

How does Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica categorize herbs?

Herbs are typically categorized by their therapeutic effects such as warming or cooling properties, organ systems targeted, flavor, and nature (e.g., aromatic, bitter, sweet), which helps in selecting the right herb for treatment.

Are there modern resources or databases available for Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica?

Yes, there are digital databases and mobile applications that provide detailed Materia Medica information, including clinical studies, pharmacology, and herb-drug interaction data, enhancing accessibility for practitioners and students.

What precautions should be taken when using Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica?

Users should consult qualified practitioners to avoid misuse, consider potential herb-drug interactions, ensure correct identification and dosage of herbs, and be aware of contraindications to ensure safe and effective treatment.

Additional Resources

Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica: An In-Depth Exploration of Traditional Healing Knowledge

chinese herbal medicine materia medica stands as a foundational cornerstone in the extensive practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). This compendium of herbal knowledge not only catalogs thousands of medicinal substances derived from plants, minerals, and animal sources but also systematically describes their properties, therapeutic actions, and clinical applications. As interest in holistic and alternative therapies increases globally, understanding the nuances and scientific context of the

materia medica is essential for practitioners, researchers, and patients alike.

The Historical and Cultural Significance of Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica

The term “materia medica” in the context of Chinese herbal medicine refers to the comprehensive reference texts that document the characteristics of medicinal substances used for centuries in TCM. The earliest surviving texts date back over two millennia, with seminal works such as the “Shennong Bencao Jing” (Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica) setting the precedent for classification and therapeutic guidelines.

Over successive dynasties, the materia medica evolved into more elaborate encyclopedias, including the renowned “Compendium of Materia Medica” (Bencao Gangmu) compiled by Li Shizhen in the 16th century. This monumental work cataloged nearly 2,000 herbs and substances, complete with illustrations, pharmacological descriptions, and indications that remain influential in contemporary practice.

Core Components of Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica

The materia medica organizes herbs based on several key attributes that guide diagnosis and treatment:

- **Four Properties (Si Qi):** The temperature nature of the herb—cold, hot, warm, or cool—which influences its effect on internal body conditions.
- **Five Flavors (Wu Wei):** The taste profile—acrid, sweet, sour, bitter, or salty—that correlates with therapeutic actions, such as dispersing, tonifying, or purging.
- **Channels Entered:** The specific meridians or organ systems the herb targets, critical for formulating treatments aligned with TCM theory.
- **Functions and Indications:** Documented clinical uses, ranging from enhancing blood circulation to clearing heat or resolving phlegm.

These classifications create a sophisticated framework enabling practitioners to tailor herbal prescriptions precisely to individual symptom patterns and constitutional types.

Analyzing the Therapeutic Applications and

Scientific Insights

With the surge of integrative medicine, the scientific community has increasingly investigated the pharmacological properties and bioactive compounds of herbs detailed in the materia medica. For instance, traditional herbs such as Ginseng (Ren Shen), Licorice (Gan Cao), and Angelica Sinensis (Dang Gui) have been subjected to rigorous biochemical studies confirming their antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and immunomodulatory effects.

Herbal Pharmacology and Modern Research

Modern pharmacognosy bridges ancient descriptions with contemporary evidence:

- **Ginseng (Ren Shen):** Traditionally used to tonify Qi and enhance vitality, ginsenosides extracted from the root exhibit neuroprotective and anti-fatigue properties validated in clinical trials.
- **Licorice (Gan Cao):** Widely employed as a harmonizer in formulas, glycyrrhizin compounds demonstrate antiviral and hepatoprotective activities.
- **Rhizoma Coptidis (Huang Lian):** Noted for clearing heat and dampness, berberine isolated from this herb has documented antibacterial and antidiabetic effects.

These findings reinforce the materia medica's empirical knowledge while supporting safe integration into evidence-based medical frameworks. However, challenges remain in standardizing herbal preparations, establishing dosage guidelines, and elucidating herb-drug interactions.

Comparative Overview: Chinese Materia Medica vs. Western Herbal Pharmacopeia

While Western herbal medicine often emphasizes isolated active ingredients and standardized extracts, Chinese herbal medicine materia medica promotes a holistic approach—emphasizing synergy among multiple herbs in complex formulae. This difference reflects divergent medical philosophies: reductionism versus system-based interventions.

Moreover, Chinese materia medica incorporates animal and mineral substances alongside botanicals, expanding therapeutic possibilities but raising ethical and sustainability concerns. In contrast, Western herbal pharmacopeias may limit usage to plant derivatives, often favoring regulatory clarity.

This comparative perspective highlights the unique value and complexities inherent in Chinese herbal medicine materia medica.

Practical Considerations in Utilizing Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica

For practitioners and students, mastery of the materia medica demands both scholarly study and clinical experience. The following points underscore practical aspects:

Integration in Clinical Practice

- Diagnosing patient patterns according to TCM diagnostics (e.g., pulse, tongue, symptomatology) is critical before selecting herbs.
- Formula composition involves combining multiple herbs to balance efficacy and minimize toxicity.
- Awareness of contraindications and herb-herb or herb-drug interactions is essential to ensure patient safety.

Quality Control and Standardization Challenges

The global herbal market faces issues related to adulteration, contamination, and variability of herbal quality. Reliable sourcing and adherence to pharmacopeial standards, such as the Chinese Pharmacopoeia, help maintain the integrity of materia medica applications.

Educational Resources and Materia Medica Texts

Current educational frameworks often provide access to classical texts alongside modern annotated editions, supplemented by digital databases featuring chemical profiles and clinical research. This blend of tradition and innovation aids practitioners in making informed decisions.

Emerging Trends and the Future of Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica

As the demand for natural health solutions continues to rise, the materia medica's role is expanding beyond its traditional boundaries. Advances in molecular biology and pharmacology facilitate the identification of active constituents, helping to develop standardized herbal extracts with reproducible efficacy.

Simultaneously, interdisciplinary research incorporating ethnobotany, pharmacogenomics, and clinical trials is refining the understanding of herb efficacy and safety. Regulatory agencies worldwide are increasingly recognizing the importance of traditional materia medica knowledge while imposing stricter quality controls.

Efforts to digitize and translate materia medica works are making this knowledge more accessible to global practitioners, potentially fostering safer and more effective integrative healthcare models.

Chinese herbal medicine materia medica remains a dynamic and evolving body of knowledge, bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary science. Its rich repository of therapeutic agents reflects centuries of empirical observation, cultural heritage, and philosophical depth—continuing to inspire research and clinical innovation in the 21st century.

Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica

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chinese herbal medicine materia medica: A Materia Medica for Chinese Medicine Carl-Hermann Hempen, Toni Fischer (MD.), 2009-01-01 Phytotherapy or herbal medicine is the most important therapy within Chinese medicine and is being used increasingly in the West. A Materia Medica for Chinese Medicine: plants, minerals and animal products describes 400 of the most important plants, minerals and animal substances used as treatments by Chinese medical practitioners. The items included have been selected according to their degree of clinical relevance. Each remedy is clearly described and illustrated on two facing pages, making this an easily accessible reference for both students and practitioners of Chinese herbal medicine. The clearly laid out text presents the following details for each herb or substance included: a detailed description of the characteristic features indications for safe use medicinal and toxic effects possible combinations with other substances full-colour illustrations, generally two for each substance, showing the detailed characteristics of the item described A Materia Medica for Chinese Medicine has been written by two medically trained doctors who have worked as TCM therapists specializing in the use of Chinese herbs for more than 30 years. Based on their many years of teaching and practice, the book has been carefully compiled and designed to provide a concise and accurate practice-based reference for both students and practitioners.

chinese herbal medicine materia medica: Essentials of Chinese Materia Medica and Medical Formulas Shengyan Xi, Yuewen Gong, 2017-05-01 Essentials of Chinese Materia Medica and Medical Formulas: New Century Traditional Chinese Medicine presents specific knowledge about the source, medicinal nature, action and application of more than 800 commonly-used Chinese materia medica, as well as the efficacy and application of more than 740 kinds of commonly-used Chinese medical formulas. Notably, all of the content is presented in table form, making the information easier to access, understand and apply. Each primary herbal medicine is introduced with color pictures, and each primary formula is presented with efficacy analysis pictures. The book provides readers with essential information on Chinese materia medica and formulas and how to use them accurately, including the most common Chinese materia medica used in clinics and in commonly used clinical formulas. This is an essential reference for traditional medical professionals and those interested in traditional Chinese medicine, including advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students. - Includes over 800 Chinese materia medica and 740 medical formulas with their essential information - Combines 514 color pictures of medicine material crude slices and 255

formulary efficacy analysis pictures - Organized with concise forms, facilitating understanding and memorization

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The new 3rd edition of Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica is designed to give practitioners the information they need to practice Chinese herbal medicine with greater understanding and confidence. It provides a wealth of new information - more than twice the content of the previous edition -- and practical insight into more than 530 of the most commonly used herbs in the Chinese pharmacopoeia.

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Chinese Materia Medica - Chemistry, Pharmacology and Applications provides comprehensive and up-to-date information on the chemistry and pharmacology of commonly-used Chinese herbs. It gives an in-depth profile of the traditional experience of Chinese materia medica with modern scientific explanations. It also features the theories and concepts of Chinese materia medica from the Western medical perspectives, and the sources, production and quality control of Chinese materia medica. This book can be used both as a reference book and a textbook for specialized university and on-the-job training courses. It is essential reading for all students and practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine. It should also be of interest to those in education and research in natural products, pharmaceutical sciences and medicine.

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Kaptchuk, 1993

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Chinese herbal remedies have been proven to work, but have not been adopted into Western medicine to any large or accepted degree. Most of the natural medicines described in this book are from ancient sources. They were developed at a time when the Chinese were fiercely protective against foreigners and chose to remain isolated from the world. Today we are discovering how valuable many of the early Chinese medical breakthroughs are. This book was written by a scientist and is very well researched.

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medicines, such as the practice of herbal medicine and acupuncture, are becoming widely accepted alternative medical treatments in the medical field outside China. Nevertheless, the terminology and usage, many of which are not even understood among present day Chinese, always pose a challenge to the practitioner. This lexicon makes possible the speedy identification of Chinese materia medica. Approximately 2,000 species of plants, 135 species of animals and 110 kinds of minerals and other chemicals used in traditional Chinese medicine are included. Listed alphabetically are the English, Chinese, scientific and pharmaceutical names of the Chinese drugs. This book has been a useful reference for natural and medical scientists since its publication in 1980. About 50 new Chinese drugs have been added to this new and revised edition.

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Wu, 2005-04-28 One of the cornerstones of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), herbal medicine has evolved over centuries of clinical practice and empirical results into a vast body of knowledge encompassing more than 6,000 substances, most of whose effects and uses have been documented and researched. The literature on Chinese medicinal herbs is unparalleled and unsurpassed in the world's medical knowledge; the earliest known pharmacological work was composed before the end of the third century B.C. The first classical Chinese materia medica appeared during the late Han dynasty (25-222 A.D.) and included 365 entries of botanical, zoological, and mineral substances, listing their properties and effects. Subsequent materia medica were assembled during virtually every dynasty from the Liang (456-536 A.D.) to the Qing (1645-1911). Among the major treatments

published during these centuries was the 30-volume *Materia Medica Arranged According to Pattern*, which had 1558 entries, more than 3,000 formulae, and became the official pharmacopoeia of herbal medicine in China for 500 years. *Illustrated Chinese Materia Medica* brings to the English language a lavishly illustrated atlas of the 320 herbs used most frequently in traditional Chinese medical practice. Each substance is profiled authoritatively in monographs that provide pharmaceutical, botanical and English names; flavor properties and channel tropisms; functions; clinical uses and major combinations; dosage and administration; and precautions. Intended for medicinal and pharmaceutical chemists as well as practitioners of homeopathic and alternative medicines, this materia medica offers a unique blend of authenticity that is derived from knowledge of classical Chinese literature with a clearly practical objective of presenting valuable information in a straightforward, easily comprehensible style.

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chinese herbal medicine materia medica: *Chinese Herbal Medicines: Comparisons and Characteristics* Yifan Yang, 2009-12-09 Students and practitioners of Chinese herbal medicine must learn hundreds of commonly used herbs as the first step in studying Chinese herbal medicine. Additionally, junior practitioners lack the clinical experience required to ensure that they can skilfully select the appropriate herbs to use in the formulas. This presents them with a major challenge. *Chinese Herbal Medicines: Comparisons and Characteristics* presents a method of learning individual herbs through vivid and clear discussion of their characteristics and through a comparison with other herbs of their characteristics and strengths. This clear and logical approach makes it easy for the user to understand and memorize the functions of specific herbs. It also enables experienced practitioners to improve their therapeutic results through the use of better formulas. Key features of the new edition - Retains the same easy to follow format as the first edition - Presents detailed comparisons and discussions of commonly used Chinese herbs - Provides a series of thought-provoking questions with very detailed answers - Structured to help the reader to learn and memorize the content more easily - The easy-to-use question-and-answer format is convenient to apply in the consulting room - Includes discussion of clinical applications to help with the practical use of the information in clinical setting - Revised and updated with particular emphasis on the safe use of Chinese herbal medicines - New appendices provide information on safe dosages, commonly used herbal combinations and the meanings of Chinese words used in herbal names - Provides a sound foundation for the study and practice of Chinese herbal medicine. *Chinese Herbal Medicines: Comparisons and Characteristics* is already wellknown to students and practitioners of Chinese herbal medicine. This new, improved edition will continue to be of value to students and practitioners alike. It is now supported by a new companion volume by the same author entitled *Chinese Herbal Formulas: Treatment Principles and Composition Strategies*. Together these two books provide a sound foundation for the study and practice of Chinese herbal medicine. - Detailed and vivid comparisons and discussions of Chinese herbs to help the reader memorize and understand their characteristics - Structured as a series of thought-provoking questions with very

detailed answers, again to help memorize the content - Includes clinical applications subsection within each section, to help the reader understand how to apply information better and more accurately in the clinical setting.

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Thomas Dehli L Ac, 2010-04-01 The 'Visual Materia Medica of Chinese Herbs' is a concise, organized, and beautiful photo identification guide for over 350 common Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) herbs. Used by students, teachers, practitioners, and doctors in universities and clinics around the world, the 'Visual Materia Medica of Chinese Herbs' is the de facto standard for Chinese herb photo identification. Students use it to replace long hours in the herb room or having to carry herb samples. Doctors and practitioners can quickly cross reference Latin, English, and Pinyin names, as well as glance at the Chinese characters, properties, temperatures, and channels. The book has been used for everything from classroom lectures to USDA import inspection. Each Chinese Herb Features: Pinyin name with tone marks Common English name Latin/Pharmaceutical name Chinese name (Chinese characters) Temperature scale Channels entered Herb properties Over 350 hi-res color photos, 32 herb categories, table of contents, multiple indices, 112 pages. The 2nd edition fixes all of the errors since the 1st edition, correcting herbs that were adulterated, replacements, or mislabeled.

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Barolet, 2009 The new 2nd edition of Chinese Herbal Medicine: Formulas & Strategies, the companion volume to Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica, is designed to serve as both a textbook for students and an authoritative reference for practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine. Included in the new edition are over 800 medicinal formulas drawn from both classical and modern sources, which provide more than twice the information in the earlier edition. For each of the 340-plus principal formulas there is a discussion of its therapeutic actions and indications, analysis of the functions and interactions of the ingredients, method of preparation, and a list of modifications to customize the formula in the clinic. Over 460 variations and associated formulas offer additional options for the practitioner. The commentary to each formula has been considerably expanded. This section deepens the reader's understanding of a formula's genealogy, presents an overview of controversies regarding composition, usage, and other issues, describes the extension of a formula's application to a wider range of disorders, and provides key clinical pointers to facilitate use of the formula in the modern clinic. A new section on comparisons has been added to this edition. This is intended to help students and practitioners focus on the distinguishing characteristics of each formula by contrasting it with other formulas that are similar in terms of composition or indication. Tables at the end of each chapter reinforce these distinctions by comparing and contrasting formulas across a wider range. The introduction to the book traces the historical evolution of the formulas, and provides practical pointers for their preparation and use. Detailed timelines depict the key events, authors, and texts in the 2,000-year history of traditional Chinese herbal medicine, placing the contents of this book in historical context. Among the appendices are a pinyin-to-English cro

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Introduction to chinese materia medica Jin Yang, Huang Huang, Li-Jiang Zhu, 2013 Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), with a history of thousands of years, is the crystallization of the ancient Chinese people's experience in their struggle against diseases. It is also an integral part of their splendid culture. Under the influence and direction of classic Chinese philosophies, it has undergone long-term medical practice and infiltrated into, as well as absorbed from, other subjects at that time, thus gradually evolving into a unique medical theoretical system that contributed significantly to the health care of the Chinese people and the prosperity of the Chinese nation. This 7-volume set

comprehensively covers the main components of TCM, such as Basic Theory, Diagnosis, Prescription, Chinese Materia Medica, Tui Na, Acupuncture and Moxibustion.

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