

# **The Inheritance and Changes with Last 60 Years for The Traditional Chinese Medicine Stores in Taiwan**

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## **I. Introduction**

From the end of the Ming Dynasty to the early Chin Dynasty, our ancestors had been gradually immigrating to Taiwan. From then on, the knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine, pharmacology, Chinese herbal medicines and its conventional trading system, came along with the splendid culture of central China and rooted in Taiwan. In these past 400 years, the torch of this profession has been passing on from master to pupil and from generation to generation, in the endless succession.

The Traditional Chinese medicine stores is said to be a traditional and closed commerce group. The specialty of this commerce is that, it is not merely a kind of business, but a profession covered by mysterious colors. The outsiders hardly can get into this restricted area. As a result, there is no other related literature found except the report I published in 1993 -- "The current status of traditional Chinese medicine stores".<sup>(1)</sup>

In this report, it represents the interviews, observations, and studies carried out in more than 30 years by the authors.

## **II. Chinese Medicine Stores Owner--A Closed Conservative Circle**

With 2000 years old of history, traditional Chinese medicine has evolved with Chinese culture, tradition and society. The traditional Chinese medicine stores in Taiwan are run by very conservative and traditional people, who are not college-educated pharmacists. The Chinese medicinal community with centuries-old tradition is a closed world. All stores are family business, teacher and pupil pass them on or father and son impart. For this reason, they keep very well for their Chinese medicine culture, which is handled down generation by generation for two thousands years. The characteristics from our survey, they are honest, gentle, sincere, frank, stubborn, advocate tradition, conservative, faith, etc . The people's way of living have been deeply influenced by Buddhsim and Taoist temples.

Because this is special traditional business, they are not college-educated pharmacists but do the medical work. In the passed 1072-1993 years, our government had spent a lots effort work to settle the license problem for this special business circle. Many policy and improved methods were tried, but failed. The business license fighting between government and traditional Chinese medicinal stores were continued for more than 20 years. Many chairman, directors of health department of our government had involved this complex problems, but failed again and again. One of the main reasons was caused by neglect the special characteristics of their traditional Chinese medicinal culture.

It is very difficult to change their thoughts in a short time. It is also very difficult to conduct any investigation research among these closed group of people. Above all, the gap between tradition type and the modern life. The study methods or future developed direction of government should be arranged more detail and carefully as this work is very complex and hard.

### **III. The Culture of HOLO Chinese Medicine**

Located in the outer skirt of central China, Taiwan, its main population is the HoLo people. Source back to its history, at the time of the five nomadic tribes from the North invading central China, the Han nationality who originally from yellow river area, in behalf of preserving Han culture, they largely moved to the south, and settled down in the far southern part of Fukien Province. They therefore named as the “HoLo people”. In the end of Ming dynasty, following by Zheng Chegn Gong, later on immigrated again to Taiwan. Look back upon the history of this tribe; we can see that HoLo language preserves the most essential part of ancient language in the end of West-Han dynasty.

In our past studies, we found that the succession system of Taiwanese traditional Chinese medicine stores is from master to pupil, therefore, they discreetly obey the ancient customs handed down by their own masters. This eventually leads them to form a very traditional HoLo Chinese medicine culture. Besides, they keep a lot of ancient Han dictions in their phraseology. Many of the medicines are so called in HoLo ancient Han language.

Many Hang dynasty spelling are reflected in the Taiwanese names of herbal medicine, for example, the same word with different spelling with Ho Lo phonetic symbols as the following.

Plantaginis Herba (車前草 ki7-cian7- chau), Plantaginis Semen (車前子 ki7-cian7-ci2), The“車”word is pronounced ancient “ki7”, not now “chia7”. As the other example, Cortex Cinnamomi (肉桂 jiok4-kui3), the word“肉”is not (bah4) as (羊肉 iubb3-bah4) , Talcum(滑石 kut4-cioh8), the word“滑” is not (huat4). Radix Hydesari 黃耆 is popularly called (晉耆 chenn7-ki5);

the word “晉州” was a district name in Chin dynasty (秦代 B.C. 248-207), the place of origin the best quality for Radix Hydesari.

The word “子” is pronounced in Radix Aconiti Carmichaeli (附子 hu4-cu2 ), Radix Pseudostellaria (太子參 thai2-cu2-som1), it means the origin is the root of the plant, But the Fructus Schizandrae(五味子), Fructus Arctii (牛蒡子), Fructus Lycii (枸杞子), Semen Benincasae (冬瓜子), Semen Cassiae Torae (決明子), Semen Celosiae (青葙子) are pronounced “ci2”, because the origin is fruit or seed. The word “草” is pronounced “cho2” in Radix Glycyrrhizae (甘草), Radix Arnebiae (紫草), Radix Gentianae (龍膽草), Medulla Tetrapanax (通草), because the origin is root or pith, but it is pronounced different as “chau” in Herba Ecliptae (旱蓮草), Herba Leonuri (益母草) because the origin is whole plant.

Radix Scrophulariae (玄參 hian7-som1), not (suan7-som1), or practice of avoiding the emperor name changed to(元參 guan7-som1).

The patient take the prescription to the traditional Chinese medicinal drugs store to buy Chinese herbal drugs according to a doctor's prescription is called “抓藥 grab drugs” in common Chinese, but called “拆藥 take apart drugs, 合藥 combine drugs” in Ho Lo Chinese language.

We point out the detail for these characteristics is He Ro traditional Chinese medicine culture. Consequently, Chinese medicine profession turns to be the precious lively database for ancient Han language study among all the existing commerce circle.

Because of the long and difficult immigrating journey, they were especially concerned about diseases, and therefore put a lot of efforts on the medicine study. Under this condition, the doctors and Chinese Medicine shops received a lot respects from the public. The people were willing to spend their money on medicines. Taiwan Chinese Medicine traders have been the biggest buyers of the high quality medicines in Mainland China for hundreds years long. Obviously, the knowledge of differentiating herbal medicines' qualities is derived from the same original for hundreds years. This special culture of respecting traditional Chinese physicians comes along with HoLo culture; this is also the main reason lead to the vigorous development of Medicine industry's.

#### **IV. The Quality of Chinese Herbal Medicines**

In the respect of clinical therapy, there are 5 distinctive principals in Chinese medicine: “4 diagnosis methods – observation, auscultation/olfaction, inquiry and palpation; Diagnosis; Write out a prescription; Prescription review; Cautiously select suitable materials for medicinal treatment. Except the “observation, auscultation/olfaction, inquiry and palpation”; “Diagnosis”; “Prescription”, “Select the medicinal materials carefully, and prepare herbal medicine by the prescribed method” is essentially important for obtaining the best curative effect. To use the high quality materials is the key point to get the most curative effect. Therefore, the slogan -- “Precious medicinal materials,

prepared by the prescribed methods” can be found in the Chinese Medicine shops in Taiwan. It is taken as the golden law and precious rule for the operation of Chinese Medicine business.

The selection of high quality medicinal materials is accumulated from all the valuable experiences of Chinese medicine dealers and doctors. In the domain of knowledge succession system, from master to pupil, developed a lot of slang. The slang connotes a lot of manners about how to select the precious medicinal materials. From these slang, they can easily distinguish what kind of materials can be brought out the best curative effect.

Take an example of Ginseng, there is a slang shows the way to distinguish high quality Ginseng, “butterfly calabash, yellow mandarin, cricket skin, general shoulder, up-side-down barb, chrysanthemum material, easy slice, no sticky, solid”, On the other hand, for the low quality of Ginseng is, “rough skin, dessert legs, white material, hallow, black material, sticky, not solid”<sup>(2)</sup>..

In Chinese medicine field, all store owners always display their precious Chinese medical drugs in the window. This concept is pretty much the same as the window display in today’s department stores. More than 30 Chinese drugs including ginseng are the most common ones to be displayed.

The Chinese Medicine dealers in Taiwan preserve the very traditional manners of how to distinguish precious medicinal materials. Especially for those common saying slang, they are the most valuable treasure from the perennial interactions between Taiwan and Mainland China. While these treasures were seriously destroyed during culture revolution in Mainland China, it is kept intact by Taiwanese masters. From 30 years’ field study, we collected this precious knowledge, and codified them into my publishable work of Chinese medicine production. We hope these thousands years’ valuable knowledge can be handed down by our efforts.

## **V. The Differentiation of Chinese Medicinal Materials**

The quality of Chinese medicinal materials is critically related to the curative effect and the life of the patient. All the knowledge of how to differentiate the quality of Chinese Medicinal materials by their appearances is accumulated from generations’ experiences. The principals of differentiation are mainly from traditional experiences, such as simply discriminating from the shape or scent. These methods can help to distinguish the quality in very short time.

There are approximately 500 common used materials, and each of them has its own characteristics, market, and manners of differentiation. These are the key points for the teaching from mater to pupil, and needless to say, this is the most difficult and complicate part during the whole learning process.

## **VI. Prepare Herbal Medicine by the Prescribed Methods**

“Prepare herbal medicine by the prescribed methods” is generally known as the traditional technique of preparing Chinese Medicines. It is based on the fundamental theory of Chinese pharmacology and the nature of Chinese medicines, in order to manufacture the medicines, fit in with different medical therapies and make up properly prescriptions. The purpose of preparing a medicine is usually multilateral. More often than not, one certain method of preparation, or preparing one certain medicine contains many-sided purposes at the same time.

Before the year of 1980, there was usually existed a manufacturing house behind the Chinese medicine shop. The pupils had to learn the techniques and prepared the medicines here. Nevertheless, the wages in Taiwan is 20 times expensive than in Mainland China nowadays. These medicines’ manufactures are mostly processed in Mainland, and almost all are mechanized now. The Taiwan’s Chinese pharmacies are no more doing the medicine manufactures. Some of them even set up the factories in China, and then import the finished products to Taiwan directly.

## **VII. Importers, Intermediaries and Retails**

In the succession of professional drugs business operation system from Chin dynasty, this system is showed as bellow:

1. Big drugs stores (Importer): According to the trading history between Taiwan and Mainland China, the trade of Chinese herbal medicines can be sourced back to Chin dynasty. Even during the very strain period of 1950-1980, all the goods from China were not allowed, except Chinese herbal medicines, continued to be imported through Hong Kong into Taiwan. This triangular trade is still booming even up to date.

2. Intermediaries drugs stores (distributors): This was demarcated by city as a unit, and each city owns one intermediary. They usually have very strong capital for their business, and besides, they built an efficient operation structure – “Flexible stock distributing system”. Especially for some precious herbal medicines, the little shops do not need to spend a great amount of money for the stock. They can simply ring the nearest intermediary to order what they need.

3. Traditional Chinese medicine shops: Retail, it is usually combined with the Chinese medicine doctor, and dealt with the patients directly, and then the shops prepared the medicines by the prescriptions. It mostly owned the basic facility, such as medicine cabinet, and only run by families, like by the husband and wife, or more with 1-2 pupils.

## **VIII. The Separation of Prescription and Dispensing**

The separation of prescription and dispensing has been implementing for many years in Europe and U.S.A.. This system proposes the doctor and pharmacist stand in their own profession. The physician writes out the prescription, and the pharmacist in charge of dispensing. This preserves the right for the patient to know what the physician prescribed. The Taiwanese Pharmacists Association strived for more than 30 years to achieve this professional system, and they finally achieved their expectation after the implementation of National Health Insurance in 1995.

An attentive fact is, the Traditional Chinese medicinal drugs stores in Taiwan has been always implemented the separation of prescription and dispensing since the ancient time. The patient got prescription from the doctor, and he/she could buy the medicines from any Chinese medicinal drugs stores. The patient could even bring these medicines to another Chinese medicinal drugs stores discriminate the quality. Around year 1960 ago, the customer could even ask the shop he/she purchased the medicines to decoct the medicines for them, the shop keeper would then put the medicine residues in front of their shop to the public after two times' decoction. Thus, the public can come to exam if this shop used the right medicines, and as well as the quality. These residues would be presented until the late evening. This is exactly matched to the essential sprit of the separation of prescription and dispensing – “the right of knowing”.

## **VIII. Teaching from Master to Pupil**

The pupils in Chinese medicine shops had to start from the very basic job. In general, it takes 3-5 years' trial for the pupils. Teaching from master to pupil is the most special character in this profession. The master plays the role of the master and as well as the father. Taking care of the pupils is the important responsibility of the master. This sentimental teaching system therefore produced many touching stories among the masters and pupils.

Nowadays, the way to be proved as the doctor of traditional Chinese medicine in Taiwan, is either through except the normal university education, or through the formal examination set by the government for the pupils learned from their masters. In 30 years, there are hundreds of pupils get the doctor licenses from this system.

## **X. Special Customs: tea service; prescribe in quantity writing; the system of buying on account**

Tea service: This is the most special character in this commerce circle. When the customer

arrived, whether to buy the medicine or not, the tea always would be served to the customer first. Compared to the modern society, which is particularly stressed on the efficiency and profits, this commerce circle keeps its own way, elegantly served the tea first, and then rest for the business.

Prescribe in quantity writing: Most of the prescriptions are still continue to be written in the old quantity system. However, it has been changing to the Chinese numeral or Arabic numeral writing in this decade.

The system of buying on account for the poor: Before the year of 1950 and Japanese colonized period, the rural area was very poor. When the people fell ill, they would usually buy the Chinese medicine from the shop and put it on credit till the time of harvest to pay back the bill. According to the account books, the shopkeepers would go to every village collecting bills. In some old pharmacies, it could sometimes found the bills from their forefathers. However, this system diminished after year 1950.

## **XI. Oracle Prescription from the Temples**

In the domain of religious medical system, oracle prescription plays a very important role. Many studies about oracle prescriptions from the temples can be found <sup>(3)(4)(5)</sup>, however, most of them focused on the content of prescriptions, the classification, and the quantity. Regarding to the relationship between medicinal oracle and Chinese medicine shops is rarely investigated in depth.

1. It was a hard period before year 1960, many poor people cannot afford the medicines. Therefore, the medicine expense of the oracle prescription decided to be paid by the temple fund donated by the disciples. It is kind of giving alms for the disciples, however, this custom already vanished nowadays.

2. Many people doubt, from the point of view of statistic, the probability of drawing lots may lead to get the wrong prescription. As a result, it might cause a big risk to take these medicines. As a fact of truth, oracle prescription is just the gateway of beginning the therapy. While the patient take the prescription to the medicine shops, the shopkeeper would ask again the symptoms of this patient, and slightly regulate the prescription. For some patients who do not fit to the prescription, they would write the prescription on a paper money, prayed with this paper money in front of the God, and burned it in the water, drink this bowl of water. In some special cases, the shopkeeper would ask the patient stop taking the medicines.

3. The oracle prescriptions are generally classified beforehand, and there are different prescriptions in each classification. The patient would merely ask for the oracle based on that

certain domain of his/her disease.

4. In general, the medicines put in the oracle prescriptions are mild. They generally do not make big harms to take them. The more important part is the prescription regulated by the medicine shops. They usually put the key medicines for the treatment.

5. The most powerful curative effect of oracle prescription is seem to be the psychological effect.

6. Incense's ashy: The patient usually does not just ask for the oracle prescription from the temple, they usually also ask for the incense's ashy to take. This might make sense for the therapy, since the ingredients of the incense are mostly made of Chinese medicines, such as, RhizomaRhei 大黃 Chinese rhubarb, Radix Aucklandiae 木香 banksias rose, Lignum Santali 檀香 sandalwood, Lignum Aquilariae 沉香 agalloch, Aloe 蘆薈, and etc.. Under the circumstance of incomplete burning, the ashy keeps the ingredients of Chinese medicines. As a result, it does the curative effect. However, during 1970-1985, it had been the dark, messy period of taking the incense's ashy. The problems caused by many temple keepers mixed the antiphlogistic, antibiotics, or even steroids with the ashy. It was later vanished by the ban of hygiene authorities.

7. After year 1985, due to the strict laws of medical treatment Law and pharmacy, and drugs control Act, oracle prescriptions were not as popular as old times. In order the keep off breaking the laws, some temples changed to oracle houses. The patient would simply draw the number for the lots in the oracle house, and then take this number to the traditional Chinese medicine shops. The shopkeeper would find out the matched prescription from the prescription booklet. It turns to another way of operation for the oracle prescription.

8. Recently, some health food sales promote their products to the temples. The people in the temples then promote these products to their disciples. This already turns to another kind of enterprise operational system, it is no more the conventional system of traditional Chinese medicine commerce style.

## **XII. The Changes of the Qualification Standard**

This a very complicate changing process (1)(6), from the Japanese colonized time till year 1967, the business operator unified with the shop in one, it is said to be low standard. From 1967, the law took apart the business operator from the shop. The drug professional and drugs stores control act took effect with high standard, "The profession has to be qualified with basic Traditional Chinese medicine knowledge and the ability of medicine discrimination", in order to recognize the



professional ability. However, in the drug professional and drugs stores control Act 1969, the mother law in legislation department stated as “Registration”, but the executive law in Department of Health stated as “Examination”. This contradiction leads to the fault of succession in Chinese medicine commerce group during 20 years. The period of 1972-1993, it was about the time of generation replacement, the imperfect law so as to produce a lot of disputes between generations. This problem continued till 1990, even the mass media press made five main governmental departments to judge jointly, it still could not find the solution. This recorded 20 years’ battle history.

Till the year of 1987, it turned back to the low standard, unify the business operator with the shop. In 1993, the Pharmaceutical Affairs Law passed, and the 103 items of this law helped to solve the problem by listing all the business operator and shops. On 1998, the amended 103 items made this sunset rule become continued rule, the total amount of Traditional Chinese medicinal drugs stores increased to 14,000 now.

### **XIII. Endangered animal Species in TCM Drugs**

Wildlife conservation is a world-wide trend. It has become a common consensus for countries on the globe to protect wildlife. Given the circumstances, wildlife conservation needs the cooperation of all the nations around the world. Chinese medicine covers more than two thousand drugs, which include various kinds of plants, animals, and minerals. Rhino horn, tiger bone, and bear gallbladder are just a few, Since 1992, these animal-based medicinal drugs have received great attention among international media. It is because rhinos, tigers, bears were listed as endangered wildlife species, for which hunting, trade, or consumption is prohibited by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

International wildlife conservation group regard the continued use of rhino horn and parts of other endangered animals in Chinese medicine as the main reason for the speedy disappearance of several endangered species. The Chinese medicine store owners have since become the target. Since then, Chinese medicine, long being regarded as a profession devoted to preserving human life, has turned out to be the center of criticism. In 1992-1994, their sons and daughter in primary school were ashamed for their parents work.

The main TCM drugs relative to endangered animal species are rhino horn, rhino skin, tiger bone, bear gallbladder, antelope horn, musk, turtle shell, pangolin scale, elephant skin etc.

### **XIII. The twist of rhino horn and tiger bone in 1992-1995 in Taiwan**

The very serious case was the rhinoceros horn and tiger bone problem storm in Taiwan in 1992-1994, Taiwan being the killer of rhinos and tigers is completed biased in the world media. It was caused by the paper “the Horns of a Dilemma: The Market for Rhino Horn in Taiwan”<sup>(7)</sup> was compiled by a foreign conservationist and two domestic zoologist scholars. The biased result of investigation report only caused by these 3 authors did not understand the special characteristics of the Ho Ro traditional Chinese medicinal culture. The international environmental group, as EIA (UK’s Environmental Investigation Agency), without coming to Taiwan and just using the result of above paper, produced a film “Mad in Diewa.” In this film, it blamed Taiwan as the killer of rhinos. The condemnation of “ People in Taiwan reserving ten ton of rhino horn are killer of rhino” had gone with Taiwan since then. The accusation with this paper as the strong evidence to attack Taiwan. Taiwan invoked the Pelly Amendment from the United States, and lost more than US\$30,000,000 per year, in 1993. It hurt Taiwan government, people and the Chinese medicine so much.

In fact, some of the statistics and information related Chinese medicine cited by international wildlife conservation groups are incorrect. Nobody had ever double checked the accuracy of the information. Chinese medicine dealers in Taiwan were the main cause of the extinction of these wild animals. Our government did undercover operations to investigate Chinese medicine stores. Plain-clothes officers acted as customers to buy rhino horn powder. Some officers pretended that they had some patients under emergency conditions at home and begged the store owners to sell rhino horn to them.<sup>(8)(9)(10)(11)</sup>

Some facts distorted by the international media and environmental group by EIA etc. were as (1) Rhinoceros horn can be used as aphrodisiac in Chinese medicine, (2) The stock of rhinoceros horn in Taiwan total ten tons, People in Taiwan consume bit quantities of rhinoceros horn and the are the killer of rhinos, (3) Taiwan imported 2,000 kilograms of tiger bone to produce tiger bone wine each year. (4) The trade of rhinoceros horn was still common in Taiwan. (5) People in Taiwan are killing tiger. (6) Taiwan restaurants is selling tiger penis soup, etc. I had papers to commend these distorted facts.<sup>(12)(13)</sup>

This was the black days of Chinese medicine commerce group in Taiwan in 1992-1994. They were angry about a series of accusations, attacks, and infringement of copyright made by the international conservations group, but they must faced this sanction.

## **XV. The Impact after the Implementation of National Health Insurance**

Before the implementation of National Health Insurance in March 1, 1995, many experts worried the impact brought by this policy would make the traditional Chinese medicinal drugs

stores lose its market, and diminished soon after.

However, from the statistic of Association for Traditional Chinese Medicinal Drugs Stores of ROC, in March 31, 1988, there were totally 8,212 shops (including the shops with license and without) in Taiwan. On September 5, 2003, as I called this association to check, there are more than 14,000 membership shops and more than 3000 shops without membership. This proves this commerce group does not diminish, but in contrary, it increased two times more. The reasons can be explicated as bellow: (1). National Health Insurance turned a big quantity of population flows to the traditional Chinese medicine. (2). Only extraction products are available in the grant of National Health Insurance. This makes the public would rather to spend extra money for high quality herbal medicines, and decorate by their own to pursuit better curative effect. To place the importance on “High quality of Chinese herbal medicines” is the key point keeps this traditional Chinese medicine drugs stores commerce group stand still and even keeps on flourishing on its market.

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