



IF YOU HAD BEEN living in the West 10 years ago and told a friend that you were being treated by a practitioner of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) the response might have included a raised eyebrow or two. Back then, mainstream western society frowned on

traditional medicine, regarding it with deep scepticism. How times have changed.

Acupuncture, herbal treatments, reflexology and other forms of traditional medicine have all established great credibility in Europe and the United States. In the UK alone, there are more than 1,500 qualified acupuncturists and herbalists, with four universities offering degree programmes in TCM.

Among those spreading the word is author and teacher Jeremy Ross, who has practised and taught acupuncture and herbal medicine in both England and the United States since 1977. He is not only an expert clinician but also trains practitioners in how to create balanced herb combinations that are both effective and safe.

“What we have now is where the integrative ideas of modern physics, the integrative ideas of modern ecology, and the integrative ideas of Qi theory (a key element of TCM) are now slowly entering modern medicine so that it begins to take in these philosophies,” he said. “Medicine is slowly beginning to understand it is from within the patient himself that the disease originates. Yes, there are external environmental factors, but until you support the vital energy, the Qi, medicine won’t change. I think one of the important contributions of Chinese medicine is to bring this to the knowledge of western doctors.”

TCM is moving out of Chinatown and into the High Street of cities in the UK. This process has been accelerated by support from bodies as illustrious as the World Health Organisation, which has this to say about acupuncture: “The effectiveness

of acupuncture analgesia has already been established in controlled clinical studies. Its effective rate in the treatment of chron-

Left: Sen means “forest” in Chinese, a perfect metaphor for the human body. Facing page: New outlets are opening in London; lotus plants used in the herbal preparations.

ic pain is comparable with that of morphine.”

For proof that TCM is establishing itself in mainstream western culture look no further than Sen Medicine Company Limited, a retailer in London that represents a small but visible part of Hutchison Whampoa’s investment in this field. Located in bustling South Molton Street, just off Oxford Street, Sen is bringing centuries old Chinese healthcare to an upmarket clientele. Sen offers everything from consultations, massage, reflexology and acupuncture to herbal remedies, body and skin care.

“We are seeing a great deal of receptivity to our products,” said Mel Tung, Retail Operations Manager of Sen. “Alternative medicine is something that people in the West are really interested in. People are more and more open to trying new things. They realise that western medicine is not infallible and does have side effects.

“We are introducing both the concept and reality of Chinese medicine to a sophisticated western audience. We are taking the best of Chinese medicine and combining it with western marketing. It’s the best of both worlds. Certainly, the feedback has been very positive. Word of mouth is very important to our business.”

The clientele is 70 per cent women aged between 30 and 55. It’s a very high-end, high-income demographic. Many American tourists and visitors from the Gulf States are also regular customers.

So, what is the Sen experience all about?

As you enter Sen, the feeling is one of calm. The clean, simple layout follows *feng shui* principles and natural materials such as walnut and stone dominate. Once inside, customers can stop off at the liquid health bar offering low calorie, caffeine-

the art of

free alternatives to tea and coffee such as herbal fruit smoothies and juice mixes.

Just beyond the health bar is the retail area where Sen has used its knowledge of TCM to create packaged consumer products with Chinese herbal ingredients and teas. The range of more than 50 bodycare products incorporates Chinese herbs, more

SEN

London is the home to a retailer offering an authentic Chinese medicine experience that is both accessible and credible to a western audience

By Jon Marsh



than 30 herbal tea formulae, and a range of 11 of the highest quality Chinese green teas available in the West. This range is being expanded into prestige high-end skin care and other categories such as cosmetics and bottled drinks will soon be available.

Further into the store, qualified TCM practitioners from Mainland China offer over-the-counter remedies. Sen’s senior practitioner is Dr Wei Chunrong, a TCM

expert with over 20 years of experience. Full consultations are available for more serious ailments which may require acupuncture, reflexology or long-term herbal prescriptions.

“Weight, sleep and stress are the big three problems that our customers come to us with along with back and joint pain caused by sitting for long stretches of time. These all reflect life in a big city,” explained Mr Tung. “Ginseng is probably the most popular herbal remedy as it boosts energy levels. One of our herbal treatments called ‘Poria + 10’ speeds metabolism and reduces appetite and is quite effective in weight reduction programmes.”

There are three main ways to describe the effect that herbs can have on the energy flow within the human body. The first is temperature. Each herb is said to be either hot, warm, neutral/cool or cold. Typically, hot herbs are used to alleviate cold conditions such as certain types of arthritis and coughs. Cold herbs are used for conditions like high fevers, excessive thirst and constipation.

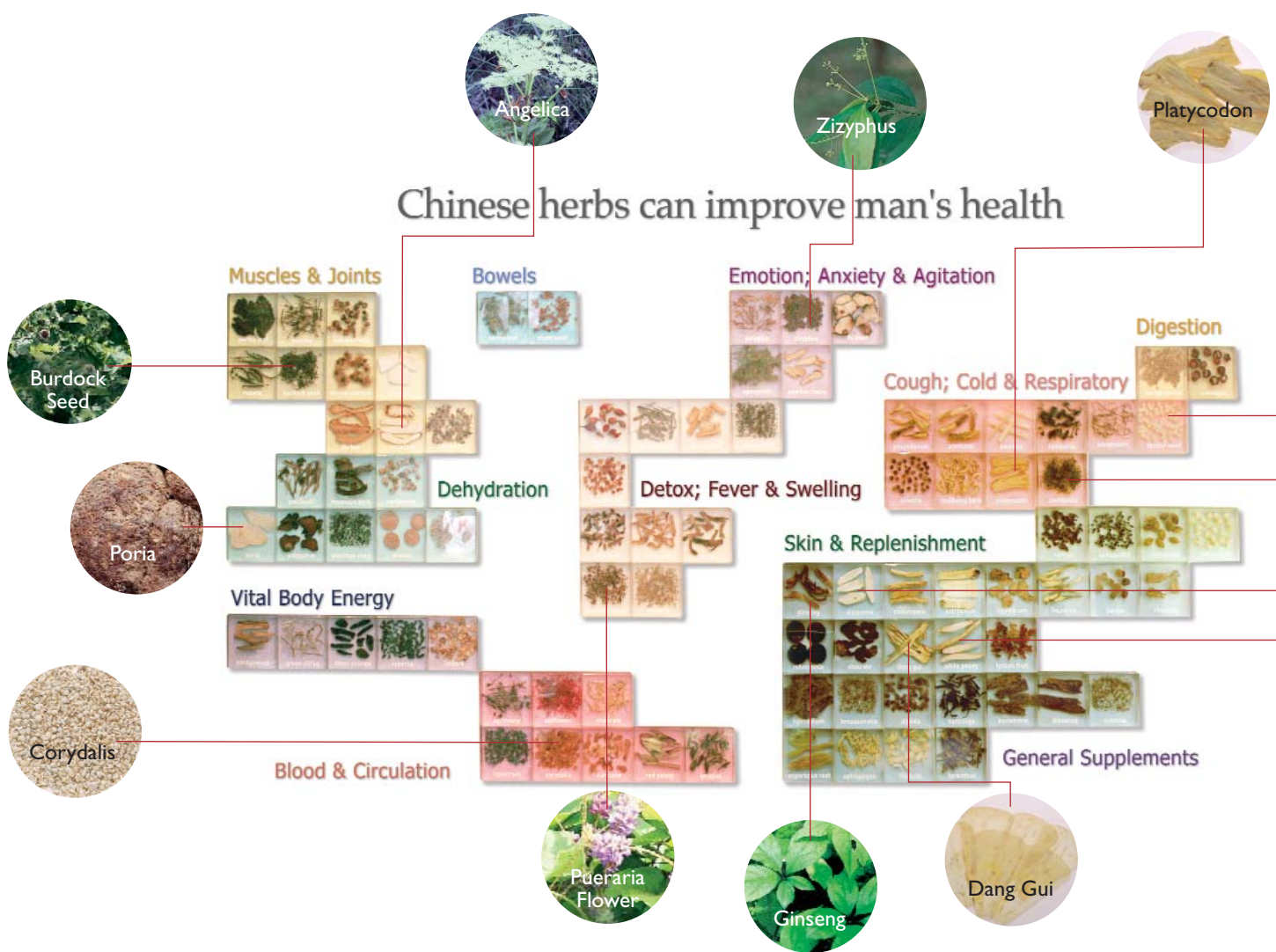
The second is taste. There are five tastes, each of which indicates the active nature of the herb. A pungent taste tends to be dispersing; bitter is cooling and draining; sweet has a toning effect; salty softens; sour substances are astringent. Finally, each herb is also linked with specific organ networks. For example,

peppermint is cool and is linked with the lungs and the liver.

Along with herbs that are known in the West, TCM uses a huge variety of other medicinal herbs including tree bark, flower petals and clay. The herbs are conventionally classified into about 20 distinctive functional categories. There are those which nourish the body energy, those which calm the mind and those used to warm the interior. Usually several



Chinese herbs can improve man's health



PERFECT PITCH

SEN is putting Chinese medicine in front of western consumers in an accessible yet sophisticated way and this approach is reflected in the branding. The warm, red shade of the Sen logo conjures up images of festivals and celebrations in China. Products are displayed in packaging that combines unbleached surfaces overlaid with Chinese motifs in warm earthy shades. This strategy has not gone unnoticed. Wolff Olins, the agency that worked with Hutchison on the Sen launch, received a coveted nomination in the 2003 Design and Art Direction Awards. Sen also won two awards in the 2003 London International Advertising Awards which attracted 13,000 entries from 71 countries.

herbs are combined together with each herb performing a specific role. Some assist the action of the primary herb, while others target secondary symptoms or focus the action of the formula on a specific organ or part of the body.

These concepts are completely foreign to western consumers and can be quite confusing. While most accept herbs are beneficial due to their natural qualities and others believe in their efficacy because of the long history of usage in Asia, almost none understands how or why these products work. Sen's mission is to simplify the concepts of Chinese medicine and inform western consumers in "their own language" about the advantages of this treasure of China. One simple example is explaining the complex concept of "Qi" more simply as "body heat and energy." Most west-

erners understand that the temperature changes when the body is sick and that "rebalancing of Qi" is simply the use of herbs to regulate the temperature. To explain these simplified concepts to consumers, Sen employs a team of high-energy staff, many of whom are mainland Chinese who have studied in the UK. Western consumers thoroughly enjoy engaging with these bright young people to try to learn more about China and the wonders of TCM.

Sen prepares these herbal remedies in a variety of convenient forms including tasteless tablets and blended juices. As Sen states proudly on its website (www.senhealth.com): "Sen is a brand new approach to health. We've taken over 5,000 years of Chinese expertise and made it easy to swallow."

Considering that so many people dis-

"I love this shop and the friendly staff. I have had acupuncture many times for stress and detox."

Maureen, London





Centipeda



Apricot Seed




White Peony



Dioscorea

like needles, the popularity of acupuncture is perhaps a little surprising and shows how much TCM has moved into the mainstream of healthcare. As Mr Tung explained: “In my experience, there has been very little resistance to acupuncture. Perhaps it is because there has been a lot of publicity about it. I’ve come across a patient. He is the foreman working at our new store in London and is a tough sort of guy in his fifties. He told me he had used acupuncture for pain in his neck and back. It shows the levels of awareness are very high.”

Indeed they are. Sen opened its doors in January, 2003, and has not looked back. Today, about 4,000 customers come through the store every month and it is no surprise to hear that Sen is expanding. A second store has just opened near Spitalfields Market in the

heart of London’s financial district. “The area is full of international banks and legal firms,” said Mr Tung. “It’s perfect – hundreds, perhaps thousands, of stressed out bankers and lawyers in need of a soothing massage or a calming herbal tea!” A third outlet will open in early 2006 across the road from Harrods, perhaps the most famous department store in Europe. It will be part of “Harrods 102,” an extension of the main department store that will provide upscale convenience shopping for a sophisticated, primarily local clientele. Sen also has a concession at Fenwick, a leading department store on Bond Street in London’s West End, and is planning to open soon in Chelsea’s trendy King’s Road. Sen’s future, just like that of TCM in the West, looks very bright indeed. 

“Our little oasis of calm to escape the bustle of London.”

Deborah and Rebecca from Little Kingshill

HOW TCM WORKS

THE NAME SEN means “forest” in Chinese – the perfect metaphor for the human body. It is an ecosystem that is in constant flux and needs to maintain a healthy balance through different seasons and physical conditions.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) can be used to treat almost all health problems, from minor imbalances to chronic disease. The basic concepts are quite simple. TCM holds that the human body must remain in equilibrium with both the external and internal factors that influence it. These factors include climate (eg, wind, cold, heat and damp) and emotional state (eg, grief, anger, fright). TCM uses herbs, reflexology and acupuncture to help counteract these forces. Without treatment, minor ailments can become chronic illnesses that affect the internal organs and lead to a serious decline in health. Achieving a physical, mental and spiritual balance is the Chinese ideal.

“Yin” and “yang” symbolise the essential Chinese ideal of perfect balance. Literally, they represent the sunny (yang) and the dark (yin) sides of a mountain. They are two opposing forces contained within the circle of life. According to Chinese philosophy, the world and all life within it contains this pair of mutually dependent opposites and only when they are in equal balance is life itself in har-

mony. TCM attempts to harmonise the opposing forces of your mind, body and spirit. Only when your yin and yang are balanced will you feel 100 per cent.

TCM often refers to the “four pillars”- observing (the patient’s facial, skin and tongue colour); smelling (the breath, body odour) and listening (to the tone of the voice or the sound of a cough); asking (symptoms and past treatment) and palpitation (for example, feeling the pulse). These methods enable a practitioner to assess the physical and psychological state of the patient.

The idea of “organ networks” is another central concept and was developed in ancient China to explain the relationship between a healthy body and a healthy mind. According to the theory, five main

and six subsidiary organs regulate the correct functioning of body and mind. For example, the liver stores blood, ensures a smooth flow of energy around the body but also “opens” into the eyes, “manifests” in the nails and plays a vital role in social interactions, creativity and a good night’s sleep.

Over the centuries Chinese doctors charted the common ways in which these networks could break down and result in illness. At the same time they developed methods of restoring the networks back to a state of health and harmony by administering herbs and acupuncture.

