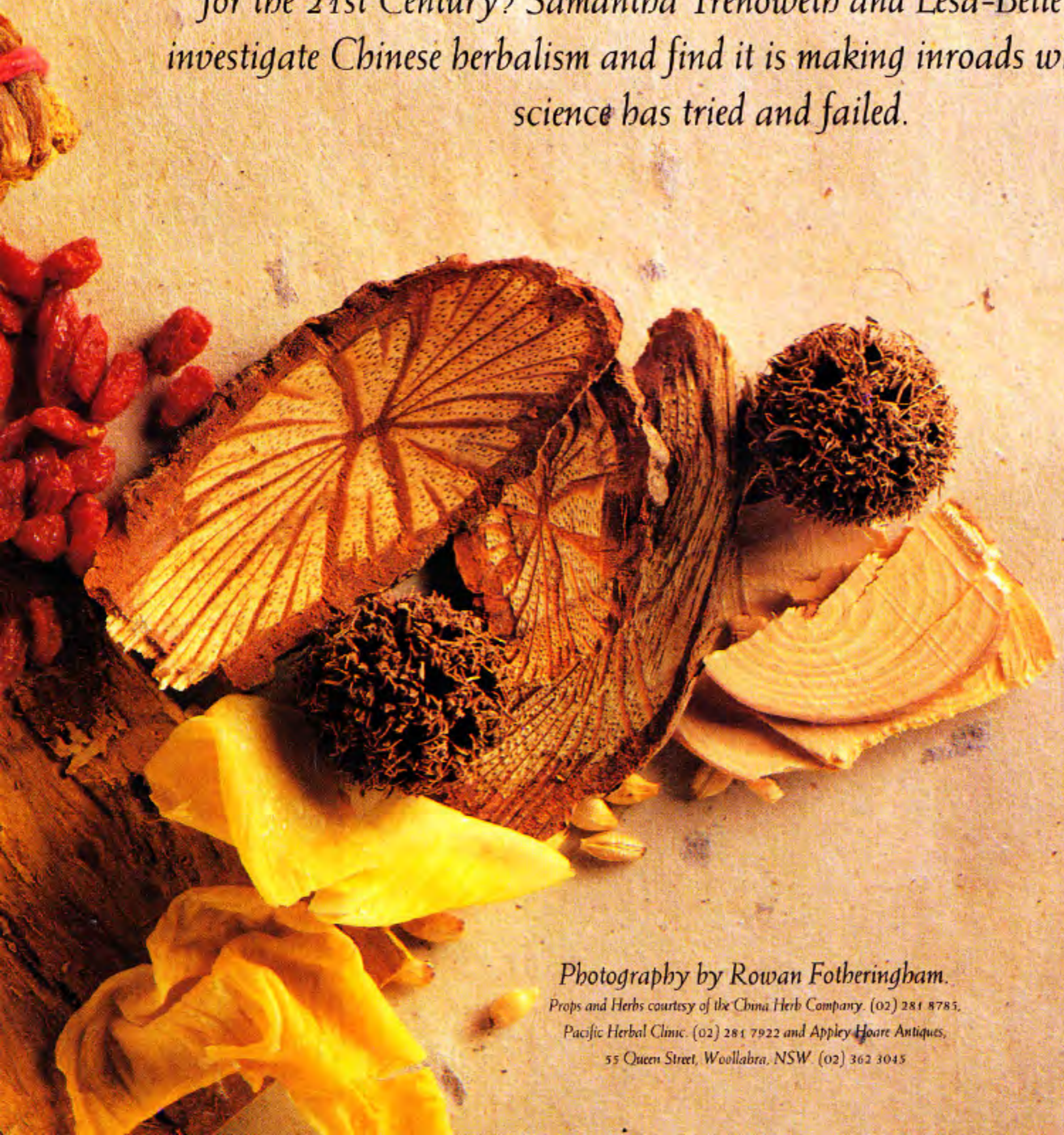


# CHINA

## SYNDROME

*Could one of the oldest healing techniques on Earth become the new medicine for the 21st Century? Samantha Trenoweth and Lesa-Belle Furbagen investigate Chinese herbalism and find it is making inroads where Western science has tried and failed.*



*Photography by Rowan Fotheringham.*

*Props and Herbs courtesy of the China Herb Company. (02) 281 8785.*

*Pacific Herbal Clinic. (02) 281 7922 and Appley Hoare Antiques.*

*55 Queen Street, Woollabra, NSW. (02) 362 3045*

**B**OTTLES ARE CRAMMED with sea horses, insects, exotic fungi and herbs. Shelves are stacked with jars and tins bearing dusty labels in ancient script. A woman behind a counter measures precise quantities of bark, roots and twigs and wraps them in white paper. A man grinds herbs with a mortar and pestle that must have been in his family since antiquity. A fine dust rises from the bowl, adding its own spicy scent to the little shop's already heady aroma. Stopping by a herbal dispensary in any Chinatown is like stepping 50, 100, even 1,000 years back in time.

Traditional Chinese medicine is one of the most ancient and respected systems of healing still practiced today, with a documented history stretching back over at least 2,000 years. The first records of qualifying examinations in medicine

are found in China. Scholarly proficiency exams were introduced by the Han emperor in 165 BC and the Imperial University was founded in 124 BC. Then, some time around AD 620, an Imperial Medical College was established. Interestingly, it was not until AD 931 that the first qualifying examinations in the Arabic world were held in Baghdad and much later, in AD 1200, the school of Salerno began to graduate Doctors of Medicine.

China also has a rich tradition in medical literature which, according to Joseph Needham and Lu Gwei-Djen of the East Asian History of Science Library at Cambridge, began with the *Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing* (*Pharmacopoeia of the Heavenly Husbandman*) in the second century BC. Much later, in AD 659, came the imperially commissioned *Hsin Hsiu Pen Ts'ao* (*Newly Reorganised Pharmacopoeia*), a world renowned pharmaceutical natural history. The first official pharmacopoeia in the Western world, the *Pharmacopoeia Londiniensis*, was not compiled until some 1,000 years later.

There are many who believe the science of immunology also had its beginnings in China, with the discovery of the smallpox inoculation. It is discussed at some length in medical texts after 1500 but there are Chinese traditions which date the discovery as much as 500 years earlier. Joseph Needham and Lu Gwei-Djen, at the 17th International Congress of Internal Medicine in Kyoto, told the story of a Prime Minister, named Wang Tan, whose son died of smallpox around AD 1000. "He looked everywhere," they explained, "to find somebody who knew a way of preventing it for his other children, whereupon a wandering Taoist medical adept appeared upon the scene and said that he knew a way to

do it. He took the lymph from a smallpox pustule of a patient and implanted it into the child to be protected and, sure enough, it worked."

The history of traditional Chinese medicine is sprinkled with discoveries like these and, even today, it continues to break new ground both in its homeland and abroad. It is an integral part of the contemporary Chinese health system, practiced alongside Western medicine. The Chinese Government has encouraged doctors of Western medicine to learn traditional Chinese medicine and there is much co-operation and sharing of knowledge between the disciplines. In the People's Republic, as of 1983, there were about 1,000 hospitals for traditional Chinese medicine with a total of more than 70,000 beds and over 450,000 workers in traditional medicine and pharmacology in local areas.

All over the world, traditional Chinese healing techniques have, in recent years, begun to gain mainstream medical respect. In Australia, a number of Chinese herbalists and acupuncturists now practice alongside Western medical doctors and Chinese medicine's well-documented success in gynaecology and obstetrics has led to Western and Chinese practitioners working together at centres like the Endometriosis Clinic in Melbourne. The most extraordinary renaissance of Chinese medicine in recent times has, however, been in Japan - the only country outside China where Chinese herbal prescriptions are available on the national medical benefits scheme.

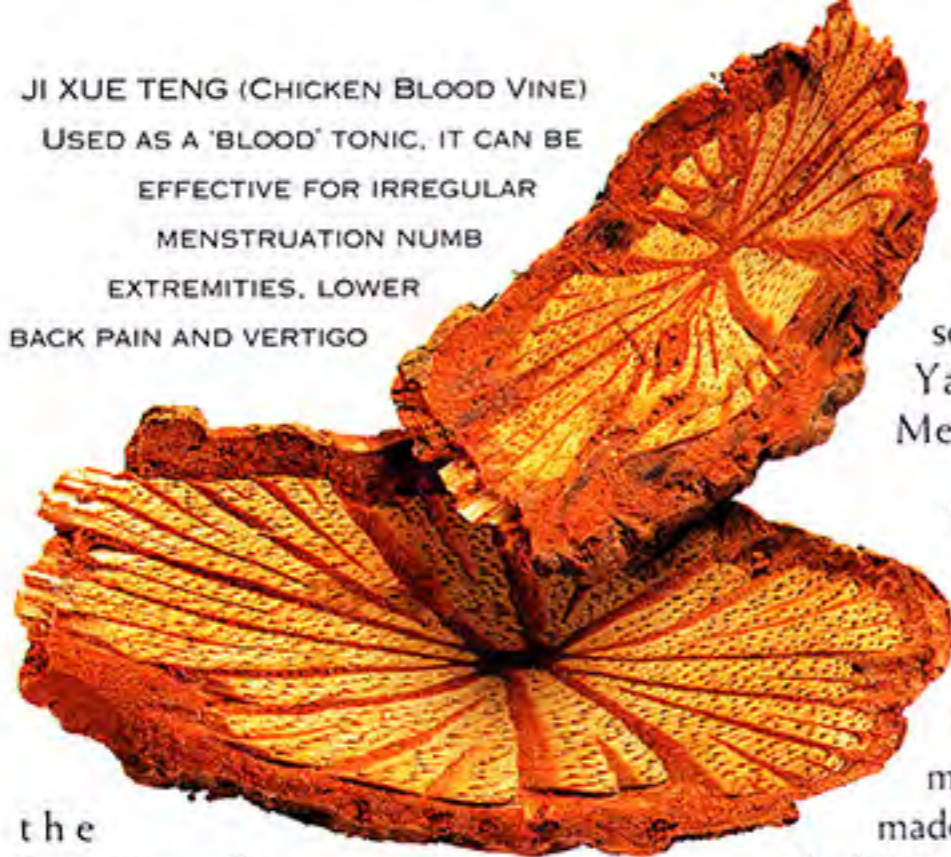
Peter Townsend, of the Chinaherb Company in Sydney, studied Chinese medicine in Japan 11 years ago. "When I first arrived there," he explains, "something like 15 or 20 per cent of Western doctors were using Chinese herbs in their practice in some form. By the mid-'80s, that had soared to around 40 per cent and now it would be way over 70 per cent. A lot of factors brought that about. The main one, I suppose, would be side effect research. As doctors began to notice adverse reactions to Western drugs, they came to see herbs as a safe alternative which did have research to back them up.

"So, in the '50s, some doctors, who were disappointed with what Western medicine had offered, began to get together and look into Chinese medicine. Then, from the '60s, they started forming associations, sponsoring research and conducting their own clinical trials. Eventually, there was enough evidence, in the early '70s, for



DUANG GAI  
CHINESE  
ANGELICA.  
THE MAIN  
'BLOOD' TONIC  
USED IN  
CHINESE  
HERBALISM:  
MAINLY USED  
FOR CONDI-  
TIONS SUCH AS  
AMERORRHOEA,  
SCANTY MENSTRUATION,  
IRREGULAR MENSTRUATION

JI XUE TENG (CHICKEN BLOOD VINE)  
 USED AS A 'BLOOD' TONIC, IT CAN BE  
 EFFECTIVE FOR IRREGULAR  
 MENSTRUATION NUMB  
 EXTREMITIES, LOWER  
 BACK PAIN AND VERTIGO



the Japanese Government to take it up as part of the health scheme. So doctors now actually say, I think we should try this herbal formula first because it has been effective in a great many cases and we know it does not have side effects. Doctors will use the herbs first. Then, if that doesn't work, they will either refer the patient to a more qualified herbal specialist or put them on a stronger drug."

Sometimes these herbal medicines are used alone and in the traditional manner but there is also a growing trend for them to be used in conjunction with modern drugs. A herbal formula might be used to heighten the efficacy of a Western drug or to alleviate its side effects. And there are an increasing number of cases in which the traditional medicines are now considered more effective than their modern counterparts.

According to Peter, traditional Chinese medicines, known in Japan as Kampo, show the best results with chronic illness. "Things like chronic hepatitis, arthritic conditions, diabetes, chronic kidney conditions, women's conditions like PMT, dysmenorrhoea and menopausal symptoms - Chinese medicine works best with some of those conditions that Western medicine just can't touch."

Traditional Chinese remedies have also had marked success with the common cold. Some of the best of these remedies can be traced back to the Chinese medical classic, the *Shang Han Lun*, which is believed to have been written about 1800 years ago. Not only are there proven cures for those who have already succumbed to colds but one formula in particular, known as Ge-Gen-Tang, has been shown in medical

studies to be a powerful preventative medicine.

Traditional medicines are used to great effect in the treatment of psychosomatic diseases. Hiromichi Yasui of the Oriental Medicine Research Centre, Kitasato Institute, Tokyo, told the 17th International Congress of Internal Medicine in Kyoto that this is largely because "in traditional medicine, no distinction is made between somatic and psy-

chological symptoms. Psychological symptoms are seen as an intrinsic part of the overall diseased condition of the patient." He says that disorders such as arteriosclerosis also respond well to treatment with traditional Chinese medicine and he has witnessed very favourable results in the treatment of patients following surgery or prolonged illness. "There are also many situations in which modern medicines cannot be administered because of allergies, side effects or other unforeseen reactions," he adds, "and in such cases it is possible that a traditional medicine can be used effectively without such problems developing."

A recent report from a dermatologist in the British medical journal *Lancet*, illustrates the very positive results that traditional Chinese medicine can have with childhood eczema. A number of the dermatologist's younger patients were referred to a Chinese herbalist, with an 80 percent success rate. In other British studies with eczema patients, success rates have been as high as 90 percent.

Perhaps most remarkable of all has been the work of traditional Chinese practitioners in obstetrics and gynaecology. According to Peter, gynaecology became one of the first separate departments in Chinese medicine some 1600 years ago. "In some ways," he says, "Chinese medicine is very feminist. It wasn't that long ago that the West shrugged off conditions like PMT, whereas in China, 1800 years ago, they were already taking women's conditions quite seriously. In China, 1,000 years ago, PMT was a condition to be treated for. If you had that, there was an imbal-

ance somewhere. It wasn't considered a solely psychological disorder."

In 1988, Dr Igarashi, of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Gunma University School of Medicine in Japan, published the results of a survey of 2,479 Japanese

GINSENG OFTEN CALLED THE KING OF HERBS, THE MAIN QI (VITAL ENERGY) TONIC USED IN CHINESE HERBALISM; ALSO USED TO TREAT CANDIDA, INTESTINAL BACTERIAL INFECTIONS AND SOME FEVERS



**THE GREATEST RENAISSANCE HAS BEEN IN JAPAN, WHERE CHINESE HERBAL PRESCRIPTIONS ARE NOW AVAILABLE ON THE NATIONAL MEDICAL BENEFITS SCHEME**

**PERHAPS THE MOST REMARKABLE OF ALL HAS BEEN THE  
WORK OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE PRACTITIONERS IN  
OBSTETRICS AND GYNAECOLOGY**



**MUGWART  
BURNER AND POT.**  
DRIED MUGWORT LEAVES ARE  
BURNT IN THIS MOXA DEVICE  
TO WARM AREAS OF THE BODY  
CONSIDERED TO BE AFFECTED  
BY COLD. CERAMIC POT FOR  
INFUSING HERBS

organism, clearing the liver  
meridian, which passes  
through the uterus, and  
mobilising the blood."

dissolve cysts.

One area in which traditional Chinese treatments are often used in combination with Western medicines is bronchial asthma. Here, traditional medicine is often used as the main medication, supplemented with stronger and more directly acting drugs during a severe attack. A traditional prescription, like Xiao-Chai-Hu-Tang, Xiao-Qing-Long-Tang or Ma-Xing-Gan-Shi-Tang, gradually strengthens the patient's constitution, so that the asthma attacks become less frequent and less severe and the need for the Western drug often ceases.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a similar case. One Japanese study reported that, among 95 patients, more than 70 per cent improvement was achieved by therapy with herbal medicines and, in many cases, it was possible to discontinue steroids and anti-inflammatory medication.

In Australia, Chinese herbs are used extensively, in conjunction with treatments like chemotherapy, to help cancer patients with the side effects of the Western therapies. And there has also been some research into treatments for HIV and AIDS.

Lily Jiang Lui says she is seeing more HIV and cancer patients who cannot obtain help from Western medicine.

"I work on the liver and kidney meridians but not to the



Liu uses a combination of herbs, massage and acupuncture but, she says, "herbs are the most effective because they are the deepest treatment."

They may be boiled up as a tea or administered as a ready-mixed medicine. After several months, Liu claims, the herbs not only alleviate

gynaecologists. He reported that 66.9 per cent of gynaecologists surveyed used Chinese herbal medicines in their practice and 12.5 per cent, who did not use them, said they would like to. Conditions for which these practitioners generally used Chinese medicines included sterility, infertility, dysmenorrhoea, failure to ovulate and complications of pregnancy.

In a recent study of a Dang Gui and Paeonia formula, a number of women, who had not menstruated for some years, were treated for infertility. Of those treated, 65.5 per cent resumed menstruation and 24 per cent became pregnant.

There has also been some work with Chinese medicine and endometriosis. "When the blood circulates poorly," explains Beijing-trained herbalist, Lily Jiang Lui, who specialises in gynaecological disorders, "especially around the time of menstruation, it causes blockages, which manifest as symptoms of feeling either very cold or having a very hot sensation in the uterus. I treat this by relaxing the

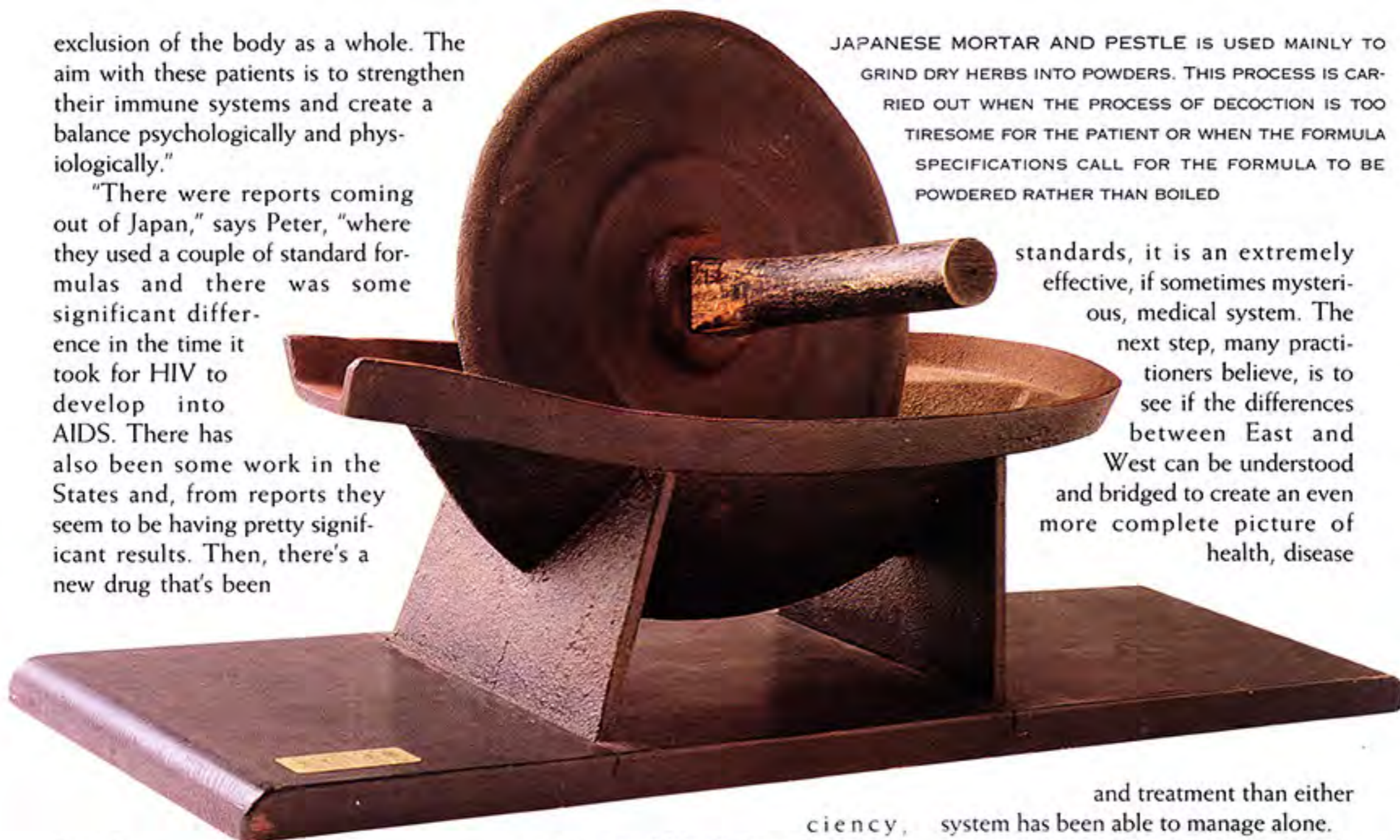
symptoms but actually soften and



**DA HUANG**  
A TYPE OF RHUBARB ROOT, ONE OF THE  
MAIN LAXATIVES USED IN CHINESE HERBALISM; ALSO  
USED TO TREAT CANDIDA, INTESTINAL BACTERIAL INFECTIONS  
AND SOME FEVERS

exclusion of the body as a whole. The aim with these patients is to strengthen their immune systems and create a balance psychologically and physiologically."

"There were reports coming out of Japan," says Peter, "where they used a couple of standard formulas and there was some significant difference in the time it took for HIV to develop into AIDS. There has also been some work in the States and, from reports they seem to be having pretty significant results. Then, there's a new drug that's been



JAPANESE MORTAR AND PESTLE IS USED MAINLY TO GRIND DRY HERBS INTO POWDERS. THIS PROCESS IS CARRIED OUT WHEN THE PROCESS OF DECOCTION IS TOO TIRESOME FOR THE PATIENT OR WHEN THE FORMULA SPECIFICATIONS CALL FOR THE FORMULA TO BE POWDERED RATHER THAN BOILED

standards, it is an extremely effective, if sometimes mysterious, medical system. The next step, many practitioners believe, is to see if the differences between East and West can be understood and bridged to create an even more complete picture of health, disease

developed, Compound Q, that's from a herb used in Chinese medicine. That's what I suppose you'd call a Western drug now. It's been isolated and it has adverse effects but it seems to be pretty strong as far as AIDS is concerned."

All this mixing and matching of Western and Chinese medicines is, however, not without its drawbacks and many traditional practitioners are critical of the way in which modern doctors transpose Chinese herbs onto a Western diagnosis and approach.

"In Western medicine, to treat a disease, first you have to diagnose the name of the disease," says Peter. "So, if you get Hepatitis B or something like that, you're given a treatment specific to that disease. There's a saying in Chinese medicine: 'One treatment for many diseases and many diseases one treatment'.

"What it means is that, say, for example, there's a diagnosis of spleen deficiency. Now spleen deficiency could be manifest in lots of things. It could be something to do with hepatitis, it could be just something to do with being run down, it could accompany the common cold, bronchitis, asthma. There are many diseases it could be manifest in, though as far as Chinese medicine is concerned, the main problem would be the spleen defi-

ciency, so you would look for a treatment that would suit that. On the other hand, because spleen deficiency is predominant in someone who has hepatitis, that doesn't mean that everyone who has hepatitis has spleen deficiency. So the diagnostic part of Chinese medicine is the core of Chinese medicine".

Hikomichi Yasui agrees. "Although traditional medicines can be used in conjunction with modern medicines," he says, "they are most effective when used in accordance with the traditional indications whereby each patient's constitution and collective symptoms are taken into account in an holistic way. This is a point where traditional medicine differs significantly from modern medicine, where all patients suffering from a specific disease would be given the same medication."

The crux of this difference is that Western medicine is still tied to a very analytical, reductionist approach, which focuses far more clearly on the disease than on the patient. Central to traditional Chinese medicine, on the other hand, is an elaborate philosophy and diagnostic technique which places greater emphasis on the whole person. Chinese medicine has a long and enviable history in the treatment of a vast range of conditions and recent research has proved conclusively that, by modern Western

and treatment than either system has been able to manage alone.

Joseph Needham and Lu Gwei-Djen speak of an "oecumenical medicine of the future", which will encompass both the clinical insights and techniques of Chinese and Japanese medicine, while retaining firm roots in modern biological science. In this way, they say, "medicine could become much more organicistic or holistic than it is and it could avoid active principles that are too powerful when used alone."

"Until now," explained Dr Taro Takemi, then Adviser to the Japanese Ministry of Science and Technology, in an address to the International Kampo Symposium in Tokyo in 1983, "Western medicine has suffered by merely treating symptoms that have developed in patients but, from now on, the complications that will beset the world, namely the environmental and atmospheric pollution of the industrialised world, will lead to greater expectations of medicine.

"The medicine of the future will be expected to safeguard the individual from the hazards of industrialisation and the problems that will arise from human interference with the natural world. The humanistic and naturalistic approach of traditional Chinese medicine can offer Western medicine exactly the things it lacks." □

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**CENTRAL TO TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE IS AN ELABORATE PHILOSOPHY AND DIAGNOSTIC TECHNIQUE, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON TREATING THE WHOLE PATIENT**