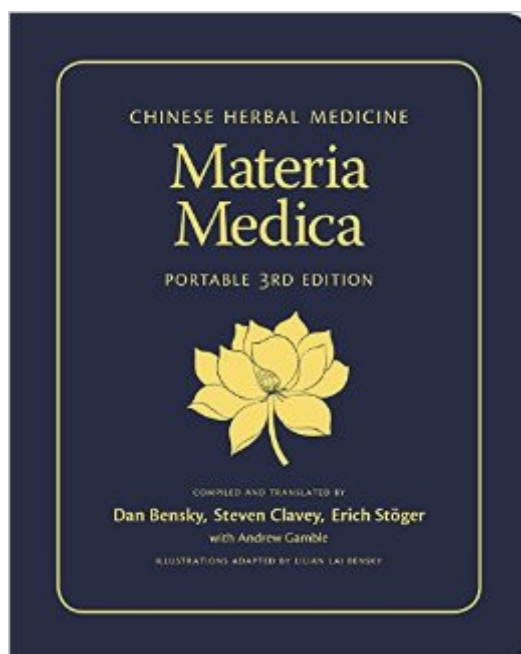


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Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica (Portable 3rd Edition)



Synopsis

The new portable edition of *Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica* (Portable 3rd Ed.) is designed to provide students and practitioners with the same comprehensive and authoritative content that they've always relied on, but in a lightweight and more flexible format. The *Materia Medica* provides a wealth of information and practical insight into more than 530 of the most commonly used herbs in the Chinese pharmacopoeia. Drawing from a wide range of sources, both classical and modern, it provides unparalleled perspective and detail that goes far beyond what is available elsewhere to the Western practitioner. Among its many features: Herbs are grouped in chapters by function, with expanded summaries and tables for contrast and comparison. Each herb is identified by its pharmaceutical, pinyin, botanical, and family names, as well as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and English common names. Key characteristics are provided at the beginning of each entry, along with dosage, properties, channels entered, and relevant cautions and contraindications. This provides a quick overview of essential information. Actions and indications are integrated with important combinations that illustrate the range of an herb's functions, with references to appropriate formulas. This presents a more three-dimensional picture of how each herb is actually used. Expanded commentary offers in-depth analysis and places each herb in its clinical context through rich historical references. The mechanisms of action underlying important combinations, and comparisons with similar herbs, provide a broader context for understanding how the herb can be used with optimal effect. A section devoted to nomenclature and preparation describes the most important methods of processing and preparing each herb, and the advantages of each method. It also provides information about other commonly-used names and historical background. Safety is an important focus of this edition, with an emphasis on proper herb identification. Issues concerning standardized products, desirable qualities, variants, and adulterants are explained for each herb. There is also extensive information on toxicity, as well as chemical constituents. The utility of this book is enhanced by its wide range of appendices, among which are color photographs comparing the standard and adulterant forms of over 20 common herbs; tables of herbs that are indicated for specific pathologies of the five yin organs, and the effects of taste combinations; and extensive cross references of the herbs by taxonomy, pinyin, pharmaceutical name, and other East Asian languages. There are also comprehensive indices of both herbs and formulas, as well as a general index.

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Customer Reviews

At last, Bensky et al. third edition is finally out and what a vast source of knowledge it is. For anyone using Chinese medicinal products, this really is your bible. Massively expanded from the 2nd edition, there are hundreds more many medicinal products included. Wonderfully categorised, excellently explained, beautifully illustrated and well indexed, this text allows all readers to easily source detailed information on hundred of medicinal products used in Chinese medicine. Required reading for all Chinese medicine doctors and those wanting to learn more about Chinese medicinal products. Can't wait for Bensky et al. 'Formulas and Strategies' 2nd edition!

When I went to update this with my handwritten notes made on the second edition I found that the material had already been added. Much improved over the older edition with more information on alternate species, constituents, pao zhi and modern uses. It still has the annoying multiple indexes but at least they are thumb indexed. Well worth the investment for owners of earlier editions who actively use herbal medicine.

The study of the herbal aspects of Chinese Medicine is still new to me. I am grateful for this unique text and the vast, comprehensive standard which the authors have set. Its organization for a newcomer is stellar. I also anticipate it would remain extremely helpful to experienced herbalists. The table of contents lays out the "Materia" by their purpose for specific diagnoses: releasing the exterior, clearing heat, extinguishing wind, etc. There is a significant section on obsolete herbs and other substances that details why -- fascinating and useful for those reading historical texts. It provides information on what has been modified to achieve greater safety and/or to cooperate with

preventing extinction to endangered species. Each chapter has its own title page which rapidly summarizes the materia therein and any overall general subdivisions. For example, the chapter on HERBS THAT RELEASE THE EXTERIOR is divided by those that are warm+acrid versus cool+acrid, and it is followed by a nice comparative summary of specialized functions at the end. Similarly, the chapter on HERBS THAT CLEAR HEAT has separate subsections for those which also drain fire, cool the blood, dry dampness, resolve toxicity, and address deficiency heat. Again, these are followed by a very helpful summary of comparative functions. This systematic structure is very useful to me as a student struggling to form an overall gestalt for such a complex field. It also seems like a powerful resource to revisit when puzzling over a potential formula and wondering what other alternatives might better suit a particular individualized need. For each herb listed the following topics are addressed: Chinese character and pinyin name followed by the corresponding pharmaceutical (Latinized) name, the classification of the substance such as its mineralogical name or plant family and species, and then the translation for English, Korean and Japanese. In many, if not most cases, the Chinese text in which it was first mentioned is cited -- intriguing for historical research and those craving original sources. In most cases there is a simplified line drawing in black and white of each substance. I suspect, however, that in many cases searching for raw substances could require more detailed color photos. There is a highlighted summary of properties, channels entered, key characteristics, dosage and Chinese contraindications as one would expect. This is followed by a quite helpful and more detailed description of: actions and indications; a commentary comparing brief quotes from several of the ancient texts; mechanisms of action or interactions with other commonly combined herbs; more detail on "Traditional" contraindications; specialized nomenclature and preparation; criteria for assessing quality; major known chemical constituents; alternative names such as those associated with different provinces in China; and finally any additional product information not inserted above. The latter section frequently seems to contain pearls regarding variations in quality that may be due to season, preparation, or locale. There is an generous section of quick reference material at the back in tabbed sections for easy access. It is well worth becoming a familiar visitor to this portion of the book. These include a section of tables which highlight herbs for the 5 Yin organs and then summarize again the bare essentials of the herbs by actions and indications. The indexing section is very adaptable and user-friendly with separate indices for each of the following: Pin-yin by pharmaceutical names; English, Korean and Japanese names cross-references with pharmaceutical names; and botanical, zoological and mineral names. I appreciate the careful contributions of the publishers/editors to its very logical layout, consistency, font and spacing with subtle use of blue highlighting. All of these features

makes the text very satisfying to either scan or read intently. My concerns at this point regard future directions for the next edition, some of which are beginning to be addressed more clearly now by other authors other than Bensky and his team. Thus, I am hopeful these long-recognized experts will address the following issues with their future updates.

1. Improving the images. *Chinese Medical Herbology & Pharmacology* by Chen and Chen includes good black and white photos. I realize that color photos in a book this comprehensive may not be practical without escalating its price beyond reason.
2. Include more data on the known chemical composition of the herbs and their comparative pharmacological effects in western terminology. I am encouraged by the way that Chen and Chen have begun to tackle this task.
3. Include more outcome data and current primary research references for the most significant attributes of covered herbs and substances. Authors currently providing more help in this regard are: Chen and Chen mentioned above as well as *Pharmacology and Applications of Chinese Material Medical* by Chang in a two-volume set. However, the latter one is now nearly a decade old and becoming harder to obtain (ie. out of print).
4. Expanded cautions/contraindications for crucial interactions with disease conditions not just in the "traditional" language, but also for western diagnoses and major western pharmaceuticals classifications. I realize these additions will make a book already pretty advanced in its comprehensiveness even bigger, possibly turning it into two volumes. However as many reviewers have already noted, Bensky and his team have painstakingly created a "Bible" for the english speaking world. Their work is an extremely critical reference now for avoiding confusions and mistakes which might weaken the impact of this very intriguing multi-generational body of work -- one that is becoming increasingly more influential in our inevitable move toward integration of western and eastern healing sciences. I recall reading that the People's Republic of China Material Medica now requires 3 volumes in order to cover the chinese materia medica as well as things relevant to western pharmaceuticals and procedures that are being utilizing alongside their traditional herbal choices. Those of us coming from the western side could deeply benefit from a resource which meaningfully helps us understand better when our patients have decided to design their own health care team composed of a variety of western practitioners, acupuncturists and specialists in chinese herbology. Doing so understandably takes time and is "never a fully completed process". But I believe that strengthening these resources ultimately helps improve safety for our mutual patients and for all of their practitioners. I think it is no longer realistic to deny that many patients who take responsibility for their own health and comfort will endeavor to combine the best of both hemispheres and will themselves begin reading these books in order to better communicate and cooperate with their practitioners. All of the members of their team will then

increasingly need to be able to communicate meaningfully with each other. Eventually for each of these herbs western-trained practitioners will need to know more specific details about absorption times, drug metabolism and excretion, durations of action, half-lives of the critical components and at least the fundamentals of how dosing may need to change in the setting of liver failure, renal failure, etc. Potential interactions between the herbs and common western drugs with specific diseases is essential. Some intuitions about this can certainly be gained by relevant western practitioners being willing to learn a shared language about yin and yang, as well chinese pathogens and pattern discriminations. Obviously chinese medicine practitioners have been willing and demonstrated a clear dedication to learning more about western diagnosis and therapeutics. However, better clarification and quantification of pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic issues would be very helpful, sometimes in fact critical to safe and effective teamwork. I think we increasingly need an authoritative resource written and published by western leaders such as Bensky et al. to consult for this purpose. I know it would still be very prudent to seek confirmation as well as alternative perspectives from recognized translations by chinese authors and publishers as well). Finally, I am hoping the authors will continue their already monumental and compulsive efforts to clarify naming/identification issues on common herbs available here in the west. One difficulty I found with Bensky's 3rd edition unfortunately arose with the very first herb I was seriously interested in researching -- Qi Ye Lian or *schefflera arboricola*. This is an analgesic and sedative herb particularly intriguing to me because so far it seems that it might not invoke the same mechanisms of action (and side effects) attributed to common nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS). However, I am still having trouble gaining enough information about that hypothesis. Unfortunately, Qi Ye Lian is not mentioned in a primary monograph at all by Bensky's team. It is only referred to as an alternate name for a totally different herb, *paridis rhizoma*, used in the Guangdong province. However, all internet sources I have found so far including an herbal pill sold directly out of Guangdong province (the latter claiming the high quality product prize for Guangdong) identify the source of Qi Ye Lian as *schefflera arboricola*. The two plants share bitterness and tropism for the liver channel, but they differ substantially in action. *Paridis* is cool and slightly toxic. *Schefflera* is warm. And perhaps less toxic? Hence their applications are quite different, if not opposite. Furthermore, the other two well-respected sources which cover Qi Ye Lian much more extensively than Bensky's text -- *Chinese Medical Herbology & Pharmacology* and *Pharmacology and Applications of Chinese Material Medical*) both identify this name with *schefflera arboricola*. Mayway (the US distributor for the PlumFlower brand of herbs as Qi Ye Lian as it is sold on) likewise identifies the preparation as *schefflera arboricola*. The Mayway website asserts that its owner

standardizes all of her herbal identifications with the PRC Materia Medica, implying that China's "bible of herbology and pharmacology" sides with schefflera as well. Given the well-earned stature of Bensky's work, I would love to see the author and his team include more information in their next text about where to turn in order to resolve these puzzles. Better yet, access to their own website for interim support between printed editions and updates would be an invaluable service.

Well, what can you say about this book? This is a hefty, giant book, and could certainly induce some kind of cerebral damage if dropped out of a third story window. :) No, in all seriousness, this is a great, concise book, and as the title of this review implies, it becomes more manageable after you get used to it. Used solely by itself, it will probably not help the student of Chinese herbology to ace any exams, but used in accordance with other study techniques, it will further deepen and reinforce the studying of the herbs.

While the information is excellent, there are so many printing errors that it is laughable. How could so many mistakes make it into publication, especially at the price charged? I hope future editions can rectify this seemingly easy problem, again before it sold as a product.

My copy of this book is full of printing errors, including chapter summaries that are incomplete and index page numbers that are as many as two pages off. I expect much more from Eastland Press.

I love the hardcover Materia Medica 3rd Edition. Be VERY careful - some sellers will sell the Portable Edition, make sure you get the hardcover (if that's what you want). I had to return my copy and actually get the hardcover.

This is a huge book. There are many many herbs in it, although they did leave out some of the truly never-to-be-used herbs, which is good to keep people from wanting them, but maybe it would have been good to learn those properties for finding good substitutions. But seriously, this is an excellent book. Every herb is gone into in detail with properties, combinations and preparation methods. Adulterants are noted as well.

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