

# Comparing chinese herbal medicine and modern medicine sociology essay



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This project is to compare Chinese herbal medicine with modern (Western) medicine in terms of culture, sociological and human well-being effects. An online system has been created to showcase a number of popular Chinese herbals in order to gain better understanding on the way that these herbs keep body balance and harmony. The system also help people to check the translation of Chinese herbs Also the users can comment on the web site, and exchange their ideas with others.

Also, some sociological and philosophical reasons that can affect people's opinions are discussed in the research section of this report.

## 1. Introduction

### 1. 1 Project background

The background of this project can be thought as the points shown below.

At any time, healthy is an important element for a human well being. Especially at present, everyone is thinking more about their health while working and living under the pressure of economic recession. Research has shown that most people choose modern medicine, i. e., western medicine to cure diseases. But not only modern medicine costs too much but also it has side defects. In 2009, after the American singer Michael Jackson died, many people have realized that taking more medicines can get sometimes unpleasant side effect, and sometimes, fatal. Furthermore, because of the pandemic of Swine Flu, people have started to think more about disease prevention than just curing them. To this end, Chinese herbal medicine can help and has since become more popular than before, which is a very natural

choice. So, more and more people are interest in Chinese Herbal Medicine (CHM). According to World Health Organization (WHO) webpage, the following description has been given: “ During its 3000-year history, traditional Chinese medicine pioneered interventions such as diet, exercise, awareness of environmental influences on health, and the use of herbal remedies as part of a holistic approach to health.”(1). Chinese Herbal Medicine can be used as in evidence. However,, similar to any other medicine, CHM is complicated, even to Chinese people. To understand Chinese Herbal Medicine is not easy. So, a system that can provide the information of Chinese herbal medicine can help people who are not used to CHM in many ways.

## 1. 2 Problem definition

From the questionnaire conducted in this project and shown in Appendix, more than 80% non-Chinese people heard about Chinese Herbal Medicine,. Whereas , more than a half of them prefer modern medicine. So, why don't they like Chinese medicine is the first question to ask.

Secondly, According to the questionnaire, more than 60% people use Internet everyday, which means, with the development of e-commerce, Internet can be a tool that provides people with different views on Chinese herbal medicine. But, during the research, until now, just a few web site can support this, which are

A) [http://www. herbalmedicineuk. com/](http://www.herbalmedicineuk.com/)

B) [http://www. holisticchineseherbs. com/](http://www.holisticchineseherbs.com/)

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C) <http://www.holisticchineseherbs.com/>

On the other hand, there are some problems in these three web sites.

Figure1: the first web site at <http://www.herbalmedicineuk.com/>

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The web page A can be used to purchase some herbs on line, i. e., it is a on-line shopping web site.

There is not any information regarding the background of these herbs. From this web site, users only can buy the herbs, but can not learn the knowledge of Chinese herbal medicine.

Figure 2: the second web site.

Similarly, web site B can only provide general information on CM, but not information regarding each individual herb and its functions.

Figure3: the third web site

On the other hand, webpage C provides amount of useful information on CHM. However, again when it comes to each herb, the knowledge is not there with a number of translation errors. In summary, although there are a few web sites that provide information on Chinese herbal medicine, for people with little knowledge of CHM, a new web sited is needed to work as an educational tool as well as an online shopping site, which is what this project does.

### 1. 3 Aims

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The aim of this project is to design and build a web site system that allows users with little knowledge of CHM to learn and understand Chinese herbal medicine. Another aim is to start an online discussion forum to find the reasons behind that why so many people don't know or dislike CHM.

#### 1. 4 Objectives

Gather information on the knowledge of CHM based on questionnaires.

Interview with doctors who practice CHM. Carry out research on these topics

Design and build an online system.

Evaluate the online website.

Write final report on project.

## **2 Literature review**

This chapter will review three books on Chinese medicine, which include ' Chinese herbal medicine -A practical guide to the healing power of herbs' by Guang Xu (Give reference in the end???), ' Medicine East And West: Two Ways of seeing, two ways of thinking' by Ted J. kaptchuk (reference???), ' Chinese herbal medicine Formulas and Strategies' by Dan Bensky and Randall Barolet (reference???) and ' Chinese Herbal Legends' by Zhu Zhongbao (reference???).

### **2. 1 The healing power of herbs**

In the book written by Guang Xu, the author tries to give a general overview about Chinese herbal medicine. The related chapters can be divided into two

parts, one is Chinese herbal medicine history, another one is the elements of Chinese herbal medicine.

Chinese herbal medicine has a long history of more than 5000 years. The history can go back to the time of Sheng Nong, when Chinese people used plants to treat the illness further than a few thousand years.

As explained by the author, Chinese herbal medicine is rooted in the culture of centuries, it cannot be easily explained or measured by modern scientific language and methods. Without a total understanding of its background and its history, it is very difficult to understand. [reference??] . According to Chinese Culture, basically, there are two different elements that can affect Chinese Herbal Medicine. One is Yin (darkness) Yang (brightness), another one is Five-Element Theory. By understanding these two elements, it is easier for people who don't know CHM to comprehend Chinese Herbal Medicine.

### **2. 1. 1 Yin and Yang (darkness and brightness)**

Yin Yang, which is from traditional Chinese philosophy, is the name of two related things that are opposite in the natural world, i. e., everything in the universe can have two opposite, such as sunshine, fire, light, which are Yang. On the other hand, grey, dark, cold, belong to the element of Yin. In Chinese Medicine, Yin-Yang theory is an important element through the whole medicine system and can be employed to explain the body system and guide the treatment. For example:

Yin-Yang implies that everything in the world has an opposite, such as sky and land, sun and moon. Although they are opposite, they also can be an unity. Through this unity, the natural world can keep the balance well.

Yin-Yang depends on with each other, meaning if there is no Yang, there is no Yin. When the balance of the relationship of the substance of Yin-Yang are destroyed, the life might reach its end.

On the other hand, Yin-Yang has a special relationship. If one wanes the other will wax. For example, just as the four seasons, if winter changes to spring, the weather should be warm. It is the process of Yin waxes and Yang wanes.

## **Five-Element Theory**

The Five-element theory includes fire, metal, water, wood and earth, as well as their motions. The ancient Chinese people found these five elements are the basic substances in universe. These five kinds of elements have relationship of generation and restriction, as found in Chinese Herbal Medicine, Chinese doctors use them to describe the problems of disease as explained in the following:

Reinforcing the spleen (earth) to strengthen the lung (metal) ;

Failure of water (kidney) to nourish wood (or failure of the kidney to nourish the liver) ;

Five movements and six climates;

Wood tending to spread out freely;

Depression of the liver (wood) generating fire;

Fire of the liver (wood) impairing the lung (metal);

Fire tending to flare/flame upward ;

Excessive fire impairing the lung (metal) ;

Failure of fire to generate earth ;

Coordination between water (kidney) and fire (heart);

In coordination between the kidney (water) and the heart (fire) ;

“ Being restricted” and “ restricting” ;

## **Philosophical concept**

Traditional Chinese herbal medicine, however, can be based on two treatments which are on philosophical concept.

### **2. 1. 3. 1 The Holistic Concept**

By this concept, there is a general meaning, i. e., the human body is a unity and a universe is within a body. On the other hand, it has a close interaction with the world. Traditional Chinese Medicine maintains that a human body is composed of different organs with each organ having its own distinct function, as a part of the whole body. Also, Chinese medicine regards the whole body as an organic body. ‘ Its constituent parts are inseparable in structure, interrelated and interdependent in physiology’. Man has a nature life, and nature provides an environment for man’s survival. So, human can be affected by nature. Traditions Chinese Medicine states ‘ Physicians have



to know the law of nature and geographical conditions when diagnosing and treating diseases'. That is the reason of Tradition Chinese Medicine not only stresses the human body is a unity but also regards the interrelationship between the body and nature environment.

### **2. 1. 3. 2 Treatment by Differentiation of Syndromes**

Chinese herbal medicine, on the other hand, is also understood as treatment by differentiation of syndromes. The meaning of differentiation is to analyze the diseases by comprehensive, implying that the patient's symptoms and signs collected by the following four diagnostic methods are analyzed and summarized in order to identify the etiology, nature and location of a disease, and the relationship between vital qi (air) and pathogens, thereby to determine what syndrome a disease in concern belongs to.

According to the relationship between "disease" and "treatment", traditional Chinese medicine is based on two different ways. One is to treat the same disease with different therapies. Whilst another one is to treat different diseases with the same therapy, i. e., different disease can be manifested in the same situation may be treated in the same way.

In summary, using different methods for the treatment of the disease is the core of Treatment by Differentiation of Syndromes.

## **2. 2 Chinese Medicine and Western Medicine**

The book by Ted J. kaptchuk discusses the difference between East and West medicines, such as why some westerners dislike Chinese Medicine? There is a philosophic reason, which is that Chinese culture is hard to understand.

But, another reason is sociological. That is the way of western people thinking about Chinese Medicine. In this book, author gives two different views on seeing and thinking via westerner's view, If a non-Chinese person can found these two ways, he/she might become interested in Chinese Medicine.

The first one is concerned with treatment result. Many non-chinese have strange notions about Chinese medicine, Some of them see it as hocus-pocus-the product of primitive or magical thinking. If a patient is cured by means of herbs or acupuncture, they see only two possible explanations: Either the cure is a placebo effect, or it is an accident.

To many people, when they heard about CHM, the first feeling in their mind is that, Chinese medicine is magical, but not science. The reason can be understood that Western medicine is based on data. Western doctors prefer using data to treat disease, whereas Chinese doctors are in favor of their experience.

Another way of thinking, as described in the book, is " Other Westerners have a more favorable but equally erroneous view of Chinese medicine. Deeply and often justifiably disturbed by many of the products of Western science and culture, they assume that the Chinese system, because it is felt to be more ancient, more spiritual, or more holistic, is also more " true" than Western medicine."

In this way, some Westerners like Chinese medicine, but, because of different background, different culture, different history, their translate

Chinese medicine of their own way based on their own culture. Also, they <https://assignbuster.com/comparing-chinese-herbal-medicine-and-modern-medicine-sociology-essay/>

learn Chinese medicine through TV, Internet and some other media. In their mind, that is what Chinese medicine should look like.

By and large, there are two groups of people. One group use Chinese medicine, but, think that Chinese medicine is less logical and is not based on science. It depends on a patient's fortune. Another group of people think Chinese medicine through their own culture. Their minds are often mixed by this culture and other media. So, in their head, they have a different image of Chinese herbal medicine. But, many times, this image is incomplete.

In Summary, the sociological reason that why westerners dislike Chinese medicine is based on a whole system. The Chinese method is based on the idea that no single part can be understood except in its relation to the whole. Understanding this overall pattern, with the symptom as part of it, is the challenge of Chinese medicine. The Chinese system is not less logical, just less analytical.

## **2. 3 Formulas and Strategies**

The book on Formulas and Strategies by Dan Bensky and Randall Barolet has divided Chinese herbal medicine as Chinese herbal and Chinese medicine.

Whereas the book by Zhu Zhongbao on Chinese Herbal Legends' focuses on the use of herbs.

Recently, more and more Chinese doctors found it hard to translate Chinese herbal names. Because, the herbal name is based on Chinese culture and history, and there are so many acceptable solutions. Since these books work as a reference text, for our project, our information is to reflect as closely as

possible the meaning and syntax of the original CHM. We use anglicized  
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Latin names for medicinal substances. The right translations of herbal can be found from these two books.

The following examples are given in the webpage designed in this project.

#### 1) Cang zhu

##### Name

English name: Swordlike Atractylodes Rhizome

Pharmaceutical name : Rhizoma Atractylodis

Nature and flavor: Pungent, bitter and warm

##### Actions

Dries dampness and strengthens the spleen

Dispels wind dampness

Induces sweat, releases the exterior

##### Indications

Syndrome of dampness stagnation in Middle Burner

Impediment syndrome due to wind damp

Exterior syndrome of wind , cold and dampness

Chickenpox, mumps and scarlet fever

Infantile rickets

Night blindness and dry eyes

Diabetes

2) Jin Yin Hua

Name

English name: Honeysuckle Flower

Pharmaceutical name: Flos Lonicerae Japonicae.

Nature and flavor: Sweet and cold

Actions

Clears away heat and resolve toxin

Disperses wind and heat

Indications

External contracted wind-heat, the onset of warm disease

Carbuncle and clove sores

Bleeding due to heat toxin

More information about translation will be given by chapter 3 "result and discuss".

## **Methodology**

Based on the study of literature review, two methods have been applied in the development of this project. One is to conduct questionnaire to gather information from the point of view of Chinese doctors. The other is to design and develop an internet based information site providing educational tool on the explanation of what each herb does and a prototype of potential online shopping site to deliver the herbs that people require.

### **3. 1 Interview with a Chinese doctor**

Location: Brent Cross Doctor Herb

Student Name: Yuanlei Wang

Following the recommendation by the supervisor, Dr. Amaldi, this interview took place at Brent Cross Doctor Herb in order to gain insight useful information from a professional CHM practitioner. The Chinese doctor of the clinic described the changing of Chinese herbal medicine during the last 10 years. After recording, translating, and analysis, the main points can be summarized as follows.

As discussed in Section 2, there are two main reasons that Chinese herbal medicine is not as popular as Western medicine. They are sociological and culture.

### **Sociological**

In the past, because Chinese government had 'closed door' policy, Chinese were hardly known to the other world. Nor was Chinese Herbal Medicine, which has led less people being interest in China culture, history, and

Chinese herbal medicine. On top of this, Chinese government imposed a 'culture revolution' and ignored CHM, leading to less and less people know this medicine, even in China.

## **Culture**

In Europe, every medical practice needs license to ensure patients' safety, which can only be obtained by field trial through gathering large amount of data. As discussed in Section 2, CHM is mainly based on experience. Therefore CHM cannot be used in many hospitals, but can be used as additional therapy, such as acupuncture. Because of the differences in culture, it is hard for non-Chinese people to understand this invasive technique,

On the other hand, the UK National Health Service (NHS) has only introduced limited CHM. Many GPs (general practitioner) think Chinese herbal medicine is an accident not a science. Because NHS is free to the UK people, whereas CHM cost a lot, people will think twice before go to a CHM shop.

## **Chinese herbal medicine (CHM) in the UK**

Since China started an 'open' policy three decades ago, more and more people have visited China and are becoming more and more interested in Chinese culture and therefore CHM.

Now, in the UK, there are over 3000 Chinese medicine shops all over the country, an increase by over 30% in the last 30 years. More and more people have started to take Chinese herbal medicine. Furthermore, the UK government has a plan to legitimate Chinese herbal medicine as part of NHS.

So, CHM is getting more and more recognized in improving people's well being and healthy life.

(More information will be given in result and discussion )

### **3. 1. 4 Media Effect**

British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) has also made huge contribution to introduce CHM to the UK. For example, in January 2006, BBC Channel 2 did a programme on Acupuncture Deactivates Brain and again on Back-pain Acupuncture Effective in Septmeber.

In these programmes, doctors try to use the acupuncture instead the general anaesthetic. During the first programme, it is said: " The pain matrix is involved in the perception of pain – it helps someone decide whether something is painful or not, so it could be that acupuncture in some ways changes a person's pain perception". But he added: " The thing about acupuncture is that it does not work on everyone. It is more likely to be effective if you believe it." I think it is a psychological manipulation technique, a distraction. We are not going to get to the stage where this could be used instead of a general anaesthetic."

In the second programme, the message is that acupuncture for low back pain is cost-effective and works, according to medical researchers.

According to the interview during the questionnaire time, the doctor remembered that after this TV programme, many people found that Chinese herbal medicine are useful for their body. More and more people have visited Chinese medicine shop.



This example has shown that media can provide a good way to spread a news. Other means of media should also be applied in this regard.

## **Design and Build an internet based Herbal Shop**

Although TV is a extremely useful way to broadcast a news, it has the limitation of time. Like the two programmes discussed in Section 3. 1. 4, they were shown near mid-night when most people are gone to bed and missed many viewers. Internet, however, is 24-7 and can be viewed at anytime, any location by using any means (e. g, mobile phone, computer, TV, etc).

Therefore in this project, an online system has been created to introduce Chinese herbs plus their relevant information. The web page is at <http://image.mdx.ac.uk/leilei>.

Figure 1 display a use-case UML (Unified Modelling Language) diagram showing the design.

### **Figure 1. A UML diagram showing the developed Chinese Herb webpage (<http://image.mdx.ac.uk/leilei>).**

The system interface is consisted of three main parts, including product viewing page, search engine, input page, and guest book to send users' feedbacks, and has client-server structure. In the server, the database is built using MySQL language, a rational database language. While the web interface is constructed using PHP (Personal Home Page) language, a c-like language.

When users use this product, the process can be described as follows.

## Figure 2. System structure.

When users enter data through internet interfaces which are coded in PHP. Then the interface through PHP sends/retrieves data to/from MYSQL database that is resided at the web page server at <http://image.mdx.ac.uk>.

### 3. 2. 1 Functions of the system

This system has three parts, including Guest book, information, and history, which are describe in review.

Homepage

About Chinese herbal medicine

Chinese herbals

Guest book

The history of Chinese herbal medicine.

The first function is the information of Chinese herbal medicine., in this web page, users can know the history of Chinese herbal medicine, and other information.

Guest book

The second function is Guest book, in this function, the users can write some words in the browser. This part just provides a environment for exchanging ideas.

Chinese herbal

The last function is Chinese herbal to introduce its function, flavor, condition, and many more.

## **4 Result and Discussion**

This Section will discuss the results obtained from the interviewing with a Chinese medicine doctor and the developed prototype online CHM shop and information system.

### **4. 1 Results from the interviewing**

Through the questionnaire and the interview with the Chinese doctor at Brent Corss Clinic, it can be concluded that nearly half of the population don't like to don't know CHM, as illustrated at Figure 6. A considerable number of people have not heard of CHM. And a quarter of people do not know the places to purchase CHM. Many people do even like the taste of CHM, which is similar to many Chinese people who take herbs.

### **Figure 3. Pie chart showing the group of people thinking of CHM.**

These differences again can be associated to the issues of 1) Culture 2) Translation. 3) Media 4) Government 5) The tastes of Herbal. In these data, culture belongs to philosophic reason, whilst media, translation, government and the tastes of herbal relate to sociological reason.

## **Culture**

Chinese Medicine has following characteristics.

Preventing is more important than treatment

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According to Chinese medicine book “ Yellow Emperor”, people should treat disease before they have it, i. e., people should take care of their body before they have illness. Another book “ Hua inan zi (Chinese medicine)” also claims that a good doctor often treats non-diseases, hence there is no disease. I. e., if a doctor can find a person’s disease before this person get it, he will never get this disease. This prevention-oriented medical thought that people should take care of their health from an early age, can transform as a measure of dialectical philosophy, which is the essence of Chinese culture.

Nature and Man should be together

The overall concept of Chinese philosophy focuses on that human and nature world should be together, like a body. That the world and the human are not isolated, and they are interdependent, interacting, and interrelated. When it comes to Chinese Herbal Medicine, it also has the same pinciple.

Chinese herbal medicine advocates astronomy, geography, and persons should be a whole entity. A nature human cannot leave the social world to survive. The factors that influence health and disease, are concerned with not only biological factors, but also social and psychological factors, So, Chinese Herbal Medicine also advocates treatment that should focus on the change of nature world.

To adjust the balance of Yin-Yang (YY)

Chinese Medicine mentions that the Yin-Yang is two sided, which is relatively representative of the body. The formation and growth is inseparable from the development of YY. In the body’s normal physiological conditions, the

relative balance of YY is maintained, which is important. If one is changed, the mis-balance will cause the change/disorder of body's normal physiological function. All the actions that a human is doing in the nature world are inseparable from the balance of YY. Therefore, the purpose of the coordination shows that traditional Chinese culture focus on symmetry, the bedrock philosophy of the balance.

### Static and dynamic idea of the constant combining

From the early age, Chinese Philosophy already found the relationship between static and dynamic understanding , as stated in the Book of Change (Zhou Yi). The static and dynamic things are happening constantly. The substance in the nature world should keep moving and changing. In the whole human life, everything in the body, should keep changing until the end. Motion is the rule of nature world. It is the basic element of human health. So, Chinese Medicine stresses dynamics that can treat disease. Just as the same way that people know that sporting is good for health. On the other hand, comparing with dynamic view, Chinese Herbal Medicine also found that silence can also be a healthy habit. " Qi Gong" (i. e., marshal art) is based on this opinion. So, Static and dynamic element should be completed.

## **Translation**

A good translation can help people with different culture background understand Chinese Herbal Medicine (CHM) better. Because CHM has its own culture and history , sometimes, it is difficult to translate the words exactly,

which can cause frustration and lead more people lose their interest in CHM, which is explained below.

The philosophic meaning in the medicine name. Some CHM names are based on their own philosophic meaning, such as Yin Yang, Yuan Qi and so on. If people do not know Chinese philosophic culture, it would be hard to translate.

For some CHM doctors, when they translate medicine names, they sometimes copy some western medicine names. Whereas actually those medicines are completely different.

Because of the long history of China, Chinese Herbal Medicine is based on an old knowledge system. Through more than thousand years, some of them have already lost their meanings with only a few people understanding. So, even to some knowledgeable Chinese people, translating medicine names is a hard job.

Other factors include Media. According to data analysis from the questionnaire, media is a very important means in order to let more people know Chinese medicine. However media can be limited, such as the 'wrong time' of a TV programme leading to many people missing the show.

Another factor is Governmental: In the past, Chinese Government had a 'closed door' policy, which has limited knowledge of CHM.

The questionnaire has also concluded that bad taste of herbs may also have some effect to prevent people taking them.

## **Online shopping system**

Figures 3-6 illustrate the snapshots of web interfaces of the developed prototype online information and shopping system.

**Figure 4. The interface showing the Herb information.**

**Figure 5. Input interface.**

**Figure 6. Search engine.**

**Figure 7. Guest book for sending users' feedbacks.**

The system now contains more than 20 herbs information.

## **System Evaluation**

The evaluation of the developed web site is based on heuristic evaluation.

That can give a general overview of the web site, also, through this way, it can give a good idea for developers to improve the system design.

The purpose of this evaluation is that, users have a task to browse the complete web pages. This task should start on the home page and finish when users get the feedback. Through this way, users can have a general view of the system by following the rules shown below.

## **User control and freedom**

Users control and freedom can be understood that system can support users undo or do. Through the task we choose, users can find that it is not easy for them to control the web sites. ie, in the comment page, when users submit the words, they will find that there is a button for them to resubmit.

## **Fun and enjoyment**

According to the purpose of this web site, the web site should give the information of the Chinese herbal medicine to users. That means that the web pages should be fun, but these web pages are very plain, i. e., 1) All the background colours are white. 2) The web site is too simply, There is no enjoyment for users.

## **Feedback**

Feedback is important for users to understand the information of the web site. In this web site, users can comment and see the other feedbacks.

## **Provide short cuts**

Short cuts are easily for users to find what they want. In general, the web site is useful. Users can find the information regarding Chinese herbal medicine that need from the home page.

## **Aesthetics and minimalist design**

Normally, users can have a good feeling with a good minimalist design. But, this web site is boring at this point. Through all web pages, there is no colour, no pictures, all the buttons are closed with each other. That might be caused some mistakes of users.

On the other hand, there are some positive feedbacks. The users can find buttons easily, especially on the last page, where there is a comment page, providing a good interaction between users and the web site.



In summary, this web site is fine, users can get some general information about Chinese herbal medicine from this web site, also, this web site has a guest page. Users can have a good interaction with the system.

According heuristic evaluation, there are some negative aspects. Such as, 1) This system is very simply . 2) The colours are not very good. 3) It is boring for users 4) Some steps are not useful.

All in all, this web site can give users a general opinion of Chinese herbal medicine.

## **Recommendations**

There are some aspects which need to recommend.

It should change colours of the web pages.

The system should not be simple.

The web site should increase some enjoyment.

It should provide the search function for users.

The web pages should give more freedom to users.

## **Conclusion**

This project aims at introducing people Chinese Herbal Medicine and has developed an online system providing information on Chinese herbs. The design of the system applies client-server structure and employ