

Book Reviews

Chinese and Related North American Herbs: Phyto-pharmacology and Therapeutic Values. By Thomas S. C. Li. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL. 2002. xi + 598 pp. 15.5 × 23 cm. \$169.95. ISBN 1-58716-128-1.

This book is an extensive handbook of Chinese and North American medicinal herbs. Its main components are three extensive tables. Table 1 lists major constituents, plant parts, and therapeutic values of more than 1800 Chinese medicinal herbs. The herbs are listed alphabetically by Latin scientific name, followed by both Chinese and English common names. Tables 2 and 3 list the same properties for 700 related North American medicinal herbs belonging both to the same species and to different species of the same genera (both Chinese and North American herbal species are listed). The first of three appendices cross-references the Chinese and scientific herbal names. The second and third appendices list major chemical components and their Chinese and North American herbal sources, respectively, by scientific name. References and an index are also included.

The sole descriptive materials are three- and one-page introductions prior to Tables 1 and 2, respectively. The introduction to Table 1 provides an excellent concise review of the history, tradition, and philosophy of Chinese herbal medicine. Also, this section discusses problems that must be addressed before commercial preparations of Chinese herbal medicine can be widely accepted medically in the Western world. Such problems include correct identification of plant species, control of contaminants, and potential drug interactions. Although other problems could have been stressed, especially the importance of accurate dosage amounts, this section correctly points out that strict regulation and quality control is needed to ensure the safety and efficacy and, subsequently, promote the use and marketing of Chinese herbs.

From the title, the reader might expect a thorough and insightful discussion and comparison of the phytopharma-

cology and therapeutic uses of Chinese and North American herbs. However, as stated above, only a minute amount of textual material is present. This deficiency is somewhat disappointing.

The juxtaposition of Chinese and related North American species is a unique feature and allows a comparison of their chemical constituents and effects. The natural source for a particular bioactive compound can be identified to locate the possible therapeutic effect of medicinal plants. But again, no effort is made to correlate or validate the two classes of information. The compounds and actions are merely listed as a single group, and a particular action is not attributed to any individual compound(s).

Other drawbacks include the absence of structural formulas, although these may be beyond the scope of this reference guide. References are provided for all chemical constituents, but in some cases the original literature reports are not given and a secondary source is quoted instead. Thus, the reader would need to take substantial time to verify the source material and determine the structural information. In addition, the Chinese reader would have benefited greatly from inclusion of Chinese symbols due to variations in translation and dialect.

The author is a veteran authority who has put much effort into acquiring and presenting this information. The book remains a comprehensive reference guide and provides a substantial database for interested scientists and health professionals dealing with both Chinese and North American herbal medicine.

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