

Legend has it, that the mystical Shen Nong tasted hundreds of herbs and learned of their functions by inspecting his clear belly as he ingested the herbs. It was through this way of literal transparency and clarity that he wrote the Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing, and it is through this way that the basis of Traditional Chinese Herbal Medicine (TCHM) knowledge came to be. The question now is, how can we, as herbalists and acupuncturists, get people to try the herbs as Shen Nong once did and even more so, how can we inspire people to want to know the power that lies in them? In order for TCHM to stand out, we should channel our inner Shen Nong and streamline TCHM by joining the social media empire, making TCHM more #relevant than ever before.

This day in age is driven by social media platforms such as Instagram. The “aesthetics” of something and how fun it looks online can be more important than how functional or practical something actually is. But, there is a way to present TCHM in a way that is aesthetically captivating and yet not lose its functionality. Take Organic Olivia, for instance. This social media queen is a student of herbalism in New York City. She has an extremely strong following on Instagram (245K). Her pull on social media is so strong that she started creating and selling her own herbal products long before she graduated from her clinical herbalism program. Organic Olivia presented herbs as a way of life, not as something separate from it and she did this all through social media.

In order to be a part of the household remedies, TCHM must find a way to integrate itself into that which has already been built just as Organic Olivia did, albeit putting a little *de qi* twist on it of course! Streamlining TCHM is needed in order to survive the social media revolution and the way to do this is through the use of online subscription platforms.

Recently, subscription boxes have taken the world by storm, increasing accessibility of clothing (LeTote), fitness (FitFabFun), and even beauty (Birchbox) to everyone and anyone. Users answer intake questions about their clothing or beauty preferences, and the online database produces an individual box just for that person, each and every month. Within each box are products from different brands, exposing its users to things they did not think they needed or wanted. These boxes are proof that people want options and they want to try new things. As a way of standing out, TCHM brands can partner with these subscription boxes offering insomnia tinctures, di ti jiaos for the athletic subscription boxes, Chaga and Ling Zhi balms for anti-aging and beauty purposes, and many other things! This is a great way for TCHM to go mainstream and stay mainstream.

Integrating TCHM into subscription boxes is one way to make a name in the social media empire, but why not think bigger? TCHM can create its *own* subscription box site, run by licensed acupuncturists and herbalists alike. A business model similar to this idea is that of

takecareof.com. This is a vitamin and supplement company that allows users to “take care of” their health by providing a service that takes the guesswork out of what supplements to take for peak health and wellness. Users take a 5 minute quiz answering questions centered on lifestyle, goals, and diet and then the system generates supplement recommendations within 1 minute! An individualized vitamin regimen is then shipped to users, providing vitamins for 30 days, all in cute little packets. This system is not only fun, it is efficient, effective, and expedited.

This system can be tailored to create a TCHM platform in which people can fill out forms online about how they are sleeping, their bowel movements, energy level, body temperature, allergies, possible pregnancy etc. In order to increase the effectiveness of the herbal prescription, the intake could include a picture of the client’s face (physiognomy) and a picture of their tongue. Upon review by a licensed acupuncturist and herbalist, clients will have a customized box of herbs, made for them and only them. This business model makes TCHM streamlined, accessible, and #relevant.

For those thinking, “this is just a watered down version of TCHM and it will never work!” My response is that unless we can go back to the genesis of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and TCHM, anything and everything we do now (no matter authentic our intentions may be) is a variation and derivative of TCM and TCHM. Guide tubes were only introduced 30 years ago and it is a rare sight to see a TCM practitioner free handing needles nowadays. Does that mean that those who use guide tubes are not authentic? I do not think so! The method of treating is just different. In the same vein, this approach to popularizing TCHM is a different way of keeping the medicine relevant and alive, while still prescribing TCHM in a clinical way. This system will simply be making the herbal medicine more accessible by bringing it to people’s eye level, which just so happens to be at the level of their smartphone.

Going mainstream is not compromising the integrity of TCHM. By not making this medicine more accessible and visible to people by way of using social media and online forums, it will undoubtedly lead to the slow extinction and dissolution of this beautiful art.