

## Unit 5

### Reading B

Excerpts from Brush Talks from Dream Brook 《梦溪笔谈》选段

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Herbal Medicine is a Prescription 草药是一种处方

1 In the past, herbal medicines have been said to be composed of four categories: primary, secondary, tertiary and auxiliary (i.e. efficacy-enhancer added to herbal medicines). This means that, although there are several herbal medicines in a prescription, only the primary plays the decisive role in curing the disease while others function in accordance with their order of place. Generally they are related to each other and each has its own role to play in the prescription. Such a job of division is reasonable, but not every prescription should conform to this rule. The so-called primary herbal medicine is the one that takes the dominating position in the prescription. Originally it can refer to any herbal medicine. However, in the book entitled *On the Property of Herbal Medicine*, the tender, cool and mild herbal medicines are taken as primary, the less tender, cool and mild ones are listed to be secondary or tertiary while the poisonous ones are mostly designated to be the efficacy-enhancers. This is indeed an erroneous statement. If a doctor wants to cure the stubborn disease such as indigestion and constipation, can't he use poisonous defatted croton seed powder as primary herbal medicine?

过去，草药据说分为四等：君、臣、佐、使（即添加到草药中的增强药效的药物）。这意味着，虽然一个方剂中有几种草药，但只有君药在治愈疾病中起决定性作用，其他药物则按照其地位顺序发挥作用。一般来说，它们相互关联，在方剂中各有其作用。这种划分是有道理的，但并非每个方剂都应遵循此规则。所谓君药，是在方剂中占据主导地位的藥物。原本它可以指任何一种草药。然而，在《本草性事类》一书中，将性嫩、凉、和缓的草药视为君药，不太嫩、凉、和缓的列为臣药或佐药，而有毒的大多被指定为使药。这确实是一个错误的说法。如果医生要治疗消化不良和便秘等顽固疾病，难道不能用有毒的巴豆霜作为君药吗？

Traditional Chinese Medicine in the Form of Decoction, Powder and Pellet

中药的汤剂、散剂和丸剂形式

2 Traditional Chinese Medicine is often made into a decoction, powder or pellet. And each has its own functions. In ancient times, traditional Chinese medicine was often prescribed in the form of a decoction rather than in the form of a powder or pellet. The medicine in the form of a powder boiled in water was rare. Only recently have doctors begun to write out prescriptions of this kind. Generally, if we are to make the efficacy of the medicine reach the entire body of the patient, the decoction of Chinese medicinal herbs is most effective. If we are to make the potency of the medicine stay in the stomach, the powdered one is the best. And if we are to sustain the efficacy of the medicine before it shows its effect, the pellet is the best. What is more, the poisonless medicine should be made in the form of a decoction. The medicine containing a few poisonous elements should be made in the form of a powder. And the extremely poisonous medicine should be made in the form of a pellet. The medicine in the form of a powder goes into effect a bit slower while the medicine in the form of a pellet is the slowest to go into effect. These are general cases in which the traditional Chinese medicine is used. Recently few doctors prescribe medicine in the form of decoctions. And the medicine in the form of powder boiled in water has almost replaced

the one in the form of a decoction. Normally the medicine in the form of a decoction is potent enough to produce tremendous effect, and its efficacy is several times stronger than that of the medicine in the form of a powder or pellet. In contrast if the medicine made into the form of a powder is boiled in water, the patient can only take three to five qian at a time. So in terms of medical efficacy, it can never match the medicine in the form of a decoction. Now that the efficacy of the medicine in the form of a decoction is potent enough, the total amount that a patient should take should not go wrong. To sum up, it all depends on a doctor's medical knowledge to choose the form of the medicine to be used for the patient. The stipulation of a fixed rule is not feasible.

中药常制成汤剂、散剂或丸剂，每种形式都有其自身的作用。在古代，中药常常以汤剂的形式开方，而非散剂或丸剂。用水煮散剂的情况很少见，只是近来医生们才开始开具这种处方。一般来说，如果要使药物的功效遍及患者全身，中药汤剂最为有效；如果要使药物的效力停留在胃部，散剂最好；如果要在药物发挥作用之前维持其药效，丸剂最好。此外，无毒的药物应制成汤剂，含有少量有毒成分的药物应制成散剂，剧毒的药物应制成丸剂。散剂见效稍慢，而丸剂见效最慢。这些是使用中药的一般情况。近来很少有医生开汤剂处方了，用水煮散剂几乎取代了汤剂。通常汤剂药效强大，能产生巨大的效果，其功效比散剂或丸剂强数倍。相比之下，如果将制成散剂的药物水煮，患者一次只能服用三到五钱。所以在药效方面，它永远无法与汤剂相比。既然汤剂的药效足够强大，那么患者应服用的总量就不应出错。总之，选择给患者使用哪种药物形式完全取决于医生的医学知识，规定一个固定的规则是不可行的。

#### No Time Limit Should Be Set for Plucking Medicine Herbs

##### 采药无定时

3 In ancient times medicinal herbs were usually plucked in February and August, which is indeed inappropriate. Though in February plants have already sprouted and in August vegetation has not withered, which will be easy for people to identify the herbs, these two months are not the best months for plucking them. Normally if the old roots of medicinal herbs are to be used as the medicine, it is best to dig them out when the herbs are still stemless or leafless, because at this time the roots are the essence. To verify this, all you need to do is take a look at radishes and glutinous rehmannia. If they are pulled up when they are still stemless or leafless, their roots will be heavy and plump. If they are pulled when they already have leaves and stems, their roots will be light and hollow. For those herbs which do not have old roots, the best time to pull them up is when their stems and leaves are already in good shape and are yet to bloom, because it is in this period that their roots are fully grown without showing any signs of becoming old. For example, if Chinese gromwell is pulled up before it blooms, its roots will be fresh and moist. If it is pulled up after it has already bloomed, its roots will be dark and dry. If the leaves are to be used as medicine, they should be plucked when they have just grown up. If the sprouts are to be used as medicine, they should be plucked in February as mentioned above. Similarly, if the flowers are to be used as medicine, they should be plucked when they have just bloomed. If the fruits are to be used as medicine, they should be plucked when they have just ripened into maturity. We cannot set the time limit for plucking these herbs, as the temperature and humidity of the soil vary in different places with the change of weather. For instance, a plant may put forth flowers in March in a flat country, but in remote mountains its flower may come out in April. In the poem "Visiting the Temple in the Forest," the poet Bai Juyi wrote: "All flowers in late spring have fallen far and wide, / But peach blossoms are full-blown on the mountainside." This is due to topographical difference. The bamboo shoots of guizhu may germinate in February, March or April. Those germinate in May

are called “late bamboo shoots.” Rice also may ripen in July, August or September. And the one that ripens in October is called “late rice.” Sometimes the maturation period of the same plant that grows in the same field may vary from each other owing to the differences in properties. The grass in Lingqiao will not wither in winter while the leaves of trees in Bingzhou and Fenzhou will fall in the early autumn. Peaches and plums in Liangguang region will bear fruit in winter while those in the north will blossom in summer. All these are due to the different temperature and humidity of the soil in different places. Sometimes on the same piece of farmland, the crops that have been adequately fertilized and irrigated will grow faster. Similarly the seedlings that are planted late may bear fruit late. All these are due to different human factors. Therefore, how can we set time limit for plucking medicinal herbs?

在古代，草药通常在二月和八月采摘，这确实不合适。虽然二月时植物已经发芽，八月时草木还未枯萎，这会让人容易辨认草药，但这两个月并非采摘草药的最佳时间。通常，如果要用草药的老根入药，最好在草药还没有茎或叶的时候挖掘，因为此时根是精华所在。为了验证这一点，只需看看萝卜和地黄。如果在它们还没有茎和叶的时候拔起，它们的根就会又重又饱满。如果在它们已经有了茎叶时拔起，它们的根就会又轻又空。对于那些没有老根的草药，最好在它们的茎叶已经长成但还未开花的时候采摘，因为在这个时期它们的根已经完全长成，还没有变老的迹象。例如，如果在紫草还未开花时拔起，它的根就会新鲜湿润。如果在它已经开花后拔起，它的根就会又黑又干。如果要用叶子入药，应该在叶子刚长好的时候采摘。如果要用芽入药，就像上面提到的，应该在二月采摘。同样，如果要用花入药，应该在花刚开的时候采摘。如果要用果实入药，应该在果实刚刚成熟的时候采摘。我们不能为采摘这些草药设定时间限制，因为不同地方的土壤温度和湿度会随着天气的变化而变化。例如，一种植物在平原地区可能在三月开花，但在偏远的山区可能在四月开花。在《大林寺桃花》这首诗中，诗人白居易写道：“人间四月芳菲尽，山寺桃花始盛开。”这是由于地形差异造成的。桂竹笋可能在二月、三月或四月发芽。五月发芽的被称为“晚笋”。水稻也可能在七月、八月或九月成熟。十月成熟的被称为“晚稻”。有时，同一块田里生长的同一种植物，由于性质不同，成熟期也会不同。灵桥的草在冬天不会枯萎，而并州和汾州的树叶会在初秋落下。两广地区的桃李在冬天结果，而北方的桃李在夏天开花。所有这些都是由于不同地方的土壤温度和湿度不同造成的。有时在同一块农田里，施肥和灌溉充足的庄稼会长得更快。同样，晚种的幼苗可能会晚结果。所有这些都是由于不同的人为因素造成的。因此，我们怎么能为采摘草药设定时间限制呢？