

## The Benefits of Traditional Chinese Medicine for Cosmetics

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### Abstract

One of the things in line with the 'Back to basics' motto that could be heard everywhere for a year, is Traditional Chinese Medicine. Indeed using the principles of this art, whose origins date back thousands of years, to develop cosmetic products fits perfectly with the increasing demand for tradition. This article will give some insights about what TCM is, as well as some examples of cosmetic active ingredients developed based on this age-old knowledge.

### Traditional Chinese Medicine

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is more than just medicine – it combines complementary treatments such as acupuncture, phytotherapy, massage and less well known, moxibustion and cupping. Since 2010, TCM has been considered one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity for its contribution to maintaining health in Asia.

In his book "Tao Te Jing", Confucius' contemporary Lao-Tseu revealed TCM's basic philosophy of promoting health and prosperity through understanding and adhering to Tao. Tao represents the absolute principle underlying the universe. It emphasises the existence of two equivalent but opposing forces, Yin and Yang, between which a natural energy, 'Qi', flows. Qi is influenced by external factors, such as the time of day, the seasons, the five elements, including cold, warmth and dryness, as well as by internal factors, such as emotions and the unreasoned use of food.

TCM promotes bodily health through balanced Qi flows. This philosophy considers in a premonitory and enlightened way that an unbalanced external environment, which induces stress and injudicious behaviours, such as inappropriate diet or lifestyle, disrupt the harmony between Yin and Yang. This interferes with the body's homeostasis and causes imbalances (leading to symptoms and illnesses). The goal of

the TCM practitioner is to restore balance to the whole by removing the cause or adjusting abnormal function. Moreover, health is seen as circular and not linear, a bit like ionic flow regulation systems or protein synthesis feedback loops.

### From Philosophy to Biology

TCM is varied and complex. It is practiced by trained specialists and is based on several techniques and therapies, including phytotherapy, the oldest TCM practice. These plant-based treatments appeared at different times and places in China and each has its own history and legend. Depending on the author studied, TCM treatments originated anywhere from 2,000 to 6,000 years ago.

Phytotherapy, which was originally based on boiled herbs, has evolved and is now applied using dissolvable powders. In addition to phytotherapy, TCM also uses minerals and animal extracts. There are many formulas that aim at restoring the skin's balance after infection or ailments such as eczema or psoriasis, as, for example, a widely-used ancestral formula called San Huang Xi Ji.

Furthermore, TCM nearly always uses a combination of plants with complementary properties. This differs from other traditional medicines, which tend to use only one plant.

Given the numerous possibilities afforded by TCM, it can also generate plant mixtures with properties that are of interest to the cosmetic industry. Such combinations must be created by a specialist trained through the transmission of oral, ancestral knowledge. Researchers may then assess combinations and establish optimal proportions for each type of plant. Once their properties are scientifically evaluated, combinations become ingredients that can re-establish skin balance to offer varied cosmetic benefits, as demonstrated by the two examples below.