

Discovering the Herb *Du Zhong Cha*

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During the past year, I was introduced to a rather obscure herb by some local village elders while traveling up in the mountains. It's the tender, dark-green sprouting leaf of the eucommiae tree. This is the same tree that yields *du zhong pi*/eucommiae bark.

Even though the herb is not mentioned in modern TCM manuals/literature, it's referenced in historical Chinese literature (which has not yet been translated for me). It's so rare most herbalists here in Shanghai are not aware of it and it's nearly impossible to find. Over the past six months, I have been drinking it on a regular basis to try to learn more about its properties and actions.

Du zhong cha tastes great, unlike most herbs we prescribe. The taste is light, bright and mostly sweet, but slightly bitter. It's similar in taste to some of the sweeter green teas and to the variety of the *jiao gu lan* herb (gynostemma, a relatively well-known adaptogen). The beverage is a clear, light-emerald green.

This herb, steeped as a normal green tea would be prepared, is noticeably very thirst-quenching, leaving the throat and mouth refreshed. It seems to have a mild effect on the vision, similar to that of drinking *jue hua cha* (chrysanthemum). It clearly seems to have the ability to nourish *yin*. It also gently clears the mind, without any noticeable caffeine-like effect that is easily noticed when drinking regular green tea. That, combined with its gentle diuretic effect, suggests it has some *yang*-tonifying character as well. It does not cause any heat, nor does it have a tremendously obvious effect on the *yang qi*, such as that found in strong *yang* tonics.

In effect, this is quite similar to the actions of *du zhong pi* in that it tonifies *yang* without causing heat or damaging *yin*. Another herb famous for similar actions is *yin yang huo*, a primary herb used in numerous traditional and modern menopause herbal formulas.

As far as the world of good-tasting tea beverages goes, *du zhong cha* is a significant find in that most other drinkable tea beverages act more in a diuretic/digestive "regulating" and "cleansing" capacity with either cooling or warming properties. Generally speaking, they do not actually have a direct tonifying effect on the kidney and liver, as compared to *du zhong*.

Something that really surprised me was that these delicate little leaves, less than an inch long, have the exact same elastic fibrous threads that are the barometer characteristic found in thick, high-grade *du zhong pi*. This trait suggests it also is nourishing to the tendons and ligaments, as per the TCM herbal "appearance/action" philosophy. Of course, it will make identification easy when comparing high-grade leaf to low-grade leaf and numerous other green-leaf products that are possibly used as counterfeits on the market.

Chinese data report this herb to be effective in treating kidney, liver and lung deficiency, with symptoms including protrusion of lumbar intervertebral disc, fatigue and difficulty walking. It also claims to lower high blood pressure, cause visceral (organ) fat reduction and overall weight loss.

A Japanese university biochemical research report (included in the Chinese data) states that this

herb consists of:

- Moisture: 2.1 percent
- Protein: 14.5 percent
- Fat: 6.5 percent
- Fiber: 8.7 percent
- Saccharides: 50.2 percent
- Tannin: 5.4 percent
- Phosphorus: 225mg/100g
- Iron: 27.5mg/100g
- Calcium: 1.51 percent
- Magnesium: 280mg/100g
- Vitamin C: 20 mg/100g
- Sodium: 1.48mg/100g
- Potassium: 1.52 percent
- Zinc: 18mg/kg
- Pectin: 4.15 percent

So, in addition to *jiao gu lan*, *jue jua* and *go qi zi*, this might be a good tea to have on hand for those patients desiring a flavorful beverage that also is beneficial to staying fit!

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