

14 Food-related *Yangsheng* short

The year 2017 witnessed a spurt in the availability of short video apps in mainland China. By the end of 2017, there were 334.1 million active users of short video apps in a month.⁴ According to a recent report,⁵ with 45 million downloads worldwide, *Douyin* (抖音), a newly launched Chinese short video app dominates the iPhone download. The popularity of short videos also emerges among the retired population who are generally regarded as the less digitally savvy population. Despite the fact that less than 10% of the participants had been to the cinema in the previous six months, all the participants watched short videos on smartphones; and more than 70% of them watched short videos on a daily basis. Almost one-third of them watch short videos for more than one hour per day.

In her early 60s Ms Jiang has become a big fan of short videos. In order to take her smartphone wherever she goes, Ms Jiang sewed a pocket into her apron. From time to time when she sits down for a short break in the middle of her housework, she pulls out the smartphone and clicks all the 'new-in' videos people have shared in four different WeChat groups (two alumni groups, one previous neighbours group, one family group) and those which were sent to her directly by a few of her good friends.

Like Ms Jiang, retirees are very keen on short videos and have accepted it as a

Saltiness moistened the body, while sour gathered and contracted, cleansing the body and moving the blood. Saltiness entered the kidneys and sour, the liver. Bitter was the most yin of favours. It caused contraction and made qi descend and move inward reducing fever and calming agitation. It was also drying and therefore good for dampness. Bitter entered the heart clearing heat and calming the spirit (Lo 2005).

In general, medical priorities demanded restraint with a distinct moral overtone aimed at the leisure classes: too much strong meat, spice, oil, and fat would create excess heat, while raw vegetables and cold food and water were indigestible and

Food-related Yangsheng

to check. It is also very convenient to share them with others who you care about, you simply click a few times. For example, I heard an old friend of mine was suffering from rheumatism, I sent him this video about the benefit of green bean soup . . . A previous middle school classmate of mine told me the other day that her daughter-in-law, 39, is pregnant again. I recalled a few days ago I watched a short video talking about food restrictions for older pregnant women, so I forwarded this video to her.

Another example comes from Ms Fan in her late 50s. Ms Fan is a retired middle school teacher, now regarded as a *yangsheng* expert among her friends. Knowing one of her neighbours, Ms Yu, suffers from mood swings and bad sleep, Ms Fan suggested:

I think you probably have liver Qi stagnation (). Try and have some *siwu* decoction (*siwutang*). It is good for women, easy to prepare. I will send you the short video later when I am home.

‘Liver Qi stagnation’ is one of the most commonly experienced patterns identified in TCM, and it seems that all the participants above 50s have heard about such medical expressions, even if they have not entirely understood their meaning. As shown on the screenshots below, the two videos Ms Fan sent to Ms Yu via WeChat are both very short; the first one is about one minute, the second one two and half minutes. The first one is taken from a TV programme called

decoction (Figure 14.2). This decoction is widely used to 1) tonify and invigorate the blood; and 2) regulate the liver, harmonise the menses, and alleviate pain. It is made from four herbs: processed Chinese foxglove root (*dihuang* 地黄), white peony root (*shaoyao* 芍药), Chinese Angelica root (*danggui* 当归), and Szechuan lovage root (*chuanxiong* 川芎). The second short video illustrates how to prepare the decoction with these four medical materials (Figure 14.3).

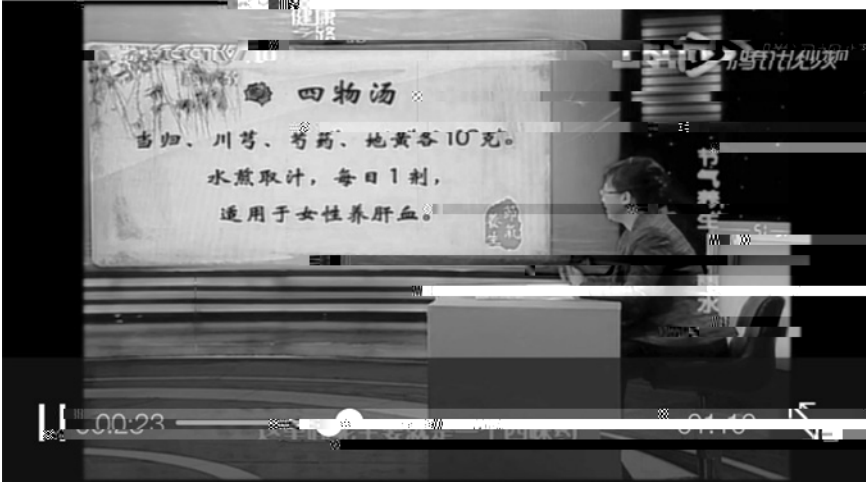


Figure 14.2 Screenshot of one-minute short video on the benefits of *siwu* decoction.

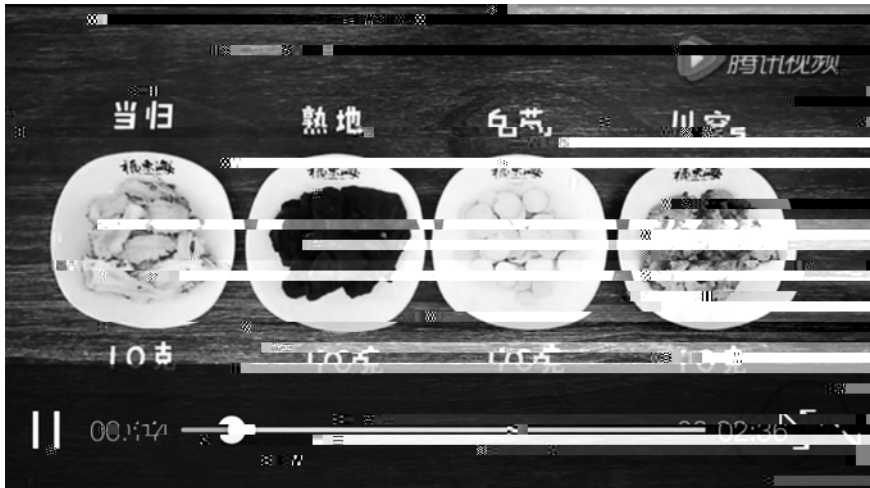


Figure 14.3 Screenshot of short video illustrating the preparation of *siwu* decoction

Ms Y

combinations and their influence on inner organ function, not to speak of regional culinary wisdom about what combinations are unpalatable.

The way in which Mr Zhu and his wife regulate their daily food intake according to the principles of 'food restrictions' (*shiwu xiangke*) provides an illuminating example.

Mr Zhu has had high blood pressure for more than 8 years. His wife Ms Zhu takes close care of his daily food intake. 'Vegetable and fruits are the best for our health, meat does nothing good'. Ms Zhu would buy onions at least twice every week as onion is believed to be effective in lowering blood pressure as well as an anti-cancer agent. The couple also take honey with hot water in the morning, as it



Figure 14.5 Screenshot of the WeChat conversation log between Ms Zhu and her friend who sent her the short videos of food prohibitions. The comment reads 'pay attention to the prohibitions of eating onion!', and Ms Zhu replies by two emoji: one says 'it makes a lot sense' with a cartoon character giving a thumbs-up gesture, the other says 'thank you' with a bunch of flowers.

as they said. Recently, they have been taking a TCM soup with ingredients like ginseng (*rensen* 人蔘), and atractylodes (*cangshu* 苍术) to strengthen *Qi* in summer, and they avoid taking turnips (*luobo* 萝卜). Mr Zhu explained:

Ginseng is to strengthen the *Qi* while turnip's properties promote digestion and eliminate excessive *Qi*. So basically, these two are doing contradictory things to *Qi*. Therefore, we need to avoid turnips if we are taking ginseng.

Ms Zhu used to keep a long list of detrimental food combinations in a cutting from a local newspaper. She kept it sandwiched underneath the transparent mat on her dining table, 'I put that newspaper cutting on food restrictions just at the right corner of the table where I sit, so that from time to time when I was having meals I could look down and learn it by heart'. That yellowed paper cutting disappeared when they changed the dining table. However, Ms Zhu no longer needs that piece of paper as she can always check WeChat.

It is common to see retirees keeping the knowledge of 'food restrictions' in the form of newspaper clippings or handwritten notes. Ms Wang (71) still keeps a handwritten list of food restrictions underneath the transparent mat of her dining table (Figure 14.6).

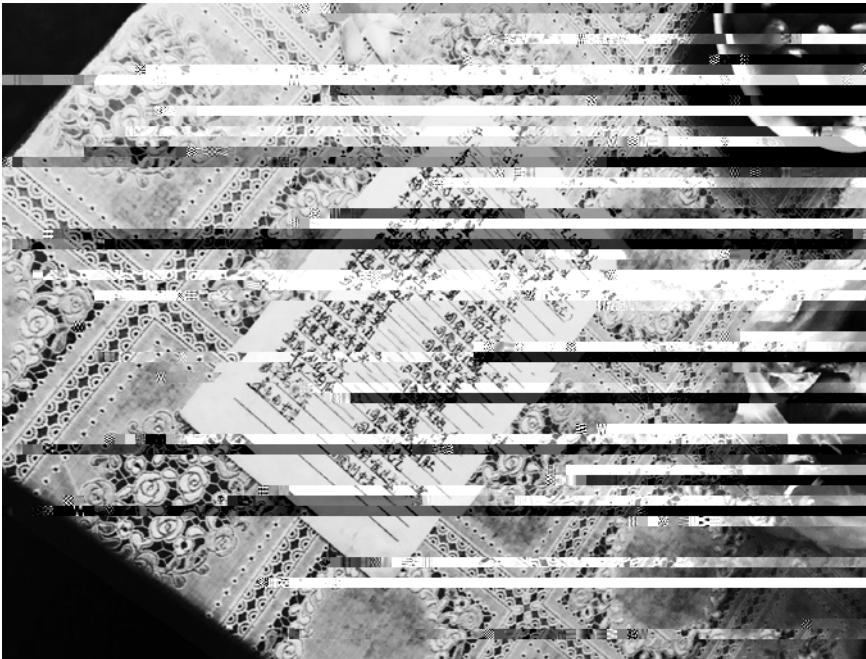


Figure 14.6 Handwritten list of food prohibitions by Ms Wang

CCTV, China's state television station, has taken a strong stance against the TCM concept of 'food restrictions' labelling such belief in the poisonous interactions of certain food combinations as spreading 'false rumors'. In 2018, the

Food-related

