The study shows that more people prefer granules to decoctions, and that the therapeutic effects of granules are comparable to decoctions.
Chinese drugs are administered in two ways — decoctions (which are prepared by boiling with water) and concentrated granules of single Chinese drugs which are dissolved in water prior to consumption. In the early 1990s, the State Chinese Medicine and Drug Administration Bureau appointed a group of experts to study systematically the history and current status of traditional decoctions and concentrated granules of traditional Chinese drugs, in particular comparing their merits and shortcomings. The study also included Chinese drug granules available in Japan and South Korea. Their findings are given below.

Use of traditional decoctions in hospitals in China is on the decline

Various hospitals which administer Chinese drugs were surveyed. Although in the early 1950s, such hospitals used 70% traditional Chinese drugs in the form of decoctions and 30% in the form of granules, the present situation is just the opposite. About 30% of the drugs administered are in the form of decoction and 70% are granules. Although this is the average ratio, it varies slightly from hospital to hospital. However, there were a few large hospitals which use as much as 60% decoctions, while most county hospitals use only about 20% decoctions.

The standard of most Chinese drug manufacturing factories is not satisfactory

There are 1500 Chinese drug material manufacturing factories in the country, in addition to 40 key state factories. A few of them are near bankruptcy because of poor sales of their inferior quality products. On the contrary, there are some factories that pay much attention to the quality of their products especially those meant for exports.

Traditional Chinese drugs in granule form is getting more popular

The study also showed that more people prefer granules to concoctions. The Tianjiang Pharmaceutical Factory in Jiangsu and the Yifang Pharmaceutical Factory in Guangzhou are developing new granules based on the requirements proposed by the State Chinese Medicine and Drug Administration.

The panel of experts also noted that in Japan the concentrated granules are prepared directly from raw drug materials, but in China they are prepared from manufactured drug materials.

More research necessary to develop new granules

There is concern that the water-dissolved Chinese drug is not the same as traditional decoctions of the same formula, and that its therapeutic value is reduced. The Tianjiang and Yifang factories are conducting studies on the difference between decoctions and granules. So far they have studied more than ten formula. The results show that for most of them, the therapeutic value of decoctions is comparable to that of granules. The panel of experts also called for more research to develop new granules.

“At present, about 30% of Chinese drugs administered are in the form of decoction and 70% are granules.”
‘Qianshi’ and its Medicinal Properties

‘Qianshi’ (燕實), in Chinese, means a fruit eaten in famine times. ‘Qian’ means compensating for loss of harvest. The name originated from a time when qianshi seeds were collected to prepare for famine in China. They were regarded as a good supplement when food is scarce. This sweet and non-toxic Chinese drug and tonic is also named “chicken head fruit.”

Chemical analysis showed that the drug contained mostly starch and other saccharides, proteins, fat, riboflavin, ascorbic acid, etc. Its purported functions include: increasing the sensitivity of the ears and eyes, promoting viscera functions and strengthening the will-power. In addition, qianshi has multiple therapeutic functions such as nourishment of the spleen, promote digestion, prevention of oral inflammation and treatment of diarrhea, gonorrhea, leucorrhrea, incontinence of urine and feces, etc. Apart from its medical usage, qianshi can be used as a culinary delight in many delicious foods. The popular dishes are old duck stewed with qianshi and sticky rice cooked with qianshi and lotus nuts pulps. These dishes are not only tasty and healthy, they are affordable as well. Lower-and middle-class households use qianshi as a form of economical healthcare substitute to costly ginseng or Cordyceps sinensis.

‘Qianshi’ can be used as a drug, tonic or food.

“Artist Impression of ‘Qianshi’”