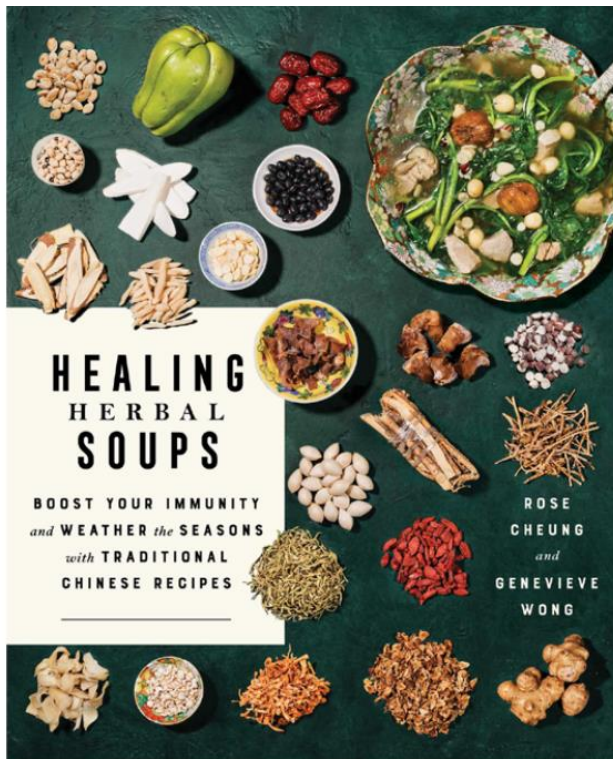


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# MEDICINAL ROOTS 藥膳 MAGAZINE

*Ancient Wisdom - Modern Healthcare*



## Interview with Rose Cheung and Genevieve Wong, Co-Authors of *Healing Herbal Soups*, by Ali Jopp, R.Ac.

Rose Cheung and Genevieve Wong are a mother daughter duo based in LA who published their book *Healing Herbal Soups* in 2021. Rose grew up eating traditional herbal soups in Hong Kong. Genevieve suffered from asthma that she healed with TCM. Driven to share information that is often inaccessible to those who don't speak Cantonese or read Chinese, they used their own extensive experience, in conjunction with an herbalist, to make a cookbook that is a safe and interesting way to introduce people to commonly used food therapies.

I have long been interested in TCM food therapy and seasonal living and was thrilled to find out that this book had been published. The recipes in the book are simple to make, flavorful, and powerful. For the practitioner it is a simple way to understand overlap between medicine and herbs in TCM, the actions

of herbs upon the qi mechanism in the body, and it will be useful to recommend to clients. It was an absolute pleasure to speak to Rose and Genevieve, and to learn more about their approach to the book. The interview has been edited for length and clarity and all photos from the book have been used with permission.

AJ: I love your cookbook, and to me it speaks to a bit of dissonance in the TCM world. The information you are presenting in the book is traditional knowledge that many or most Cantonese and southern Chinese people would have and yet there are many Western TCM practitioners who don't think of food therapy at all.

RC: You are correct that using food and especially soups to heal is a southern Chinese thing. The northern Chinese know a little bit; my father is from Northern China, my mother is from southern China, so I have no bias at all, but it is a southern Chinese specialty, and they are very good at it. They have their own theory of what to eat to prevent and treat illnesses and to maintain health. For small illnesses, like colds or coughs, you can eat your food and get cured. Even when you are seriously ill, it can complement the TCM herbs or acupuncture. Food is very important. People always forget that food and medicinal herbs are very close to each other. Medicinal herbs are more powerful, whereas the foods we eat are milder, but they still have medicinal value. They always say this is food and this is medicine, but why do they have the lines drawn so clearly?

GW: Even from the most sophisticated individuals, I think the biggest confusion we get is that they think I'm coming up with decoctions in this book; these are not decoctions, not bitter herbs, these are actual edible soups that taste good. They don't know the difference.

AJ: Something else that's interesting in this book is that it's based on seasonality, compared to other Chinese food therapy cookbooks which tend to have recipes for specific patterns or diseases.

RC: It is very important we adjust our bodies to the seasons, and to prepare ahead of the seasons. It's just like flowers, they sprout in the spring, that's how the universe is. Plants are still in wintertime, the flowers are all gone, the leaves are all gone. They are storing food in the roots so they can sprout in the spring. Modern life tends to make you forget that you are a part of the universe. If you don't prepare yourself well, you cannot sprout as freely. That is why the Chinese believe that you eat a huge amount of nutritious food in wintertime so that the rest of the year you will be healthy.

GW: The book is for the common person; it's confusing for the common person to all of a sudden be dumped into the world of herbal cooking. We see people taking herbs in the wrong season all the time or taking the wrong type of ginseng in the wrong season, which is why we divided the soups up into seasons to be clearer. We also did it for ease of shopping. We love artichokes, we live in Los Angeles, but even now we can't buy artichokes, they're not in the market. It's easier for the shopper to have ingredients that are in season.

AJ: Some people of East Asian descent use the traditional solar calendar and thus spring begins at the Chinese New Year. Other people suggest spring begins with the equinox, and so on throughout the year. I feel that your answer is going to be very pragmatic, but I wonder how you imagine these recipes are eaten within that framework.

RC: When do you decide when spring is coming? Because we all live in different parts of the continent, this is something you have to use your common sense to determine. If you live in Halifax, for example, you have four seasons. I live in Los Angeles, my four seasons are quite blurry, and

hard to determine. Somehow, I realize that in spring the fog is getting heavier in the morning, and I love flowers and grow them, so I notice when the leaves start coming out, springtime has arrived.

AJ: A lot of these recipes are from Southern China which is a very hot and humid place compared to most places in North America, with the exception of the Southeastern US. It seems that the book was written with this in mind and the recipes are adaptable to the local climate.

RC: Yes, in the Springtime we have to take away the excessive moisture, but if you live in a southern state you are pretty humid all the time, so you can use certain ingredients all of the time, regardless of the season. For example, coix seed and adzuki beans takes away excessive moisture, so you can throw them in throughout the year.

AJ: Because LA doesn't have seasons; would you eat these winter recipes that are really warming. Do you think those are still appropriate?

RC: Yes, you can eat those. You have to be flexible with what happens in your body. Last summer my daughter had menstrual issues, and had lost a lot of blood, so I made black chicken soup even though it was summer. If someone went away for a couple weeks and they ate a lot of bad food and so had a lot dampness in their body, they could use adzuki beans in any season.

AJ: On top of the seasonal recipes, you included a climactic recipe for people on the West Coast who have been suffering from the smoke from the worsening forest fires. It's made with a Chinese herb, *luo han guo*, (monk fruit).

RC: It has to be young monk fruit. The young monk fruit is yellowish

green, the regular monk fruit is dark brown. I like the yellowish green, it tastes much better.

GW: As somebody who developed lung issues after several bouts of bronchitis, I couldn't breathe for a really long time. I was able to heal myself for the most part with Chinese medicine, but when the fires would come, I wouldn't be breathing very well. It's a very important recipe for me personally, as someone who suffers from lung issues, and I see people around me all the time having breathing problems getting worse and worse, and this recipe is for them, too. It's sad for what's happening on the West Coast with the fires and global warming and there is no cure for that.

AJ: It was developed in China for people with emphysema who wouldn't stop smoking; their symptoms decreased and their lung capacity increased. Is that right?

RC: Yes. You can use the same formula for your patients who smoke.  
GW: It's right away, too, monk fruit. It really does dissolve phlegm like that.

AJ: These are traditional recipes, but you also worked with a herbalist to make sure that they're safe for general consumption.

RC: Yes, Eddie has a master's degree in biochemistry and he was chosen to be one of the best 100 TCM doctors in China, so he's extremely knowledgeable, but he possesses western chemistry knowledge.

GW: He primarily writes in Chinese, and we primarily write in English.

AJ: You wanted to be able to make sure these concepts could come across to an English audience.

GW: That's what we thought was really needed. These recipes needed to be in English because there's a lot of English speakers out there, or just people who don't speak Chinese.

RC: Yes, and we wanted to clarify a lot of myths. Even if you read Chinese, like I do, the books use a lot of mystical terms, like gold or even wood, it's like something from the star system. Or even if you say something like hot or cold, it requires too much imagination to really understand, so I wrote the book because I want to simplify the matter that those are just categorizing tools, don't get taken over by the use of words.

AJ: I think there's something in that that kind of speaks to the exotification that happens to eastern culture sometimes. Westerners will describe it as mystical, but it's actually just how people live.

GW: That's one of our struggles, if we had written this book 10 years ago, I think we would have received a lot of hate, but now in 2020 people are more accepting of eastern medicine and accepting of Asian and Chinese culture. People are more open minded now.

AJ: There are a few recipes in the book that are vegetarian. Many are cooked with meat, although you also recently posted a vegetarian broth on your website.

GW: We had a lot of requests from vegetarians and vegans about how they can veganize more of our recipes.

RC: For a vegetarian broth, you can substitute with kudzu because it has a stronger flavour. It's generic and good for everything. it regulates both low and high blood pressure.

AJ: My teachers would always suggest that if vegetarians with blood deficiency were able to, to at least cook bone broth.

GW: It's more effective if you cook with meat, because the meat is more tonifying. You don't have to eat the meat, but at least cook with it.

RC: In Chinese culinary medicine, they prefer to use pork all the time, because pork is believed to be good for your absorption and your Spleen. Not that chicken or beef are bad for you, but pork especially is mild and helps the Spleen and Stomach absorb the nutrition from the rest of the food.

AJ: Do either of you have a favourite recipe in the book, for taste?

RC: The one with coconut is my favourite. It's really tasty

GW: The coconut one is good! For taste, it's my favourite.

AJ: Thank you!

# Winter Melon Soup with Pork and Kapok Tree Flowers

Recipe from Healing Herbal Soups  
by Rose Cheung and Genevieve Wong

## INGREDIENTS:

- ½ winter melon (approximately 2 pounds)
- 1 big lily leaf
- 14 oz lean pork

- 8 cups water
- 5 dried kapok tree flowers
- 2 ounces adzuki beans
- 1 tangerine peel
- 2 ounces hyacinth beans
- 3 frozen and dried peeled figs
- Salt, for serving

#### DIRECTIONS:

1. Cut the winter melon into five pieces. Discard the seeds but reserve the inner core and skin.
2. Lightly rinse the other ingredients. Use your hands to tear the lily leaf apart into 4-5 pieces
3. Cut up the pork into smaller pieces and set aside.
4. Place the water in a pot and add all the other ingredients.
5. Bring to a boil over high heat. Then lower the heat to medium or low and simmer for another 2 hours, until reduced to 4 to 5 cups.
6. Add salt, to taste, 15 minutes before serving.