

IT'S CULTURAL

UNIVERSAL CURE

文化差異

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Every Asian household has one thing in common:
a balm to soothe every ailment and ease any pain

一瓶紓緩小病痛症的藥膏，是每個亞洲家庭的必備品

WORDS 撰文 KAREN CHIANG

IN EVERY ASIAN household, there's bound to be a vial or two lying around. Chinese medicinal oil is a mainstay of the home, and there is always one brand each family regards as a universal panacea. Be it White Flower, Wood Lock or Axe, their eye-watering aroma is instantly recognisable for the intense notes of menthol. Used almost interchangeably is another set of palliatives: Tiger Balm, Po Sum On healing balm or – our family favourite – Ping On ointment, in its millennial pink container.

In the 1950s, before pharmacies were commonplace, these medicinal ointments were sold on the roadside by hawkers who conscripted a monkey as a sales assistant. While the monkey cavorted about doing tricks, the hawker related the purported benefits of these cure-all ointments to the assembled throng.

Ever since I was young, my grandmother – the most passionate advocate I know for health-imbued Chinese soups and traditional remedies – has employed her own cornucopia of oils and balms as the answer to any given ailment. Flu and a stuffy nose? Apply balm to your cupid's bow. Stomach ache? Massage your abdomen with oil. Cough? Rub some on your chest before bed. The same goes for chronic

joint pains. It is also the reason why both my mother and I always carry a small bottle of White Flower Oil when we travel, in case of any random spells of nausea, aches – or just pesky mosquito bites.

Over the years, the cultural influence of these products has extended beyond grandma's traditional medicine and into a younger creative realm. For instance, womenswear label Mukzin, which specialises in modern designs steeped in traditional Chinese culture, recently rolled out a t-shirt emblazoned with the slogan 'I love Tiger Oil'.

From hawkers to households to hipster threads, these oils have passed on from one generation to another, one drop at a time. So next time, rather than reaching for the aspirin, try using the Asian equivalent. ■

普遍亞洲家庭總有一、兩瓶中醫藥油，以備不時之需，而每個家庭亦總會奉某個品牌的藥物為至寶靈丹。不論是白花油、活絡油或斧標藥油也好，它們的共同點是那陣濃烈的「驅風」薄荷味，令人一聞便知是「何方神聖」。居家必備的藥膏則有虎標關節膏、保心安膏以及那經典粉紅色盒的平安膏（我家常客），功效大同小異。

今時今日，藥房在香港成行成市，反觀1950年代，市民多在路邊攤購買藥膏。有些



賣藥小販更會帶著猴子做生意，讓牠擔當助理售貨員兼做雜耍，而檔主則不遺餘力地向圍觀的街坊推銷萬用藥膏，吹噓其「天上有地下無」的神奇功效。

我家祖母一向視中式保健湯水和傳統療法為金科玉律。從小到大，我見她每遇上小毛病，都會求助於自己放滿藥膏、藥油的「百寶袋」——若有感冒和鼻塞，只消在人中位置塗點藥膏；肚痛的話，就在肚皮擦上藥油按摩；如咳嗽不止，睡前於胸口搽點藥油；每有關節痛，同樣用藥油治理。

任何外傷內疾，藥油和藥膏似乎都能妥善處理。因此家母與我每逢出門遠行，定必攜帶一小瓶白花油，即使大至突如其來的頭暈作嘔和痛症，小至擾人的蚊叮蟲咬，亦能有備無患。

物轉星移，這些藥油和藥膏已經不只是上一代的萬用藥，它們超越了藥物的層面，成為一種文化符號，更吸引年輕創作人的垂青，例如把中國傳統文化融入現代設計的女裝牌子Mukzin，最近便推出了一款印上藥油商標和「愛老虎油」標語的T恤。

從小販賣藥的年代開始，藥油遍及亞洲家家戶戶，並且成為潮人的設計靈感。需要時滴一滴，藥到病除。如有需要，不妨試試這些功效媲美阿士匹靈的亞洲靈藥。 ■