

Ethnobotanical Study on the Internal Filling Herbal Medicine of Memie, the Mascot of Zhuang Nationality in Youjiang River Basin

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Abstract: The mascots of Zhuang nationality in Youjiang River basin (middle reaches of Yujiang River, Xijiang tributary of Pearl River system), Memie, are “people holding beads” sachets, representing the folk characteristics of Baise region and a form of folk traditional culture and handicrafts in Guangxi Zhuang area. The mascot appears in the form of handicrafts and is loved by modern young people. In recent years, there have been many discussions on its production techniques, artistic features and health care functions. However, there is still less ethnobotanical research on the internal filling of Chinese herbal medicine, so this paper starts from the source of the Zhuang’s mascot Memie in the Youjiang River basin, analyzes the botanical characteristics of the internal filling of Chinese herbal medicine in the Zhuang’s mascot Memie in the Youjiang River basin, and finally analyzes and summarizes its medicinal and health care value.

1. Introduction

Zhuang folk traditional handicraft “Memie” sachet made by craftsmen in Youjiang District, Baise City, Guangxi, as a traditional accessory of the Dragon Boat Festival, has developed into a tourist handicraft. It can be said that Memie sachet has created its history. As for its origin, the folk in Youjiang River basin regard May as “poison month”. This folk custom is also followed in China’s Jiangsu and Zhejiang areas. The Dragon Boat Festival on the 5th of May in the lunar calendar is the first of nine poisons. People need to ward off evil spirits, disinfect and avoid epidemic diseases, such as washing hair and scrubbing the body with wormwood leaves, hanging calamus, wearing herbal sachets to ward off evil spirits, and drinking herbal wine and realgar wine. Wearing Memie sachets in the Youjiang River basin, Baise, Guangxi is a traditional custom to celebrate the Dragon Boat Festival. It has the function of ward off evil spirits and prevent diseases. The herbal medicine filled in Memie is mainly used to calm the mind and ward off evil spirits, and it has no restrictions on color. The internal filling ingredients mainly include common Chinese herbal medicines such as wormwood, vanilla, bark of the slender acanthopanax, fructus liquidambaris, calamus and so on, which can give off fragrance. Memie is a kind of “people holding beads” sachet. It is not only the mascot of Zhuang nationality in Guangxi, but also one of the important carriers of Zhuang cultural inheritance in Western Guangxi.

2. Overview of Memie, the Mascot of Zhuang Nationality in Youjiang River Basin

The Zhuang’s mascot Memie in Youjiang River basin is a local intangible heritage. It was listed in the fourth batch of intangible cultural heritage protection list of the autonomous region in 2012, and was officially released as *The Plan for Revitalizing Traditional Crafts in China* in March 2017,

that is, “Zhuang Memie manufacture skills” was listed in the catalogue of revitalizing traditional crafts in this batch. This is a very good opportunity for the sachet products of Youjiang Memie, so the Zhuang Memie has also developed well. Meanwhile, a large number of scholars have carried out more comprehensive research on the Zhuang Memie. However, as the mascot of the Zhuang people in Youjiang basin, it is still mysterious due to its origin, manufacturing technology and cultural inheritance. In particular, the composition of its internal Chinese herbal medicine filler is not public and little known, but it also creates the ethnic characteristics of the Zhuang mascot Memie in the Youjiang River basin. It also helps to carry forward the excellent traditional culture of Guangxi and the inheritance and revitalization of traditional crafts in Guangxi.

The origin of Youjiang “Memie” (Zhuang translated sound, i.e. the meaning of deities) is lack of relevant literature records on its specific formation time and source. It is more inherited as folk culture. This inheritance is inseparable from its medicinal and health care value. There is a touching fairy tale about “Memie” in Youjiang area of Baise, Guangxi. It is said that the Zhuang people in Baise worship the dragon. Long ago, it was said that the dragon ball came from heaven. However, there was no clear record in the literature, and the legend story could not be used as historical evidence. In the process of Tu’e asking Bo Huang to find the sun fire to save the world, Tu’e told Bo Huang to drink realgar wine, rub sulfur on his body and hang wormwood, so that he can catch the dragon ball, then he can swallow it after painting it with cinnabar. Later, Bo Huang went through all kinds of hardships and finally found the dragon ball. Because the day Bo Huang found the dragon ball happened to be the fifth day of May. In order to eulogize Bo Huang and offer sacrifices to the dragon and the sun god, his wife Ya Huang and clansman made Memie with cloth to worship and commemorate Bo Huang and pray for peace and auspiciousness to the sun, Bo Huang and the dragon god. Since then, the local people have gradually formed a folk custom of making and wearing Memie on the Dragon Boat Festival. It can be said that Memie comes from legends, but what can really be handed down is its medicinal and health care function.

3. Analysis of Chinese Herbal Medicine Filled in Memie, the Mascot of Zhuang Nationality in Youjiang River Basin

The real inheritance of the making of the Zhuang mascot Memie comes from the Guanyin temple built on the dragon platform during the Qing Dynasty. The monks in the temple inherited Memie production technology, especially the addition of Chinese herbal medicine, so that Memie played the role of disease prevention, treatment and health care, and became a gift given by these monks to the people on the Dragon Boat Festival. This blessing about religion is passed on to people, and this folk culture is also inherited. People get the blessing of auspiciousness and peace by wearing it. In the 1960s and 1970s, a special historical period, due to the demolition of Guanyin temple, Memie once faded out of people’s life and sight. Until 2005, when the Dragon Boat Festival was held in Baise City, Guangdong Province, Memie was excavated and protected. Once again, it returned to people’s lives as the excellent cultural heritage of Baise Zhuang nationality. Its return also made people begin to examine the Chinese herbal medicine value of Memie. On Memie, there are people, dragons, dragon beads and other roles. On the one hand, it can reflect people’s psychology and give people confidence. On the other hand, internal filling materials include more than ten kinds of Chinese herbal medicine materials such as wormwood, sweet wormwood, calamus, rhizoma atractylodis, vanilla, Angelica dahurica, fructus liquidambaris and acanthopanax senticosus bark. Cotton or silk cotton is filled the interior, making it a “divine medicine” loved by the local people. Its manufacturing process is actually not complicated. Makers put more than a dozen air-dried and crushed Chinese herbal plants together. Through scissors, lighter, various embroidery needles of different sizes, colored cotton thread and other production processes, they put the Chinese herbal medicine on the silk cotton and it is better to plug it tightly. Another layer of cotton needs to be placed for compaction and sealing to prevent the exposure of Chinese herbal medicine and enrich the body. These internal fillers are more than ten kinds of Chinese herbal medicine materials such as wormwood, Angelica dahurica, fructus liquidambaris and acanthopanax senticosus bark, and cotton or silk cotton. There is a folk saying that “Wear a sachet and you will not be afraid of five pests”.

Wearing sachets is not only a folk custom, but also a way to prevent plague. Commonly used in the sachet are Chinese herbal medicines with the functions of aromatizing turbidity, expelling plague and avoiding pollution, such as rhizoma atractylodis, vanilla, calamus, *Ligusticum wallichii*, orchid, wormwood leaf, mint, *Agastache rugosus*, etc.

The traditional Chinese medicine commonly used in sachets is *Agastache rugosus*, which is mainly used to dispel summer heat, resolve the exterior, remove dampness and restore normal functioning of the stomach. Vanilla, fragrant and moistening, refreshing the spleen and appetizing, is often used with *Agastache rugosus*. Wormwood leaves can dispel coldness and relieve pain, warm meridian and stop bleeding. Wormwood leaves will emit a unique aroma, which can effectively repel mosquitoes and insects. Modern medical research shows that the volatile oil in wormwood leaves can inhibit or kill a variety of pathogenic bacteria and viruses. *Rhizoma atractylodis* can dry dampness, strengthens the spleen, dispels wind, dissipates coldness and brightens the eyes. It has a fragrant smell, and the smell is strong, which can dry dampness, activate the spleen and induce perspiration. Calamus can relieve dampness and appetizer, open orifices and eliminate phlegm, awaken the mind and benefit intelligence. Because its shape is like a sword, it is also called sword-calamus. Therefore, the ancients hung the calamus at the door of their home to drive away all “ghosts and devils”. *Angelica dahurica* can dispel wind, eliminate humidification, dredge orifices, relieve pain, reduce the swelling and discharge pus. Modern studies believe that the strong fragrance of Chinese herbal medicine in the traditional Chinese medicine sachet can form a high concentration small environment around the human body. The aromatic smell can excite the nervous system, stimulate the nasal mucosa, increase the content of antibody secretory immunoglobulin on the nasal mucosa, inhibit the growth of a variety of pathogenic bacteria, and improve the disease resistance of the body. Meanwhile, after the drug odor molecules are absorbed by the human body, they can also promote the vitality of digestive glands, so as to improve the activity of digestive enzymes and enhance appetite.

Especially for children, the effect is very good, because their secretory immunoglobulin in nasal mucosa is low, easy to suffer from respiratory tract infectious diseases, so it is the most suitable to wear a sachet. Placing the sachet in children’s pocket and pillow has certain preventive and adjuvant therapeutic functions for influenza, chickenpox, epidemic meningitis, measles and other infectious diseases.

4. Ethnobotanical Value of Chinese Herbal Medicine Filled in the Zhuang Mascot Memie in the Youjiang River Basin

In the long-term survival and life process, the ethnic minorities in Baise have formed unique national culture and customs. In their daily life and some festivals, they will use some special plants to resist evil and pray for blessings. For example, spear grass and peach tree branches are used to repel evil spirits on the lintel of the house, and wormwood and calamus are used to repel evil spirits and pray for blessings on the Dragon Boat Festival, and grapefruit leaves are used to ward off evil spirits or pray for peace after attending funerals or eating national worship items that should not be eaten. After preliminary investigation, there are more than 2000 kinds of Baise medicinal plants. In the long-term production practice, all ethnic groups in Baise have summarized their own unique methods of using medicinal plants to treat diseases, and created a unique medicinal plant culture, with extremely rich national prescriptions^[3]. Folk traditional Chinese herbal medicines are sold in the bazaars of various ethnic settlements in Baise, and the types are extremely rich. For the ingredients of Chinese herbal medicine in the internal filler of Memie, except that wormwood and rhizoma atractylodis are the same, the other herbals are different. There are many kinds of Chinese herbal medicine in Memie. From the initial five kinds to more than a dozen kinds now, it can be said that the development of Memie benefits from its rich botanical value, which is inseparable from the prosperity of “medicinal materials” and “drug market” in the Youjiang River basin of Baise, Guangdong. From the botanical characteristics of the ingredients of Chinese herbal medicines, these Chinese herbal medicines are made from some commonly used plants. Most of them are used to dispel dampness, dispel summer heat, resolve the exterior, dispel evils and pray for

blessings. Dragon Boat Festival is a poison day in traditional Chinese festivals. The weather is dry and hot, and all five poisons are produced, which is prone to outbreak of plague. Therefore, on Dragon Boat Festival, people often put wormwood and calamus at home to “ward off evil spirits”, soak in water and fumigate after drying to achieve the effect of disinfection and antipruritic, or wear sachets containing Chinese herbal medicine to enhance immunity, ward off evil spirits, avoid devils and pray for health. These Chinese herbal medicines placed in sachets are mainly more than ten kinds of natural air-dried Chinese herbal medicines such as wormwood, calamus, rhizoma atractylodis, vanilla, Angelica dahurica, fructus liquidambaris and acanthopanax senticosus bark. Although their components and types are different, they are all aimed at calming the nerves, eliminating evil spirits, detoxifying and eliciting blessings ^[4].

In the long-term production and life, the people of all ethnic groups in Baise area have their unique use of medicinal ethnic plants. Because the knowledge of traditional ethnic medicinal plants is handed down from mouth to mouth and hand to hand, it is difficult to collect relevant data. However, after consulting relevant literature and in-depth folk investigation, we can still draw the conclusion that there are very rich resources of medicinal and edible plants in Youjiang area of Baise. For example, vanilla and sweet wormwood are common. The use of traditional edible plants has rich connotation, many kinds and unique national characteristics. Strengthening the traditional plant species and cultivation management of all ethnic groups in Baise Youjiang area is very beneficial to the deep processing of Memie products. With the active promotion of Baise red ecotourism festival, Memie will play a greater role in ethnobotany in the future.

5. Conclusion

As an important representative of intangible cultural heritage, Memie, which spreads in the Youjiang River basin of Baise in Western Guangxi, has spread as a folk local cultural belief and custom in the process of inheritance and development. In particular, the Chinese herbal medicine filled in it is suitable for expelling evil and detoxifying, prolonging life and keeping healthy during the Dragon Boat Festival, and has high ethnobotanical value.

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