

Pharmacological Mechanisms and Therapeutic Implementation of Traditional Chinese Herbal Medicine for Depressive Disorders

Wang Ping

College of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Zhejiang University of Technology

ABSTRACT

Depression is a common mood disorder characterized by persistent depressive states, accompanied by symptoms such as low mood, physical discomfort, and sleep disturbances. It falls under the category of “depression syndrome” (Yu Bing) in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). TCM has a long history in treating depression, forming a unique theoretical system and therapeutic approach based on its holistic concept and syndrome differentiation. Traditional Chinese herbs—particularly frankincense, saffron, and Bupleurum (Caihu)—exert antidepressant effects through multi-target mechanisms, including regulating neurotransmitters, modulating brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) levels, exerting anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects, regulating the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, and modulating gut microbiota structure. These herbs demonstrate comparable efficacy to first-line antidepressants while exhibiting fewer side effects. As a treasure of Chinese civilization, TCM is now being revitalized through innovation. Contemporary TCM practitioners are writing a new chapter for this ancient medical tradition, contributing Chinese wisdom to global health governance.

