

A study of contemporary Chinese style in Herb display design

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i> Received January 03, 2025 Received in revised form Feb. 18, 2025 Accepted April 22, 2025 Available online August 01, 2025</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Contemporary Chinese design Medical displays Traditional Chinese medicine</p> <p>*Corresponding author: Mohd Jaki Mamat BSc Hons of Interior Architecture, School of Housing, Building and Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia Email: pangkaiwei@usm.student.my ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1358-8208</p>	<p><i>Herb display is the arrangement of herbs in a design setting. A good herb display is crucial in Traditional Chinese Medical (TCM) centres to create a convenient and comfortable physician working environment. The rules of herb display are frequently discussed for medical purposes to enhance work efficiency. However, there is limited research on the application of these rules in interior design, especially for contemporary Chinese TCM stores. This research aims to identify herb display designs in contemporary Chinese-style traditional medical stores and examine how these displays enhance work efficiency. Research data were collected qualitatively through case studies and observations in three TCM stores in Penang, Malaysia. The characteristics and criteria of effective herbs displayed in contemporary Chinese style design were analysed and concluded based on the case studies and observations. The findings indicate that the characteristics of contemporary Chinese herb display design, including spatial design, lighting, colours, materials, and furnishings, significantly contribute to achieving work efficiency in TCM stores. Strategically organizing herb displays can improve workflow, save handling time, and enhance overall efficiency. Furthermore, these displays conserve the cultural heritage of TCM while enhancing workspace accessibility and efficiency.</i></p>

Introduction

Contemporary Chinese style refers to the combination of contemporary and traditional elements by reinterpreting and refining traditional cultural aspects. Contemporary Chinese style aims to satisfy modern aesthetic preferences while preserving traditional charm, facilitating contemporary art's continued evolution and inheritance in contemporary society (Yin and Ruishuang 2021).

Herb display refers to the arrangement of herbs in a design setting. It is a storage unit to ensure medicines' clear and safe organisation (Gustafsson, Tuikkanen, and Virtanen 2016). The herb display cabinet, also called "Bai Zi Gui" (百子柜) in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), usually has dozens or even hundreds of drawers,

each of which is used to store a different herb. The guidelines of herb display, known as "Dou Pu" (斗谱), entail the orderly placement of Chinese medicine names on drawers, ruled by convenience and rationale. This rule ensures that each variety of herb is stored in a separate compartment, allowing for more effective dispensing and reducing internal errors. Furthermore, a reasonable "Dou Pu" arrangement improves medicine safety by ensuring clear organisation and simple access to the necessary herbs (Wang 2019; Zou et al. 2024).

In TCM centres, pharmacists frequently encounter inefficiencies and challenges during dispensing due to improper herb arrangement in cabinets. This results in the time-consuming task of locating desired herbal ingredients, leading to prolonged dispensing and heightened fatigue

among pharmacists (Chen et al. 2020). As a result, the question arises: How can the efficiency of herbal medicine dispensing in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) shops be improved through optimised herb display arrangements in contemporary Chinese-style TCM centres?

The research gaps highlighted the lack of research addressing the herb display design in a contemporary Chinese style that enhances work efficiency in TCM stores. Thus, to address this gap, this research raises two objectives: first, to identify the herb display design in contemporary Chinese-style traditional Chinese medical stores, and second, to examine the contemporary Chinese herbal display to achieve work efficiency. This research utilised John Creswell's qualitative method, involving case studies, observations, and semi-structured interviews of three selected TCM stores, to understand the herb display design and workflow efficiency.

Literature review

Contemporary Chinese style in medical interior design

Contemporary Chinese style design explores the concepts of "dialogue" and "exchange" with traditional culture. It investigates innovative design approaches that integrate new materials, techniques, philosophies, and technologies to infuse modern elements while maintaining the essence of tradition. Contemporary Chinese style design enhances the promotion and development of traditional Chinese culture (Quan & Dong 2021).

Spatial design

Contemporary Chinese style in medical interior design settings involves integrating traditional Chinese spatial layout methods into contemporary spatial layout patterns while innovating to enhance the user experience. The traditional Chinese symmetrical spatial layouts can be adapted into partial symmetrical forms, reflecting the stability of traditional Chinese design while expressing a sense of variability in spatial composition. Incorporating elements such as antique shelves into the spatial division process can enhance the classical elegance of interior ambience (Quan & Dong 2021).

An example of contemporary Chinese design research is in a cultural and creative museum. The internal of the museum applied the contemporary design with combined symmetry structure and contemporary design features, with the overall

design of partial symmetry form. For instance, the exhibition booth in the cultural and creative hall (refer to figures 1 and 2) and shelves are designed symmetrically, retaining a traditional Chinese style layout and combining with contemporary Chinese design characteristics, simultaneously bringing a solemn atmosphere (Yin and Ruishuang 2021).

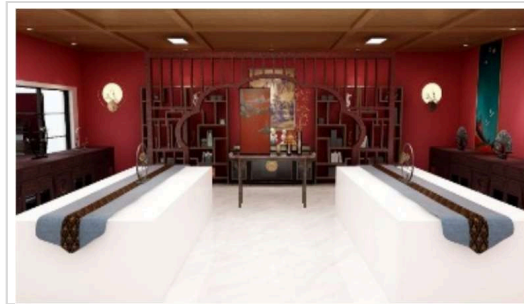


Figure 1. The symmetrical design of the exhibition booth area in the Cultural Creative Museum
Source: (Yin and Ruishuang 2021)

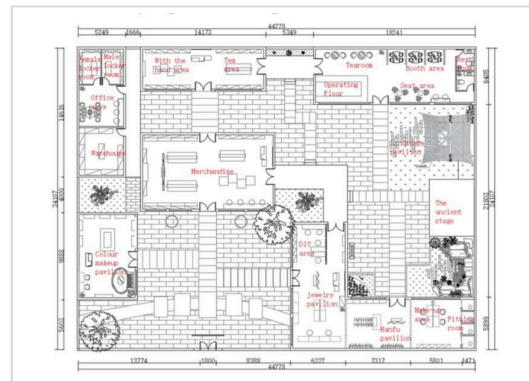


Figure 2. The floor plan of the Cultural Creative Museum
Source: (Yin and Ruishuang 2021)

Harmonious in lighting, colours, and materials combinations

Lighting colours play an important role in shaping the psychological perceptions of patients seeking medical care in contemporary Chinese design of medical interiors. Considering the characteristics of materials that blend harmoniously with lighting applied in the space is crucial. Bright white daylight lamps, supplemented by warm accents, can create an elegant ambience (Quan & Dong 2021). Contemporary Chinese style emphasises colour consistency, particularly in coordinating interior colours. The wall is mostly painted grey, while red, black, brown, and natural wood are used for

door and window frames. The choice of these colours aims to combine traditional characteristics with contemporary elements. This combination creates a strong Chinese style in the overall colour scheme, emphasising simplicity and rustic beauty, thus highlighting the heritage of contemporary Chinese interior design (Liu 2019).

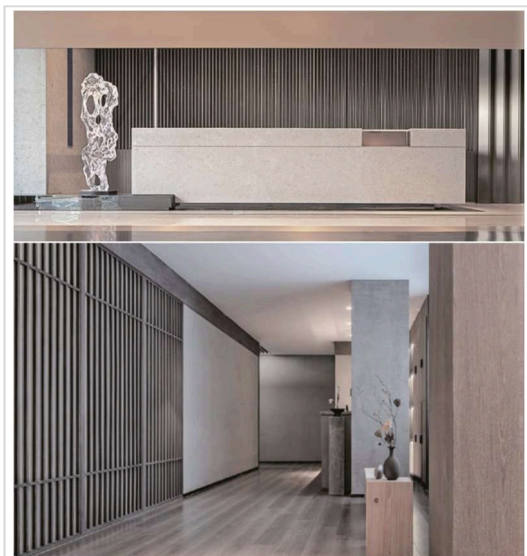


Figure 4 and 5. The Contemporary Chinese design applied in the medical interior, with harmony in lighting, colours, and materials
Source: (Quan & Dong 2021)

Furnishing design

Contemporary Chinese furniture design combines traditional elegance with modern functionality, incorporating wood, metal, cloth, leather, and glass. This technique preserves cultural characteristics while meeting current needs (Quan & Dong 2021; Yin and Ruishuang 2021). Components, including guide signs and artwork such as sculptures and calligraphy, reflect Chinese cultural values minimally, fostering harmony in the surroundings. Greenery in medical areas improves aesthetics and may positively impact well-being, especially in healthcare settings (Yin and Ruishuang 2021).

Herbal display

Bai Zi Gui 百子柜

Bai Zi Gui is a cabinet with dozens or hundreds of small drawers, each storing one or two types of herbs, and is often labelled on the front for quick identification to reduce prescription preparation time. Practitioners often rely on memory, with some labelling only the

most representative herbs (Chu 2024). Typically placed behind the counter against the wall, maintaining the traditional layout of "viewing the upper drawers at eye level and reaching the edges with extended hands." The herbs most frequently accessed are typically placed in easily accessible drawers (Cheung 2022; Wei et al. 2018).



Figure 6. Bai Zi Gui in Poh Aun Tong

Dou Pu 斗谱

To systematically and orderly store various types of Chinese medicinal herbs with different qualities in Bai Zi Gui, the Chinese medicine industry has summarised a set of storage rules based on years of practical experience, known as the "Dou Pu" (斗谱). Properly arranging the Dou Pu for Chinese medicinal herbs is an essential task that cannot be ignored (Cai et al. 2014).

Design of Bai Zi Gui

The design of Bai Zi Gui cabinets and drawers should prioritise safety and functionality. To keep herbs uncontaminated, they should be made from safe, non-toxic, non-pollutant wood and paint. Fully enclosed cabinets and drawers protect herbs from dust, insects, and rodents (Feng 2014; 2015; Li et al. 2019; Wei et al. 2018).

Effective organisation within Bai Zi Gui is crucial for efficiency. Drawers holding multiple herbs should have set boxes to maintain cleanliness and facilitate inventory tracking (Feng 2014; 2015). Cabinets should allow easy access for staff and customers, with drawers positioned no higher than two meters and ideally between chest and waist height (Yan et al. 2016; Li et al. 2019).

Typically, drawers in these cabinets follow a "horizontal seven vertical eight" pattern, with each large drawer divided into three grids (or two for larger quantities), each storing one type of

herb. Extra-large drawers at the bottom store light, fluffy herbs, and some drawers are placed inside the dispensing counter for easier access. This strategic design ensures herb safety and security and enhances pharmacy efficiency and accessibility (Feng 2014; 2015; Yan et al. 2016; Li et al. 2019; Wei et al. 2018).

Figure 7. The common arrangement of Dou Pu
 Source: (Zhu 2016)

Arrangement of Bai Zi Gui

The arrangement of the Bai Zi Gui directly affects the workload, efficiency, and work quality (Zhang 2022). Organising herbs effectively reduces physician travel distance, enhancing efficiency (Wang 2019). Traditional Chinese medicine classification methods vary by use, such as teaching, clinical application, research, and retrieval (Feng 2014; 2015; Wei et al. 2018).

- i. Stroke Order: Alphabetically arranges herbs by stroke order for easy retrieval (Feng 2014; 2015).
- ii. Natural Classification: Categorizes herbs by natural plant classification, aiding habitat and relationship understanding (Xiang 2017).
- iii. Medicinal Part: This classifies herbs by the plant part used (Feng 2014; 2015).
- iv. Formulas: Arrange herbs by common formulas for convenient access (Zheng 2017; Xiang 2017).
- v. Therapeutic Effects: Groups herbs by therapeutic effects, simplifying use (Zheng 2017; Xiang 2017; Li et al. 2019; Feng 2014; 2015; Wei et al. 2018).

Pharmacies should categorise medicines by use and formulas to enhance dispensing efficiency and effectiveness (Li et al. 2019).

Other display and storage

Different display methods serve specific purposes in organising and storing herbs:

- i. Lockable cabinet displays/Covered clear display cabinets store valuable herbs and showcase new products, promotions, and seasonal items to attract customers and boost sales (Feng 2014; 2015, Hu 2014).
- ii. Special counter displays promote the sales of valuable medicinal herbs and food homologous herbal pieces, including those with strong stickiness (Feng 2014; 2015)
- iii. Sealed storage in glass jars or sealed plastic bags prevents contamination and is ideal for sticky honey-fried herbs, herbs prone to moisture absorption and weathering, and fragrant herbs prone to volatilisation (Feng 2014; 2015).

Research gap

Based on the literature review, existing studies primarily focus on herb displays that enhance work efficiency for medical research purposes, neglecting the aspect of interior design in contemporary Chinese-style traditional Chinese medical store interiors. While there are studies on the principles of contemporary Chinese style in medical interior design, there is a lack of specific research addressing the design aspects of herb displays within this context. These research gaps highlight the need to explore how a good herb display design in contemporary Chinese design can improve work efficiency in TCM stores.

Methods

The qualitative method by John Creswell is used to collect data on display design in the TCM stores. Case study research was conducted to analyse the 3 TCM stores in Penang and observe the herb displays in the stores. A semi-structured interview is conducted when observing each TCM store to understand the overall herb display design and how efficiency in the workflow can be achieved. Selection of the TCM stores was made based on four criteria as follows:

- i. Service: An herb dispensing service was provided.
- ii. Experience: operated for more than five years
- iii. Reachability: willingness to participate in this study and respond positively

In this research, the identified TCM stores were contacted via email, message, or call to obtain permission to conduct the site visit request. Three TCM stores agreed to participate in this




research. Upon obtaining consent from the store owners, site visits were scheduled at non-peak hours convenient for the stores. Detailed observations, photographs, and voice recordings were conducted during the site visits, documenting the arrangement, organisation, and visual aspects of the herb displays in each selected

TCM store. All data collection activities were carried out with the explicit consent of the store owners.

Case study

The case studies were conducted in three selected TCM stores in Penang.

Table 1. Case studies

Case Study/observation	Yin Oi Tong (YOT)	Ren Ze Tang (RZT)	Poh Aun Tong (PAT)
Background	<p>Yin Oi Tong, established in 1796 and operating in Penang for over 100 years, is believed to be the oldest TCM store in Southeast Asia. Originally in Georgetown, it moved to a high-density area in Paya Terubong (George Town World Heritage Incorporated 2022).</p>  <p>Figure 8. YOT</p>	<p>Ren Ze Tang has been operating in Penang for almost ten years. RZT was first located at Batu Lanchang, Georgetown. In 2022, they moved to Jelutong, with a more strategic place near a primary school. RZT was renovated with a contemporary design interior.</p>  <p>Figure 9. RZT</p>	<p>Poh Aun Tong, founded in 1947, has operated in Penang for almost 80 years. It is located on Lebuhraya Campbell, Georgetown, a UNESCO Historic Site and tourist attraction (George Town World Heritage Incorporated 2022).</p>  <p>Figure 10. PAT</p>

Contemporary Design
i. Spatial Design



Figure 11. Floor plan of YOT

The floor plan of Yin Oi Tong is asymmetrical. Glass display cabinets are on both sides, and the counter is connected to the left cabinet. The Bai Zi Gui is behind the counter. Additional display cabinets and racks are on the right side of the entrance for product display.



Figure 12. Floor plan of RZT


The layout of RZT is designed partially symmetrically, with two full-height display cabinets on both sides and a counter connected with the side display cabinet.




Figure 13. Floor plan of PAT

The floor plan of PAT is partially symmetrical in overall layout. Two full-height display cabinets are placed symmetrically on both sides of the interior. The counter is connected to the right display cabinet.

Case Study/ observation	Yin Oi Tong (YOT)	Ren Ze Tang (RZT)	Poh Aun Tong (PAT)
ii. Lighting, Colours, Materials	 <p>Figure 14. Interiors of YOT</p> <p>YOT utilised natural daylight from the main entrance as the main lighting source, supplemented by T5 LED white lighting in the store because its operating hours are only until 5 p.m. White light was chosen to help pharmacists accurately observe herbs and assess patients. A red, white, light green and blue colour scheme is used. The ceiling is white, the walls are green, and the floor is dark red. Display cabinets are made of glass and aluminium. The counter and Bai Zi Gui, which had moved from the old store, were built with red and black solid wood.</p>	 <p>Figure 15, 16. Interior of RZT</p> <p>RZT lighting is designed to accommodate extended operation hours until 9 pm. Warm lighting in minor spaces contributes to a welcoming atmosphere. White light at the counter and in consultation rooms aids precise observation and assessment during herb dispensing activities. RZT features a warm colour scheme with white walls and ceilings, wood vinyl flooring, and dark brown furniture. The furniture is painted in dark brown. Full-height cabinets have glass and solid wood finishes on both sides.</p>	 <p>Figure 17, 18. Interior of PAT</p> <p>PAT utilised natural lighting as primary lighting, supported with T5 LED lighting on both sides of the store. The overall colour scheme is brown wood colour furniture with a white ceiling and beige terrazzo flooring. The display cabinets are mainly made of solid wood structure and glass surface.</p>
iii. Furnishing	 <p>Figure 19. Closeup of paintings</p> <p>Overall, YOT's furnishings blend solid wood, aluminium, and glass. Blue and white Buddhist paintings are utilised, adding a cultural and artistic touch to the space.</p>	 <p>Figure 20. Special design at RZT consultation area</p> <p>RZT's furnishings prominently combine solid wood and glass. The consultation area has a distinctive design with a solid wood moon gate partition and wood-carved black and golden signage, serving as a focal point as it faces directly towards the entrance.</p>	 <p>Figure 21. Wood-carved signage</p> <p>Figure 22. Perspective of PAT</p> <p>The straight-line design of the Full glass mix with solid wood display cabinets seems to direct attention towards the wood-carved black and golden signage, decor with a red ribbon, located at the end of the store. This arrangement highlights the signage as the store's focal point (refer to figure 22).</p>
Herbal display i. Bai Zi Gui	 <p>Figure 23. Bai Zi Gui in YOT</p> <p>The Bai Zi Gui is built from solid wood, painted black, and features carved labelling on each drawer. Each drawer consists of 4 to six herbs. Some drawers were dented and damaged during transportation</p>	 <p>Figure 24. Bai Zi Gui in RZT</p> <p>The Bai Zi Gui is made from solid wood and painted dark brown, with printed labelling in each drawer. It is approximately 190 cm high and 15 cm off the ground. The Bai Zi Gui has two drawers of different</p>	 <p>Figure 25, 26. Bai Zi Gui in PAT</p> <p>PAT Bai Zi Gui is made from solid wood painted brown with handwritten labelling on select drawers. It is approximately</p>

Case Study/ observation	Yin Oi Tong (YOT)	Ren Ze Tang (RZT)	Poh Aun Tong (PAT)
	<p>and from over 100 years of heavy use. To prevent dust, staff use bottles and plastic covers for the herbs. The Bai Zi Gui is approximately 120 cm in height with a 15 cm raise and contains 110 drawers.</p> <p>The drawers are organised by therapeutic effects, grouping 4 to 6 herbs based on their effects on specific conditions. Less commonly used herbs are stored in the Bai Zi Gui near the consultation area.</p>	<p>sizes, each containing 2 to 6 types of herbs. The condition is perfect, and each drawer can close nicely. There are 120 drawers in RZT. The Bai Zi Gui in RZT is organised based on the size and frequency of use of the herbs and the medicinal part of the herb. Smaller drawers store lightweight herbs, while bigger drawers store larger herbs.</p>	<p>180cm high, including raised 15 cm from the ground. It features two sizes of drawers: smaller drawers positioned at the upper levels and larger drawers at the lower levels, for a total of 130 drawers. One drawer holds four herbs. Despite being in use for nearly 80 years, the condition of each drawer remains good.</p> <p>The Bai Zi Gui is organised based on formulas, with herbs from the same or related formulas placed closely together within the same drawer.</p>
ii. Other Display	- Glass display cabinet	-Glass display cabinet	-Glass display cabinet
	<p>Figure 27, 28. Left and right display cabinet in YOT</p>		
<p>The display cabinets display and store items, including patent medicine, valuable herbs, medicated oils, and popular branded products. The top row displays high-value items, the second row features valuable and popular products, the third row has common products, and the fourth-row stores valuable herbs in glass jars. Cabinets opposite the counter mirror this arrangement, with the top row as storage.</p>		<p>Figure 29, 30. Left and right display cabinet in RZT</p> <p>The left cabinets stored valuable herbs, medicated oils, common ointments, and patent medicine, with the top row being for inventory and subsequent rows for products. The fifth row displayed herbs in glass jars. The right-side cabinet promotes RZT's products, with top rows for inventory, the third row at eye level showcasing valuable items, and subsequent rows displaying their leading products.</p>	<p>Figure 31, 32. Left and right display cabinet in PAT</p> <p>Figure 33. Herbs in a glass jar</p> <p>The cabinet behind the counter primarily serves as a display and storage area for herbs. The top two rows showcase valuable herbs and products. Additionally, two columns are dedicated to displaying valuable and common herbs stored in glass jars for aesthetic presentation. The opposite display cabinet is mainly the displays and storage for valuable products and patent medicines, such as common illness medicine, ointment, and medicine products.</p>
-Special counter display	-Special counter display	-Special counter display	-Special counter display
	<p>Figure 34, 35. Grid display rack and special glass display counter</p>		
	<p>Figure 38. Product display at the front counter</p>		
		<p>Figure 39, 40. Special display in RZT</p>	

Case Study/ observation	Yin Oi Tong (YOT)	Ren Ze Tang (RZT)	Poh Aun Tong (PAT)
	A grid steel rack was placed beside the entrance to display their herbal soup products, and a special glass display cabinet was placed beside the counters to display their bird nest drink. The front counter display includes various snacks, including preserved fruits, sour plums, and other treats, carefully packed in small plastic bags.	The front counter in RZT displays common patent medicine. On the left side, snacks like preserved fruits, sour plums, nuts, and tea are hygienically packed in small plastic bags to attract waiting customers. A special glass display showing the seasonal leading product is at the left display cabinet and beside the counter.	 <p>Figure 41, 42, 43. Special counter display in PAT</p> <p>PAT's full glass with solid wood structure front counter displays some samples of herbs, the store's history, packed herbs, and valuable products.</p>

Results and discussion

This section presents the analysis of the case studies for two objectives: to identify the herb display design in contemporary Chinese-style traditional Chinese medical stores and to examine Contemporary Chinese herb displays to achieve efficiency in work.

To identify the herb display design in contemporary Chinese style traditional Chinese medical stores.

Table 2. Analysis of objective 1

Design and characteristic	Case study		
	Yin Oi Tong	Ren Ze Tang	Poh Aun Tong
Contemporary design			
Spatial Design	asymmetrical	Partially symmetrical	Partial symmetrical
Lighting, colour and materials	Lighting Natural lighting and supported with white lighting	Lighting Warm light at walkway, white light at the working space	Lighting Natural lighting and supported with white lighting
	Colour Red, white and Light green decorative with blue and white painting	Colour: Dark brown and white	Colour White, beige and brown
	Material Solid wood, Glass and aluminium	Material glass and solid wood.	Material Glass and solid wood
Furnishing	- Decor with blue	- Decor with solid wood	-Décor with wood-

Design and characteristic	Case study		
	Yin Oi Tong	Ren Ze Tang	Poh Aun Tong
	Buddhist painting	moon gate partition and signage at the consultatin area	carved signage at the end of the space.
Herbal display			
Bai Zi Gui	Materials Solid wood painted black	Materials Solid wood, painted dark brown	Materials Solid wood painted brown
	Condition Damaged	Condition Good	Condition Good
	Height 120cm above waist height	Height 190cm above chest height	Height 180cm above chest height
	Drawer's compartment 4 to 6 grids in each drawer	Drawer's compartment 2 to 6 grids for each drawer	Drawer's compartment Four grids in each drawer
	Size of Drawers Only one size	Size of drawers Big and small size	Size of Drawers Big and small size
	Location -behind the Counter and Near the consultation area	Location -behind counter	Location -behind counter
	Arrangement -therapeutic effects	Arrangement -frequency of use and	Arrangement - formulas

Design and characteristic	Case study			
	Yin Tong	Oi	Ren Ze Tang	Poh Aun Tong
			medicinal part	
Other display	Glass display cabinet -covered, serves as Display and Storage for Herbs and products	Glass display cabinet -covered, serves as Display and Storage for Herbs and products	Glass display cabinet -covered, serves as Display and Storage for Herbs and products	Glass display cabinet -covered, serves as Display and Storage for Herbs and products
	Special counter display -grid rack -front counter -special glass display cabinet	Special counter display -front counter -special section And glass display	Special counter display -front counter	Special counter display -front counter

Examine the contemporary Chinese herb displays to achieve work efficiency

According to the case studies and the analysis and findings of objective 1, the contemporary Chinese herb displays to achieve work efficiency can be categorised into two parts:

Analysis and finding of contemporary Chinese design characteristics

The study of contemporary Chinese herb displays emphasises key elements enhancing work efficiency: spatial design, materials, colours, lighting, and furnishing.

- i. Spatial design is crucial. According to case time and asymmetrical and partially symmetrical layouts commonly place display cabinets on both sides of the entrance, fostering an open and welcoming environment that enhances navigability, reduces handling time, and prevents overcrowding. Placing counters near the entrance improves customer service efficiency by facilitating immediate assistance and enhancing security through proactive customer monitoring, improves navigability, reduces handling time, and avoids crowding (Quan & Dong 2021).
- ii. Strategic choices in lighting, colours, and materials are crucial. White and adequate lighting in working areas like counters and consultation rooms improve visibility for accurate herb observation and patient assessment (Quan & Dong 2021). Warm

lighting and colour schemes at entrances create a welcoming atmosphere for customers and visitors. Durable materials such as solid wood and aluminium in furnishings ensure longevity and practical functionality. Glass cabinets improve inventory visibility, optimising workflow for practitioners.

- iii. Furnishing impacts the ambience and visual appeal. The special furnishing of 3 case studies, such as Buddhist paintings in YOT, a moon gate partition, wood-carved signage in RZT, and wood-carved signage adorned with red ribbon in PAT, enhances the store's visual appeal and cultural authenticity. Effective furnishing enhances mood and attracts visitor attention to the interior design and cultural elements present.

Analysis and finding of effective herb displays

The Bai Zi Gui and special herb display counters are important to improve work efficiency.

The Bai Zi Gui, made of solid wood in all three TCM stores, has good durability, produces little noise during frequent use, and effectively manages heat and absorbs and resists moisture. (Wei et al. 2018; Feng 2014; 2015) Keeping Bai Zi Gui in good condition is critical for effective herb dispensing. For example, RZT and PAT, their fully enclosed Bai Zi Gui, ensure herb quality by protecting them from dust, insects, and rodents (Feng 2014; 2015). Labelled drawers make locating herbs easier for unfamiliar workers, increasing operational efficiency in TCM stores.

The Bai Zi Gui at YOT, RZT, and PAT are all less than 2 metres tall, ergonomics, easy operation and effective herb retrieval. Each drawer holds 2-6 types of herbs, requiring regular restocking to keep herbs fresh. The design of smaller and larger size drawers can accommodate varied herb sizes. Larger drawers can store larger amounts of bigger herb pieces, which require less frequent restocking of larger herbs than medium or small drawers.

The location and position of the Bai Zi Gui are important. Three case studies showed that having it behind the counter improves workflow by giving physicians convenient access when herb dispensing. It is not an ideal strategy to place the Bai Zi Gui separately from another Bai Zi Gui or far from the counter. It will take physicians time to travel to another Bai Zi Gui.

Each physician arranges the Bai Zi Gui Dou

Pu rules differently based on their experiences and preferences. For example, RZT is arranged by medicinal components, PAT by formulae, and YOT by therapeutic effects. The most frequently used herbs are placed in drawers that are easy to reach. This allows physicians to find the necessary herbs quickly, expediting the dispensing procedure and shortening customer wait times.

The 3 case studies utilised glass display cabinets and special counter displays to display valuable herbs, products, and leading products. Glass displays were utilised not only to display products; the upper rows of glass display cabinets were also used for storage and stock, allowing for easy detection of product stocks. Special counter displays emphasise the product's attraction. These arrangements make inventory management more efficient, excite customer interest, and streamline TCM stores' shopping experience.

The findings show that contemporary Chinese herbs display design characteristics and criteria for achieving work efficiency.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research achieved its objectives by providing vital insights into herb display design in TCM stores. The findings are a practical guide for new TCM enterprises, providing detailed insights into developing herb displays in a Contemporary Chinese-style design that maximises efficiency and utility. This research benefits anyone interested in TCM and contemporary Chinese-style medical interiors.

Furthermore, the findings found that strategically organising herb displays can improve workflow, save handling time, and increase customer happiness. This research provides a way for informed design decisions and advancements in mixing traditional and contemporary in TCM store spaces, thereby contributing to new knowledge and establishing a standard for future TCM store designs.

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Author(s) contribution

Pang Kai Wei contributed to the research concepts preparation, methodologies, investigations, data analysis, visualization, articles drafting and revisions.

Mohd Jaki Mamat contribute to the research concepts preparation and literature reviews, data analysis, of article drafts preparation and validation.

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