



YANG LIU/CORBIS

Traditional Chinese medicine uses mixtures of plant extracts in a holistic approach to disease.

ing active remedy and who is getting a placebo. And there is no requirement for TCM researchers to publish in internationally recognized journals. “Most research on TCM in the past is of poor quality, and is published only in Chinese medical journals without proper peer-review processes,” remarks Wang. “Without a clear position from the government, it is unlikely that the situation will change.”

Another concern is that the government does not specify how it will control the way in which research funding is allocated. Some critics feel that resources are currently being circulated only among certain favoured universities and institutes, and argue that reform to ensure that TCM grants are based on merit is necessary if any real progress is to be achieved. Otherwise, as Jia Wei, associate dean of the pharmacy school at Shanghai Jiao-tong University, puts it, the initiative will be

just “loud thunder, small raindrops”.

Zou says that the government is aware of the controversy and problems surrounding TCM, and that the plan, on which it has consulted widely, is set to resolve these issues. Su Gang-qiang, deputy director-general of SATCM’s science and technology department, points out that the plan outlines overall principles and long-term directions for the development of TCM, rather than going into details, and says that further strategies will be published to specify exactly how the schemes will be carried out.

Whether the government will take critics’ concerns into account while drafting these plans remains to be seen, but many are cautiously optimistic. “The wind is now right for the development of TCM,” says Jia. “Let’s hope this will not be a missed opportunity.” ■

Jane Qiu

SCORECARD

School projects
GlaxoSmithKline, which makes the blackcurrant soft drink Ribena, has been fined after a project by two New Zealand schoolgirls found that, contrary to the company’s claims, the syrup for the cordial contained almost no vitamin C.

Russian satellites
Passengers on a Chilean flight to New Zealand were stunned when they were narrowly missed by flaming chunks of a plummeting Russian satellite, apparently removed from orbit at the wrong time.

OVERHYPED

Space marathons
It seems that you don’t have to be in Boston to run the Boston Marathon these days — astronaut Sunita Williams is planning to run the race on a treadmill on the International Space Station. Presumably officials will discount the fact that she will already be travelling at more than five miles per second...

3 GOOD REASONS...

... to look at a webcam this week
The Internet’s latest cult hit is www.cheddarvision.tv, which allows fans of cheese and/or mould to witness the maturation process live as it happens.



WEST COUNTRY FARMHOUSE CHEESEMAKERS

And if you don’t do dairy, why not try some armchair astronomy at www.astro.caltech.edu/palomar/webcam.html.

Or be thankful you’re warm and dry as you check the view from the Antarctic research vessel *RRS James Clark Ross* (www.antarctica.ac.uk/Living_and_Working/Transport/Ships/Webcam).

Sources: Reuters, thewest.com.au, PlanetArk, NASA

SIDELINES