

Unjangle Your Jing

Boost your energy and ease stress with adaptogens, synergistic herbs, and teas that recharge your adrenals

by Mariana Rose Thorn for Conscious Dancer Magazine

Getting ready for an evening of dancing, I scoop a tablespoon of dried, emerald tea into my favorite teapot and gently pour piping hot water over the small mound. Steam rises upwards onto my smiling face. Breathing in the sweet, earthy aroma, I am grateful for this giving flora known as jiaogulan (pronounced jee-ow-goo-lahn).

Jiaogulan (*Gynostemma pentaphyllum*) is a plant that grows wild in China and in other countries throughout Asia. Sometimes called “Southern ginseng” since it grows in south central China and is similar to ginseng in chemical composition and function, jiaogulan is also praised as *xiancao* (immortality herb) because of its health-giving qualities and anti-aging effects.

Jiaogulan is an adaptogen, an herb that adapts to each individual’s body and needs. These herbs offer holistic well-being to enhance natural beauty and longevity, sustain energy, and soothe our systems from the wear and tear of everyday stress. The term “adaptogen” was coined in 1947 by Nikolai Lazatev, a Russian pharmacologist, but the use and appreciation of adaptogenic herbs is ancient. In traditional Chinese medicine, this class of natural wonders is lovingly referred to as superior herbs.

I began to awaken to the subtle and powerful energy-body support of adaptogens during the last three years. Over the past decade I had become dependent on coffee and caffeinated tea and ironically felt an overall lack of natural energy. At first, without recognizing that I was gravitating towards various forms of adaptogenic herbs, I incorporated more and more of

them into my days. *Maca* became a staple in smoothies to provide stamina. I drank *shatavari* with tea in the morning to balance hormones, and *ashwaghandha* in warm almond milk as a nightcap. I found reishi mushrooms in the forest, and they became an everyday cleansing and tea tonic. Each of these herbs has its specific alchemy and they all nourish the whole.

The first time I tasted jiaogulan, I felt as if someone had turned up the volume on my awareness of the vibrancy all around. Shortly afterwards, a friend intuitively gifted me a jar of looseleaf jiaogulan, and I embarked on a month-long devotional practice. The sweet, blue-green leaf unfurled in my being. Channels opened, eyes cleared, my energy transformed to a calm and comfortable flow.

Functionally, jiaogulan and other adaptogens recharge the adrenal glands, which are the body’s mechanism for responding to stress and emotional changes. The adrenals, which cover the upper surface of each kidney, synthesize and store dopamine, norepinephrine, and epinephrine. These compounds are responsible for the changes that occur during the fight-or-flight reaction. This means that every time we get stressed out by work, kids, school, traffic, relationships, finances, or politics, our adrenal system gets overrun and then depleted. “Adaptogens are nature’s number-one solution to adrenal fatigue,” according to Stephen D. Rogers, co-formulator of Shentrition adaptogen superfood blend.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) understands that the kidneys and their

adrenal caps are the seat of jing, our birth-given, lifetime supply of vital energy. Jing is the most dense and irreplaceable of the three kinds of energy recognized by TCM, which also includes qi and *shen*. In the West, we are familiar with the most dynamic form of energy, *qi* (pronounced chee). Qi flows like water. It can be cultivated from within, and harvested from the energetic sea all around us through practices like Qigong. Jing, however, our primordial battery, requires a much deeper restoration when depleted before its time. The key is to take care of the kidneys and the adrenals before they become dry and tired. Enough sleep, meditation, and adaptogens like ginseng and jiaogulan and the keys to wellness.

Asian Panax ginseng is the superstar of adaptogenic superior herbs. Other cutting-edge supplements like Siberian ginseng, ashwaghandha, maca, and jiaogulan are commonly referred to as the ginseng of their respective regions. Trying out a variety of these herbs is the best way to determine which resonates with you. It's worth taking the time to experiment until you connect with an adaptogen that suits your body's particular rhythms and needs. Once I found jiaogulan, I incorporated it into my routine and have enjoyed its powerful benefits every day.

Jiaogulan's properties parallel those of ginseng, and in many ways are even more effective. Jiaogulan contains three to four times the active ingredient, gypenosides, found in ginseng. It is

likely because of these gypenosides that jiaogulan has been shown to have a powerful regulatory effect on metabolism, cholesterol, blood pressure, the reproductive system, the digestive system, the immune system, cognition, strength, and endurance.

Although the valued part of ginseng is its roots, jiaogulan tea is derived from the leaves. This helps to make jiaogulan an even more sustainable resource, and more affordable than its famous competitor. It offers energy throughout the day, as well as aiding the body in getting a good night's sleep. As a revitalizing tea it can be sipped any time, without the dehydrating, or counter-productive effects of caffeine.

It only takes a few moments to prepare my evening's tea, as jiaogulan needs as little as 30 seconds to steep. I have barely finished enjoying my herbal facial steam treatment, and the vital tea is ready for sipping. I pour one cup into a small vessel for instant connection, and then fill a travel thermos with the rest. With the first sweet, nutty taste, I am at once grounded and ready to fly. Arriving at my dance venue, I greet friends and strangers with warm sincerity. I move onto the floor and let the rhythm take over where jiaogulan took off. On breaks, I enjoy a mini-cup, share with those around me, and allow the tea's subtle magic to dance its way through me.

Jiaogulan is a plant that grows wild in China and other continents throughout Asia. It's worth taking the time to experiment until you connect with an adaptogen that suits your body's particular rhythms and needs. Sourcing pure jiaogulan Try www.aumtea.com or www.jiaogulan.com See these links for more information: www.aumtea.com/faq_about_jiaogulan_herbs.htm - basic introduction questions www.aumtea.com/scientific_studies.htm - some deeper information summarize for the layperson www.aumtea.com/link.htm - summaries of published articles available on the internet