

*Chinese Herbal Formulas:
A Clinical Handbook*

2ND EDITION

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Introduction



We hope that this book, and its coming editions, will be of use to you as you seek to come into a deeper, more vital relationship with the study and practice of Chinese herbal medicine. It has been specifically created as a clinical handbook for students and practitioners interested in a lineage based practice of herbal medicine. As such, this volume has a different structure and different content than most formulas textbooks. This introduction will outline the basic philosophy that underlies the organization and content of the book, and review some basic details about the science of Chinese herbal formula prescribing.

Organizational Structure

If you leaf through this volume, or even just peruse the index, you will notice that it is organized differently from most formulas textbooks. The prescriptions are listed by herb families, instead of the more common method of categorizing according to the “eight strategies” (*bafa*). What is the advantage of discussing formulas according to single herb categories rather than the standard *bafa* approach?

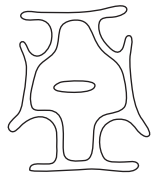
Most Chinese herbal textbooks are structured in accordance with the eight therapeutic strategies: sweating (*han*), vomiting (*tu*), purging (*xie*), harmonizing (*he*), warming (*wen*), clearing (*qing*), dissolving (*xiao*) and tonifying (*bu*). Memorizing herbs and formulas in groups that correspond with these eight methods is a simple way to get a basic grasp of the herbs and their actions. When Guizhi Tang is memorized as a diaphoretic formula, for instance, one quickly understands the most basic clinical situation in which this formula can be used.

However, consider another possibility – the one that guides the organization of this book. The principle of this text is to organize the herbs into “formula families” associated with the chief, or most representative, herb in the formula. In this case, one’s knowledge of the formula exists alongside one’s knowledge of the single herb with which it is associated. There are three main positive benefits to learning formulas according to herb families – I will illustrate each with an example.

1) Focusing on single herbs helps students gain deeper, and more accurate understanding of associated formulas. Consider the cinnamon herb family. In a standard textbook, cinnamon remedies are found in virtually every category of formulas. As a student, it is extremely important to understand the multidimensional quality of this herb - it has the potential to unfold profound benefits for every organ system at every layer of the body. However, if two important cinnamon formulas are presented in very different categories, the standard *bafa* structure can

fang as square. In the cosmic map of China's most ancient Shang dynasty, the cosmic map of Earth is portrayed in five quadrants: top, bottom, left, right and center. The Chinese term for square is thus a synonym for the cardinal directions: north, south, east, west and center.

Ancient medical masters thus viewed a formula as a tightly organized collection of herbs coming together to produce the power of a specific direction - a formula emulating the energetic quality of South, for instance. This can be used to enhance a balanced "Southern" state in a patient: warm and luscious, but not too hot and damp.



In a clinical context, it can be very difficult to sift through the vast body of formula knowledge and arrive at the appropriate prescription for a patient. Novice practitioners often find themselves paralyzed because the many thousands of possible formula combinations, with their attendant actions and indications, represent too large a field of prospects. The meanings of *fang*, discussed here, help us to understand that we needn't become paralyzed by the overwhelming amount of details and choices. The most important thing to do is to get in the right ballpark, or in other words, to match the general direction the patient requires. The two boats, moving in the correct direction and working together closely, will get the recovery process on track.

This does not mean, of course, that very minute course corrections are not necessary. They are - and sometimes, minor adjustments in formulas can make all the difference. Some types of common formula modifications will be discussed at the end of this chapter, and again at the end of the book. The most important thing for a formula student to remember, however, is to focus on the directionality of the formula and to be certain that the prescription is situated in the right ballpark.



Order in Herbal Formulas and the Organizational Principle of Jun, Chen, Zuo, Shi

Classical formulas exhibit an inherent structure that is dictated by their intended effects. While many of us may have difficulty understanding this structure at first, with study and practice it will become evident as the

organizational backbone of ancient formula science. One of the easiest ways to think about the structure of a formula, after all, is by determining the hierarchy of herbal ingredients within it.

Ancient masters of alchemy compared the structure of a formula to the organization of an administrative entity. How is a formula like a government?

» Jun 君: Emperor

The emperor is irreplaceable and the "head of state" of a formula. If the emperor in a formula is changed, it becomes a different formula altogether. The emperor determines the entire direction of the formula and nests it in one formula family or another. All of the other members of the formula are working from the basic functional direction set by the emperor herb. In learning formulas, fully comprehending the nature of the emperor will take you a long way in understanding the formula. The chapters of this book are, in many cases, organized by emperor herb.

» Chen 臣: Minister

The minister is second in power behind the emperor. While you could, in theory, change the minister of a formula and still retain most of the important characteristics of that formula, the full depth of the power of a Classical formula involves the function of all of the positions - particularly the minister. Minister herbs are often used to complement the emperor in the major function of the formula. However, they may be used to temper the emperor, making the formula more tolerable. They might also bring another major function (especially secondary symptom relief) into the formula, expanding the scope of the formula.

» Zuo 佐: Assistant

Assistant herbs are narrower in scope than either emperor or minister. An assistant may, like the minister, be similar in character to the emperor, thus increasing the strength of its major functions. Sometimes an assistant may address a secondary or tertiary complaint not already addressed by the emperor and minister. The assistant can also restrain the intensity of both emperor and minister, lessening side effects and improving patient outcomes. While the assistant herbs may seem to be less potent members of a formula, it is important not to minimize their role. The emperor and minister herbs alone, in most cases, do not create the kind of elegant formulas that characterize the highest practice of Chinese medicine. Assistants help the formulas to have a wider scope and more potent effect, while avoiding alchemical instability and uncomfortable side effects.

1

Cinnamon: Traditional Perspectives & Formulas

桂枝

Cinnamon Twig (Guizhi): Ramulus cinnamomi

1) Cinnamon twig primarily enters the muscle layer at the surface of the body. At the same time, it enters the heart and liver channels. It is the branch of the cassia tree which also yields cinnamon bark. Cinnamon twig is light, its nourishing essence is pungent, and its color is red (therefore its affinity to the heart).

The action of cinnamon twig is rising without descending. Therefore, it can also enter the lung and facilitate uninhibited movement of qi, and enter the bladder channel and stimulate water metabolism. In a horizontal direction, it enters the upper extremities, harmonizes ying and wei, and thus treats pain in the arms and sides of the chest.

Cinnamon twig controls restless sweating, dispels wind, and disperses external pathogens. It is the primary herb to relieve the muscles. Therefore, the books all say that cinnamon twig can induce sweat if there is none; and that it can astringe sweat if there is too much of it. Actually, the type of sweat that can be induced or controlled by cinnamon is caused by wei excess and ying deficiency, referring to a situation where the yin is being advanced upon by yang. Therefore, cinnamon can be used to regulate the ying. If the ying is regulated, then the wei will become harmonious by itself. Since now there will be no place to go to for the wind pathogen, it will be relieved via the sweat. This action is quite different from that of ephedra, which can directly open the pores and thus induce sweat.

The type of sweat that can be astringed by cinnamon is caused by wind injury to the wei layer, which in turn

cannot attend to (holding) the ying (in place); the ying qi is weak, and the fluids and humors thus not secured properly; therefore, the patient experiences symptoms of sweating, fever, and aversion to wind. This condition is best treated with Cinnamon Combination (Guizhi Tang), since this remedy contains peony to enter the ying and astrinthe the yin inside, and cinnamon to enter the wei and eliminate the pathogens outside. In this way, the sweat will stop naturally. This does not mean that cinnamon closes the sweat pores directly. In other words, if you just say that cinnamon induces sweat and controls sweat without understanding why and under what conditions, you will miss the meaning of cinnamon by far.

[from Huang Gongxiu, *Bencao qiuzhen* (Exploring the True Meaning of the Materia Medica), 1769]



2) The nourishing essence of cinnamon is pungent and slightly sweet, and its functional nature is warming. It opens up the energy pathways, raises the ancestral qi upwards, descends counterflow of qi (such as flushing up, or liver qi flushing up), and disperses pernicious qi (as in wind cold situations).

Zhang Zhongjing's Atractylodes and Hoelen Combination (Ling Gui Zhu Gan Tang) employs cinnamon to treat shortness of breath, utilizing the herb's ascending properties. His Cinnamon Plus Cinnamon Combination (Guizhi Jia Gui Tang) employs cinnamon to treat running piglet syndrome, utilizing the herb's descending properties. And his Ma-huang Combination (Mahuang Tang), Cinnamon Combination (Guizhi Tang), and Minor Blue Dragon Combination (Xiao Qinglong Tang) all use cinnamon to treat external cold affliction, utilizing the herb's dispersing properties.

Defining the properties of cinnamon twig, *Shen Nong's Herbal Classic* states at the very beginning that cinnamon treats coughing and upward counterflow of qi, a fact that seems to underscore once more that it is really the descending quality of cinnamon that is its specialty. However, rarely do we find that one of the other materia medicas emphasizes this descending quality. This came to foster a use of cinnamon which neglected its most outstanding feature.

Another example illustrating this point is the fact that in the context of Minor Blue Dragon Combination, ephedra and cinnamon are used side by side. For patients suffering from asthmatic breathing, the original source suggests to remove ephedra and add apricot seed, but not to remove cinnamon. The formula's author had apparently considered the *Herbal Classic* line that cinnamon treats

“spitting breath,” an ancient term for asthma, and thought that by removing cinnamon, the formula would not be able to treat this problem anymore. Since many physicians nowadays fail to read the *Herbal Classic*, they only know that ephedra can drain the lung and calm asthma, but are unaware of the fact that cinnamon can descend qi and calm asthma.

The cassia flowers blossom in mid-autumn, demonstrating that the plant's functional nature becomes activated as soon as it receives metal qi. At the same time, the nourishing essence of cinnamon is pungent, another indication that links it to metal. Cinnamon, therefore, is able to keep the upflaring tendency of liver wood in check. Also, the branches of the cassia tree grow in the form of a deer antler (tree forms are generally differentiated into deer antler form and crab claw form), going straight up without bending. Therefore, cinnamon twigs can regulate the straightforward quality of the liver, and moderate its tendency to become bogged down and depressed.

Since its essence is sweet, it is also a good herb to harmonize the spleen and the stomach, causing collapsed spleen qi to rise and rebellious stomach qi to descend. Once the spleen and the stomach are properly regulated and in harmony, accumulations of phlegm or stagnating food will naturally disappear. Its circulating powers can also entice the force of the triple warmer to enter the bladder and thus disinhibit urination (do not use cinnamon, however, if there is inhibited urination that is due to heat; you may, as some doctors do, use a little bit of cinnamon in combination with cooling herbs, in order to entice the herbal effects into the bladder). The only situation where cinnamon should be thoroughly avoided is heat in the upper burner, or patients who regularly suffer from bleeding disorders.

I should emphasize that cinnamon twig is not a sweat inducing herb, just as it is not a sweat astringing herb. Its circulating and surface dispersing force spirals in between the surface and the interior: it can thus harmonize ying and wei, warm the flesh and the muscles, and invigorate movement within the blood vessels. It is due to these actions, then, that wind cold resolves and surface paralysis opens up.

The essence of cinnamon is both pungent and sweet: the pungent flavor disperses, the sweet flavor tonifies. The function of cinnamon, therefore, is somewhere in between dispersing and tonifying. Let's say that somebody wants to take Cinnamon Combination for the purpose of inducing sweat, the source book suggests that s/he must take some hot porridge along with it. This addendum illustrates that Cinnamon Combination by itself does not have a strong sweat inducing effect. On the other hand, if somebody

Modern Modifications: For weak constitution, atypically deep pulse, cold/flu accompanied by sweat, remove or decrease Mahuang (this will produce Guizhi Jia Gegen Tang); for nausea, add Banxia; for recurrent surface tension, add Xiao Chaihu Tang (this will produce Chaihu Guizhi Tang with Mahuang and Gegen added); for sinus congestion, may add Xinyinhua and Chuanxiong; for sinus congestion with secretion of yellow phlegm, heavily add Gualou; for early stage of rheumatoid arthritis, add Yiyiren, Danggui, Baishao, and Baizhu (this will produce Yiyiren Tang with (Sheng) Jiang, Dazao, and Gegen added); for back and leg pain, add Duhuo and (Sheng) Dihuang.

小青龍湯

Xiao Qinglong Tang

Minor Blue-Green Dragon Decoction

Source: On Cold Damage (*Shanghan lun*)

Xiao Qinglong Tang first appeared in the classic formula compendium, *Shanghan lun*. It is a famous modification of both Guizhi Tang and Mahuang Tang, specifically designed for lung congestion with clear phlegm in the yang deficient patient. The Blue-Green Dragon is a stellar confirmation in the eastern sky, which is associated with spring and wind. Spring is a period of frequent wind afflictions (such as colds and allergies). Also, it is the time when a developing yang (warmth, light) gains superiority over a gradually diminishing yin (cold, darkness). If the human body cannot hold step with this decisive move in nature, symptoms of pathological yin (phlegm) will appear and cause chills, water stagnation, and coughing. The dragon, moreover, is the symbolic governor of water. Nature's water metabolism has always been the key to health and prosperity in agriculture based societies. According to traditional lore, the large dragon can dance in the clouds and entice rain if there is not enough water, and the small dragon can submerge itself in the waves if there is too much water. Major Blue Dragon Tang, therefore, is mostly used to induce sweat ("not enough water") in patients with a strong constitution, while Xiao Qinglong Tang is generally prescribed to remove stagnating fluids and phlegm ("too much water") in patients with a weak constitution. In modern Japan, this formula has become one of the prime remedies to treat lung problems in children as well as allergic sinus problems characterized by profuse nasal discharge. In the original *Shanghan lun* version, no prominent use of Banxia is recorded. In modern clinical practice, a daily dose usually consists of 10g of each of the herbs, but Wuweizi and Xixin are often used in more moderate amounts (3-6g).

Category: Formulas that release exterior cold

Therapeutic Principles: Relieve the surface and disperse cold, warm the lung and transform phlegm, control coughing, asthma, and allergic sinus reactions

Typical Symptoms: Chills, possibly accompanied by fever, but without sweat; profuse production of clear, runny, or sometimes foamy phlegm by the lungs and/or sinuses; runny eyes; cold feeling in upper back; coughing and/or asthmatic wheezing; gurgling sounds or feeling of stagnation in epigastric region; dry mouth without desire to drink; nausea; stuffy chest; heavy and painful feeling in body, puffy face and extremities; decreased urination

Pulse: Floating and tight, or floating and weak, or floating and rapid

Tongue: Pale, with white and slippery coating

Western Indications: Colds, flus, upper respiratory tract infections (including acute bronchitis or acute flare-up of chronic bronchitis, pneumonia), bronchial asthma, allergic asthma, allergic rhinitis, hypertrophic rhinitis, whooping cough; catarrhal ophthalmia, dacryocystitis; pleurisy, hydrothorax; high gastric acidity (only if accompanied by feeling of epigastric stagnation); eczema, blisters (only if lots of clear secretions); arthritis, acute and chronic nephritis (only if puffy face and extremities, decreased urination)

Herbs and Actions:

CLASSICAL DOSAGE	MODERN DOSAGE	PINYIN	COMMON NAME LATIN NAME	ACTION(S)
3 liang	6-9 g	Mahuang	Ephedra <i>Ephedrae Herba</i>	Perfuse lung qi, calm asthmatic breathing, and open up the sinuses; expel surface cold and induce sweating
3 liang	9-12 g	Guizhi	Cinnamon twig <i>Cinnamomi Ramulus</i>	Expel surface cold and induce sweating
3 liang	9-12 g	Shaoyao	Peony root <i>Paeoniae Radix</i>	Nourish yin and blood and astringe body fluids to balance the strongly diaphoretic action of Mahuang and Guizhi
3 liang	9-12 g	(Gan) Jiang	Dried ginger <i>Zingiberis Rhizoma</i>	Warm the lung and disperse stagnating fluid
3 liang	6-9 g	Xixin	Asarum <i>Asari Herba</i>	Warm the lung and disperse stagnating fluid
0.5 sheng	6-9 g	Wuweizi	Schizandra <i>Schisandrae Fructus</i>	Normalize mucous secretions, and protectively moisten and astringe the lung to balance the strongly drying and dispersing action of Xixin and Shengjiang
0.5 sheng	9-12 g	Banxia	Pinellia <i>Pinelliae ternatae Rhizoma</i>	Enhance the anti-phlegm effect and counteract nausea
0.5 sheng	3-6 g	(Zhi) Gancao	Honey-fried licorice <i>Glycyrrhizae Radix</i>	Harmonize yin (nourishing, moistening, astringing) and yang (warming, drying, dispersing) actions of herbs; moderate diaphoretic and dispersing effect of the formula

Traditional Modifications: (*Shanghan lun* 40)

- Thirst: minus Banxia, add Gualougen (Tianhuafen);
- Mild diarrhea: minus Mahuang, add Raohua (*Wikstroemia canescens*, dry-fried);
- Dysphagia: minus Mahuang, add (Zhi) Fuzi; inhibited urination and lower abdominal pain: minus Mahuang, add Fuling;
- Panting: minus Mahuang, add Xingren.

Typical Modifications: for restlessness, thirst with desire to drink, yellow tongue coat, or other symptoms of secondary heat, add Shigao (this will produce Xiao Qinglong Jia Shigao Tang); for severe coughing, add Xingren; for nausea, combine with Er Chen Tang; for edema, add Fuling; for chronic bronchitis without surface symptoms, remove Mahuang, Guizhi, Banxia, and Baishao, add Fuling (this will produce Ling Gan Wuwei Jiang Xin Tang; if pronounced coughing and phlegm, do not remove Banxia, further add Xingren); for chronic asthma, add Taizishen and Zisuzi; for whooping cough, add Nan Shashen, Wumei, Tianhuafen, and Fuling.

四逆湯

Si Ni Tang

Frigid Extremities Decoction

Source: On Cold Damage (*Shanghan lun*)

Si Ni Tang is the representative remedy for Shaoyin disorders in the classical formula manual, *Shanghan lun*. Traditionally, it is known as a remedy that is used exclusively for the recapturing of the escaping life force in emergency situations, such as elderly patients suffering from a heart attack. Due to the extreme toxicity of unprocessed aconite (Fuzi), it would be important to boil the Fuzi thoroughly with the Ganjiang and Gancao (heat application greatly diminishes the toxin aconitine in Fuzi) if used according to original specifications. More important for using this remedy in the age of modern emergency medicine is to learn from the way how the Fire Spirit School of Sichuan herbalism has been using this remedy for the last 150 years. Zheng Qin'an, the Qing dynasty physician who is regarded as the founder of the Huoshen lineage, based all remedies for chronic patients requiring warming and at the same time consolidating action on the therapeutic principle exemplified by Si Ni Tang, labeling it Si Ni Fa—the Si Ni Tang Method.

Category: Formulas that rescue devastated yang

Therapeutic Principles: Rescue escaping yang

Typical Symptoms: All shaoyin symptoms; fatigue, cold hands and feet, blue lips; loss of consciousness, or clouded consciousness

Tongue: Fat and pale, with tooth marks

Pulse: Weak and slow, or feeble and rapid

Western Indications: Heart attack and other life-threatening diseases (acute usage); obvious immune deficiencies in the elderly (long-term usage, especially in the Fire Spirit School of Chinese herbalism)

Herbs and Actions:

CLASSICAL DOSAGE	MODERN DOSAGE	PINYIN	COMMON NAME LATIN NAME	ACTION(S)
1 piece	10-15 g	(Sheng) Fuzi	Fresh aconite <i>Aconiti Radix lateralis recens</i>	Draw escaping yang qi back into the lower dantian; warm spleen and kidney yang
1.5 liang	6-9 g	(Gan) Jiang	Dried ginger <i>Zingiberis Rhizoma</i>	Warm spleen and kidney yang; moderates the potential toxicity of Fuzi
2 liang	10-15 g	(Zhi) Gancao	Honey-fried licorice <i>Glycyrrhizae Radix</i>	Moderate potential toxicity of Fuzi

Traditional Modifications: (*Shanghan lun* 317)

- Red Facial Complexion: add Congbai;
- Abdominal Pain: add Shaoyao;
- Retching: add (Sheng) Jiang;
- Sore Throat: add Jiegeng;
- Diarrhea Ceases but Pulse does not Move Outward: add Renshen.

Modern Modifications: This is a formula that is not often used by modern TCM practitioners, especially as prescribed in the original text (which according to most experts specifies raw, unprocessed Fuzi). For the The Fire Spirit School of Sichuan herbalism (Huoshen Pai), however, it is the most important base formula for the treatment of chronic diseases, and the base for many more complex remedies. This remedy generally calls for 18-120 g of Fuzi, albeit in *processed* form.

11

Rehmannia: Traditional Perspectives & Formulas

地黃

Rehmannia (Dihuang): Rehmanniae radix

1) Dry rehmannia—that is the dried, unprocessed fresh root—primarily enters the kidney, and it also enters the heart and the spleen. Its nutritive essence is bitter and sweet, and its functional nature is yin and cold. If we consult the source book of Dr. Zhang Lu from Changzhou (*Comprehensive Medicine According to Master Zhang*, Zhang Shi Yi Tong), we read the following:

“At its very heart rehmannia is red and thus enters the heart; inside it is yellow and thus enters the spleen; its skin is black and thus enters the kidney. The nutritive essence of rehmannia is strong, while its functional qi is weak. Internally, it mostly cools the blood and enriches yin, while externally it moistens the skin and promotes a glossy appearance. The use of rehmannia is indicated in situations when the patient is deficient and exhibits signs of heat (if there are no heat signs, cooked rehmannia should be used). Just as Dai Yuanli once stated: ‘In situations where the yin is feeble and the yang exuberant, the ministerial fire is generally flaring beyond its boundaries and invades yin territory. There, it keeps steaming the yin, causing a symptom complex of yin deficiency and fire flare-up. For this type of disorder, one should use rehmannia to enrich the yin and control upflaring yang.’

In combination with ginseng, hoelen, and honey, rehmannia produces Jade Gelatin (Qiongyu Gao), a remedy that treats tubercular coughing accompanied by hacking blood (thus primarily tonifying the lung yin). In combination with ophiopogon, cooked rehmannia, and ginseng, raw rehmannia produces Stabilize the Root Pill (Guben Wan), a remedy that treats conditions of dried up jing and blood in the elderly (while at the same time stabilizing the kidney root). If we add lycium fruit gelatin

to this prescription, it is called Gather Spirit Gelatin (Jiling Gao), a remedy that treats deficiency emaciation accompanied by coughing and chronic fatigue (stabilizing all organ networks simultaneously).

In simplified terms, the general principle for the use of rehmannia is the following: males tend to be yin deficient, and thus should take cooked rehmannia; females tend to easily develop conditions of blood heat, and thus should take raw rehmannia. Never forget, however, to differentiate this usage according to the constitution of the individual patient!

Yu Bo once said: ‘Raw rehmannia cools the blood, but in patients with weak stomach qi it may cause symptoms of poor appetite. Cooked rehmannia tonifies the blood, but in patients with lots of phlegm-rheum it may gum up the diaphragm.’ Although these two potential complications are actually very, very important, contemporary doctors rarely bother to heed this principle in clinical practice.

Some people say that if raw rehmannia is fried in alcohol, then its appetite inhibiting affect will be neutralized, or that if cooked rehmannia is processed with ginger, then it will not gum up the diaphragm. But no matter what, we should only use rehmannia after we have obtained a detailed understanding of the varying degrees in which source qi and pernicious qi are involved. For instance, if we encounter a post-partum patient who suffers from a pronounced aversion to food, diarrhea, pain caused by coagulations in the lower abdomen, taxation fatigue, a constitutionally weak spleen/stomach manifesting in chronically loose stools, profuse phlegm in the chest and epigastric region, signs of inhibited respiration, and symptoms that indicate an obstruction of the body’s ascending/descending actions, one should definitely stay away from rehmannia.

In post-partum situations, rehmannia primarily cools blood and moistens dryness. If a patient’s source qi is exhausted, and she suffers from [bowel] obstruction and accumulation due to heat pathogens accompanied by a dry and scorched black tongue, constipation and inhibited urination, then this is a situation where the purgative method is contraindicated. The best method to resolve constipation in this particular circumstance is to add some rehmannia to a combination of heat clearing materials, because a) rehmannia moistens dryness, and b) this patient does not exhibit signs of excess moisture involvement.

In *Shen Nong’s Herbal Classic*, rehmannia is categorized as a superior medicinal substance. Actually, its functional nature is yin and gentle, so rehmannia is really a kind of impostor! It can be compared to all those oh-so-

filial people who conceal their mischief inside, but who always wear a friendly face on the outside. All of those famous scholars say that rehmannia is a prime herb to enrich yin and a magic remedy to control bleeding. Even though rehmannia is often used this way, this is not what it is indicated for. It should really be used to gently clear exuberant qi, and after intake it will bring about temporary peace.

This is quite different from the functional nature of ginseng, a yang and bright herb which is like a gentleman in nature: too much of it, and you will definitely notice it (yang herbs are usually more intense than the disease that is being addressed; so, if you use them inappropriately, you will know about it right away). This is precisely the reason why many masters have a tendency to put their hands up their sleeves when it comes to the use of yang herbs like ginseng—they are afraid of using it, just like most patients are sealing their mouths in fear of trying it. They rather use the meekest and most yin of herbs, rehmannia and ophiopogon, the affect of which the patient will not feel until death occurs (when somebody gets killed due to the affect of yin herbs, most people do not notice the cause and affect relationship; that is why most everybody likes to use yin substances).”

This discussion by Zhang Lu underscores the fact that if the patient’s condition is not clearly understood, the use of rehmannia may bring about calamity. Where has such a thorough understanding of herbal usage been presented before?

[from Huang Gongxiu, *Bencao qiuzhen* (Exploring the True Meaning of the Materia Medica), 1769]



2) The functional nature of fresh rehmannia is cold. Its nutritive essence is slightly bitter and slightly sweet. It is an excellent substance to clear heat, cool blood, transform static blood, generate new blood, and treat blood ejection, nosebleed, blood in the stool or urine, or other conditions that are due to blood heat causing rampant blood movement. Rehmannia contains iron, and that is why it turns black as soon as it is dried or steamed. Its iron content is also partly responsible for the affect of generating and cooling blood.

Dry rehmannia (called raw rehmannia in contemporary herb shops) refers to the fresh herb after it has been dried under the sun. Its functional nature is cool but not cold. It boosts the vessels, generates jing and marrow, brightens the eyes and clears the ears, and treats bone steaming and other forms of taxation heat, as well as kidney deficiency engendering heat symptoms.

14

Gu: History, Clinical Perspectives & Representative Formulas



Driving Out Demons & Snakes: Gu Syndrome, A Forgotten Clinical Approach to Chronic Parasitism

As the field of Oriental medicine matures in a modern environment, we are beginning to become aware of the enormous dimensions that this field encompasses. While ten years ago the Western public still thought of Oriental medicine as a synonym for acupuncture, most practitioners have now broadened their understanding of the term to something that includes acupuncture, moxibustion, herbs, dietetics and qigong exercises. Although other clinical approaches that once shaped the face of Chinese medicine, such as Daoist psychotherapy or the application of herbs to acupuncture points, remain forgotten, there is good reason to believe that in time they will be unearthed and put to use in a modern clinical context.

This presentation is an attempt to participate in the process of 'medical archaeology' by exploring one of the submerged areas of Oriental medicine, namely the complex and variegated clinical approach to the diagnosis and treatment of Gu syndrome (*gu zheng*). A review of the modern research literature shows that this topic has remained virtually unexplored in both China and the West¹. Although there are too many classical references to entirely ignore the phenomenon of Gu syndrome, mainland Chinese scholars generally dismiss it as an "ancient, feudalist and superstitious" belief in demons and exorcist practices that has little or no value in modern clinical practice. However, a close examination of the original texts illuminates the mysterious concept of Gu syndrome as a valid clinical approach that may potentially provide an answer to the many invisible 'demons' that plague patients in a modern



Treating Chronic Inflammatory Disease with Chinese Herbs

AN INTERVIEW ON THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF GU SYNDROME

IN THE AUTUMN OF 2008 HEINER FRUEHAUF, PHD, LAC, SAT DOWN WITH TWO OF HIS STUDENTS, ERIN MORELAND, LAC., AND BOB QUINN, DAOM, LAC, TO DISCUSS THE FINER POINTS OF GU SYNDROME TREATMENT. THIS DISCUSSION IS BEST UNDERSTOOD AS A FOLLOW-UP TO AND ELABORATION OF THE IDEAS PRESENTED IN HEINER'S EARLIER ARTICLE ON GU SYNDROME PUBLISHED IN *The Journal of Chinese Medicine* IN MAY 1998.

Quinn: Heiner, first of all thanks for making time for the interview. We want to discuss clinical treatment strategies for *Gu* syndrome, but before we get into the specifics, for the sake of the people who did not read your article in *The Journal of Chinese Medicine* on *Gu* syndrome, could you quickly go over what *Gu* syndrome is and how you got started on the research?

Heiner: Certainly. The phenomenon of *Gu* syndrome is for me a prime example of the clinical power that classical Chinese medicine carries, in a field where we have thrown out so much and where the record has been truncated for the sake of standardization. My own discovery of *Gu* syndrome came when there was a certain number of cases that I was not making sufficient progress with clinically, particularly with people I believed had parasites. I finally took literally a two-week time out and just immersed myself in ancient texts. From my reading of the *modern* literature there were very few cases with chronic parasites recorded—sure, there were some cases of acute amoebic dysentery, but I felt that in a country like China it shouldn't be any different from Nepal or India, where I knew that parasites have been a part of the clinical landscape for hundreds of years. When I looked at the classical textual record, it was a different story. I found chronic parasitism reflected in a huge area of classical Chinese medicine that was called *Gu zheng*,

or *Gu* syndrome, which essentially means “Possession Syndrome”. *Gu* is a character that is very old, perhaps one of the oldest characters in the Chinese textual record altogether, since it is a hexagram in the *Yijing*. It is literally the image of three worms in a vessel. This to me is one of those strokes of brilliance that you find in the symbolism of the ancient Chinese—that they recognized 3000 years ago that chronic parasitism can cause psychotic or psychological symptoms. Because of the psychological, emotional, and perhaps spiritual implications of this term, *Gu*, when the Chinese standardized the *classical* record for the much simplified barefoot doctor approach of the TCM system in the 1950's, they threw out lots of complicated and ideologically problematic topics, and obviously this “Possession Syndrome” was one of the first ones to go. There are of course magical modalities that are associated with the treatment of *Gu* syndrome—like Fu talismans, mantras, and techniques such as visualizing thunder and lightning in your abdomen, etc.—but the herbal treatment is quite practical and included a vast array of formulas that are unique and effective for the treatment of severe parasitism. Due to that standardization of Chinese medicine that took place and a general state of ignorance about the clinical power of this approach, this syndrome has been virtually erased from the record and no one thinks about it any more at all. Once I started using this approach fifteen years ago in my own clinical practice, I started making massive headway in cases that I couldn't treat before, and not all of these patients came with obvious signs of chronic parasitic infection.

Quinn: Just to be clear, you're not saying that all instances of parasitic infection equate to *Gu*. Someone comes back from Mexico, comes to a clinic and says I think I picked up a parasite....

Heiner: You are absolutely right, *Gu* syndrome does not equal acute parasitic infection. Not all cases that, from a classical perspective, would be diagnosed as *Gu* syndrome would [also] be patients with parasites, and vice-versa, not all people with a positive parasitic test from the Western perspective would be accurately diagnosed as *Gu*. *Gu* syndrome actually means that your system is hollowed out from the inside out by dark yin forces that you cannot see. This not seeing often includes Western medical tests that come back negative for parasites. So from a certain perspective, AIDS falls into this category, with body and mind being hollowed out from the inside out, without knowing what is happening. *Gu* syndrome originally meant “black magic.” To the patient it felt as though someone had put a hex on them, without anybody—whether it's the Western medicine community or, in ancient times, the regular Chinese medicine approach—being able to see what was really going on. Regular



Lyme Disease

AN IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW
WITH HEINER FRUEHAUF

IN THE SPRING OF 2011 HEINER FRUEHAUF, PHD, LAC SAT DOWN WITH HIS STUDENT AND COLLEAGUE, BOB QUINN, DAOM, LAC TO DISCUSS THE FINER POINTS OF “BRAIN GU” SYNDROME, SPECIFICALLY AS IT PERTAINS TO THE TREATMENT OF LYME DISEASE. THIS DISCUSSION IS BEST UNDERSTOOD AS A FOLLOW-UP TO AND ELABORATION OF THE IDEAS PRESENTED IN HEINER AND QUINN’S EARLIER INTERVIEW ABOUT GU SYNDROME PUBLISHED IN THE FALL OF 2008.

Quinn: Welcome Heiner. It is nice to sit and have a cup of tea with you to discuss one of the most perplexing health conditions of this time, Lyme disease. I wanted to start by establishing your own experience in this area.

Heiner: I have been seeing Lyme patients since the time I started my practice, more than 20 years ago. At first I wasn’t aware of what I was treating. I was differentiating symptoms and tried to devise a traditional diagnosis that fit the overall picture as closely as possible. I see this conversation as a follow-up to our earlier discussion on *Gu* Syndrome. After many years of treating Lyme disease with Chinese herbs, I can say with great certainty that, from a classical Chinese perspective, Lyme is a specific type of *Gu* Syndrome.

When I initially began my *Gu* Syndrome research, I saw a number of patients who were young Peace Core volunteers returning from Africa and South America with intestinal parasites. Most likely, they were suffering from a combination of different protozoan infections. These infections wouldn’t go away with the conventional Chinese treatments for parasitic diarrhea, or bloating and constipation. In addition to a host of chronic digestive symptoms, I found a prevalence of mental/cognitive symptoms in these patients, such as anxiety and insomnia. I soon felt that the clinical methods I was familiar with at the time were not adequate to solve this clinical picture. Fortunately, at this point in my career I still had plenty of

time to shift into research gear. After immersing myself in a lot of clinical case studies preserved in pre-modern China’s medical literature, I came across the concept of *Gu* Syndrome. The word *Gu* is one of the oldest Chinese characters. Hexagram Eighteen of the ancient *Yijing* (Classic of Change) is entitled *Gu* 蠱: Rottenness. One frequently comes across the word in Chinese language, but never really considers it, including native Chinese speakers. It is like the word “magic” in the English language. You use it to conjure up an atmosphere, but never think about what it really means.

As a clinical concept, I found *Gu* most interesting. Every major medical book in ancient China, starting with the *Neijing* (Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine), mentions *Gu* as something that is common, yet very entrenched and difficult to treat. The most remarkable diagnostic advice I gleaned from these texts is that our regular diagnostic parameters won’t get traction in patients suffering from *Gu* syndrome. *Gu* patients, for instance, manifest with symptoms that look like spleen *qi* deficiency, yet the normal methods to treat their fatigue, bloating, and digestive issues do not work. As a matter of fact, they may get worse with conventional treatment. It is one of the diagnostic parameters of *Gu* syndrome that the herb Renshen (ginseng), generally regarded as the prototypical spleen *qi* tonic, is contraindicated in this condition and will worsen symptoms. It appears that in a *Gu* patient, Renshen, Dangshen (codonopsis) and similar *qi* tonics boost not only the immune system, but invigorate the pathogen as well. Therefore, one classical *Gu* expert once stated that “*Gu* syndrome may look like chronic diarrhea, but if you treat it like the regular type of diarrhea it does not work. It may look like chronic constipation, but if you treat it like regular constipation, it does not work.”

Incorporating this important yet forgotten clinical advice, I embarked on a journey of more than 15 years of diagnosing and treating people suffering from *Gu* syndrome. In this process, I gradually zeroed in on a group of remedies and herbs that are in a class of their own. Just as modern Chinese physicians have established an anti-cancer materia medica in recent years, I read through all relevant texts and worked to establish an anti-*Gu*—or, in the widest possible sense of meaning, an anti-chronic inflammatory syndrome—materia medica.

Quinn: You have an interesting way of differentiating *Gu* into brain and digestive *Gu* categories. Can you go into that a bit?

After a while, I discovered that there are two major groups of patients with *Gu* syndrome. I labeled them “Digestive *Gu*” and “Brain *Gu*”. Digestive *Gu* is characterized by a

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