

BLOOD STASIS AND THE BLOOD-INVIGORATING METHOD

Blood stasis is a common and damaging pathogenic factor that is at the root of many serious diseases. A characteristic of Blood stasis is that it is the result of a long pathogenic process: thus, it is always a relatively serious pathogenic factor and one that leads to more serious diseases than Qi stagnation. For example, coronary heart disease, abdominal masses, tumours, high blood pressure, stroke, etc. all present with Blood stasis. By definition, Qi stagnation cannot, by itself, cause any of the above problems. Thus, whenever we see signs of Blood stasis, we know that the condition is one of long duration and the prognosis is less good than that for Qi stagnation.

Blood stasis never arises independently (like Qi stagnation) but is always the consequence of other conditions, usually after a long period of time. Thus, there are no aetiological factors (diet, emotions, etc.) that give rise to Blood stasis by themselves as Blood stasis itself arises from other conditions. The conditions giving rise to Blood stasis are as follows with the main organs involved in brackets:

- Qi stagnation (Liver and Heart)
- Internal Cold (Uterus, Stomach, Heart)
- Heat or Fire (Stomach, Intestines, Heart, Liver, Uterus)
- Qi deficiency (Stomach and Heart)
- Blood deficiency (Uterus, Heart, Liver)
- Phlegm (Stomach, Intestines, Uterus)

1. Qi Stagnation

This is the most common cause of Blood stasis: since Qi is the commander of Blood and Blood relies on the moving action of Qi for its movement, any Qi stagnation may lead to Blood stasis after some time. In this instance, it is primarily Liver-Qi stagnation that leads to Liver-Blood stasis. However, other organs may also be involved and Qi stagnation in an organ may induce Blood stasis in another. For example, Heart-Qi stagnation may also lead to Heart-Blood stasis. Liver-Blood stasis may also influence the Uterus and the Intestines.

2. Internal Cold

Internal Cold may be full or empty. Full Cold arises from invasion of external cold and it may settle in the Stomach, Intestines or Uterus where it may last for some years. Eventually, it will inevitably injure the Yang and lead to Yang deficiency so that it will become Empty Cold. Empty Cold may also arise independently from a Yang deficiency usually of the Spleen and/or Kidneys.

3. Heat or Fire

Heat or Fire (but especially the latter) injure and condense the body fluids and therefore Blood since Blood is part of body fluids. This may occur in the Heart, Liver, Stomach, Lungs, Intestines and Uterus.

4. Qi Deficiency

In relation to Blood, Qi deficiency normally leads to deficient Qi being unable to hold Blood in the vessels and therefore to bleeding: this is the most common outcome of Qi deficiency in relation to Blood. However, Qi deficiency may also lead to Blood stasis because deficient Qi

fails to move and transport and may lead to Qi stagnation and Blood stasis. Indeed, there is a formula precisely for this situation (Bu Yang Huan Wu Tang, p. 320 in Bensky).

5. Blood Deficiency

Blood deficiency may also lead to Blood stasis because Blood is the mother of Qi; when Blood is deficient, Qi is also usually deficient, Qi fails to move Blood and Blood stasis ensues. A simultaneous Blood deficiency and stasis is more common in women. This may result, for example, in periods that are scanty but dark with clots.

6. Phlegm

There is a strong interaction between Phlegm and Blood stasis as both are pathologies of Body Fluids. Phlegm is a pathological accumulation of turbid fluids, while Blood stasis is a pathological accumulation of Blood; since there is an interchange between Blood and Body Fluids, Blood stasis and Phlegm interact with each other and aggravate each other. A simultaneous condition of Blood stasis and Phlegm is common in the elderly and it is a particular pernicious combination leading to serious diseases which are difficult to treat.

The first three aetiological factors are the most important ones.

CONSEQUENCES OF BLOOD STASIS

Blood stasis can itself become a cause of disease. First of all, it may induce Blood deficiency: in fact, when stagnant Blood obstructs the Blood vessels, Qi stagnates, this may not manufacture Blood properly and Blood deficiency ensues.

Secondly, when stagnant Blood obstruct the blood vessels, new Blood cannot occupy its rightful place and leaks out giving rise to haemorrhages: thus, in an apparent paradox, Blood stasis may cause bleeding.

Thirdly, Blood stasis may cause dryness: this happens because Blood is part of Body Fluids and when Blood stagnates for many years, Body Fluids cannot be properly produced and dryness ensues.

Fourthly, Blood stasis may lead to Qi deficiency. Thus, Blood stasis may cause the four following conditions:

- Blood deficiency
- Bleeding
- Dryness
- Qi deficiency

DIAGNOSIS

The main manifestations of Blood stasis are:

- Pain
- Swellings, lumps, tumours, masses
- Colour purple
- Purple tongue
- Dark complexion
- Dry nails and hair
- Bleeding

- Maculae
- Stiffness
- Dreaming a lot
- Dark moles
- Dark eye sockets
- Purple nose bridge
- Purple venules
- Umbilicus bulging out
- Hardness of the abdomen on palpation
- Enlarged ends of fingers and toes
- Skin not elastic, lustreless, dark, scaly, dry
- A history of chronic illness with repeated bouts
- Adhesions and scars from surgery
- Poor memory
- Aggravation at night
- Wiry, Choppy or Firm (Lao) pulse
- Irregular periods, painful periods with dark clots, hesitant start to periods, periods starting and stopping
- Fever
- Mental restlessness
- Thirst with desire to gargle but not to swallow
- Abdominal pain

TREATMENT PRINCIPLES AND METHODS

BEN-BIAO AND XU-SHI

Blood stasis is always the Manifestation (Biao) of a condition because it arises from other conditions such as Qi stagnation, Cold, Heat, etc. Blood stasis is a Full condition by definition. Thus, the question arises how to approach a patient who suffers from Blood stasis (Full-Biao) but also from an underlying condition that is the Ben (which, itself, may be Xu or Shi).

The Ben of Blood stasis may be a Deficiency (of Qi or Blood) or a Fullness (Cold, Heat or Phlegm). Thus, treating Ben consists in either tonifying Qi and Blood or in scattering Cold, clearing Heat or resolving Phlegm. Since Blood stasis is always a chronic condition, generally speaking one needs to treat both Ben and Biao simultaneously. However, especially when herbal medicine is used, the question arises whether one should start with a formula to invigorate Blood modifying it to treat the Ben, or start with a formula to treat the Ben modifying it to invigorate Blood. The answer is simple: in more acute cases when the symptoms and signs of Blood stasis predominate, start with a modification of a formula to invigorate Blood and eliminate stasis; in more chronic cases when the symptoms and signs of Blood stasis are less pronounced, start with a modification of a formula that treats Ben.

My personal inclination, however, is always to clear pathogenic factors first, i.e. in the case, invigorate Blood and eliminate stasis. Two examples will clarify this.

Example 1.

A patient suffers from Chest Bi with a severe, frequent chest pain irradiating to the shoulder, with a very purple tongue and wiry pulse. In his case, the Blood stasis in the chest derives from Heart-Yang deficiency (he also suffers from a feeling of stuffiness of the chest, cold hands, the tongue is pale-Purple and his pulse is slow). In such as case, I would concentrate the attention initially in invigorating Blood and eliminating stasis in the chest with a formula such as Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang (Red Stirring), adding something to warm Heart-Yang such as

Gui Zhi and Xie Bai.

Example 2.

Another man suffers from cold hands, palpitations, occasionally irregular heart beat, a feeling of stuffiness of the chest, slight breathlessness on exertion, pale tongue that is very slightly purple on the sides in the chest area, and a slow and weak pulse; he occasionally suffers from a slight chest tightness and pain. In this example, there is also Blood stasis but it is secondary compared to the Ben, that is Heart-Yang deficiency and Empty-Cold. Thus, I would start with a formula to tonify the Heart and warm Yang, with the addition of one or two herbs to invigorate Blood and eliminate stasis.

Herbal Treatment

Invigorating Blood is such an important method of treatment in gynaecology and other disorders that Tang Zong Hai, author of the "Discussion on Blood Syndromes" (1884), said: "In Blood syndromes one must always eliminate stasis of Blood".¹

There are many herbs that eliminate stasis of Blood. Practically all Blood-invigorating herbs are contraindicated in pregnancy: unless absolutely necessary, it is strongly recommended that they are not given to a pregnant patient. The only Blood-invigorating herbs that might be relatively safe to use in pregnancy are Chi Shao Radix Paeoniae rubrae, Si Gua Luo Fasciculus vascularis Luffae, Ji Xue Teng Radix et Caulis Jixueteng and Dan Shen Radix Salviae miltiorrhizae.

Since there are so many Blood-invigorating herbs, to classify them in a rational way makes their use easier. A threefold classification around which there is some consensus is between herbs that invigorate Blood herbs that invigorate Blood and eliminate stasis and herbs that break up Blood and eliminate stasis, in ascending order of strength.² A list of herbs according to this threefold classification is as follows:

1) Herbs that invigorate Blood

Chuan Xiong Radix Ligustici Chuanxiong, Yan Hu Suo Rhizoma Corydalis Yanhusuo, Yu Jin Tuber Curcumae, Ru Xiang Gummi Olibanum, Mo Yao Myrrha, Wang Bu Liu Xing Semen Vaccariae segetalis.

2) Herbs that invigorate Blood and eliminate stasis

Dan Shen Radix Salviae miltiorrhizae, Yi Mu Cao Herba Leonori heterophylli, Tao Ren Semen Persicae, Hong Hua Flos Carthami tinctorii, Chuan Niu Xi Radix Cyathulae, Ze Lan Herba Lycopi lucidi, Su Mu Lignum Sappan.

3) Herbs that break-up Blood and eliminate stasis

E Zhu Rhizoma Curcumae zedoariae, San Leng Rhizoma Sparganii stoloniferii, Shui Zhi Hirudo seu Whitmania, Meng Chong Tabanus bivittatus, Di Bie Chong Eupolyphaga seu Opisthoplatia, listed here in ascending order of strength. These herbs are particularly strong and are said to "break up" (rather than "invigorate") Blood. Herbs that break up Blood are suitable to dissolve masses from stasis of Blood and should be used with great care and sparingly.

Apart from this classification, the Blood-invigorating herbs can be classified according to various other criteria as follows:

According to nature (hot or cold)

Hot: Chuan Xiong Radix Ligustici Chuanxiong, Ji Xue Teng Radix et Caulis Jixueteng, Yan Hu Suo Rhizoma Corydalis Yanhusuo, Ze Lan Herba Lycopi lucidi, Hong Hua Flos

Carthami tinctorii, E Zhu Rhizoma Curcumae zedoariae, Ru Xiang Gummi Olibanum, Wu Ling Zhi Excrementum Trogopteri.

Cold: Dan Shen Radix Salviae miltiorrhizae, Yu Jin Tuber Curcumae, Yi Mu Cao Herba Leonori heterophylli, Chi Shao Radix Paeoniae rubrae, Mu Dan Pi Cortex Moutan radicis, Chuan Shan Jia Squama Manitis pentadactylae, Di Bie Chong Eupolyphaga seu Opisthoplatia.

Herbs that invigorate Blood and stop bleeding

Pu Huang Pollen Typhae
San Qi Radix Notoginseng
Qian Cao Gen Radix Rubiae cordifoliae
Su Mu Lignum Sappan
Wu Ling Zhi Excrementum Tragopteri

Herbs that invigorate and cool Blood

Mu Dan Pi Cortex Moutan radicis
Chi Shao Radix Paeoniae rubrae

These two herbs are very widely used in gynaecology to cool and invigorate Blood simultaneously.

Blood-invigorating herbs that affect the breasts and the Connecting channels

Some Blood-invigorating herbs are also said to "penetrate the Connecting channels": this means that they move Qi and Blood and remove obstructions from the Connecting channels. They can be used for channel problems, but in gynaecology, they can also be used for breast problems. These herbs are: Si Gua Luo Fasciculus vascularis Luffae, Chuan Shan Jia Squama Manitis pentadactylae and Lu Lu Tong Fructus Liquidambaris taiwaniana.

Blood-invigorating herbs that invigorate the lower back and knees

Chuan Niu Xi Radix Cyathulae and Ji Xue Teng Radix et Caulis Jixueteng. Chuan Niu Xi is particularly important because, besides invigorating the lower back and knees, it has a descending movement and is often used for upwards bleeding (such as epistaxis, haematemesis or haemoptysis) deriving from stasis of Blood.

Herbs that invigorate Blood and calm the Mind

Dan Shen Radix Salviae miltiorrhizae invigorates Blood and calms the Mind. It is such an important Blood-invigorating herb that some doctors say that using Dan Shen in the proper dosage is like using the formula Si Wu Tang Four Substances Decoction: this is because in small dosages, Dan Shen can also nourish Blood. According to modern research, this herb also has an anti-allergic effect.³

Yu Jin Tuber Curcumae also calms the Mind and opens the Mind's orifices in cases when this is obfuscated by stasis of Blood or Phlegm. It is especially indicated in depression.

Pharmacology of Blood-Invigorating Herbs

Finally, something should be said about the complex pharmacology of the Blood-invigorating herbs which makes them some of the most useful herbs in the Chinese pharmacopoeia. The pharmacological actions of these herbs may be summarized as follows:

- They improve the dynamics of blood flow and dilate the peripheral, coronary, cerebral, renal and mesenteric arteries.
- They improve microcirculation. Disturbance of microcirculation causes many diseases such as coronary heart disease, angiitis, endometriosis, chronic hepatitis, hepatic cirrhosis

and scleroderma.

- They improve concentration, coagulation and accumulation of blood and prevent thrombosis by inhibiting accumulation of platelets.
- They influence connective tissues and can treat diseases of these tissues such as skin warts, burn scars and adhesions.
- They readjust cellular and humoral immunity.
- They have an analgesic effect.
- They increase uterine contractions.
- They combat inflammation and bacterial infection.

Interaction with Western Medication

Generally speaking, all invigorating-Blood herbs are contraindicated if the patient is taking anticoagulants.

TREATMENT

The method of invigorating Blood is often combined with other methods of treatment according to the condition. The main treatment methods combined with invigorating Blood are:

- Move Qi
- Tonify Qi
- Nourish Blood
- Warm the menses and scatter Cold
- Clear Heat
- Move downwards
- Transform Water and resolve Phlegm
- Open the orifices
- Soften hardness
- Nourish Yin

These combinations will now be discussed in detail.

Move Qi

The treatment method that combines moving Qi with invigorating Blood is extremely common. It is for this reason that very many Blood-invigorating prescriptions contain herbs that move Qi.

Three Treasures remedy: Break into a Smile, Release Constraint,
Women's Treasure remedy: Freeing Constraint, Free Flow.

Tonify Qi

Stasis of Blood may arise from Qi deficiency. When Qi is deficient it does not circulate as it should and it therefore fails to move Blood properly.

The formula Bu Yang Huan Wu Tang Tonifying Yang and Restoring Five-Tenths Decoction is an example of a prescription for Blood stasis occurring against a background of Qi deficiency, for which the formula uses a very large dose of Huang Qi Radix Astragali membranacei.

Nourish Blood

It is often necessary to nourish Blood when invigorating it either because Blood deficiency may be at the root of Blood stasis or because the latter may cause the former. This happens

because stagnant Blood obstructs the channel and blood vessels and prevents new Blood from taking its rightful place.

Examples of Blood-invigorating formulae that also nourish Blood are Si Wu Tang Four Substances Decoction (which can be classified as a Blood-invigorating formula) and Wen Jing Tang Warming the Menses Decoction.

Women's Treasure remedy: Precious Sea, Warm the Menses.

Warm the menses and scatter Cold

The method of warming the menses and scattering Cold is used when there is Blood stasis deriving from Cold obstructing the Uterus. This condition may cause dysmenorrhoea, infertility or abdominal masses.

Women's Treasure remedy: Warm the Menses.

Clear Heat

Heat is another pathogenic factor that may lead to stasis of Blood: it does so by condensing Blood and therefore slowing down its circulation.

Women's Treasure remedy: Cool the Menses.

Move downwards

The method of moving downwards (i.e. eliminating pathogenic factors through defecation) is frequently used in conjunction with that of invigorating Blood and eliminating stasis in the treatment of stasis of Blood in the Middle of Lower Burner (not Upper Burner).

Transform Water and resolve Phlegm

There is an interrelationship between stasis of Blood and Phlegm, especially in chronic conditions. When Blood stagnates over many years, the stagnant Blood obstructs the proper movement of Qi and functioning of the internal organs and impairs the transformation of body fluids, leading to the formation of Phlegm.

Open the orifices

The orifices of the Heart may be clouded not only by Phlegm or Phlegm-Fire but also by stagnant Blood. Obstruction of the Heart's orifices may occur with various degrees of severity and in serious cases it causes total loss of insight giving rise to psychotic episodes. Stagnant Blood affects the Heart's orifices because this organ houses the Mind and governs Blood and in conditions of not only Heart-Blood deficiency but also of Blood stasis the Mind therefore suffers.

Three Treasures remedy: Red Stirring.

THREE TREASURES REMEDIES AND WOMEN'S TREASURE REMEDIES TO INVIGORATE BLOOD

Main Ones

Red Stirring: Blood stasis in the Upper Burner

This is the main remedy for Blood stasis in the Upper Burner affecting the Heart. As it acts on the Upper Burner, it can also be used for Blood stasis in the channels of the Upper Burner.

Stir Field of Elixir: Blood stasis in the Lower Burner

This is the main remedy for Blood stasis in the Lower Burner: it is the remedy of choice for women suffering from Blood stasis in the Uterus causing gynaecological problems. The best

time to take this remedy is during the 4th (pre-menstrual) and 1st phase (period itself) of the menstrual cycle. This remedy should not be taken during the period if the period is heavy (see below).

Invigorate Blood and Stem the Flow: Blood stasis with excessive menstrual bleeding

This is the remedy of choice for women suffering from gynaecological problems from Blood stasis but who suffer from heavy bleeding. It contains herbs that simultaneously invigorate Blood and reduce bleeding: this is invaluable when the periods are painful with dark clots but also heavy. It can be taken during the period itself.

Harmonizing the Moon: Blood stasis with endometriosis

This is a new remedy formulated specifically to treat endometriosis from Blood stasis. It contains some herbs that "break" Blood, i.e. invigorate Blood strongly to break up masses. It should be taken during the 4th and 1st phases, unless the period is heavy, in which case, the woman can take this remedy during the 4th phase and **Invigorate Blood and Stem the Flow** during the 1st phase.

Other Remedies

Release Constraint

This remedy primarily moves Qi but it also contains herbs that invigorate Blood. It is therefore given when there is some Blood stasis but primarily Qi stagnation. It is specific for emotional problems and depression deriving from Qi stagnation.

Freeing Constraint

This remedy is similar to **Release Constraint** and it was specifically formulated to treat pre-menstrual tension deriving from Qi stagnation. Like **Release Constraint**, it also mildly invigorates Blood.

Warm the Menses

Warm the Menses invigorate Blood in the Uterus by expelling Cold. It is the remedy of choice for painful periods from Blood stasis deriving from Cold.

Cool the Menses

This remedy is specifically formulated to reduce bleeding in women suffering from menorrhagia from Blood Heat. It is also mildly invigorates Blood.

Clear the Root

This is remedy is specific for prostate problems such as hypertrophy. In this condition, there is always an element of Blood stasis and this remedy contains herbs that invigorate Blood.

END NOTES

1. Cited in Li Fei, Discussion about Formulae to Invigorate Blood and Eliminate Stasis, in Journal of the Nanjing College of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Nanjing Zhong Yi Xue Yuan Xue Bao), 1, 1987, p. 44.
2. There are actually several terms used to say "eliminate stasis": qu yu, hua yu and zhu yu. Qu yu means to "eliminate" or "dispel" stasis, hua yu means to "resolve" stasis and zhu yu means to "drive out" or "expel" stasis. The first and the third are the same except for a difference of degree, the latter being stronger. The second, hua yu, "resolving stasis" indicates a different way of eliminating stasis.
3. Journal of Chinese Medicine (Zhong Yi Za Zhi), Vol. 32, no. 12, p. 4.
4. Cited in Li Fei, Discussion about Formulae to Invigorate Blood and Eliminate Stasis, p. 43.
5. Ibid, p. 43.

6. Ibid, p. 44.

7. Shang Xian Min 1990 Practical Traditional Chinese Medicine and Pharmacology, p. 227.