



when reading classical case studies. From a purely academic perspective, I have always looked at aconite as something that will warm you in a very similar way to cinnamon.

BQ: Can you explain how you now see the difference between the cinnamon dynamic and the aconite?

HF: Yes, the difference between cinnamon and aconite is very important and must be understood by every practitioner of the yang tonic school. The warming effect in cinnamon is associated with the opening process of *taiyang*. The *Neijing* states that *taiyang* is “the opener,” the function of yang within yang. It is thus in charge of propelling the yang qi “out of the box”, dispensing it outwards to the flesh, muscles, and surface layers, and upwards to the head, causing every part of the outer and upper regions of the body to feel warm. Aconite, on the other hand, is considered by the Fire Spirit School as an herb that is almost opposite to that in action. It is said to fortify yin within yang—in other words, bring about a contracting, inward-bound momentum within an overall warming function. It is thus considered to be the primary herb to bring roaming yang qi back into the box. Rather than causing you to overheat, i.e. in the form of mouth sores or ulcers or nose bleeds (often feared by practitioners as an imagined side-effect of aconite use), aconite takes the floating yang qi at the surface and entices it back into a state of “battery storage” in the lower *dantian*. It should in fact reduce symptoms such as restlessness, anxiety, insomnia, hot flashes in menopause, mouth ulcers and so on. When aconite is used correctly, therefore—referring to the usage of the right kind and the right dosage of the herb—it will actually treat the kinds of symptoms that many modern practitioners fear it might induce.

BQ: Can you say a word or two about your dosing of the herbs in this formula?

HF: To bring about this downward and inward movement, aconite should not be used in the 3-6 gram range that we see commonly in TCM, but at least in the 15-18 gram range. This is in comparison to the other ingredients in the formula that would be in the 6-9 gram range. Again, it should be stressed that I am assuming people are using a quality fuzi or wutou as we discussed in our previous interview. If you use the poor quality fuzi

that is available on the market, and you use it in these dosages, you might well get adverse effects. With fuzi grown as it should be grown, where it should be grown, and processed how it should be processed, you will be able to treat the conditions we just listed more successfully than with the use of yin tonics. But be sure to know that with poor quality fuzi you will possibly cause the very problems you are trying to cure. Fire Spirit School veterans such as Dr. Lu Chonghan in Sichuan or Dr. Wu Rongzu in Yunnan will go quite a bit higher to coax out the descending effect of aconite, using 30g as their lowest dose, and going up to 200 grams for severe rheumatoid arthritis patients.

BQ: This is grams per day, correct? Most TCM-trained herbalists will balk at going that high.

HF: Yes, grams per day. I find aconite’s healing effects verified in these dosage ranges, particularly for people with stubborn insomnia and anxiety. This is a common problem in the modern world. If I had to name one symptom that is most prevalent among my patients, whether they state it overtly or not, it would be a state of general restlessness, often accompanied by anxiety and possibly insomnia. Modern life-styles are so different from those of ancient times, everything is always go-go-go—an eternal emphasis on drumming the yang qi out of the box, and very little on bringing it back into a state of storage and regeneration. Aconite

is the perfect remedy for this situation, more so than Suanzaoren Tang (Zizyphus Decoction) that is often used in TCM nowadays. I personally like Suanzaoren Tang and use it often myself, but I can say without reservations that the aconite-based approach gets much more to the heart of the matter, by addressing the constitutional level of the stress problem. Suanzaoren Tang can be combined with an aconite remedy such as Qianyang Dan, but by itself it would only be able to moderate the symptoms a bit.

BQ: In this type of situation you described, of the go-go-go state of mind with underlying anxiety and insomnia, many and probably most TCM herbalists would focus more on enriching the yin. You and your teachers, however, with this aconite-based approach have a focus on what you call bringing the yang back into the box. Can you clarify this a bit?

HF: It is only during sleep that we regenerate our yang qi. In our culture we are all encouraged from a young age on to push more yang to the surface, whether it is through using coffee or seeking extreme entertainment like roller coaster rides or watching three movies in a row. All of this brings about excitement but not peace, and human physiology needs periods of calm more than excitement. It is not just a matter of recharging an empty battery, but to prevent a vicious cycle of energy loss. It is the job of the Kidney yang to safeguard the yang qi, similar to how cinnamon in Guizhi Tang acts at the surface. It is the yang in the circulation of the *weiqi* at the surface that keeps the *ying* fluids in; as the *weiqi* gets weaker we start to sweat more, losing more fluid essence as a result. That is why the Shanghan lun emphasizes the symptom of sweating, albeit as a symbolic marker, as the key indication for Guizhi Tang. The same applies for processes that take place deeper and lower in the body. The weaker the Kidney yang, the more essence you will be leaking. This might be an “energetic leakage,” or it could be actual blood in the case of a woman, or sperm in the case of a man. The key is that we are burning *jing* on a daily basis with our activities. We speak of “burning the midnight oil” or

“burning the candle at both ends”; it is the essence we are burning in both cases when we use these English expressions.

BQ: So you use fuzi to guide the yang back into the box?

HF: Aconite is the strongest way to put that yang back into storage. It also is the best way to restore the battery’s ability to hold a charge, so that it is not constantly leaking again after you have restored it. Let’s look at a typical symptom: people are exhausted but they can’t go to sleep. What do they do? Some leave the television on, others do their emailing, and some have sex so that they can go to sleep. In all these three options there is a kind of restlessness. Aconite will diminish this kind of restlessness in the system. There are many uses of aconite, very much like there are many uses of chailu or huangqi, but if you pair it in a certain way with other key herbs a particular quality of the herb will be brought forth. In Fuzi Lizhong Tang (Regulate the Center Decoction With Aconite), for instance, aconite’s ability to stabilize the fire of the middle burner gets emphasized. In Qianyang Dan, though only slightly different in design, we find the combination of fuzi with sharen or baidoukou. In this combination, the descending properties of aconite are particularly underlined and come to the fore. That is why conditions that are traditionally viewed as deficiency states—night sweats, insomnia, hot flashes, anxiety—are primarily reflecting an insufficiency of the yang’s ability to store. This is what aconite excels at. Aconite’s ability to bring the yang back into storage and to maintain it there is strengthened by cardamon, either in the form of sharen or baidoukou. This cardamon-aconite combination is really at the core of Qianyang Dan.

BQ: Where did this formula originate?

HF: Qianyang Dan is a formula with very much a local character. It was first designed by Zheng Qin’an, the founder of the Fire Spirit School in the late 1800s. In his original remedy he also included

guiban and zhimu, two strong yin substances. His last student, Lu Zuzhi—this would have been in the 1890s (the tradition has primarily lived on since then in the Lu family)—developed an even stronger focus on supporting the yang and so dropped these two yin-nourishing substances. It is interesting to note that for the same reason the Lu family line even dropped baishao and dazao from Guizhi Tang. What has developed is a sort of modernized Qianyang Dan without the sticky and partially cooling yin substances guiban and zhimu. I have had very good clinical results using this modified form of the original Qianyang Dan.

BQ: Just to be clear on the ingredients you are using when you use this formula...

HF: It is basically Fuzi Lizhong Tang minus baizhu plus sharen or baidoukou. It seems like a minor adjustment, but it changes the direction of the remedy, so that it enters into the *shaoyin* rather than just into the *taiyin* layer.

BQ: I'm just curious. Is anyone still using the original Qianyang Dan of Zheng Qin'an with the zhimu and guiban included?

HF: There is a resurgence of interest in Europe in the Fire Spirit School through students of Tang Buqi (a student of Lu Zuzhi's son Lu Yongding) who practice in Switzerland. My colleague Gunter Neeb, who I think was the first Westerner to earn a doctoral level degree in the Chinese TCM college system, has written much in recent years about the Fire Spirit School. He uses Qianyang Dan with the zhimu and guiban still included. When I speak of this formula, I am always referring to the Lu family modification that drops these two yin substances.

BQ: Can you take a moment and place cardamon somewhere on the continuum of cinnamon and aconite? I am trying to understand how it warms and the direction of its action and so on.

HF: This use of sharen was new for me also when I encountered the Fire Spirit teachings. My earlier teachers were not typically using sharen. In TCM it is generally prescribed for people with Spleen qi deficiency and a tendency to dampness that results in either diarrhea or poor appetite, especially in children. We could look at Xiang Sha Liu Junzi Tang as an example of this type of use. It is also added to other tonic formulas as a sort of benign food-grade herb. This applies to both sharen and baidoukou. During the last century, one famous pharmacy in China would automatically include 3 grams of sharen with Liuwei Dihuang Wan (Rehmannia Six Pill) scripts, whether the herbalist prescribed it or not. In the Fire Spirit School, however, sharen, especially the favored and less expensive xi sharen (literally western amomum), similar to aconite but different from cinnamon and fresh ginger, draws the yang qi down and dries damp in the deepest levels of the body, down to the bone marrow.

BQ: To speak of a deep damp like this, “down to the bone marrow” is a new idea to me. Can you say a bit more?

HF: There are certain kinds of damp you can clear with Pingwei San (Harmonize the Stomach Powder), for instance. The tongue coat might be thick in a patient of this kind, which will automatically make you think of herbs like cangzhu and houpo, and you will most likely end up prescribing a variation of Pingwei San. You might use it in combination with a more constitutionally acting formula, but the job of the Pingwei San is to get rid of that damp that the tongue coating points to. But there are certain kinds of damp that are so chronic in the body—as in Epstein-Barr or Gu Syndrome or rheumatoid arthritis—these kinds of damp cannot be cured with cangzhu and houpo. For this deeper damp we need aconite, possibly combined with cardamon. You could think of it as driving out the damp by shining the sunlight on the deepest layer of the body. The *shaoyin* networks represent this deepest layer. In this very practice-oriented form of herbalism, the sharen is regarded as an herb that can dry damp at this deeper level; it also draws the body's

attention down and in. This is interesting, because I always wondered why these two herbs, sharen and baidoukou, are so important in Ayurvedic medicine and why they are used so pervasively in Indian cuisine. India is the land of constant summer. You sweat heavily all day long. In the terms of Chinese medicine, people are exposed to a constant state of *taiyang* in the climate sense. This means that the energy is continually drawn to the surface, leading the inside to be actually cold and deficient. That is why sharen is so important there; it draws the body's energy inside to prevent this kind of depletion. It also may be helpful in the prevention of parasites, another big issue in India. I now better understand the Indian use of sharen and baidoukou as another example of cultural wisdom.

BQ: I am assuming some people will read this interview and want to use their own granule pharmacies to investigate the use of Qianyang Dan with their patients. Are there any dosing guidelines you adhere to when you use this formula? You already mentioned the aconite dose running from 15 to 45 or so grams. Is there anything else to mention about the other herbs in this formula?

HF: I think the rule of thumb is a rough sort of 2:1 ratio of aconite to amomum/cardamon. I typically use 18 grams of fuzi and 9 grams of sharen. In China I have seen Fire Spirit School practitioners using 60 grams of fuzi and 45 grams of sharen. I don't think these high amounts are absolutely necessary, but it may give experienced practitioners an idea of what they can do if they wish to experiment with the dosage of Qianyang Dan.

BQ: How about the type of ginger you use in this formula?

HF: If I am using Fuzi Lizhong Tang or Qianyang Dan I will consider paojiang, ganjiang, or shengjiang, depending on what my specific intentions for the prescription are. Paojiang is a form of ginger that is astringent and inward bound rather than outwardly dispersing like shengjiang. Ganjiang is used if you want to warm internally more.

BQ: And the renshen? You typically seem to use substitutes. I don't think I have ever seen you prescribe renshen,

not even once.

HF: I never use renshen really, mostly for reasons of quality control with regards to pesticides and fungicides used in the cultivation of ginseng. Also, you may recall from the discussion of Gu syndrome that renshen is contraindicated for patients with chronic infectious issues. It is regarded as a substance that can strengthen the power of parasitic pathogens. I usually use dangshen or sanqi, and my favorite is wujiashen (aka ciwujia). If a more yin influence is needed, I use beishashen. Beishashen, in particular, is not only anti-parasitic, but also has a calming effect that is similar to baihe. If you are hesitating to use a formula like Qianyang Dan with its exclusive focus on the yang, then maybe you want to use the beishashen for balance. My avoidance of renshen, by the way, applies not just to Qianyang Dan, but also to any other formula that calls for ginseng.

BQ: Let's talk now about the two Classical Pearls formulas that are built around Qianyang Dan.

HF: In the Classical Pearls line there are presently five formulas with aconite, and two of these are based on the Qianyang Dan design. Both of these formulas are intended to draw the energy back down into the

***For this deeper damp we need aconite, possibly combined with cardamon. You could think of it as driving out the damp by shining the sunlight on the deepest layer of the body.***

battery, so to speak. There is Guanyin Pearls, a formula created for menopausal and post-menopausal women suffering from hot flashes, nightsweats, anxiety, heart palpitations, insomnia and other symptoms of floating yang. It is particularly beneficial for women in the later stages of menopause or post-menopause when there are still issues of restlessness, hot flashes and dryness. In the standard TCM manuals this condition is invariably described as a manifestation of yin deficiency, but based on the opinion of my Fire School teachers and my own clinical experience this symptom complex must primarily be understood as a weakening of the yang qi. The feeble yang qi is suddenly no longer able to hold on to the yang that is still there in the box, and so it rushes up and out to the surface and the upper body. Qianyang Dan will draw this escaping yang qi back down, making menopausal patients calmer and reducing the hot flashes. Guanyin Pearls also contains parts of the effective menopausal remedies Erxian Tang (Two Immortals Decoction) and Erzhi Wan (Two Solstice Pill). This provides the additional yang tonics of yinyanghuo and xianmao, but also zhimu, hanliancao and nüzhenzi to give some yin counterbalance.

BQ: And the second formula in your line that is based on Qianyang Dan?

HF: I have been working with the Classical Pearls line for over a year now and have been very happy overall with the alchemical integrity of the formulas we have brought to market, but I have to say my favorite so far has been the Peace Pearls. This is our second formula based on Qianyang Dan. Like many of my colleagues, prior to encountering the Fire School teachings I had been working with Suanzaoren Tang for people with anxiety and insomnia, and it took me by surprise how much better the Qianyang Dan approach works in these situations. I still include elements of Suanzaoren Tang and another experimental formula that goes in the same direction. The Peace Pearls get especially good feedback from our customers.

BQ: Heiner, I want to thank you for taking the time to

do this interview. I hope it will be of some use to those who read it.

HF: Thank you very much as well.

To learn more about the Classical Pearls Herbal Formula™ series, please visit [classicalpearls.org](http://classicalpearls.org).

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Original Qianyang Dan as published in  
Zheng Qin'an's *Yili zhenchuan* (Genuine  
Transmission of the Principles of Medicine):

Xi Sharen 30 (fried in ginger juice)  
Fuji 24  
Guiban 6  
Gancao 15

Qianyang Dan as prescribed in the Lu family  
tradition:

Fuji 18  
Paojiang 9  
Sharen 9  
(Renshen 9)  
Gancao 6

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