

Hu Xi-Shu's approach to painful obstruction

(痹证 *bi zheng*)



Translation and commentary by Eran Even

The famous *Shang Han Lun* expert Liu Du-Zhou regarded Dr Hu Xi-Shu (1899-1984) as a modern master at employing classical formulas for the treatment of a wide array of syndromes. Dr Hu used the eight principles as a method to explain and elucidate the six channels, creating a systematic, accessible and highly effective approach to the *Shang Han Lun*.

BASED ON ORIGINAL translations from Dr Hu's book *Shang Han Lun Tong Su Jiang Hua* (Popular Lectures on the Treatise of Cold Damage, 2008), this article extracts his most commonly used formulas and their specific patterns for the treatment of pain in obstruction syndrome. Case studies demonstrating the application of these formulae by both Dr Hu and the translator can be found at the end of the article. The original dosage indications are used; the reader will remember that one *qian* equals approximately three grams.

Common formulas & patterns

Ge Gen Jia Zhu Tang

(Kudzu plus Atractylodes Decoction, 葛根加术汤): Neck and nape tightness

and pain, heat effusion, aversion to cold, lumbar soreness, generalised heaviness, white tongue coating, and a wiry-slippery pulse.

<i>Ge Gen</i>	4 <i>qian</i>	Radix Puerariae
<i>Ma Huang</i>	3 <i>qian</i>	Ephedrae Herba
<i>Gui Zhi</i>	2 <i>qian</i>	Cinnamomi Ramulus
<i>Sheng Jiang</i>	3 <i>qian</i>	Zingiberis Rhizoma Recens
<i>Bai Shao</i>	2 <i>qian</i>	Paeonia Radix Alba
<i>Zhi Gan Cao</i>	2 <i>qian</i>	Glycyrrhizae Radix Preparata
<i>Da Zao</i>	4 pcs	Jujubae Fructus
<i>Cang Zhu</i>	5 <i>qian</i>	Atractylodis Rhizoma

This formula is used in both acute and chronic inflammatory joint problems, especially when manifesting with heat effusion, an absence of sweating and aversion to cold.

The use of this formula is still warranted in cases of acute joint inflammation without the presence of neck and nape pain. It may be used in treating cases of lumbar muscular injury, hyperosteo-genesis, ankylosing spondylitis, and chronic arthritis.

This formula is warranted in patients with either pre-existing dampness or a predisposition to damp obstruction who are attacked by wind-cold pathogens, manifesting with the above symptoms and signs.

Ma Xing Yi Gan Tang

(Ephedra, Apricot Kernel, Coicis and Licorice Decoction, 麻杏薏甘汤): Whole body joint pain, late afternoon feverishness, body heaviness or swelling of the joints in the four extremities, normal or slightly sticky taste in the mouth, greasy-white tongue coating, deep-wiry-slippery pulse.

Ma Huang	3 qian	Ephedrae Herba
Xing Ren	2 qian	Armeniacae Semen Amarum
Yi Yi Ren	6 qian	Coicis Semen
Zhi Gan Cao	2 qian	Glycyrrhizae Radix Preparata

This formula pattern is often seen in cases of chronic and acute rheumatoid arthritis with a tendency towards damp heat. The formula effuses sweat, relieves the exterior, dispels wind and transforms dampness, thus making it excellent for relieving wind-damp exterior patterns specifically manifesting with afternoon fevers, body aches and joint pain.

Gui Zhi Shao Yao Zhi Mu Tang

(Cinnamon Twig, Peony, and Anemarrhena Decoction, 桂枝芍药知母汤): Whole body joint pain, joint swelling in the extremities or knees, stiffness and/or deformities in the fingers or toes, dizziness, shortness of breath, white tongue coating, wiry pulse.

Gui Zhi	4 qian	Cinnamomi Ramulus
Ma Huang	2 qian	Ephedrae Herba
Bai Shao	3 qian	Paeonia Radix Alba
Sheng Jiang	5 qian	Zingiberis Rhizoma Recens
Bai Zhu	5 qian	Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma
Zhi Mu	4 qian	Anemarrhenae Rhizoma
Fang Feng	4 qian	Saposhnikoviae Radix
Pao Fu Zi	2 qian	Aconiti Carmichaeli Preparata Radix Lateralis
Gan Cao	2 qian	Glycyrrhizae Radix

This formula pattern is commonly seen in chronic rheumatic cases such as damp-heat type rheumatoid arthritis and is classified as a combination of the *shaoyin* and *taiyin* disease stages. This formula is especially indicated in cases of swelling with joint deformities accompanied by upward rising qi and nausea. In cases where redness,

swelling and heat are significant, *Sheng Shi Gao* (Gypsum Fibrosum, unprepared) may be added to the above formula.

■ A modified version of the above was an empirical formula used in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis by the late Dr Jiao Shu-De. In his popular book *10 Lectures on the Use of Formulas*, he says that:

When Zhang Zhong-Jing wrote “joint deformity with marked emaciation” in the source text, he meant the joints of the body are stiff, bent and deformed such that they do not move independently, and the body is so emaciated and weak that the patient cannot take care of personal needs and becomes disabled, succinctly describing what modern medicine diagnoses as rheumatoid arthritis.

Gui Zhi Jia Ling Zhu Fu Tang

(Cinnamon Twig plus Poria, Atractylodis, and Aconite Decoction, 桂枝加苓术附汤): Lumbar, knee or shoulder joint pain; head, neck and nape pain; possibly accompanied by palpitations, epigastric pain, sweating, aversion to wind, cold extremities, normal taste in the mouth, white tongue coating, wiry pulse.

Gui Zhi	2 qian	Cinnamomi Ramulus
Bai Shao	3 qian	Paeonia Radix
Zhi Gan Cao	3 qian	Glycyrrhizae Radix Preparata
Sheng Jiang	3 qian	Zingiberis Rhizoma Recens
Da Zao	4 pcs	Jujubae Fructus
Cang Zhu	3 qian	Atractylodis Rhizoma
Fu Ling	3 qian	Poria
Pao Fu Zi	3 qian	Aconiti Carmichaeli Preparata Radix Lateralis

This was one of Dr Hu's most commonly used formulas. If joint pain was more evident on one side of the body, he would consider this obstruction and stasis of blood and would add a small dose of *Da Huang* (Rhei Radix et Rhizoma) in order to quicken the blood and free the collaterals.

Gui Zhi Jia Huang Qi Tang

(Cinnamon Twig plus Astragali Decoction, 桂枝加黄芪汤): Enduring joint pain, obvious sweating and aversion to wind,

■ Hu Xi-Shu (1899-1984) was born in the city of Shenyang in Liaoning province. From 1958, Dr Hu was a professor at the Beijing College of Chinese Medicine teaching the *Shang Han Lun* and *Jin Gui Yao Lue* classes. Dr Hu was a famous scholar/physician known for his clear-cut approach to the use of classical formulas and was considered a master in the school of classical formulas (*jing fang*) by the famous *Shang Han* scholar-physician Liu Du-Zhou.

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■ To read more translations of Dr Hu Xi-Shu's work and that of other classical doctors, visit Eran's blog at: www.chinesemedicinecases.blogspot.com



Dr Hu commonly used the formulas *Chai Hu Gui Zhi Gan Jiang Tang* combined with *Dang Gui Shao Yao San* in the treatment of systemic lupus erythematosus.

cold extremities with perhaps a warm body, and/or numbness in the extremities. Thin-white tongue coating, moderate pulse.

Gui Zhi 3 *qian* Cinnamomi Ramulus
Bai Shao 3 *qian* Paeonia Radix
Sheng Jiang 3 *qian* Zingiberis Rhizoma
 Recens
Da Zao 4 pcs Jujubae Fructus
Zhi Gan Cao 2 *qian* Glycyrrhizae Radix
 Preparata
Huang Qi 3 *qian* Astragali Radix

This formula is used in cases of exterior vacuity combined with water-damp pathogens seen in cases of painful obstruction, numbness and sores.

Chai Hu Gui Zhi Gan Jiang Tang

combined with **Dang Gui Shao Yao San**

(Bupleurum, Cinnamon Twig and Ginger Decoction, plus Dang Gui and Peony Powder, 柴胡桂枝干姜汤合当归芍药散): Lumbar and/or pelvic pain, neck and back pain, weak knees, palpitations, fullness below the heart, spontaneous or night sweating, lower leg edema, white tongue coating, deep-thin-wiry pulse.

Chai Hu 4 *qian* Bupleuri Radix
Gui Zhi 3 *qian* Cinnamomi Ramulus
Gan Jiang 2 *qian* Zingiberis Rhizoma
Huang Qin 3 *qian* Scutellariae Radix
Tian Hua Fen 4 *qian* Trichosanthis Radix
Sheng Mu Li 5 *qian* Ostreae Concha
Dang Gui 3 *qian* Angelicae Sinensis Radix
Bai Shao 3 *qian* Paeonia Radix
Chuan Xiong 2 *qian* Chuanxiong Rhizoma
Bai Zhu 3 *qian* Atractylodis
 macrocephalae Rhizoma
Ze Xie 5 *qian* Alismatis Rhizoma
Fu Ling 4 *qian* Poria
Zhi Gan Cao 2 *qian* Glycyrrhizae Radix
 Preparata

This formula is commonly used in the treatment of lumbar and cervical hyperosteoarthritis, osteoporosis, ankylosing spondylitis and wind-damp type rheumatic disorders. The location of this disease is both the *jueyin* and *taiyin* levels and is a pattern of blood vacuity with damp exuberance, therefore treatment involves resolving the two yin levels, while nourishing the blood

and disinhibiting water. According to many recorded cases studies, Dr Hu commonly employed this formula in the treatment of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE).

Case studies

A 19-year-old male presented on February 15, 1966 complaining of left foot swelling and pain for more than five years. During the previous two years the pain had become quite severe. X-ray imaging confirmed osteogenesis of the heel.

Presenting symptoms were swelling and pain in the left foot, fear of cold, severe pain after walking, normal taste in the mouth, no desire to drink, a thin-white tongue coating and a deep-wiry pulse.

This is wind-dampness in the *shao yin* and *tai yin*, and is therefore a *Gui Zhi Shao Yao Zhi Mu Tang* (Cinnamon Twig, Peony and Anemarrhena Decoction) pattern.

Gui Zhi 4 *qian* Cinnamomi Ramulus
Ma Huang 2 *qian* Ephedrae Herba
Bai Shao 3 *qian* Paeonia Radix
Zhi Mu 4 *qian* Anemarrhenae Rhizoma
Sheng Jiang 4 *qian* Zingiberis Rhizoma
 Recens
Chuan Fu Zi 2 *qian* Aconiti Carmichaeli
 Preparata Radix Lateralis
Fang Feng 4 *qian* Saposhnikoviae Radix
Cang Zhu 4 *qian* Atractylodis Rhizoma
Zhi Gan Cao 2 *qian* Glycyrrhizae Radix
 Preparata)

After seven packages of the above formula, the foot pain had decreased. The patient still experienced pain after walking but would recover quickly after rest. *Chuan Fu Zi* (Aconiti Carmichaeli Preparata, Radix Lateralis) was increased to 3 *qian* and after taking the formula for another month the swelling and pain was resolved.

Translator's case study

A 48-year-old female presented on February 22, 2010 complaining of pain in her left shoulder extending down into the extensor aspects of her arm. She experienced occasional numbness in her whole hand but had a constant sense of "pins and needles" in the thumb and index

finger. X-ray imaging showed no signs of pathology.

The pain started suddenly about five weeks prior with no specific triggers. Sleep was interrupted due to pain. Her range of motion was normal with only slight restriction in right lateral bending of the neck and a slight decrease in abduction of her left arm. She was chilled easily, had a propensity to sweat, a thin white tongue coating and a slightly wiry quality to her pulse. Otherwise she was in excellent health.

Acupuncture was administered to several local and distal points along the *taiyang* and *shaoyang* channels, including muscular motor points (middle trapezius, lower trapezius, rhomboids major, subscapularis) to address some of the muscle imbalances and overall tight quality. She returned one week later with increased range of motion but no reduction in pain and with a constant sense of heaviness and soreness in the arm. The pain had not intensified but was clearly no better, so instead of acupuncture a herbal formula was administered.

The condition was diagnosed as damp-cold obstruction in the *taiyang* channel with mild stagnation of qi and blood. Since the weather in January was windy, cold and wet (typical for Pacific North-West winters) the diagnosis was fitting.

A modified version of *Ge Gen Tang* (Pueraria Decoction) was administered in concentrated granule form.

<i>Ge Gen</i>	15g Puerariae Radix
<i>Gui Zhi</i>	12g Cinnamomi Ramulus
<i>Bai Shao</i>	12g Paeonia Radix
<i>Dan Fu Pian</i>	8g Aconitum Carmichaeli Radix Preparata
<i>Rou Gui</i>	8g Cinnamomi Cortex
<i>Jiang Huang</i>	12g Curcumae Longae Rhizoma
<i>Sheng Jiang</i>	10g Zingiberis Recens Rhizoma
<i>Da Zao</i>	10g Jujubae Fructus
<i>Zhi Gan Cao</i>	8g Glycyrrhizae Radix Preparata

Roughly five grams of powder to be mixed in hot water, twice daily, and taken after meals. After one week on the above formula, her pain was markedly reduced and she was able to sleep through the night without discomfort. The numbness was still slightly present but reduced significantly.

Another two weeks of granules were given with the following dosages:

<i>Ge Gen</i>	20g Puerariae Radix
<i>Gui Zhi</i>	15g Cinnamomi Ramulus
<i>Bai Shao</i>	15g Paeonia Radix
<i>Dan Fu Pian</i>	12g Aconitum Carmichaeli Radix Preparata
<i>Rou Gui</i>	8g Cinnamomi Cortex
<i>Jiang Huang</i>	18g Curcumae Longae Rhizoma
<i>Sheng Jiang</i>	12g Zingiberis Recens Rhizoma
<i>Da Zao</i>	12g Jujubae Fructus
<i>Zhi Gan Cao</i>	10g Glycyrrhizae Radix Preparata

Two weeks later, the pain was almost non-existent. Slight tightness was felt after long days at work, which resolved quickly. The numbness subsided. In addition to the reduction of pain, the patient also stated she felt a “greater sense of wellbeing” on the herbs. She did not feel as cold, sleep had improved and her overall energy levels were great. Another two weeks of granules were given in order to consolidate the treatment.

Five months later, on a follow-up phone call, the patient reported that she had experienced no relapse of pain or any problems in her shoulders. The formula I used for this patient can be seen as either a modified version of *Ge Gen Tang* (Pueraria Decoction) or *Gui Zhi Jia Ge Gen Tang* (Cinnamon Twig Decoction plus Pueraria). Either way, the formula was designed to treat damp-cold obstruction in the *taiyang* level.

Since this patient sweated easily, I removed *Ma Huang* (Ephedrae Herba) and added *Dan Fu Pian* (Aconitum Carmichaeli Radix Preparata) to scatter cold, resolve dampness and stop pain. Since the pain manifested on only one side of the body, I followed Dr Hu's advice and added a herb to quicken the blood. Instead of adding *Da Huang* (Rhei Radix et Rhizoma) as he would have done, I added *Jiang Huang* (Curcumae Longae Rhizoma) which not only quickens the blood and stops pain, but also has a special affinity with the shoulder.

Practising Chinese medicine in the wet, cold Pacific North-West offers many opportunities to see patients with the above symptom patterns. When the above treatment principles are applied correctly, the results can be quite astounding.



Jiang Huang not only quickens the blood and stops pain, but also has a special affinity with the shoulder.

References

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