

Hu Xi-Shu's unique approach



# Formulas for wheezing and dyspnoea

## Translation & commentary by Eran Even

Dr Hu Xi-Shu's students often asked why, when treating wheezing, he didn't just use *Ma Huang* (Ephedrae Herba). He would reply that unless the case presenting was an actual *Ma Huang* pattern – ie. a *taiyang* pattern – its use was not warranted.

DR HU SAID that from the perspective of six-channel pattern differentiation, while many patients with wheezing and/or dyspnoea presented with *taiyang* patterns, many others come in with *shaoyang* patterns, *yangming* patterns, or even *shaoyang-yangming* or three yang combination disease.

Treatment must therefore be adjusted to match the pattern actually manifesting. In the latter case, for example, he would use the *Shang Han Lun* (Discussion of

Cold Damage) formula *Da Chai Hu Tang* (Major Bupleurum Decoction) with quite astonishing results. In order to diagnose a *shaoyang-yangming* case of wheezing and dyspnoea, he says, instead of focusing completely on the asthma-like symptoms, he also looked for symptoms such as chest fullness, rib-side pain, nausea, sweating, afternoon tidal fever, dry throat, dry bowel movements, and so on.

According to Dr Hu, patterns of excess are most commonly observed, and he felt most wheezing cases could be easily handled if one realised they fell into three main categories: a) phlegm and thin mucous; b) blood stasis; or c) phlegm and thin mucous combined with blood stasis. One uses these categories to guide one's thinking, while attending to the six-channel patterns.

This short article will look at these three main categories, and the formulas Hu Xi-Shu uses, together with their main indications.

### Phlegm and thin mucous as primary cause

A common presentation in wheezing and dyspnoea patterns is the contraction of an external pathogenic factor with simultaneous retention of phlegm and thin mucous. In patients who are constitutionally predisposed to phlegm and damp retention, usually the initial attack by an external factor will stir the interior phlegm, which rebels upwards into the Lung, bringing on the wheezing and dyspnoea. This pattern is mentioned in the *Shang Han Lun* (Discussion of Cold Damage):

*“In cold damage where the exterior is unresolved, (and) there is water qi below the heart...”*

In these cases, treatment generally involves effusion to resolve the exterior, with simultaneous warm transformation of fluids. The various manifestations of this condition can be treated with the following prescriptions:

#### Xiao Qing Long Tang

Minor Blue-Green Dragon Decoction  
小青龍湯

**Main signs:** Aversion to cold, generalised body pain, an absence of sweating, coughing with a need to rest and lean up against something, yet unable to lie down (this is normally due to the presence of copious phlegm), severe coughing with frothy phlegm. If this is accompanied by signs such as a dry throat, vexation and agitation, *Sheng Shi Gao* (Gypsum, raw) may be added.

<i>Ma Huang</i>	Ephedrae Herba
<i>Gui Zhi</i>	Cinnamomi Ramulus
<i>Gan Jiang</i>	Zingiberis Rhizoma
<i>Xi Xin</i>	Asari Herba
<i>Wu Wei Zi</i>	Schisandrae Fructus
<i>Bai Shao</i>	Paeoniae Radix alba
<i>Ban Xia</i>	Pinelliae Rhizoma
<i>Zhi Gan Cao</i>	Glycyrrhizae Radix preparata

#### She Gan Ma Huang Tang

Belamcanda and Ephedra Decoction  
射干麻黃湯

**Main signs:** Aversion to cold, generalised body pain, copious phlegm and the sound of phlegm in the back of the throat. If this

pattern is accompanied by signs such as a dry mouth, dry tongue, and heart vexation, *Sheng Shi Gao* (Gypsum, raw) may be added.

<i>She Gan</i>	Belamcandae Rhizoma
<i>Ma Huang</i>	Ephedrae Herba
<i>Zi Wan</i>	Asteris Radix
<i>Kuan Dong Hua</i>	Farfarae Flos
<i>Ban Xia</i>	Pinelliae Rhizoma
<i>Xi Xin</i>	Asari Herba
<i>Wu Wei Zi</i>	Schisandrae Fructus
<i>Sheng Jiang</i>	Zingiberis Rhizoma
<i>Da Zao</i>	Jujubae Fructus

#### Ge Gen he Xiao Xian Xiong Tang

Minor Sinking into the Chest Decoction with Pueraria  
葛根和小陷胸湯

**Main signs:** Stiffness in the upper back and neck, chest fullness, oppression or pain, heat effusion, aversion to cold and dyspnoea. If heart vexation is quite obvious, then *Sheng Shi Gao* (Gypsum, raw) may be added. Dr Hu notes that the dosage of *Gua Lou* (Trichosanthis Fructus) must be large; he commonly uses 30-45g.

<i>Ge Gen</i>	Puerariae Radix
<i>Ma Huang</i>	Ephedrae Herba
<i>Gui Zhi</i>	Cinnamomi Ramulus
<i>Shao Yao</i>	Paeoniae Radix alba
<i>Sheng Jiang</i>	Zingiberis Rhizoma
<i>Da Zao</i>	Jujubae Fructus
<i>Gan Cao</i>	Glycyrrhizae Radix
<i>Ban Xia</i>	Pinelliae Rhizoma
<i>Gua Lou</i>	Trichosanthis Fructus
<i>Huang Lian</i>	Coptidis Rhizoma

#### Ling Gan Wu Wei Jiang Xin Xia Xing Tang

Poria, Licorice, Schisandra, Ginger, Asarum, Pinellia and Apricot Seed Decoction  
苓甘五味姜辛夏杏湯

**Main signs:** Coughing, dyspnoea with chest fullness, spitting up of frothy phlegm and no abnormal tastes in the mouth.

<i>Fu Ling</i>	Poria
<i>Gan Cao</i>	Glycyrrhizae Radix
<i>Wu Wei Zi</i>	Schisandrae Fructus
<i>Gan Jiang</i>	Zingiberis Rhizoma
<i>Xi Xin</i>	Asari Herba
<i>Ban Xia</i>	Pinelliae Rhizoma
<i>Xing Ren</i>	Armeniaca Semen

■ 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 modern-day 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. 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*.

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**Ma Huang Fu Zi Xi Xin Tang**

Ephedra, Asarum and Prepared Aconite Decoction

麻黄附子细辛汤

**Main signs:** Aversion to cold, absence of sweating, perhaps an aversion to cold felt in the back, counterflow cold of the extremities, a fatigued spirit, and a deep-thin pulse.

<i>Ma Huang</i>	Ephedrae Herba
<i>Fu Zi</i>	Aconiti Radix
<i>Xi Xin</i>	Asari Herba

Blood stasis as the primary cause

Originally when blood stasis is lying dormant in the interior, any changes caused by external pathogenic activity, food stagnation or damage from excessive emotions will cause movement of the blood stasis which will invade the Liver and Lungs and cause wheezing and dyspnoea.

If this stasis is not eliminated then the wheezing and dyspnoea will endure and recovery would be difficult to achieve. Therefore, many cases of wheezing and dyspnoea that persist unchanging throughout winter or summer are often due to blood stasis.

The following two formulas can effectively treat these presentations.

**Da Chai Hu Tang he Gui Zhi Fu Ling Wan**

Major Bupleurum Decoction combined with Cinnamon Twig and Poria Pill

大柴胡汤和桂枝茯苓丸

**Main signs:** Chest and rib-side bitter fullness, difficulty breathing, hypertonic epigastrium, bitter taste in the mouth, dry throat, and dry stool.

<i>Chai Hu</i>	Bupleuri Radix
<i>Huang Qin</i>	Scutellariae Radix
<i>Zhi Shi</i>	Aurantii Fructus Immaturus
<i>Da Huang</i>	Rhei Radix et Rhizoma
<i>Bai Shao</i>	Paeoniae Radix alba
<i>Ban Xia</i>	Pinelliae Rhizoma
<i>Sheng Jiang</i>	Zingiberis Rhizoma
<i>Da Zao</i>	Jujubae Fructus
<i>Gui Zhi</i>	Cinnamomi Ramulus
<i>Fu Ling</i>	Poria
<i>Mu Dan Pi</i>	Moutan Cortex
<i>Tao Ren</i>	Persicae Semen

**Da Chai Hu Tang he****Tao He Cheng Qi Tang**

Major Bupleurum Decoction combined with Peach Pit Decoction to Order the Qi  
大柴胡汤和桃核承气汤

**Main signs:** Similar symptoms to the above, with the addition of abdominal distension and fullness, and difficult bowel movements.

<i>Chai Hu</i>	Bupleuri Radix
<i>Huang Qin</i>	Scutellariae Radix
<i>Zhi Shi</i>	Aurantii Fructus Immaturus
<i>Da Huang</i>	Rhei Radix et Rhizoma
<i>Bai Shao</i>	Paeoniae Radix alba
<i>Ban Xia</i>	Pinelliae Rhizoma
<i>Sheng Jiang</i>	Zingiberis Rhizoma
<i>Da Zao</i>	Jujubae Fructus
<i>Tao Ren</i>	Persicae Semen
<i>Gui Zhi</i>	Cinnamomi Ramulus
<i>Mang Xiao</i>	Mirabilitum
<i>Zhi Gan Cao</i>	Glycyrrhizae Radix prep.

**Modifications to the above formulas:**

With signs of dry mouth, throat or tongue, vexation, agitation and/or vexation thirst, add *Sheng Shi Gao* (Gypsum, raw).

With further signs of external pathogen with fever, chills and absence of sweating, combine with *Ge Gen Tang* (Pueraria Decoction).

With signs of sweating and significant wheezing, combine with *Ma Xing Shi Gan Tang* (Ephedra, Apricot Kernel, Gypsum, and Licorice Decoction).

Phlegm and thin mucous together with blood stasis as the primary cause

Situations with concurrent signs of an external pathogen, internal phlegm and thin mucous and blood stasis are commonly observed. For example, patients commonly present with *Xiao Qing Long Tang* pattern symptoms, as well as elements and signs of *Da Chai Hu Tang* and/or *Gui Zhi Fu Ling Wan* (for specific symptoms, see above). In a case like this, the two or even three formulas may be combined.

With difficult bowel movements one should change *Gui Zhi Fu Ling Wan* to *Tao He Cheng Qi Tang*.

If instead of *Xiao Qing Long Tang*, the pattern is one of *She Gan Ma Huang Tang*,



*Many cases of wheezing and dyspnoea due to cold, or summer-heat that fail to resolve usually contain elements of static blood.*



*The fact that the symptoms were mild in the daytime and more severe at night indicated that blood stasis was a major factor*

then this should be the main formula, and choose either *Da Chai Hu Tang* or *Gui Zhi Fu Ling Wan* according to the accompanying symptoms. One can even combine all three.

If there are signs of mouth or tongue dryness, or vexation and agitation are seen with the above formulas, then *Sheng Shi Gao* (Gypsum, Raw) may be added.

#### Case studies

**Case 1:** On April 29, 1964 a 36-year-old male teacher presented at the clinic. Three years prior, after eating some spicy green chillies, he developed a cough. Since then he has been taking Western medications to no avail. The wheezing persists all winter, an attack often brought on by the occasional cough or sneeze. He feels as if his digestion is not very good, and dry stool is a precursor to an impending attack. The attack itself involves dyspnoea with fullness and chest oppression where he needs to rest in order to catch his breath, and he is unable to lie down (due to difficulty breathing). This past spring he had visited several hospitals in Shenyang, and Harbin, and after seeing no positive results, he came to Beijing for treatment. In Beijing, he also visited several hospitals and had numerous procedures, including a surgical method involving the carotid artery, which again were ineffective. He saw several well-known Chinese medical physicians and took Lung diffusing, dyspnoea settling, Kidney supplementing prescriptions for over seven months, but his symptoms were still not improving. This caused him great suffering, and he had completely lost hope of recovery. His plan was to return to his hometown and wait for his eventual death. At this time he was introduced to Dr Hu and was willing to give it one last shot.

**Current signs and symptoms:** Dyspnoea with oppression, chest and abdominal distention and fullness, all worse at night. His wheezing and dyspnoea would act up every night, and he would often need to rest in order to catch his breath; he had difficulty lying down. He experienced copious sweating, a dry mouth, constipation, palpitations and vexation in his chest, poor sleep which was easily disturbed, a

thin white tongue coating, and a deep and moderate pulse.

He was prescribed *Da Chai Hu Tang he Gui Zhi Fu Ling Wan jia Sheng Shi Gao* (Major Bupleurum Decoction combined with Cinnamon Twig and Poria Pills with the addition of unprocessed Gypsum).

<i>Chai Hu</i>	4 qian	Bupleuri Radix
<i>Huang Qin</i>	3 qian	Scutellariae Radix
<i>Ban Xia</i>	3 qian	Pinelliae Rhizoma
<i>Sheng Jiang</i>	3 qian	Zingiberis Rhizoma
<i>Zhi Shi</i>	3 qian	Aurantii Fructus Immaturus
<i>Zhi Gan Cao</i>	2 qian	Glycyrrhizae Radix prep.
<i>Bai Shao</i>	3 qian	Paeoniae Radix alba
<i>Da Zao</i>	4 pieces	Jujubae Fructus
<i>Da Huang</i>	2 qian	Rhei Radix et Rhizoma
<i>Gui Zhi</i>	3 qian	Cinnamomi Ramulus
<i>Tao Ren</i>	3 qian	Persicae Semen
<i>Fu Ling</i>	3 qian	Poria
<i>Mu Dan Pi</i>	3 qian	Moutan Cortex
<i>Shi Gao</i>	1.5 liang	Gypsum fibrosum

**Follow up,** May 3, 1964: After taking two days worth of the above formula, his symptoms started to decrease, and after the third, his bowel movements were smoother, the wheezing and dyspnoea had stopped and his chest and rib-side fullness, abdominal distention, palpitations and vexation were not as obvious. He stopped taking sulphanilamide and continued with another three doses of the formula.

September 25, 1966: The patient had returned to the capital on a business trip and came into the clinic to report about his condition. He said that over the past two years, he had had several coughs with the common cold, but the wheezing and dyspnoea had never returned.

**Commentary:** This patient had suffered from bronchial asthma, and for over three years used Western medications and underwent surgery to no effect. The key here was to identify the pattern with precision. If one were to use supplementation for treatment, this would not be treating according to the pattern, and would therefore create an extended course with little to no resolution. The pivotal symptoms here were the chest and ribside fullness and oppression, palpitations and vexation in the chest, sweating, dry mouth,

and constipation, which signify a *shaoyang-yangming* combination disease pattern. The disease was not caused by an external pathogen, so effusion was not used, nor was phlegm and thin mucous a factor. The fact that the symptoms were mild in the daytime and more severe at night indicated that blood stasis was a major factor involved in the overall pathology. Therefore once the *shaoyang-yangming* pattern was relieved, and the blood stasis resolved, the results were rapid and certain. Xu Ling–Tai famously said “Use medicine like directing an army: if you have a strong pathogen, your attack cannot let up, you must use powerful herbs; and use more gentle herbs to harmonise.” Here the patient had strong blood stasis, so Dr Hu used the powerful *Da Huang*, *Zhi Shi* and *Tao Ren* together with the gentle herbs *Da Zao*, *Gan Cao*, *Fu Ling* and *Sheng Jiang* to harmonise. This enabled the blood stasis to be cleared without harming the normal qi. Dr Hu frequently used this formula effectively for asthma, and would point out to his doubting students that *Ma Huang* did not appear in it.

**Case 2:** On May 5, 1979, a 62-year-old female presented at the clinic with wheezing and dyspnoea for more than 10 years, following a case of pneumonia. Every fall and winter the symptoms would manifest, then subside during the spring and summer months. But since last winter the symptoms had continued unrelieved all through the year. Close to the end of last month, after catching a common cold, her wheezing and dyspnoea worsened.

**Current signs and symptoms:** Severe wheezing and dyspnoea, preventing her from being able to lie down in the evenings, the sound of phlegm rattling in her throat, coughing up copious amounts of white phlegm, aversion to cold, coldness in her upper back, no abnormal taste sensation in her mouth, loose stools occurring two to three times a day, a white, slightly greasy tongue coating, and a thin-wiry pulse. On pulmonary auscultation, a full resonant sound was noted, with rales being most obvious on the left side.

A modified version of *She Gan Ma Huang Tang* (Belamcanda and Ephedra Decoction) was prescribed.

<i>She Gan</i>	3 qian	Belamcandae Rhizoma
<i>Ma Huang</i>	3 qian	Ephedrae Herba
<i>Sang Bai Pi</i>	3 qian	Mori Cortex
<i>Sheng Jiang</i>	3 qian	Zingiberis Rhizoma
<i>Gui Zhi</i>	2 qian	Cinnamomi Ramulus
<i>Zhi Gan Cao</i>	2 qian	Glycyrrhizae Radix prep.
<i>Xi Xin</i>	3 qian	Asari Herba
<i>Wu Wei Zi</i>	3 qian	Schisandrae Fructus
<i>Kuan Dong Hua</i>	3 qian	Farfarae Flos
<i>Zi Wan</i>	3 qian	Asteris Radix
<i>Ban Xia</i>	3 qian	Pinelliae Rhizome
<i>Xing Ren</i>	3 qian	Armeniacae Semen Amarum

**Results:** After taking three packages of the above formula, the wheezing settled, but she was still coughing up copious amounts of phlegm. The left lung had an occasional dry rattle, but the rales were no longer evident. She continued on the same prescription.

On a follow-up consultation on July 17, she reported only slight chest fullness, and occasionally spitting up small amounts of white phlegm.

**Commentary:** This is a case of asthmatic bronchitis with wheezing and dyspnoea of long duration. However, at the time when the patient came in for diagnosis, exterior signs were still quite obvious. The main symptoms were phlegm rattling in the throat, coughing with expectoration of copious amounts of white phlegm, and aversion to cold with coldness in the back. This pattern was undoubtedly a case of exterior pathogens with internal phlegm-thin mucous. Therefore it was appropriate to effuse sweat, resolve the exterior, eliminate phlegm, and calm wheezing. Due to the sound of copious phlegm in the throat, Dr Hu gave a modified version of *She Gan Ma Huang Tang* with positive results.

#### Reference

Hu Xi-Shu, (2008), *Popular lectures on cold damage*, China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine: Beijing. (伤寒论通俗讲话, 胡希恕著, 北京: 中国中医药出版社, 2008. 10)



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Make sure your patient sees  
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