



Notes from

Vol. 005 | Nov 2003

Cinnabar Creek

Discussion of Huang Qin *Scutellaria baicalensis*

As is our custom in this publication, we will begin by discussing the origin of the issue's herb and then outline the historical evolution of its clinical applications, concluding with modern usage. Our goal is to provide a multidimensional view of the herb by presenting the views of various thinkers through the ages.

Formulae and Herbs

Huang Qin 黃芩

Huang Qin is the root of *Scutellaria baicalensis*.¹ Mature roots have yellow flesh that is fibrous (with holes in the flesh) and hollow in the center; they are termed Ku Qin or Pian Qin. The young root or newer growth on an older root has flesh that is green and firm and not hollow in the center; it is called Zi Qin or Tiao Qin.² Ku Qin, being light and hollow, is said to float to the upper body and clear lung heat. Zi Qin is firm and heavy and thus sinks to the lower body and drains heat from the lower burner. While many modern practitioners do not differentiate between the two kinds of Huang Qin, most classical literature (and some modern texts as well) record the different functions of these two forms of the herb.³ The Qing dynasty materia medica, *De Pei Ben Cao*, sums up the difference between the two forms of Huang Qin as follows: "Pian Qin drains lung, stomach, and upper burner fire, and Zi Qin drains large intestine and lower burner fire."

First discussed in the *Shen Nong Ben Cao*,⁴ Huang Qin is grouped in the intermediate category;⁵ this is a group of herbs that are considered assistant agents and can either directly treat diseases or supplement and boost. The *Shen Nong Ben Cao* says the following about Huang Qin:

“黃芩，味苦平。主諸熱，黃瘡，腸澼瀉痢，逐水，下血閉，惡瘡，疽蝕，火傷。”

Huang Qin, [its] sapor is bitter and balanced. [It] governs heat [patterns],⁶ jaundice, intestinal afflux, [and] dysentery. [It] expels water, precipitates blood block, [and treats] malign sores, deep-lying abscesses, erosion, and fire sores.

Zhang Zhong-Jing used Huang Qin in a large number of formulas. Of the herbs used in the *Shang Han Lun* and the *Jin Gui Yao Lue*, Huang Qin ranks fourteenth in frequency of use. This puts it ahead of agents such as Dang Gui (Tangkuei), Chai Hu (Bupleurum), and Ze Xie (Alisma). The functions of Zhang Zhong-Jing's Huang Qin-containing formulas can be classified into the following four categories:

1. Clear heat and drain glomus
2. Relieve diarrhea and vomiting by draining damp-heat
3. Clear heat and quiet the fetus
4. Open, clear and resolve exterior pathogens (also expressed as draining heat from the qi and blood aspects)

The approach of this article is to examine the uses of Huang Qin as they developed over time from the uses and functions listed in the *Shen Nong Ben Cao* and implied in the works of Zhang Zhong-Jing. Our method is to discuss each of the functions mentioned above and to explore how these root functions gave rise to branch uses. Lastly, we include a translation of a section of the Huang Qin entry in a modern herbology textbook from the People's Republic of China. It is hoped that this approach will give the reader a well-rounded view of the herb that goes beyond that offered by any single perspective.

“Huang Qin, [its] sapor is bitter and balanced ...”

Bitter herbs drain and downbear, thus this herb is said to downbear fire. Also, since bitter herbs dry damp, Huang Qin is used to treat damp disorders.

Note that though the *Shen Nong Ben Cao* deems Huang Qin’s qi to be balanced, this was amended in later dynasties, first to greatly cold (Tang) and then to simply cold (post-Tang). These changes were most likely a concession made to reflect the usage of the herb to treat heat disorders and bring the herb’s properties in line with the principle of “using cold to treat heat” as stated in the *Inner Classic*.

“[It] governs heat [patterns] ...”

Through the centuries the definition of Huang Qin’s function of governing heat was expanded by new uses as the treatment scope of Huang Qin grew. These new expressions of this herb’s ability to treat heat disorders can be sorted into four categories as follows:

1. Phlegm-heat, stomach heat, and strangury⁷

The *Xin Xiu Ben Cao*, a materia medica of the Tang dynasty, states that Huang Qin “treats phlegm-heat and heat in the stomach.” Gan Lu Yin (Sweet Combination) is an example of a formula that uses Huang Qin to clear stomach heat. The *Xin Xiu Ben Cao* also mentions this herb’s ability to disinhibit the small intestine and treat strangury disorders.

2. Lung heat, lung fire, and phlegm-heat in the lung

By the end of the Yuan dynasty (1368 A.D.), Li Dong-Yuan and others had credited Huang Qin with treating damp-heat in the lung, upper [burner] heat, and fire in the lung. This emphasis on using Huang Qin to treat lung-heat disorders was a very important expansion of this herb’s treatment scope, as neither Zhang Zhong-Jing nor the *Sheng Nong Ben Cao* directly suggests this use. From the Yuan dynasty on, Huang Qin is found in many formulas that treat phlegm-heat in the lung.⁸ By the Qing dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.) most formulas designed to treat heat or phlegm-heat in the lung included Huang Qin. Examples of Qing dynasty formulas that use Huang Qin in this manner are Qing Qi Hua Tan Wan (*Wan Bing Hui Chun*) and Xing Su Yin - pediatric version (*Yi Zong Jin Jian*).

3. Deep-lying heat, vacuity heat

Huang Qin’s use in treating deep-lying heat was first noted just prior to the Tang dynasty. The *Ming Yi Bie Lu* credits Huang Qin with “dispelling deep-lying heat.” Around the same time Sun Si-Miao used Huang Qin in San Wu Huang Qin Tang⁹ for treatment of “post-partum yin and blood damage that allows a wind pathogen to enter deeply into the body and transform into heat, which in turn manifests as heat vexation of the four limbs.” Later, possibly based on this usage, Huang Qin was employed to treat a variety of deep-lying pathogens. Because Huang Qin is bitter and drying, and deep-lying pathogens usually damage yin, when using it for this purpose it should be combined with agents such as Zhi Mu (Anemarrhena) and Sheng Di Huang (Rehmannia) to protect yin while clearing heat.

While this herb is primarily utilized to treat repletion heat, it also lends its heat-clearing capability to formulas that treat vacuity fire. Dang Gui Liu Huang Tang (Tangkuei & Six Yellow Combination) is an example of Huang Qin used in this way.

4. Cool the heart and dispel heat

The bitter sapor is associated with the fire phase and thus the heart. While we generally think of Huang Lian (Coptis) for treatment of heat in the heart, Huang Qin is also used for this purpose. For example, Li Dong-Yuan, in his formula to treat eye disorders (Zi Yin Di Huang Wan – Rehmannia, Bupleurum, & Scute Formula) included Huang Qin and not Huang Lian.

Its function of clearing the heart explains the use of Huang Qin in formulas that treat heart heat such as Huang Qin San (*Tai Ping Sheng Hui Fang*), which treats vexation heat in the heart and chest, headache, astringent eyes, and incessant vexation thirst. For heat disorders in which vexation, insomnia, mouth sores, red eyes, or dark urine are present one can consider Huang Qin as a means of addressing those symptoms. This is especially true if the root cause or main disorder is one that Huang Qin normally addresses such as heat in the lungs, shao yang patterns, strangury, liver-gallbladder heat, hot or toxic sores, damp-heat diarrhea, blood-heat bleeding (particularly uterine, rectal, or nasal), summerheat-damp, or heat trapped in the fleshy exterior.

In a more general sense, since the heart is a fire organ, Huang Qin's ability to clear heat in general, and in the blood in specific, is related to its five-phase connection, through its bitter sapor, with the heart.

"jaundice ..."

Zhu Dan-Xi stated in the *Dan Xi Xin Fa* that "There is no need to discriminate between the five jaundices, they all are damp-heat." Though this is generally considered an over-simplification of the nature of jaundice, it clearly points out the dominant role of damp-heat in this disorder. Huang Qin, being bitter and cold, is a natural choice to address jaundice. It generally plays the assistant role in formulas populated with herbs such as Chai Hu, Yin Chen Hao (Capillaris), and Da Huang (Rhubarb).

Though the use of Huang Qin to treat jaundice is mentioned in the *Shen Nong Ben Cao*, Zhang Zhong-Jing seems to prefer Shan Zhi Zi (Gardenia) to drain damp-heat from the liver-gallbladder in the treatment of that disorder. Sun Si-Miao, on the other hand, used Huang Qin in a great number of jaundice-abating formulas. An example is his Jia Wei Yin Chen Hao Tang, intended for the treatment of chronic jaundice.¹⁰

Zhu Dan-Xi also favored Huang Qin as a main herb in his jaundice formulas. This is especially true regarding jaundice that is strongly damp. An example is his formula Fu Ling Sheng Shi Tang.¹¹

Of interest is the explanation Ye Tian-Shi posits for the reason Huang Qin is effective at treating jaundice. The following quote is from the *Ben Cao Jing Jie*:

Jaundice is a pattern where damp-heat dominates the spleen. The spleen is associated with tai yin, damp, and earth. When earth [suffers from] damp-heat, its natural color [yellow] is revealed and jaundice ensues. Huang Qin is bitter and balanced and it clears the lung. The lung is also tai yin. When damp-heat abates from the tai yin, jaundice subsides.

It is not surprising that Huang Qin's ability to clear damp and heat from the liver and gallbladder led to its use in treating other liver-gallbladder damp-heat disorders. Formulas such as Long Dan Xie Gan Tang (Gentiana Combination) and

Chai Hu Qing Gan Tang (Bupleurum & Rehmannia Combination) employ Huang Qin in this way. Further, Zhang-Zhong-Jing's use of Huang Qin in shao yang disorder formulas such as Xiao Chai Hu Tang (Minor Bupleurum Combination) can be attributed to symptoms shared by jaundice disorders and the shao yang (gallbladder) channel, such as bitter taste, flank pain, and bitter fullness.

In modern times, Huang Qin is found in formulas that treat a variety of liver-gallbladder disorders such as hepatitis or inflammation of the bile duct, regardless of whether or not they present with jaundice. Very often, variations of Xiao Chai Hu Tang form the basis of treatment for these disorders.

"intestinal afflux and dysentery ..."

The use of Huang Qin to treat intestinal afflux and dysentery has remained constant through the centuries. It is often coupled with Huang Lian because the two herbs together are thought to provide a more complete approach to treating damp-heat. The reasoning behind this belief is expressed in the Ming dynasty herbal, *Ben Cao Jing Shu*:

Huang Lian can treat heat engendered by damp but cannot treat damp engendered by heat ... thus Huang Qin aids Huang Lian by treating damp engendered by heat.

Huang Qin's use in formulas that treat dysentery and diarrhea are best exemplified in two of Zhang Zhong-Jing's well-known formulas: Ge Gen Huang Qin Huang Lian Tang (Pueraria, Coptis, & Scute Combination) and Huang Qin Tang (Scute & Licorice Combination).

Ye Tian-Shi, in his text *Ben Cao Jing Jie*, calls on the interior-exterior relationship between the large intestine and lung to explain Huang Qin's function in treating diarrhea and dysentery:

The lung and the large intestine sit in interior-exterior [relationship]. When the large intestine [is encumbered by] damp-heat, there is intestinal afflux and dysentery. Huang Qin clears the lung. If the lung is clear, the water path is unhindered [free-flowing] and harmonious and damp-heat is precipitated and expelled. When damp-heat is not obstructing the water path, fluids can flow normally out of the body through urination, and the lung and large intestine recover their dry-metal qi. [Thus] afflux and dysentery are naturally resolved.

“[It] expels water ...”

Most scholars believe that the phrase “expels water” refers to Huang Qin’s function of draining damp, clearing heat and freeing the water path. The mechanism is not dissimilar from that described by Ye Tian-Shi as stated above in the discussion of intestinal afflux and dysentery.

Later practitioners have applied this function to the treatment of strangury (lin) disorders. As mentioned above, this practice began in the Tang dynasty when the *Xin Xiu Ben Cao* listed the function of disinhibiting the small intestine and treating strangury disorders. A good example is found in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368 A.D.) writings of Zhu Dan-Xi, where he suggests adding Huang Qin to Wu Lin San (from the He Ji Ju Fang) for the treatment of strangury. Of interest is that he chose Huang Qin instead of Huang Bai (Phellodendron), which is traditionally associated with treating the lower burner.

Another example is the *Sheng Ji Zong Lu*, which suggests Niu Xi Tang (Chuan Niu Xi, Huang Qin, and Dang Gui) for the treatment of inhibited urine and pain in the penis as well as female blood-bind abdominal pain (see “precipitates blood block” below).

The formula Qing Xin Lian Zi Yin, from the *He Ji Ju Fang*, addresses strangury that is owing to heart heat pouring into the small intestine. In this formula the role of Huang Qin is to both expel water and clear heart heat.

“precipitates blood block ...”

Blood block is equivalent to menstrual block (amenorrhea). When blood-construction heat gives rise to blood block, Huang Qin can be part of a formula to clear heat and cool blood. Usually it is combined with blood-moving agents such as Chi Shao (Red Peony) or Chuan Niu Xi (Cyathula). The *Ben Cao Shu Jing* says the following about Huang Qin’s ability to treat blood block:

Repletion heat in the blood aspect leads heat to enter the blood chamber [uterus]. This gives rise to menstrual block. [If] damp-heat is resolved, the construction (ying) qi is cleared and can move freely.

This function is related to bitter herbs’ facility for discharging stasis. This ability is also partly responsible for Huang Qin’s use in treating

glomus as discussed below in the section on Zhang Zhong-Jing’s heart-draining decoctions. Ye Tian-Shi explains this function of Huang Qin in the following quote from the *Ben Cao Jing Jie*:

Repletion-heat in the blood aspect leads to menstrual block. The heart governs blood. The bitter sapor [of Huang Qin] clears the heart and thus [the heart] can precipitate and discharge. Thus [Huang Qin] governs [blood block].

The implied capability of Huang Qin to enter the blood aspect and clear heat in the treatment of blood block may be what led later practitioners to consider using the herb for blood-heat bleeding disorders. Huang Qin’s use in the treatment of bleeding disorders was omitted or peripherally mentioned in the major materia medicae of the Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties. However, when Li Shi Zhen published the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in the Ming dynasty (1590 A.D.) he listed Huang Qin as useful for treating bloody strangury, blood in the stool, nosebleed, and vomiting of blood. Interestingly, the use of Huang Qin for this purpose can be seen in formulas beginning in the Tang dynasty, but the function was not comprehensively included in a materia medica until the Ming, about one thousand years later.

In the Yuan dynasty (1291 A.D.), Wang Hao-Gu recorded a formula called Huang Qin Liu He Tang that added Huang Qin and Bai Zhu to Si Wu Tang for the purpose of treating excessive menstrual flow (presumably owing to blood-vacuity blood-heat). Around the same time, Zhu Dan-Xi proposed a formula containing just Sheng Di Huang, Bai Zhu, and Huang Qin for spotting during pregnancy owing to blood vacuity with heat.¹² Further, in the *Dan Xi Xin Fa*, Zhu Dan-Xi suggests a decoction (unnamed) for blood-heat nosebleed that contains only Huang Qin, Bai Shao (White Peony), and Gan Cao (Licorice).

Several authors in the Song and Yuan dynasties cite Huang Qin as a single herb treatment for blood-heat flooding and spotting. The *Ben Shi Fang*, for example, addresses this disorder with a one qian (3g) dose of Huang Qin powder to be washed down with wine.

“[and treats] malign sores, deep-lying abscesses, erosion, and fire sores.”

Heat in the blood can accumulate at specific locations to produce toxic sores of various sorts.

Huang Qin can clear blood heat and discharge stasis and thus is appropriate for use in treating these types of dermal sores. It can be applied externally or internally for this purpose.

As an external application, Huang Qin can be ground with equal parts of Da Huang and mixed with an adjuvant such as sesame oil to treat damp-heat eczema. It is also an important ingredient in Jin Huang San (Golden Yellow Powder) a staple formula for external treatment of hot, red, swollen skin eruptions. Another example of an external use of Huang Qin comes from the *Yi Zong Jin Jian*. That text records a powder made from equal parts of the following herbs for the treatment of damp-heat mouth sores: Huang Qin, Huang Bai, Huang Lian, Shan Zhi Zi, Gan Jiang (Dried Ginger), and Xi Xin (Asarum).

Formulas like Huang Lian Jie Du Tang (Coptis & Scute Combination) and San Huang Xie Xin Tang (Coptis & Rhubarb Combination) illustrate Huang Qin's use in internal formulas for treating hot skin lesions. When treating these types of lesions, herbs such as Chi Shao, and Zao Jiao Ci (Gleditsia Spine) are often included to move blood and out-thrust pus.

Ye Tian-Shi says the following about Huang Qin's treatment of these types of toxic sores:

These are all owing to excess heart fire eroding the skin and hair [which are related to the] lung. [Huang Qin is] bitter and balanced and clears the heart and lung, therefore it governs painful and itching sores.

There is some disagreement among scholars in the field as to the meaning of the term fire sores. Some agree with Ye Tian-Shi, who posits that this is a burn of the skin, while others suggest that it refers to an eye disorder that resembles a serious sort of conjunctivitis. The latter seems to be how authors in older texts interpreted the symptom because one finds red, painful, and astringent eyes as an indication for Huang Qin in many earlier materia medicae.

Functions of Huang Qin implied by Zhang Zhong-Jing's usage

1. Clear heat and drain glomus

Huang Qin is in all of Zhang's heart-draining decoctions. These formulas (Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang,

Sheng Jiang Xie Xin Tang, etc.) treat glomus below the heart (epigastria) that results from heat bind (in some cases accompanied by cold). Thus, the Song dynasty herb manual *Yao Wei* says, "Huang Qin governs treatment of disorders below the heart ... if there is glomus below the heart, using Huang Qin will exact a cure."

This usage most likely contributed to Huang Qin's application in treating lung heat disorders, as mentioned above in the section on governing heat patterns.

2. Relieve diarrhea and vomiting by draining damp-heat

Interior heat disrupts the earth's ability to send the pure upward and precipitate the turbid. While diarrhea is mentioned in the *Shen Nong Ben Cao* as an indication for Huang Qin, there is no mention of the upper body symptoms of nausea and vomiting. Since Zhang mentions vomiting and nausea, in almost all these cases, along with the glomus just discussed, we can assume that heat bind is again the cause and that Huang Qin's role in these formulas is to clear and dissipate heat bind. In this case, Huang Qin's ability to dry damp also aids the recovery of the spleen, which can then resume its function of transporting and transforming. In this fashion, stagnation in the central burner is spontaneously resolved.

3. Clear heat and quiet the fetus

The application of Huang Qin to clear heat and quiet the fetus is thought to be based on its presence in Zhang Zhong-Jing's formula Dang Gui San (Tangkuei Formula). In the *Jin Gui Yao Lue* Zhang simply recommends the formula for all pregnant women, but later practitioners, most notably Zhu Dan-Xi, cite that formula and especially Huang Qin and Bai Zhu as particularly useful for quieting the fetus. An often-quoted statement from Zhu Dan-Xi is, "Bai Zhu and Huang Qin are miraculous herbs for quieting the fetus."

Many formulas for treating pregnant women were based on Dang Gui San. An example is An Tai Wan (literally, Fetus Calming Pills) from the *Wan Bing Hui Chun* (Qing dynasty). This formula is identical to Dang Gui San but in pill form. The accompanying instructions however, are more revealing than those in the *Jin Gui Yao Lue*. The pills are said to be useful for "thin women with heat

and scant blood who suffer from excessive fetal movement and a tendency to miscarry.”

Unfortunately, Zhu Dan-Xi’s statement that Huang Qin and Bai Zhu are useful for quieting the fetus is often taken out of context and used to justify the use of those herbs for this purpose in women of all constitutions.¹³ Study of Zhu Dan-Xi’s usage of this pair of herbs reveals, however, that he, like the author of the *Wan Bing Hui Chun*, uses Huang Qin and Bai Zhu for fetal disquietude, threatened miscarriage, and spotting during pregnancy only when these symptoms are owing to heat.

When using Huang Qin for this disorder, many practitioners char it to reduce the herb’s cold nature and increase its ability to staunch bleeding and secure the fetus. For blood-vacuity heat, Huang Qin and Bai Zhu can be combined with Sheng Di Huang. For damp-heat a small dose of Huang Lian is often included.

4. Open, clear, and resolve exterior pathogens (also expressed as draining heat from the qi and blood aspects)

The *Ben Jing Shu Zheng*, in a discussion about the use of Huang Qin in Zhang Zhong-Jing’s works states:

Chai Hu can open qi-aspect binds but is unable to drain qi-aspect heat. Shao Yao can open blood-aspect binds but is unable to drive out blood-heat ... Thus Huang Qin aids Chai Hu so it can clear qi-aspect heat and aids Shao Yao so that it can drain blood-heat ...

Both historically and in modern practice, Huang Qin and Chai Hu are paired to treat qi-aspect heat, especially heat bind in the chest. Chai Xian Tang (Bupleurum & Scute Combination) exemplifies this usage. Huang Qin’s use in the treatment of qi-aspect heat is exemplified by formulas as varied as Pu Ji Xiao Du Yin (Scute & Cimicifuga Combination), Xin Yi Qing Fei Yin (Magnolia & Gypsum Combination), and Gua Lou Zhi Shi Tang (Trichosanthes & Aurantium Combination).

Often Sang Bai Pi (Mulberry Bark) is coupled with Huang Qin to treat qi-aspect lung fire or phlegm-fire. The modern practitioner Gong Shi-Cheng in his book *Lin Zheng Yong Yao Jing Yan* (Clinically Verified Herb-Use Experience) points out

that qi-aspect heat patterns usually cause damage to lung yin. Thus, the sweet-moistening nature of Sang Bai Pi offsets the potentially drying and bitter nature of Huang Qin, allowing the pair to clear heat without causing further damage to lung yin. Ding Chuan Tang (Ephedra & Ginkgo Combination) from the *Zheng Zhi Zhun Sheng* is an example of a formula that uses Sang Bai Pi and Huang Qin this way, as is Xing Su San - pediatric version (Apricot Seed & Perilla Pediatric Formula) from the *Yi Zong Jin Jian*. Xing Ren (Apricot Seed) and Mai Men Dong (Ophiopogon) are other herbs that are frequently used to counteract Huang Qin’s drying nature in the treatment of lung-heat patterns.

A related role of Huang Qin is that of aiding the resolution of heat trapped in the fleshy exterior. In this case, it assists herbs like Ge Gen (Pueraria) and Chai Hu (Bupleurum), as in Chai Ge Jie Ji Tang (Bupleurum & Pueraria Combination). The Song-Yuan materia medica the *Ben Cao Huai Yan* comments on this role of Huang Qin as an assistant to Chai Hu. “Chai Hu is unsurpassed for clearing the flesh and abating fever, however, without Huang Qin it cannot cool the flesh and conduct [heat to the] exterior.”

In the Qing dynasty, Huang Qin was applied to the theories of warmth disease that were developing at the time. According to the *Wen Bing Tiao Bian*, Huang Qin, in the combination Huang Qin Hua Shi Tang (Scute & Talc Decoction),¹⁴ is applied to middle burner damp-warmth that appears as what we would now label the flu with body aches, intermittent fever that resolves with sweating only to reappear, absence of thirst or thirst with no desire to drink, and a glossy, yellow tongue fur. Jia Jian Qin Shao Tang¹⁵ is an example of a formula (also from the *Wen Bing Tiao Bian*) containing Huang Qin in the treatment of a damp-warmth pathogen affecting the large intestine with symptoms of diarrhea, and abdominal pain and distention.

Functions of Huang Qin that did not evolve from those mentioned in the *Shen Nong Ben Cao* or the works of Zhang Zhong-Jing

In early materia medicae there are several mentions of Huang Qin being used to treat pain of the eye socket. In this case, it is usually

combined with Bai Zhi (Angelica) and Chuan Xiong (Ligusticum).

For the treatment of deep-source nasal congestion and other nasal disorders Huang Qin is usually combined with Cang Er Zi (Xanthium), Xin Yi Hua (Magnolia Flower), Fang Feng (Siler), and Gan Cao. One modern author suggests adding Bai Zhi, Bo He (Mint), and Chi Shao (Red Peony).

In modern applications that have no known historical precedent Huang Qin is used

1. as a preventative to scarlet fever
2. as an enema for the treatment of chronic pelvic inflammatory disorders¹⁶
3. as an ingredient in toothpaste to reduce inflammation in the gums.

A Modern Presentation of the Functions and Uses of Huang Qin¹⁷

SAPOR AND QI: Bitter and cold.

Comment: It is generally agreed that Huang Qin is considerably less bitter and cold than Huang Bai or Huang Lian.

CHANNELS OF ENTRY: Lung, gallbladder, stomach, and large intestine.

Comment: The Ming dynasty materia medica *Ben Cao Gang Mu* assigns to Huang Qin entry into the channels of the hand shao yin and yang ming and the hand and foot tai yin and shao yang (heart, large intestine, small intestine, lung, spleen, and triple burner). In the Qing dynasty, when almost all materia medicae included channels of entry for each herb, the channels of the heart, lung, large intestine, gallbladder, and bladder were the most commonly mentioned. This reflects the main uses of the herb at that time for the treatment of fire disorders (heart), lung heat (lung), dysentery and diarrhea (large intestine), jaundice and shao yang disorders (gallbladder), and strangury disorders (bladder).

FUNCTIONS: Clear heat, dry damp, drain fire, resolve toxin, staunch bleeding, and quiet the fetus.

APPLICATIONS:

1. Used to treat all manner of damp-heat including damp-warmth, jaundice, diarrhea and dysentery, heat strangury, and toxic lesions.

2. Treatment of strong damp-heat fevers with vexation thirst, yellow tongue fur, and a rapid pulse.

Comment: This is a reference to qi-aspect repletion-heat (with damp).

3. Treatment of lung heat cough.

4. Used to treat effulgent internal heat that causes the blood to leave the vessels, as in vomiting of blood, coughing of blood, nosebleed, or spotting and flooding.

5. Used to treat fetal disquietude owing to fetal heat.

Summary

From its first recorded uses to the present time, Huang Qin has been a major herb for clearing heat and drying damp. These functions were put to a large range of new uses as the centuries passed. The major disorders to which Huang Qin was applied did not stray far from the jaundice, dysentery, toxic sores, and general heat patterns mentioned in the *Shen Nong Ben Cao*. Several therapies sprang from those uses, however, such as the application of this herb to treat lung-heat disorders, qi-aspect heat, shao yang channel disorders, and blood-heat bleeding disorders. Also, applications of Huang Qin appeared that were less directly related to previous uses such as its use with Bai Zhu in the treatment of heat-induced fetal disquietude and the use of Huang Qin in the treatment of strangury disorders.

Whereas modern texts tend to take past uses of an herb and categorize them into function-related groups, older books usually emphasize specific uses and imply functions from them. As a result, modern references sometimes miss some uses of an herb, and herbs of similar function can begin to look almost identical. In the case of Huang Qin, modern books fail to mention the herb's ability to treat eye socket pain and make no mention of its capacity to dispel deep-lying heat and vacuity-vexation heat. Application of this herb in the treatment of menstrual block, blood-bind abdominal pain, stomach heat, and heart fire is also missing from most modern texts. It is hoped that the chronology of use presented here gives the reader insight into Huang Qin's specific character and applications.

Footnotes

- ¹ The roots of *Scutellaria amoema* or *S. rehderiana* are also found occasionally in trade but *S. baicalensis* is by far the most common species employed as Huang Qin.
- ² The Chinese for the various types of Huang Qin is: Ku Qin (枯芩), Pian Qin (片芩), Zi Qin (子芩), Tiao Qin (條芩).
- ³ The following quote from the eminent practitioner Pu Fu-Zhou (1888–1975) slightly oversimplifies the functions of Huang Qin, but it clearly elucidates the generally agreed upon thinking about how the different forms of the herb home to the upper and lower body.
- “The treatment scope of Huang Qin does not extend beyond clearing fire from the three channels of the lung, large intestine, and gallbladder. Ku Qin moves to the lung and particularly clears lung fire. Zi Qin moves to the large intestines and particularly clears large intestine fire.”
- ⁴ Huang Qin is mentioned in the Ma Wang Tomb documents which predate the *Shen Nong Ben Cao*. Owing to the large number of indecipherable characters, however, no clear function or usage of Huang Qin can be derived from that text.
- ⁵ Intermediate (中). The superior category (上) is made up of medicinals that primarily boost and supplement, and the inferior category (下) consists of agents that serve as either assistant or courier and have a particularly strong or toxic nature.
- ⁶ Because of the nature of classical Chinese it is not clear if the text reads as “governs heat” or “governs heat jaundice.” While the former interpretation is supported by comments from Ye Tian-Shi (Qing dynasty, *Ben Cao Jing Jie*) and Miao Xi Yong (Ming dynasty, *Ben Cao Jing Shu*), there are several other texts, both ancient and modern, that leave the interpretation ambiguous.
- ⁷ Strangury (淋) refers to painful and inhibited urination.
- ⁸ While some texts also credit Huang Qin with the ability to downbear phlegm, Zhu Dan-Xi points out that this role is inseparable from Huang Qin’s fire-downbearing function. In other words, it is Huang Qin’s ability to clear heat and downbear fire that allows it to treat phlegm. If heat were not a factor in the phlegm collection, Huang Qin would be of no use. Zhu Dan-Xi states: “黃芩降痰，假其降火也”
- ⁹ This formula contains Huang Qin 6g, Ku Shen 6g, and Sheng Di Huang 12g.
- ¹⁰ This formula consists of Yin Chen Hao 12g; Shan Zhi Zi and Long Dan Cao each 6g; and Huang Qin, Chai Hu, Sheng Ma, and Da Huang each 9g.
- ¹¹ This formula contains Yin Chen Hao, Fu Ling, Ze Xie, Huang Lian, Huang Qin, Shan Zhi Zi, Fang Ji, Jie Geng, Cang Zhu, Chen Pi, and Qing Pi. Amounts are not given in the source text.
- ¹² Tai Luo Tang (胎漏湯) from the *Mai Yin Zheng Zhi*.
- ¹³ An example of this interpretation of Zhu Dan-Xi’s statement is the experience of Qing dynasty physician Chen Xiu Yuan, author of *Nü Ke Yao Zhi*, who used Huang Qin and Bai Zhu to treat his wife through five miscarriages. Finally, he changed his strategy and used Si Wu Tang along with herbs to supplement yang qi and secure the fetus, such as Du Zhong, Xu Duan, Bu Gu Zhi, and Lu Jiao Jiao. This approach proved successful.
- ¹⁴ Huang Qin Hua Shi Tang contains Huang Qin (Scute), Hua Shi (Talcum), Fu Ling (Poria), and Zhu Ling (Polyporus) each 9g; Da Fu Pi (Areca Huak) 6g; and Tong Cao (Tetrapanax) and Bai Dou Kou (Cardamon) each 3g.
- ¹⁵ Jia Jian Qin Shao Tang contains Huang Qin (Scute) 6g, Bai Shao (White Peony) 9g, Huang Lian (Coptis) 4.5g, Hou Po (Magnolia Bark) 6g, and Wei Mu Xiang (Saussurea – roasted - now we often use Vladimiria) and Chen Pi (Citrus Peel) each 6g.
- ¹⁶ This suggestion is from the *Zhe Jiang Journal of Chinese Medicine* #10, 1985. The other herbs in the formula are Huang Lian (Coptis), Huang Bai (Phellodendron), and Hu Zhang (Polygonum Cuspidatum).
- ¹⁷ This section is derived from 中藥學，上海科學技術出版社，1984.

EDITOR’S DESK

We value your feedback on our efforts. Please send questions, comments, and suggestions to:
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