

Tang Xudong's Clinical Cases of Sini Powder: A Selection

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Abstract: Sini Powder is a well-known formula commonly used by clinicians to harmonize the liver and spleen. Professor Tang Xudong, who studied under the renowned physician Dong Jianhua, attaches particular importance to Professor Dong's theory of "promoting qi flow and descending adverse qi". Professor Tang is especially fond of using Sini Powder, and has achieved remarkable therapeutic effects by modifying it and combining it with other formulas. He has also developed and innovated its applications. Hereby, I briefly present my teacher's experiences to share with colleagues in the field.

Keywords: Sini Powder; Bupleurum; Paeoniae Radix; Aurantii Fructus Immaturus; Tang Xudong

Sini Powder was first documented in Line 318 of Shang Han Lun: "For Shaoyin disease with cold limbs, if the patient exhibits thirst, or palpitations, or dysuria, or abdominal pain, or diarrhea with tenesmus, Sini Powder should be prescribed". Although the syndrome pattern of Sini Powder has long been subject to numerous controversies with no consensus reached, this has not hindered its widespread clinical application in the slightest. The formulation of Sini Powder, with its profound and intricate composition, demonstrates remarkable therapeutic efficacy when applied clinically through pattern differentiation, modification, and combination with other formulas. This article aims to introduce and analyze Professor Tang's proven cases [1], with the hope of enhancing the understanding and clinical application of this formula. Any omissions or inadequacies are sincerely open to correction and discussion by fellow practitioners.

1. Introduction to Proven Cases of Sini Powder by Master Tang

Patient X, female, aged 45, first consultation on June 7, 2012.

Medical History: Gastroscopy performed two years prior indicated Chronic Superficial Gastritis (CSG). The patient has experienced recurrent episodes of epigastric pain for over two months.

Presenting Symptoms:

- Bowel movements once every 1–2 days, with dry stool and difficult defecation.
- Easily feels hungry with a good appetite, yet experiences early satiety and abdominal distension immediately after eating.
- Sensation of food stagnation and epigastric fullness, particularly pronounced after dinner.
- Belching, but no acid regurgitation [2].
- Poor sleep with frequent dreaming.
- Occasional palpitations. No nocturnal discomfort reported.
- General fatigue and lassitude.
- Absence of menstruation for six months.

Tongue and Pulse:

- Tongue: Pale-red with a slightly dark hue, coated with a thin, slightly greasy coating.
- Pulse: Thready and slippery.

Prescription by Master Tang:

Herbal Medicine	Dose/g
Chái Hú (Bupleuri Radix)	10
Bái Sháo (Paeoniae Radix Alba)	15
Dāng Guī (Angelicae Sinensis Radix)	12
Zhǐ Qiào (Aurantii Fructus)	15
Shēng Huáng Qí (Astragali Radix Cruda)	20
Chuān Lián Huáng (Coptidis Rhizoma)	6
Wú Zhū Yú (Evodiae Fructus)	2
Wū Zéi Gǔ (Sepiae Endoconcha)	30
Guā Lóu Pí (Trichosanthis Pericarpium)	12
Qīng Bàn Xià (Pinelliae Rhizoma Praeparatum)	9
Ròu Cōng Róng (Cistanches Herba)	12
Zhēn Zhū Mǔ (Margaritifera Concha)	30
Pú Gōng Yīng (Taraxaci Herba)	20
Yuán Hú Suǒ (Corydalis Rhizoma)	12
Shā Rén (Amomi Fructus)	8
Shēng Gān Cǎo (Glycyrrhizae Radix Cruda)	6

Second Visit: All symptoms have diminished, but the patient feels soreness and pain in the limbs with mild coughing. Slight shortness of breath was noted after taking the previous medication. Bowel movements are essentially once daily. The tongue coating has become thinner, and the pulse is fine and slippery.

Prescription by Dr. Tang: Remove Zhenzhumu (Mother-of-Pearl) from the previous formula, add Fuxiaomai (Light Wheat) 30g and Chanyi (Cicada Moulting) 9g, and change Huangqi (Astragalus) to a combination of raw and honey-fried versions, 12g each.

Third Visit: Bowel movements occur once daily but remain pellet-like (sheep dung). No heartburn. Dry mouth with a pale red tongue and thin coating.

Prescription by Dr. Tang:

Herbal Medicine	Dose/g
Chái Hú (Bupleurum)	10
Bái Sháo (White Peony)	15
Dāng Guī (Chinese Angelica)	12
Zhǐ Shí (Immature Bitter Orange)	12
Zhǐ Qiào (Aurantii Fructus)	12
Shēng Huáng Qí (Raw Astragalus)	30
Sāng Shèn (Mulberry Fruit)	30
Qīng Bàn Xià (Pinellia Tuber)	9
Guā Lóu (Trichosanthes Fruit)	15
Huáng Lián (Coptis)	6
Wǎ Lèng Zǐ (Ark Shell)	30
Shú Dì Huang (Prepared Rehmannia)	15
Shēng Dì Huáng (Raw Rehmannia)	15
Huǒ Má Rén (Hemp Seeds)	20
Hòu Pò (Magnolia Bark)	12
Shā Rén (Amomum Fruit)	6
Zhì Gān Cǎo (Honey-fried Licorice)	6
Chǎo Shén Qū (Fried Medicated Leaven)	15

The patient took the medication for one month and subsequently recovered.

2. Pattern Analysis of Sini Powder Syndrome

2.1. Perspectives from Various Schools

The “Four Counterflow Cold Limbs” in the Sini Powder Pattern: An Analysis of Four Major Viewpoints. The term “counterflow coldness of the limbs” refers to a condition where the hands and feet become cold. There are roughly four main scholarly perspectives regarding the nature of this condition:

2.1.1. Cold Counterflow due to Yang Qi Deficiency and Cold

Proponents of this view, such as Shu Chiyuan and Qian Tianlai, note that the text first mentions “Shaoyin disease”, which should include the characteristic signs of Shaoyin disease: “fine pulse and lethargy”. Here, the Yang Qi of the Shaoyin channel is declining and deficient. The inability of the ministerial fire to generate Earth leads to a failure in warming Spleen Yang. This can manifest as abdominal pain and diarrhea with tenesmus. Since the Spleen governs the limbs, the decline of both Spleen and Kidney Yang results in Yang Qi being unable to distribute to the limbs, thus causing cold limbs.

2.1.2. Heat Counterflow due to Pathogenic Heat Transmitting to the Yin

In this scenario, a Cold pathogen from cold damage transforms into heat as it transmits through the three Yang channels, gradually penetrating into the Shaoyin channel. The constrained pathogenic heat internally harasses, which can also manifest as abdominal pain and diarrhea with tenesmus. The discordance between the channel and fu-organ Qi means the heat, constrained internally, cannot reach the exterior, thus presenting with cold extremities. As stated in the Annotated Treatise on Cold Damage, “Sini Powder is used to dissipate the heat that has transmitted to the Yin”. Scholars like Fang Youzhi, Zhang Nan, and Wang Zijie subscribed to this theory.

2.1.3. Stagnation Counterflow due to Stagnated Earth Qi and Constrained Stomach Qi

The Stomach is considered the sea of the five zang and six fu organs, as well as the twelve channels. If the Earth Qi of the Stomach becomes stagnant and impeded, Qi and blood will become congested and chaotic, unable to properly reach and warm the extremities, leading to cold limbs. Scholars like Zhang Zhicong and Huang Yuanyu advocated this perspective.

2.1.4. Qi Counterflow due to Constrained Yang Qi Failing to Disperse and Reach the Limbs

The limbs are the foundation of all Yang Qi and constantly require its warmth. The Yang Qi of the human body is valued for its free flow and uninterrupted movement. If it encounters even slight obstruction, or if the Yin pivot of the Shaoyin fails properly, Yang Qi cannot spread to warm the limbs, resulting in counterflow coldness. As Wu Qian succinctly stated, “If there is only counterflow coldness of the limbs without signs of cold or heat, then there is no cold to warm and no heat to drain. The only suitable treatment is to unblock and smooth the Yang Qi, which is why Sini Powder is prescribed”. This is the viewpoint endorsed by the majority of physicians, both ancient and modern.

2.2. *The Author's View*

The author contends that the Sini Powder pattern is, in fact, a manifestation of Shaoyin disease and should have been classified within the Shaoyin chapter of the Treatise on Cold Damage. It was not included there merely for the purpose of differentiation from the “counterflow coldness” of the Sini Decoction pattern, as Zhang Zhongjing sought to do. The “counterflow coldness” in the Sini Powder pattern arises from constraint and stagnation within the Shaoyin channel, which is fundamentally distinct from the “counterflow coldness” and resultant cold limbs seen in the Sini Decoction pattern, the latter being caused by the extreme decline and near exhaustion of Yang Qi. Given this vast difference, there is little necessity for a direct comparison between the two.

So, what then is the true etiology and pathogenesis of the Sini Powder pattern? Zhang Zhongjing himself explicitly states in the original preface to the Treatise on Cold Damage that he “composed [this work] by consulting the Basic Questions and the Nine Volumes... and by combining pulse examination with pattern differentiation”. Therefore, any analysis of the Sini Powder pattern must be sought and grounded in the theoretical framework of the Basic Questions and the Nine Volumes.

As stated in Basic Questions: On Prohibitions in Acupuncture, “The liver’s qi ascends on the left, the lung’s qi descends on the right, the heart’s qi disseminates to the exterior, the kidney’s qi governs the interior, the spleen acts as the envoy, and the stomach is the marketplace”. The human body is fundamentally rooted in the five zang-organs. The qi of the Liver-Wood ascends on the left, the qi of the Lung-Metal descends on the right, the qi of the Heart-Fire spreads to the exterior, and the qi of the Kidney-Water consolidates the interior. The Spleen ascends and the Stomach descends, with the central earth serving as the pivotal axis, rotating the central qi.

However, the qi dynamics of the zang-fu organs do not function in isolation; they must coordinate and cooperate. Among them, the heart, pertaining to fire, is the “Greater Yang within Yang”, while the kidneys, pertaining to water, are the “Greater Yin within Yin”. The heart fire descends to the kidneys, transforming into the true yang within the kidneys, thus preventing the kidney water from becoming cold. The kidney water ascends to nourish the heart, transforming into the yin-blood within the heart, thus preventing the heart fire from becoming hyperactive.

Furthermore, heart fire generates spleen earth, and kidney water generates liver wood. The spleen earth, being the “supreme yin within yin”, governs ascent, while the liver wood, being the “lesser yang within yin”, also governs ascent. The motive force and pathway for kidney water to ascend and nourish the heart fire lie precisely in the liver wood and spleen earth. As noted in *Random Notes While Reading Medicine*, “The spleen is the conduit through which ascent and descent occur; the liver is the root from which ascent and descent initiate”. The liver and spleen work together to ascend the frigid water of the kidneys up to the heart monarch. Correspondingly, the lung and stomach work together to descend the yang fire of the heart down to the kidney water. Through this coordinated cooperation, the interaction between the heart and kidneys is accomplished, leading to the harmonious communion of yin and yang.

The Sini Powder (Four Counterflow) pattern arises precisely when liver qi fails to ascend and the spleen pathway becomes obstructed. Consequently, kidney water cannot ascend to nourish the heart fire and transform into yin-blood. This leads to insufficiency of heart yin, where the substance (ti) fails to support its function (yong), preventing yang from reaching the extremities. Hence, the chief manifestation is counterflow coldness of the limbs. Since the disease affects the harmonious flow of the heart and kidney qi within the Shaoyin channel, the original text of the *Treatise on Cold Damage* categorizes it under “Shaoyin disease”. It is, therefore, indisputably a Shaoyin disorder and its placement in the Shaoyin chapter is justified.

As for the accompanying symptoms mentioned in the treatise—“there may be coughing, or palpitations, or difficult urination, or abdominal pain, or diarrhea with tenesmus”—these are all caused by the failure of liver qi to generate and ascend, the stagnation of the spleen earth pathway, and the resulting rebellion and disorder of qi dynamics. Clinically, disorders arising from the failure of the liver and spleen to regulate and facilitate are extremely common. Zhang Zhongjing listed these five possible symptoms here merely to illustrate the broad applicability of the formula.

Although the disease involves the heart and kidneys, clinical manifestations where the heart and kidneys themselves are the primary focus of the pathology are relatively rare. This is because the heart and kidneys are fundamentally normal; the malfunction lies in the pathway of communication between them. Therefore, the disorders most frequently observed are those caused by the liver and spleen.

2.3. Constitutional Type for the Sini Powder Pattern

The Constitution of the Sini Powder Pattern, the concept of “Formula-Pattern Constitution” was proposed by Professor Huang Huang from Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine [3]. The Sini Powder constitution refers to a specific bodily type in which the clinical manifestations indicative of the Sini Powder pattern frequently occur. Based on the author’s observations, the primary characteristics of this constitutional type can be preliminarily summarized as follows:

2.3.1. Physical Appearance:

- Build is medium or leans towards thin.
- Facial complexion is primarily bluish (qing), which may present as slightly darkish, yellowish, or pale, often lacking lustre.
- The skin tends to be relatively dry and feels firm or tight to the touch.

2.3.2. Personality & Temperament:

- The individual typically has an introverted personality.
- They often exhibit a pessimistic and negative outlook, prone to excessive overthinking and worry.
- Emotional fluctuations are significant.
- They are very detail-oriented and highly sensitive to minor physical abnormalities, often tending to interpret them in a negative light.

2.3.3. Common Symptoms:

- Frequent abdominal distension or pain, often localized in the chest/rib-sides or the lower abdomen.
- Extremely cold hands and feet in winter, with high sensitivity to temperature changes.
- A sensation of stuffiness, fullness, or oppression in the chest and rib-sides, which may be tender upon palpation.
- Stiffness, soreness, or a constricted feeling in the shoulders and neck.
- For women, the menstrual cycle is often irregular. Pre-menstrually, there is commonly chest tightness, breast distension, irritability, and dysmenorrhea. Menstrual blood is often dark and may contain clots.

The manifestations listed above can serve as a reference for pattern differentiation and the application of Sini Powder in clinical practice.

2.4. Tongue and Pulse Findings in the Sini Powder Pattern

The most commonly encountered pulse in the Sini Powder pattern is the wiry (xian) pulse. A wiry pulse is a sign of constraint, stagnation, and impeded flow. The causes of this constraint are numerous: it may be due to the congealing of phlegm-dampness or fluid retention, manifesting as a wiry and slippery pulse; or it may stem from stasis and stagnation of static blood, presenting as a wiry and choppy or wiry and fine pulse; alternatively, it may be caused by constrained fire lying latent, evidenced by a wiry and rapid, wiry and hard, or deep wiry pulse with a restless, agitated quality.

These pulse manifestations are invariably most pronounced when palpated with medium-level pressure (zhong qu) at the guan positions of both wrists. However, regardless of the specific pulse type, its strength upon deep-level pressure (chen qu) is generally not excessively weak.

As for the tongue body, it is often described as firm, rough, and dry. Its color may be somewhat dark or even slightly purplish. The tongue coating is typically thin—either thin and white or thin and yellow—and is mostly characterized by a lack of moisture or a slight stickiness.

3. Analysis of the Sini Powder Formula Composition

Despite containing only four herbs, Sini Powder (Frigid Extremities Powder) is renowned for its exquisite composition and remarkable herb pairing. Its formula is structured around four fundamental “herb pairs/core combinations”:

- ① Chai Hu (Bupleurum) and Gan Cao (Licorice)
- ② Shao Yao (Peony) and Gan Cao (Licorice)
- ③ Zhi Shi (Immature Bitter Orange) and Shao Yao (Peony)
- ④ Chai Hu (Bupleurum), Zhi Shi (Immature Bitter Orange), and Shao Yao (Peony)

The ingenious integration of these core combinations forms the foundation for the potent and multifaceted action of Sini Powder.

3.1. Chai Hu (Bupleurum) and Gan Cao (Licorice)

The combination of Chai Hu (Bupleurum) and Gan Cao (Licorice) forms the essential core of the classic formula Xiaochaihu Tang (Minor Bupleurum Decoction). As Zou Shu noted in Ben Jing Shu Zheng (An Evidential Commentary on the Divine Farmer’s Materia Medica), “Among the seven herbs in Xiaochaihu Tang, five can be modified or omitted. Only Chai Hu and Gan Cao are irreplaceable, as the tasks of pacifying the interior and repelling the exterior cannot be neglected”. This pair constitutes the most crucial combination within Sini Powder.

The herb Chai Hu, with its bitter flavor and neutral nature, embodies the qi of Shaoyang. It enters the Liver channel and acts with a direct, targeted effect. By following the Liver’s innate Spring-like tendency to ascend and disperse, it:

- Releases Pathogenic Qi: Effortlessly dissipates pathogenic factors.
- Raises Clear Yang: Lifts and disseminates clear, uplifting qi.
- Rectifies Liver Qi Descent: Specifically lifts and rectifies depressed or sunken Liver Qi, guiding it to ascend from the left side and carry the clear yang to flow along the Yang pathways.

Furthermore, as it also embodies the Earth qi of Taiyin, it enters the Spleen and Stomach systems. Here, it:

- Disperses Binding Qi: Resolves bound or stagnant qi in the intestines and stomach.
- Promotes Qi and Blood: Facilitates the smooth movement of qi and blood.
- Unblocks Stagnation: Clears obstructions and stagnation.

In summary, Chai Hu soothes the Liver-Wood, disperses pathogenic stagnation, elevates clear yang, unblocks the Spleen and Stomach, and promotes the expulsion of the old to usher in the new.

3.2. *Shao Yao (Peony) and Gan Cao (Licorice)*

The combination of Shao Yao (Peony) and Gan Cao (Licorice) generates Yin from sour and sweet flavors, thereby promoting the production of fluids and blood. This pairing lubricates and facilitates the downward drainage and breaking of stagnation, thus unblocking and promoting the free flow of pathways.

Shao Yao, with its sour and bitter taste and neutral nature, is a magnificent and flourishing flower that captures the vibrant essence of Spring. It has the ability to consolidate and regulate Liver Qi, making it a supreme herb for nourishing the Liver. Entering the blood level of the Liver-Wood system, it “constructs the body fluids and protects the nutrient-blood, gathers the liver qi and drains pathogenic heat” (Ben Jing Feng Yuan). When fluids, blood, and Yin Qi are properly consolidated and nourished, stagnation has nothing to cling to and linger. Furthermore, by utilizing its bitter quality and downward-draining function, it attacks and redirects floating and dispersed accumulations of stagnation.

When combined with Gan Cao, which supplements and nourishes Qi and Blood, the Liver-blood is effectively nourished. Consequently, the Liver’s innate functions of generation, ascent, and smooth flow (free diffusion) can fully express themselves.

Shao Yao also “enters the Spleen and breaks up Qi stagnation within the Blood” (Ben Cao Si Bian Lu). Once these Yin knots within the Spleen are broken, the Liver and Spleen become free and unobstructed. Yang Qi can then spread normally, and Yin and Yang are harmonized.

3.3. *Zhi Shi (Immature Bitter Orange) and Shao Yao (Peony)*

The inclusion of the Zhi Shi (Immature Bitter Orange) and Shao Yao (Peony) combination within Sini Powder is primarily intended to harness their ability to break up accumulations of phlegm, qi, and blood.

Zhi Shi, with its bitter and cold nature, is characterized by its potent and rapid action. It possesses the property of “dredging, clearing, breaking up, and dissipating, with the meaning of breaking bound [stagnation] and solid [masses]” (Ben Cao Yan Yi Bu Yi). Its round shape and aromatic fragrance align it with the Spleen and Stomach, making it a key herb for unblocking the stomach’s network vessels.

Ben Jing Feng Yuan summarizes its functions as: “It enters the blood aspect of the Liver and Spleen, disperses food retention, drains phlegm, lubricates the orifices, and breaks up qi stagnation”.

When paired with Shao Yao, which, as previously discussed, enriches the Liver’s fluids and consolidates the Liver’s qi, the combination is further empowered to open and reach the Yin knots in the Liver and Spleen. Together, these two herbs synergistically eliminate phlegm nodules and blood stasis, and promote the free flow of qi dynamics.

3.4. *Chai Hu (Bupleurum), Zhi Shi (Immature Bitter Orange), and Shao Yao (Peony)*

The combination of Zhi Shi (Immature Bitter Orange) and Chai Hu (Bupleurum) in the formula utilizes the acrid (of Chai Hu) and bitter (of Zhi Shi) properties to raise the clear (Yang) and lower the turbid (Yin). This restores the free flow of the Liver and Spleen, thereby establishing a dynamic balance between Yin and Yang.

- The Ascending Action (Chai Hu): Guides the clear Qi upward to the upper burner—the Heart, Lungs, and head.
- The Descending Action (Zhi Shi): Directs the turbid downward to the large and small intestines, freeing the fu-organs, resolving stagnation, and breaking up accumulations.

This dynamic is further enhanced by Shao Yao (Peony), which assists both the ascending and descending actions, smoothing their flow. Crucially, it also protects the body’s righteous Qi from potential damage or consumption by the strong moving herbs.

Their coordinated actions can be analyzed across different physiological dimensions:

- In the Realm of Qi:
 - Zhi Shi: Breaks up stagnation and directs Qi downward.
 - Chai Hu: Disperses and facilitates the upward movement of Qi.
 - Shao Yao: Consolidates and gathers Qi that has lost its proper place.
- In the Realm of Blood:
 - Chai Hu: Regulates Qi to promote Blood movement.

- Zhi Shi: Opens blockages and breaks up congealed stasis.
- Shao Yao: Regulates the Nutritive (Ying) level, harmonizes the Blood, and facilitates the downward expulsion of blood nodules.
- In the Exterior-Interior Relationship:
 - Chai Hu: Spreads and facilitates outward movement.
 - Zhi Shi: Disperses and facilitates inward and downward movement.
 - Shao Yao: Dredges and unblocks the channels and network vessels.
- In the Yin-Yang Dynamic:
 - Chai Hu and Gan Cao (Licorice): Activate and move in the sphere of Yang.
 - Zhi Shi and Shao Yao: Activate and move in the sphere of Yin.

Yang governs ascent, and Yin governs descent. When ascending and descending are harmoniously coordinated, the Qi dynamic encounters no obstruction, and free circulation is achieved throughout all the bones and joints of the body.

4. Clinical Case Examples of Modified Sini Powder Formulations

Sini Powder (Frigid Extremities Powder) boasts an extremely broad range of clinical applications. However, regardless of the disease it is used to treat, the underlying pathogenesis invariably involves an aspect of impaired diffusion of the Liver and obstructed transportation of the Spleen. Therefore, in clinical practice, it is often combined with other formulas tailored to the specific cause of the Liver-Spleen constraint. When the pattern identification is accurate, the results are often rapid and remarkably effective, like the immediate sound of a drumstick striking a drum.

The following sections present several of Dr. Tang's frequently used formula combinations in his clinical practice, offered here as a preliminary guide to inspire further discussion and refinement.

4.1. *Sini Powder Combined with Wuling Powder*

Wuling Powder was first documented in the *Treatise on Cold Damage and Miscellaneous Diseases*: “In cases of wind-stroke with fever that persists for six or seven days without resolution, accompanied by irritability, both exterior and interior patterns, thirst with a desire to drink, but vomiting upon intake of water—this is called ‘water counterflow’—Wuling Powder is indicated”.

This formula, created by the Han Dynasty physician Zhang Zhongjing, has the effects of disinhibiting water and percolating dampness, warming yang and transforming qi. It is composed of five herbs: Zhuling (Polyporus), Zexie (Alismatis Rhizoma), Baizhu (Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma), Guizhi (Cinnamomi Ramulus), and Fuling (Poria). Its principal indication is the water retention pattern due to impaired qi transformation of the bladder.

Within the formula:

- Zexie (Alismatis Rhizoma) serves as the sovereign (monarch) herb. Its sweet and cold nature is employed to disinhibit water and percolate dampness.
- Fuling (Poria) and Zhuling (Polyporus) act as minister herbs. Their bland nature facilitates percolation and disinhibition of dampness, assisting the sovereign herb in promoting urination.
- Guizhi (Cinnamomi Ramulus) serves as an assistant herb. Its acrid and warm nature warms yang to transform qi, releases the exterior to dissipate pathogens, and levels counterflow to direct qi downward.
- Baizhu (Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma) also serves as an assistant herb. Its bitter and warm nature fortifies the spleen to aid transportation and transform dampness. Combined with Fuling, it strengthens the spleen to control water and transport fluids for distribution throughout the body.

The combined use of Sini Powder with Wuling Powder is primarily indicated for patterns where water qi pervades the Sanjiao (Triple Burner) and internally encroaches upon the Liver and Spleen, leading to dysfunction of these two systems. The Liver Qi governs and regulates the Sanjiao, as stated in *Random Notes While Reading Medicine*: “When the Liver is harmonized, the qi transformation of the Sanjiao proceeds normally”. Furthermore, the *Basic Questions: The Canon of the Spiritual Pivot* states: “The Sanjiao is the official in charge of drainage, and it is from it that the waterways emerge”. The Sanjiao facilitates the passage of water fluids, a process propelled by the movement of Liver Qi.

Within the body, the Spleen, being the damp earth of Taiyin, is responsible for transforming and transporting water-dampness. If the Liver and Spleen become constrained—if the Liver fails in its ascending and diffusing functions—then the Sanjiao lacks the qi dynamic to move fluids, and the Spleen's transformative and transporting power is compromised. Unchecked, water-dampness will inevitably lead to the pervasive overflow of water qi

throughout the Sanjiao, flooding the system, encroaching upon the Liver and Spleen, and stagnating to cause pathology.

Wuling Powder, through the coordinated action of its five herbs, harmonizes the Liver and Spleen and restores the function of the Sanjiao, providing a holistic regulation of the body's water metabolism. When combined with Sini Powder, the latter aids in moving, dispersing, and transforming qi, as well as ascending and descending the qi of the pivotal systems. This combined action guides the water qi back to its normal pathways. Consequently, the water qi that has encroached upon the Liver and Spleen is dispersed, the constraint is unblocked, the water qi is properly distributed, the qi dynamic flows freely, and the body returns to a state of peaceful health.

4.2. *Sini Powder Combined with Taohong Siwu Decoction*

Taohong Siwu Decoction (Peony and Carthamus Four Substances Decoction) was first recorded in the Golden Mirror of Medicine: "If there is heavy menstruation with clots, purple color, and thick, sticky consistency, this indicates the presence of static blood internally. Use Siwu Decoction with added Taoren (Peach Kernel) and Honghua (Carthamus) to break it. This is named Taohong Siwu Decoction".

It primarily treats menstrual periods that arrive early, with heavy flow, thick consistency, or the presence of blood clots, accompanied by abdominal pain and distension, all due to blood stasis.

In terms of composition, Taohong Siwu Decoction is based on the famous Siwu Decoction with the addition of Taoren (Peach Kernel) and Honghua (Carthamus). The entire formula skillfully pairs moving and stabilizing herbs, combining tonification with regulation. It tonifies blood without stagnating it, and moves blood without damaging it.

Due to its advantages in alleviating symptoms, reducing recurrence rates, simple composition, low cost, safety, and good tolerability, it is not only a commonly used formula in gynecology but is also widely applied in internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, and other clinical departments.

The combination of Sini Powder and Taohong Siwu Decoction, with the further addition of Jiegeng (Platycodon) and Niuxi (Achyranthes), constitutes Xuefu Zhuyu Decoction (Drive Out Stasis in the Mansion of Blood Decoction). This combined approach is primarily used for patterns where binding depression of both qi and blood leads to disharmony of the Liver and Spleen.

The Liver stores blood, and the Spleen engenders blood and governs the blood. The nature of Liver Qi is to be free-flowing and regulated. If Liver Qi fails in its diffusing and discharging functions, blood fails to follow Qi along its pathways. It may extravasate from the vessels, congeal, and form stasis. The Spleen is the root of the acquired constitution and is responsible for receiving nutrients and transforming them into red blood. If Spleen Earth fails in its transportation function, new blood cannot be generated and nourish the body, causing blood movement to become difficult, sluggish, and stagnant, eventually leading to congelation and stasis.

Once static blood is formed, it obstructs the pathways of the Liver and Spleen, readily giving rise to numerous diseases. As the Basic Questions: The Great Treatise on Yin and Yang Corresponding Manifestations states: "For repletion in the blood, it is suitable to open and free it".

The formula employs Taohong Siwu Decoction to activate blood, disperse stasis, move qi, and unblock the channels. It is paired with Sini Powder to diffuse and unblock the qi dynamic. This approach embeds qi-moving within blood-activating, allowing the actions of moving qi and activating blood to complement and enhance each other in dispersing stasis and bind. This restores harmony and free flow to the Liver and Spleen, thereby preventing the occurrence of numerous diseases [4].

4.3. *Sini Powder Combined with Erchen Decoction*

Erchen Decoction first appeared in the Taiping Huimin Hejijufang (Formulas from the Imperial Pharmacy) of the Song Dynasty. It is composed of six herbs: Banxia (Pinellia), Fuling (Poria), Chenpi (Citrus Peel), Gancao (Licorice), Shengjiang (Fresh Ginger), and Wumei (Dark Plum). Its functions are to dry dampness, transform phlegm, regulate qi, and harmonize the middle. It is a fundamental formula in clinical practice for treating patterns of spleen deficiency with phlegm-dampness.

The combination of Sini Powder with Erchen Decoction is primarily used for patterns where phlegm and qi bind in stagnation, leading to disharmony between the Liver and Spleen.

The Spleen Earth governs transportation and transformation. If the Spleen fails in its healthy functioning, the nutrients from food and drink cannot be properly transported and distributed. These congeal to form dampness, which accumulates to form phlegm. Phlegm-dampness is slippery and prone to movement; it follows the ascent and descent of qi and can reach anywhere in the body. Once it obstructs the pathways of the Liver and Spleen, the

Liver-Wood and Spleen-Earth become constrained and stagnant, leading to rebellion and disorder of the qi dynamic.

Therefore, this combined formula uses Sini Powder to soothe the Liver-Wood and unblock the Spleen-Earth, paired with Erchen Decoction to dry congealed dampness and dissolve accumulated phlegm. Together, they clear the obstructions of phlegm-dampness and restore the free flow of the body's qi dynamic.

As the Zheng Zhi Zhun Sheng (Standards for Diagnosis and Treatment) also states: "Those skilled in treating phlegm do not treat the phlegm itself, but treat the qi. When the qi is smooth, all the fluids of the body will follow the qi and become smooth".

Sini Powder regulates stagnation and treats the qi, while Erchen Decoction smoothes the qi and treats the phlegm. By addressing both phlegm and qi simultaneously, the bind is unblocked, and the Liver and Spleen are harmonized.

5. Summary

In Chinese medicine, the Yang Qi of the human body is valued for its free and ceaseless flow. Should it encounter even slight obstruction, or if the Yin pivot of the Shaoyin fails to move properly, it cannot spread smoothly to warm the limbs, thus resulting in counterflow coldness (Jue Ni). As Wu Qian aptly stated in his analysis: "Here, there is only counterflow coldness of the four limbs, without any signs of cold or heat. This means there is no cold to warm and no heat to drain. The only suitable treatment is to unblock and smooth the Yang Qi, which is why Sini Powder is prescribed".

In Chinese medicine clinical practice, the diagnosis and treatment of chronic gastritis can focus on the Spleen and Stomach, but also importantly on the Liver. Both Professor Dong's "Theory of Unblocking and Descending" and Dr. Tang's "Modified Sini Powder" approach recognize that the pathogenesis involves an aspect of impaired Liver dispersal, obstructed Spleen transportation, and constrained Yang Qi.

In clinical practice, symptoms like hunger and a burning discomfort sensation in the stomach are signs of heat constraint transforming into fire. This fire pathogen, lying latent internally, readily damages both fluids and Qi. While fire's consumption of fluids is self-evident, its depletion of Qi aligns with the concept that "a vigorous fire consumes Qi".

As fluids are scorched, they easily condense into phlegm. As righteous Qi is impaired, the movement of the Qi dynamic becomes sluggish. Consequently, the Spleen pathway becomes obstructed and Liver Qi fails to ascend.

Tracing this to its root, the core issue is fire and heat being constrained and causing disruption. Therefore, a modified Shengjiang San (Upbearing and Downbearing Powder) can be used to dissipate and discharge this fire-heat from the Sanjiao. As Yang Lishan stated: "Jiangcan (Silkworm) and Chantui (Cicada Moulting) upbear the clear Yang within the Yang. Jianghuang (Turmeric) and Dahuang (Rhubarb) downbear the turbid Yin within the Yin. One ascends, one descends, creating free flow and harmony between the interior and exterior, whereby the flowing toxicity of miscellaneous qi is promptly eliminated".

Dr. Tang added Chanyi (Cicada Moulting) to the formula to strengthen its ability to regulate the ascending and descending movements and to diffuse and discharge pathogenic heat from both the exterior and interior. Through this approach, the constrained heat is dissipated, preventing the formation of phlegm and the consumption of Qi.

In this specific patient, the constrained heat had damaged fluids and injured Yin. Therefore, herbs like Sangshen (Mulberry Fruit), Gualou (Trichosanthes Fruit), Shengdi (Raw Rehmannia), Houpo (Magnolia Bark), and Huomaren (Hemp Seeds) were added to enhance the "power to move the boat"—that is, to increase fluid volume, facilitate the movement of dry stool, and allow the Qi of the Spleen and Stomach to recover naturally.

In Chinese medicine, the Spleen's function is optimized through free flow, the Stomach achieves harmony through descent, and the Liver maintains smooth function through diffusion. Thus, in the strategy of promoting free flow and descent, diffusion (soothing the Liver) takes priority.

Clinically, the "Counterflow Coldness" (Si Ni) in the extremities is resolved by diffusing the counterflow, achieving harmony through descent, and ensuring smoothness through free flow. When this principle is applied clinically, it is remarkably effective. This "counterflow" fundamentally involves a rebellion of Qi and stagnation of Blood. The use of Chai Hu (Bupleurum) in the formula serves to follow the Liver's nature, regulate Liver Qi, and soften the Liver's activity.

As stated in Du Yi Sui Bi (Random Notes While Reading Medicine): "The Spleen is the conduit through which ascent and descent occur; the Liver is the root from which ascent and descent initiate" [5].

The text distinguishes between "ascent-descent" and "exit-entry". Ascent and descent refer to the pathways of mutual rotation between the internal qi mechanisms within the body. Exit and entry refer to the pathways of exchange between the body's internal qi and the external qi.

- “Internal Qi” here refers to the “body’s qi”—that is, the qi dynamic of the entire body, along with the various forms of qi transformation and functional manifestations produced during its circulation.
- “External Qi” refers to the air, the clear qi of the natural environment.

This clarifies that the exchange and movement of the zang-fu organs’ qi mechanisms internally is what is termed “ascent and descent”. The Liver and Spleen work together to ascend the frigid water of the Kidneys to the Heart monarch. Correspondingly, the Lung and Stomach work together to descend the yang fire of the Heart to the Kidney water. Through this coordinated cooperation, the interaction between the Heart and Kidneys is accomplished, leading to the harmonious communion of Yin and Yang.

The Sini Powder (Frigid Extremities Powder) pattern arises precisely when Liver Qi fails to ascend and the Spleen pathway becomes obstructed. Consequently, Kidney water cannot ascend to nourish the Heart fire and transform into Yin-blood. This leads to insufficiency of Heart Yin, where the substance (ti) fails to support its function (yong), preventing Yang from reaching the extremities, which manifests as the characteristic cold limbs.

Sini Powder is indeed a time-honored, excellent formula in clinical practice for harmonizing the Liver and Spleen and dispersing stagnant Qi. Therefore, Dr. Tang frequently employs Sini Powder and its modified variations in the treatment of conditions like gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and chronic gastritis [6]. He skillfully adapts and combines the formula flexibly according to the specific pattern presentation. Having had the privilege of observing his practice, I feel I have gained a deeper understanding of this formula’s indications, pattern, and the intention behind its creation. I gladly share this with my colleagues in the field.

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