Tang-kuei & Tribulus Combination

Danggui Yinzi is a formula that was designed to alleviate skin itching. The prescription is rarely mentioned in Chinese sources, but is widely appreciated by Japanese and Taiwanese practitioners. It is commonly presented in most countries in the form of dried extracts. The original form was a drink (yinzi).

The theoretical basis for this itchy skin condition in the Chinese medicine system is wind. Specifically, the problem arises because the blood is deficient and this allows wind to thrive in the unfilled meridians, the dried tissues, and spaces between the muscles. The wind can come from the exterior and it can be generated internally by the liver that is deficient in blood. We might interpret the ancient concept of external wind—as it applies to this case—in terms of skin irritants, such as allergenic substances that contact the skin or things eaten that produce a skin reaction. The concept of internal wind might correspond to generation of “stress hormones” that can contribute to inflammation, as occurs, for example, with neurogenic dermatitis (neurodermatitis). Blood deficiency might be interpreted here as corresponding to a lack of control over the generation of immune complexes involved in allergy or autoimmunity and substances that are related to stress reactions. Blood, which is a moist, yin substance, is attributed a controlling, calming action in the traditional Chinese system.

The type of skin itching addressed by Danggui Yinzi, with blood deficiency and dryness, differs somewhat from that attributed to damp-heat syndrome, which corresponds to some cases of chronic eczema, such as those with “weeping sores.” In that case, blood deficiency may also be present, but the dryness of blood is overwhelmed by the accumulation of dampness in the skin from other pathological factors (see the appendix).

The traditional concept that wind plays an important role in skin diseases is frequently manifested in the Chinese name for the diseases. Following is a list of some skin diseases that include the term wind (feng) in their name, as listed in the text Practical Traditional Chinese Dermatology (1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Term</th>
<th>Medical Designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baibo Feng</td>
<td>Vitiligo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fengre Chuang</td>
<td>Pityriasis rosea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baioxie Feng</td>
<td>Seborrhea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaoyao Feng</td>
<td>Contact dermatitis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chibai Youfeng</td>
<td>Angioneurotic edema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mianyou Feng</td>
<td>Seborrhagic dermatitis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chun Feng</td>
<td>Exfoliative cheilitis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shennang Feng</td>
<td>Scrotal eczema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezhang Feng</td>
<td>Tinea manuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siwan Feng</td>
<td>Atopic dermatitis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feifeng Fenci</td>
<td>Acne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tufeng Chuang</td>
<td>Sand dermatitis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng Peileiu</td>
<td>Urticaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You Feng</td>
<td>Alopecia areata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng Saoyang</td>
<td>Pruritis cutis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zi Dianfeng</td>
<td>Lichen planus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng Xuan</td>
<td>Tinea corporis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zibai Dianfeng</td>
<td>Tinea versicolor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feng Zhen</td>
<td>German measles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of these skin disorders are characterized by itching, especially the various types of dermatitis, eczema, tinea, seborrhea, urticaria (fengtuan), and, of course, pruritis (a term for itching and burning sensation). Other skin disorders may not have the character for feng in their Chinese name, but are still considered to have wind as one of the etiologic factors. In addition to itching, wind disorders of the skin often involve production of scales.
THE HISTORY AND BASIS OF THE FORMULA

Danggui Yinzi is based on therapies recorded by Zhu Danxi. The foundation of Danggui Yinzi is Siwu Tang (Tang-kuei Four Combination), a formula that Zhu favored for treating many ailments. Siwu Tang consists of tang-kuei, peony, cnidium, and rehmannia. Depending on the application, the formula may be made with red peony or white peony, and with either raw rehmannia or cooked rehmannia or a combination of the two. For Danggui Yinzi, white peony and raw rehmannia are traditionally used.

In the book of Danxi’s teachings, Danxi Zhifa Xin-yao (2), the chapter that covers formulas similar to Danggui Yinzi is the one devoted to laifeng. The concept of laifeng was popularized during the time of the Tang and Song Dynasties. It is a damaging wind that arises in the spring time, the season traditionally associated with wind and its pathogenic effects.

A poem titled the Dawn of Spring (by Meng Haoran; ca. 689–740 A.D.) mentions laifeng, in the context of hard wind and rain making the flowers fall:

In my spring slumber I felt not the dawn,
till I heard birds singing all around.
There was the clamor of wind and rain in the night.
How many petals lie strewn on the ground?

Laifeng is mentioned in another poem as the wind at dusk, also having a negative impact on spring flowers, as follows (by Li Yü, 937–978 A.D.)

The red of the spring orchard has faded.
Far too soon!
The blame is often laid
on the chilling rain at dawn
and the wind at dusk.
The rouged tears
That intoxicate and hold in thrall—
When will they fall again?
As a river drifts toward the east
So painful life passes to its bitter end.

This wind adversely affects the skin and, in the field of medicine, the term laifeng (or, simply, lai) is often translated as “skin diseases” generally, or specifically referring to leprosy or scabies. The character for lai is different than that used in the poems, but the pronunciation is the same and its origins similar.

There is little discussion of the subject of laifeng in Zhu's book, other than the recommendations for treatment. In the laifeng chapter, itching of the upper body due to deficiency of blood is to be treated by Siwu Tang with scute and spirodela (herbs used for clearing heat). Danggui Yinzi (not specifically mentioned in this section of the book) has additional tonics and wind-resolving herbs.

Siwu Tang is selected to nourish the blood to calm wind following the ancient idea: “To treat wind, first treat the blood; when the blood is full, the wind will naturally be extinguished.” In Siwu Tang, two of the herbs are reputed to specifically aid dispelling wind: tang-kuei and cnidium which, unlike peony and rehmannia, have volatile oils commonly encountered in herbs for dispelling external wind (these two herbs are botanically related to the wind-dispelling herbs angelica, siler, chiang-huo, and tu-huo, with similar aromatic components).

The blood nourishing and wind-dispelling aspects of Siwu Tang are complemented in Danggui Yinzi by ho-shou-wu, an herb especially used for calming internal wind.

To this base, three other herbs specific for resolving wind syndromes are added: siler, schizone-peta, and tribulus. In the modern Materia Medica, tribulus is classified as an herb for internal wind, while the others are for external wind, but in Zhu Danxi’s time, the separation between internal and external wind had not been made. Originally, it was understood that internal and external wind could intermingle, one reinforcing the other, and cause various symptoms. Tribulus was considered an important herb for dispelling external wind.
The complete Danggui Yinzi formula is:

**BUPLEURUM & TRIBULUS COMBINATION**

- **Tang-kuei** 4.5 g
- **Peony** 4.5 g
- **Cnidium** 4.5 g
- **Rehmannia, raw** 4.5 g
- **Siler** 4.5 g
- **Schizonepeta** 4.5 g
- **Tribulus** 4.5 g
- **Ho-shou-wu** 3.0 g
- **Astragalus** 3.0 g
- **Licorice** 3.0 g

The formula is available as a SUN TEN combination.

According to the Chinese interpretation, when skin lesions do not heal quickly, this indicates that both the qi and blood are deficient. The inclusion of astragalus and licorice with the blood nourishing herbs helps to boost the qi for more quickly nourishing the blood and more rapidly healing the skin. Further, when using wind-dispelling herbs, such as siler and schizonepeta, there is a concern that those who suffer from deficiency will experience increased perspiration and further loss of essential fluid and drying of the blood. Therefore, herbs that astringe sweating, such as astragalus and peony, are included. These herbs are used in other famous surface-regulating formulas, such as Jade Screen Formula (with astragalus counterbalancing siler) and Cinnamon Combination (with peony counterbalancing cinnamon twig). The principles of therapy here are applicable to other allergic-type surface reactions. For example, the formula has been applied (with claimed success) in treating allergic rhinitis.

Itching that is accompanied by a hot, burning sensation and/or reddening of the skin, may be treated by variants of Danggui Yinzi that incorporate herbs for dispelling heat, such as scute, sophora, or gypsum. An example is Xiaofeng San, which is mentioned in the appendix.

**APPENDIX**

A formula that was devised after a detailed examination of formulas like Xiaofen San (Tang-kuei & Arctium Combination is Kochia 13 (available as a Seven Forests formula). The formula clears heat, resolves damp and vitalizes blood.

**KOCCHIA 13**

- **difuzi** 3.0 g  **Kochia**
- **tufuling** 3.0 g  **Smilax**
- **fangfeng** 3.0 g  **Siler**
- **huaihua** 3.0 g  **Sophora flower**
- **danshen** 3.0 g  **Salvia**
- **baiji** 3.0 g  **Tribulus**
- **jixueteng** 3.0 g  **Mulleitia**
- **xuanshen** 3.0 g  **Scrophularia**
- **daqingye** 3.0 g  **Isatis leaf**
- **bixie** 3.0 g  **Tokoro**
- **shengdi** 3.0 g  **Rehmannia**
- **jiegeng** 3.0 g  **Platycodon**
- **gancao** 3.0 g  **Licorice**

The main ingredient, kochia, is traditionally used for damp heat syndromes including urinary tract inflammation, pruritis, and furuncle. Recent work has shown that it inhibits skin inflammation associated with eczema and psoriasis. Smilax, also used for damp heat syndromes, has been used to treat syphilis, furuncle, carbuncle, skin ulceration, and arthritis. Tokoro, a type of dioscorea, has similar uses, treating syphilis, arthritis, and furuncle. These three herbs contain saponins which usually reduce inflammatory response.

The recurrence of inflammation at a particular location on the body usually signals a weakness
of those tissues and a breakdown in the normal pattern of blood circulation. The Kochia 13 formula contains salvia to promote blood circulation and sophora flower to inhibit bleeding (it contains a large amount of flavonoids that protect capillaries from damage). These two herbs thus regulate the circulation and, in addition, they both remove heat from the blood. The prescription is largely a reflection of recent research done with treatment of eczema and psoriasis.

In using Kochia 13, one may wish to add a second prescription such as Salvia Shou Wu for additional blood vitalising action, Isatis 6 when treating more severe inflammation and for skin disorders related to infection (viral or otherwise), or with Lithospermum 15 for treatment of skin inflammation associated with autoimmune disorders such as SLE.

REFERENCES