



Tears of the Lung yin

Remarks on Gan Mai Da Zao Tang

By Cao Yingfu

From his *Jin Gui Fa Wei* (Elaborating the Subtleties of the Golden Cabinet)

婦人臟躁，悲傷欲哭，象如神靈所作，數欠喜伸，甘麥大棗湯主之。

甘麥大棗湯

甘草三兩 小麥一升 大棗十枝

上三味，以水六升，煮取三升，分溫三服，亦補脾氣。

Women with organ restlessness who are so sad and teary it appears they have been possessed; who yawn frequently and like to stretch: *Gan Mai Da Zao Tang* treats this.

Gan Mai Da Zao Tang

(Licorice, Wheat, and Jujube Decoction)

Gan Cao (Glycyrrhizae Radix) three *liang* (9g)

Xiao Mai (Tritici Fructus) one *sheng* (15g)

Da Zao (Jujubae Fructus) 10 *zhi* (10 pcs)

Boil these three herbs in six *sheng* of water until three *sheng* is left.

Separate this into three portions and take warm. Also tonifies Spleen qi.

OUR TEACHER ZHANG Zhongjing said only “zàng” in the term zàng-zào (“restless organ syndrome”) but did not specify which organ. However, we can tell which one from his description of the disorder and the formula that treats it.

The Lungs deal with grief and melancholy, so when he says “sad and teary” (悲傷欲哭 *bēishāng yù kū*) we know the problem is probably in the Lungs.

Whenever people are tired, they stretch and yawn, but not if they are energised. So repeated stretching and yawning shows sluggish Spleen yang and lazy middle qi.

After food and fluids enter the Stomach, Spleen qi disperses fluids and sends them up to the Lungs. But if Spleen essence does not transport, then the Lung organ will dry out (肺臟燥 *Fèi zàng zào*)!¹

The Lung influences all the qi so when its yin is deficient it is blocked up, and this is the cause of the sorrow, grief, and urge to cry.

The four characters appended to the formula description state: “also tonifies Spleen qi”. This confirms that the illness mechanism belongs particularly to the Lungs. *Gan Cao* (Glycyrrhizae Radix), *Xiao Mai* (Tritici Fructus) and *Da Zao* (Jujubae Fructus) are used specifically for their sweet flavour, which enables Spleen essence to transport upwards to the Lungs and to refill Lung yin.

Then the Lungs are able to pour qi and fluids downwards into all the channels of the body, and transport essence outwards to the skin, allowing the inside and outside to communicate and invigorating the qi mechanism.

Under these circumstances, there can be no pent-up, constrained or inharmonious qi, and only when these conditions prevail will the patient no longer feel “sad and teary”.

When Zhang Zhongjing said “[the symptoms] are like some demon controls them” this is a powerful indicator that the emotions of the patient were not under their control.

1. Cao is using the word “parched” (燥 *zào*) which is a homophone for the word “restless” (躁 *zào*) so “parched organ” instead of “restless organ” syndrome.

■ Translated by
Nick Dent.