

# What's in a Name? *Er Chen Tang*

by Subhuti Dharmananda, Ph.D., Director, Institute for Traditional Medicine, Portland, OR

## Background

During the early development of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), essential texts such as the *Nei Jing Su Wen* and *Shang Han Za Bing Lun* made little reference to phlegm, and where there is such reference it was mainly to the secondary manifestation of a disease, such as in production of sputum related to a disorder of the lungs. Even in several later texts, phlegm was not discussed as a direct contributor to disease development. The turning point for recognizing phlegm as a substance of key importance in causing disorders came with the teachings of herb scholar Zhu Danxi (1281-1358). He was working primarily with formulas that had been developed during the Tang Dynasty and recorded for posterity during the Song Dynasty. This article looks at some elements of the transition in thinking about phlegm and implications for practice with a focus on one of Zhu's favored base prescriptions.



In modern herb formula texts presenting traditional formulas arranged by their dominant therapeutic action, under the heading of herbs for resolving phlegm the first formula listed is *Er Chen Tang*. This formula appeared in a compilation of prescriptions published during the Song Dynasty called *Tai Ping Hui Min He Ji Ju Fang* (ca. 1080 A.D., *He Ji Ju Fang* for short; image from an ancient edition, left). The numerous formulas of that work were developed during the preceding Tang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.) or the first century of the northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 A.D.) but, for the most part, these did not appear in prior texts that have survived until now. The *He Ji Ju Fang* was edited repeatedly, starting with about 279 formulas and reaching 788.

## Combination of Two Key Herbs: Ban Xia and Ju Hong (or Chen Pi)

The name *Er Chen Tang* refers to the two lead ingredients of the formula: *ban xia* (pinellia) and *ju hong* (red citrus). *Ju hong* is the designation for the reddish-yellow outer part of the tangerine peel; it is distinguished from *chen pi*, which designates the whole peel; both have the same medicinal use, but Chinese herbalists suggest that there are slight differences in emphasis in their actions. According to *Oriental Materia Medica* by Hsu et.al., *ju hong* has stronger qi-descending and phlegmolytic activities than *chen pi*. *Ju hong* is the ingredient specified in the earliest herb texts but it is almost always substituted by *chen pi* when the prescriptions are made today. *Er Chen* literally means “two aged” and is a unique short hand way of indicating that both *ban xia* and *ju hong* are processed. The term *chen* refers to something “old,” as in remaining unused for a long time. It is not entirely clear how this name fits the herbs it depicts. Possibly, the herbalist who named it used a processing method in which the material is stored for a long time to allow it to gradually transform into the desired medicinal material. Among other commonly used processed herbs, none are designated as *chen*. In the modern book *Pao Zhi* by Sionneau depicting herbal processing, the term *chen* is only applied to *chen pi* and in that case it applies to the uncooked (*sheng*) material. For *ban xia*, processing is needed in order to remove crystalline irritants (raphides) that can harm the mouth, throat, and gastrointestinal tract, and agglutinin, a protein that causes inflammation of the intestinal tract. The ancient processing involved soaking the pinellia corms in water for about a week, and then using another medicinal agent, such as fresh ginger juice or alum, to soak them further. This is not inherently a prolonged process compared to the way some Chinese foods and medicines are prepared and doesn't make it “old.” For tangerine peel, the processing is slow sun drying (or faster oven drying), which is thought to enhance its action; either way, it is not a particularly long process. For simplicity, despite *ju hong* being specified originally, in the following, I refer to *chen pi*, because it is the ingredient most often used in this and many other formulation today and typically listed in formula guides. It is important to note, however that when this formula was written, the ingredient used was not known by “*chen*” (as in *chen pi*), but as “tangerine red” (*ju hong*).

The naming of the formula as “*Er Chen*” is consistent with a practice among Chinese herbalists to indicate the use of two herbs of similar action, nature, origin, or naming. Thus, for example, there is *Er Jia Fu Mai Tang* (refers to “two shells”), *Er Mu San* and *Er Mu Ning Sou Wan* (two herbs named *mu*; *bei mu* and *zhi mu*), *Er Xian Tang* (“two immortals”; *xian mao* and *yin yang huo*, also known as *xian ling pi*), *Er Zhi Wan* (“two solstices”; both herbs collected at the solstices), and *Er Zhu Tang* (“two types of *zhu*,” *bai zhu* and *cang zhu*). Likewise for triples: *San Huang Shi Gao Tang* (“three yellow herbs”), *San Jia Fu Mai Tang* (“three shells”: *mu li*, *gui ban*, *bie jia*: oyster, tortoise, and turtle), *San Jin Tang* (“three herbs named for gold: *ji nei jin*, *jin sha teng*, and *jin qian cao*), and *San Ren Tang* (three seeds). This pattern continues with four, five, or rarely six ingredients of similar nature. In other cases, the number of ingredients is included in the formula name without suggesting similarity among the components, as in *Liu Wei Di Huang Wan*, which is indicating six “tastes” as designation for six distinguishable ingredients that are not each of similar effect or similar origin.

I mention this approach to naming in the current context because the widespread appreciation of *Er Chen Tang* versus another formula that has these two key ingredients may reside in the easily remembered and slightly peculiar name (its name is strange in that *ju hong* and *ban xia* are not named “*chen*,” not processed the same way, and not of similar substance). In essence, I am implying here that *Er Chen Tang* may be well-known among the phlegm resolving formulas and among the formulas with these two key herbs because of its catchy name. Once the formula was adopted by a few scholarly practitioners, such as Zhu Danxi, its therapeutic place in Chinese medicine was firmly established going forward, propelled by its name.

### Combining Herbs to Reinforce Effects

Combining two, three, more herbs of similar nature or function was one means herbalists have employed for reinforcing the intended therapeutic action of a formula. From a modern viewpoint, if two or more herbs have a similar application it is reasonable to consider that they can reinforce each other’s effects. Combining the two “*dong*” herbs (*mai men dong* plus *tian men dong*) involves herbs of the same plant family, same plant part, and similar active components, so that, at the least, the dose of those components is doubled by including both. It is possible that there is enough difference in ingredients between the constituents of each that the mixture yields better results than either alone, accomplished by providing a fuller range of components. Some of the formulas named for “related” herbs might not make sense when thinking of similar nature or function. Thus, combining three ingredients named “*jin*,” with reference to the characteristic yellow-gold coloration of each, would seem rather arbitrary, and not providing any particular advantage: the three substances of “*san jin*” are of entirely different origins and have unrelated constituents for which the color does not clearly signify their activities. For the Chinese herbalists, the name assisted in memorizing the formula.

The pairing of *ban xia* and *chen pi* that we take for granted today does not appear in the *Shang Han Lun/Jin Gui Yao Lue*, nor is it common in texts in subsequent centuries until the Song Dynasty *He Ji Ju Fang*. The primary contrary example is *Wen Dan Tang*, usually attributed to Sun Simiao during the early Tang Dynasty (in his book *Bie Ji Qian Jin Yao Fang*, ca. 625 A.D.). The later formula *Er Chen Tang* is probably not derived from that *Wen Dan Tang* but rather from one of the *Shang Han* prescriptions that combines *ban xia* with *sheng jiang* and *fu ling*. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that *Wen Dan Tang* is not even mentioned by the main historical proponent of using *Er Chen Tang*, Zhu Danxi, even though *Wen Dan Tang* appeared again in *San Yin Ji Yi Bing Zheng Fang Lun* (ca 1180) and with slight modification under other another name, *Dao Tan Tang* from *Fu Ren Liang Fang* (ca 1237), which is *Wen Dan Tang* with *nan xing* in place of *zhu ru*. Zhu did make a few recommendations for using *Dao Tan Tang*.

Neither of the two “*chen*” herbs are depicted in early texts as being particularly for use in treating phlegm disorders. *Ban xia*, for example, was being used to treat coldness of the stomach/spleen and uprising qi from the stomach in the *Shang Han Lun*. The two herbs are drying, and so are each sometimes mentioned in relation to alleviating damp accumulation. Of the two, *ban xia* is frequently used in Zhang Zhongjing’s *Shang Han Lun* and *Jin Gui Yao Lue*. For the purpose of resolving fluid accumulation, this herb is combined with ginger (usually *sheng jiang*, but sometimes *gan jiang*) and *fu ling* (poria, also called hoelen), but most often, *ban xia* is used in treating coldness. Sun Simiao’s *Wen Dan Tang* incorporating *ban xia* with *chen pi* is

indicated for fatigue and insomnia suffered after a severe illness, and is a condition attributed to coldness in the gallbladder. In ancient times, there was the image of coldness or heat emerging from a meridian and rising or falling into the area that would then be affected; in this case, cold in the gallbladder channel of the leg was considered the origin of the disorder. The warming qualities of *ban xia* and *chen pi* were the properties for which these herbs were mainly relied upon in *Wen Dan Tang*, not their phlegm-resolving properties.

In *Er Chen Tang*, *ban xia* is combined with *fu ling* as well as *sheng jiang* (as found in the *Jin Gui* formulas), and there is also a small amount of *gan cao* and even smaller amount of *wu mei* (mume). The use of *sheng jiang* and *gan cao* together was a common feature of *Shang Han Lun* formulas; these two are often combined with a third component, *da zao*, but that ingredient was usually eliminated when the treatment was aimed at alleviating dampness (because of the thick moist quality of *da zao*). In the case of *Er Chen Tang*, *da zao* is replaced by another fruit, *wumei*, an astringent for controlling dampness. Adding *chen pi* is the unique feature of this new formula compared to ancient prescriptions. Because of the method of preparation originally described for *Er Chen Tang*, where *ban xia*, *chen pi*, *fu ling*, and *gan cao* are made as a powder and then a quantity of that is boiled with *sheng jiang* and *wu mei*, the latter two are frequently dismissed in modern presentations and in modifications of the formula, but they are a valuable part of *Er Chen Tang* that is good to retain. In all the published modifications of *Er Chen Tang*, *wu mei* is always eliminated.

The original description of *Er Chen Tang* from the *He Ji Ju Fang* is:

Treats phlegm-rheum causing suffering, or vomiting and nausea, or dizziness of the head and palpitations, or blockage of *Zhong Wan* (CV-12), or occurrence of cold and heat, or causing food that generates cold, and disharmony of the spleen and stomach. *Ban xia* (wash in hot water seven times), *ju hong* (each five liang), *bai fu ling* (three liang), *gan cao* (honey-fried, one and a half liang). Pound the above. Each dose [take] four qian, in one small cup of water, add seven slices of fresh ginger, and one piece of *wu mei*. Decoct all of this together until reduced to six fen, remove the dregs, and take warm. Do not wait for any certain time.

Sun Simiao's *Wen Dan Tang* had *ban xia*, *chen pi*, *gan cao*, and *sheng jiang*, but in place of *fu ling* and *wu mei*, it had *zhu ru* and *zhi shi*. Some confusion is generated by the fact that these two herbs are depicted today as treating heat syndromes, while the formula is indicated in its name as warming (*wen*). In the earlier centuries, the cooling or warming nature was not the key element of concern for selecting *zhu ru* and *zhi shi* (*ban xia*, especially with *chen pi* and *sheng jiang*, was plenty warming). *Zhi shi*, for example, is used in a formula for treating "cold limbs" (*Si Ni San*), and in that formula this herb was combined with *chai hu* and *bai shao* that we consider today as cooling. *Zhu ru* was deemed effective in purging the gallbladder. These two herbs taken together could rectify the flow of cold qi originating in the gallbladder *meridian* that is causing stagnation of the gallbladder *organ*.

In today's texts, the use of *Er Chen Tang* is described in relation to the spleen function and in treating the secondary effect of a disorder of spleen weakness and food stagnation yielding an accumulation of phlegm in the lungs, with symptomatic presentation of coughing with copious sputum. Interestingly, the use of this formula was not mentioned in the *Pi Wei Lun* (ca 1249 A.D.) by Li Gao (Li Dongyuan) where it might be most appropriate for those current indications, since Li Gao focused on treating weakness of stomach/spleen. He did present a formula with *ban xia* and *chen pi*, namely *Ban Xia Bai Zhu Tian Ma Tang*, which is missing *gan cao* and *wu mei* from *Er Chen Tang* and has several additional herbs, including the two in the title, *bai zhu* and *tian ma*. Rather, it was Zhu Danxi, an admirer of Li Gao's teachings, who would make much of *Er Chen Tang* and the subject of phlegm as a contributor to disease.

### **Zhu Danxi and the Role of Phlegm in Disease**

Zhu Danxi was the fourth and most famous of the four leading physicians of the Jin-Yuan medical reform period. Yang Shouzhong, in his preface to the translation of one of Zhu Danxi's books, aptly stated: "Zhu Danxi can be seen not just as one of four co-equal great masters of the Jin-Yuan, but the fruition and amalgamation of Jin-Yuan medicine." He is named for his home, Cinnabar Creek (Dan Xi), but traveled

extensively to gain knowledge of medicine. Zhu is remembered especially for the concept that yang tends toward excess and yin toward deficiency, so that protecting the yin is especially important. He saw yang as representing movement and the excess of it deriving from ministerial fire that was consuming yin essence (the “water” as opposed to fire). Nonetheless, in the book that serves as the culmination of his work, *Dan Xi Zhi Fa Xin Yao* (Heart and Essence of Danxi’s Method), nearly *all* the therapeutics instead involve treatment of dampness, qi deficiency, and stagnation. His ideas regarding the need to balance yin and yang were predominantly manifested as recommendations for life style, to regulate ministerial fire through restraint in certain activities, while in treatment of disease, other considerations usually come into play. His chapter on Various Kinds of Deficiency in this book was the main one about nourishing yin, usually with formulas to lower fire, using *huang bai* as a key ingredient. Commentators on this book take note that Zhu primarily relies on four formulations, provided with adjustments as might be needed for the particular concern:

*Er Chen Tang*, *Si Jun Zi Tang*, and *Si Wu Tang*: formulas of the *He Ji Ju Fang*

*Yue Ju Wan*: a formula of his own design, comprised of five herbs: *shen qu*, *xiang fu*, *cang zhu*, *zhi zi*, and *chuan xiong*.

The formulas *Er Chen Tang* and *Si Jun Zi Tang* both are used in warming therapies and for drying dampness and *Yue Ju Wan* would also be deemed a formula that alleviates damp congestion, especially through its inclusion of *cang zhu* and *zhi zi*. It is interesting to note that one of the *He Ji Ju Fang* formulas is *Liu Jun Zi Tang*, which is *Si Jun Zi Tang* to which is added *ban xia* and *chen pi*, but this one is not referenced by Zhu.

### Zhu’s Primary Discussion of Phlegm

In *Dan Xi Zhi Fa Xin Yao*, there is a lengthy section devoted to phlegm disorders, and this may be the first major discourse on the subject, at least among texts preserved from antiquity. Preservation of old texts is often hit or miss. For this book, it is fortuitous to have a good copy, as the originals were either lost or were corrupted by later editors, but a preserved copy from a Ming Dynasty edition was found in 1898 that allowed for the currently available text and its translation. There are three lines that will be the particular subject of this article, coming from the beginning, middle, and at the end of the chapter on phlegm. First, Zhu describes a circumstance that can lead to epilepsy:

Because of fright, the spirit leaves its abode, and, when its abode is left vacant, phlegm may enter. Occupying this abode, phlegm repulses the spirit. Thus, it is impossible for the spirit to return.

This mechanism is not limited to producing epilepsy, but can lead to numerous disturbances attributed to the spirit not finding rest in its abode, many of them mental disturbances, ranging from frequent waking at night to schizophrenia. The description quoted above (recently translated by Yang Shouzhong) is in the first paragraph of Zhu’s chapter on phlegm.

In the middle of his discussion is this important commentary:

As a substance, phlegm can follow qi up and down in the human body. Everywhere is accessible to it, and nothing is beyond its reach. Phlegm complicates the majority of the hundreds of diseases. Of this, the world is unaware.

Zhu implies here that, in fact, few herb scholars had written about this previously and, as a result, his contemporary practitioners were not seeking signs that phlegm was involved in the diseases, which led to a deficiency in their diagnosis and their treatment strategy.

The other line is at the end of the chapter:

*Er Chen* is a very important formula for treating phlegm, but many people tend to neglect it....If only one is able to make appropriate additions and subtractions in accordance with signs, one will never use it but with effect.

The three statements provide a trajectory of thought. The first statement relays a new understanding that Zhu proposes as to how phlegm can contribute to disease, displaying a hidden action and not just overt excretion as “phlegm-rheum.” The origin of this phlegm can be from any sort of imbalance, and Zhu outlines many possibilities in his discussion. He alerts his audience in the second quotation that any prior concept of where phlegm necessarily resides is to be put away: it can be anywhere, and it can contribute to just about any disease. In the last paragraph, he emphasizes that a key formula for treating phlegm is *Er Chen Tang*, but this formula is not yet being sufficiently used in his time. All that is needed is to modify the simple prescription to address the particular situation. His observations and considerations about an insufficient understanding of phlegm and its treatment may still be applicable today. The republication of his book, first in China and then in English translation, helps overcome this possible blind spot in Chinese medicine practice.

### **Spirits and Their Abodes: An Example of Residences to be Filled Up**

From early times in the evolution of Chinese ideas about what it is to be human, there was a concept of spirits animating the body and activating the mind. Though there are a number of ways in which the animating principles are presented, one of the well-known depictions is with the kidney as the abode of the “po,” which are three spirits of physical life; the liver being the abode of the “hun,” seven spirits of mental life; and the heart as the abode of the “shen,” the creativity of the person, manifest as a single spirit. The “abode of the [shen] spirit” is variously described in the literature as the heart, the heart orifices, the heart channels, or the totality of channels of the body. Location is not a major concern, though making a connection with the heart at some level is of importance in depicting spirit disorders. To avoid prejudice, the other organs are attributed their spirits, but these three, po, hun, shen, have been the formative group of Chinese medicine. I have described hun and po elsewhere, and also dealt with treatment of “shen disorders” extensively (see: *Towards a Spirit at Peace*). The topic of phlegm-mist obstructing the heart, with reference to Zhu Danxi’s statement above, was also discussed (“What is Phlegm-Mist Affecting the Orifices of the Heart?”).

A basic tenet of Chinese medicine is that if a part of the body is not filled with what would normally fill it in a healthy way, then it may rapidly become filled with something else that is not healthy. The *Neijing* makes a blanket statement (chapter 10): “All disorders can be attributed to the blood and qi not arriving at certain streams and valleys and caves....Then the pathogenic wind has an opportunity to invade...” Perhaps the best known examples are: if the superficial vessels are not filled with qi and blood, then exogenous wind may enter and if the stomach and spleen are not filled with normal qi, then pathological qi from the liver may enter. Thus, nourishing qi and blood is a means of preventing attack by wind and tonifying the spleen and stomach is a means of preventing liver qi from adversely affecting those organs. This “entry” of a pathological influence is not necessarily a temporary invasion; rather, the wind may come to occupy the vessels and the excess liver qi may come to occupy the stomach and spleen, thus preventing the healthful essences that belong to those parts from re-establishing themselves. The disorder then becomes a chronic one, until that situation can be reversed: the pathological dispelled and the normal replenished.

The heart organ system is normally full of yin and blood and is the home for the *shen*. The spirit is somewhat mobile, but spends most of its time in its “abode” and usually leaves temporarily and partially. Yin and blood provides a welcoming condition, a softness, for comforting rest. As Zhu describes, fright is an example of a cause of the spirit to depart its abode. After a fright, the spirit is highly alert and sensitive, seeking to observe potential harm and ready to initiate a sudden response as might be necessary. Most times, a fright is passing, either by its brevity or by knowledge that the circumstance, experienced as threatening, is actually controlled. As examples, someone may be encountered unexpectedly; a serious accident may be barely escaped. Today, people purposefully take a roller coaster ride or jump from a plane; some go to horror movies to experience this stimulating and agitating effect, knowing, at least afterward, that all is safe. Whether incidental or purposeful, there is no anticipation that these occurrences will lead to a persisting disorder. However, the incident of fright can be more severe or more prolonged or occur more frequently than in these minor cases. Depending on one’s sense of control or lack thereof, the spirit may be able to return or it may end up staying away from its abode. Fright is one cause of this departure; feeling very embarrassed or ashamed or being in a situation that produces much confusion can have a similar impact.

Phlegm is a fluid essence that is normally present to a certain extent everywhere in the body. In healthy situations, phlegm serves as a lubricating essence and it is distributed according to need for that purpose, which can vary over time. Phlegm is not stagnant; as Zhu points out, it moves with the qi; that is, when the qi is activated to move in a certain direction, phlegm can accompany it. In some cases, phlegm is present in excess, and the excess may be evident (for example, mucus accumulation affecting the lungs and/or sinuses) or hidden (it may be in the channels, causing obstruction that leads to pain). The phlegm that moves into an area left vacant is inherently obstructive: it has taken up occupancy and block entry and transit.

According to Zhu, the starting point of treatment for phlegm excess is often *Er Chen Tang* or a modification of it. To be clear, Zhu uses a lot of other formulas for treating phlegm disorders as well. He just doesn't want *Er Chen Tang* to be missed. And, specifically, it is the pair of herbs in its title that are the key: Zhu says: "Generally speaking the existence of [pathological] phlegm requires *Chen Pi* and *Ban Xia*. While these two herbs, and the formula as a whole, is most specifically oriented to treatment of cold phlegm, it need not be limited to that application.

The idea of phlegm rushing into emptiness is also part of Zhu's explanation of wind stroke, the subject of the first chapter of the book. The first line of the first chapter reads:

Largely wind stroke is governed by blood vacuity and the existence of phlegm. The treatment of phlegm should take precedence, and blood should be nurtured and moved afterwards. [Wind stroke] may also be produced by blood vacuity embracing fire and dampness, and the great method is to eliminate phlegm as the ruling therapy.

The difference between "ordinary" wind invasion and wind stroke is that the latter is considered a deeper penetration of wind into the interior vessels, causing blockage. Today, we refer to this condition as a stroke or cerebrovascular stroke, indicating a temporary blockage of circulation in the brain, possibly causing loss of consciousness, which can have long term consequences or cause death. The stroke survivor may display hemiplegia, deviation of mouth and eyes, and difficulty speaking and swallowing. A frequent characteristic is appearance of copious phlegm, including drooling, which is taken as a sign that phlegm is part of the disorder. The beginning of this disabling event, according to Zhu, is blood vacuity of the main vessels, particularly of the lung and heart, and then this emptiness allows entrance of wind, fire, and dampness; the fire causes the dampness to congeal and form phlegm which combines with entering wind to cause a fierce disease condition that results in sudden and complete blockage. Zhu describes the situation as blood vacuity with phlegm embraced within it. The reason for his admonition to clear phlegm first and build blood secondly is that the phlegm has taken the place of the blood, and thus must be removed in order for blood to return. Likewise, Zhu discusses cases of qi deficiency with phlegm embraced within, though in that situation the two therapies—clearing and tonifying—might go together, in that there must be sufficient qi to move the obstructive phlegm.

Zhu liked to quote from the *Neijing* that: "wherever evils converge, the qi invariably becomes vacuous there." This statement references the basic concept of evils taking up a place where otherwise good substances would reside. The *Neijing* statement appears to imply that the evils first converge and then the qi is displaced. However, the underlying thought is that there is first a deficiency (vacuity) of qi at a location, then the evils converge there, and then the qi cannot return. In chapter 5 of the *Neijing*, it is stated that "It is important to understand that the pathogen always attacks where there is deficiency." This framework applies as well to the blood, the spirit, or any other essence that is normally occupying a location, has left it (by deficiency or movement) and then is unable to return for any reason, though mainly because of replacement. Nonetheless, if it is perceived that the location has not been totally vacated by the normal abiding substance, tonifying the normal may help expel the evil, by displacing it. This is an idea captured in modern TCM thought as "Fu Zheng Therapy," namely supporting the normal to overcome the pathogenic.

## Examples of Diseases Involving Phlegm According to Zhu

Among the diseases commonly attributed to phlegm are those in which the head is affected. As examples, Zhu observes that: “headache is usually ruled by phlegm” and “spinning head [vertigo] is due to phlegm embraced by qi deficiency and fire” and “if there is phlegm above and fire below, fire may flare up and stir this phlegm, thus causing dizziness.” A combined treatment can involve herbs for resolving phlegm (for example, *ban xia*, *chen pi*, and *zhu ru*) along with those that tonify qi (to alleviate its deficiency; for example *ren shen*) and herbs to clear fire, to eliminate the excess and flaring upward (for example: *huang lian*). As will be described below, this combined treatment is captured in a formula called *Zhu Ru Wen Dan Tang*.

Phlegm may also cause symptoms that are due to its obstructive nature when filling a void. Thus, Zhu described a case of absent menstruation that he attributed to phlegm obstruction (blocking the process of menstrual bleeding), and where the pulse of the patient was barely detectable not because of any deficiency but because the blood was bound and hidden by accumulated phlegm. He indicated a case of coughing with inability to sleep while lying on either side as due to phlegm embracing static blood. Other cases of phlegm obstruction causing various symptoms include spontaneous sweating, back pain, and macules. A description of some of the phlegm manifestations and syndromes described by Zhu is found in the Appendix, below.

## Examples of Herbs Important for Treating Phlegm

Zhu gives some explanation for the value of certain herbs that he commonly applied as shown in this table.

Herb	Description
<i>huang qin</i> (scute)	<i>Huang qin</i> is able to treat phlegm heat since it is easy for it to downbear fire.
<i>tian hua fen</i> (trichosanthes root)	<i>Tian hua fen</i> treats hot phlegm above the diaphragm.
<i>zhi shi</i> (chih-shih)	<i>Zhi shi</i> drains phlegm and is even able to break down walls [overcome obstruction].
<i>wu bei zi</i> (gall)	<i>Wu bei zi</i> effectively treats stubborn phlegm.
<i>ban xia</i> (pinellia)	<i>Ban xia</i> effectively treats damp phlegm and also treats asthma and cough with heart pain. Best taken with <i>sheng jiang</i> .
<i>gua lou</i> (trichosanthes fruit) and <i>hua shi</i> (talc)	<i>Gua lou</i> and <i>hua shi</i> effectively treat food accumulation phlegm
<i>cang zhu</i> (red atractylodes)	Master Xue instructs: to treat phlegm damp developing into a gathering lump use <i>cang zhu</i> ; it is extremely efficacious in moving phlegm.
<i>zhu li</i> (bamboo juice)	Phlegm existing in the limbs can be moved by nothing else than <i>zhu li</i> ; <i>zhu li</i> treats phlegm existing around the diaphragm with mania or withdrawal, impaired memory, or wind phlegm.

## Juice Herbs Used for Phlegm

Zhu Danxi made frequent use of juices squeezed from certain herbs. These are often impractical to use today, but some related preparations will have a similar action, mainly the herbs prepared by decoction. For the most part, he applied four favored juices: the basic one is *jiang ji* (ginger juice); to this he often would add *zhu li* (bamboo juice; see table above), especially with concern for phlegm stagnation; for cases of excess (secondary to the deficiency) he would add *jing li* (vitex negundo juice). In a few circumstances he would use *jiu zhi* (garlic juice), particularly when there is stagnated blood as well as dampness and phlegm.

## Modified Er Chen Tang Carried Forward Into Modern Texts

Famous herbalists like Zhu Danxi relayed many formulas that they considered important, but only a few of them appear in the modern textbooks that are used for the purpose of learning Chinese herbal medicine. As I have indicated above, the formula name might even be a reason for its retention. In one modern collection, **Thousand Formulas and Thousand Herbs of Traditional Chinese Medicine** by Huang, et.al. a couple of formulas based on *Er Chen Tang* are relayed and these are briefly mentioned here to illustrate how this basic formulation has been retained in modified forms: *Jia Wei Er Chen Tang* (from *Yi Zong Jin Jian*, 1740) is *Er Chen Tang* minus *sheng jiang* and *wu mei*, plus *huang qin*, *huang lian*, and *bao he*; and *Jin Shui Liu Jun Jian* (from *Jing Yue Quan Shu* 1624) is *Er Chen Tang* minus *sheng jiang* and *wu mei* plus *dang gui* and *shu di*.

## Modifications of Er Chen Tang for Mental Disorders

One of the important formulas for mental disorders is mentioned in few modern texts on TCM; rather, its use was maintained in Japan, where the text *Wan Bing Hui Chun* by Gong Tingxian had been quite popular. I have written previously alerting modern practitioners to a characteristic of many of Gong's formulations, namely that he tends to pile up a lot of herbs rather than focusing on a few key ones, so his formulas were often cumbersome and not a good model for formula design. He produced many prescriptions for phlegm-damp disorders and the one I am referencing here is among his smaller ones, an exception to this bulky formula tendency, with just ten herbs. This formula captured certain key principles of therapy that Zhu Danxi described and also relied on herbs frequently recommended by Zhu. The formula addresses the combination of phlegm and fire embracing deficiency of qi.

Gong's formula is called *Zhu Ru Wen Dan Tang*, that is, bamboo-modified *Wen Dan Tang*, which can be viewed as *Er Chen Tang* (minus *wumei*) to which is added the two herbs characteristic of the *Wen Dan* formula, *zhu ru* and *zhi shi*, plus: *ren shen*, *huang lian*, *xiang fu*, *jie geng*, and *chai hu*. Zhu had raised concern about phlegm embracing vacuous qi, for which *ren shen* was a recommended remedy; he was concerned about stagnation of qi contributing to accumulation, for which *xiang fu* was a common remedy, and about fire generating wind, for which *huang lian* was a remedy. Despite his emphasis on treating phlegm disorders, Zhu did not often use *jie geng*, which is today frequently relied on for this purpose. Similarly, Gong Tingxian, with all his work on phlegm-damp treatments, only used this herb rarely and then he mainly applied it in combination with *lian qiao* to treat skin eruptions and other surface swellings (this was the primary use of *jie geng* in the *Jin Gui Yao Lue* as well). Nonetheless, based on the current ideas of *jie geng* resolving phlegm accumulation, it can be seen as a reasonable adjunct to the other phlegm controlling ingredients, such as *ban xia* and *chen pi*. Zhu would sometimes utilize *chai hu* to raise qi, and one of his favored formulas was *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* (from the *He Ji Ju Fang*) which included *chai hu* (along with *sheng ma*) for that purpose. Today, we often utilize *chai hu* for regulating qi circulation to overcome stagnant qi, so that in this formulation, it also can be seen as aiding *xiang fu*. The formula may benefit from slight modifications, such as enhancing the qi tonification component by adding *bai zhu* and *huang qi* and conducting out phlegm with *sheng jiang*. If there is notable evidence of fire, *huang lian* might be complemented by *huang qin*.

## Appendix

Zhu identifies six categories involving phlegm combined with another pathological influence:

Syndrome	Sample Herbs to Use
Phlegm Damp	<i>cang zhu</i> , <i>bai zhu</i>
Heat Phlegm	<i>qing dai</i> , <i>huang qin</i> , <i>huang lian</i>
Cold Phlegm	<i>Er Chen Tang</i> ( <i>ban xia</i> , <i>chen pi</i> )
Wind Phlegm	<i>nan xing</i> , <i>bai fu zi</i>
Old Phlegm	<i>hai shi</i> , <i>gua lou</i>
Food Accumulation Phlegm	<i>shen qu</i> , <i>mai ya</i>

This table provides examples of syndromes involving phlegm according to Zhu.

Pattern Manifestation	Sample Herbs
Internal damage embracing phlegm	<i>ren shen</i> , <i>huang qi</i> , <i>bai zhu</i> , with <i>jiang zhi</i> or <i>ban xia</i> ; <i>zhu li</i> for severe vacuity
Phlegm caused by exuberant fire flowing up	<i>ba zhu</i> , <i>huang qin</i> , <i>shi gao</i> ; if central qi is insufficient, add <i>bai zhu</i> and <i>ren shen</i>
Spleen deficiency with phlegm accumulation	<i>Er Chen Tang</i> plus <i>bai zhu</i> ; use <i>sheng ma</i> to raise qi
Dizziness due to phlegm stirred by fire	<i>Er Chen Tang</i> plus <i>zhi zi</i> , <i>huang qin</i> , and <i>huang lian</i>
Arm pain due to dampness in the upper burner	<i>Er Chen Tang</i> plus <i>cang zhu</i> , <i>bai zhu</i> , <i>xiang fu</i> , <i>wei ling xian</i> , <i>huang qin</i> , <i>nan xing</i>
Aversion to food (food damage)	<i>Er Chen Tang</i> plus <i>bai zhu</i> , <i>shan zha</i> , <i>chuan xiong</i> , and <i>cang zhu</i>