

Emetic Method in *Shang Han Lun*

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1. Introduction

Emetic method is one of the eight therapeutic methods in *Shang Han Lun* (Treatise on Cold Damager) written by Zhang Zhong-jing in the East Han Dynasty (3rd century). It was the least used treatment method in *Shang Han Lun*, but it will not be complete if this method is not discussed in our series.

Emetics method makes the patient vomit so as to expel phlegm, undigested food, or toxic substances from the throat, the thoracic cavity or the stomach. The representative formula is Guadi San (Melon Stalk Powder).

2. Original Text

This formula was introduced in Clause 166 of *Shang Han Lun*. It states that “the patient’s condition appears similar to those indicated of *Guizhi Tang* (Cinnamon Twig Decoction), but there is no headache and no stiff neck. The patient’s pulse is slight floating at the *cun* position, feeling of fullness and hardness in the chest, and as if some air is rushing up to the throat causing breathing difficulties. This is due to some pathogenic factor obstructing the chest (and stomach). The emetic method is right choice and Guadi San (Melon Stalk Powder) should be recommended.”

病如桂枝证，头不痛，项不强，寸脉微浮，胸中痞硬，气上冲咽喉不得息者，此为胸有寒也。当吐之，宜瓜蒂散。（166）

3. Analysis

This text was talking about treatment of pathogenic factors such as phlegm in the chest or indigested food in the stomach, treated by an emetic method. In the original text, it states “this means there is cold in the chest 此为胸有寒也”，but our understanding is that in the context of this clause, “cold” here should mean any pathogenic factors which can cause the symptoms.

When it talks about *Gui Zhi Tang* condition, it should have fever and aversion to wind. In the context of this clause, there is no headache and no stiff neck. Therefore it is not a *Guizhi Tang* syndrome. The feeling of fever and cold that the patient has is different to that in *Guizhi Tang* syndrome. It must be a feeling inside, not outside. Slight floating pulse at *cun* position and a full and hard sensation in the chest mean the pathogenic factors in the chest or in the upper part of the stomach.

A sensation resembles some air is rushing up to the throat causing breathing difficulties indicates that there is a tendency that the pathogenic factor is moving upwards. Hence the most suitable method should be the emetic method, as it can clear the pathogenic factor out of the body by inducing vomiting.

4. Formula

Guadi San (瓜蒂散 Melon Stalk Powder) is composed of the following ingredients:

Guadi 瓜蒂 Melon Stalk / *Pedicellus Melo* or *Cucumis Melo* L (stew until it turns yellowish) 1 *Fen*/0.75g

Chixiaodou 赤小豆 Rice Bean / *Semen Phaseoli* 1 *Fen* /0.75g

Xiangchi 香豉 Prepared Soybean/ *Semen Sojae Praeparatae* 1 *Ge* /1.8g

Its original preparation and administration: Pound and sieve the first 2 ingredients separately and mix them together to make powder. Boil 1 *Ge* (1.8g) of Xiangchi in 7 *Ge* (140 ml) of boiling water to make a thin porridge. Remove dregs, add the powder and mix well with the porridge. Drink it when it is warm in a single dosage. If the patient does not vomit, add a little more. As soon as the patient vomits, stop drinking it. Patients having conditions of bleeding and chronic deficiencies should not be given this formula.

The main action of this formula is inducing vomiting to eliminate pathogenic factors, such as phlegm, food and toxin from the body.

The main ingredient of the formula is Guadi (English name Muskmelon Base). It is extremely bitter in taste, but it can induce vomit to eliminate pathogenic factors such phlegm, toxic substance and undigested food from the chest or the upper part of stomach. Chixiaodou, which is bitter and sour in flavour, can protect the chest and the stomach so the induced vomiting will not damage them. It can also clear toxin from the body. Xiangchi can help dispersing pathogens outwards. Together, they induce vomiting to clear away pathogens, and at the same time protect the stomach and the chest.

5. Contemporary clinical application

This formula can be used for treatment of gastrectasia (an abnormal dilation of the stomach that may be accompanied by pain, vomiting, rapid pulse, and falling body temperature. Causes include overeating, obstruction of the pyloric valve, or a hernia) due to the stagnation of food in the epigastrium, ingesting toxic substances mistakenly and retained in the stomach, bronchial asthma, and schizophrenia caused by abundant phlegm obstructing the chest.

Additionally, Li (2005) modified this formula and applied it to patients with acute hepatitis marked by jaundice. Guadi 5g was decocted in 500 ml of water for 30 minutes. It will then be divided into 3 equal portions. Each portion is taken orally at 3 separated times within a day after meals. It was claimed that it was effective in clearing jaundice.

6. Pharmacodynamic research

Some experiments showed that Guadi San could increase the cerebral cortex's norepinephrine levels (He et al 2005).

The main component of Guadi is Melotoxin. Animal experiments have shown that it can stimulate the sensory nerve of the gastric mucosa, and excite the vomiting centre as a reflex action, causing vomiting (Lin 1977).

7. Summary

Emetic method is one of the eight therapeutic methods introduced in *Shang Han Lun*. It was mainly used to expel phlegm, undigested food, or toxic substances from the throat, the thoracic cavity or the stomach. Guadi San is the reprehensive formula. Clinically, it can be used for some conditions with caution.

References

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