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*Blood Stasis in East
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*Herbs and Cytokine
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Blood Stasis in East Asian Medicine

Introduction

Blood and its movement are key concepts in East Asian Medicine (EAM). However, it is difficult to have a discussion of Blood without also discussing Qi, as they form a Yin-Yang

pair and are complementary to one another. Therefore, we need to know one to know the other.

Blood & Qi

Qi, can be, and is understood in many ways. It is a qualitative rather than a quantitative term, and in everyday usage it covers a range of meanings and contexts. It is most often translated as an immaterial vital force, oxygen, breath or energy. As a principle it is dynamic. All movement involves Qi¹. The relationship and interdependence of each may be described in this way: Qi is said to generate, move and hold the Blood, while Blood nourishes Qi². Physiologically we know Blood nourishes and moistens the body and carries in it a range of chemical (molecular) components. But in EAM Blood is also said to 'provide the material foundation of the Mind'². The Classical texts refer to 'Blood is the Mind of a person', and '(w)hen Blood is harmonised, the Mind has a residence'². As the Yin counterpart of the Qi, the concept of 'Blood' in EAM has a much broader range of influences and activities than those that are recognised by Western science.

Put another way, and to further develop that idea of Blood nourishing the Qi, 'the central function of the blood is to nourish the Spirit (shen) and to carry its influence on every part of ourselves'³. In a way, we could say that the Blood itself holds the unifying role, and has both a physiological aspect as well as an immaterial aspect, being the substrate for the memory and ancestral Qi (DNA and genes), emotions, psyche and the spirit or spirits of a human being.

Blood & Blood Stasis

When we discuss Blood and more specifically Blood stasis or stagnation, (what the Japanese call Oketsu) it is important to remember both aspects of Blood, the material Yin aspect and immaterial (Yang or Qi aspect) are affected and treated.

For Lonny Jarrett (author), the emotional or psychic factors that create Oketsu are as significant as the physical factors because the most 'fundamental

stagnation in life is the kind that comes when the true self has been forgotten³. It is one of the aspects of EAM that I love so much. It gives us not only a framework to recognise and understand the emotional components of health, but a way to physically treat and recognise the somatic effects of emotions, trauma or stress in a manner that does not require us to necessarily know the story or delve into personal issues. By treating Oketsu (particularly) where we find it, we will, by the virtue of the body's own interconnectedness, treat and help to heal the internal landscape. Whether it's an improved sense of wellbeing, an insight, a shift of behaviour or a disclosure from a patient, it is well to remind yourself that when Qi and Blood move in the ways we want them to, the medicine is manifesting and assisting healing on both the physical and psychological levels.

Blood Stagnation & Stasis: What is it, where does it come from and why should we be concerned about it?

As a student I had only a cursory understanding of Blood and its relationship to the internal organs of the Liver, Spleen and the Heart, which seemed both obvious and unremarkable. The concept of Blood stagnation and stasis I remember was taught as a prescribed list of classical symptoms; the sharp stabbing pain, purple colouration of nails, skin and tongue, and/or dark menstrual Blood with clots. With this approach I had very little sense of the mechanisms that create Oketsu in the first instance. It became a thing in my mind rather than an integrated process. It was only when I discovered the texts of Dr Ju-Yi Wang and then Dr Yoshio Manaka that I began to get a deeper and richer awareness of Blood and the effects of its stagnation and stasis on the body as a whole.

Dr Ju-Yi Wang reminds us that 'while the heart gives movement to the blood, sending it through the body, and the liver stores the blood in the deepest levels, it is the spleen which...on one hand gathers the necessary constituents to provide the nutritive aspect of the blood, and on the other, it gathers the blood at the level of the microcirculation to bring it back into the vessels⁴. And this idea of the microcirculation is one to keep front of mind because Dr Yoshio Manaka identifies 'Blood stasis is a condition where some obstruction has occurred in the microcirculation'¹. Suddenly the idea was no longer a thing, but a way of understanding that Blood stasis as a pathological agent can occur in many conditions and situations where we may not traditionally think about it. It put life back into the terms, for now they meant something

Blood which is stagnant or not moving well through the microcirculation is usually deficient, (of nutrients) and stagnation or stasis will often affect the ability of the Blood to make new Blood, 'for once blood stasis has manifested, it is difficult for the body to naturally eliminate and it tends to remain permanently'¹. It can then 'give rise to conditions such as bacterial infections, bruising easily, spontaneous bleeding and blood coagulation...'¹. 'In Western medical terms, inhibition of lymphatic tissue and venous return may reduce the ability of the body to fight against pathological occurrences (such as abnormal cell division, mutations and formation of tumours)⁵.

If it's in the microcirculation, in the fine capillary networks of the body, in the lymphaticⁱⁱ flow and connective tissue that we need to think about Blood stasis, then it's not hard to realise that it can be created from 'the by-products of the natural breakdown of the cellular elements of blood, including the after effects of fever; local swelling, edema and discolouration due to trauma or bruising; incomplete menstrual flow'¹; but also 'other pathological occurrences (which) may include the development of inflammation, muscular tightness, swelling, edema and pain'⁵.

This then opens up a wider spectrum of signs and symptoms many more readily observed in clinic. These include pigmentation changes in the skin and mucus membranes, red or brown moles and/or dry and rough skin in broad areas over the shoulders and around the neck and thoracic region, or there may be calluses on the feet and around the heels. For those who do regular massage those hard and tight knots of congestion in the muscle and fascial layers



(kori) around and between the shoulder blades are generally indicative of Blood stasis, especially if they don't seem to go away with treatment.

Conditions such as whiplash, broken or fractured bones, strains and sprains, surgeries and scar tissue, poor posture, or chronic stress and emotions can all affect the muscles of the neck and shoulders causing disturbances of the lymphatic and venous return and creating an 'anatomical obstruction of the free flow of blood and lymph from the head and the limbs to the trunk'⁵.

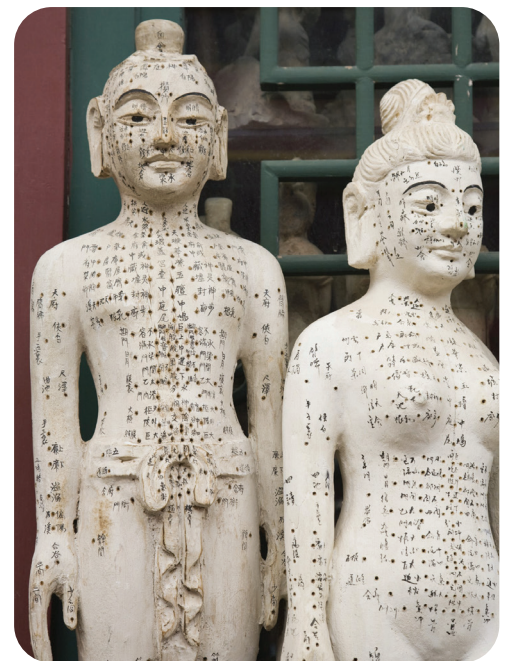
'Menstrual disorders and psychological or emotional issues will often present as blood stasis progresses'¹ and the clinical reasoning is twofold. Firstly, because any stagnation of Blood is related to or affects the Liver organ, and the Liver has many connections to our ability to manage stress, enjoy good sleep and regulate menstrual bleeding in women (among other roles). It also affects the Spleen, which together with the Pericardium creates the Chong Mai and rules the uterus. As a corollary 'Blood stasis is heavy and typically remains in the lower abdominal regions. Since the left common iliac vein is larger than on the right, more blood stasis can be found on the left side, resulting in palpable reactions at the surface of the abdomen in the lower left abdominal quadrant'¹. 'This kind of stagnation will often directly affect the liver, because the accumulation of toxins absorbed by the rectal veins can then cause the portal vein to become congested, which will with time irritate the Liver'⁵. Blood stagnation and stasis then is often to be found at the root of many of the complex problems that practitioners see in clinic these days, and 'is understood as the origin of many internal disorders causing pain'⁵.

Treatment Considerations and Guidelines

'A general rule in many traditions of Eastern medicine is the requirement of moving stagnation concurrent with or before using methods that tonify'³. Whether it's coming from an internal source (i.e. Qi, Blood, heat, cold, phlegm) or an external one (i.e. wind, damp heat or cold), 'if we tonify without clearing stagnation, the risk is we will make matters far worse'³. It is useful to articulate here that what EAM calls 'Cold, Heat or Damp in Western terms is understood as viruses, bacteria, moulds/yeasts/fungi respectively'⁶.

With this in mind, all initial diagnostic evaluations (and indeed most treatments to some degree) from an EAM practitioner will seek to identify, assess and treat the identified pathogen, stagnation or stasis of Qi and Blood. 'Assessing the degree of Blood stasis

can be critical to formulating a prognosis'⁷ as well as understanding how readily the patient responds, how long the treatments are needed, and how successful the practitioner is in addressing the underlying causes of the condition.



Chinese herbal formulas like Gui Zi Fu Ling Wan, Tao Hong Si Wu Tang, Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang and Wen Jing Tang are used often in cases that have long standing and obvious Blood stasis (and depletion). The first two are used a great deal in menstrual disorders, but acupuncture, including moxibustionⁱⁱⁱ and cupping, bloodletting and ion pumping treatments^{iv} can also be effective in the treatment (of Oketsu)¹. In fact, acupuncture and moxa are excellent treatment choices for patients who cannot take herbs due to possible interactions with other medications they may be taking, or who are simply non-compliant with taking medicinals.

Acupuncture for Oketsu (Blood Stasis) in the Abdomen

Japanese style acupuncturists will often use hara (abdominal) diagnosis to discern Blood stasis in the abdomen, as this is a primary site, other than the head, where lymphatic and venous return is compromised, and Blood stasis tends to manifest. 'The primary diagnostic sign is palpation pain or hardness in a triangular area between Kd15 and St27. The focal diagnostic point of Oketsu is found around St27'⁷ on the patient's left side. It is important to remember that palpation of the abdomen should be with soft hands and not done to elicit pain. Tenderness and pressure pain will show in the reflex areas without prodding.

When this kind of Oketsu is found at St27, the treatment is to needle Lr4 and Lu5 on the patient's left side. 'The practitioner should keep one hand on the patient's abdomen at the Oketsu sign and palpate the acupuncture points with the other hand. Needles are inserted at the exact angle and location that have reduced the pressure pain in the abdomen'⁷. Lr4 should be needled first, usually at a 15° to 45° angle upwards, with the flow of the

meridian. This point alone will normally reduce the pressure pain and tightness on the reflex area of the abdomen by 50 - 85%. Lu5^v is then needled in the same way, with the flow of the meridian at the same angle and will usually reduce the pressure pain in the abdomen by another 15 - 35%⁷. This style of finding the point that releases the pressure pain in a reflex area is a feature of the Japanese style acupuncture and meridian therapy strategies and one that allows for immediate feedback in the treatment.

Bilateral needling of Nagano's immune points may also be added to this treatment. These points are found between the area of Li10 to Li11, which should be palpated to find nodules or 'geloses' (sometimes referred to as 'gummies'), and then needled or treated with direct rice grain moxa (Okyu). Sometimes two needles are inserted into the geloses to achieve better results⁵. Okyu can be applied to Lu5 as well for good effect, especially if there are underlying respiratory issues to the Oketsu in the abdomen⁵.

Obvious forms of Oketsu in the abdomen include endometriosis and inflammation of the fallopian tubes, which are considered as excess conditions that affect the Spleen. Whether your patient complains of symptoms or not, the diagnostic reflex areas for palpation and pressure pain will generally show at St28, Kd13 and around the Dan Tien (the area below the umbilicus). When these areas of tenderness are found, the major treatment points generally used are Sp5 and Lr5. When needling Sp5, using a dispersing technique, and ensure that the pressure pain at St28 is being significantly released. If you or your patient prefer moxa, Okyu can be

applied for 30 to 50 rounds⁹.

There are profound 5 Phase connotations to the use of this point with moxa. Sp5 is the metal point of the Spleen channel (yin earth channel), and as such it is considered a dispersion point. The application of Okyu moxa with its yang characteristics, which is also quite dispersive, can be employed as a way of using 'fire' to subdue or regulate the metal point, (according to the ke cycle) while still supporting and nourishing the yin earth channel (according to the sheng cycle). 'Clinically the use of Sp5 has a strong anti-inflammatory effect on the abdomen and pelvic cavity'⁵.

When needling Lr5, which is located halfway between the medial malleolus and Lr8, ensure that it reduces the palpation pain on Kd13. 'Considered an essential point for irritation of, and inflammation in the mucus membranes and for scar tissue within the abdomen, Lr5 is also used as a point to assist detoxification of the Liver. It has the added benefit of treating bladder infections and gout pain'⁵. Mucus membranes may be considered one of those places internally 'where the smallest blood vessels intersect with the interstitial fluids surrounding the cells'⁴, and this is a practical way to understand how the Spleen governs Blood and holds the flesh at the microcirculatory levels.

Other important points to consider with any kind of gynaecological symptoms are to check Kd2 for palpation or pressure pain. As the fire point on the kidney channel, when it is painful, it will often indicate inflammation in the channel. To reduce the pressure pain, use Kd7 and Kd10 (Metal/Water



points), needle and then check that the reflex point (Kd2) has reduced its sensitivity. Metal/Water point combinations can be used on all the yin and yang meridians when there is palpation pain in the fire points of the channels.

Supporting points to use for gynaecological issues and especially endometriosis include GB34 and SJ4 or SJ5, which when used together will engender the Dai mai and the Yang wei mai. This point pairing can be needled or given okyu, usually 7 - 10 rounds⁹. If you wish to use them with a stronger balancing focus with the eight extraordinary meridians, use either SJ4 or SJ5, together with GB34 on opposite sides to each other. If you use them on the same side, the points will tend to treat a more structural alignment of the Shaoyang^{vi}.

A Few Notes on Moxa 'Kyuji' – Okyu aka Rice Grain or Thread Moxa



Most acupuncturists in the West, unless they have done specific training, don't really learn much about moxa, its broad application and its many styles. If they think of moxa at all, they think of the pretty smelly and smoky cigar-style moxa sticks that are used in an indirect way, never applied directly to the skin. The smell and the smoke have meant this style of moxa hasn't had good take up in recent times in the modern clinic. However, moxa offers so much more than this most basic of applications, is richly varied in technique and has benefitted from Japanese specialisation.

'Moxa specialists in Japan are separately licensed from acupuncturists'¹⁰ and yet most acupuncturists from meridian therapy lineages both in Japan and those trained in the West (say those who have studied in the applications and techniques of Ikeda, Nagano, Manaka and, or Toyohari) all use Okyu.

This direct form of moxa, and by direct it means that the moxa punk or wool is rolled into cones of varying sizes, placed on the body at specific points, lit and allowed to burn down to, or just above the skin level.

The larger cones (chinetskyu) or heat perception moxa cones are used more for the qi level and generally are not burnt to the skin level, while the rice grain size and smaller (toonetsukyu) cones

are used to treat more 'chronic conditions by affecting the stagnated blood and disease which is manifesting at the blood or deeper level'¹⁰. The modern use of this kind of moxa with adequate training is not intended to blister or to scar^{vii} although the possibility is always there.

If you haven't been trained in direct moxa, while I urge you to develop the skills of this really wonderful technique, there are a few options that you can use instead that give some of the benefits of moxa treatment with a lot less risk. The first is a tiger warmer, the second is Choseikyu or platform moxa. Both kinds of moxa are considered isolated or indirect forms but can be used by acupuncturists on the patient as an alternative to using rice grain moxa and are certainly helpful when giving moxa to those patients unfamiliar with the therapy. Both forms of moxa application can also be provided by the practitioner to the patient for home treatment. Once the patient has been instructed on where to put the choseikyu or where to best use the tiger warmer for their condition, they can continue the use of the moxa at home. In any modern setting where a small amount of smokiness is tolerated, these are acceptable alternatives to the direct moxa.

Conclusion

It is helpful to remember that any impediment to the free flow and circulation of Qi and Blood in the body will create a degree of stasis and stagnation at the Blood level. Whether due to structural changes from surgery, anatomical factors such as poor posture, chronic stress affecting the musculature or aging, or indeed physiological causes; damage on internal organs from medications, genetic predispositions, environment, lifestyle or aging, the extent of Blood stasis should always be in the mind of the practitioner. Many conditions that we might not previously have considered to be issues of blood stasis, are with a deeper understanding of the microcirculation realised to be just that. Addressing these microcirculatory changes as soon as they appear, or with consistent treatment if they are long standing will improve health outcomes. Acupuncture and moxa are excellent treatment choices, especially for those patients who can't or won't take herbal prescriptions.

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