

# Foreword

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What is it that so fascinates and enthralls us about the study and practice of Chinese medicine? There are many answers to this question, but there are perhaps two principal ones. The first is the ability to adapt its fundamental principles, born out of thousands of years of human experience, to a wide variety of situations (both in terms of illnesses and the patients themselves). The second is the opportunity it offers to embrace a compassionate attitude to patients and their health problems by focusing on the individual and addressing their differing responses to internal and external imbalances.

Western medicine has only relatively recently developed its theory of autoimmune disease, even though such disorders have almost certainly existed throughout the history of humankind. The idea of the body reacting against itself, now accepted as the standard explanation of autoimmune disease in Western medicine, is not a concept found in the classical tradition of Chinese medicine. However, the theories that form the essence of understanding disease in Chinese medicine lend themselves particularly well to interpreting this complex family of disease – a fundamental derangement of the body's essential processes leading to the production of pathological changes as well as the internalization of pathogenic factors and the subsequent conversion into toxicity and heat.

Professor Shen has specialized in the treatment of immune disease during his five decades of work at the Shanghai TCM Hospital. He has gathered a huge amount of experience in this time. He was among the pioneers in advancing the theory that internal Heat due to Yin Deficiency is a crucial pattern underlying many autoimmune diseases and he has applied this principle successfully in his clinical practice. On this basis, he has developed a number of empirical herbal prescriptions based on combinations of classical formulas which are employed on a regular basis in his hospital and elsewhere.

By their very nature (the body reacting against one or more of its own components), autoimmune diseases are generally considered incurable. However, this does not mean that a major impact on managing the disease and influencing its progress cannot be achieved. The long-term nature of these disorders means that a combination of herbal medicine and acupuncture is ideally suited to reducing the overall intensity of the

disease, prolonging remission periods and improving the patient's general quality of life. The latter is such an important aspect since patients can become demoralized by the persistent nature of their condition. The spectrum of severity of these diseases is very broad, and whereas some patients may be managed entirely by Chinese medicine, Professor Shen recognizes that others may require some form of Western medicine and in such cases offers Chinese medicine as part of an integrated treatment strategy. In his experience, this enables the doses of Western medication to be reduced more quickly than would otherwise be the case, while helping to offset some of the more distressing side-effects of the doses needed to control the progress of these diseases.

Autoimmune diseases cover a wide range of disciplines and many of Professor Shen's colleagues at his hospital have contributed their own specialist knowledge to the writing of this book. At the same time, the wide range of approaches offered by Chinese medicine to any given subject is acknowledged in the additional clinical experiences of other leading Chinese practitioners offered in each chapter. This provides an extra stimulus to the reader in the search for the best way to assess a particular patient (and we all know that patients rarely correspond exactly to pre-ordained descriptions). An excellent overall introduction to diet therapy and recommended recipes in individual chapters are an added bonus and also help patients to help themselves.

I first came across Professor Shen's writings two decades ago in books as well as articles published in medical journals. From the outset I have been very impressed not only by the clarity of the concepts he expounds, but crucially by the practical relevance and applicability of his work to the reality of the clinic. I can thoroughly recommend this excellent work to all practitioners of Chinese medicine. I also sincerely hope that it will find a wider audience among other health professionals so that the very real benefits of Chinese medicine can be understood and ultimately offered to as many patients with autoimmune diseases as possible.

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# Introduction

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Autoimmune diseases are a relatively new discipline in medical science and the management of these diseases has increasingly come to the fore in recent years, as effective ways are sought to influence the progression of what are generally chronic and often distressing conditions. The rationale of these disparate disorders, the notion of the body turning against itself and attacking its own components, is one that patients often find difficult to understand and accept. Yet Chinese medicine, with its strong theoretical foundation, its great adaptability and its focus on treating the individual as a whole, is ideally suited over the long term to reducing the overall intensity of the disease, prolonging remission periods and improving the patient's general quality of life.

I was lucky enough to grow up in a family with four earlier generations of traditional Chinese medicine practitioners and I naturally decided to follow the same path. During my Chinese medicine studies, I was therefore able to combine two approaches – absorbing the lessons handed down according to family tradition while systematically assimilating more modern techniques and theories at medical university. This background was crucial to my future career in that it provided me with different perspectives on my work and offered me a unique opportunity to constantly search for practical and effective ways to treat my patients, particularly those suffering from difficult and stubborn conditions.

I started to work in the Shanghai TCM Hospital in 1962, but just four years into my practice there, the Cultural Revolution suddenly exploded. Everyone was involved in this “great event” at the time and doctors either joined in or were sent to countryside. I was young and volunteered to work non-stop in the internal medicine department, treating hundreds of inpatients and outpatients a day. This arrangement allowed me to escape from much of the turmoil going on in the rest of the country and I was able to keep a low profile and focus on the treatment of patients with a wide variety of diseases. Many of the experienced doctors had been forced to leave the hospital and I had to face, and solve, endless questions and problems without the benefit of their advice. The only way I could do this at the time was to study in secret, searching for, trying out and revising treatment strategies in order to achieve an effective result. By the time the Cultural Revolution finished, I had treated a huge number of cases and accumulated a vast amount of knowledge, evidence

and experience in the treatment of a variety of conditions and diseases by combining classical materia medica prescriptions, personal formulas and acupuncture. These formed the basis for my future practice. At least I was able to emerge from this troubled decade with something to work on.

When the rheumatology and immunology department was set up in my hospital at the beginning of the 1980s, I was appointed as director with a dual task – treating patients with immune, autoimmune and rheumatic diseases while organizing research into these diseases, thus covering both clinical and laboratory aspects. Seeing 40-50 patients a day from different parts of the country allowed me to continue with implementing a combination of classical formulas and my own personal formulations and to integrate Chinese and Western medicine into a combined treatment strategy.

My deep interest in treating SLE and rheumatoid arthritis began at this time and has remained my major preoccupation to the present day. Not only do these diseases possess a complexity that poses a challenge to physicians of all disciplines and traditions, but they also mainly affect young and middle-aged people in the prime of life, often severely restricting their ability to work regularly and to live normal lives. The complications of these diseases can involve almost any part of the body including the internal organs, making them difficult to treat satisfactorily and often resulting in patients becoming demoralized as their quality of life is affected. It is our duty as doctors to explore every treatment option in order to assist patients both physically and psychologically.

Although autoimmune diseases can be considered as “modern” diseases since it is only in recent decades that their mechanism has been established, many of their symptoms are described in detail in classical Chinese medicine literature. Some authors think that since the diseases themselves are not recognized in earlier writings, using a Chinese medicine approach in their treatment often limits the effectiveness of treatment. This is not an attitude I would agree with wholeheartedly, having found that traditional herbal formulas and acupuncture point indications function very well in a number of cases. Nevertheless, in many other cases, especially those that are more complex, I have found it more rewarding not just to look at the symptoms and patterns themselves but

also to take account of the biomedical properties of materia medica and contemporary research into the effects of acupuncture, thereby combining traditional Chinese medicine treatment with a modern viewpoint. This does not mean that I advocate jettisoning the principles of traditional Chinese medicine in favor of a biomedical characteristics-based approach. In fact, the opposite is true: Just as Chinese medicine has adapted itself to take account of new theories throughout its long history, so it should be flexible enough to adopt recent findings and integrate them into its long-established and time-tested foundation so that the patient ultimately benefits.

The role of pattern identification in the analysis and treatment of disease is of course crucial. Many autoimmune diseases are multi-system and Chinese medicine often has an advantage here in its overall approach, recognizing correspondences and associations where Western medicine may only see complications. For autoimmune diseases, it is usually necessary to take both the underlying disease and the current manifestations into consideration when analyzing the pattern and formulating a treatment strategy. Many of these diseases are chronic and focusing on one only of these aspects is not likely to achieve the desired result.

I have seen and treated thousands of patients over the years, revising my personal formulas constantly. These formulations are now so thoroughly established with regard to their long-term effectiveness that they have been regularly used in our hospital and elsewhere in China for more than 20 years in addition to or instead of classic formulas. These empirical formulas are detailed in the main text in relevant chapters and have proven very effective both in alleviating symptoms and in controlling the underlying disease.

For example, the initial formulations of *San Shi Tui Re Tang* (Three Stones Decoction for Abating Fever), *Hong Ban Tang* (Erythema Decoction), *Xiao Ban Tang* (Decoction for Dispersing Erythema), *Cu Ji Su Tang* (Hormone-Promoting Decoction), and *Qing Shen Tang* (Decoction for Clearing the Kidneys) date back to 40 years ago when I was faced with stubborn conditions such as erythema, vasculitis, high fever, proteinuria, or increased creatinine levels and are based on the theory that in autoimmune diseases Yin is often insufficient and Yang is often in surplus.

It is my experience that 90-95 percent of patients with autoimmune diseases (particularly SLE, rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, Sjögrens syndrome, or mixed connective tissue disease) manifest with Yin Deficiency and internal Heat, even those relatively few patients not already taking Western drugs. The overall treatment principle of nourishing Yin, clearing Heat, cooling the

Blood, and transforming stasis has therefore become my main approach in dealing with these chronic and stubborn diseases, resulting in very satisfactory results in the management of symptoms and the return to normal values of various laboratory test parameters. This approach has allowed the condition of many patients to be stabilized and their quality of life to be maintained. My longest-surviving SLE patient first consulted me in 1983 when she was 20 years old. Chinese medicine treatment at the time and intermittently thereafter enabled her condition to be stabilized sufficiently to allow her to marry and have a child.

Based on the above treatment principles and many years of experimentation, I particularly favor including *Sheng Di Huang* (Radix Rehmanniae Glutinosae), *Sheng Shi Gao* (Gypsum Fibrosum Crudum), *Xuan Shen* (Radix Scrophulariae Ningpoensis), *Huang Qin* (Radix Scutellariae Baicalensis), *Ren Dong Teng* (Caulis Lonicerae Japonicae), *Zhi Mu* (Rhizoma Anemarrhenae Asphodeloidis), *Yi Yi Ren* (Semen Coicis Lachryma-jobi), *Gui Jian Yu* (Lignum Suberalatum Euonymi), and *Gang Ren Gen* (Radix Rhodomyrti) in herbal prescriptions. I have found these materia medica to be extremely useful in enriching Yin and clearing Heat to treat the underlying autoimmune or rheumatic disease. They are very effective in the management of fever, vasculitis, erythema, and joint pain and are also safe for use by patients requiring long-term administration; they can be taken intermittently for up to 10-20 years without noticeable side-effects.

Although spontaneous remission may occur, most autoimmune diseases are generally considered to be incurable. As I have explained, this does not mean that the symptoms cannot be alleviated, but it is almost invariably the case that patients will at some stage of their disease be taking Western medication. In my experience, 95-99 percent of patients who come to me for a consultation have already taken or are still taking Western drugs. Some of these patients turn to me because their condition has not completely disappeared nor improved significantly after long-term administration of Western drugs, whereas others have been put off by the side-effects of these drugs.

In my experience, integrating Chinese medicine into an overall disease management strategy has a dual role in increasing the combined effect of Chinese and Western medicine treatment while reducing the side-effects of higher doses of Western drugs. Except in some very mild cases, I usually ask the patient to continue with their Western drugs for up to three months while I prescribe Chinese medicine treatment; only then would I recommend starting to reduce the dose of Western medicine. It normally takes three years or more to completely withdraw the drugs. Some patients taking Chinese materia

medica may have to continue with a maintenance dose of 5-10 mg of corticosteroids. The integration of Chinese and Western medicine is discussed at greater length in Chapter 5.

At present in Western countries, the use of biological immunomodulatory agents is growing in importance in the treatment of certain autoimmune diseases, notably rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn's disease. Use of these new drugs in China is still at the early stage and there is as yet little experience in using Chinese medicine with them as part of an integrated disease management strategy. This is obviously a subject that will be studied closely in the next few years and I am optimistic that, with suitable early monitoring, there is a place for Chinese medicine alongside biologics.

My main interests remain in the areas of autoimmunity, rheumatology and the pharmacology of *materia medica* and their clinical application, and I have written several

books in Chinese on these subjects. This is the first book of mine to be translated into English and is based partly on my experiences in lecturing in Austria, Japan and Taiwan. The questions I am most often asked by members of the audience include

- How to reduce fever?
- How to relieve proteinuria?
- How to eliminate erythema?
- How to manage vasculitis?
- How to resolve swollen and painful joints?
- How to treat effusions?

It is my hope that this first English edition of *Shen's Textbook on the Management of Autoimmune Diseases with Chinese Medicine* will help to answer these and other questions in terms of pattern identification, treatment strategy and my personal experience, thereby enabling patients to cope better with their disease and enjoy a better quality of life.