



# Patterns and presentations of Gui Zhi and Da Huang

Dr Huang Huang's small book on the 10 big formula families in Chinese medicine (中醫十大類方 *Zhong Yi Shi Da Lei Fang*) is an excellent clinical manual that helps the practitioner to effectively think about prescriptions. This is accomplished by getting a clear understanding of how similar formulas are related, their special focus and function, and when to choose one over another. Secondly, and rather interestingly, Dr Huang looks at a patient's constitutional type. This, for him, is an extremely important aspect of diagnosis, and helps him to select appropriate medicinals.

## By Michael Max

**I**N THIS ARTICLE, WHICH LARGELY is translated from his book, we will look at herbs as *being* the diagnosis for a symptom pattern, and the distinguishing features of two of the constitutional types. As Dr Huang says, this is not a typical modern TCM way of thinking, but more of a *Classic Formula* way of thinking. But more on that in another article!

In this article we will look at two rather different herbs, *Gui Zhī* (Cinnamomi Ramulus) and *Dà Huáng* (Rhei Radix et Rhizoma) as a way to introduce Dr Huang's ideas about formula families, formula presentations, and constitutional types.

First a word about formula families. Figuratively speaking, all the different types of formulas can be regarded as families or clans. Which is to say, based on one or a few ingredients that make up the core, they can make up a group of formulas that have similar effects. Let's take for example

*Gui Zhī* type formulas. These are the group of formulas of which *Gui Zhī* is the most important component. Formulas such as Cinnamon Twig Decoction (*Gui Zhī Tāng*), Minor Construct the Middle Decoction (*Xiǎo Jiàn Zhōng Tāng*), Cinnamon Twig with Dragon Bone and Oyster Shell Decoction (*Gui Zhī jiā Lóng Gǔ Mǔ Lì Tāng*), Cinnamon Twig with Peony (*Gui Zhī jiā Sháo Yào Tāng*), are a few examples of what are referred to as cinnamon twig family formulas.

In the same way, *Dà Huáng* (Rhei Radix et Rhizoma) formulas are those in which *Dà Huáng* plays a major role in the overall formula function. These include formulas such as Major Order the Qi Decoction (*Dà Chéng Qì Tāng*), Peach Pit Decoction to Order the Qi (*Táo Hé Chéng Qì Tāng*), Capillaris Decoction (*Yīn Chén Hāo Tāng*), and Saposchnikovia Powder that Sagely Unblocks (*Fáng Fēng Tōng Shèng Sǎn*), and the others that are referred to as rhubarb family formulas.

It is just like individual members of a family who share a blood connection. Each has its individual character, while also demonstrating certain family characteristics. Every formula family has its basic effects and symptoms for which it is appropriate. At the same time, each formula, due to its own unique make-up, is especially effective in treating specific illnesses.

Becoming familiar with these formula families and their constituent herbs will not by itself enable the practitioner to have complete mastery over all aspects of Chinese medicine. It will, however, allow practitioners to grasp the rules in general for using Chinese herbal formulas, to understand the basic principles of the differentiation of patterns as a basis for treatment, and to handle these with ease in the clinic. In addition, it lays a firm foundation for further study!

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### Gui Zhi (Cinnamon twig) pattern

In Chinese medicine the symptom pattern or signs that point to the use of a particular herb is referred to as the “herb presentation” (藥證 *yào zhèng*).

For example, the symptom pattern that should be treated with *Gui Zhī* (Cinnamomi Ramulus) is the “*Gui Zhī* presentation” (桂枝證 *Gui Zhī zhèng*). In essence, this is a summary of the distinctive functions and appropriate uses of *Gui Zhī*.

Drawing a metaphor, if *Gui Zhī* (Cinnamomi Ramulus) is an arrow, then the *Gui Zhī* presentation is the target. Accurate aim results in a better score.

In similar fashion if the herb presentation accurately matches the patient’s presentation, treatment will of course be effective. The logic of this method is just that simple. Therefore, it is said, “by the presentation, prescribe the herbs” (對證下藥 *duì zhèng xià yào*) or “treat by the corresponding herb presentation” (藥證對應 *yào zhèng duì yìng*)

These are the signs that point toward the use of *Gui Zhī* (Cinnamomi Ramulus). The presentation is composed of two aspects; note that both have to do with issues of deficiency:

1. Fever, or the patient having a subjective feeling of fever; sweats easily, even to the point of spontaneous sweating; aversion to wind, sensitivity to cold, and joint pain.

2. A subjective feeling of upward movement or pulsations in the abdomen; palpitations, being easily startled, feeling flushed, and insomnia.

**Constitution:** The *Gui Zhī* constitution (桂枝體質 *Gui Zhī tǐ zhì*) refers to the frequently seen constitutional body types that often exhibit signs associated with cinnamon twig and *Gui Zhī* family formulas. Distinguishing this kind of constitution is accomplished by looking, asking and palpating to examine the patient’s body, skin, pulse and tongue.

**External characteristics:** The body tends to be thin, the skin is comparatively fair with a fine texture, the flesh appears moist and is firm. The abdomen is usually relatively flat, and the abdominal muscles tend to be tight.

The eyes have a spirited look, lips are pale red or dark. The pulse is often floating and large and can be felt when barely touching the skin. The tongue body is soft, pale red or darkish pale. The tongue surface is moist with a thin, white coat.

*Gui Zhī* patients are predisposed toward symptoms of sweating easily, or spontaneous sweating, night sweats or sweaty palms and soles; emotional or physical sensitivity to cold temperatures; frequent colds, tendency toward abdominal pain, palpitations, shallow or dream-filled sleep, or muscle spasms.

### Da Huang (Rhubarb) pattern

Let us now consider the polar opposite of *Gui Zhī* (Cinnamomi Ramulus) in *Dà Huáng* (Rhei Radix et Rhizoma), a herb that commonly comes to mind for internal excess.

*Dà Huáng* presentation (大黃證 *Dà Huáng zhèng*) belongs to the category of interior excess and interior heat. Interior excess is evidenced by constipation, abdominal pain and swelling and a dislike of having the abdomen pressed. These are the clinic signs of a fullness condition in the abdomen. Interior heat is seen by the fever, agitation, a red tongue and dry mouth. Similarly, the red face, dark red lips, yellow-coated red tongue, thick, sticky phlegm and tendency toward constipation of the rhubarb constitution (大黃體質 *Dà Huáng tǐ zhì*) are all manifestations of heat. Note the distinguishing characteristics of the *Dà Huáng* presentation:

1. Constipation, abdominal pain and swelling, with a dislike of pressure or a rigid abdominal wall that resists pressure.

2. Restless spirit, agitation, easily excitable, fever with sweating.

3. Tongue body that is red, firm and old-looking, with a yellow, dry, burnt coating.

**Constitution:** This constitution (大黃體質 *Dà Huáng tǐ zhì*) is the body type that often has *Dà Huáng* (Rhei Radix et Rhizoma) family types of symptoms. Chronic *Dà Huáng* presentation is not nearly as obvious as acute presentations.

**External characteristics:** Physique is robust, with strong, tight muscles. The complexion is red with an oily sheen, or greasy with stopped up pores. The lips are thick and dark red. Tongue coating is thick and dry.

Normally, these people dislike heat and enjoy cold. They have a tendency to experience dizziness, are easily constipated, do not sweat much, and when they do the sweat does not flow easily.

They may get a stuffy feeling in the chest; the mouth is dry and accompanied by a bitter taste, while the saliva is thick and sticky.

Cholesterol and blood pressure tend to be high in these patients. They do not like having their abdomen palpated, as any pressure is uncomfortable; alternatively their abdomen has a strong feeling of resistance when palpated.

### Conclusion

Of course, focusing on constitutional type alone is too simplistic, but I find applying Dr. Huang’s methods a useful way to double check my thinking about how to treat a patient. Being clear on what herb matches a patient’s constitution is a powerful tool in organising one’s thinking, and helps to act as a touchstone when writing a prescription.