

# Phlegm Misting-Disturbing the Orifices and Mitral Valve Prolapse

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## Introduction

My initial appreciation of the role of the heart, in this instance the valves of the heart, in mental-emotional illness occurred in medical school, since in biomedicine at that time the prolapse of the mitral valve was associated with panic attacks and phobias. Therefore it was a simple cognitive step from that information to identifying other aspects of Heart function, the orifices in Chinese medicine, with psychological conditions. My work with my teacher, Dr John H.F. Shen, and his emphasis on the relationship of the heart valves and vessels to mental-emotional issues reinforced that initial connection with the concept and clinical reality of 'Phlegm misting the orifices'.

## Concepts

When encountering a slippery quality at the mitral valve position according to the Shen-Hammer pulse system we discovered that in all instances allopathic medicine had identified a 'mitral valve prolapse'. All of these patients presented with moderate to severe emotional problems. Furthermore and as important, when I employed the aromatic herbs described in my paper 'Awareness' [i] I found remarkable resolutions of the symptoms ascribed to 'Phlegm misting the orifices' in Chinese medicine, as well as the panic and phobias associated with 'mitral valve prolapse'.

It is important to me that I understand the pathophysiology of Chinese medical conditions within the language and concepts of this medicine. What are the 'orifices'; what is Phlegm and how does it appear in the Heart? Why would mitral valve prolapse be associated with panic and phobias?

Standard answers to the question, 'What are the orifices' were invariably that they are the seven or nine orifices to the outside, especially the upper seven. The explanation of Phlegm was the blocking of the orifices by disquiet in the Heart due to impure thoughts, feelings and cravings. This is well expounded by Stephen Higgins in his thesis on the orifices [ii]. While I could appreciate the truth herein I was not satisfied with the lack of a mechanism that I could use to understand the process and therefore evolve a clinical approach. Yes, the aromatic herbs could dispel the Phlegm, but how was the Phlegm created and how did it get to the Heart?

I encountered an oft-repeated explanation, that 'Phlegm-Fire congestion is the result of stagnant dampness from poor digestion... that accumulates into mucus, combined with excessive heat from Liver *qi* stagnation. Since food is eighty per cent water, a weak Spleen (and/or Triple Burner), or excessive fluids or food that is difficult to digest can leave the digestive tract with more dampness (water) than it can handle. Chinese medicine teaches that this dampness (water) normally ascends to the Lung with Spleen energy to be "digested" or, more accurately, "misted". If, in addition to poor digestion, the Lungs are weak and cannot "mist" this dampness that is normally dispersed through sweat or moved downward to the Kidneys, the dampness accumulates into mucus. Longstanding Heat from Liver *qi* stagnation transforms into Fire and combines with the mucus to become the more viscous substance referred to as Phlegm-Fire, which goes to the Heart where it disturbs the orifices' [iii].

My clinical experience pointed elsewhere. Shock to the Heart is initiated by any sudden event that the Heart experiences or anticipates as a danger to its existence, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. These are personal, usually unexpected hurtful emotional experiences that cause the feeling associated with the Heart to withdraw, mostly for purposes of protection from further hurt. Sudden severe physical trauma can cause a fright that will lead to similar stagnation.

With shock the '*qi*' of the Heart retreats or closes off outside contact to various degrees and this may ultimately include Blood as well as fluid. [See the discussion below]. This retreat may be conceived as being a protective function of the Pericardium. Dr Shen referred to these conditions as 'Heart closed' [*qi* stagnation (Flat or Inflated pulse quality)] or 'Heart small' [Blood stagnation – (Choppy pulse quality)]. A third pulse quality indicating *qi* stagnation, Muffled, is associated with a dysphoric depression and possibly also involved in the formation of phlegm [iv]. *Note: While on the pulse, the lower burner informs us of a person's foundation, the middle of their stability, the upper burner tells us how well they can reach out to the world. The palm of the hand that reaches out contains Heart and Pericardium points and in addition the finger tips the Small Intestine and Triple Burner points.*

Since in Chinese medicine the movement of *qi* is necessary for life, the organism experiences stagnation as dangerous and automatically acts to overcome it. The physiological mechanism begins by bringing metabolic [normal] heat to overcome the stagnation; if it succeeds, then there is no problem; if the stagnation is greater than the ability of the metabolic heat to move it, the metabolic heat starts accumulating and becomes 'excess Heat'.

The body experiences 'excess Heat' as a toxic pathogen and attempts to eliminate it, or failing that, balance it with something cool that we call *yin* or fluid. This combination of accumulating Heat and fluid consolidates as Phlegm that 'mists', 'confuses' or 'obstructs' the Heart orifices [v]. This mechanism is increasingly more common today than the scenario involving the Spleen and Liver mentioned above [vi].

I reiterate that in our time 'Heart shock' is the primary aetiology of the condition 'Phlegm misting-disturbing-confusing the orifices'. What are other minor sources of stagnation leading to this disorder? Clinically I have observed arrhythmias, especially atrial fibrillation, obstruction from the Lung, Heart *qi* deficiency in which the *qi* is too deficient to move *qi* and a Heart type of depression associated with the Muffled quality in the left distal position that I call 'Dysphoric' [vii] and Heart Fire Bipolar mania-depression [viii].

### Clinical Experience

Generally speaking, patients with a slippery quality in the left distal position, or both distal positions, slippery in the 'mitral valve position' or even some kind of relatively significant emotional problem, I would usually begin with herbs that removed Damp from the Heart, *chang pu*, *huang qi*, as part of a formula that simultaneously addressed other Heart conditions [blood, *qi* and *yin* deficiency, etc. See Appendix I.

The most effective formula in acute conditions was *Niu Huang Ching Xin Wan*, continuing with something milder if they responded favorably. With this approach I had considerable success with neurosis and personality disorders and with psychosis when the rare opportunity occurred.

### Case One

The most dramatic patient that I recall was a woman about 60 or so, who was referred to me in 1985 by her daughter, a nurse. She was a diagnosed schizophrenic, and when her daughter brought

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her to see me, she wouldn't or couldn't stand still; she kept running around this large room, going in a sort of circular counter-clockwise motion around and around.

She wouldn't stand still long enough for me to talk to her or to take her pulse – she just kept running. Then, she suddenly tripped and fell and I managed to grab her hand and felt her left distal position, and it was very slippery. I had nothing else to go on except that I'd felt her left distal pulse and felt this slippery quality when she'd fallen down.

With the assumption that this was 'Phlegm misting-disturbing the orifices', I started treating her with *Niu Huang Ching Xin Wan*, a very powerfully acting formula particularly effective for a psychotic condition. Within three days she ceased to run around the room, to try to kill her husband [no one knew why including her daughter] and behaved normally.

She continued to take the *Niu Huang Ching Xin Wan* for three months and was completely sane until her 'born again sister' from somewhere in the south came to live with her, hearing that she was taking 'medicine'. The sister, the family matriarch, was from some extremist sect that didn't believe in any form of medicine, and so she convinced her sister to stop taking the *Niu Huang Ching Xin Wan*.

I don't know exactly how long it took for her to revert to her psychotic condition because her sister wouldn't let her see

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me. Not too long after that, her husband was taking a trip by air and was waiting in the airport when she appeared and tried, unsuccessfully, to kill him. That's the last I heard about her.

### Case Two

There was one other dramatic experience that involved a year-and-a-half-old child. The mother was referred to me, and she came in with three children, the other two being one aged three and one aged five.

The patient was a one-and-a-half-year-old boy who she had to hold at arm's length because he was constantly trying to hit her. She said that this went on day and night since he had been capable of assaulting her. She had been seeing a Five Element acupuncturist who I knew, who had referred her to me.

I saw his tongue and it had a lot of mucus on it. On the assumption that he had 'Phlegm misting the orifices', I suggested that she try very tiny amounts of *Niu Huang Ching Xin Wan*. It came in balls: a sort of soft gumming substance that you could cut up. She went home and came back a couple of days later and the little boy was not trying to hit her. She was carrying him, and he looked perfectly normal.

She said that she'd tried to cut up the *Niu Huang Ching Xin Wan* in very small amounts and to get him to swallow it, but he wouldn't swallow it. This woman was very creative, she dissolved a small amount of the *Niu Huang Ching Xin Wan* in water and then used an eyedropper and gave it to the little boy rectally. It worked. I followed them for five years and he had reverted to being a perfectly normal little boy. She'd only given him *Niu Huang Ching Xin Wan* for a couple of months at the most.

She also had a five-year-old that was not physically violent but was very, very angry, and very unhappy. She started giving him the *Niu Huang Ching Xin Wan* by mouth and he reverted to being a relatively normal child. [This woman was pregnant again when she came and had a three-and-a-half-year-old daughter who was no problem. She and her husband were evangelical Christians and planned to have as many children as possible. Subsequent to our initial contact her husband developed pancreatic cancer and died within two years.]

### Discussion

With regard to the aetiology of the disorders presented by these children, Dr Shen would say "How can be, brand new" pointing to some form of in-utero Heart shock. Kidney Essence is the force that guides foetal development and is also compromised.

Since I did not have the opportunity to employ my usual diagnostic tools except for his tongue [mucus], the assumption that these children's Chinese medical condition is 'Phlegm misting the orifices' is based only on the extraordinary positive response to a Chinese herbal formula that is indicated in the literature for a wide range of 'Wind' neurological disorders mostly involving the restoration of consciousness associated with extreme Heat and Phlegm. The formula is also said to clear Heart Heat and pacify the Spirit. [Note: *The pulse is not reliable in children and tends to change from day to day along with their ever changing maturation*].

The lingering question is how did this Heat appear sufficiently during the nine months of two pregnancies four years apart to produce Phlegm that could 'disturb' the Heart? I saw this woman as an urgent referral by another acupuncturist at a time when I was not in a regular practice, just teaching and writing. I did not get a sufficient history of her pregnancies to know if she had had toxemia of pregnancy or some fever producing illness that could have affected two fetuses in two separate pregnancies four years apart.

Since then this technique has proven to be very valuable with other children with ADHD [formerly called Minimal Brain Damage].

### Conversation

'Phlegm misting the orifices' is a general term that from the literature includes:

1. 'Phlegm-Fire disturbs the Heart orifice' marked by irritability and being easily startled and is an Excess Heat Heart condition. The allopathic diagnosis most closely approximating 'Phlegm Fire' is the manic phase of bipolar disease, though excited phases of schizophrenia are mentioned along with epilepsy.
2. 'Phlegm confuses the Heart orifice' marked by a lack of excitement, or depression and mental confusion. The allopathic equivalent would probably be endogenous [inherited tendency] depression and the catatonic form of schizophrenia.

### 3. 'Phlegm obstructs the Heart orifice' associated with stroke.

It is my impression that patient number one was misdiagnosed as schizophrenic. I discovered while living in England in 1971 that those patients diagnosed as schizophrenic were considered there to be bipolar of the 'Phlegm-Fire disturbs the Heart orifice' type. That view has been gradually adopted here in the USA. A separate issue not relevant for discussion here is the entire allopathic diagnostic schema of mental illness.

I have identified shock to the Heart as being a primary source of the stagnation that leads to the 'Phlegm misting the orifices' condition. Dr Shen described the Heart's response to shock to the Heart as draining *yin*. I explain this as the heart sending blood [*yin*] from the periphery and itself to the internal organs to protect them from whatever the danger to the organism.

*Sheng Mai San* is the formula of choice for treating shock [along with *Yunnan Pai Yao*]. *Sheng Mai San* is composed of American Ginseng, which protects *yin*. Ophiopogon nourishes *yin* and *schizandra* astringes and thereby conserves it. *Yunnan Bi Yo* overcomes the stagnation of Blood that occurs with this withdrawal while mysteriously initiating a clotting mechanism that conserves it.

However, approximately simultaneously we observe the mechanism described above in which the Heart [Pericardium] withdraws its *qi* from the outside world to varying degrees depending on its sense of its own vulnerability.

This withdrawal in Chinese medical terms is initially *qi* stagnation ['Heart closed'] that Dr Shen associated with a tendency to jealousy and envy. A more advanced stage of the withdrawal mechanism is Blood stagnation ['Heart small'], the manifestation of which is profound fear. The associated pulse qualities are discussed above. The nature of the mental-emotional consequence in biomedical terms is in a continuum from mild neurosis, personality disorders to the various psychoses. The differentiation of these disorders in terms of the degree of 'Phlegm misting the orifices' is yet to be investigated.

The result of this stagnation described above leads to the appearance of Phlegm in the Heart and to the subsequent condition, the subject of this article, 'Phlegm misting the orifices'.

### Conclusion

'Phlegm misting [disturbs-confuses-obstructs] the orifices' is discussed above with regard to its aetiology, physio-pathology, pathogenesis and clinical consequences, alluding to clinical tools for diagnosis and treatment, and leaving us with profound unanswered questions with regard to all the above.

We are left with useful instruments for intervention and a plethora of the unexplained that challenge us all for time to come. Or perhaps we should follow the advice of Lao Ze: 'Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets But always allow yourself to observe its manifestations' [ix] and leave the inexplicable to higher powers.

### Appendix I: the Mitral Valve Prolapse

The 'mitral valve syndrome' is, or was, associated in allopathic medicine with panic and phobia about which I learned in medical college. As stated above, a mitral valve position is accessible in the Shen-Hammer [CCPD] pulse system. Various qualities may appear that indicate an incompetent mitral valve, a sign within this system of Heart *qi* deficiency. The 'prolapse' and concomitant panic attacks and phobias are associated only with the presence

of the slippery quality in this position. For several years we referred patients with this finding to cardiologists who confirmed the presence of a mitral valve prolapse each time. The slippery quality has been associated with turbulence in another position and we assume that its presence in the mitral valve position indicates greater incompetence of the valve that impairs Heart 'shen' in specific but unknown ways [x].

## Appendix II: Generic Heart Formula

A general formula for the Heart that I have recently developed is as follows. Additions and subtractions can occur depending on the diagnosis, including Opening Heart orifice herbs and removing Phlegm-Fire. The following is suggestive, not all-inclusive. [xi].

### Heart Shock and Heart Yin Deficiency [Sheng Mai San]

American Ginseng	<i>xi yang ren</i>	9 gm
Ophiopogon	<i>mai men dong</i>	9 gm
Schizandra	<i>wu wei zi</i>	6 gm

### Calm Heart and Nourish Shen [Blood and Qi]

Zizyphus	<i>suan zhao ren</i>	9 gm
Biotae Seed	<i>bai zi ren</i>	3 gm
Polygoni Multiflori	<i>ye jiao teng</i>	6 gm
Longan	<i>long yan rou</i>	6 gm
Albezziae	<i>he huan pi</i>	9 gm
Poria Cocos	<i>fu shen</i>	10 gm
Craetegus	<i>shan zha</i>	6 gm
Placenta	<i>zi he che</i>	4.5 gm
Dragon Bone	<i>long gu</i>	9 gm
Oyster Shell	<i>mu li</i>	12 gm
Dragon Teeth	<i>long chi</i>	9 gm
Succinum (Amber)	<i>hu po</i>	1 gm
Margarita	<i>zhen zhu</i>	1-3 Fen
Licorice	<i>gan cao</i>	5 gm
Wheat	<i>fu xiao mai</i>	20-50 gm
Jujube	<i>da zao</i>	5-20 gm

### Build Heart Qi

Ginseng	<i>ren shen</i>	9 gm
Korean Ginseng		4.5 mg
Rx. Codonopsis	<i>dang shen</i>	15 gm

### Build Heart Yang

Aconite	<i>fu zi</i>	0.25 gm
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### Move Heart Blood

Cinnamomum	<i>rou gui</i>	3 gm
Salvia	<i>dan shen</i>	6 gm
Tu. Curcumae	<i>yu jin</i>	6 gm
Ligisticum W.	<i>chuan xiong</i>	9 gm

[circulation to the brain]

### Move Constrained Liver Qi and Liver Wind

Cyperus	<i>xiang fu</i>	6 gm
Fr. Aurantii	<i>zhi ke</i>	2 gm
Uncaria	<i>gou teng</i>	4 gm
Co. Hallioidis	<i>shi jue ming</i>	3 gm
Gastrodia	<i>tian ma</i>	6 gm
Bupleurum	<i>chai hu</i>	3 gm

[very cold and drying especially in women]

### Open Orifices and Remove Phlegm

Acorus	<i>shi chang pu</i>	6 gm
Calculus Bovis	<i>niu huang</i>	0.1 gm
Polygala Tenuifoliae	<i>ho shou wu</i>	9 gm
Poria cocos	<i>fu shen</i>	9 gm

### Remove Excess Heat

Scute	<i>huang qin</i>	6 gm
Coptis	<i>huang lian</i>	1.5 gm

### Appendix III: Literature

I. Refer primarily to Stephen Higgins discussion of the 'Conduits of Consciousness: the Orifices of the Heart in Chinese Medicine' in the references page 37.

II. Dr Ning Yu

In ancient Chinese culture, the heart – not the brain – is regarded as the centre of human consciousness, and the orifices of the heart are portals into and out of this centre. According to cognitive linguist and Chinese language scholar Dr Ning Yu, 'In Chinese, the word *xin* that primarily denotes the heart organ may also refer to it as the "organ for thinking" and the "seat of thought and emotions" ... in this way, the Chinese word *xin* "heart" [心] covers the meanings of both "heart" and "mind" as understood in English.' It is our finding that in Chinese medicine consciousness resides inside of the metaphorical empty space within the container that is the heart, and awareness is the product of that consciousness reaching out to and bringing intelligible information back from the external world to the heart via the orifices.

Thus, the orifices of the heart are essentially the portals into and out of this 'seat of thought and emotions', and they allow for communication between our inner experience and the outer world. In short, these orifices are conduits of consciousness that, when unobstructed, grant the heart a capacity to observe the world clearly; and, in fact, according to Dr Yu, in modern Chinese the term 'heart orifices' (心竅) can even be translated as 'the capacity for clear thinking'. Because the orifices act both as conduits for sensory input into the body (or mind) and the 'radiance of [our] spirits' (Larre), *shen ming* (神明), outward from the heart (or mind), it is these 'free and open' (通) spaces that allow for a human being's ability to understand messages from the outside world and respond with 'clear intelligence' (Clavey). The various pathologies that can lead to the obstruction of the orifices all affect this ability to clearly understand and respond to the world.

### References

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