

## VITILIGO and TCM – by Prof. Shulan Tang

I received the following email from Japan:

*“Dear Dr. Tang, I have read with interest your series of articles on TCM in Qi Magazine. If I were in the UK, I would certainly come and consult you about the vitiligo problem I have. Unfortunately, I am stuck in Japan for the moment. I was wondering if I might suggest that you do an article on vitiligo and the TCM perspective for Qi Magazine, Yours sincerely Chris.”*

I feel real empathy with Chris and other vitiligo sufferers. I understand how distressing the condition is, and how they must yearn for answers and ultimately a cure.

So what is vitiligo? Vitiligo is an acquired skin disease involving localised pigment loss, which is characterised by irregular white patches on the skin, without subjective symptoms. TCM refers to vitiligo as “Bai Dian Feng” or “Bai Dian” or “Bai Bo Feng”.

### **Main Points of Diagnosis:**

The white patches vary in size, shape and number. The patches have clear borders and may have increased pigment around them. Hair growth is restricted on the patches. They may be stable and unchangeable at the advanced stage. Some children may recover spontaneously at the early stage.

There are no subjective symptoms. Erythema and blisters may appear after exposure to sunlight and the patient often has a sense of burning heat in the affected areas. The condition is chronic and may occur at any age, anywhere on the body and is common in adolescents.

### **What Causes Vitiligo?**

In terms of TCM, vitiligo is mainly caused by deficiency, wind, dampness and blood stasis. The main pathogenesis is deficiency of Qi and blood. Invasion of the skin by wind results in blockage of blood circulation and consequently the skin fails to be nourished. This is called Bai Bo Feng (Adverse White Wind) in the classics.

According to western medicine, the condition is due to a dysfunction in the metabolism of tyrosine into dihydroxyphenylalanine within the melanocytes. As a result, melanin cannot be produced. Mental disturbance, nervous dysfunction and disorders of the endocrine system often induce this condition.

The treatment principle by TCM is to tonify the Qi and blood, expel wind and eliminate dampness, nourish the liver and kidney and promote blood circulation. Satisfactory results are attainable in treatment of vitiligo by TCM.

### **A typical case:**

A 45-year-old lady came to see me in May 1995. She had been suffering from vitiligo for twenty months. She had white patches on her arms and chest and was very depressed about it, although her general health condition was fine. I prescribed Chinese herbal powder for her. A month later, she reported an improvement - the white patches were getting darker, and she felt less depressed and healthier.



Chinese Herb – Chong Lou (*Paris polyphylla*)

She continued to take the herbal powder for one year. By that stage, the white patches on her chest had cleared up, and the patches on her arms had almost gone. No new white patches appeared.

The main ingredient used in the powder formula was Bu Gu Zhi. It is pungent, bitter and warm and acts on the kidney and spleen channel. Its main function is to tonify the Kidney Yang. Bu Gu Zhi is also useful in treating chronic diarrhoea and asthma.

Modern research shows Bu Gu Zhi contains a light-sensitive substance related to ultra-violet light. Bu Gu Zhi Su and Yi Bu Gu Zhi Su can both promote production of melanin pigment. Bu Gu Zhi Su can also relax the blood vessels, improve local skin tissue nutrition, thus increasing skin melanin. Bai Dian Feng Wan is a patent commonly used in treating vitiligo. The main ingredient is Bu Gu Zhi.

A mixture of Bu Gu Zhi and alcohol (30g and 100ml (75%) respectively) can be rubbed on the skin, as an external treatment, in addition to taking the powder.

Diet: Black sesame seeds, mulberry fruit, soy sauce and peanut skin help melanin production in the treatment of vitiligo.