

East/West Approaches to Respiratory Health, Part 2

Craig Williams, LAc, AHG

In [part one](#) of this article (November 2006 issue), I addressed the integration of Western herbs with Chinese medicinals in treating respiratory disorders. In this article, I will continue discussing the topic of respiratory health by examining two Chinese medicinals that are, in my opinion, underused in the West and are effective clinical additions to TCM protocols addressing respiratory challenges: *ling zhi* and *dong chong xia cao*.

The medicinal *dong chong xia cao* (*Cordyceps sinensis*) is a unique substance in the TCM materia medica. *Cordyceps* has the ability of supplementing yin, gently warming yang, augmenting the essence, tonifying the lungs, settling coughs and wheezing, and stopping sweating. It's sweet and warm and enters the Lung and Kidney channels. Bensky and Gamble stated, "Because it supplements both yin and yang and is a gentle substance, it can be taken over long periods of time." These diverse and comprehensive actions are not commonly found in most single herbs or substances.

The TCM medicinal *ling zhi* (*Ganoderma lucidum*) also has a diverse therapeutic range similar to *dong chong xia cao*. *Ling zhi* or reishi mushroom calms the spirit while augmenting the *qi*, nourishes the blood, tonifies lung *qi*, transforms phlegm, and stops coughing/wheezing. Reishi is sweet and neutral and enters the Heart, Liver and Lung channels. *Ling zhi*, much like *dong chong xia cao*, offers a surprisingly wide breadth of action, unlike most single medicinals.

The wide applications of *ling zhi* and *dong chong xia cao* allow for fluid and flexible use in the clinic. Respiratory disorders can have many different types of pattern expression, and patterns often simultaneously overlay one another, particularly in chronic complaints. *Qi* and yin vacuity are very common patterns found in long-standing or post-exterior invasion conditions. TCM states that enduring disease reaches the kidneys. If kidney water becomes vacuous or insufficient, the lungs may lose their depurating and down-bearing functions. TCM also states that *qi* vacuity engenders phlegm and enduring lung yin vacuity will allow Heart Fire to blaze easily. All these TCM statements of fact must be kept in mind when treating respiratory conditions. These statements of fact also reveal clues as to how the clinician might effectively use *ling zhi* and *dong chong xia cao* within standard TCM formulas. The following are some basic examples:

- *Qi* vacuity: *bu zhong yi qi tang* or *liu jun zi tang* with *ling zhi/dong chong xia cao*.
- *Qi* vacuity with yin vacuity: *sheng mai san* with *ling zhi/dong chong xia cao*.
- *Qi* vacuity sweating: *yu ping feng san*, *huang qi jian zhong tang* or *wu zi yao zan wan* with *ling zhi/dong chong xia cao*.
- Yin vacuity sweating: *zhi bai di huang wan*, *da bu yin wan*, *dang gui liu huang tang*, or *qing gu san* with *ling zhi/dong chong xia cao*.
- Yin vacuity with Heart Fire: *tian wan bu xin dan*, or *gan mai da zao wan* with *ling zhi/dong chong xia cao*.

- Lung yin vacuity: *bai he gu jin tang* or *sha shen mai meng dong tang* with *ling zhi/dong chong xia cao*.
- Lung yin vacuity with phlegm: *bei mu gua lou san* with *ling zhi/dong chong xia cao*.

After examining the multitudinous ways to integrate *ling zhi* and *dong chong xia cao* with appropriate TCM formulas, it becomes apparent how the practitioner can intelligently and creatively treat chronic recalcitrant respiratory disorders with improved clinical efficacy. *Cordyceps* and reishi tend to yield clinical results over a long-term course of treatment, and the clinician can rotate or modify the appropriate formulas around these unique medicinals as needed. Yin vacuity, *qi* vacuity and phlegm are all difficult issues to treat and will require consistency and compliance on both the patient's and the clinician's part. But with the addition of *Cordyceps* and reishi, improvements will be quicker and more substantial, which can encourage patience with a protracted course of treatment.

In my next article, I will introduce unique ayurvedic diagnostic and therapeutic insights for treating respiratory issues. I will discuss some ayurvedic medicinals that can effectively treat respiratory challenges, and show how yoga therapies can speed recovery and empower the patient to assume an active role in the healing process. Until then, take care and *namaskar*.

FEBRUARY 2007