



## Review article

# Concept of blood stasis in Chinese medical textbooks: A systematic review



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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Blood stasis is a clinical syndrome caused by an impedance or cessation of blood flow and is regarded as the cause or the result of many chronic diseases in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). The aim of this review was to summarize definitions of blood stasis in TCM and recurring concepts regarding the physiopathology that accompany these definitions.

**Methods:** A systematic review of textbooks was performed in 5 internet bookstores (Huawen and Cathay bookshops, Taobao, Amazon, Dangdang, Baidu), 3 search engines (Google, Baidu, and Yahoo) and 2 electronic libraries (the Korea Institute of Oriental Medicine and the Beijing University of Chinese Medicine), to find unique definitions of blood stasis. The authors assessed all books, extracted unique definitions, and selected concepts of physiopathology by using the constant comparison method.

**Results:** The authors found a total of 55 textbooks. Of which, 17 was included for further analysis and identified 17 definitions of blood stasis with recurring concepts surrounding the physiopathology. These concepts were composed of 4 categories that included vascular obstruction, abnormal flow of blood, blood congestion in a viscus, and contaminated blood.

**Conclusion:** Blood stasis is still a developing concept. This information may be a valuable reference for future research seeking to standardise the concept of blood stasis.

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## 1. Introduction

Blood stasis (Xueyu [瘀血] in Chinese) is a clinical syndrome caused by an impedance or cessation of blood flow and is regarded as the cause or the result of many chronic diseases in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) [1]. English translation of 瘀血 which is rendered as “blood stasis” in Western Pacific Region Standard [2] also rendered as “static blood” in World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies Standard [3]. Blood stasis is associated with a number of signs and symptoms, such as a dry mouth, a stabbing pain in a fixed location aggravated by pressure that worsens at night, a hard and fixed abdominal mass, a subcutaneous hematoma or purpura, cyanosis of the complexion and lips and scaly skin [4,5].

In the classical textbook *The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic*, blood stasis was referred to as ‘blood and vessels stasis’, ‘evil blood’, ‘retained blood’ and ‘vascular obstruction’ [6]. The concept of blood stasis first appeared in the text *Treatise on Cold Diseases and Miscellaneous Diseases*, where it was described in relation to impaired blood flow [1]. Wang Qing Ren, in his book *Corrections of*

*Mistake in the Medical World*, contributed more to the theory and practice of blood stasis than any other author. He strongly promoted the idea that many diseases were due to blood stasis and that, by stimulating blood circulation and clearing away static blood, one could cure even serious diseases [1]. His contributions and prescribed treatments for the management of blood stasis are still widely used today.

The study of blood stasis is one of the most active areas of research in China today that integrates traditional and western medicine. Since the 1980s, the academician Ke-ji Chen has been a leader in blood stasis research and has been the main proponent in defining criteria for the diagnosis of this disorder and for evaluating therapeutic effects, which have been nationally implemented [7]. His studies have investigated the correlation between the stimulation of blood circulation and a number of genes, proteins, and metabolites, and he has identified several potential candidates [6]. Additionally, there is increasing clinical evidence supporting the benefits of Chinese medicine for managing several diseases [8–10].

**Table 1**  
Definitions of blood stasis in the Chinese medical textbooks.

First author (year) [Ref]	Definitions of blood stasis
Chen (1990) [13]	Abnormal flow of blood, poor blood circulation and increased blood coagulability. Stagnant blood within the body.
Chen (1996) [14]	Abnormal flow of blood and stagnant blood within the blood vessel. Dead blood, dark blood, contaminated blood, extravasated blood caused by blood stasis.
Zhang (1996) [15]	The stagnant blood within the body, including the extravasated blood accumulated within the body and the retarded or stagnated blood of meridians in the local part or whole body.
Zhang (1998) [16]	Blood stagnation in local or the blood flow to the body has declined and the blood is unclean.
Yi (1999) [18]	Blood stagnation, which included abnormal flow of the blood within the body or poor blood circulation and stagnated blood of meridians in the viscera blood.
Chen (1999) [17]	Abnormal flow of blood. Blood stagnation in body or skin or viscera. Vascular obstruction out of meridian and blood vessel.
Jiang (2004) [19]	Four types of blood stasis pathological conditions such as poor blood circulation, dead blood in the congestion veins, stagnated blood of meridians, and blood stagnation. Blood stasis is a pathological product of static blood. Additionally, static blood static is the result of blood stasis.
Su (2005) [20]	The blood can fail to move properly and stagnate. This may be caused by stagnation of Qi (mostly of the liver), by heat, or by cold. Blood stasis often causes pain.
Fu (2006) [21]	Poor blood circulation. That is stagnant blood within the body or local part. Abnormal flow of the blood. Vascular obstruction. Blood coagulability. Due to the phlegm, dyspepsia, plague, summer fever, cold-dampness and emotional stimulation cause by blood stasis.
Sun (2006) [22]	Abnormal flow of the blood, poor blood circulation and stagnant blood within the meridian or viscera.
Zhu (2006) [23]	Poor blood circulation and stagnant blood within the body. Major symptoms of blood stasis are fixed pain, lump, haemorrhage and uneven pulse
Gunter (2007) [1]	Blood flow that slows down or brought to a standstill. Blood may accumulate in the blood vessels and thus it has numerous pathogenic influences on the body and its organs.
Qu (2008) [24]	Blood flow that slows down or brought to a standstill caused by blood stasis. Microcirculation disturbance, extremely haemorrhageology.
Liu (2009) [4]	This is a pathological condition of retarded or impeded blood circulation, or even gelling of blood. Syndromes of blood stasis result from obstruction of blood flow or from the extravasation of blood.
Chen (2009) [26]	Abnormal flow of blood. Stagnant blood within body and local parts.
Cai (2013) [27]	Abnormal flow of the blood. Blood flow that slows down or brought to a standstill. Stagnant blood within the body or local part.
Chen (2013) [26]	Abnormal flow of blood and stagnant blood. Vascular obstruction out of meridian and blood vessel. Disease cause by blood stasis. Pathological products of blood static. Additionally, blood static is the result of blood stasis.

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