

THINKING OUT OF THE BOX: SHANG HAN LUN FORMULAS AND FATIGUE

The Shang Han Lun is routinely considered the most important historical text in Chinese herbal medicine. Written in the Eastern Han period (25–220 CE) by Zhang Zhong-Jing, the original text, called the Shang Han Za Bing Lun, was later edited and split into two different texts: The Shang Han Lun (“Treatise on Febrile Diseases Caused by Cold”) and the Jin Gui Yao Lue (“Synopsis of Prescriptions of the Golden Chamber”).

Remarkably, both books are still extremely popular as textbooks and reference books, which is mainly due to the revolutionary method of recognising disturbances of bodily function as patterns defined by a certain combination of symptoms and signs. Once the pattern or “zheng” is recognised, it can be treated by a specific formula that addresses that particular pattern. The formula can then be modified to allow for variations in the pattern. This method of pattern differentiation and treatment made the Shang Han Lun a work far beyond its time, allowing for diseases not even existent at the time of writing to be differentiated into a pattern and thus be linked with a specific treatment strategy and formula. In this way, the Shang Han Za Bing Lun has provided the foundation of diagnosis, pattern differentiation and treatment strategy of Chinese Medicine today.

Staying with the theme of fatigue, below are some case study examples of the incredible versatility of the Shang Han Lun formulas in the treatment of “xu lao” (vacuity taxation, any pattern of severe vacuity) and insomnia in cases that seemed untreatable.

INSOMNIA TREATED WITH XIAO CHAI HU TANG [MINOR BUPLEURUM COMBINATION]

A 52 year old female with persistent insomnia that started 30 years ago when she suffered an extreme fright. At the beginning it was hard for her to go to sleep and she awoke with the slightest noise such as a closing door, people talking outside, etc. After waking it was impossible for her to fall asleep again. Her family took to tiptoeing and not daring to touch things on the rare occasions that she was asleep. Her sleep time was

around four hours per night, with many nights not sleeping at all. She had already undergone TCM treatment elsewhere, modalities including herbs, acupuncture, massage and qi gong therapy.



At the time of consultation, the conditioned had worsened to the degree that she didn't sleep at all for several days and had at one point broken down and wept without being able to talk. At the consultation her spirits were admirably well and she was still working, her appetite was normal and there were no obvious other signs and symptoms.

Previous unsuccessful treatment strategies had aimed at common patterns of insomnia, including nourishing blood and calming the spirit, calming the heart, nourishing yin, clearing heat, eliminating phlegm and clearing the heart, moving blood and transforming stasis, and dispersing food and harmonising the stomach. Nothing had worked.

Considering the numerous failed treatment approaches and the persistent nature of the disorder, the treating doctor remembered the quote from Lin Pei Qin's Lei Zheng Zhi Cai (“Collection of Differential Diagnosis and Treatment”): “In insomnia, the disorder stems from

yang not associating with yin”. Upbearing and outward movement are yang, while downbearing and inward movement are yin. These movements of yin and yang are facilitated through the shao yang (lesser yang) pivot. During the day, defense qi moves in the yang channels and a person is awake. For the person to fall asleep at night, defense qi has to enter the yin channels.

This patient's insomnia was due to the shao yang pivot mechanism not functioning correctly, preventing yin and yang from associating correctly. The main formula for correcting the shao yang pivot mechanism is *Xiao Chai Hu Tang* [Minor Bupleurum Combination]. After taking one dose, the patient slept through the night for ten continuous hours. She was told to take another nine packets to stabilise the result.

XIAO CHAI HU TANG [MINOR BUPLEURUM COMBINATION]

- **Ingredients:** Chai Hu [Bupleurum], Huang Qin [Scute], Ban Xia [Pinellia], Ren Shen [Ginseng], Da Zao [Jujube], Gan Cao [Licorice], Sheng Jiang [Ginger].
- **TCM Functions:** Harmonises and resolves half exterior half interior pattern (midstage pattern), resolves exterior heat, soothes the liver and resolves depression, supplements qi and strengthens the spleen, harmonizes the stomach and stops vomiting.

Case Study: Insomnia treated with *Da Chai Hu Tang* [Major Bupleurum Combination]

38 year old female, neurasthenia for 10 years, frequently takes sedatives, sleeps only 3 to 5 hours per night. Due to her lack of sleep and resulting fatigue and nervousness she seeks consultation in hospital. Her appetite is low, she is emaciated and is worn out. No strength, pale tongue with thin yellow coating, deep string-like pulse, takes three sleeping pills at night but still can't sleep, dizziness, hard stool.

The treating doctor diagnoses her insomnia to be due to vacuity heat disturbing the heart spirit and prescribes formulas including *Suan Zao Ren Tang* [Ziziphus Combination], *Huang Lian A Jiao*

Tang, Yang Xin Tang [Astragalus & Ziziphus Combination], *Zhu Sha An Shen Wan*. None of these formulas yield any result. The doctor changes his treatment strategy and prescribes *Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang* to move blood, also with no result.

The patient now also suffers from oppression in the chest, agitation, and constipation. She changes doctor. The new doctor diagnoses her with inhibited shaoyang qi dynamic and disturbed downbearing in the yangming (hand yangming large intestine and foot yangming stomach channels). As the ancient classic *Xia Jing* (Classic of Medicine) stated, 'when the stomach is in disharmony, one cannot sleep peacefully at night.' Hence, his treatment strategy is to course the liver (shaoyang), drain heat and free the intestine and stomach with *Da Chai Hu Tang* [Major Bupleurum Combination] with modifications: The doctor added *Bai Zi Ren* [Biota] and *Ye Jiao Teng* [Polygonum Stem] to the *Da Chai Hu Tang* [Major Bupleurum Combination] to calm the spirit.

After taking three doses, the oppression in the chest and agitation are significantly reduced, and she can sleep for 2 to 3 hours per night. After another five doses, she passes stool once a day, all other symptoms are significantly relieved, and her sleep is restored to normal.

DA CHAI HU TANG [MAJOR BUPLEURUM COMBINATION]

- **Ingredients:** *Chai Hu* [Bupleurum], *Huang Qin* [Scute], *Ban Xia* [Pinellia], *Sheng Jiang* [Ginger], *Zhi Shi* [Aurantium], *Bai Shao* [Peony], *Da Huang* [Rhubarb], *Da Zao* [Jujube].
- **TCM Functions:** Harmonises and resolves half exterior half interior pattern³ (midstage pattern), drains heat and precipitates (purges), soothes the liver and resolves depression, rectifies qi and stops vomiting.

Case Study: Insomnia treated with Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang [Pinellia Combination]

Mrs Li, female, insomnia for several years which was treated unsuccessfully and progressed in severity until she was highly agitated, could hardly eat, and was dependent on sleeping pills for sleeping at least a few hours. Her pulse was rough, the tongue had a thick yellow sticky coating, pointing to damp heat brewing internally. When asked whether there was a feeling of fullness and oppression in her stomach duct, she replied yes, very much

so. She also had not passed any stool for several days.

Her insomnia was hence diagnosed to be due to stomach disharmony. Treatment strategy: Harmonise the stomach. Prescription: *Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang* [Pinellia Combination] with the addition of *Zhi Shi* [Citrus Sinensis]. After taking one packet in the evening, she promptly slept through the night. After taking several more packets, her feeling of fullness and oppression ceased, so did her agitation, her appetite returned, her stool returned to normal and she could sleep well again.

In this patient, damp heat accumulation was obstructing the stomach duct, impairing the correct qi mechanism and causing disharmony in yin and yang, resulting in insomnia. By using *Ban Xia Xie Xin Tang* with the addition of *Zhi Shi* the heat was discharged and obstruction abducted, and the qi mechanism was smoothed.

BAN XIA XIE XIN TANG [PINELLIA COMBINATION]

- **Ingredients:** *Ban Xia* [Pinellia], *Huang Qin* [Scute], *Huang Lian* [Coptis], *Ren Shen* [Ginseng], *Da Zao* [Jujube], *Gan Jiang* [Dry Ginger], *Gan Cao* [Licorice].
- **TCM Functions:** Harmonises the spleen and stomach, aids the descending of stomach qi, relieves retention of food and fluids in the stomach, stops diarrhoea, clears heat, regulates and harmonises the intestines and stomach.
- **Traditional Indications:**
 - Spleen and stomach disharmony. Accumulation of cold and heat.
 - Nausea, vomiting, hiccoughs, distension and discomfort of the upper abdomen, borborygmus, diarrhoea, little appetite.

- Tongue: White to slightly yellow coating.
- Pulse: Slippery.
- Diarrhoea due to the incorrect use of laxatives (purging formulas etc.) during a febrile disease.

Case Study: Xu Lao (Vacuity taxation) treated with Gui Zhi Tang [Cinnamon Combination]

Mr. Liu, 18 years old. Six months after having married, the following symptoms appeared: Backache and weak legs, dizziness and tinnitus, frequent short voidings of urine, aversion to cold and not being able to warm up by putting on clothes despite it being summer, numb cold feeling in the lower extremities, sweating with minimal movement, reduced appetite and abdominal distension, sweet sticky feeling in mouth, profuse dreaming. Consumption of Ginseng and Deer Antler yielded no result. Observations: Thin emaciated body, withered complexion, feeble voice, pulse deep fine and weak, red tongue with scarce coating.

Diagnosis: Exhausted qi and damaged essence, dual depletion of yin and yang. Treatment strategy: Regulated yin and yang with *Gui Zhi Tang* [Cinnamon Combination] before attempting kidney supplementation.

After five packets of *Gui Zhi Tang* the symptoms largely disappeared. In order to strengthen the spleen, the following herbs were added to the original *Gui Zhi Tang*: *Shan Yao* [Dioscorea] 15 g, *Bai Zhu* [Atractylodes, white] 12 g, *Nei Jing* [Nei-Chin] 10 g. At the same time, the patient started taking *Gui Fu Ba Wei Wan* [Rehmannia Eight Formula] to supplement kidney qi. After the patient had taking the amended prescriptions for two weeks, all symptoms had disappeared.



Wearing excessive clothing in summer and not able to warm up, sweating upon minimal movement, deep and weak pulse are symptoms of yang deficiency. An aching lumbus and weak legs, dizziness and tinnitus, profuse dreaming and a red tongue with little coating are symptoms of yin deficiency. When yin and yang are not in harmony, then it is hard for construction (ying) and defense (wei) to be in harmony. Hence, the treatment method is to harmonise yin and yang.

However, in order to see fast results another doctor had recommended Ginseng and Deer Antler to strongly supplement the kidneys, without any results. Using Gui Zhi Tang to enrich yin, harmonise yang, and harmonise construction and defense treated the pattern perfectly. After harmonisation of yin and yang, the patient was ready for supplementation. The spleen (later heaven) was strengthened in order to support supplementation of the kidneys (earlier heaven).

GUI ZHI TANG [CINNAMON COMBINATION]

- **Original citation** Shang Han Lun Line 12: "In greater yang wind strike with floating yang and weak yin, floating yang is spontaneous heat effusion, and weak yin is spontaneous issue of sweat. If there is huddled aversion to cold, wetted aversion to wind, feather-warm heat effusion noisy nose, and dry retching, Gui Zhi Tang governs." (Shang Han Lun, Line 12, translation according to "Shang Han Lun – On Cold Damage" by Craig Mitchell, Feng Ye and Nigel Wiseman, Paradigm Publications, p.60)
- **Ingredients:** *Gui Zhi* [Cinnamon], *Bai*

Shao [Peony], *Da Zao* [Jujube], *Sheng Jiang* [Ginger], *Gan Cao* [Licorice].

- **TCM Functions:** Pungent warming exterior resolving, regulates and harmonizes construction and defence qi.
- **Traditional Indications:**
 - Exterior (defence qi) vacuity with wind cold invasion.
 - Aversion to wind, mild chills, spontaneous sweat, fever, headache, body aches, nasal obstruction, nasal discharge, sneeze, dry retching.
 - Tongue: Normal or pale tongue with thin white coating. Pulse: Floating, moderate pulse.

Case Study: Xu Lao (vacuity taxation) and low fever treated with Xiao Jian Zhong Tang [Minor Cinnamon and Peony Combination]

Five year old girl, fatigue, low fever in the afternoons for three months, which did not respond to any treatment. White face, low vitality and signs of impaired digestive function such as emaciated body, very little appetite, hard stool passed once a day. Deep fine forceless pulse, pale tongue with normal coating. Diagnosis: Xu lao (vacuity taxation). In this case, based on her symptoms, supplementation of the middle burner and harmonization of yin and yang had to be used.

Prescription: *Xiao Jian Zhong Tang* [Minor Cinnamon & Peony Combination] plus *Dang Shen* [Codonopsis], *Huang Qi* [Astragalus], *Dang Gui* [Angelica Sinensis]. After two packets, the afternoon fever abated, her spirits and energy level improved. To consolidate the results a further 21 packets were taken after which her energy levels were back to normal.

XIAO JIAN ZHONG TANG [MINOR CINNAMON & PEONY COMBINATION]

- **Commentary:** This formula is *Gui Zhi Tang* [Cinnamon Combination] plus malt sugar [jiao yi] which warms and supplements the spleen and stomach and relieves pain. Hence, while Gui Zhi Tang harmonises construction and defense, *Xiao Jian Zhong Tang* harmonises both the exterior and interior.
- **Ingredients:** *Gui Zhi* [Cinnamon], *Sheng Jiang* [Ginger], *bai shao* [Peony], *Da Zao* [Jujube], *Gan Cao* [Licorice], *Yi Tang* [Maltose].
- **TCM Functions:** Relieves spasms and stops pain, warms the spleen and stomach, and supplements vacuity.
- **Traditional Indications:**
 - Common cold in the very weak or infants.
 - Common cold in the very weak or infants where there is only low fever or inflammation .
 - Abdominal pain due to spleen vacuity and/or insufficient blood and qi.
 - Occasional abdominal pain (often pain due to spasms in the umbilical area) which is relieved with warmth or pressure and aggravated by cold or raw foods; pale complexion, fatigue, tires easily, anorexia. May also have oliguria, low-grade morning fever, sweating, coldness and discomfort of the extremities, dry mouth and palpitations.
 - Tongue: Pale red with a thin white coating.
 - Pulse: Soft, slightly thready.

