

The Herbalist's Corner

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TREATING COMPLEX MULTI-LAYERED CASES

Part 2: Treatment

Jake Paul Fratkin, OMD, L.Ac.

In the October, 2009 issue of ACUPUNCTURE TODAY, I wrote on how to use pulse diagnosis to distinguish patterns as excess, deficiency or complex excess with deficiency. I ended that article by saying “in conclusion, most complex layered cases that enter the clinic will show excess/deficiency patterns affecting the liver, stomach and spleen. Our job, as herbalists, is to evaluate the various stagnation and deficiency patterns and to apply the appropriate herbal formula.”

As I have written in previous articles, most notably “Managing A Patient With Multiple Complaints” (*Acupuncture Today*, July 2008), patients coming in for the first time tend to have mixed excess and deficiency patterns. My recommendation, then as now, is to prioritize liver stagnation for the first month. If their complaints are multiple, with symptoms occurring in various burners simultaneously (eg, insomnia, menstrual cramps, abdominal bloating, etc.), it is best to start with a broad purpose formula to move liver *qi* and blood. My preferred formula here is *Chai Hu Shu Gan Wan*¹. This formula actually is an elaboration of *Si Ni San* (“Four Counter-Flow Powder”)². The original *Si Ni San* contains *chai hu*, *bai shao*, *zhi ke* and *gan cao*³. To reinforce the formula's ability to move *qi*, *xiang fu* is added, as is *chen pi* which helps descend stomach *qi*. To reinforce *bai shao* in moving liver blood, the herb *chuan xiong* is added.⁴

After one month, we can now prioritize more accurately the predominant pattern, based on both symptoms and pulse. On the first visit, the patient has many complaints, but after one month of *Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang*, some of those complaints will be completely gone, while others have significantly reduced. We now need to focus on the worst complaints by prioritizing a burner – upper, middle or lower.

Upper Burner. If the worst complaints focus on insomnia and/or headache, we prioritize the upper burner. It is important to know if liver excess still plays a part, and

this is determined through pulses. If we find wiriness in the superficial aspect of the left *guan*-middle position, with a corresponding weakness in the deeper aspect of the same position, this shows that liver *yang* is rising. In more severe cases of liver *yang* rising, the superficial aspects of all the positions will be wiry, while the deeper aspect of every position will be weak in comparison. But even if it only shows on the left *guan*-middle position, this shows liver *yang* rising up along the gallbladder channel, which can create headache or insomnia.⁵ In this case, I recommend the classical formula *Chai Hu Jia Long Gu Mu Li Tang* ⁶. This formula takes *Xiao Chai Hu Tang* as its foundation, and adds the heavy mineral sedating substances *mu li* (Concha Ostrea) and *long gu* (Os Draconis).

In some cases of headache and insomnia, the cause is actually liver fire rather than liver *yang* rising. These cases are more rare, and are confirmed by red sides along the tongue body, and perhaps other signs such as redness to the eyes ⁷. The pulses may still demonstrate a sharp excess in the superficial *guan*-middle position, but it will also show some rapidity. In this case, the best treatment is *Long Dan Xie Gan Tang* ⁸, which cools liver and gallbladder fire.

Middle Burner. Complaints include epigastric symptoms (acid reflux, local pain), feeling of fullness after eating, poor appetite or indigestion. Here, it is important to distinguish excess alone, mixed excess and deficiency, or deficiency alone. Excess alone will show strong pulses of the superficial aspect of the *guan*-middle position on both right and left hands. The stomach position on the right hand will clearly show excess in comparison to its deeper aspect, the spleen. The treatment strategy is to clear liver excess by moving liver *qi* and blood, and to descend stomach *qi*. The treatment of choice is *Shu Gan Wan*, a modern patent medicine containing 18 herbs.⁹ This formula is for pure excess, containing 6 herbs that move liver *qi* and blood ¹⁰ and 10 herbs that descend stomach *qi* and damp.¹¹

If the excess is due to food stagnation, the pulses are also wiry in the superficial positions, but more importantly, the tongue shows a significant coat. Patients get full easily. In the absence of obvious liver *qi* stagnation, I would go with *Bao He Wan*¹² in acute or chronic cases. In purely an acute case, I would recommend the patent medicine *Kang Ning Wan*, “Culing Pills”.¹³

In mixed excess and deficiency, we again find wiry pulses in the superficial aspect, but with more noticeable weak or empty pulses in the deeper pulses of both the left and

right *guan*-middle positions. The left side represents wood (gallbladder and liver), and the right represents earth (stomach and spleen). There can be variations here, but usually the excess is not as strong as in the pure excess state described above. There is still a slight wiry quality to the floating aspect of the pulse. Both spleen and liver will be weaker than their corresponding stomach and gallbladder positions. While excess signs of stagnation are still obvious (abdominal distension, discomfort after eating), the history shows some chronicity of symptoms. The formula I would recommend is *Xiang Sha Yang Wei Tang*.¹⁴ This formula is similar to *Xiang Sha Liu Jun Zi Tang*¹⁵ and many people feel it is a variation of that formula, but *Xiang Sha Yang Wei Tang* actually predates *Xiang Sha Liu Jun Zi Tang* by 88 years. In *Xiang Sha Yang Wei Tang* we have a foundation that supports spleen *qi* (*bai zhu, fu ling, gan cao, da zao, gan jiang*), while reinforcing with herbs to descend stomach *qi* and dampness (*chen pi, ban xia, mu xiang, huo xiang, xiang fu, bai dou kou, hou po, sha ren* and *zhi shi*). The emphasis is still on addressing excess, but we see the inclusion of spleen *qi* tonification herbs.

With mild liver stagnation with deficiency of spleen *qi* but without stagnation of stomach *qi*, one can use *Xiao Chai Hu Tang*.¹⁶ Here we would see slight wiriness on the left *guan*-middle position, no wiriness of the right *guan*-middle position (stomach), and weakness in the deep right *guan*-middle position (spleen).

In pure deficiency, the pulses are uniformly weak, and the history is one of chronically poor digestion. Here we find deficiency of spleen *qi*, usually without dampness. These patients tend to be thin and weak, with very poor appetite and energy. I often see it with strict vegetarian patients. By avoiding adequate protein, their hydrochloric acid secretion gradually diminishes, and it becomes difficult to digest any food. It is unlikely that one can bring a quick turn around with these patients. I usually supplement herbal medicine with 3-6 capsules of hydrochloric acid per meal so they can begin to digest their food. Rehabilitation of the spleen and stomach *qi*, however, is not accomplished by HCL supplementation, and herbal medicine becomes very important. Various tonic formulas can be used, and I rely on either *Xiang Sha Liu Jun Zi Tang*, or if they are too weak, *Si Jun Zi Tang* or *Liu Jun Zi Tang*¹⁷. I also use GALLUS-MALT, a formula from Seven Forests. In this formula, 50% of the formula is composed of *ji nei jin* (Endothelium Corneum Galli Gigeriae), the dried internal gizzard of a chicken, which is powerful for aiding very weak digestion.

Lower Burner. If liver stagnation of *qi* and blood primarily affects the lower burner, there is usually a gynecological complaint: premenstrual syndrome, dysmenorrhea, irregular periods or infertility. For each case, we can often distinguish 3 stages: ovulation to menstruation, menstruation, and post-menses. One should pursue treatment for 3-4 months.

For ovulation to menses, one determines the degree of liver stagnation. For mild stagnation, one can use *Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang* (described above), but most cases will respond best to *Jia Wei Xiao Yao San*¹⁸. This variation of *Xiao Yao San*¹⁹ adds *zhi zi* (Fructus Gardenia Jasminoides) and *mu dan pi* (Radix Cortex Moutan) to help cool the liver. Pre-existing liver stagnation will worsen between ovulation and the period due to a natural increase in temperature, and *Jia Wei Xiao Yao San* is excellent for treating liver stagnation during this time, much better than *Xiao Yao San*. It is the medicine of choice in premenstrual syndrome.

If menstrual cramps present before or during the period, several formulas are effective if given during the attack. The classical prescription is *Shao Fu Zhu Yu Tang*²⁰, a formula that breaks blood stasis while warming the uterus. Also effective is the modern patent medicine *Tong Jing Wan*²¹.

For post-menses excess-deficiency combinations, one can use *Xiao Yan San* or *Tao Hong Si Wu Tang*²², which tonify the blood while moving liver *qi* and blood. One will sense a slight excess to the superficial pulse in the wood position (left *guan*-middle). In frank blood deficiency without excess, many women in China self-medicate with the patent medicine *Wu Ji Bai Feng Wan*²³ between menses and ovulation.

¹ *Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang*. "Bupleurum Dredge Liver Decoction." Recorded in *Jing yue quan shu*, "Jing-Yue's Complete Writings"; Zhang Jie-Bing (Zhang Jing-Yue), 1624.

² *Si Ni San*. "Four Counter-Flow Powder." Recorded in *Shang han lun*, "Injury (by) Cold, Discussion"; Zhang Zhong-Jing, 220.

³ *Chai hu* (Radix bupleurum); *Bai shao yao* (Radix paeonia lactiflora); *Zhi ke* (Fructus citrus aurantium); *Gan cao* (Radix glycyrrhizae uralensis).

⁴ *Xiang fu* (Rhizoma cyperi rotundi); *Chen pi* (Pericarpium citrus reticulata); *Chuan xiong* (Rhizoma ligustici wallichii).

⁵ Many recent graduates often treat insomnia as heart-*shen* disturbances, which has a deficiency root. I have found that insomnia, especially with menstrual disorders or peri-menopausal or menopausal disorders, are best treated as liver excess patterns.

⁶ Recorded in *Shang han lun*, “Injury (by) Cold, Discussion”; Zhang Zhong-Jing, 220.

⁷ At the risk of offending many practitioners and teachers, I would like to offer my clinical experience on tongue diagnosis. While all the textbook information is accurate concerning coats, colors, shapes, etc when it shows itself, I feel that the tongue offers no helpful information 85% of the time. When it does, it is accurate, but diagnosis is more often dependent on pulses and clinical symptoms and history.

⁸ Recorded in *Yi fang ji jie*, “Medical Formulas Collected (and) Explained”; Wang Ang, 1642.

⁹ The modern patent medicine is not to be confused with a classical formula of the same name recorded in *Wan bing hui chun*, “Thousand Diseases Return (to) Spring”; Gong Ting-Xian, 1587. Although four herbs from the original 9 herb formula are found in the modern *Shu Gan Wan*, the original formula was used for strong liver stagnation with heat.

¹⁰ *xiang fu* (Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundi), *bai shao* (Radix Paeonia Lactiflora), *qing pi* (Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae Viride), *yan hu suo* (Tuber Corydalis Yanhusuo), *chai hu* (Radix Bupleurum) and *jiang huang* (Rhizoma Curcumae Longae).

¹¹ *zhi ke* (Fructus Citrus Aurantium), *fo shou* (Fructus Citri Sarcodactylis), *bai dou kou* (Fructus Amomi Rotundi), *chen xiang* (Lignum Aquilaria), *tan xiang* (Lignum Santali Albi), *hou po* (Cortex Magnoliae Officinalis), *sha ren* (Fructus Amomi), *chen pi* (Pericarpium Citrus Reticulata), *xiang yuan* (Fructus Citri Medicae seu Wilsonii) and *mu xiang* (Radix Aucklandia).

¹² *Bao He Wan*, “Preserve Harmony Pills”, recorded in *Dan xi xin fa*, “Dan-Xi’s Essential Teachings”; Zhu Dan-Xi, 1481.

¹³ *Chinese Herbal Patent Medicines, The Clinical Desk Reference*, Jake Fratkin, Shya Publications, 2001, p. 488-490.

¹⁴ “Aucklandia, Amomum Nourish Stomach Pill.” Recorded in *Wan bing hui chun*, “Thousand Diseases Return (to) Spring”; Gong Ting-Xian, 1587.

¹⁵ Recorded in *Gu jin ming yi fang lun*, “Ancient (and) Modern Famous Doctors’ Formulas, Discussion”; Luo Mei, 1675

¹⁶ Recorded in *Shang han lun*, “Injury (by) Cold, Discussion”; Zhang Zhong-Jing, 220.

¹⁷ *Si Jun Zi Tang*, “Four Gentlemen Decoction” and *Liu Jun Zi Tang*, Six Gentlemen Decoction” are both recorded in *Tai ping hui min he ji ju fang*, “Heavenly Peace Benefit (the) People Harmonious Medicines Office of Formulas”; Imperial Medical Bureau, 1107. Attributed to Chen Shi-Wen, 1080.

¹⁸ *Jia Wei Xiao Yao San*, “Added Ingredients Free Relaxed Powder”. Recorded in *Nei ke zhai yao*, “Internal (Medicine) Department Summary”, Xue Ji, Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Also attributed to *Zheng zhi zhun sheng*, “Pattern Treatment Standards”; Wang Ken-Tang, 1602.

¹⁹ Recorded in *Tai ping hui min he ji ju fang*, “Heavenly Peace Benefit (the) People Harmonious Medicines Office of Formulas”; Imperial Medical Bureau, 1107. Attributed to Chen Shi-Wen, 1080.

²⁰ Recorded in *Yi lin gai cuo*, “Physicians Circle Correction (of) Errors”, Wang Qing-Ren, 1830.

²¹ See Fratkin, p. 547-550.

²² *Tao Hong Si Wu Tang* was recorded in *Yi lei yuan rong*, “Medical Ramparts Supreme Commanders”, Wang Hao-Gu, 1291. It has also been attributed to *Yi zong jin jian*, “Medical Tradition’s Golden Mirror”; Wu Qian, 1742.

²³ See Fratkin, p. 561-565.