

The Treatment of Liver Patterns

MODERN AND TRADITIONAL PRINCIPLES AND METHODOLOGIES WITH CORRESPONDING FORMULAS

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Liver Qi stagnation is a commonly seen clinical pattern in current practice. This paper outlines and defines the strategies and corresponding formulas for the treatment of pathological Liver patterns in Chinese medicine. Chinese traditional methodology is explained in detail, and two case studies are presented.

The relationship of a herbal prescription to theoretical therapeutic principles constitutes the framework of formula selection in Chinese medicine. This system of formulas, matched to a comprehensive symptom-sign picture, with modifications to fit the individual's state of resistance or the specific disease process, is a unified medical model following specific methods or strategies. These strategies form the central position between the diagnosis and the prescription, with an inherent consistency between each. The physician organizes a prescription according to a clinical rationale, which includes diagnosis, therapeutic principle, and methodology. The final prescription mirrors the full symptom, sign, and constitutional picture of the patient. Modifications follow the rules of the therapeutic function and interrelationships of individual herbs.

This paper discusses the common methods of treatment, outlines the most widely used corresponding formulas, discusses the principles of Chinese medical therapy for Liver patterns (*gan bing*), and presents commentaries on modern adaptations of the traditional principles.

METHODS AND FORMULAS

The following methods and formulas constitute the basic methodology for the treatment of Liver patterns. In Chinese, the formula's name is frequently matched to the diagnostic terminology and methodology, thereby making it a convenient and consistent system of prescribing.

1. To Smooth the Liver (*Shu Gan*)

Also meaning "to dredge or spread the Liver," *shu gan* refers to the process of scattering Qi stagnation in order to smooth its flow, thereby reducing symptoms. Since the Liver rules from the middle heater, the primary symptoms for this method are conditions of local Qi

stagnation, primarily breast pain, flank pain, chest distention, and epigastric pain. Although most frequently used to treat upper gastrointestinal conditions, this method is also used to treat a wide range of Liver patterns. Psychogenic conditions such as ulcerative disease, chronic gastritis, and irritable bowel syndrome also fall under this method, as do menstrual complaints including premenstrual syndrome, dysmenorrhea, and fibrocystic breast disease. The *shu gan* strategy constitutes the main methodology for Liver therapy. Its representative formula is *Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang* (Bupleurum Powder to Spread the Liver).

There are several submethods, each involving modification of *Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang*, although one submethod, *shu gan jie yu*, uses a specific formula, *Yue Ju Wan* (Escape Restraint Pill). The difference between these two formulas is that *Yue Ju Wan* is primarily indicated for digestive conditions, whereas *Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang* is a more adaptable prescription.

The most frequently used herbs to smooth the flow of Liver Qi are Chai Hu (*Radix Bupleuri*) and Xiang Fu (*Rhizoma Cyperi Rotundi*). Other commonly used herbs are Qing Pi (*Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae Viride*), Zhi Shi (*Fructus Citri seu Ponciri Immaturus*), Yu Jin (*Tuber Curcumae*), Chuan Lian Zi (*Fructus Meliae Toosendan*), and Hou Po (*Cortex Magnoliae Officinalis*).

Submethods

- to smooth the Liver and regulate Qi (*shu gan li qi*).
- to smooth the Liver and remove stagnation (*shu gan jie yu*).
- to smooth the Liver and harmonize the Stomach (*shu gan he wei*).
- to smooth the Liver and strengthen the Spleen (*shu gan jian pi*).

2. To Harmonize (*Tiao He*)

Tiao he means to harmonize, adjust, or return to balance, and is sometimes called "to redress balance". This method is based on the naturalistic perspective of the interplay of opposites - in Chinese philosophy symbolized by the yin and yang concept of balance - and is one of the main elements of Chinese medicine. This important method for Liver therapy, although treating similar conditions as *shu gan*, has important variations. The *shu gan* method

primarily treats conditions of Liver Qi stagnation, with an emphasis on moderate to excess conditions in the middle heater, e.g. digestive conditions. *Tiao he* refers to harmonizing imbalances created between the elements of wood and earth, Liver and Spleen-Stomach, including not only digestive conditions but also conditions related to deficiency of Qi and blood. In the *Jin Gui Yao Lue*, (Synopsis of Prescriptions of the Golden Chamber) the initial passage of the first chapter says, "Because a disease moves, the superior physician knows that Liver disease eventually transmits to the Spleen."¹ Many physicians, referring to this passage, prefer to treat Spleen deficiency to rectify Liver stagnation, but that form of therapy is incomplete. A balanced methodology is needed - partly regulating Liver Qi, and partly supplementing the Spleen. This method is represented by two formulas: *Xiao Yao Wan* (Leisure Powder) and *Si Ni San* (Frigid Extremities Powder). A third formula worth mentioning is *Xiao Chai Hu Tang* (Minor Bupleurum Decoction).

Chai Hu (Radix Bupleurum), the main agent in all of the formulas above and in *Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang*, is considered to belong to the superior class of herbs according to the legendary figure *Shen Nung* in the *Ben Cao*, the original materia medica. Its taste is bitter with a slightly cold nature; it is used to harmonize the Liver and Spleen by elevating Spleen Qi and relieving Liver Qi stagnation, and to harmonize the interior and exterior. The main differentiation of these Bupleurum formulas is as follows: *Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang* primarily treats Liver Qi stagnation without significant Spleen Qi deficiency. *Xiao Yao Wan* and *Si Ni San* treat Liver Qi stagnation and Spleen deficiency. *Si Ni San* treats patterns of Liver invading Spleen where the Qi stagnation results in heat congestion trapped in the interior while the extremities are cold. *Xiao Yao Wan* is used for cases of Liver Qi stagnation with Spleen Qi and blood deficiency, and is also widely used for gynecological conditions. In fact, *Xiao Yao Wan* is one of the most commonly prescribed formulas by Western acupuncturists. An associated formula to *Xiao Yao Wan* is *Shu Gan Li Pi Tang* (Spread the Liver and Regulate the Spleen Decoction). It is used to treat severe Liver Qi stagnation, Spleen Qi deficiency, and blood stagnation. *Xiao Chai Hu Tang*, primarily used to treat shao yang stage illness and disharmony between the Liver and Gall Bladder, may be also used to treat chronic Liver Qi stagnation with Liver and Spleen disharmony.

Submethods

- to harmonize the Liver and Stomach (*tiao he gan wei*).
- to harmonize the Liver and Spleen (*tiao he gan pi*).

3. To Drain the Liver (*Xie Gan*)

Xie means to release, clear, discharge, or cleanse but is commonly called "draining". This method is used to clear excess pathogenic heat and fire from the Liver (*xie gan hou* or *qing gan xie hou*), thereby freeing the course of Qi. Its representative formula is *Long Dan Xie Gan Tang* (Gentiana Long Dan Cao Decoction to Drain the Liver). Excess heat in the Liver and Gall Bladder causes symptoms of hypochondriac pain and abdominal distention, bitter taste in the mouth, and headache. If the stagnant heat is severe, it will transform into fire and produce symptoms of severe headache, redness and pain in the eyes, and tinnitus. Congested heat frequently combines with dampness

causing an accumulation of damp heat in the lower heater with symptoms of turbid urine or dysuria, itching of the scrotal or vaginal area, purulent vaginal discharge, and constipation.

Long Dan Xie Gan Tang is capable of clearing heat from all three heaters. For specific locations of heat stagnation, associated formulas such as *Qing Gan Shen Shi Tang* (Clearing the Liver and Eliminating Dampness Decoction) have been developed. This formula clears heat from the lower burner and activates blood circulation, and is primarily used for prostatitis.

Another formula commonly used to clear accumulated heat from the Liver and Gall Bladder is *Da Chai Hu Tang* (Major Bupleurum Decoction). It is used for cholecystitis, hepatitis, and intestinal obstruction and may also be used to treat upward flaming of fire causing hypertension, tinnitus, and conjunctivitis. This formula should only be used in patients with a moderate to strong constitution.

The most commonly used herbs to clear Liver fire are Long Dan Cao (Radix Gentianae Scabrae), Xia Ku Cao (Spica Prunellae Vulgaris), Zhi Zi (Fructus Gardeniae Jasminoidis), and Huang Qin (Radix Scutellariae Baicalensis).

4. To Simultaneously Treat the Liver and Kidney (*Zi Yang Gan Shen*)

Since Chinese medicine considers the Liver and Kidney as having the same origin, excess Liver conditions of ascending yang or heat often have an accompanying deficiency of Kidney yin, either as cause or effect. Therefore the most effective strategy of treatment is to tonify Kidney and Liver yin by modification of *Liu Wei Di Huang Wan* (Six-Ingredient Pill with Rehmannia). The representative formula for this method is *Qi Ju Di Huang Wan* (Lycium Fruit, Chrysanthemum, and Rehmannia Pill). Other commonly used formulas include *Hu Qian Wan* (Hidden Tiger Pill) and *Da Bu Yin Wan* (Great Tonify the Yin Pill).

The most common herbs to nourish Liver yin are Gou Qi Zi (Fructus Lycii Chinensis), Han Lian Cao (Herba Ecliptae Prostratae), Bie Jia (Carapax Amydæ Sinensis), and Nu Zhen Zi (Fructus Ligustri Lucidi).

5. To Subdue Yang (*Qian Yang*)

This method, also called "lowering, or checking" excess Liver yang, refers to the control of yang by yin; in Chinese it means to hide yang within yin. It is the strategy of treatment for conditions of ascending Liver yang excess, with symptoms of headache, mania, and insomnia. Its predominant characteristic is the use of heavy agents, such as Mu Li (Concha Ostrea), to lower the excess yang. The representative formula is *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin* (Gastrodia and Uncaria Decoction), but *Chai Hu Jia Long Gu Mu Li Tang* (Bupleurum plus Dragon Bone and Oyster Shell Decoction) is also commonly used.

Conditions of excess yang may be complicated by yin deficiency. And, since yin controls yang, yin tonics are frequently combined in formulas to treat yang excess. Therefore, formula differentiation is based on the degree of yin deficiency. If yin deficiency symptoms predominate over yang excess symptoms, use *Qi Ju Di Huang Wan* (Lycium Fruit, Chrysanthemum, and Rehmannia Pill) with the addition of herbs to lower Liver yang. If the yin deficiency is relatively minor compared to the yang ex-

cess, use formulas that primarily treat the Liver yang excess with the addition or increased dosage of yin tonics.

Additionally, internal wind or fire may be generated by excess Liver yang; in such cases, use *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin* (Gastrodia and Uncaria Decoction). Both of these formulas, *Chai Hu Jia Long Gu Mu Li Tang* and *Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin*, primarily treat excess symptoms, but are balanced to address complicating deficiency patterns.

The most commonly used herbs to subdue Liver yang are: Mu Li (Concha Ostreae), Shi Jue Ming (Concha Haliotidis), Long Gu (Os Draconis), and Bai Ji Li (Fructus Tribuli Terrestris).

Submethods

- to nourish the yin to subdue the yang (*zi yin gian yang*).
- to settle the Liver to subdue yang (*zhen gan Qian yang*).

6. To Calm the Liver (*Ping Gan*)

Another unique aspect of Liver therapy is the calming method*. The symptom picture for this method includes dizziness, headache, tinnitus, insomnia, and irritability. Severe conditions have symptoms of vertigo, syncope, mental confusion, and loss of consciousness. In Chinese medicine, *ping gan* refers to a specific method of treating hyperactive Liver generating internal wind, *ping gan xi feng*: "to calm the Liver and extinguish wind". Its representative formula is *Zhen Gan Xi Feng Tang* (Sedate the Liver and Extinguish Wind Decoction). As in other methods for the treatment of the Liver, the management of Yin deficiency is important. If Liver and Kidney Yin deficiency are present with hyperactivity of Liver Wind, with symptoms of dizziness, sore lower back and knees, insomnia, dream-disturbed sleep, with a red tongue and a thin rapid pulse, use *Da Ding Feng Zhu* (Major Arrest Wind Pearl). As in other methods for the treatment of the Liver, the management of yin deficiency is important and features in both formulas but predominates in *Da Ding Feng Zhu*.

The most commonly used herbs are Tian Ma (Rhizoma Gastrodiae Elatae), Gou Teng (Ramulus Uncariae Cum Uncis) and Ju Hua (Flos Chrysanthemi Morifolii).

7. To Nourish Blood and Smooth the Liver (*Yang Xue Rou Gan*)

This method is used to treat deficiency of Liver blood. Its symptom picture includes fatigue, dry eyes and poor vision, muscle spasm and twitching, and insomnia. This indicates stagnation of Qi with blood deficiency causing poor nourishment of the tissues related to the Liver, including the tendons and eyes. Its representative formula is *Bu Gan Tang* (Tonify the Liver Decoction) a modification of *Si Wu Tang* (Four-Substance Decoction).

PRINCIPLES

Constant and regular movement is one of the five major characteristics of Qi. The other four are: the ability to transform; the ability to retain and hold the organs in place; the maintenance of a warm and consistent body temperature, and the natural defense from external

pathogenic influences. A core principle of Chinese medicine is the focus on the effects of Qi in the body and the therapeutic manipulation of Qi by herbs, massage, exercise, and acupuncture. The basic principle for the treatment of stagnant, sluggish, or impeded flow of Qi or blood, is to use herbs with regulatory or activating effects (*yi zhe xing zhi*).

In the *Nei Jing Su Wen* it says, "Those who have a disease of the Liver are animated and quick witted in the early morning. Their spirits are heightened in the evening and at midnight they are calm and quiet. When the Liver is sick it has the tendency to disintegrate. Then one should quickly eat pungent food which dispels this tendency. One uses pungent food in connection with the Liver in order to supplement its function and to stop leaks, and one uses sour food in order to drain and expel"². This passage indicates that there are two general principles for treating the Liver: i) smoothing or regulating methods, and ii) tonification or supplementation methods.

Treatment of Liver disorders is complex. The following guidelines to therapeutic principles, along with suggestions for formulas and modifications, will greatly enhance the practitioner's expertise in the treatment of these commonly seen conditions.

1. Regulating the Liver

Li Qi, the general principle for the regulation of Qi, emphasizes not only constant and regular flow but also the appropriate direction of flow. The flow of Qi has specific characteristics relative to each organ system. Spleen Qi transports upwards, Stomach Qi moves downward, Lung Qi governs the descending function, and Liver Qi governs ascending function. Because of the importance of appropriateness, constancy, and unimpeded movement of Qi, and the physiological characteristic of the Liver to control the harmonious flow of Qi, the majority of prescriptions for the treatment of the Liver are formulated with the addition of Qi regulators. Additionally, since there is a close relationship between the movement of Qi and the circulation of blood, herbs for the regulation of Qi and the regulation or activation of blood (*hou xue*) are frequently combined.

2. Main Principles

There are two major therapeutic principles in Chinese herbal medicine. One is the effect on the physiological characteristics of the organs, and the other is the effect on the disease process. Effective treatment requires attention to both principles. In the case of the Liver, its two main physiological characteristics are control over the regulation of Qi, and the storage of blood.

The Liver's function of Qi regulation has several important features, namely regulation of digestion, harmony of the emotions, harmony of menstruation and secretion of bile. Each of these functions is easily affected by irregular or disturbed flow of Qi. Furthermore, there are two important aspects to consider in relation to the Liver's regulation of Qi: the harmonious flow and even distribution of Qi, and the control of the tendency for yang Qi to rise. Therefore the characteristics of Liver physiology and the general features of Qi regulation should be considered when prescribing or modifying formulas for the treatment of Liver patterns. Specific treatment for patho-

*This important method also refers to the ability of the Liver to regenerate or restore itself with rest and avoidance of stress, and is addressed in more detail in the section on principles.

logical states and conditions should also be integrated into the formula choice.

The therapeutic regulation of stagnated Liver Qi involves several unique principles. One of the most important is based on the nature of the Liver as a yin organ. The traditional saying *mu yu da zhi*, "wood stagnation should be smoothed", indicates this important principle. Even though Liver patterns commonly present with excess symptoms, its energy should not be depleted. Liver Qi should not be forced. It should not be pushed or rushed. Frequently referred to as the "brittle organ", its Qi must be coordinated, relaxed, harmonized, balanced, smoothed, calmed, and relieved of stress. Therefore the Liver is always treated with a combination of nourishing herbs, for either yin, blood, or Spleen Qi, along with herbs that have a harmonizing effect. The most notable of the herbs that have this unique harmonizing property is *Chai Hu* (Radix Bupleurum). Simultaneously herbs may be applied to lower excess symptoms or regulate stagnation. A careful study of the interrelationships of the individual herbs in the formulas listed in this paper illustrates these principles.

3. Spirit, Mind and Emotions

Since Liver conditions often have accompanying emotional components, they may also be treated by balancing excess and deficient energies with rest, meditation, a relaxing vacation, and the like. Conditions of stress, irritability, anger, restlessness, purposelessness, depression, and ungrounded behavior all relate to Liver Qi stagnation, and respond well to rest or stress-reduction techniques. From the standpoint of Chinese etiology, stress and emotional excesses are the fundamental cause of most Liver patterns.

According to Chinese medical theory, during rest and sleep blood returns to the Liver; thus the Liver is able to replenish its yin aspect from this supply of stored blood. Of course, if the blood is systemically deficient, rest will be insufficient to resolve the condition, and blood tonification methods must also be applied. Bob Flaws points out that healthy spiritual qualities depend on the uninterrupted nourishment of essence from the zang organs: "all disturbances of the *hun* and *po* are due to insufficiency of Qi and blood".³ The main formula for conditions of abnormal emotional disturbance with deficiency of blood is *An Hun Tang* (Peaceful Soul Decoction).⁴ According to the author's clinical experience, although this is a highly effective formula, an adaption of this formula, creating a more comprehensive experimental formula, *An Shen Ping Gan Tang* (Pacify the Spirit, and Calm the Liver Decoction)⁵ is more effective. Both of these formulas may be used for patients under great mental stress, with symptoms of severe insomnia, restlessness, controlled or repressed anger and anxiety, with underlying blood or yin deficiency.

The relationship of the Liver and the Heart figures in all cases of psychological distress. Maciocia points out that when the Liver yin and blood are full the Hun provides stability for the Shen.⁶ If the Liver is hot, either because of deficiency heat or because of Qi stagnation transforming into heat, the Shen will become restless, leading to nighttime anxiety and palpitations. If the Liver blood is empty, the Shen becomes unstable, leading to insomnia,

excessive dreaming, and a tendency to fantasize. These conditions may be treated by *Suan Zao Ren Tang* (Sour Jujube Decoction).

According to traditional Chinese theory the Liver also controls some aspects of higher thought (*gan zhu mou li*), especially as related to management and planning. If the Liver is deficient, the patient will be indecisive. If both Hun and Shen are affected, the patient may have good ideas and tend to start projects but have difficulty finishing them. The Gall Bladder is said to rule courage and the decision making process. If the patient starts with good intentions, but is afraid to follow through, they may also suffer from a deficiency of the Liver and Gall Bladder. In all of the above conditions, yin, blood, and Spleen Qi should be tonified, while regulating the Liver, and harmonizing the spirit. Modifications of *Si Wu Tang* (Four-Substance Decoction), *Xiao Yao San* (Rambling Powder), or *Liu Wei Di Huang Wan* (Six Ingredient Pill with Rehmannia) may be used.

In addition, depressed Liver Qi causing psychological problems can be complicated by internal heat, which can be generated either from deficient yin and blood or from Qi stagnation. The patient will be nervous, agitated, and irritable, making it difficult to sleep or get restorative rest. These cases must be treated by methods for clearing excess internal heat (or deficient heat, whichever the case may be) combined with herbs to tonify the yin and blood, as well as herbs to activate Qi and blood. The Chinese are adherents of the use of *Xiong Dan* (Fel Ursi) for excess Liver heat or *Niu Huang* (Calculus Bovis) for internal wind with heat. Consider the use of *Niu Huang Qing Xin Wan* (Cattle Gallstone Pill to Clear the Heart) in cases of severe irritability and restlessness caused by internal Liver wind and heat affecting the Heart and Pericardium. Fel Ursi products should be avoided due to the inhumane use of bile extracted from live Asiatic black bears. Cases of agitation due to yin deficiency may respond to modifications of *Liu Wei Di Huang Wan*.

4. Chinese Medicine and Psychotherapy

Many Western acupuncturists combine herbal and acupuncture treatments with stress-reduction counselling or therapy. They find that American patients require a relaxed, safe, and peaceful environment for treatment, one that temporarily takes them away from the high stress of modern life. Frequently soothing music is played, and patients are allowed to rest or sleep during treatment sessions. The emphasis of treatment is the harmonizing of body and mind in order to create a state conducive to self healing, i.e. a meditative type state. Some acupuncturists feel that psychotherapy is a very limited answer to modern stress-related conditions. They contend that a more balanced approach, addressing both mind and body issues, is more relevant, and that in some cases psychotherapy may actually be another stress factor for these patients.

Kaptschuck has creatively made analogous assumptions about the psychoactive use of Chinese herbal formulas from the ancient Buddhist medical texts.⁷ He concentrates on the psychic aspects of symptomatology, translating physical states into emotional ones. For example: in the use of *Si Ni San*, the traditional key symptom is cold extremities, based on a diagnosis of trapped internal heat

due to Liver Qi stagnation being unable to circulate to the periphery. Dr. Kaptchuck contends that the coldness indicates held-in frustration, making the patient feel on edge. Thus, according to Kaptchuck's theory, case taking should emphasize deeper, more emotionally based symptoms, with formula prescribing matched primarily to the psychological components.

5. Concept of Balance

Ping, the traditional phrase meaning "level" or "even", is commonly used in reference to a state of equanimity. In Chinese, this state is synonymous with harmony (*he*), or balance. It is a state of mind free from stress. In this state the Liver is healthy, its Qi is moving freely and appropriately. Harmony exists.

There are many references to this state in Chinese philosophy and medicine. *Ping xin* (calm Heart) means to be even-tempered, or to have levelled out the rough spots of one's temperament, and is frequently used in reference to emotional disturbance. Another term, *ping chuan*, means ordinary, and refers to the levelling out of excess emotions, to everything being evened out or smooth. *Ping ren* means a normal or healthy person. *Ping mai* means a normal or even pulse.

In Chinese medicine, facial distortion, tremors, dizziness, and severe headaches are associated with internal wind due to Liver and Kidney yin deficiency and exuberant Liver yang. Modern acupuncturists consider these conditions as powerfully stress-induced, often in patients with repressed anger. The correct methodology for these cases is *Ping gan*, "to calm the Liver". Practitioners have found that integrated treatment is the most effective form of therapy, using acupuncture to regulate stagnant Liver Qi and Chinese herbs to tonify yin deficiency and calm internal wind, combined with stress reduction techniques, which may include Qi gong, meditation, music, counselling, spending more time in nature or with family, or finding out one's true interests in life.

6. Excess Accumulations

Excess pathogenic accumulations of dampness, phlegm, cold, or heat must be removed for effective results in cases of concurrent Qi stagnation. For damp heat with Liver Qi stagnation, diuretics are indicated to remove accumulation of water toxins. In cases of trapped heat causing constipation, with damp heat and Liver Qi stagnation, purgatives may be combined. For phlegm accumulation, predominantly occurring in the throat and neck regions in cases of concurrent Liver Qi stagnation, herbs to remove phlegm are added to the formula. In cases of cold accumulation, predominantly in the inguinal and perineal regions, the Liver and Gall Bladder meridians must be warmed. The main formulas for the treatment of Liver cold are *Wu Zhu Yu Tang* (Evodia Decoction) and *Tian Tai Wu Yao San* (Top Quality Lindera Powder).

7. Dietary Considerations

Some patients have a constitutional propensity to have a hot Liver (*gan hou*), indicated by a tendency to anger easily, to be jumpy or irritable, to have reddish eyes, restlessness, or insomnia. These patients should also make dietary adjustments and routinely clear heat from the Liver with beverage teas such as chrysanthemum, wa-

tercross, artichoke, or roasted cassia seeds. Foods that heat or agitate the Liver are to be avoided in the treatment of Liver patterns, most importantly spicy foods, oils, fats, and fried foods. Alcohol is also contraindicated during the treatment of Liver patterns, especially those with damp heat configurations, and many modern practitioners also require patients to avoid coffee, because its stimulating effects on the nervous system cause Liver wind.

8. Supplementation

The second main principle for the treatment of the Liver is supplementation or tonification. Many of the principles already discussed under the regulation of Liver Qi also indicate concurrent supplementation; such indications will not be repeated in this section. Because the Liver has close relationships with yin and blood, several schools of thought have addressed the issue of the most efficacious treatment for Liver patterns. As has already been indicated, the primary principle of treatment for the Liver has three main points: i. to address depletion of its essence, ii. to balance the flow of Qi, and iii. to treat excess symptoms. It is important to understand the principles of supplementation and recognize when it is the most appropriate therapy for treating Liver patterns.

9. Yin and Blood Deficiency

According to Chinese medicine, the Liver and Kidney have the same origin (*gan shen tong yuan*), meaning that the Liver stores blood and the Kidney stores essence, *jing*; thus most chronic Liver conditions have a Kidney yin deficiency component. The treatment for chronic Liver conditions often parallels treatment for Kidney yin deficiency. In addition, it is common to have blood deficiency concurrent with longstanding yin deficiency. These cases are treated with the addition of yin and blood tonics. [Many blood tonics, such as *Gou Qi Zi* (Fructus Lycii Chinensis) have the property of simultaneously supplementing the Kidney and Liver yin]. If the yin deficiency is severe, modifications of *Liu Wei Di Huang Wan* (Six-Ingredient Pill with Rehmannia) may be used.

Blood deficiency may also be caused by Spleen Qi deficiency, concurrent with Liver Qi stagnation. These cases are treated with the addition of Qi and blood tonics. *Xiao Yao Wan* (Rambling Powder) is the best example of this principle.

In cases of deficiency of yin and blood with Liver yang excess or internal wind, the Heart blood may be affected, causing restless *shen*. Herbs to nourish the Heart and calm the *shen* should be added to these formulas, along with herbs to supplement Qi, yin, and blood. The most commonly used formulas for these conditions are *Tian Wang Bu Xin Wan* (Emperor of Heaven's Special Pill to Tonify the Heart), *Suan Zao Ren Tang* (Sour Jujube Decoction), and *Zhen Zhu Ma Wan* (Mother of Pearl Pill).

10. Spleen Qi Deficiency

In cases of cold damp, damp heat, and phlegm accumulation, there is usually a concurrent Spleen deficiency pattern along with Liver Qi stagnation. This deficiency may be an underlying one, or be caused by an external invasion of heat or cold giving rise to accumulation of phlegm, or by external dampness penetrating inwards.

Both may injure the Spleen and cause obstruction of the flow of Qi. Since the Liver regulates Qi, its function may be affected and it may overact on the Spleen, further weakening it. In either case, the addition of herbs to benefit the Spleen is required. If the accumulation of dampness is severe with static edema, it is necessary to use diuretics along with Spleen supplementation.

CASE STUDIES

Case 1

A 53-year-old female executive assistant complained of severe epigastric pain and abdominal distention, which became worse after eating; frequent and severe migraine headaches for 15 years; and secondary symptoms of anxiety, depression, fatigue, lack of appetite, tightness in the throat, palpitations, and insomnia. The pulse was weak, and the tongue was enlarged and pale with a red tip. Her complexion was pale with a slight overlay of redness, and her mannerism was of the nervous type.

Clinical impressions: This patient suffered from a stress-induced Liver Qi stagnation syndrome (*gan qi yue ju*) complicated by Spleen Qi deficiency, causing disharmony between the Liver and Spleen (*gan qi bu he*). It was further complicated by Liver Qi and phlegm stagnation in the throat; with stagnation of Liver Qi causing ascending yang affecting the Heart.

Therapeutic Principle and Methodology: To regulate the Qi (*li qi*), soothe the Liver, and harmonize the Spleen and Stomach (*shu gan he pi wei*). A combined method of regulating excess with harmonizing and soothing was preferred. Her presenting symptoms were predominantly excess in nature: headache and epigastric pain, but this patient also had deficiency symptoms: fatigue, lack of appetite and a weak pulse. Since the co-ordination between the Liver and Spleen was so unbalanced, a harmonising method was required. Since the excess symptoms were so severe they had to be firmly addressed, and the therapeutic principle was to treat the excess symptoms first, followed by warm tonification of Qi and blood, while maintaining general regulation of Liver Qi (*shu gan*). The patient was also given suggestions for time away from work and daily stress reduction techniques to even out and restore the Liver yin (*ping gan*).

Prescription and Results: *Shu Gan Wan* (Soothe the Liver Pills) in patent form, 6 pills 3 times per day for one month. After two weeks of treatment the patient was free of headaches and the digestive complaints were eliminated. She continued to have palpitations and tightness in her throat, and was therefore prescribed *Ban Xia Hou Po Tang* (Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Decoction), in crude form, 1 cup 2 times daily, which eliminated the remaining symptoms. She returned to my office several months later complaining of generalized fatigue, no appetite, and insomnia, and was prescribed *Liu Jun Zi Tang* (Six Gentlemen Decoction) with the addition of blood tonics, 1 cup 2 times daily, which eliminated the remaining symptoms.

Discussion: This was a complex case of Liver Qi stagnation causing an array of conditions and conflicting symptoms. Since the tongue was pale and enlarged and the pulse weak and thin, it could be argued that *Liu Jun Zi*

Tang or *Xiao Yao San* should have been used first. In the author's experience, the better approach is to match the symptom picture and methodology to the formula, in this case *Chai Hu Shu Gan Wan* (Bupleurum Powder to Spread the Liver), which although predominantly used for mild to moderate excess symptoms also has some tonification aspects making it a very balanced formula.

The first and main issue in this case was deciding which was the root, the Liver Qi stagnation or the Spleen deficiency. In Chinese medicine, Liver Qi stagnation is divided into two major types, both of which have Spleen and Stomach complications. The first is *gan qi yue ju*. This is basic stagnation, causing epigastric symptoms, which predominate over Spleen deficiency. The other is *gan qi bu he*, which is disharmonious Liver and Spleen, where Spleen Qi and blood deficiency may predominate. In this case the Liver Qi stagnation, caused by emotional stress, was the root. The second issue was deciding which were the most important secondary complications: Spleen deficiency, phlegm, heat, or Liver yang. Since the patient's emotional state (anxiety, depression, insomnia and palpitations) became predominant after the gastrointestinal symptoms and headache lessened with treatment, and she also had frequent complaints of tightness in her throat, a formula to address Liver Qi stagnation and obstruction by phlegm (*Ban Xia Hou Po Tang*) was prescribed. Thus, both first and secondary issues were addressed. The final aspect of treatment was to supplement the Spleen to prevent any further over-control by the Liver.

Case 2

A 47-year-old male heavy equipment operator complained of intense whole body itching. He reported that during a routine physical examination, his general practitioner found his prostate gland enlarged, and white cells were expressed in the prostatic fluid. The patient was diagnosed as having prostatitis and prescribed Noroxin. The itching started within a few days after taking the antibiotic. He had no previous history of allergies or dermatitis. He was reexamined by his physician and blood was drawn, revealing an SGOT (serum glutamic oxaloacetic transaminase) at 298 and SGPT (serum glutamic pyruvic transaminase) at 334. He was told to discontinue the antibiotics, but the itching did not subside. About two weeks after the discontinuation of the medication, he presented at my office. Further investigative findings included positive antibodies for chronic hepatitis B, normal ultrasound of the Liver, and numerous small gallstones. Secondary symptoms included a feeling of being stressed, a tendency to have recurrent tendonitis, chronic low back stiffness, decreased libido, and nocturia 4 to 5 times nightly. He had no complaints of abdominal discomfort or pain, and his abdomen was normal to palpation. The pulse was wiry and fast. The tongue was normal in size, with purplish edges, a red tip, and a thin white coat. His general appearance was of an active and robust middle aged man with a dark complexion.

Clinical impressions: This patient, of strong constitution, suffered from an occult damp heat syndrome of the Liver and Gall Bladder with Liver Qi stagnation. The Western diagnosis was cholestasis of unknown origin, but probably due to the stones and the previous hepatic

tis. My opinion was that the etiology was most likely due to the previously undiagnosed case of chronic hepatitis B. This created a predisposition to Liver Qi stagnation. He was also an excessive beer drinker, and that contributed to accumulation of dampness in the lower burner. The gallstones created additional stasis in the Liver. The accumulated stagnation generated heat and wind causing itching, which was precipitated by the antibiotic. Additionally, the chronic stagnation of Qi and damp heat damaged the Qi and yin of the Kidneys, causing low back pain, reduced sex drive, and prostatitis.

Therapeutic Principle and Methodology: To clear Liver heat (*xie gan*), soothe and regulate the Liver Qi (*shu gan li qi*), and remove dampness (*chu shih*), followed by tonification of the Liver blood and Kidney yin (*zi yang gan shen*). The focus of the therapeutic principle was to clear excess heat and dampness from the Liver and Gall Bladder. Simultaneous tonification was reserved for the secondary symptoms and to counter any side-effects of long term treatment with bitter and cold herbs.

Prescription and Results: *Long Dan Xie Gan Tang* (Gentiana Long Dan Cao Decoction to Drain the Liver) was given with modifications as follows: addition of Chuan Xiong (Radix Ligustici Wallichii) and Chi Shao (Radix Paeoniae Rubrae) to activate blood, and Huang Bai (Cortex Phellodendri) to aid in the elimination of damp heat in the lower burner and to assist the Kidney in reducing deficiency heat. This formula was prescribed in crude form, 1 cup 2 times per day for one month. This was followed by the same formula in patent form, without modifications, for two months, 6 pills 3 time daily, which was followed by *Xiao Chai Hu Tang* (Minor Bupleurum Decoction) in granule form, 2 grams dissolved in water 2 times daily for one month. At the end of the first course of treatment the itching had completely stopped, the prostate was normal to digital exam without pus cells, and the elevated Liver enzymes were slightly lowered. At the end of the full course of treatment, the Liver enzymes were significantly lowered, overall energy was improved, and nocturia was reduced to once nightly.

Discussion: This was a case of dampness invading the Liver and Gall Bladder causing stasis of Liver Qi transforming to damp heat, complicated by stress. The patient's constitutional strength was sufficient enough not to manifest symptoms of the localized Qi stagnation, such as abdominal distention or pain. This case shows that the toxic focal conditions - infection of the prostate, gallstones, and hepatitis - can be asymptomatic until a triggering agent brings out the superficial symptoms - skin itching. Pruritus of cholestasis is a complication of liver disease that is characterized by an accumulation in the plasma of substances that are normally secreted into the bile.^{8,9}

SUMMARY

Liver Qi stagnation, a common syndrome of modern patients with emotional stress, is a pattern of illness with diverse symptoms ranging from headache to lower abdominal pain. A comprehensive knowledge of Liver pathophysiology and methodology is necessary in prescribing the correct formula. Symptomatic prescribing is cautioned against, and systematic follow-up is recom-

mended in complex cases. According to an old Eastern saying, "if the doctor does not find the right prescription, the patient will find the right doctor."

FORMULAS DISCUSSED

Ban Xia Hou Po Tang (Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Decoction)
Bu Gan Tang (Tonify the Liver Decoction)
Chai Hu Jia Long Gu Mu Li Tang (Bupleurum plus Dragon Bone and Oyster Shell Decoction)
Chai Hu Shu Gan Tang (Bupleurum Powder to Spread the Liver)
Da Bu Yin Wan (Great Tonify the Yin Pill)
Hu Qian Wan (Hidden Tiger Pill)
Liu Wei Di Huang Wan (Six-Ingredient Pill with Rehmannia)
Long Dan Xie Gan Tang (Gentiana Long Dan Cao Decoction to Drain the Liver)
Niu Huang Qing Xia Wan (Cattle Gallstone Pill to Clear the Heart)
Qi Ju Di Huang Wan (Lycium Fruit, Chrysanthemum, and Rehmannia Pill)
Shao Yao Gan Cao Tang (Peony and Licorice Decoction)
Shu Gan Li Pi Tang (Spread the Liver and Regulate the Spleen Decoction)
Si Ni San (Frigid Extremities Powder)
Si Wu Tang (Four-Substance Decoction)
Suan Zao Ren Tang (Sour Jujube Decoction)
Tian Ma Gou Teng Yin (Gastrodia and Uncaria Decoction)
Tian Tai Wu Yao San (Top-Quality Lindera Powder)
Wu Zhu Yu Tang (Evodia Decoction)
Xiao Chai Hu Tang (Minor Bupleurum Decoction)
Xiao Yao San (Rambling Powder)
Yue Ju Wan (Escape Restraint Pill)
Zhen Gan Xi Feng Tang (Sedate the Liver and Extinguish Wind Decoction)

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END NOTES

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2. Veith, I. *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949.
3. Flaws, B. *Blue Poppy Essays*, Boulder: Blue Poppy Press, 1988.
4. Ibid: *An Hun Tang* is composed of: fried Suan Zao Ren (Semen Zizyphus spinosae), Bai Zi Ren (Semen Biotae), Long Yan Rou (Arillus Longan), Long Gu (Os Draconis), and Mu Li (Concha Ostrea), it was developed by Zhang Xitun.
5. *An Shen Ping Gan Tang* is composed of: Tai Zi Shen (Radix Psuedostellariae), Xi Yang Shen (Radix Panax quinquefolium), fried Suan Zao Ren (Semen Zizyphi spinosae), Long Yan Rou (Arillus Longan), Shan Yao (Radix Dioscorea), Dan Shen (Radix Salviae), baked Gan Cao (Radix Glycyrrhizae), Mu Li (Concha Ostrea), and Long Gu (Os Draconis).
6. Unpublished data, 1990 lecture.
7. Unpublished data, 1991 lecture.
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