

Treatment of Menstrual Diarrhea Based on the “Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth” Theory

Zixing Wang¹, Xinchun Xiao^{2,*}, Zehui Zhang¹

¹Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine, Xianyang 712046, Shaanxi, China

²Affiliated Hospital of Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine, Xianyang 712000, Shaanxi, China

*Correspondence Author

Abstract: Menstrual diarrhea is a common disease accompanying the menstrual cycle, which seriously affects patients' quality of life. Traditionally, it is mostly treated based on the theories of “disharmony between the liver and spleen” or “deficiency of spleen and kidney yang”. Although effective, the underlying mechanism of qi movement remains to be elaborated. The “Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth” theory takes the “spleen-earth” as the core and the four zang-organs (liver, heart, lung, kidney) as the four dimensions, systematically explaining how the qi movement of the four zang-organs surrounds the middle earth and coordinately regulates the pivot movement to maintain the normal transportation and distribution of food nutrients. This review systematically sorts out the origin and development of this theory, deeply analyzes its guiding significance in the core pathogenesis of menstrual diarrhea (“deficient earth failing to pivot, four dimensions losing coordination”), and summarizes the relevant clinical treatment principles and prescriptions, aiming to provide new ideas and theoretical basis for the diagnosis and treatment of this disease.

Keywords: Menstrual diarrhea, Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth, Spleen-earth, Qi movement pivot, TCM treatment.

1. Introduction

Menstrual diarrhea refers to the condition where loose stools, or even watery diarrhea, occur several times a day before, during, or after menstruation, and stop spontaneously after the end of menstruation [1]. Ye Tianshi in the Qing Dynasty called it “menstrual onset diarrhea” in his work *Ye's Gynecological Diagnosis and Treatment·Menstrual Regulation Section*. The earliest record of menstrual diarrhea can be found in Chen Wenzhao's *Chen Su'an's Supplementary Explanations on Gynecology·Menstrual Regulation Section* in the Ming Dynasty: “Sudden diarrhea during menstruation is due to spleen deficiency”. Fu Qingzhu in the Ming Dynasty mentioned in *Fu Qingzhu's Gynecology*: “Some women have watery diarrhea for three days before menstruation, and then... Is it due to spleen qi deficiency?”; Fu believed that the spleen governs blood control, and the spleen is the Taiyin damp earth. Deficiency of spleen qi leads to loss of blood-controlling function. When menstrual blood flows downward, pathogenic dampness seizes the opportunity to invade the lower jiao, resulting in “watery diarrhea” [2].

There is no clear diagnosis of menstrual diarrhea in Western medicine, and it is generally classified as premenstrual syndrome (PMS). PMS includes clinically significant physical and psychological manifestations during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle, leading to severe physical discomfort and decreased physical function [3], and these symptoms disappear within a few days after the onset of menstruation. The etiology of PMS in Western medicine is unclear, and it is generally believed to be the result of the combined effect of multiple factors. The core lies in the fluctuation of ovarian hormones during the menstrual cycle, which affects the normal function of neurotransmitters (especially serotonin) in the brain. This imbalance of the neuroendocrine system further leads to abnormalities in emotion regulation, fluid retention, and pain perception, thereby triggering a series of physical and psychological symptoms. In addition, individual sensitivity, genetic tendency, psychological stress, and unhealthy eating habits

may also aggravate or induce the syndrome [4]. The diagnostic concept of PMS was first proposed by Raymond Greene and Katharina Dalton in 1953. Its global prevalence is approximately 47.8% [5].

Western medicine has no obvious advantages in the treatment of this disease, and symptomatic treatment is often used. TCM treatment of menstrual diarrhea is a popular therapy at present, which well reflects the characteristics of TCM syndrome differentiation and treatment. It improves zang-fu function, regulates qi and blood of the body, and allows various diseases to heal spontaneously, achieving good clinical curative effects.

2. Elaboration of the “Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth” Theory

2.1 Origin and Development of the “Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth” Theory

The qi transformation model of “Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth” originates from the ancient philosophical thought of “qi monism” and the observation and perception of natural phenomena such as the movement of the sun and moon and the changes of yin and yang. The *Heart Source of the Four Sages* [6] states: “Taiji is one qi... which is called Yin and Yang (Two Principles)”. “Two Principles” refer to yin and yang, which are dynamic concepts full of dialectical relationships, reflecting the dialectical and dynamic characteristics of the ascending and descending movement of “one qi”. *Su Wen·Yin Yang Ying Xiang Da Lun Pian* [7] says: “Therefore, clear yang ascends to form heaven, and turbid yin descends to form earth... The left and right sides are the paths of yin and yang”. Clear yang ascends and turbid yin descends. “Earth qi rises to form clouds” means that yin can be transformed into yang, and there is clear yang within turbid yin. “Heavenly qi descends to form rain” means that yang can be transformed into yin, and there is turbid yin within clear yang. “Rain comes from earth qi” indicates that the root of rain lies in the ascent of earth qi, explaining that “yin is the

foundation of yang". "Clouds come from heavenly qi" indicates that the root of clouds lies in the descending function of heavenly qi, explaining that "yang is the guide of yin". This reflects that the human body is a microcosm of the universe. Applying the laws of yin and yang movement in heaven and earth to the human body forms the qi movement model of "left ascent and right descent", which is the key to understanding human physiology and pathology. Su Wen·Ju Tong Lun Pian states that "all diseases arise from qi", linking qi transformation with human physiology and pathology, and reflecting the role of the ascent, descent, entry, and exit of qi in life activities and disease changes. Treatise on the Spleen and Stomach emphasizes that "deficiency of the spleen and stomach is the origin of all diseases", highlighting that the spleen and stomach are the key to the ascent and descent of qi in the whole body, and that treating diseases requires paying attention to regulating and nourishing the spleen and stomach and enhancing the movement of middle qi. Huang Yuanyu integrated the viewpoints of yin and yang ascent and descent in I Ching with the qi transformation theory of the unity of heaven and man in Huang Di Nei Jing, followed the concept of protecting the spleen and stomach by physicians of past dynasties, and summarized and innovated a complete syndrome differentiation and treatment system for yin and yang qi movement ascent and descent with comprehensive principles, methods, formulas, and medicines [8].

2.2 "Introduction to the "Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth" Theory

The term "Four Dimensions" originates from Zhuangzi: Autumn Floods: "It is vast like the boundlessness of the four directions, without boundaries. Embracing all things, who supports and protects them? This is called being formless". In TCM theory, it is extended to the four key directions or forces that support and regulate the center. "Pivot Earth" means that the spleen and stomach are the key pivot of the ascending and descending movement of human qi, which Huang Yuanyu called "middle qi". The Heart Source of the Four Sages·Changes of Yin and Yang mentions: "The middle between clear and turbid is middle qi, which is earth. During the pivot movement, clear qi rotates left and transforms into fire, turbid qi rotates right and transforms into water; the part that is half ascending and not yet transformed into fire is wood, and the part that is half descending and not yet transformed into water is metal". Therefore, the theoretical model of "Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth" is a qi circulation model with "middle qi and spleen-earth as the axis, liver qi ascending left, lung qi descending right, heart fire descending to connect with kidney water, and kidney water ascending to nourish heart fire". This model emphasizes the ascent of spleen-earth qi. The spleen governs the ascent of clear yang and transportation and transformation. When spleen-earth rotates left, yin ascends and transforms into yang, and clear yang qi ascends left, initiating the operation of the model. The qi circulation of the four peripheral zang-organs starts from shaoyin kidney water and circulates endlessly under the mediation of middle qi [8].

The core idea of "Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth" is: the "earth" located in the center is the pivot of human life activities, and its core functions are reflected through regulating the operation of the "Four Dimensions".

The orderly ascent and descent of qi in the whole body depend on the normal operation of the spleen-stomach pivot. Human health relies on the control and coordination of the central "pivot earth" over the ascent and descent of qi in the whole body.

3. Interpretation of the "Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth" Theory and Pathogenesis of Menstrual Diarrhea

The theory of "earth is the foundation of the four dimensions" emphasizes that the spleen and stomach, as the middle jiao pivot, are the foundation for maintaining the stable functions of the liver, heart, lung, and kidney. The functions of the human spleen-earth do not exist in isolation, but are coordinately regulated by the four-dimensional zang-organ system of liver, heart, lung, and kidney. Dysfunction of any dimension may affect the "pivot earth" through qi movement, water-fire, and essence-blood pathways, leading to disorder of spleen-stomach function and diarrhea. The occurrence of menstrual diarrhea is precisely a typical manifestation of "shaking of the four dimensions, involving the middle earth, and resulting in pivot dysfunction" during the special physiological period of menstruation. Lu Lijun [9] believes that before menstruation, qi and blood converge in the uterus, leading to relative deficiency of yin and blood in other zang-organs and meridians, thereby inducing dysfunction of certain zang-organs or imbalance of qi and blood, and then manifesting a series of symptoms.

3.1 Shaking of the Four Dimensions and Dysfunction of the Middle Earth

The kidney belongs to water, governs storage, and is the residence of water and fire. Kidney yang is the foundation of spleen yang, and kidney water can moisten the spleen and stomach. The spleen's transportation and transformation of food nutrients cannot do without the nourishment and promotion of the kidney. At the same time, the innate essence stored in the kidney and the original qi transformed from this essence also need to be continuously nourished and supplemented by the food nutrients transported and transformed by the spleen. Deficiency of kidney yang leads to loss of warmth of spleen yang, resulting in deficiency of spleen and kidney yang, dysfunction of transportation and transformation, undigested food in the stool, and dawn diarrhea. This is particularly obvious during menstruation. Deficiency of kidney yang leads to loss of qi transformation function, overflow of pathogenic dampness, immersion of spleen-earth, increased turbid dampness, and aggravated diarrhea. When menstrual blood comes, menstrual diarrhea is caused by the further deficiency of the spleen and kidney.

The liver belongs to wood and governs dispersion. Excessive liver qi invades the spleen-earth transversely, leading to weakness in ascending clear yang, and clear yang sinks, resulting in diarrhea. This is called "excessive wood counteracting earth". Failure of the liver to disperse leads to stagnation of middle jiao qi, obstruction of the spleen's function of transporting and transforming dampness, and downward flow of dampness into the intestines. TCM believes that "qi is the commander of blood, and blood is the mother of qi". During menstruation, menstrual blood flows

downward into the chong meridian and conception vessel (sea of blood), with rapid changes, which is prone to various emotional disorders, thus leading to stagnation of qi movement. Qi stagnation causes liver depression, loss of liver wood's smoothness, and transverse invasion of the earth (spleen), that is, affecting the function of the spleen and stomach, resulting in diarrhea.

The heart belongs to fire and is the sovereign of the five zang-organs and six fu-organs. The descent of heart fire to connect with kidney water and the ascent of kidney water to nourish heart fire are called "harmonious interaction between water and fire". Weak heart fire cannot warm the spleen-earth, leading to insufficient spleen yang, dysfunction of transportation and transformation, internal generation of cold-dampness, and downward flow into diarrhea. At the same time, excessive heart fire consumes kidney water downward and impairs stomach fluid, leading to insufficient moisture of the spleen and stomach, abnormal ascent and descent, urgent downward flow of fire, and acute diarrhea.

The lung belongs to metal, governs purification and descent, governs regulation, can regulate water channels, and is the upper source of water. The purification and descent of lung qi can assist the stomach in descending turbid qi. Failure of the lung to disperse and descend leads to inability to regulate the qi movement and water channels of the whole body. Stagnation of qi in the upper jiao obstructs the ascent of the spleen; obstruction of water channels leads to direct flow of dampness into the large intestine, resulting in diarrhea.

The core pathogenesis of menstrual diarrhea can be summarized as: during the special physiological state of premenstrual period and menstruation, where qi and blood flow downward into the chong meridian and conception vessel, and the sea of blood overflows from fullness, the functions of the liver, kidney, heart, and lung fluctuate sharply. This fluctuation exceeds the normal bearing and regulatory capacity of the spleen and stomach, leading to weakness of the spleen-earth, failure of the pivot, indistinction between clear and turbid, and downward flow of dampness, resulting in diarrhea. A large amount of qi and blood flows downward into the chong meridian and conception vessel (sea of blood) during menstruation, leading to relative insufficiency of qi and blood supplying the four dimensions and the middle earth. The already "shaking" four dimensions become more unstable at this time, and the "pivot earth" also operates weakly due to qi and blood deficiency. At the same time, the middle earth already loses its pivot function, and its astringent and consolidating ability is further reduced, making it easier for dampness to flow downward into diarrhea.

3.1.1 Shaking of the Liver Dimension and Transverse Invasion of the Earth

Ling Shu·Bai Bing Shi Sheng [7] mentions: "Unregulated joy and anger injure the zang-organs, and injury to the zang-organs leads to diseases originating from yin". The liver stores blood and can regulate the blood volume of the whole body. Women take the liver as the innate foundation. The descent of liver blood into the chong meridian forms menstruation. Healthy function of the spleen ensures the normal circulation of blood and regular menstruation. Only

when qi and blood are abundant and qi movement is smooth can the zang-organs be nourished and peaceful, and the meridians be unobstructed, resulting in regular menstruation [10]. Coordination between the liver and spleen and abundance of yin and blood lead to normal menstruation.

The liver is the core of the five zang-organs system, regulating the qi movement of the whole body. The spleen and stomach are located in the middle jiao, transporting and transforming food nutrients. Harmony between the liver and spleen can assist the spleen in ascending clear yang, promoting the ascent of clear yang and descent of turbid yin, making diarrhea less likely to occur [11]. Lei Jing·Volume Thirteen holds that: "Excessive wood bullies earth, thus causing diarrhea easily". Smooth dispersion of liver qi can ensure the unobstructed operation of qi in the zang-organs, meridians, and collaterals of the whole body. The ascent of clear yang by the spleen and the descent of turbid qi by the stomach both depend on this. The liver belongs to wood and the spleen belongs to earth. The dispersing function of the liver is conducive to the transportation and transformation of the spleen, that is, wood can disperse earth. However, when liver qi is excessive, "excessive wood counteracting earth" occurs. Abnormal emotions before or during menstruation lead to dysfunction of liver dispersion, unsmooth qi movement, and the state of "liver qi stagnation", thereby causing excessive liver qi to restrain the spleen-earth, dysfunction of the spleen in transportation and transformation, undigested food and dampness, and mixed downward flow into diarrhea. Clear yang fails to ascend, but instead mixes with turbid yin and flows downward, resulting in diarrhea. This is exactly what Yi Fang Kao [12] states: "Diarrhea is due to the spleen, pain is due to the liver; liver excess is excess, spleen disorder is deficiency". Moreover, during women's menstruation, "the sea of blood overflows from fullness, and qi and blood flow downward rapidly". The leakage of menstrual blood leads to relative deficiency of yin and blood stored in the liver, hyperactivity of liver yang, transverse invasion of the spleen, sudden dysfunction of the spleen's transportation and transformation, and downward flow of dampness into diarrhea. This pathway reflects "shaking of the liver dimension and direct restraint of the middle earth".

3.1.2 Shaking of the Kidney Dimension and Fire Failing to Warm the Earth

The kidney is the innate foundation, with life gate fire, inherent primordial yang, and is the root of human yang. The normal function of spleen yang depends on the warmth of kidney yang. If kidney yang is deficient due to innate insufficiency, or consumption of kidney yang due to chronic illness, excessive sexual activity, etc., and then qi, blood, and kidney qi are lost with menstrual blood during menstruation, the consumption of menstrual blood further weakens the life gate fire, which cannot warm the spleen-earth upward, leading to deficiency-cold of the spleen-earth, loss of astringent and consolidating function, and thus diarrhea.

"The kidney is the gateway of the stomach and opens into the two yin (anus and urethra). Therefore, the opening and closing of defecation and urination are dominated by the kidney. Now, insufficient yang qi in the kidney leads to decline of life gate fire. When yin qi is extremely abundant, it causes continuous

diarrhea". During menstruation, the leakage of kidney qi with blood aggravates this unstable state. During menstruation, the sea of blood overflows from fullness, leading to relative deficiency of yin and blood in the whole body, and the leakage of yang qi, resulting in the breakdown of the yin-yang balance of the kidney dimension and temporary relative deficiency of kidney yang. The kidney governs the storage of essence. If the constitution is inherently kidney-deficient, the life gate fire declines. During menstruation, the flow of menstrual blood further aggravates the inherent kidney deficiency, which may involve kidney yang, leading to deficiency of both yin and yang. Yang deficiency cannot warm the earth, resulting in dysfunction of transportation and transformation and diarrhea. The kidney governs defecation and urination and controls opening and closing. Insufficient kidney yang leads to internal generation of cold-dampness, abnormal steaming and transforming function, failure of clear water to ascend and turbid water to descend, metabolic disorder, and diarrhea [13]. Chen Minhong [14] proposed analyzing menstrual diarrhea from the perspective of constitution, believing that menstrual diarrhea is due to significant changes in yin, yang, qi, and blood in women before and after menstruation, and the body's difficulty in adapting and regulating zang-organ dysfunction, making women with kidney-deficient constitution more susceptible. This pathway reflects "shaking of the kidney dimension and inability to warm the middle earth".

3.1.3 Shaking of the Lung Dimension and Dampness Obstructing the Spleen Earth

Huang Di Nei Jing [7] states: "Excessive dampness causes soft diarrhea"... all belong to the lower part". These discussions support the mechanism that disorder of water transportation leads to the flow of dampness into the intestines and diarrhea. The hand taiyin lung meridian is internally-externally related to the hand yangming large intestine meridian. The dispersion and descent of lung qi are conducive to the normal function of the large intestine in "transporting transformed substances". The purification and descent function of lung qi is conducive to the conduction function of the large intestine, that is, promoting the downward excretion of dregs. During menstruation, the qi and blood of the chong meridian are abundant, and the qi and blood of the whole body flow downward into the sea of blood. At this time, if the patient's constitution is inherently lung-qi deficient, their purification and descent ability is already insufficient. The downward flow of qi and blood during menstruation further causes the lung qi of the upper jiao to sink weakly, unable to assist the conduction of the large intestine. Failure of lung qi to purify and descend directly leads to dysfunction of the large intestine's conduction. The large intestine cannot absorb water normally, resulting in the mixture of food nutrients and water and downward flow, thus causing diarrhea. The lung is the "upper source of water", governing and regulating the transportation, operation, and excretion of water in the whole body through its dispersion and descent functions. Dispersion transports body fluid to the skin and hair, and descent transports water downward to the kidney and bladder, just like a pivot for regulating water channels. During menstruation, qi and blood flow downward. If the dispersion and descent functions of the lung are disordered, the function of "regulating water channels" is lost. Excessive dampness in the body cannot be excreted through

normal channels, but instead rushes downward into the large intestine, mixing with dregs, leading to loose stools, which is what Su Wen calls "excessive dampness causes soft diarrhea". Changes in qi and blood during menstruation aggravate this imbalance of water distribution, thereby inducing diarrhea.

The lung governs the qi of the whole body and assists the heart in promoting and regulating blood circulation. Su Wen·Wu Zang Sheng Cheng Lun states: "All qi belongs to the lung". Nei Jing believes that insufficient lung qi leads to inability to astringe and consolidate, unstable fu-organ qi, and thus diarrhea. During menstruation, the sea of blood overflows from fullness, and a large amount of qi and blood flow downward into the uterus, which is prone to temporary disorder of the whole body's qi movement. If lung qi is stagnant, the production and distribution of pectoral qi are unfavorable, and the whole body's qi movement is stagnant accordingly. Qi stagnation, especially the abnormal ascent and descent of middle jiao spleen-stomach qi, leads to the failure of the spleen's clear yang to ascend but instead sink, resulting in diarrhea. This is the embodiment of the lung dimension interfering with the operation of the "pivot earth" by affecting the whole body's qi movement in the "Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth" theory.

3.1.4 Shaking of the Heart Dimension and Consumption of Heart and Spleen

The heart belongs to fire and is the "sovereign fire"; the spleen belongs to earth, and fire generates earth. The sovereign fire can warm and nourish the spleen-earth, helping the spleen complete the functions of transporting and transforming food and dampness. This is called "sovereign fire shining, spleen-earth being warmed". Jiang Guan in the Ming Dynasty stated in Famous Physicians' Case Records [15]: "Fire generates earth, so the spleen is prosperous... If fire is not dry, the spleen-earth is affected by dampness, thus causing diarrhea". If the patient's constitution is inherently insufficient in heart yang, or excessive intake of cold and cool medicines, or injury to yang due to chronic illness, leading to weakness of the "sovereign fire". At this time, heart fire cannot warm the spleen-earth downward, and the spleen-earth cannot be warmed by heart yang, resulting in decreased transportation and transformation function, internal abundance of cold-dampness, undigested dampness, failure of clear yang to ascend but instead sink, leading to deficiency-cold diarrhea. During menstruation, due to the massive loss of blood, qi is consumed with blood, and yang qi is also weakened, making heart yang more insufficient, thereby inducing or aggravating diarrhea. Su Wen·Wu Zang Sheng Cheng Lun states: "All blood belongs to the heart". Wu Kun in the Ming Dynasty stated in Yi Fang Kao·Xu Sun Lao Zhai Men Di Shi Ba [12]: "The heart governs blood; sufficient blood moistens the stool... Insufficient heart fire fails to generate spleen-earth". The onset of menstruation is essentially a downward flow of nutritive blood. For patients with insufficient heart blood, menstruation is even a time of "blood deprivation". The massive loss of blood and consumption of qi with blood inevitably lead to qi consumption. One of the main functions of qi is astringency and consolidation, that is, controlling the non-involuntary loss of liquid substances. During menstruation, qi is consumed with blood, leading to deficiency of spleen qi and decreased

astrigent and consolidating ability. It can not only fail to control blood, but also fail to consolidate the food nutrients in the intestinal lumen. As a result, water and chyme stay in the intestinal tract for too short a time and flow downward hastily, forming diarrhea. If the patient has been overthinking and overworking for a long time, it not only consumes heart blood secretly, but also directly injures the heart and spleen. Su Wen states: "Sorrow, worry, fear, and dread injure the heart". The heart is the "sovereign of the five zang-organs and six fu-organs"; injury to the heart leads to the shaking of all zang-organs. Weak heart fire cannot generate earth, directly leading to weakness of the spleen-earth and dysfunction of transportation and transformation. This is a typical manifestation of "mother disease affecting the child".

3.1.5 Spleen Deficiency as the Root and Easy Shaking of the Four Dimensions

Fu Qingzhu's Gynecology·Menstrual Regulation points out that the pathogenesis of menstrual diarrhea mainly lies in the patient's inherent constitutional weakness, especially insufficient spleen qi. This weak state may be caused by various factors, including invasion of cold pathogens, irregular diet, excessive fatigue, etc., which together lead to further impairment of spleen qi. During women's menstruation, a large amount of qi and blood in the body converge in the chong meridian, conception vessel, and uterus, making the already deficient qi and blood more insufficient, and spleen qi weaker accordingly. Due to insufficient spleen qi, the transportation and transformation functions of the spleen and stomach are abnormal, unable to normally digest and absorb food nutrients, leading to the retention of food residues and water in the intestinal tract, and then inducing diarrhea symptoms [16]. Nu Ke Jing Lun quotes Wang Shishan as saying: "Some women have diarrhea during menstruation... and then menstruation comes; their pulses are all soft and weak, which is spleen deficiency". The spleen belongs to damp earth in the five elements. Spleen deficiency leads to the accumulation of pathogenic dampness in the body, as stated in Huang Di Nei Jing: "Excessive dampness causes soft diarrhea", indicating that when dampness in the body is excessive, it blocks the ascent of spleen yang, further disrupting the spleen's transportation and transformation functions, and thus causing soft diarrhea. In addition, the spleen also has the important function of controlling blood. Once spleen qi is injured, the blood-controlling function is also affected, leading to unsmooth blood circulation. Pathogenic dampness takes the opportunity to invade, further obstructing the normal operation of qi and blood. Therefore, patients often have diarrhea symptoms before the onset of menstruation [17]. This sequential change is a specific manifestation of spleen qi deficiency and internal abundance of pathogenic dampness. "Earth is the foundation of the four dimensions". If the spleen-earth is inherently deficient and cannot withstand restraint, even slight fluctuations in liver qi and kidney yang during menstruation are enough to be the "last straw that breaks the camel's back", leading to the collapse of the spleen-earth's transportation and transformation functions and diarrhea. Long-term spleen-earth weakness leads to insufficient production of qi and blood, inability to nourish innate essence, which can involve the kidney dimension, leading to kidney qi deficiency, forming a vicious cycle of deficiency of both spleen and

kidney, and making menstrual diarrhea persistent and unhealed.

4. Clinical Application of Treatment Based on the "Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth" Theory

The general treatment principle is "restoring the pivot and regulating the four dimensions", that is, invigorating and transporting the spleen-earth to restore the pivot, and regulating the four zang-organs to stabilize the dimensions.

4.1 Invigorating and Transporting the Middle Earth to Restore the Pivot

Golden Mirror of Medicine·Gynecological Heart Method Essentials points out that menstrual diarrhea belongs to spleen deficiency and is treated with Shenling Baizhu San (Ginseng, Poria, and Atractylodes Powder). Fu Qingzhu's Gynecology proposes that regulating menstruation should first tonify qi; abundant qi promotes blood production, dampness transformation, and regular menstruation, and Jiangu Decoction is selected. Su Wen·Zhi Zhen Yao Da Lun emphasizes that treating diseases requires accurately understanding the etiology and implementing targeted treatment based on the etiology. For spleen deficiency diarrhea, clinically, drugs with dual effects of aromatically transforming dampness and invigorating the spleen and stomach can be selected for regulation. In actual diagnosis and treatment, physicians often prefer the classic formula Shenling Baizhu San and flexibly modify it according to the patient's specific condition to better meet the patient's treatment needs. In addition, if the patient not only has spleen deficiency but also has severe dampness symptoms without obvious heat signs in clinical observation, some warming yang drugs can be appropriately added to the original formula. The purpose is to warm spleen yang and eliminate internal dampness through the characteristics of warming yang drugs. This treatment idea and viewpoint are clearly recorded and elaborated in the ancient medical classic Yi Zong Bi Du·Xie Xie (Essentials of Medical Zong·Diarrhea), providing valuable theoretical basis and practical guidance for later physicians in treating spleen deficiency diarrhea. For patients with persistent diarrhea and sinking of middle qi, Buzhong Yiqi Decoction can be selected for treatment. For spleen heat with dampness syndrome, as stated in Jing Yue Quan Shu·Za Zheng Mo (Complete Works of Jing Yue·Miscellaneous Syndrome Treatise), if damp-heat accumulates in the spleen, and the patient has symptoms of heat, thirst, preference for cold drinks, and diarrhea, formulas such as Da Fenqing Yin (Great Clearance Drink), Yinchen Yin (Capillary Wormwood Drink), and Yiyuan San (Benefit Origin Powder) can be used for treatment.

Professor Zhu Nansun of the Shanghai School Zhu's Gynecology [18] mostly treats this disease starting from the liver, spleen, and kidney, focusing on the spleen, and taking spleen deficiency with dysfunction of transportation as the main cause of menstrual diarrhea. Clinically, she often uses formulas that invigorate the spleen and stomach, tonify qi and nourish blood, supplemented with drugs that warm and tonify kidney yang, thereby promoting the transportation and transformation functions of the spleen and stomach. Her

self-formulated formula uses rice-fried *Codonopsis Radix*, honey-fried *Astragali Radix seu Hedysari*, *Angelicae Sinensis Radix*, and *Chuanxiong Rhizoma* to tonify qi and blood; stir-fried *Dioscoreae Rhizoma* and stir-fried *Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma* to warm spleen yang; supplemented with *Rehmanniae Radix Preparata*, *Achyranthis Bidentatae Radix*, *Dipsaci Radix*, and *Lycii Fructus* to tonify kidney and warm yang.

4.2 Regulating the Four Dimensions to Assist Transportation

4.2.1 Soothing the Liver Dimension to Regulate Qi and Transport Earth

Su Wen·Bao Ming *Quan Xing Lun* clearly points out that earth becomes unobstructed when obtaining wood, which reveals the important effect of liver qi in promoting the ascent of spleen-earth qi and preventing the sinking of spleen qi. Specifically, the normal dispersion of liver qi can effectively promote the ascent of spleen-earth qi, thereby maintaining the normal operation of spleen-stomach functions and preventing sinking due to insufficient spleen qi. Based on this theory, when facing diarrhea caused by liver wood restraining earth or spleen deficiency with liver invasion, the treatment strategy should be flexibly adjusted to adopt methods of suppressing liver and supporting spleen or tonifying spleen and softening liver. Among them, *Tongxie Yaofang* (Painful Diarrhea Decoction) is a typical representative of this treatment idea, which relieves diarrhea by regulating the liver and spleen.

For diseases of liver stagnation with spleen deficiency, treatment must strictly follow the treatment principle of “dispersing stagnated wood” proposed in *Su Wen·Liu Yuan Zheng Ji Da Lun*. Specifically, a comprehensive therapy of soothing liver depression, invigorating spleen, and relieving diarrhea should be used to restore the coordinated balance between the liver and spleen. In terms of practical medication, *Xiaoyao San* (Free and Easy Wanderer Powder) or *Chaihu Shugan San* (*Bupleurum Soothing Liver Powder*) can be reasonably combined with *Shenling Baizhu San* [11] to effectively relieve various symptoms caused by liver stagnation with spleen deficiency through soothing liver qi and invigorating spleen qi, thereby achieving the therapeutic effect of treating both symptoms and root causes.

4.2.2 Regulating the Lung Dimension to Smooth Water Channels

Su Wen·Wu Chang *Zheng Da Lun* clearly records: “Treat diseases of the lower part by addressing the upper part”, which emphasizes that in treating diseases, one should start from the root cause, especially when the lesion is in the lower jiao, more attention should be paid to the regulation of the upper jiao. Zhu Danxi, a famous physician in the Yuan Dynasty, further pointed out in his book *Mai Yin Zheng Zhi* (Pulse, Etiology, Syndrome, and Treatment) that when lung qi fails to descend smoothly for various reasons, leading to stagnation of qi movement, and at the same time, the large intestine function is weak, resulting in diarrhea symptoms, the key to treatment should be placed on regulating the upper jiao, especially the recovery of lung qi. For diarrhea caused by lung deficiency, the main treatment principle is to tonify the lung

and lift qi. Specific formulas can be *Bufeitang* (Lung-Tonifying Decoction) or *Buzhong Yiqi Decoction*, which can be appropriately modified according to the patient’s specific condition to enhance the curative effect.

In the process of clinical diagnosis and treatment, physicians often use a vivid “lifting the kettle lid” therapy, that is, adding *Platycodonis Radix* to the formula. *Platycodonis Radix* has the effect of dispersing lung qi, which can effectively promote the lung to restore its normal function of governing water, thereby allowing the dampness in the lower jiao to flow smoothly and the diarrhea symptoms to heal naturally. In addition, if diarrhea is caused by exogenous pathogens invading the lung defense, leading to failure of the lung to disperse and descend, the “countercurrent boat pulling” method can be used in treatment, and *Huoxiang Zhengqi San* can be modified [19] to dispel exogenous pathogens and restore the normal function of lung qi. If lung disease further involves the spleen, resulting in deficiency of both lung and spleen and subsequent diarrhea, then the treatment strategy of “cultivating earth to generate metal” is appropriate, that is, while tonifying lung qi, formulas such as *Sijunzi Decoction* or *Shenling Baizhu San* are used to tonify spleen qi, and lung qi is supported by invigorating the spleen, so as to achieve the effect of treating both symptoms and root causes. This comprehensive regulation method can not only effectively relieve diarrhea symptoms but also fundamentally improve the patient’s constitution and promote their overall health.

4.2.3 Warming the Kidney Dimension to Warm the Earth and Consolidate the Dike

As elaborated in *Su Wen·Biao Ben Bing Chuan Lun*, if a person first suffers from a certain disease and then develops diarrhea symptoms, the treatment should target the root cause of the disease. That is to say, the focus of treatment should be on the initially suffered disease, not just the diarrhea symptom. *Su Wen·Jue Lun* also mentions a similar view: when jue inversion occurs in the shaoyin meridian, accompanied by symptoms such as abdominal emptiness and fullness, vomiting, and clear and thin diarrhea, the key to treatment lies in addressing the root cause of the main disease.

Based on the theory of *Nei Jing*, later physicians developed a treatment method called “replenishing fire to generate earth” for chronic diarrhea caused by kidney yang deficiency and spleen failing to be warmed. The root cause of the disease is treated by using drugs that can warm and tonify kidney yang, such as *Zingiberis Rhizoma* and *Cinnamomi Cortex*. For example, *Shenqi Wan* (Kidney Qi Pill), *Sishen Wan* (Four-Shen Pill), etc. [20]. For diarrhea caused by kidney yin deficiency, the treatment principle is mainly to tonify kidney yin. In this case, *Liuwei Dihuang Decoction* minus *Corni Fructus* plus *Ostreae Concha*, or *Cunyin Decoction* from *Bian Zheng Lu* (Treatise on Syndrome Differentiation) written by Chen Shiduo in the Qing Dynasty can be selected for treatment.

In the treatment of kidney-deficiency type diarrhea, *Yougui Wan* can be used with appropriate modifications according to specific conditions. The main function of *Yougui Wan* is to warm and tonify kidney yang, fill essence and nourish blood, so it is called “a formula for benefiting fire” in *Jing Yue Quan*

Shu. In addition, Lizhong Decoction is also a commonly used formula, which can be modified for treatment according to specific conditions. For example, Ye's Gynecological Diagnosis and Treatment records: "During menstruation, diarrhea occurs at dawn, ... this is kidney deficiency, no need to treat the spleen, and Lizhong Decoction should be taken for seven doses" [21]. In the treatment of kidney-deficiency type diarrhea, emphasis should be placed on tonifying the kidney, not just treating the spleen.

4.2.4 Assisting the Heart Dimension to Replenish Fire and Warm the Earth

Su Wen·Yin Yang Ying Xiang Da Lun clearly records: "The heart generates blood, and blood generates the spleen". This theory reveals the close connection between the heart and the spleen. When heart fire is insufficient, leading to deficiency of both heart yang and spleen yang, physicians often adopt the treatment method of "benefiting fire to replenish earth" in clinical treatment. Specifically, they will select Lingui Zhugan Decoction and modify it according to the patient's specific conditions. In this formula, the combination of Cinnamomi Ramulus and Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma plays a key role in warming and tonifying heart fire. Based on the TCM theory of "replenishing the mother for deficiency" in Nan Jing (The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Eighty-One Difficult Issues), the combination of Cinnamomi Ramulus and Poria Cocos can not only benefit fire to replenish earth but also warm and unblock heart yang, and at the same time tonify spleen yang, so as to achieve the effect of treating both symptoms and root causes.

For patients with diarrhea caused by excessive heart fire forcing fire downward into the small intestine, the clinical manifestation is often oral erosion with diarrhea. In view of this situation, the main treatment principle is to clear heart fire and reduce fire. Physicians usually select Daochi San combined with Shenling Baizhu San for modified treatment according to the patient's specific condition. Golden Mirror of Medicine also has relevant discussions: although oral erosion with diarrhea is a heat syndrome, there may be deficiency signs in the process of upper-lower migration. The heart and spleen open into the tongue and mouth respectively. When the transportation and transformation functions of the small intestine and gastrointestinal tract are impaired, oral erosion symptoms occur. At this time, drugs such as Rehmanniae Radix, Akebiae Caulis, Coptis Chinensis Franch, and Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma should be used for treatment; for diarrhea symptoms, Shenling Baizhu San is suitable to regulate the spleen and stomach and restore normal transportation and transformation functions [11].

5. Summary and Prospect

The "Four Dimensions Regulating the Central Earth" theory, from a dynamic and systematic holistic perspective, profoundly reveals that menstrual diarrhea is not a single zang-organ lesion, but an imbalance of the qi movement pivot system with spleen-earth as the core and four dimensions as the support during the special physiological state of menstruation. It elevates menstrual diarrhea from a simple spleen-stomach disease to the height of coordinated dysfunction of the five zang-organs system (liver, heart, lung,

kidney, and spleen), reflecting the holistic and dynamic view of TCM. It refines the syndrome differentiation and classification, makes the treatment more targeted, and avoids the drawback of "treating diarrhea only when diarrhea occurs". By regulating the four dimensions, it fundamentally improves the patient's physical condition, not only treating the current diarrhea but also preventing recurrence next time, realizing "treating pre-disease". It guides clinical treatment to shift from the local thinking of "treating the head when the head aches" to the systematic regulation of "restoring the pivot and regulating the dimensions", which helps to formulate more accurate and comprehensive individualized treatment plans.

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