

Professor Li Fenping's Approach to Treating Insomnia Based on Liver Theory

Chunyan Liu¹, Fenping Li^{1,*}, Yinghui Tang²

¹Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine, Xianyang 712046, Shaanxi, China
²Shaanxi Provincial Hospital of Chinese Medicine, Xi'an 710003, Shaanxi, China
*Correspondence Author

Abstract: *Insomnia, classified under the category of “Bu Mian” in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), is a chronic condition characterized by the inability to obtain normal sleep. It is closely related to liver function. TCM treatment for insomnia follows the holistic principle of “integrating man with nature” and applies syndrome differentiation to implement individualized treatments. The safety of herbal medicine, combined with the absence of drug dependence, makes it highly favored by patients compared to Western medications. Professor Li Fenping believes that insomnia results from dysfunction in the liver’s regulation of Qi and blood, which prevents the Hun (ethereal soul) from returning, thus disrupting sleep. Based on clinical practice, she has identified four major liver-related patterns in insomnia: liver Qi stagnation with unsettled Hun, deficiency of heart and liver blood (or Yin) leading to poor nourishment of the Shen (spirit), liver fire excess disturbing the Hun, and blood stasis obstructing the meridians and unsettling the Shen. These distinct approaches to liver-focused treatment of insomnia have expanded the clinical applications of TCM in treating the disorder, with remarkable therapeutic outcomes. This paper presents Professor Li Fenping’s clinical experience in treating insomnia from the perspective of liver pathology.*

Keywords: Insomnia, liver-focused treatment, Li Fenping, clinical experience.

1. Introduction

Insomnia is classified under the categories of "sleeplessness" and "inability to sleep" in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The earliest recorded mention of insomnia is in the ancient TCM text *Yin Yang Eleven Pulses Moxibustion Classic* [1], where it is referred to as "inability to lie down." Over time, scholars have expanded and enriched the understanding of insomnia. According to a 2016 survey conducted by the Sleep Research Association, the insomnia rate among Chinese adults has exceeded that of developed countries like Europe and the U.S., reaching as high as 38.2% [2]. With the intensifying pressure of modern life, insomnia has become a significant threat to physical and mental health, leading to psychiatric disorders such as anxiety, mania, depression, and schizophrenia [3]. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated emotional disturbances, increasing the prevalence of insomnia [4-6], often coupled with heavy economic burdens. These conditions are closely associated with liver function in TCM. While Western medicine has achieved considerable progress in studying sleep disorders through modern science and technology, pharmacological treatments often lead to dependence and withdrawal symptoms, limiting their long-term efficacy. In contrast, TCM treatment of insomnia emphasizes a holistic approach, integrating the concept of unity between heaven and humanity, applying syndrome differentiation for individualized therapy. Herbal remedies are well-regarded for their safety, lack of drug dependence, and strong patient acceptance [7]. This paper explores the treatment of insomnia from the perspective of liver regulation in TCM while also addressing the adjustment of other organs, highlighting the liver's key role in managing insomnia. Professor Li Fenping, a renowned TCM practitioner in Shaanxi Province and disciple of the National Master of TCM, Professor Zhang Ruixia, has engaged in clinical research for many years, adhering to the principles of integrating disease and syndrome differentiation within a holistic framework. She excels in

treating various complex internal disorders. As a student of Professor Li, I have had the privilege of learning extensively from her clinical experience. Here, I present a brief discussion of Professor Li's approach to treating insomnia, supplemented by a clinical case for reference.

2. Etiology and Pathogenesis

2.1 Sleep and the Soul are Closely Related

According to the “Five Spirits Theory”, the heart is the “sovereign ruler” of the body. The *Ling Lan Mi Dian Lun* of the *Su Wen* states: "The heart governs the soul and spirit, along with the will and intention." The heart governs life activities, including physiological, cognitive, and emotional processes. The soul, which accompanies the heart's activity, plays a key role in conscious, responsive thought. The *Ling Shu – Ben Shen* states: "The soul follows the spirit's movement." As one of the five spirits, the soul is a higher form of mental activity and plays a critical role in sleep [8]. Ye Lin's *Nanjing Zhengyi – Difficulty 34* explains: "During the day, the soul travels to the eyes to aid vision; at night, the soul returns to the liver to induce sleep" [9]. This demonstrates that the liver regulates the movement of the soul, which in turn affects sleep quality. The relationship between the soul and spirit, as well as the connection between the heart and liver, is inseparable. When the heart is disturbed, sleep disturbances arise, manifesting as difficulty falling asleep, early waking, vivid dreams, and even sleepwalking. The *Ling Shu – Excessive Pathogenic Influences Lead to Dreaming* notes: "When the soul and spirit are agitated, one cannot sleep peacefully and becomes prone to dreaming." The *Lei Jing – Zang Xiang* further states: "The soul, in its dream-like wandering, creates illusions."

2.2 Insomnia is Caused by the Liver's Inability to Store the Soul

In TCM, insomnia is referred to as "inability to sleep," "inability to lie down," or "eyes that do not close." The diagnostic criteria for insomnia from the *Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Common Internal Medicine Diseases* (2008 Edition) include difficulty falling asleep, frequent waking, or inability to sleep after waking, lasting for more than four weeks, often accompanied by symptoms such as dreaminess, irritability, dizziness, headaches, palpitations, forgetfulness, and fatigue, with no other organic conditions affecting sleep [10]. Professor Li believes that insomnia is primarily a disorder of mental activity involving both the heart and liver, manifested by disturbed spirit (shen) and the liver's failure to store the soul. The *Xue Zheng Lun – On Sleep* by Tang Rongchuan explains: "In liver disease-related insomnia, the soul, which resides in the liver, wanders to the eyes during waking hours and returns to the liver during sleep. If yang energy floats externally, preventing the soul from entering the liver, insomnia occurs" [11]. When the soul has no place to rest, insomnia ensues. Clinical experience shows that insomnia often arises from emotional disturbances, leading to conditions such as depression and insomnia, which are effectively treated by focusing on the liver. The *Ling Shu – Ben Shen* states: "The liver stores blood, and blood houses the soul." The *Zhu Bing Yuan Hou Lun* notes: "The soul, governed by the liver, resides in the blood." Blood provides the material basis for the soul, and when the liver's blood is sufficient, the soul can be properly housed, leading to restful sleep. Conversely, if liver function is impaired, leading to blood deficiency, the soul becomes restless, resulting in insomnia and related symptoms like vivid dreams, impaired memory, and even severe mental disorders [12].

2.3 Emotional Disturbances are the Primary Cause of Insomnia

In TCM, abnormal emotional activity disrupts the movement of qi, impairing the liver's ability to regulate emotions and flow freely. This stagnation can result in emotional disturbances, further worsening insomnia. The liver governs emotions and smooth flow, facilitating unhindered circulation of qi and blood. The *Xue Zheng Lun – On Zang-Fu Pathophysiology* states: "The liver is associated with wood; when wood's energy is balanced and unobstructed, the blood and vessels remain unobstructed." The *Su Wen – Eight Principal Components of Shenming* elaborates: "Qi and blood are governed by the spirit, and their harmonious flow is essential for peaceful sleep." Emotional stress, such as frustration and unfulfilled desires, combined with a lack of proper lifestyle habits, increasingly leads to psychological disorders like depression and insomnia. The *Zhang Shi Yi Tong* observes: "Ordinary people who cannot sleep are often troubled by excessive thinking or emotional disturbances." The *Jing Yue Quan Shu – On Sleeplessness* emphasizes: "Sleep is rooted in yin, governed by the spirit; when the spirit is calm, one can sleep peacefully; when disturbed, insomnia occurs" [13]. Emotional disturbances can overstimulate or stagnate liver qi, leading to insomnia, characterized by restlessness, dreaminess, and irritability. Consequently, liver dysfunction, with its failure to store the soul, is the fundamental cause of insomnia, alongside qi stagnation, blood deficiency, and heat disturbances [14].

3. Diagnosis and Treatment Based on Syndrome Differentiation

Professor Li Fanping believes that the root cause of insomnia lies in the liver. Therefore, the treatment should aim to harmonize the qi and blood and pacify the liver and the ethereal soul (hun). For deficiency syndromes, astringing therapy is appropriate, while for excess syndromes, dispersing therapy is advised, adjusting the balance between deficiency and excess to ensure smooth flow of liver qi and blood. Once the ethereal soul is stabilized, insomnia will naturally resolve. The primary treatment involves soothing the liver, regulating qi, promoting blood circulation, and removing blood stasis. Alternatively, nourishing yin and replenishing blood, or clearing heat and subduing yang can be used. For symptomatic treatment, calming the mind and stabilizing the ethereal soul is emphasized, often using heavy and astringent substances such as Longgu (Dragon Bone), Muli (Oyster Shell), Cishi (Magnetite), and Zhusha (Cinnabar). If insomnia is caused by other organs, the treatment should also address those organs accordingly.

3.1 Liver Qi Stagnation with Restlessness of the Ethereal Soul

The most prominent feature of this pattern, besides the chief complaint of insomnia, is the variability of accompanying symptoms, which often combine deficiency and excess and may even involve both yin and yang. This is particularly common in individuals with a yin constitution, manifesting as stagnation of qi, depression, low mood, and reticence. In addition to liver qi stagnation, there are often concurrent conditions such as dampness, phlegm, or blood stasis. This pattern is frequently associated with modern medical conditions such as anxiety, depression, cardiac neurosis, hysteria, and menopausal syndrome. Symptoms include difficulty falling asleep, vivid dreaming, easily startled, or early waking with difficulty returning to sleep. Emotional triggers often worsen the condition, accompanied by chest tightness, frequent sighing, hypochondriac distension, melancholy, suspicion, dizziness, or head distension. The patient may also be irritable, have a poor appetite, and loose stools. The tongue is red with a white or yellow coating, and the pulse is wiry. Professor Li believes this syndrome is due to unresolved emotional issues leading to stagnation of liver qi, which disturbs the mind, resulting in the liver's inability to store the ethereal soul, causing insomnia. The treatment principle is to soothe the liver, relieve depression, nourish the blood, and calm the mind. Professor Li often uses a modified Chaihu Guizhi Ganjiang Tang: Beichaihu 10g, Guizhi 20g, Ganjiang 10g, Muli 30g (pre-decocted), Suanzaoren 15g, Baishao 20g, Xiangfu 12g, Danggui 10g, Fushen 15g, Hehuanpi 15g, Zhigancao 5g, Shichangpu 15g, and Hupo 2g. Modifications: For abdominal pain, loose stools, poor appetite, belching, fatigue, deep and thin pulse, and liver qi stagnation with spleen deficiency, combine with Shenling Baizhu San with modifications. For epigastric pain, belching with acid regurgitation, bitter mouth, dry stools, and wiry-slippery pulse, indicating liver-stomach heat, add Wulengzi, Chuanlianzi, Wuzeigu, Dandelion, and Wuzhuyu. For food retention with phlegm-damp obstruction in the middle burner, causing

“disharmony of the stomach leads to disturbed sleep,” add Banxia Shumi Tang, Lai Fuzi, Shan Zha, and Jiao Sanxian. For a foreign body sensation in the throat, dry throat, frequent belching, or chest tightness, add Xuanfuhua, Zhe Shi, Houpu, Baibu, or modify Banxia Houpu Tang. For premenstrual breast distension and lumps, chest tightness with phlegm, add Sigualuo, Juhé, or modify Erchen Tang.

3.2 Heart and Liver Blood (Yin) Deficiency, Leading to Insufficient Nourishment of the Ethereal Soul

This pattern is characterized by chronic liver blood deficiency, aging with blood deficiency, prolonged illness with blood loss, or long-term use of aromatic and pungent herbs, which deplete the liver's yin fluids. As a result, the liver fails to store the ethereal soul, leading to insomnia. Apart from insomnia, patients exhibit symptoms such as palpitations, forgetfulness, vivid dreams, fatigue, pale complexion, pale lips and nails, and a weak, thin pulse. Professor Li emphasizes the heart and liver's combined role in controlling the mind. In her prescriptions for nervous system disorders, she often treats both the heart and liver simultaneously. Famous Chinese medicine physician Yan Dexin also approaches insomnia treatment by prioritizing the liver and harmonizing the qi and blood to nourish the heart and calm the mind. He proposed the theory, "Qi is the source of all diseases, and blood is the root of all diseases," offering new insights into insomnia treatment. In the "Jingyue Quanshu·Sleeplessness," it is stated, "Excessive labor and worry exhaust the blood, leaving the ethereal soul without a home, resulting in sleeplessness." Ye Tianshi's "Clinical Guide to Medical Cases·Sleeplessness" notes, "When liver blood is insufficient, the ethereal soul floats, causing sleeplessness." Professor Li often uses Guipi Tang or Hupo Yangxin Tang to tonify qi, nourish blood, and calm the mind and ethereal soul. The ingredients include Dangshen 15g, Baizhu 10g, Fushen 15g, Yuanzhi 10g, Suanzaoren 15g, Danggui 10g, Huangqi 15g, Maidong 10g, Baiziren 10g, Hehuanpi 15g, Yejiaoteng 20g, Heshouw 15g, Shichangpu 15g, and Baihe 15g. Modifications: For epigastric fullness, chest tightness, poor appetite, and fatigue with a greasy tongue coating, combine with Erchen Tang, Sharen, and Wuyao. For patients with a weak constitution, timid heart, indecision, doubtfulness, or easily startled, presenting with insomnia, tinnitus, fatigue, palpitations, shortness of breath, cold extremities, pale tongue, and wiry-thin pulse, indicating heart deficiency with gallbladder timidity, add Zhigancao, Zhusha, Hupo, Longgu, and Muli to calm the heart and mind, or use Anshen Dingzhi Wan with modifications. For cold hands and feet, thick and greasy tongue coating, indicating gallbladder deficiency with cold, add Xiao Huixiang, Wuyao, and Ganjiang to warm the liver. For heart-liver yin deficiency with insomnia, vexation, dizziness, tinnitus, night sweats, red tongue with scant fluids, and internal disturbance by deficiency heat, combine Huanglian Ejiao Tang to nourish yin, clear heat, and calm irritability. For peri-menopausal insomnia with menstrual irregularities, irritability, facial flushing, sweating, dark circles under the eyes, and liver-kidney deficiency, add Heshouw, Shudi, Yin Yanghuo, Shanzhuyu, Zhimu, Wuweizi, and Fuxiaomai.

3.3 Liver Fire with Restlessness of the Ethereal Soul

Insomnia in this pattern is often associated with emotional

triggers, where the patient tends to be irritable, with a flushed face, red eyes, restlessness, dry mouth, bitter taste, and constipation. Professor Li believes this condition is due to liver qi stagnation transforming into fire, causing the ethereal soul to become unsettled and resulting in disturbed sleep. The liver stores the ethereal soul, and when liver fire flares up, the ethereal soul becomes unstable, leading to vivid dreams and emotional instability. When liver qi is excessive, it causes angry dreams. Treatment should focus on soothing the liver, draining heat, calming the mind, and stabilizing the ethereal soul. Professor Li often uses modified Dan Zhi Xiao Yao San or Longdan Xiegan Tang: Chaihu 20g, Mudanpi 10g, Zhizi 15g, Huangqin 15g, Xiakucao 15g, Yujin 10g, Xiangfu 15g, Longgu and Muli 30g each, Shengdi 20g, Danggui 10g, Chishao 10g, Zhenzumu 30g, Longdancao 6g, and Hupo 2g. Modifications: For internal phlegm-fire disturbance with a bitter mouth, dry stools, greasy yellow tongue coating, and slippery-rapid pulse, combine Huanglian Wendan Tang with Gualou, Tianzhuhuang, Lianqiao, and Suanzaoren. For severe headaches, irritability, and constipation, add Dahuang, Huanglian, and Zhike. For hallucinations or auditory disturbances with agitation, add Cishi, Sheng Tie Luo, or Mengshi Guntan Wan.

3.4 Blood Stasis Blocking the Meridians, Disturbing the Shen and Hun

Prolonged stagnation of liver qi leads to impaired circulation of qi, which may result in blood stasis obstructing the meridians. The stagnation prevents blood from returning to the liver and nourishing the Shen (spirit), causing the Hun (ethereal soul) to lose its dwelling, thereby leading to insomnia and frequent dreams. Additional symptoms may include chest and hypochondriac pain, irregular menstruation, dysmenorrhea, a dull complexion, a tongue with a purplish hue or petechiae, and a wiry, fine, or choppy pulse. Professor Li specializes in using modified Xuefu Zhuyu Tang to invigorate blood circulation, resolve stasis, and calm the Shen. Even in cases where signs of blood stasis are not prominent, if other treatments fail, it is often due to stagnation of liver qi and impaired blood circulation. Utilizing a treatment approach that soothes the liver, regulates qi, invigorates blood, and harmonizes qi and blood often yields significant results. The Qing Dynasty physician Wang Qingren stated, "Irritability, insomnia, frequent dreams, and palpitations are all due to blood stasis preventing defensive qi from entering yin." Prolonged blood stasis disrupts the circulation of blood, leading to the Shen becoming unsettled and resulting in insomnia. In *Corrections of Errors in Medical Practice*, it is noted that Xuefu Zhuyu Tang treats insomnia characterized by restlessness during sleep: "The patient sits up as soon as they lie down, unable to remain still, tossing and turning all night. Severe cases roll around the bed restlessly. This is caused by blood stasis in the chest. Ten doses of this formula can provide a complete cure." Another quote states, "For insomnia that does not respond to Shen-nourishing blood tonics, this formula works like a charm." The formula includes: Sheng Di Huang 20g, Chi Shao 10g, Chuan Xiong 15g, Dang Gui 15g, Tao Ren 10g, Hong Hua 10g, Chai Hu 15g, Zhi Ke 12g, Suan Zao Ren 30g, Fu Shen 15g, Zhen Zhu Mu 30g, Hu Po 2g, Long Chi 30g, He Huan Pi 20g, Ye Jiao Teng 20g, and Zhu Sha 1g. For cases of intractable insomnia, Huang Lian and Ban Xia can be added to clear heat and

transform phlegm.

4. Treatment Philosophy

Professor Li emphasizes not only pharmacological interventions but also focuses on the patient's psychological state, advocating for a holistic approach to treatment that addresses both mind and body. After medical consultations, he often engages in verbal guidance and psychological counseling to lay a solid foundation for treating insomnia. Emotional imbalance is considered a root cause of insomnia, as emotional distress obstructs the flow of qi in the body, leading to various psychological disorders and, over time, exacerbating insomnia. Therefore, Professor Li promotes a treatment approach that integrates the mind and body, ensuring comprehensive adjustment to accelerate the patient's recovery. Below are some of Professor Li's therapeutic principles regarding medication, psychology, diet, and exercise.

4.1 Treat the Mind First, Then Heal the Body

Fei Boxiong's *The Essential Meanings of Medical Purity* states: "Although the damage caused by the seven emotions is distributed among the five organs, it ultimately returns to the heart." The method of nourishing the Hun lies in nourishing the heart, and when the Shen (spirit) fails to reside within, insomnia ensues. In clinical practice, Professor Li tailors his approach based on the causes and processes underlying the patient's insomnia, considering their physical condition, psychological resilience, social and family environment, and financial situation. He guides patients to establish a proper understanding, fully mobilizing their initiative, cultivating self-correction abilities, and alleviating psychological barriers. By encouraging patients to modify negative personality traits such as impatience and depression, to establish healthy habits, and to maintain a positive emotional state, recovery can be facilitated. Additionally, he advises patients to engage in physical activities like jogging, tai chi, or Baduanjin (Eight Pieces of Brocade), maintain regular sleep schedules, and avoid intense exercise before bedtime. Such rest and exercise regimens are important for improving sleep quality.

4.2 Dietary Principles

Contemporary nutritionists have pointed out the close relationship between diet and sleep quality. Research has shown that dietary adjustments can significantly improve sleep. Professor Li recommends a daily diet that is low in fat and easy to digest, including moderate amounts of grains, beans, and other carbohydrates, along with protein-rich foods such as eggs, lean meat, chicken, and fish, as well as dairy products, vegetables, and fruits. He advises increasing the intake of foods that promote sleep, such as mulberries, lilies, longan fruit, lotus seeds, red dates, wheat products, millet, and grapes, while reducing the consumption of greasy, fried, smoked, and spicy foods, as well as strong tea and coffee. Dinner should not be too heavy, and foods that are sticky or difficult to digest should be avoided, as well as excessive fluid intake.

4.3 Emphasizing the Regulation of Qi and Blood, Skillfully Using Qi-Regulating Techniques

Professor Li observes that insomnia in many patients is often due to stagnation of liver qi, which leads to dysregulation of qi and blood, obstruction of their flow, and a disturbance of the Shen and Hun, thus exacerbating the disorder of the five spirits. Therefore, he emphasizes the importance of soothing liver qi and regulating qi and blood. The liver governs the free flow of qi, is responsible for planning and decision-making, and stores the Hun. If the liver's ability to facilitate the smooth flow of qi is compromised, qi stagnation will eventually result in blood stasis. As noted in *Great Achievements in Differentiating Medical Formulas*, "Disorders of qi and blood lead to irregularities in waking and sleeping." In clinical practice, even when there are no overt signs of blood stasis, Professor Li frequently adds qi-regulating and blood-invigorating herbs to the treatment based on pattern differentiation, such as He Huan Pi, Xiang Fu, Yu Jin, Dan Shen, Chuan Xiong, and Chi Shao.

4.4 Emphasis on the Use of Shen-Calming Herbs

The key to insomnia lies in the liver's failure to store the spiritual soul. Many patients have a long medical history, and some have been taking sedative medications for an extended period, as they seek quick relief. In clinical practice, Professor Li selects Shen-calming herbs based on syndrome differentiation, employing strategies such as nourishing the blood to calm the mind, clearing the heart to calm the Shen, nurturing Yin, benefiting Qi, pacifying the liver, and stabilizing the spirit. Among these, Professor Li favors the use of He Huan Pi and Hu Po. As recorded in *Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica*, Mimosa Tree Bark "calms the five organs, harmonizes the heart and mind, and brings joy and freedom from worries." It enters the heart and liver blood systems, effectively relieving liver qi stagnation, making it an essential herb for calming the mind and promoting blood circulation. It is particularly useful for emotional distress, anger, depression, restlessness, insomnia, and an unsettled Shen. In clinical practice, it is often combined with He Huan Pi, Suan Zao Ren, Hu Po, and Xiang Fu to calm the Shen and alleviate emotional stagnation. The theory of the *zangxiang* (organ manifestations) in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) emphasizes the five organs as central to both internal and external physiological responses. Calming the five organs helps stabilize the spirit and resolve blood stasis, promoting smooth urination, pacifying the liver, clearing the heart, nourishing the Ying, and calming the Hun and Po (spiritual and corporeal souls). According to *Shennong's Classic of Materia Medica Annotation*, Mimosa Tree Bark enters the blood system and is effective in moving blood when used with warming herbs, draining excess fluids with diuretic herbs, and pacifying the Shen with minerals and metals. In *The Complete Works of Jingyue*, the main ingredient in Hu Po Duo Mi Wan is amber, which is used to treat memory loss, confusion, Shen deficiency, and insomnia.

4.5 Use of Peanut Stem and Leaf Foot Soaks

Peanut stems and leaves are sweet and bland in flavor, neutral in nature, and have the functions of pacifying the liver, subduing Yang, calming the mind, tonifying the brain, and stopping cough and bleeding. In folk medicine, they are commonly used for their sedative and hypnotic properties.

Wang Qiaochu from Shanghai developed Luohua Shen-Calming Mixture from peanut stems and leaves to treat insomnia, which has been shown to extend total sleep time, reduce the time taken to fall asleep, decrease the frequency of night awakenings, deepen sleep, and improve the feeling of wakefulness, with reliable efficacy. Professor Li often advises patients to take 200g of peanut stems and leaves, decoct them in water, and use the solution for a foot soak each night. This method relieves fatigue and improves sleep, with particularly notable effects for individuals with persistently cold hands and feet. Foot baths in TCM can promote blood circulation, improve metabolism, and enhance the body's defense mechanisms. The use of peanut stems and leaves in foot soaks can help unblock the meridians, regulate qi and blood, subdue Yang, and calm the mind and brain, while also being safe, convenient, and fast-acting.

5. Case Study

Patient Zhang, 37 years old, initial consultation on October 7, 2022. The patient reported suffering from insomnia for over six months, particularly during the past half year. Symptoms included poor sleep quality, frequent dreams, easy awakening, and epigastric fullness without a clear cause, along with poor appetite, particularly in the mornings. The patient also experienced low mood, a bitter taste in the mouth (without dryness), noticeable memory decline, increased scalp oiliness, frequent flatulence, and loose stools occurring 1 to 3 times daily. Urination was normal. Tongue was pale with reddish edges and greasy coating, and pulse was wiry. TCM Diagnosis: Insomnia (Bu Mei), attributed to liver qi stagnation with spleen deficiency. Western Medicine Diagnosis: Sleep disorder. Prescription: Modified Chaihu Guizhi Ganjiang Tang. Ingredients included: Chaihu 10g, Guizhi 20g, Ganjiang 10g, Muli 30g, Yuzhu 20g, Zhi Gancao 5g, Cangzhu 20g, Baibian dou 30g, Wuweizi 10g, Baijiangcao 20g, Chaoguya 30g, Hehuan Hua 10g. The prescription was for 7 doses, one per day, divided into two warm servings of 200 ml each. Second Consultation (October 17, 2022): After the treatment, the patient's sleep quality had improved significantly. Epigastric discomfort had reduced, appetite increased, and the bitter taste in the mouth had lessened. However, loose stools persisted. The tongue was pale with a thin white coating, and the pulse was wiry and thin. The original prescription was modified with the addition of 10g of Bu Gu Zhi, salted. Another 7 doses were prescribed with the same administration instructions. Follow-up: The patient did not return for further consultations but reported via phone that all symptoms had resolved.

Commentary: Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) considers insomnia under the category of "Bu Mei" (insomnia). The patient had a long-standing history of emotional distress leading to liver qi stagnation. This stagnation transformed into fire, manifesting as a bitter taste in the mouth, which is commonly associated with excess heat. According to the Five Elements theory, the liver belongs to wood and is the mother of the heart, which belongs to fire. When the liver (the mother) is affected, it can disturb the heart (the child), leading to hyperactivity of heart fire and causing poor sleep, frequent dreams, and easy awakening. The patient's spleen was weakened by liver qi overacting on it, leading to poor appetite and epigastric fullness. Loose stools were attributed to spleen

yang deficiency, leading to internal dampness. The chosen formula, Chaihu Guizhi Ganjiang Tang, was used to soothe the liver, clear heat, and warm the spleen yang. Herbs such as Yuzhu were included to nourish yin and generate fluids, while fried Cangzhu and Baibian dou were used to dispel dampness and strengthen the spleen. Schisandra was used to tonify qi and generate fluids, and Baijiangcao was added to clear heat and detoxify. In the second consultation, Buguzhi was added to further warm the spleen yang and consolidate the improvement in symptoms. When liver qi flows smoothly, and spleen yang is restored, the patient can achieve restful sleep.

6. Discussion:

As societal pressures intensify, insomnia has become increasingly prevalent. While insomnia can be related to dysfunction in all the organs, it is primarily attributed to the liver in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). This paper explores the connection between insomnia and the liver as proposed by Professor Li, aiming to expand clinical approaches to insomnia treatment in TCM. According to Professor Li, emotional disturbances are a key factor in the development of insomnia. His treatment approach focuses on the liver, aiming to regulate Qi movement and emphasizes the importance of mental well-being. He believes that insomnia is not only a physiological sleep disorder but also a psychological and emotional disturbance. Therefore, in addition to pharmacological treatment, psychological counseling and emotional management should also be prioritized. Patients are advised to maintain a balanced diet, engage in regular exercise, and adopt healthy lifestyle practices to achieve optimal therapeutic outcomes.

References

- [1] Zhou, Y., Xiao, Z. (1988). Study and Annotation of Mawangdui Medical Books [M]. Tianjin: Tianjin Science and Technology Press, p. 238.
- [2] Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinical Practice Guidelines Project Team, Chinese Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine. (2016). Clinical practice guidelines for insomnia in Traditional Chinese Medicine (WHO/WPO). World Journal of Sleep Medicine, 3(1), 8-25.
- [3] Taylor, D. J., Lichstein, K. L., Durrence, H. H. (2003). Insomnia as a health risk factor. Behavioral Sleep Medicine, 1(4), 227-247.
- [4] Zhang, Y., Li, X., Li, Y., et al. (2020). Survey on sleep quality and related factors of 529 residents during epidemic prevention and control. World Journal of Sleep Medicine, 7(9), 1668-1670.
- [5] Chinese Society of Neurology, Sleep Disorders Study Group, Neuropsychology and Neurology Study Group. (2020). Expert consensus on the diagnosis and treatment of insomnia with depression and anxiety in Chinese adults. Chinese Journal of Neurology, 53(8), 564-574.
- [6] Cmoh, Kim, H. Y., Nah, K., et al. (2019). The effect of anxiety and depression on sleep quality in individuals with high risk for insomnia: A population-based study. Frontiers in Neurology, 10, 849.

- [7] Yang, R., Liu, J., Zhou, Y., et al. (2023). Research overview on treating insomnia based on gallbladder theory [J/OL]. *Journal of Liaoning University of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 1-8. Retrieved December 18, 2023.
- [8] Ou, Y., Zhou, D., Hu, H. (2015). Discussion on the correlation between the Traditional Chinese Medicine theory of "Liver Stores the Soul" and insomnia. *Hunan Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 31(4), 14-17.
- [9] Zhang, X., Liang, J., Zhang, H., et al. (2023). Diagnosis and treatment of insomnia based on the theory of "Harmonization of Liver and Heart". *Practical Journal of Traditional Chinese Internal Medicine*, 37(10), 18-21.
- [10] Chinese Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine. (2008). *Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Common Diseases in Traditional Chinese Medicine: Syndromes Section* [M]. Beijing: China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine, pp. 50-53.
- [11] Tang, R. (1996). *Treatise on Blood Syndrome*[M]. Beijing: China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine, pp. 144-146.
- [12] Zhang, Y., Li, X. (2011). Exploration of the concept of insomnia in Traditional Chinese Medicine based on the theory of "Liver Stores Blood, Blood Nourishes the Soul". *Chinese Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 26(10), 2211-2216.
- [13] Zhang, J. (1994). *Complete Works of Jingyue* [M]. Beijing: China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine, p. 961.
- [14] Liu, B. (2012). Experience of Chief Physician Zhang Tianwen in treating insomnia from the liver. *Guangming Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 27(4), 781-782.
- [15] Ju, Y., Xu, H., Wu, M. (2002). Observation of the efficacy of Luohua Anshen Mixture in treating insomnia. *Liaoning Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 29(5), 283-283.
- [16] Chen, Y., Chen, Y., Li, T., et al. (2019). Academic thoughts on the treatment of insomnia from Qi and Blood by Master of Traditional Chinese Medicine Yan Dexin. *Shanghai Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 53(3), 1-4.
- [17] *Lingshu Jing* [M]. (1997). Annotated by Wang Bing, collated by Peng Jianzhong. Shenyang: Liaoning Science and Technology Press, p. 49.
- [18] Wen, L., Yi, J., Deng, L., et al. (2023). Efficacy of exercise therapy in insomnia patients and its impact on sleep quality and emotional state. *World Journal of Sleep Medicine*, 10(7), 1455-1458.
- [19] Jin, E., Wu, S. (2012). Experience in dietary regulation for insomnia based on syndrome differentiation. *Clinical Research in Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 4(2), 108-109.
- [20] *Yifang Bian Nan Da Cheng*. (2006). Annotated by Ma Ruren, Wang Ronggen [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine Press, p. 1078.
- [21] Ju, Y., Xu, H., Wu, M. (2002). Observation of the efficacy of Luohua Anshen Mixture in treating insomnia. *Liaoning Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 29(5), 283-283.
- [22] Zhang, Y., Liu, W., Li, J. (2015). Systematic review of randomized controlled trials on Chinese medicine foot bath for insomnia patients. *Hunan Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 31(7), 150-152.