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Resolving Method in Shang Han Lun

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Resolving method (Xiao Fa 消法) is one of the eight therapeutic methods in Shang Han Lun (Treatise on Cold Damage) written by Zhang Zhong-jing in the East Han Dynasty (3rd century, about 200-219 AD).

Resolving method (Xiao Fa 消法) is through the promotion of digestion and dispersion of accumulation or lumps to eliminate pathogens and the stagnation of qi (气), blood (血), phlegm (痰), retained food (食), water (水), parasites (虫) and the like. It will gradually disperse them so that eventually all the accumulation and stagnation will disappear. The concept of Resolving method (Xiao Fa 消法) is quite wide ranging and the condition this method treats are quite diverse. For example, resolving phlegm, removing damp, expelling parasites, regulating qi and regulating blood are all within the wide concept of Resolving method (Xiao Fa 消法). In modern TCM practice, Resolving method (Xiao Fa 消法) is normally referring to clearing stagnated food and to disperse lumps, masses and accumulations.

In Shang Han Lun, though, Resolving method (Xiao Fa 消法), there are examples for regulating the flow of qi, such as Sini San (四逆散 Powder for Treating Cold Limbs); sending down abnormally ascending qi, such as Xuanfu Dezhe Tang (旋复代赭汤 Decoction of Inula and Red Ochre); clearing away phlegm and heat in the chest, such as Xiao Xianxiong Tang (小陷胸汤 Minor Chest Bind Decoction); promoting blood circulation,, such as Didang Tang (抵挡汤 Resistant and Withstanding Decoction) and Didang Wan (抵挡丸 Resistant and Withstanding Pill); removing dampness by dieresis, such as Zhuling Tang (猪苓汤 Polyporus Decoction); and eliminating parasites, such as Wumei Wan (乌梅丸 Mume Pill).

1. Sini San (四逆散 Powder for Treating Cold Limbs)

Sini San, which means “four cold limbs powder”, consists of following ingredients:

Zhi Gancao (Radix Glycyrrhizae)

Zhishi (Fructus Aurantii Immaturus)

Chaihu (Radix Bupleuri)

Shaoyao (Radix Paeoniae); normally Bai Shaoyao

Original preparation and administration: Pound 10 fen (7.50g) each of the above herbs into powder. Take one fangcunbi (1 g) of mixed powder with rice soup, 3 doses a day.

Additionally, if accompanied with cough, add 5 fen (3.75g) of Wuweizi (Fructus Schisandrae) and 5 fen (3.75g) of Ganjiang (Rhizoma Zingiberis).

If accompanied with palpitation, add 5 fen (3.75g) of Guizhi (Ramulus Cinnamomi).

If accompanied with dysuria , add 5 fen(3.75g) of Fuling (Paria) .

If accompanied with abdominal pain, add 1 piece (3g) of Fuzi (Radix Aconiti Praeparata).

If accompanied with diarrhoea and tenesmus, boil 3 sheng (30g) of Xiebai (Bulbus Allii Macrostemi) in 5 sheng (1000 ml) of water till 3 sheng (600 ml) is left. Filter the decoction and put 3 fangcunbi (3 g) of Sini San into the decoction and boil it till 1.5 sheng (300ml) is left. Take the decoction warm in 2 doses.

In Shang Han Lun, there is only 1 clause (Clause 318) that discusses this formula. This clause states that that “in shaoyin disease, Sini San is a curative for the syndrome manifested as coldness on the four extremities, accompanied by cough , palpitation, dysuria, abdominal pain and diarrhea with tenesmus”. The cause of cold limbs in this situation is due to liver qi stagnation, which leads to the blockage of yang qi distribution to the limbs. The cold limbs, though uncomfortable, normally is not too severe. There are no other deficient and cold symptoms. The cold limbs are not caused by yang deficiency. Therefore, the treatment should not be boosting the yang qi with yang tonics. It should be to removing qi blockage so that yang qi can flow freely and distribute to all limbs.

For the above stated reason, Sin San is the very original Chinese herbal medicine treatment for liver qi stagnation. Today, there are many Chinese herbal formulae that are based on Sini San, such as Xiao Yao San, Dan Zhi Xiao Yao San, Hei Xiao Yao San and Chai Hu Shu Gan San.

We often apply this formula and its derivatives to treat patients with chronic hepatitis A or B, cholecystitis, cholelithiasis, pancreatitis, intercostal neuralgia and IBS marked by symptoms of stagnation of qi. Modern studies have indicated that the formula may have effects of tranquilizing the mind, relieving spasm and pain, allaying fever and resisting bacteria. Additionally, it could also be effective in treating hepatic injury¹.

2. Xuanfu Daizhe Tang (旋复代赭汤 Decoction of Inula and Red Ochre)

Xuanfu Daizhe Tang (旋复代赭汤) is composed of following ingredients:

Xuanfuhua (Flos Inulae) 3 liang/9g
Rensheg (Radix Ginseng) 2 liang/6g
Shengjiang (Rhizoma Zingiberis Recens) 5 liang/15g
Daizheshi (Haematitum) 1 liang/3 g
Zhigancao (Radix Glycyrrhizae Praeparata) 3 liang/9g
Banxia (Rhizoma Pinelliae) 0.5 sheng (washed) 9g
Dazao (Fructus Ziziphi Jujubae) 12 pcs

Original preparation and administration: Boil the above ingredients in 1 dou (2000ml) of water till 6 sheng (1200 ml) is left. Filter the decoction and stew it again till 3 sheng (600 ml) are left. Take 3 doses a day, each time 1 sheng (200 ml).

In Shang Han Lun, clause 161 states that “during febrile disease caused by cold, after the adoption of a diaphoretic, or emetic, or a purgative, if the patient has a hard and blocked sensation in the

epigastrium and continuous belching when exterior syndrome has already gone, Xuanfu Dezhe Tang should be used". In this case, the patient has had treatment with diaphoretic, or emetic, or purgative methods, but developed hard and blocked sensation in the epigastrium and continuous belching. This is because the treatment has caused middle qi deficiency, leading to liver qi invading the stomach and stomach qi rebellious. Therefore, the treatment is to strengthen the middle qi, calm the liver and lower the stomach qi. The composition of Xuanfu Daizhe Tang suits this situation.

This formula can be used to treat chronic gastritis, gastroptosis, gastric dilatation, ulcerous pylorospasm or incomplete pylorochesis, neurogenic hiccup or vomiting, Meniere's disease and other conditions marked by reversed flow of qi caused by stagnation of phlegm and deficiency of stomach-qi. Studies have indicated that this formula may be able to tranquilize the mind, relieving cough, expelling phlegm, arresting vomiting, relieving spasm of the bronchial smooth muscles, protecting gastric mucosa and promoting the reproduction of the red blood cells and haemoglobin².

3. Xiao Xianxiong Tang (小陷胸汤 Minor Chest Bind Decoction)

Xiao Xianxiong Tang (小陷胸汤) consists of following ingredients:

Huanglian (Rhizoma Coptidis) 1 liang/3g
Banxia (Rhizoma Pinelliae) half sheng/9g
Gualoushi (Fructus Trichosanthis) 1 big piece/15g

Original preparation and administration: Boil Gualoushi in 6 sheng (1200 ml) of water till 3 sheng (600 ml) is left. Remove Gualoushi and put the other 2 ingredients into it; continue to boil till 2 sheng (400 ml) is left. Filter the decoction and take it warm in 3 even doses.

Clause 138 of Shang Han Lun states that "for minor block-up chest syndrome, if the disease is in the epigastrium manifested as tenderness when pressed, marked by a floating-slippery pulse, Xiao Xianxiong Tang should be used." The condition described here is the patient had a Taiyang syndrome. Due to improper treatment, phlegm and heat accumulated in the chest, causing hardness and pain in the chest and the epigastrium. Treatment should be to clear heat, resolve phlegm and disperse the hardness. The 3 ingredients can just do that. Gualoushi, being the main herb and aided by Banxia,, is to resolve the phlegm. The dosage of Huanglian is quite small, indicating that the heat is not too serious.

We can use this formula for treatments of coronary heart disease such as angina, pericarditis, pneumonia, pleurisy, bronchitis plus pneumonectasis, bronchiectasis, chronic pharyngitis, hyperplasi, pancreatitis, gastritis and other condition marked by stagnation of phlegm and heat in the chest³.

4. Didang Tang (抵挡汤 Resistant and Withstanding Decoction) and Didang Wan(抵挡丸 Resistant and Withstanding Pill)

Didang Tang consists of following ingredients:

Shuizhi (Hirudo) 30 pieces

Mangchong (Tabanus) 30 pieces
Taoren (Semen Persicae) 20 pieces
Dahuang (Radix et Rhizoma Rhei) 3 liang/9g

This formulae contains 4 ingredients, but 2 of them Shuizhi (Hirudo) and Mangchong (Tabanus) are not allowed to be use in the UK. The placements for them can be Sanleng (Rhizoma Sparganii) 9 g and Ezhu (Rhizoma Curcumae) 9 g.

Original preparation and administration: boil the above ingredients in 5 sheng (1000 ml) of water till 3 sheng (600 ml) is left. Filter the decoction and take 1 sheng (200 ml) as a dose. If stasis is not resolved, take a second dose.

In Shang Han Lun, a number of clauses describe the use of Didang Tang and Didang Wan. Clauses 123 and 124 give the idea about the condition they treat, which is accumulation of heat and blood in the lower jiao following Taiyang diseases. Clause 123 states that “Taiyang disease for 6 or 7 days, there are still external symptoms, but the pulse is deep, no block-up chest but there is manic behaviour. This is because the heat is in the lower jiao. The lower abdomen is hard and full but urination is normal. The treatment should be to purge the blood in the lower jiao, as this is in the Taiyang channel with stagnated heat inside. In this situation, Didang Tang is best treatment”. Clause 124 states that “if the patient shows yellowish skin, has a deep, slow and irregular pulse, hard lower abdomen and dysuria, these may not indicate blood stasis. However, if the patient has a normal urination and but behave in a manic manner, then it may indicate that there is definite blood stasis. Didang Tang should be used in this situation.”

Didang Tang is the original formula for treatment of blood stasis in Chinese herbal medicine. It is a powerful formula to break up stagnated blood and purge excessive heat. Although originally it was designed for blood and heat in the lower jiao, Li⁴ has report to use it in cases of maniac with emotional excitement, endometriosis, chronic prostatitis and amenorrhea marked by blood stasis.

Didang Wan is the tablet form of Didang Tang, but the proportions of the original ingredients are different. For an example, in the tablet form, Shuizhi is 20 pieces (versus 30 pieces in decoction), Mangchong 20 pieces (30 pieces in decoction) and Taoren 25 pieces (20 pieces in decoction). The amount of Dahuang is the same. These change of dosage and the change from decoction to tablets means that Didang Wan should be used in milder form for heat and blood stasis of the lower jiao.

5. Zhuling Tang (猪苓汤 Polyporus Decoction)

Zhuling Tang (猪苓汤) consists of the following herbs:

Zhuling (Polyporus Umbellatus) 1 liang/9g
Fuling (Poria) 1 liang/9g
Zexie (Rhizoma Alismatis) 1 liang/9g
Ejiao (Colla Corrii Asin) 1 liang/9g
Huashi (Talcum) 1 liang/9g

Original preparation and administration: Boil the above ingredients in 4 sheng (800 ml) of water till 2 sheng (400 ml) is left. Filter the decoction and put Ejiao into it till it melts. Take 3 doses a day of 7 ge (140 ml) each time.

Huashi and Ejiao are not allowed to be use in the UK. We can replace them with Danzhuye (6g) and Shengdihuang 12g.

Zhuling Tang is a formula for water retention which was developed after improper treatment of Yangming disease. The pathology is that fluid is lacking after wrong treatment but at the same time there is a problem is urination. Clause 223 of Shang Han Lun states that “when the patient shows a floating pulse and fever, thirst and dysuria, Zhuling Tang should be used.” This formula gives tonics to Yin and at the same time clears heat and help remove retention water.

Chen⁵ reported that applying this formula to 107 patients with acute cystitis, all patients were better after taking 1-6 doses. He⁶ reported a case by using this formula to treat a patient with chronic pyelonephritis. the patient was cured after taking 5 doses.

6. Wumei Wan (乌梅丸 Mume Pill)

The formula consists of following herbs:

Wumei (Fructus Mume) 300 pieces/15g

Xixin (Hera Asari) 6 liang/3g

Ganjiang (Rhizoma Zingiberis) 10 liang/9g

Huanglian (Rhizoma Coptidis) 16 liang/9g

Zhifuzi (Radix Aconiti Praeparata) 6 liang/3g

Danggui (Radix Angelicae Sinensis) 4 liang/9g

Huangbai (Cortex Phellodendri) 6 liang/9g

Guizhi (Ramulus Cinnamomi) 6 liang/6g

Reshen (Radix Ginseng) 6 liang/9g

Shujiao (Pericarpium Zanthoxyli) 4 liang/6g

Original preparation and administration: Pound the above herbs separately into powder and mix them up. Soak Wumei in vinegar overnight. Remove the stone of Wumei and steam them under 5 dou (500-600g) of rice. When the rice is well-cooked, pound Wumei until it becomes creamy. Mix it with all the powdered herbs, and pound 2000 times with small amount of honey. Make the pills as big as a Phoenix Tree Seed. Take 10 pills each time before meals, 3 time a day. Dosage can be increased to 20 pills. Caution: Cold dishes, food that is difficult to be digested, and food with strong odour should be avoided.

Xixin and Fuzi are not allowed to use. We can use Shijunzi 10g to replace them in this formula.

Orinally, Wumei Wan was designed to treat a parasite, ascaris, in the “internal organs”. Clause 338 of Shang Han Lun recorded a case, that “during cold disease with cold extremities and feeble pulse, on the 7th or 8th day, if the patient suffers from continuous restlessness and irritation and feels cold

on his skin, it is the syndrome caused by internal cold, not by ascariasis. If it is caused by ascarides, the patient should have a history of vomiting ascarides,.....when ascarides come above the diaphragm (biliary tract or gallbladder), restlessness (biliary colic) will occur and then might stop after a time. The patient may also have nausea and vomit after eating. When ascarides sense the smell of food and crawl upwards, the patient might probably vomit ascarides. Wumei Wan should be used in this case. Wumen Wan is also a good formula for treating chronic diarrhoea.”

The formula is quite complicated in its composition. Its original form has 10 ingredients, which include cold and bitter herbs such as Huangliang and Huangbai, spicy and hot herbs such as Shujiao, Fuzi, Ganjiang, Guizhi and Xixin, sour herb in Wumei, and sweet herbs in Danggui and Renshen. This mixture would tranquilise and then clear away the worms. At the same time, the patient’s yang qi will recover and cold limbs become warm.

This formula can still be used for treatment of biliary ascariasis (although rarely seen), chronic enteritis or colitis and chronic diarrhoea in IBS. It should be noted that Fuzi and Xixin are currently banned in the UK and should be removed from any prescription of Wumei Wan.

Summary

Resolving method (Xiao Fa 消法), as one of the 8 therapeutic therapies introduced in Shang Han Lun, is through the promotion of digestion and dispersion of accumulation or lumps to eliminate pathogens and the stagnation of qi (气), blood (血), phlegm (痰), retained food (食), water (水), parasites (虫) and the like. It will gradually disperse them so that eventually all the accumulation and stagnation will disappear. 6 representative formulae have been discussed in this paper, namely Sini San (四逆散 Powder for Treating Cold Limbs), Xuanfu Daizhe Tang (旋复代赭汤 Decoction of Inula and Red Ochre), Xiao Xianxiong Tang (小陷胸汤 Minor Chest Bind Decoction), Didang Tang (抵挡汤 Resistant and Withstanding Decoction) and Didang Wan (抵挡丸 Resistant and Withstanding Pill), Zhuling Tang (猪苓汤 Polyporus Decoction) and Wumei Wan (乌梅丸 Mume Pill). These classical formulae are representatives of the advancements of Chinese herbal medicine in the Han dynasty. It is important to recognise that some of these formulae are the original formulae from which many TCM formulae are derived and we are still using them today. Applying classical formulae in today’s TCM practice may help resolve many clinical problems.

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