

Six crucial concepts

from the practice of Professor Liu Du-Zhou



■ Professor Liu Du-Zhou (1917–2001) was a renowned specialist in Shang Han Lun in China. He studied Chinese medicine from the age of 16 under the tutorship of two famous practitioners: Dr Wang Zhi-Yuan from Liaoning province and Dr Xie Si-Quan from Dalian. Professor Liu was thoroughly familiar with all the major classics and also involved in research work on the Shang Han Lun. In 1978, the Beijing College of Traditional Chinese Medicine conferred life professorship in recognition of his scholarship in the classics, and in particular for the extensive work he had accomplished in the study and teaching of the Shang Han Lun.

By Fu Yan-Ling

Compiled and translated by Greta Young

OVER HIS MANY YEARS of clinical practice, Professor Liu Du-Zhou not only followed the guidelines of the classics in general and Shang Han Lun in particular, but reflected upon his own experience with patients and the clinical mechanisms that applied.

The results of these reflections he expressed in his teaching as six crucial concepts, which are:

- 1) The qi dynamic
- 2) Attacking the pathogen
- 3) Pathogenic fire and heat
- 4) Water qi
- 5) Attention to key symptoms
- 6) Spleen and Stomach as key

1. The qi dynamic

The qi dynamic (气机 qi ji) is the movement of qi in four directions: inward, outward, upward and downward. The *Su Wen*: Chapter 68 (The Six Atmospheric Influences) has this passage:

The Emperor asked: [Among all the continual permutations you have just described] is there ever any rest?

Qi Bo replied: There is rest only when there is no generation or transformation.

The Emperor said: And when is that?

Qi Bo said: When movement between inside and out [eg. breath] is abandoned, the activity and transformation by the spirit is cut down; when

ascent and descent [eg of yin and yang] ceases, then the energy of life dries up. Therefore, if there is no outward and inward movement, then there will be no birth, growth, maturity, old-age and death; if there is no upward and downward movement, there will be no generation, growth, transformation, harvest and storage.

This movement between inside and out, the continual interchange of ascent and descent, is called the qi dynamic, and it is vital to life of any kind. The physiological activity of all human beings depends on this interaction between the environmental qi and the qi of the human body. Professor Liu made a special point of the correlation between impaired qi dynamic and the development of disease.

He further pointed that the zang fu organs associated with the movement of qi are the Liver, Gallbladder, Spleen and Stomach. This is because the Liver and Gallbladder act as a pivot for the incoming and outgoing of qi between the exterior and interior, while the Spleen and Stomach form the internal pivot for the ascent and descent of the qi of the zang fu. This concept plays a significant role in the treatment of diseases. There is an ancient maxim: “Those that are good in treating diseases must focus on regulating qi; those that are good at regulating qi must focus on the regulation of Liver and Gallbladder qi, while still considering qi of the Spleen and Stomach.”

Professor Liu was very experienced in the application of the commonly used Shang Han formulas such as the *Chai Hu* and *Xie Xin* groups of formulas. The significance of *Chai Hu* in the *Chai Hu* formulas relates to its function of regulating and dispersing constrained Liver and Gallbladder qi. By promoting the pivotal movement of qi,

Chai Hu (Bupleuri Radix) is able to enhance and support the normal qi activity of the zang fu. The *Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing* states: “*Chai Hu* commands all Stomach and Intestinal knotted qi, food accumulation, pathogenic heat and cold, as well as enhancing the metabolic process.” This means *Chai Hu* acts as a catalyst in the digestion and metabolism of food and, indirectly, achieves a regulatory effect on the movement of qi between the exterior and interior. Because *Chai Hu* is acrid and dispersing, it facilitates the outward movement of qi in the shao yang (Gallbladder and San Jiao). The bitter and cold properties of *Huang Qin* (Scutellariae Radix) stabilises the inward movement of the qi of the jue yin (Liver and Pericardium). The combined effect of these two herbs ensures the proper movement of qi, thus supporting normal qi activity. Based on Zhang Zhong-Jing’s strategy of regulating the qi dynamic, *Bai Shao* (Paeoniae Radix) is combined with *Chai Hu* because its sour and astringent properties balance the acrid dispersing properties of *Chai Hu* and it thus further enhances the qi movement of the Liver and Gallbladder.

In regard to the regulation of the Spleen and Stomach, it is not enough just to facilitate the ascent of Spleen qi, but there must also be focus on the descent of Stomach qi. To this end, *Huang Lian* (Coptidis Rhizoma) and *Huang Qin* are included to drain heat and help Stomach qi descend. Examples are *San Huang Xie Xin Tang* (Three-Yellow Drain the Epigastrium Decoction) in the treatment of epistaxis and hemoptysis and *Gan Jiang Huang Qin Huang Lian Ren Shen Tang* (Ginger, Scutellaria, Coptidis and Ginger Decoction) in the treatment of vomiting due to pathogenic cold. In the latter formula, *Ren Shen* (Ginseng Radix) and *Gan Cao* (Glycyrrhizae Radix) raise the Spleen qi and *Gan Jiang* (Zingiberis Rhizoma) warms the middle.

The strategy of regulating qi can also be used in the treatment of miscellaneous disease. In regard to his use of *Si Ni San* (Frigid Extremities Powder) to treat male impotence, Professor Liu said: “Male impotence can be attributed to yang deficiency or yang constraint. Most practitioners focus on the treatment of yang deficiency but fail to identify the yang constraint.” In the treatment of gynaecological disorders, Professor Liu often used *Xiao Yao San* (Rambling Powder), *Chai Hu Tang* (Bupleurum Powder to Spread the Liver) and *Yue Ju Wan* (Escape Restraint Pill) with the addition of *Mei Gui Hua* (Rosae Rugosae Flos) and *Lu E Mei* (Pruni Mume Flos).

2. Attacking the pathogen

The manifestation of disease is a result of depleted zheng qi, as the *Su Wen* states: “An attack by pathogenic qi is ascribed to deficiency of qi.”

However, in practice one cannot simply use a massive amount of tonifying herbs in an endeavour to dispel the pathogen, one must attack the pathogen itself. As an example, in the treatment of nephritis characterised by facial swelling and oliguria, Professor Liu used *Yue Bi jia Zhu Tang* (Maid-servant from Yue Decoction plus Attractolodes) to eliminate the pathogenic qi and thus promoted diuresis and reduced the facial swelling.

Similarly, in treating lower back pain, practitioners will often focus on tonifying the Kidney. But they fail to consider that quite a few cases of back pain are due to damp, heat or water retention, and these cases will improve only when the pathogenic factor has been eliminated.

3. Pathogenic fire and heat

The professor said that of the five elements, fire is the only element incorporating fire and heat. The *Su Wen* Chapter 74 states that of the 19 mechanisms of disease, five are associated with fire and four are associated with heat.

During his later years Professor Liu simplified the categorisation of the main fire patterns into fire constraint, fire stroke, fire glomus, fire mania and fire pain. He proposed that excess fire patterns should be treated by draining and purging, and deficiency fire patterns by tonification.

The commonly used formulas are *Da Huang Huang Lian Xie Xin Tang* (Rhubarb, Coptis Drain the Epigastrium Decoction), *Huang Lian Jie Du Tang* (Coptis Decoction to Relieve toxicity), *Long Dan Xie Gan Tang* (Gentiana Longdancao Decoction to Drain the Liver), *Zhi Zi Jin Hua Tang* (Gardenia and Lonicera Decoction), *Zhu Ye Shi Gao Tang* (Lopatherus and Gypsum Decoction), *Ge Gen Qin Lian Tang* (Kudzu, Coptis and Scutellaria Decoction) and *Bai Tou Weng Tang* (Pulsatilla Decoction). He treated stroke patients who presented with vexation, constipation and a red tongue with a dry yellow coat with *Huang Lian Jie Du Tang*.

4. Water qi

Water qi disorder refers to impaired fluid metabolism, which results in the accumulation of pathogenic water in the body, manifesting as oedema or water swelling. The zang fu organs associated with water metabolism are the Lung, Spleen, Kidney, Urinary Bladder and the San Jiao. Professor Liu pointed out that the Heart belongs to fire and is located in the chest. Both fire and the chest are yang and are better known as “yang within the tai yang”. If the yang qi of the Heart is flourishing and interacts properly with the Kidney water in the lower burner, there will be no upsurge of cold-water qi to harass the upper burner where



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■ SEMINARS: Professor Fu Yan Ling will be visiting Australia in October to present two seminars on the application of key Shang Han formulas to enhance clinical outcomes. For further details please contact Dr Greta Young at (03) 9842 0253



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the Heart and Lung are located. When Heart yang is weak however, this mechanism is a common cause of palpitations, dizziness, epigastric fullness, and a sensation of something rushing upwards into the chest.

Among the pathogenic factors, wind and water have the characteristics of changeability and unpredictability. Oedema, for example, can be a prime mechanism in causing the symptoms of bloating, vertigo, deafness, diarrhoea, inhibited urination, heart palpitations, cough, wheezing, nausea and vomiting.

Professor Liu advocated that in these cases one should follow teaching of Zhang Zhong-Jing and warm the Heart yang, and this is in fact an important aspect of treatment in the *Shang Han Lun*. Some of the *Shang Han Lun*'s key formulas in warming yang to treat oedema are *Ling Gui Zhu Gan Tang* (Poria, Cinnamon Twig, Atractylodes and Licorice Decoction), *Wu Ling San* (Five Ingredient Powder with Poria), and *Zhen Wu Tang* (True Warrior Decoction).

Water qi is reflected in the tongue, the complexion, the pulse and in the skin pigmentation known as water papules. Two of the professor's favourite personal formulas are *Ling Gui Qian Hong Tang* (with added *Qian Cao* (Rubiae Radix) and *Hong Hua* (Carthami Flos) and *Ling Gui Xing Yi Tang* (with added *Xing Ren* (Pruni Armeniacae Semen) and *Yi Yi Ren* (Coicis Semen).

In the treatment of cold fluid retention in the chest characterised by wheezing, Professor Liu used *Ling Gui Zhu Gan Tang* as the core formula with additional herbs such as *Gan Jiang* (Zingiberis Rhizoma), *Xi Xin* (Asari Herba cum Radice) and *Wu Wei Zi* (Schisandrae Fructus).

5. Attention to key symptoms

Professor Liu adheres to the traditional approach of pattern differentiation: identification according to the zang fu, the eight guiding principles and the six channels. Yet Professor Liu emphasises the importance of "focusing on the key symptoms", which is in fact what the most experienced masters in Chinese medicine do as a matter of course.

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In leg cramps, for example, the differentiation and treatment is as follows:

If the key symptoms are a red tongue with a wiry, thready pulse, the corresponding formula is *Shao Yao Gan Cao Tang* (Paeony and Licorice Decoction).

If there is a bitter taste, a parched throat, knotted fullness in the chest and hypochondrium, explosive loose stool or occasional abdomi-

nal pain with inhibited urination, numbness of the limbs and a wiry, moderate pulse, then *Chai Hu Gui Jiang Tang* (Bupleurum, Cinnamon Twig and Dried Ginger Decoction) is indicated.

If the pattern is characterised by glomus and fullness, nausea, vomiting and a watery stool, then the indicated formula is *Sheng Jiang Xie Xin Tang* (Raw Ginger Decoction to Drain the Epigastrium).

It can be seen that "key symptoms" refers to signs and symptoms which are a clear reflection of the mechanism behind the disease, and therefore constitute an important key to diagnosis. It is like a short-cut to reach the same conclusion that one might have done via differentiation by the eight principles and zang-fu, but instead of all symptoms being given equal weight, certain patterns or groupings in the symptoms stand out and point the way. One can learn to discern these patterns on one's own, after accumulating several decades of clinical practice, or one can study the *Shang Han Lun*, where these groupings of symptoms underpin the whole structure of the book.

6. Spleen and Stomach as key

"Preserving the Stomach qi" is a fundamental principle in *Shang Han Lun*. Because Professor Liu was strongly influenced by the *Shang Han Lun* and also Li Dong Yuan's *Pi Wei Lun*, he incorporated this into his treatment strategy. He based his theory on three basic premises:

- Spleen and Stomach provide energy from food and fluids, and are thus the source of qi and blood; therefore, the all health is ultimately dependent on the healthy functioning of the Spleen and Stomach.
- The qi of the Spleen and Stomach acts as a pivot for the ascent and descent of qi, thus governing the qi dynamic.
- Exterior pathogenic attack via the mouth affects the Stomach and diseases associated with diet are the cause of many disorders.

Favourite formulas that Professor Liu used frequently are variations of *Xie Xin Tang* (Drain the Epigastrium Decoction) and *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* (Tonify the Middle and Augment the Qi Decoction). A small dosage of *Da Huang* (Rhei Rhizoma) is often added to free stagnation and harmonise the Stomach qi. Formulas such as *Xiao Xian Xiong Tang* (Minor Sinking Into the Chest Decoction) are used to clear Stomach phlegm heat and *Xie Huang San* (Drain the Yellow Powder) to clear damp heat from the Spleen. Professor Liu emphasised that while harmonising the Spleen and Stomach is of course effective in the treatment of Spleen and Stomach related disorders, this strategy is also advocated to consolidate recovery in the aftermath of serious acute disease characterised by fatigue and loss of appetite.