



Liu Duzhou talks Huang Lian E Jiao Tang

From a transcription of a lecture by the famous Shang Han Lun expert

Shang Han Lun (Discussion of Cold Disorder), line 303: After suffering from *shaoyin* disease for more than two or three days, there is vexation in the heart and an inability to fall asleep. *Huáng Lián É Jiāo Tāng* (Coptis and Ass-Hide Gelatin Decoction) should be prescribed.¹

Huang Lian E Jiao Tang

Coptis and Ass-Hide Gelatin Decoction

Huang Lian	12g	Coptidis Rhizoma
E Jiao	9g	Asini Corii Colla
Huang Qin	3g	Scutellariae Radix
Bai Shao	6g	Paeoniae Radix
Ji Zi Huang	2	Egg yolk

THIS LINE DISCUSSES a *shaoyin* pattern of yin deficiency with fire. It is usefully compared with the situation in which *Zhen Wu Tang* (True Warrior Decoction) is used for yang deficiency with pathogenic water.

Shaoyin organs are the organs of fire and water and the root of yin and yang. *Shaoyin* disorder is divided into “cold transformation” and “heat transformation”. Whether cold transforms or heat transforms is based on the strength or weakness of *shaoyin*’s own basic yin and yang.

When there is yin deficiency and heat transformation, this is the reason that there is ***shaoyin* disease for more than two to three days** and there appears **vexation in the heart**. Vexation is a heat sign, and leads to **inability to fall asleep**.

When yin is deficient, water is lacking and cannot control fire. Here that means Kidney water is insufficient and Heart fire is flaring, so there is vexation and insomnia. One should drain fire and nourish yin, “strengthen the mastery of water to control yang illumination”²

2. 壯水之主，以制陽光 *zhuāng shuǐ zhī zhǔ yǐ zhì yáng guāng* is a famous annotation to chapter 74 of the *Su Wen* by the Tang dynasty commentator Wáng

In order to drain fire and heat while at the same time tonifying yin water, use *Huang Lian E Jiao Tang* (Coptis and Ass-Hide Gelatin Decoction).

Influential formula

This formula has had a great impact on the development of warm disease theory. To look at the situation from a clinical angle: the situation is flaring out of control, and yin is so deficient it cannot subdue fire.

This is expressed in the *Book of Changes* hexagram *Wèi Jì* (Before Completion, hexagram 64).³



Heart fire cannot descend, Kidney water cannot rise, fire and water are unable to work together for their mutual benefit.

The patient is irritable and the irritability increases as evening approaches. Daytime is yang, night-time is yin, and in evening yang wants to enter yin, but because the patient’s yin water is insufficient it cannot submerge yang, so the yang fire acts up and leads to irritability and vexation as night closes in.

The patient can’t sleep but paces the room, vexed at heart, unable to quiet themselves. They feel all pent up, as if they must go outside where at least they can breathe the open air.

Bing (王冰). It continues, “benefit the source of fire to disperse yin shadows” 益火之源以消阴翳 *yì huǒ zhī yuán yǐ xiāo yīn yì*.

3. This hexagram shows fire ascending and water descending, a very unfortunate situation because everything is separating instead of mixing in a harmonious manner. The harmony is shown when the trigrams are switched so that water ascends and fire descends. The relation to human physiology is obvious.

1. The translation of this line is from the excellent *Discussion of Cold Damage: Commentaries and Clinical Applications* by Guohui Liu, Singing Dragon Press, 2016, p. 723.

Chen Xiuyuan has a mnemonic rhyme for this formula:

*Four liang Huang Lian, three liang Gel,
add two yolks last whip them well;
one Qin two Shao treat vexation,
and too poor sleep from agitation.*⁴

I once treated a middle-school teacher who could not sleep but who was still energetic and excited about everything. With a red face and agitated reactions, this was excessive Heart fire with poor Kidney yin. This type of patient usually has no tongue coat or one that is thin

4. 四兩黃連三兩膠二枝雞子取黃敲一苓二芍心煩治更治難眠睫不交。Sì liǎng Huáng Lián sān liǎng Jiāo èr zhī jī zǐ qǔ huáng qiāo; yī qín èr sháo xīn fán zhì, gèng zhì nán mián jié bù jiāo. The rhyme comes from Chen Xiuyuan's book of rhymes for Shang Han Lun formulas called Chángshā Fānggē Kuò (長沙方歌括 Summary Songs for Formulas from Changsha, 1803). Liu Duzhou memorised the entire book.

and yellow, the tongue itself being red or with deep red prickles, and a thready, rapid pulse. This type responds well to *Huang Lian E Jiao Tang* as it drains the Heart and nourishes yin.

Of course, it is only my own opinion that later when Li Dongyuan invented *Zhu Sha An Shen Wan* (Cinnabar Pill to Calm the Spirit) he got the idea from *Huang Lian E Jiao Tang*.

The meaning of the formula is this: the bitterness of *Huang Lian* (Coptidis Rhizoma) and *Huang Qin* (Scutellariae Radix) drains Heart fire and causes it to descend. The *E Jiao* (Asini Corii Colla) and egg yolks are both animal products that tonify Heart and Kidney yin. The increased power to tonify derives from the innate relationship of animal to human which transcends that of plants or minerals.

The addition of *Bai Shao* (Paeoniae Radix alba) can not only drain fire but

can also transform into yin and calm Liver. Cheng Wuji says, "The sourness of *Bai Shao* restrains yin qi and drains pathogens."

But how well does this formula work for treating insomnia and irritation? Well, in the case of the middle-school teacher I mentioned earlier, I gave her *Huang Lian E Jiao Tang* exactly as written in the original. After she took it, she slept heavily, snoring away, and did not even respond to being called or shaken. Her long solid sleep was due to Heart and Kidneys being able to again relate.

When cooking this formula, first boil the *Huang Lian*, *Huang Qin* and *Bai Shao* until 40 per cent of the water has gone, then discard the herbs and add *E Jiao*. Once it has cooled somewhat, mix in the two egg yolks.

This method of cooking the formula must be remembered.

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