

UNDERSTANDING THIRST IN THE SHANG HAN LUN

Liu Du Zhou

Translated and introduced by Eran Even



Introduction

Professor Liu Du-Zhou (刘渡舟) (1917-2001) was the student of two famous physicians, Dr. Wang Zhi-Yuang and Dr. Xie Si-Quan. His passing in 2001 was a loss to the world of Chinese medicine but he lives on through his prolific writings and his disciples. At an early age Professor Liu was smitten with the power of studying the classics, especially the Shang Han Lun (傷寒論). He noted that some supporters of the classical Shang Han Lun formulas adhere to a rather simple lock and key way of working. It is a matter of matching a presentation of signs and symptoms to a formula, based on the clauses of the Shang Han Lun. Such practitioners have little interest in either the patho-mechanism of the illness or the way the herbs work together to address the patho-mechanism. Although a deep study of the signs and symptoms that make up a formula presentation is essential for any serious practitioner of classic formulas, stopping at this level will ultimately bring limited and mediocre clinical results.

What I love about the work of Liu Du-zhou is his interest in understanding the classic formulas of the Shang Han Lun in relation to both the presentation and the physio- and patho-logical mechanisms that explain it. Furthermore he articulates the way the formulas work to address the pathology. It is only when we study and work this way, deeply "seeing" the way the body is not finding its way and understanding the formulas and the herbs within them, that we become fine tuned and more dependably effective in our work. Such depth is exemplified in Liu's commentary on the question of thirst in the Shang Han Lun.



**Liu Du Zhou
(1917-2001)**

1. Heat Exuberance

Original Lines

Line 26

"When after gui zhi tang is taken and following major sweating there is major vexation and thirst, and the disease is unresolved and the pulse is surging and large, bai hu jia ren shen tang (白虎加入參湯) (White Tiger plus Ginseng Decoction: shi gao, zhi mu, zhi gan cao, geng mi, ren shen) governs".

Line 168

"In cold damage if vomiting or purgation (methods) are used, and after seven or eight days the condition has not resolved, heat is bound in the interior, (and there is) heat in both the exterior and interior, (with) frequent aversion to wind, great thirst, a dry tongue, vexation, and a desire to drink several sheng of water, bai hu jia ren shen tang governs".

Line 170

"In cold damage when the pulse is floating, and there is heat effusion with an absence of sweating, the exterior has not yet resolved; bai hu tang (White Tiger Decoction) cannot be given. If there is thirst with a desire to drink and no exterior signs, bai hu jia ren shen tang governs".

Line 169

"In cold damage when great heat effusion is absent and there is a dry mouth, thirst, heart vexation, and slight aversion to cold in the back, bai hu jia ren shen tang governs".

Line 222

"If there is thirst with a desire to drink water, a dry mouth, and dry tongue, then bai hu jia ren shen tang governs".

Line 373

"When there is diarrhea with a desire to drink water, this indicates heat and bai tou weng tang (白頭翁湯) (Pulsatilla Decoction: bai tou weng, huang lian, huang bai, qin pi) governs".

Summary

The Shang Han Su Yuan Ji (傷寒溯源集) (Discourse on Tracing back to the Source of (the Discussion) of Cold Damage), a text written in 1707 by Qian Huang (錢潢) says: "the presence or absence of thirst is the main determining factor of the

Thirst in the Shang Han Lun

existence of heat. When there is no heat in the interior, there will be no thirst, and if thirst is present, (due to) a lack of fire in the lower burner, fluids are unable to be steamed by the bladder resulting in a lack of moisture (fluids) in the mouth. Although thirst is present, there will be a lack of desire and an inability to drink copious amounts of water. If the stomach is hot and dry, it would be completely logical that there would be thirst with a desire to drink, as opposed to an absence of heat in the interior still with a desire to drink fluids”.

In the Jue Yin chapter in the Shang Han Lun, major heat has caused excessive loss of water, and this lack of water will result in thirst. All of the patterns in the lines above are the result of great heat, which has damaged fluids; therefore they all use bai hu jia ren shen tang. Bai tou weng tang is also used to clear superabundant heat.

2. Water Amassment

Original Lines

Line 71

“.....If the pulse is floating, urination is inhibited, and there is slight heat with dispersion thirst, *wu ling san* (五苓散) (Five-Ingredient Powder with Poria: ze xie, fu ling, zhu ling, bai zhu, gui zhi) governs”.

Line 74

“In wind strike when there is heat effusion that is unresolved for six or seven days and vexation; (here) there is an exterior and interior pattern with thirst with a desire to drink water and vomiting immediately after ingesting fluids, this is called water counterflow, and *wu ling san* governs”. [1]

Line 72

“When sweat has already been promoted and the pulse is floating and rapid, and there is vexation and thirst, *wu ling san* governs”.

Line 244:

“In Tai Yang disease.....when there is thirst with a desire to drink water, give a small amount of water, for only by this method will the condition be eliminated. If there is thirst, *wu ling san* is suitable”.

Summary

A *wu ling san* (Five-Ingredient Powder with Poria) pattern is primarily the result of obstruction in urinary function manifesting with inhibited urination. There is accumulation and fullness of water toxicity in the blood, and the gastro-intestinal tract is unable to reabsorb water into the blood. Water amassment has also now been generated within the stomach resulting in this kind of obstruction to the body’s fluid metabolism and there is a failure to secrete fluids in the salivary

glands and the mucus membranes in the mouth resulting in thirst. Therefore, we know that a lack of water or water amassment can both lead to thirst, so with a lack of water, one needs to merely supplement and fill the water aspect with a formula like bai hu jia ren shen tang, which on the one hand clears heat, while on the other, it also generates fluids. With water amassment, treatment involves disinhibiting water, and while *wu ling san* can stop thirst, it primarily eliminates amassed water. This thirst is similar to that associated with *zhu ling tang* (zhu ling, fu ling, ze xie, hua shi, e jiao) (lines 223 and 319), however the pathological changes with *wu ling san* are in the bladder.

3. Damage to Yin

Original Lines

Line 282:

“In Shao Yin disease when there is a desire but inability to vomit, heart vexation, a desire only to sleep, and after five or six days there is spontaneous diarrhea and thirst, this belongs to Shao Yin. (Because there is) vacuity, water intake should relieve (the thirst)”.

Line 329:

“In Jue Yin disease, when there is thirst with a desire to drink water, give a small amount of water and there will be recovery”.

Line 326:

“In Jue Yin disease there is dispersion thirst, qi surging upwards into the heart, pain and heat in the heart, hunger with no desire to eat, and vomiting of roundworms after eating. If purgation is used, this will result in incessant diarrhea”.

Summary

Shang Han Ming Li Lun (傷寒明理論)(The Clear Rationale of Cold Damage), a Jin dynasty text by Cheng Wu-Ji (成无己) [2] says: “When pathogenic qi first enters the interior, warm qi is scattered and is unable to be absorbed becoming heat. This heat is fumed and steamed, which burns the diaphragm resulting in contention and the inevitable consumption of fluids, which gradually creates thirst. Although the patient is thirsty and has a desire to drink water, they are unable to drink copious amounts. If large amounts of water are drunk, the heat would still not be dispersed, and this would result in rheum stoppage disease”. All yin patterns with thirst are typically not due to repletion heat, but are the result of the exhaustion of fluids and the harassment of vacuous yang. Therefore, cool and cold (medicinals) should not be carelessly administered, nor should copious amounts of water be given.

All three lines above are patterns due to yin damage and vacuous fire harassing the upper.

Where line 282 applies, Wei Ling-Tong therefore recommends giving fu zi tang (Aconite Decoction: fu zi, bai zhu, ren shen, fu ling, bai shao) to warm Shao Yin.



Cheng Wu-Ji
(成无己)
1050-1144

Case Study on Edema

On January 15th, 1992 a fifty-two year old woman presented to Dr Liu with pitting lower body edema, which (had been) fluctuating in severity. In addition, her urination was inhibited, with the color resembling green tea, and during urination, her feet and heels would go numb. Other symptoms included thirst, chest oppression, (a sensation of) qi surging upward into the throat, lumbar soreness, lethargy, and occasional dizziness. Her tongue was swollen and large with a white coating, and her pulse was wiry and forceless. Dr. Liu identified this as a pattern of qi vacuity and dampness, with inhibited bladder qi transformation, and the internal amassment of water dampness. Treatment consisted of supplementing qi, freeing yang, transforming dampness, and disinhibiting water.

Formula: fu ling 30g, zhu ling 20g, bai zhu 10g, ze xie 20g, gui zhi 12g, dang shen 12g

After taking 3 packages of the above formula, her urination was moving freely, and as a result, the edema in her lower limbs had receded. In addition, the thirst and surging qi (sensation) had completely resolved. The dang shen was increased to 15g, and another 5 packages were taken, at which point all her symptoms resolved.

Commentary

Chapter 8 of the Su Wen (Discourse on the Hidden Canons in the Numinous Orchid (Chambers) says: *"The bladder is the official, functioning as the regional rectifier. Liquids and humors are stored in it, and (only through) qi transformation, can they be discharged"*.

If there is a failure in qi transformation, then water will amass in the location of the regional rectifier, which fails to provide nourishment above resulting in thirst. (In addition), there (will be) blockage in the lower (body), which results in inhibited urination. When water qi amasses internally, metabolism is inhibited, which typically leads to edema. Chun Ze Tang (Alismatis Springtime

Decoction) was first recorded in the Yi Fang Ji Jie (Analytic Collection of Medical Formulas) (醫方集解) [3] (as a treatment for) qi vacuity and damp damage with thirst and inhibited urination. The formula consists of Wu Ling San to cleanse the palace in order to free the qi of the foot Tai Yang (channel), and percolate and disinhibit dampness so urine can be discharged. Dang shen was added to supplement and boost the qi of the spleen and lungs, thereby restoring the mechanism of qi transformation. When assisted by the warm and freeing (nature) of gui zhi, water is able to be transformed, and fluids can be transported through the whole body.

Notes

[1] The Qing dynasty scholar-physician Wei Li-Tong (1671-?) commented: "What is the interior pattern? It manifests with vexation, thirst with a desire to drink, and vomiting immediately after ingesting fluids. What is the exterior pattern? It manifests with a headache, tightness of the nape, and aversion to cold, heat effusion, and sweating". Wei Li-Tong wrote many commentaries on the classics including Shang Han Lun Ben Yi (傷寒論本義) (Original Meanings on Cold Damage) and Jin Gui Yao Lue Ben Yi (金匱要略本義) (Original Meanings of the Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet).

[2] Cheng Wu-Ji (1050-1144) was a scholar-physician of the Northern Song dynasty who compiled the Annotations to the Shang Han Lun (注解伤寒論 Ju Jie Shang Han Lun), which became what is known as the Song version of the Shang Han Lun used to the present day. Cheng devoted over forty years of his life to compiling his seminal work, completed in 1140. However, it was not published till 1172, more than thirty years after Cheng's death. His annotation was extremely comprehensive, citing numerous sources and references in his attempt to repair and resolve the various inconsistencies that existed amongst the numerous surviving versions of the text.

[3] Medical Formulas Collected and Analyzed by Wang Ang (1682).

About the Author

Eran Even is a registered Doctor of Chinese medicine and Acupuncturist living and practicing in beautiful Port Moody, British Columbia. Eran has studied Chinese medicine and language in Canada and China and is constantly striving to be a better clinician by learning and re-learning Chinese medicine through the classics.

Eran is the translator of the forthcoming 'Formulas from The Golden Cabinet with Songs' Volume 2 (*Jin gui fang ge kuo*), and co-translator of the forthcoming 'Five Steps to Shang Han Treatment Based on Pattern Identification'.