

# TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING AND TREATING DEPRESSION

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## Abstract

Depression, a widespread emotional disorder closely linked to life's mental stress, has been recorded in historical texts with various names such as 'Pivot madness' and 'forgetfulness'. Traditional Chinese medicine classifies it under 'depression disease' and 'dirty irritability'. The prolonged course of depression leads to unstable moods and, in some cases, life-threatening behaviors. The modern era's intense competition and economic pressures contribute to a rise in depression cases, making it a significant mental health concern affecting approximately 300 million individuals globally. This review explores the multifaceted nature of depression, its impact on human health, and potential avenues for management and treatment.

**Keywords:** depression, emotional disorder, mental health, traditional Chinese medicine, management

## 1. Introduction

Depression is an emotional disorder disease, mainly manifested as low mood, no interest in anything, silence, and no communication. This disease is closely related to the mental stress of life. Predecessors recorded depression a long time ago, 'Pivot madness', 'Forgetfulness, bitterness, fearful people, have to control hunger'. According to the unique theoretical system of traditional Chinese medicine, depression can be attributed to 'depression disease', 'dirty irritability', 'Bentun', 'lily' and so on. Depression has a long course of disease, and the patient's mood is unstable in a short period of time, and the condition is often aggravated by a sudden event, resulting in life-threatening phenomena such as self-harm. With the rapid development of economy, the competition in modern life is becoming more and more fierce. Excessive pressure makes depression frequent. As one of the most important mental illness, depression has important effect on human health, about 300 million people worldwide suffer from the disease.<sup>[2]</sup>

## 2. Depression from the viscera

### 2.1. Treating depression from the heart

In the 'Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic', the theory that the heart regulates mental activities is mainly manifested in 'the heart is the master of the five internal organs and the spirit', indicating that the mind can control the spiritual and emotional activities of people. Furthermore, the 'heart hidden veins, veins of God' blood filling, mental and emotional can be normal. 'Jing Yue Quan Shu' expresses 'the depression of emotion, which is always from the heart, and this disease is also caused by depression. Depression belongs to the incidence of emotional disorders, the heart governs, and the loss of control leads to the loss of heart qi, depression, and depression. Therefore, the occurrence of depression is related to the mind of the heart. In the 'medical law', it is recorded that 'worry about the lung should... It describes the relationship between heart and five emotions in

detail. In the clinical center, patients with blood deficiency often have mental trance, depression and so on, which further illustrates the relationship between heart and depression.

### 2.2. *Depression from the liver*

The liver regulates emotions, and is angry. The liver governs dispersion and regulates the qi movement of the human body. If the liver's catharsis function is proper, the mood is pleasant and stable. The dysfunction of the liver will lead to depression, sentimentality, and irritability. Zhang Jinru<sup>[3]</sup> with a small radix bupleuri tonga decreased after treatment, patients with depression significantly reduce bad emotions, at the same time can reduce the recurrence rate of western medicine after discontinuation of treatment. Traditional Chinese medicine says that 'the liver likes to regulate and is bad for depression'. Zhang Guowen believes that if the liver's catharsis function is proper, the qi movement is unobstructed, the liver qi is smooth, the qi and blood run smoothly, the body fluid can run normally in the body, and emotional diseases are not easy to occur<sup>[4]</sup>.

### 2.3. *Depression from the spleen*

The pivot of the ascending and descending of qi movement in the human body is mainly related to the spleen. If the ascending and descending of spleen qi is abnormal, the qi of clear yang and the essence of water and grain cannot be dispersed, and the corresponding dross cannot be discharged, it can cause other diseases, such as qi stagnation, qi reversal, qi stagnation, and severe cases can lead to mental separation. Therefore, the ascending and descending of spleen qi is derelict, which plays a vital role in the occurrence of depression and other mental activities. In life, depression is often accompanied by fatigue, low mood, lack of energy, etc., which can be called depressive hypokinetic symptoms. Literature studies have concluded that spleen disease is the basis for the treatment of low-dynamic symptoms of depression. Therefore, low-dynamic symptoms of depression can be differentiated from spleen-strengthening and spleen-restoring methods. Li Dongyuan<sup>[5]</sup> said that "all anger, wrath, sadness, thinking and fear in the theory of spleen and stomach are harmful to the vitality... Good governance of disease, only in the spleen and stomach. It shows that the treatment of emotional diseases such as unsmooth heart, unimaginable things and low mood should be treated by harmonizing the spleen and stomach. The vitality of the stomach can be extended and the mood will be open and cheerful.

### 2.4. *Depression from the lung*

The lung is determined to be sad. The clinical manifestations of depression often have sadness and desire to cry, and cannot raise interest in anything and the performance ability is reduced. Sadness and worry are born by the lung in the five internal organs, and lung qi injury is prone to emotional diseases such as sadness and sorrow. Furthermore, the lung stores qi, qi stores the soul, and the lung governs the qi of the whole body. The occurrence of depression is mostly due to the fact that the qi cannot stretch. In the "Golden Chamber"<sup>[6]</sup>, the woman's zang-mania, the symptoms are 'sad and bitter, as if made by the gods'. Therefore, the lung must not descend, the qi movement is not smooth, and emotional diseases such as depression can be produced. Lung in the taste of Xin, Xin scattered and vent, can Shu Tongqi, Kaida depression improve depressive symptoms. In a word, the lung governing qi, and the five wills and five flavors can affect the occurrence of depression, which provides a scientific basis for the treatment of depression from the lung. A large number of clinical practices have also proved the certainty and accuracy of treating depression from the lung.

### 2.5. *Depression from the kidney*

'Danxi Xinfu 'yun 'qi and blood Chonghe, all diseases are not born, one is not depressed, all diseases are born. Therefore, personal diseases are mostly caused by depression. ' Danxi's six depressions explain the occurrence of depression syndrome. The kidney stores essence, the essence stores the will, the kidney qi fails, the yin and yang in the kidney gradually loses, the qi of the five zang organs fails, and the qi and blood cannot run, then endogenous pathogens such as phlegm coagulation and blood stasis can be generated. Depression syndrome can occur in the body of phlegm coagulation and blood stasis. At the same time, the kidney is the foundation of qi. Kidney deficiency leads to deficiency of the five internal organs, weak qi and blood circulation, poor qi movement, mental depression, anxiety, emotional disorders and other symptoms. 'Huangdi Neijing ' points out that ' Yang is active ', and kidney yang is the root of yang qi. The main symptoms of depression are low mood, dull reaction and slow movement, which are all manifestations of yang weakness. It has been reported in the literature that the use of warming yang and tonifying kidney drugs has good antidepressant effect <sup>[7]</sup>.

### 3. *Depression from meridian theory*

The theory that zang-fu organs and acupoints are closely related is the way to run qi and blood, connect zang-fu organs and limbs, and communicate inside and outside. The five internal organs and six fu organs have their own meridians, and each meridian has its corresponding acupoints. In the theory of meridians and collaterals, the core problem is the regulating function of meridians and collaterals in promoting qi and blood circulation and dredging yin and yang, while the occurrence of depression is mostly caused by the dysfunction of qi movement and qi and blood stagnation.

The theory of meridians and collaterals to treat depression is mainly reflected in the theory of opening, closing and pivoting. The operation of qi is manifested as ascending, descending, exiting and entering in the way of opening, closing and pivoting <sup>[8]</sup>. Depression is mostly caused by the disorder of qi movement, so the treatment of depression starts from the opening and closing of meridians.

The sun is the surface of yang qi, and yang qi accumulates here, which can promote the operation of qi and blood while resisting external pathogens. One of the keys to depression is the lack of yang. If the yang qi of the human body is not running smoothly, there will be mental fatigue, slow response, depression and so on. There is an acupoint in the bladder meridian of foot sun, massage this acupoint can improve the symptoms of depression, the clinical effect is remarkable. The sun is open, and the qi runs smoothly. The qi and blood run smoothly and the mood is stable. Therefore, Tongyang Sanjie can be used clinically to treat depression by dredging Taiyang meridian qi <sup>[9]</sup>.

Yangming is the meridian of qi and blood. Yangming is Shengyang, and yang qi accumulates here. Acupuncture and moxibustion of Yangming meridian, mobilizing qi and blood, regulating yin and yang, has a certain significant effect on improving depression. Foot Yangming meridian mainly receives water and grain essence, nourishes zang-fu organs and produces spiritual activities. If the yang qi of the yangming meridian of the foot is not running smoothly, the patient may have low mood, loss of appetite, decreased food intake, etc. If Yangming does not drop, the fire gold rises and the spirit floats on, which further explains the connection between Yangming meridian and emotional disorders such as depression.

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## Research Article

Shaoyang is the hub of qi regulation, 'pivot fold pulse knot but not pass. Shaoyang cardinal adverse, unable to coordinate qi, depression, sadness and so on. 'Five or six days of typhoid fever, stroke, cold and heat, chest pain,... It further expounds that the abnormal operation of Shaoyang meridian will lead to depression diseases such as chest pain and silence. An effective case of acupuncture combined with medicine in the treatment of depression has been reported in the literature. Taking 'Qishen acupuncture' as the main point, combined with herbal medicine Shuda Shaoyang, regulating qi and relieving depression, eliminating phlegm and resuscitation, calming the heart and tranquilizing the mind, effectively improving physical symptoms and emotional symptoms, and improving the quality of life of patients. Qi shows that Shuda Shaoyang Qi is also effective in the treatment of depression<sup>[10-11]</sup>.

Taiyin, Jueyin 'Spiritual Pivot Root knot' cloud: 'He fold gas and joy and sorrow, sorrow take Jueyin, as there is more than enough. 'Taiyin main qi movement is unobstructed, Jueyin main closed, Taiyin Jueyin opening and closing is normal, qi movement is unobstructed, and depression is not easy to occur. If the Taiyin and Jueyin meridians run abnormally, the opening and closing of the qi movement are derelict, the qi movement is disordered, and the depression is in the body, there will be mental disorders. The spleen meridian of foot taiyin is generated by qi and blood for transportation, and the spleen is strengthened to remove dampness and evil. Most of the spleen meridians can prevent depression. The liver meridian of foot jueyin governs emotion, soothes qi movement, and the liver meridian is affected by evil, which can often cause emotional disorders such as chest tightness and belching.

Shaoyin is the pivot, and the pivot of opening and closing is the pivot of yin-yang and qi transformation. Proper opening and closing is conducive to the operation of Shaoyin hub. Shaoyin hub operates normally, and the operation of gas is unimpeded. Shaoyin meridian includes foot Shaoyin kidney meridian and hand Shaoyin triple energizer meridian. The kidney governs the essence of yin and yang of the human body, and the kidney qi deficiency will cause fatigue, fatigue, and depression. The triple energizer meridian is the pathway of qi movement. If the triple energizer runs smoothly, the qi movement will be adjusted. If the function of the triple energizer is disordered, the qi movement will be depressed, and tangible things such as phlegm and blood stasis will be produced, resulting in depression.

Jueyin main closed, is to make the stagnation of the gas in the human body through the role of Shaoyin hub spread throughout the body, so that the gas 'open' spread to go out, so that the gas machine smooth, gas smooth and stable. The liver meridian of foot jueyin and the pericardium meridian of hand jueyin are more emotional diseases. The liver governs the growth and development, and the liver qi is not smooth, the depression is in the body, and the depression will occur over time. The classical prescription Sini Powder is an empirical prescription for regulating liver qi, which is widely used in clinical practice, and further shows that the treatment of depression from the foot jueyin meridian is effective. Pericardial congestion, chest yang cannot spread, it will be melancholy, depression. Tanzhong is the intersection of pericardium meridian qi accumulation. In the observation of the clinical efficacy of acupuncture at Tanzhong in the treatment of post-stroke depression, it is proved that Tanzhong has antidepressant effect.

### 4. Depression from Ying Wei

Ying-wei is the material basis of mental activity. Cognition, emotion, thinking, will and other parts constitute mental activities. In the 'Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon, seven emotions and five spirits belong to mental activities. The cognitive, emotional and will activities included in the five spirits are closely related to the occurrence of depression. Seven emotions and five spirits are produced by the gasification of viscera under the guidance of the heart, and the gasification of viscera depends on the support of ying-qi. The smooth operation of ying-wei is the normal operation of viscera function and the stability of mental emotion. On the contrary, the abnormal operation of wei-qi, its sexual prostitution, easy to lead to emotional changes quickly become a variety of emotional disorders. If the nutrient qi is not properly nourished, the blood is congested, the nutrient blood is not available, and the pulse channel is occluded, there will be mental abnormalities. 'Pivot Camp Health Association '... Rong Wei has passed, the five internal organs have become... It describes that ying-wei is the material foundation of god, and the disharmony between ying-wei can lead to the blockage of the mechanism of god and cause depression. Ying is in the pulse, and Wei is outside the pulse. Depression is based on the disharmony between Ying and Wei, and Yang depression is the key to pathogenesis.

The heart protection of the method of harmonizing Ying and Wei on chronic stress depression rats provides an important theoretical basis for the treatment of depression-related heart diseases <sup>[13]</sup>. At present, there are a large number of literatures on the treatment of depression by harmonizing Ying and Wei <sup>[14]</sup>. Only the smooth flow of the camp, the coordination of the five internal organs, mental activity can be normal.

### 5. Depression from qi, blood and body fluid

#### 5.1. Treating depression from qi

According to the ancients, gods control the physiological and psychological activities of the human body. The material basis of mental activities is qi and blood. Therefore, sufficient qi and blood can be conducive to the normal activities of mental spirit and maintain the dynamic balance of human physiology and psychology. In addition, there is a saying: 'Qi is the mother of God '. With sufficient Qi and blood, smooth operation and proper nourishment of mind, the human body can be energetic, emotionally stable, conscious and responsive. Qi depression is the beginning of all depressions, and the basic pathogenesis of depression syndrome is poor qi movement. In the 'Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon, there are ' anger is on it, sadness is qi elimination, fear is qi downward, and panic is qi disorder <sup>[15]</sup>, indicating that unstable emotions can affect the operation of qi and blood, resulting in insufficient qi and blood or poor operation. Therefore, the treatment of depression should be based on regulating qi first. In qi depression, deficiency and excess should be distinguished. Empirical qi depression is often accompanied by blood stasis and phlegm turbidity, which is manifested as mental depression, rigidity, chest distension and suffocation, belching discomfort, etc. Deficiency syndrome qi stagnation is mainly based on the dysfunction of zang-fu organs, often with mental malaise, lazy words and less movement, less food, forgetfulness and insomnia, so the treatment can dredge qi movement, open depression and disperse stagnation.

#### 5.2. Treating depression from blood

'Lingshuying health club ' cloud ' blood, spirit also. Essence, qi and blood nourish the five zang-organs, six fu-organs and mental activities of the human body. The blood in the human body is sufficient, the blood moves

properly in the vein, and the mental activity can be normal. Blood deficiency or poor exercise will produce corresponding mental disorders. Poor blood flow, blood stasis, can be manifested as irritability, emotional depression, insomnia, numbness, dark purple tongue or petechiae, pulse string, etc.

In a meta-analysis of the relationship between anemia and postpartum depression, it was concluded that maternal anemia was associated with an increased risk of postpartum depression<sup>[16]</sup>. The occurrence of postpartum depression is inseparable from the physiological characteristics of postpartum deficiency and blood stasis. A large amount of blood is lost after delivery. Blood deficiency cannot nourish the viscera. The imbalance of qi and blood in the viscera leads to depression, sadness and depression, fear and pessimism. On the contrary, the blood and the spirit, the mood is stable, not prone to emotional diseases. Zhao Yonghou<sup>[17]</sup> also put forward the diagnosis and treatment thinking of 'viscera-qi and blood-brain spirit' to treat mental illness, and believed that the fundamental principle of treating mental illness was to regulate qi and blood. Therefore, in clinical practice, there are depressive symptoms such as abnormal consciousness, low mood, fatigue and fatigue, and slow thinking. It is necessary to treat depression by supplementing qi and nourishing blood while relieving depression and resolving stagnation, and nourishing qi to treat depression, so that qi can be dispersed and depressed, and qi can be stretched.

### 5.3. *Treatment of depression from body fluid*

The large intestine is the main body fluid, and the small intestine is the main fluid. Mr. Hu Xishu proposed that the body fluid is 'Yang Qi'. The body fluid is depleted, the Yang Qi is insufficient, and it is prone to depression, slow response and other depressive symptoms. In addition, body fluid is a substance that nourishes the life activities of the human body. It is continuously supplemented by the essence of water and grain transported by the spleen and stomach and the qi of clear yang absorbed by nature. The abnormal operation of body fluid leads to phlegm coagulation and blood stasis and other real evils in the body, leading to depression. In the core qi of mei, 'if there is a hot spot in the pharynx, it cannot be spit out, and the pharynx cannot be swallowed'. It is expounded that the pathogenesis of this disease is mainly caused by stagnation of phlegm and qi, and Banxia Houpu Decoction is used to remove phlegm.

### 6. *Depression theory from brain-gut-axis*

The brain-gut-axis theory is a newly proposed theory to study depression. It expounds the close relationship between the gastrointestinal tract and the brain. It affects the brain through the gastrointestinal tract. The occurrence of the brain is related to depression, which further explains the brain-gut-axis treatment of depression.<sup>[18]</sup> 'Huangdi Neijing Suwen Juelun' Yun: 'The Great Jue of Yangming... This paper expounds the abnormal operation of gastrointestinal meridians, the evil qi goes up to the brain along the Yangming meridians, and the brain is the house of the original spirit, which controls the mental and emotional activities of the human body. On the contrary, if the brain function is abnormal, the human body will have abnormal consciousness, mental malaise, insensitive response and so on. The modern brain-gut axis theory is a new direction and new target for the study of depression. Zhang Sichao put forward the hypothesis of brain-gut communication, 'the essence of the clear stored in the brain, not turbidity invasion; the turbidity of water and grain gathers in the intestine, and the discharge must be sometimes'<sup>[19]</sup>. The brain is the sea of marrow, the sea of marrow is empty, the body fluid is insufficient, and the large intestine also controls the body fluid. Therefore, the intestine is dry due to insufficient



body fluid, and the dregs stop inside. The dregs stop for a long time, the body fluid is insufficient, and the fire is accumulated in the body. The fire is easy to violate the brain collaterals, and the original spirit is damaged, which makes the brain's main god function dereliction of duty, anxiety, depression and other emotional diseases. It has been reported that the microbial dysfunction of the brain-gut axis may be the main pathological mechanism of depression.<sup>[20]</sup> In short, attention should be paid to gastrointestinal function in life. Gastrointestinal dysfunction, constipation and other gastrointestinal diseases will also increase the incidence of depression.

### 7. **Acupuncture therapy**

(a) Acupuncture and moxibustion is an important treatment method of ' internal disease external treatment ' unique to traditional Chinese medicine. It is based on the theory of viscera, yin and yang, meridians and collaterals of traditional Chinese medicine to treat depression. The operation is simple, the side effects are small, and the curative effect is significant. Acupuncture and moxibustion is also widely used in clinical work to treat depression and has a good effect. Dong Yeqing et al.<sup>[21]</sup> focused on the mechanism of acupuncture treatment of depression from the perspective of neurotransmitters and receptors, neuroplasticity, neuroendocrine immune network and brain-gut axis, and confirmed that acupuncture treatment of depression is not only effective, but also has almost no side effects, and has high clinical application value. Acupuncture treatment of depression is safe and effective, easy to operate, acupuncture Sishencong, Baihui, Yintang, Shenmen can effectively improve the symptoms of the nervous system, the treatment of neurological diseases.

(b) Pricking blood therapy is a clinical treatment method to select a certain acupuncture point for bloodletting, so as to eliminate pathogenic factors, dredge collaterals and regulate qi movement. Studies have found that pricking blood therapy can reduce the content of plasma interleukin-1 $\beta$  and interleukin-6 in depressed rats and improve the depressive symptoms of rats<sup>[22]</sup>.

(c) Auricular pressure bean therapy is the application of holographic theory. Auricular point pressing cannot only regulate visceral function, but also strengthen the functional connectivity of prefrontal cortex, cingulate gyrus and precuneus, thus improving the depression of patients.

### 8. **Other treatment**

Tan Zhigang et al.<sup>[23]</sup> used Health Qigong Baduanjin to intervene in 35 college students with mild and moderate depression, and found that practicing Baduanjin could alleviate the depression level of college students and improve the symptoms of somatization disorder of college students. Researchers have found that light therapy can be used not only for the treatment of seasonal affective disorders, but also as an adjuvant therapy for non-seasonal depression, enhancing the clinical efficacy of antidepressants.<sup>[24-25]</sup> Studies have shown that Baduanjin therapy can reduce the level of depression in patients, enhance personal confidence and improve the quality of life. Studies have shown that the effect of practicing Baduanjin for more than one month is more accurate than drug treatment<sup>[26]</sup>. In exercise therapy, Frank et al.<sup>[27]</sup> found that aerobic exercise such as jogging and swimming can improve mood and reduce stress, which can reduce the anxiety state of depression. In order to obtain the effectiveness of exercise therapy for depression, supervised aerobic exercise is required, at least three times a week, at an intermediate intensity, for more than 9 weeks.<sup>[28]</sup> Zhang Wentao et al.<sup>[29]</sup> converted the ' Huangdi Neijing ' prescription into a track to play twice a day for patients.

After 2 weeks, it was found that the cure rate of the experimental group was higher than that of the drug group and there was no adverse reaction. It is suggested that this method can achieve the effect of 'preventive treatment of disease'. It can effectively alleviate depression and avoid the occurrence of disease when people's emotions fluctuate abnormally but not morbid.

### 9. Nodule

Depression syndrome is a common emotional disorder disease, the incidence rate is increasing year by year, the disease course is long, is a kind of psychological disease, its occurrence is mainly responsible for the human body seven emotions, qi and blood running is not smooth, stagnation in the body, generating phlegm turbidity and blood stasis induced depression. Based on the five zang-organs, meridians and collaterals, qi, blood and body fluid, brain-gut axis theory and this paper expounds how they lead to the occurrence and development of depression by affecting the operation of qi in the human body and the use of non-drug therapy Baduanjin exercise, light therapy, music therapy, exercise therapy, etc., comprehensively expounds the effectiveness, diversification and small toxic and side effects of the treatment of depression. Compared with western medicine, it has more practical and medical advantages. Through the elaboration of the theory of depression in traditional Chinese medicine, we can master the characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine in the treatment of diseases. In the treatment of depression, we should follow the characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine treatment, adjust the balance of yin and yang and viscera on the whole, reduce the relatively consistent main symptoms and relatively different accompanying syndromes of depression patients, and promote the purpose of physical and mental rehabilitation of patients in an all-round way.

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