

Treatment of Dizziness Based on the Theory of "One-gas Circulation"

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Abstract

The theory of "Earth Pivot Four Elephants, One Qi Circulation" was initially proposed by Huang Yuanyu, a royal physician in the Qing Dynasty. It emphasizes the central role of the spleen and stomach in the middle burner as the pivot, with the liver and lungs serving as the wheels of the four elephants. This theory highlights that the healthy movement of middle qi ensures the smooth circulation of qi, allowing clear yang to rise and turbid yin to descend. Based on this theory and the holistic view of "Earth Pivot Four Elephants," this article posits that dizziness arises from the deficiency of the middle earth, the failure of the pivot to rotate, leading to liver stagnation, wind disturbance, lung stagnation, turbid reversal, and the loss of nourishment to the clear orifices. Clinically, the focus should be on strengthening the middle burner, restoring the pivot's function, and regulating the liver and lungs to harmonize the ascending and descending movements, thereby achieving coordinated wheel and pivot movements and the smooth circulation of qi. This approach aims to provide new insights for the clinical treatment of dizziness.

Keywords: Dizziness; Earth Pivot Four Elephants; One Qi Circulation; Axial Movement; Traditional Chinese Medicine; Etiology and Pathogenesis.

1. Introduction

Dizziness is a common clinical symptom characterized by a sensation of spinning, swaying, or tilting of oneself or the surrounding environment, often accompanied by nausea, vomiting, and balance disorders. The etiology of dizziness is complex, involving multiple systems such as the inner ear, central nervous system, and cardiovascular system. Based on its cause, dizziness can be classified into peripheral and central types.[1] Peripheral dizziness is often caused by inner ear disorders, such as benign paroxysmal positional vertigo (BPPV), Ménière's disease, and vestibular neuritis. Central dizziness is associated with central nervous system lesions, such as stroke and multiple sclerosis. Additionally, dizziness may be related to cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorders (e.g., diabetes), and psychological factors (e.g., anxiety, depression)[2]. Identifying the cause is crucial for treatment, as different etiologies require different approaches.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), dizziness falls under the categories of "vertigo" or "dizziness." Its etiology and pathogenesis are often related to the dysfunction of the liver,

spleen, and kidneys. The theory of "Axial Movement" was first introduced in Huang Yuanyu's Four Sages' Source of the Heart, which creatively proposed the concept of "Earth Pivot Four Elephants, One Qi Circulation." This theory emphasizes the importance of middle qi, asserting that the ascending and descending movements of visceral qi are inseparable from the functioning of the spleen and stomach in the middle burner[3]. Later physicians further elaborated on the etiology and pathogenesis of diseases based on this theory, providing significant insights into the treatment of mental disorders. This article elaborates on the diagnostic and treatment approach to dizziness based on the "Axial Movement" theory for clinical reference.

2. The Connotation of the "Earth Pivot Four Elephants, One Qi Circulation" Theory

2.1 One Qi as the Foundation, Circulating Continuously

The concept of "One Qi" originates from Huang Yuanyu's description of a chaotic state where "yin and yang are undifferentiated, and One Qi is vast and boundless." [4] This qi is the source of all creation. After differentiation, it forms clear yang and turbid yin, with the clear rising as yang and the turbid descending as yin. These two opposing yet unified forces create a dynamic balance akin to the Taiji generating the two polarities. In the human body, "One Qi" circulates through the nutritive and defensive qi: the nutritive qi flows through the 28 meridians day and night, while the defensive qi travels through the yang meridians during the day and the yin meridians at night, completing 50 cycles in a day, forming an endless loop. This circulation permeates the functions of the viscera, manifesting as the liver wood's ascending, heart fire's flaming upward, lung metal's descending, and kidney water's storing. The middle qi acts as the pivot, driving the left ascending and right descending circular movement, maintaining the dynamic balance of life activities.

2.2 Middle Earth as the Pivot, Four Elephants Rotating

Middle qi (spleen and stomach) is the core hub of qi movement. Huang Yuanyu proposed that "middle qi is like the axle, and the four elephants are like the wheels." When the middle earth functions healthily, clear qi ascends to transform into liver and heart qi, while turbid qi descends to transform into lung and kidney qi, ensuring the orderly rotation of the four elephants. If middle qi declines, the ascending and descending movements become obstructed, leading to the imbalance of the four elephants and the onset of various diseases. This theory inherits the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine's emphasis on "ascending, descending, exiting, and entering," highlighting the spleen and stomach as the foundation of qi movement. Middle qi rotates leftward to transform into liver wood, ascending as heart fire, and rotates rightward to transform into lung metal, descending as kidney water, forming the physiological model of "Earth Pivot Four Elephants." Pathologically, deficiency and cold in the middle burner can lead to the disconnection of the heart and kidney, manifesting as insomnia. Therefore, treatment often focuses on strengthening the spleen and stomach to restore the circulation of qi [5].

2.3 Harmony Between Heaven and Human, Orderly Ascending and Descending

The theory of One Qi Circulation integrates the human body with natural laws. The alternation of day and night, the cycle of the four seasons, and the growth, transformation, and storage of all things correspond to the ascending and descending movements of qi in the human body. For example, the growth of spring and summer corresponds to the ascending of liver and heart qi, while the harvest and storage of autumn and winter align with the descending of lung and kidney qi, revealing the holistic view of humans coexisting with heaven and earth. This theory provides a theoretical basis for the principle of "treating diseases according to the time." The Suwen·Six Microcosmic Principles emphasizes that "the cessation of ascending and descending leads to the isolation and danger of qi." Huang Yuanyu further condensed this into the four nodes of qi movement: ascending, descending, exiting, and entering. The orderly movement of qi ensures the continuity of life, while its disorder leads to disease. This model not only explains physiological norms but also establishes a dynamic framework for analyzing pathological mechanisms, such as the reversal of liver and lung qi and the imbalance of nutritive and defensive qi.

3. Analyzing the Pathogenesis of Dizziness Based on the "Earth Pivot Four Elephants, One Qi Circulation" Theory

3.1 Deficiency of Middle Qi, Disorder of Clear and Turbid Movements

Middle qi is the pivot of qi movement. If the spleen and stomach are weak, the middle earth fails to rotate, leading to the failure of clear qi to ascend and turbid yin to descend, resulting in the loss of nourishment to the clear orifices and the onset of dizziness. Huang Yuanyu pointed out that "the decline of middle qi leads to the obstruction of ascending and descending." Spleen and stomach deficiency causes the left pathway of liver wood to fail to ascend and the right pathway of lung metal to be obstructed, leading to qi stagnation in the middle burner. Clear yang cannot rise to nourish the head and eyes, while turbid yin reverses and rushes to the vertex, causing dizziness and a sensation of falling. This condition is often accompanied by poor appetite and fatigue. Treatment should focus on strengthening the middle earth to restore the ascending and descending movements[6].

3.2 Liver Stagnation and Wind Stirring, Qi Reversal Disturbing the Clear Orifices

The liver wood governs ascending and relies on the warmth and nourishment of the middle earth to regulate qi movement. If the middle burner is obstructed, the liver fails to disperse, leading to stagnation and the generation of wind. Wind yang carries qi upward, disturbing the head and eyes and causing dizziness[7]. As described in Four Sages' Source of the Heart, "wood stagnation generates heat, and gallbladder fire rushes upward along the meridians." Clinically, this manifests as dizziness accompanied by headaches, tinnitus, and irritability, representing the phenomenon of "wood fire punishing metal and the reversal of ascending and descending." Treatment should focus on dispersing liver qi, calming wind yang, and restoring the left ascending and right descending movements to achieve smooth qi circulation.

3.3 Phlegm-Dampness Obstruction, Stagnation of Qi Circulation

When the middle burner is damp and the spleen fails to transport, phlegm-dampness accumulates, obstructing the circulation of One Qi and leading to qi stagnation, blood stasis, and the failure of clear yang to rise[8]. Huang Yuanyu stated that "the failure of earth and the reversal of stomach qi cause the two fires to fail to descend, and cold water gradually congeals." Phlegm-dampness obstructs the middle burner, leading to qi stagnation and the obstruction of nutritive and defensive qi, resulting in the loss of nourishment to the head and eyes and the onset of dizziness. This type of dizziness is often accompanied by a heavy sensation in the head, chest tightness, and nausea. Treatment should focus on resolving phlegm, dispelling dampness, and restoring the middle burner to achieve smooth qi circulation.

4. Treating Dizziness Based on the "Earth Pivot Four Elephants, One Qi Circulation" Theory

4.1 Strengthening the Middle Burner, Restoring the Ascending and Descending Pivot

Since middle qi is the hub of circulation, dizziness caused by the deficiency of the middle earth should focus on strengthening the spleen and stomach and regulating qi movement. Huang Yuanyu proposed that "middle qi is like the axle, and the four elephants are like the wheels." Therefore, treatment can include formulas such as Si Jun Zi Tang (Four Gentlemen Decoction) or Li Zhong Tang (Regulate the Middle Decoction), supplemented with herbs like Sha Ren (Amomum) and Chen Pi (Tangerine Peel) to awaken the spleen and transform turbidity, restoring the ascending and descending functions of the spleen and stomach. When the middle burner functions properly, clear yang rises to nourish the head and eyes, turbid yin descends, and dizziness is alleviated. If phlegm-dampness obstruction is present, herbs like Ban Xia (Pinellia) and Fu Ling (Poria) can be added to resolve phlegm and unblock the meridians, ensuring smooth qi circulation[9].

4.2 Dispersing Liver Qi and Calming Wood, Regulating the Left Ascending Pathway

For dizziness caused by liver stagnation and wind stirring, treatment should focus on dispersing and softening the liver and calming wind yang. Following the principle of "left pathway wood and fire ascending," herbs like Chai Hu (Bupleurum), Bai Shao (White Peony Root), and Tian Ma (Gastrodia) can be used to disperse liver qi and calm yang, combined with Long Gu (Dragon Bone) and Mu Li (Oyster Shell) to suppress floating qi. If liver stagnation transforms into fire, herbs like Zhi Zi (Gardenia) and Dan Pi (Moutan Bark) can be added to clear and drain ministerial fire, ensuring the smooth ascending of liver qi and restoring qi circulation, thereby alleviating dizziness.

4.3 Resolving Phlegm and Unblocking Collaterals, Promoting Smooth Qi Circulation

For dizziness caused by phlegm-dampness obstruction in the middle burner, the basic formula Er Chen Tang (Two Aged Ingredients Decoction) can be used, supplemented with Ze Xie (Alisma) and Bai Zhu (Atractylodes) to strengthen the spleen and drain dampness, or Chuan Xiong (Ligusticum) and Dan Shen (Salvia) to activate blood circulation and unblock

collaterals, removing the obstruction to One Qi circulation. Huang Yuanyu emphasized that "earth is the pivot, and the four elephants are the wheels." When phlegm-dampness is resolved, the middle pivot is restored, and the ascending and descending movements of the four elephants return to normal, nourishing the clear orifices and alleviating dizziness. If phlegm and blood stasis are intertwined, herbs like Tao Ren (Peach Seed) and Hong Hua (Safflower) can be added to enhance the effect of resolving stasis.

5. Conclusion

Treating dizziness based on the theory of "Earth Pivot Four Elephants, One Qi Circulation" emphasizes the central role of the spleen and stomach in the middle burner as the pivot of qi movement, with the liver and lungs serving as the wheels of the four elephants. The smooth circulation of qi ensures the rising of clear yang and the descending of turbid yin, calming the clear orifices. Clinically, the focus should be on strengthening the middle earth as the foundation, dispersing liver qi and regulating the lungs as the secondary approach, and addressing phlegm-dampness obstruction to restore the normal circulation of One Qi. This theory not only embodies the holistic and dynamic balance concepts of TCM but also provides a systematic framework for the syndrome differentiation and treatment of dizziness, highlighting the essence of "treating the root cause of disease."

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