



# Exploring the Approaches and Methods of Treating Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) with Comprehensive Traditional Chinese Medicine Therapy Based on the “Establishing the Extremes of Yin and Yang” Theory

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the approaches and methods of treating Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) with comprehensive Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) therapy, centered on the “Establishing the Extremes of Yin and Yang” theory. The paper proposes that the primary pathogenesis of CFS lies in the deficiency or imbalance of innate primordial Yin and Yang, or the imbalance between the body and its functions, leading to the weakness of the five internal organs or the blockage of essence, qi, and blood in the acquired constitution. Coupled with external factors such as family, work, interpersonal relationships, and lifestyle habits in modern society, over time, this can result in symptoms such as qi stagnation, phlegm turbidity, and blood stasis, which are the manifestations (biāo) of the disease, while the underlying deficiencies (běn) include qi and blood deficiency, essence depletion, and organ malnourishment, leading to symptoms such as cold limbs, shortness of breath, laziness in speech, and emaciation. To realize the diagnostic and therapeutic value of “constitution differentiation-disease differentiation-syndrome differentiation” in TCM’s “preventive treatment of disease”, the clinical approach takes the relationship between the body and its functions of the Yin and Yang extremes as the top-level design of the TCM diagnostic and therapeutic system. The paper focuses on adjusting the biased constitution caused by the imbalance between innate Yin and Yang and its functions as the foundation, identifying the malformations of acquired Yin and Yang and their functions, diagnosing diseases and differentiating syndromes, balancing Yin and Yang, regulating and nourishing the internal organs and qi-blood, emphasizing the concept of “correlation between constitution and disease.” The treatment involves combining TCM herbal formulas with external TCM therapies to “nourish the kidneys, regulate the spleen, and soothe the liver”, implementing holistic diagnosis and treatment throughout the entire life cycle to jointly promote the harmony of Yin and Yang, the abundance of qi and blood, and the smooth functioning of the internal organs.

**Keywords:** Cardiac Polarity Theory of Yin and Yang; Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS); Comprehensive traditional Chinese medicine therapy; Therapeutic approach; Constitution-disease-syndrome differentiation

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## 1. Introduction

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), also known as myalgic encephalomyelitis, is a complex syndrome characterized by a group of clinical features, including sudden or gradual onset of persistent disabling fatigue, post-exertional malaise (PEM)/exercise-induced fatigue, inability to recover energy after sleep, cognitive and autonomic nervous system dysfunction, accompanied by numerous symptoms such as headaches, muscle aches, and tender lymph nodes, persisting for more than six months without any organic or psychiatric disorders<sup>[1-2]</sup>. The global incidence rate of CFS is approximately 0.4%–2.5%, affecting the physical health and quality of life of nearly 0.9% of people worldwide<sup>[3]</sup>. According to statistics, in 2021 alone, at least 1.5 million people were diagnosed with CFS in the United States, with the national disease and economic burden exceeding \$35 billion per year<sup>[4]</sup>. With the global outbreak of COVID-19, the prevalence of CFS is expected to increase to 5–9 million<sup>[5]</sup>. Currently, the etiology and pathogenesis of CFS have not been fully elucidated, and clinical treatment often involves symptomatic management such as antiviral, antidepressant, and immune-enhancing therapies, with a lack of effective treatment measures.

CFS falls under the category of “consumptive disease” in traditional Chinese medicine. Modern medical research has shown that traditional Chinese medicine, ethnic medicine, and treatments such as acupuncture, cupping, and moxibustion, as the main therapeutic approaches in traditional Chinese medicine, can improve sleep quality, alleviate fatigue symptoms and depressive states in CFS patients by regulating intestinal flora and immune cell levels, balancing the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis feedback system, and inhibiting abnormal expression of cytokine levels, thereby demonstrating unique therapeutic advantages<sup>[6-8]</sup>. The Internal Classic states, “Yin and Yang establish their extremes through water and fire. Water is classified into the three Yin categories based on its clarity and turbidity, while fire is divided into the three Yang categories according to its rigidity and softness.” This indicates that Yin and Yang represent the operational laws of all natural phenomena and serve as synonyms for the material and energy systems of life. The core concept of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is “Yin and Yang.” Based on the “Establishing Extremes of Yin and Yang” theory, this paper explores comprehensive TCM diagnostic and therapeutic approaches for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), aiming to provide new insights for its treatment.

## 2. Elucidating the pathogenesis of CFS—characterized by “yin-yang disharmony, qi-blood deficiency, and visceral malnourishment”—based on the “establishing extremes of yin and yang” theory

In Lixu Yuanjian: Six Causes of Deficiency Syndromes, it is stated that “(deficiency fatigue) can result from congenital factors, acquired factors, factors following smallpox or other eruptive diseases and post-illness conditions, exogenous pathogenic factors, environmental and emotional factors, and iatrogenic factors.” Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), as a complex condition characterized by deficiency fatigue, closely aligns with this theory in terms of its onset and progression. This disease can arise from congenital insufficiency or be triggered by various acquired factors that deplete the body’s resources, leading to fatigue due to illness or deficiency, which, if prolonged and unaddressed, results in chronic fatigue. These factors interplay within the body, with the core pathological mechanism being attributed to an imbalance in the “Yin-Yang polarity”, which sets off a chain reaction, ultimately manifesting as a pathological state characterized by “Yin-Yang disharmony, Qi-blood deficiency, and impaired nourishment of the zang-fu organs.”

The evolution of its pathogenesis is rooted in congenital factors, manifests in qi and blood, and ultimately affects the internal organs. “The ultimate polarity of yin and yang” represents the primordial yin and yang within the human body, serving as the fundamental driving force and material basis for life activities. If the congenital primordial yang

is deficient, it is akin to having no fire beneath a cauldron, weakening the warming and propelling forces, and leading to dysfunction in the “yang transforming into qi.” Conversely, if the congenital primordial yin is insufficient, it resembles a lamp without oil, resulting in a scarcity of nourishing and shaping substances, and causing a depletion of the “yin shaping into form.” These conditions represent the deepest and most primordial pathological roots of chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). Such an imbalance in congenital yin and yang inevitably leads to a lack of source for the generation and abnormal circulation of acquired qi. As stated in “Su Wen: Discussion on Regulating the Meridians”, “What humans possess are nothing more than blood and qi.” Qi and blood are the core substances that sustain life activities. “Qi is the commander of blood”; when yang qi is weak, its propelling and warming functions are impaired, leading to sluggish blood circulation. “Blood is the mother of qi”; when yin blood is deficient, qi loses its carrier and becomes dissipated and uncontrolled. The statement in “Bu Ju Ji” that “qi is the intangible aspect of blood, and blood is the tangible aspect of qi” profoundly reveals the interdependent relationship between qi and blood. Once yin and yang are out of balance, the mutual generation and transformation of qi and blood are disrupted, forming a vicious cycle of “qi and blood deficiency.”

Prolonged qi and blood deficiency lead to a lack of nourishment and warmth for the five viscera and six bowels, resulting in “visceral malnourishment.” “Medical Essence Extraction” clearly states: “The syndrome of deficiency fatigue is characterized by damage to both essence, spirit, qi, and blood.” The kidney stores essence; when essence is deficient, the kidney is injured, leading to symptoms such as soreness and weakness in the waist and knees, and poor mental capacity. The heart houses the spirit; when blood is deficient, the spirit has no foundation, resulting in palpitations, insomnia, and absent-mindedness. The lungs govern qi; when qi is depleted, the lungs are injured, manifesting as shortness of breath, reluctance to speak, and susceptibility to external pathogens. The liver stores blood; when blood is deficient, the tendons lack nourishment, causing discomfort in the flanks and ribs and emotional depression. The root cause of diseases in these four organs “is all due to the failure of middle qi.” The spleen and stomach are the foundation of acquired constitution and the source of qi and blood production. Imbalance in innate yin and yang will inevitably affect the middle earth (spleen and stomach). When middle qi fails, and the pivot mechanism is impaired, it cannot transport essence upwards to nourish the heart and lungs, nor can it irrigate the source downwards to nourish the liver and kidneys, resulting in deficiency in all five organs and forming the complex clinical manifestations of multiple systems and symptoms in CFS.

### **3. Treating CFS from the perspective of “establishing the extremes of yin and yang”**

#### **3.1. The connotation of “establishing the extremes of yin and yang”**

The connotation of “establishing the extremes” has two aspects. Firstly, it refers to the initial and most primitive state. Secondly, Zheng Qinan proposed in “Comprehensive Medical Methods” that: “Men inherit the constitution of Qian (heaven), while women inherit the constitution of Kun (earth). Qian governs transformation and dissemination, while Kun governs generation and nourishment... Through the union of husband and wife, essence and blood coalesce, and the combination of the five elements generates the principles of continuous transformation and generation, marking the beginning of human life.” The primordial yin and yang that establish the extremes in the human body originate from the Qian constitution of the father and the Kun constitution of the mother. Through the union of Qian and Kun, the true qi of the father’s essence and the mother’s blood combine to form the root of the innate ancestral qi in the human body, thus giving rise to new life<sup>[9]</sup>. The original yin and original yang mutually transform to generate the central earth (spleen and stomach in traditional Chinese medicine).

Possessing the essence of the kun entity and interconnected with the yin and yang of the four seasons in heaven

and earth, the central earth gives rise to the “acquired five elements.” Through the temporal changes of growth, transformation, storage, and collection, the “acquired four images” are formed. In the human body’s viscera, this manifests as the morphological composition and functional qi transformation of organs such as the liver, heart, lungs, and kidneys, thereby constituting a complete human body structure. It is worth mentioning that the foundational original yin and original yang each have their own inherent positions <sup>[10]</sup>.

From “The Essence of Medical Theory, Volume One”: “At noon, yang energy initiates, drawing true water upward to connect with the heart; at noon, yin energy begins to emerge, guiding heart fire downward to connect with the kidneys. This ascent and descent, in an endless cycle, establishes life and vitality.” When the human body is initially formed, the innate kan, yang is concealed within the kidneys, drawing true water upward from below to connect with the heart, positioned below and internally; the innate li, yin is concealed within the heart, guiding heart fire downward from above to connect with the kidneys, positioned above and externally. Only in this way can yin and yang unite, water and fire harmonize, transforming into the yin and yang of each specific viscus and bowel. Therefore, the changes in the human body and the key mechanisms of diseases lie in the different states of qi transformation of the unified qi of innate and acquired nature, guided by the “foundational yin and yang”, as it waxes and wanes, opens and closes, in different positions and temporal phases, giving rise to the different forms of the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire, earth) or the three yin and three yang <sup>[11]</sup>. Hence, Zheng Qin’an said, “Zhang Zhongjing’s lifelong scholarship lies in exploring the waxing and waning of the innate foundational yin and yang, revealing the outlines of the six meridians and distinguishing the boundaries of yin and yang.”

### **3.2. Emphasizing the relationship between the substance and function of yin and yang is the basis for tonifying qi and blood**

“Ti-Yong” (Substance and Function) is an important pair of categories in ancient Chinese philosophy, where “Ti” refers to substance or entity, and “Yong” refers to function or role. In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) theory, both Yin and Yang possess substance and function. The substance of Yang serves as the material foundation for warmth, promotion, and excitation, while its function manifests as the ability to warm, promote, and excite. Similarly, the substance of Yin provides the material basis for moistening, nourishing, and inhibiting, with its function expressed through moistening, nourishing, and inhibiting capabilities. In the concept of “Establishing the Extremes of Yin and Yang”, the primordial Yin and primordial Yang represent not only the “substance” of Yin and Yang in the human body but also the fundamental sources of all physiological functions (“Yong”).

In the pathological process of chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), the core issue lies in the imbalance of the substance-function relationship of “Establishing the Extremes of Yin and Yang.” This imbalance primarily manifests as:

#### **3.2.1. Inadequate yang function and feeble qi transformation**

A deficiency or stagnation of primordial Yang leads to insufficient “function”, resulting in a weakened Qi transformation function throughout the body. Since Qi is the commander of blood, feeble Qi transformation leads to sluggish blood circulation and inadequate distribution of bodily fluids, thereby giving rise to core CFS symptoms such as fatigue, cold limbs, and exacerbation upon exertion. This reflects the dysfunction of the “Yang Qi nourishes the spirit when pure and nourishes the sinews when supple”, as described in the Huangdi Neijing (The Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor).

#### **3.2.2. Depletion of yin essence and deficiency in nourishment of body and spirit**

When the primordial Yin is insufficient or depleted, its “substance” becomes deficient, failing to nourish the internal

organs, enrich the blood vessels, and nurture the mind. This leads to symptoms of “deficiency in nourishment of body and spirit”, such as muscle soreness, memory loss, lack of concentration, and failure to recover energy after sleep. As stated in “Su Wen · Yin Yang Ying Xiang Da Lun” (Plain Questions · Great Treatise on the Correspondence Between Yin and Yang and the Manifestations of the Four Seasons), “Yin is the guardian of Yang within”, if the Yin substance is not firm, Yang will have nothing to rely on, leading to floating of deficient Yang and complex syndromes such as extreme fatigue following deficient excitement.

#### **4. Deficiency in both substance and function, and impairment of both Yin and Yang**

As the disease progresses, it affects not only Qi but also blood, and not only Yang but also Yin, ultimately resulting in a severe condition of deficiency in both Yin and Yang, as well as depletion of both Qi and blood. At this point, both the “substance” and “function” of the primordial Yin and Yang are insufficient, leading to a comprehensive decline and forming the pathological basis for the chronic and difficult-to-cure nature of CFS.

Therefore, to regulate and replenish Qi and blood, it is essential to start by restoring the relationship between the substance and function of Yin and Yang. Replenishing Qi is not simply about augmenting it; it requires assisting Yang to transform Qi and ensuring the smooth flow of Qi. Nourishing blood is not simply about moistening it; it requires nourishing Yin and harmonizing Yang to ensure the smooth flow of blood vessels. Only when the relationship between the substance and function of the foundational Yin and Yang is restored can the innate and acquired Qi transform normally, ensuring a continuous source of Qi and blood production, smooth circulation, and nourishment of the internal organs. This is the fundamental approach to treating CFS <sup>[12]</sup>.

### **5. Comprehensive TCM treatment approach to CFS from the perspective of “yin-yang establishing the extremes”**

#### **5.1. Identifying body types and regulating yang, nourishing qi and blood**

“Identifying body types” refers to discerning the biased constitution of patients formed based on their innate primordial yin and primordial yang. CFS patients often exhibit yang-deficiency constitution, qi-stagnation constitution, and qi-deficiency constitution, among others. The core treatment principle is “supporting yang and nourishing yin, replenishing primordial qi.” The yang at the extreme is the primordial driving force behind life activities, and supporting primordial yang is the key to breaking the vicious cycle of “fatigue-depletion-increased fatigue” in CFS.

##### **5.1.1. Application of herbal formulas**

- (1) Supporting Yang: Pungent and hot herbs such as aconite, cinnamon bark, and dried ginger can be selected to warm and assist the primordial yang in the kidneys. Representative formulas include Aconite Decoction for Regulating the Middle (to warm and regulate the middle and lower jiao) and Yougui Decoction (to warm and tonify kidney yang, replenish essence, and nourish blood). When using these formulas, yin-nourishing herbs such as prepared rehmannia root and *Cornus officinalis* should be added to achieve the effect of “yang receiving assistance from yin for endless generation and transformation”, preventing excessive dryness and heat from injuring yin.
- (2) Nourishing Yin: Prepared rehmannia root, wolfberries, and *Cornus officinalis* can be selected to nourish and replenish true yin. Representative formulas include Zuogui Pill (to nourish kidney yin, replenish essence,

and enrich marrow). Most yin-nourishing herbs are viscous and heavy, so they should be combined with spleen-awakening herbs such as *Amomum villosum* and dried tangerine peel to aid digestion and absorption.

- (3) Harmonizing Qi and Blood: On the basis of supporting yang and nourishing yin, astragalus root and ginseng can be used together to strongly replenish primordial qi, while Chinese angelica root and white peony root can be used to nourish and harmonize blood, achieving the dual supplementation of qi and blood and the mutual generation of yin and yang.

### 5.1.2. External treatment methods

Moxibustion, particularly heavy moxibustion, is applied to acupoints such as “Guanyuan”, “Qihai”, “Mingmen”, and “Shenshu.” These four acupoints are the sites for the generation and storage of vital energy (Yuan Qi). The warmth from moxibustion can directly warm and nourish the Yuan Yang, stimulate the flow of Qi, and serve as a model example of “differentiating body types to regulate Yang”<sup>[13]</sup>. Meanwhile, Zhai Chuntao et al. utilized the classical herbal formula Xiaoyao San as a medicinal cake for moxibustion at acupoints Shenque, Guanyuan, bilateral Zusanli, and Qimen, which improved fatigue and memory function in CFS model rats<sup>[14]</sup>. The underlying mechanism involves the medicinal cake-separated moxibustion alleviating inflammatory responses and oxidative stress, improving the internal environment of the body, upregulating the expression of PI3K and Beclin1 proteins, increasing the activity of the PI3K/Beclin1 signaling pathway, and reducing autophagy-related processes in hippocampal neurons.

## 5.2. Treatment based on disease differentiation to replenish deficiencies and enhance vitality

“Disease differentiation” targets the common pathogenic mechanisms of CFS, characterized as “consumptive disease” with deficiencies in Qi, blood, Yin, and Yang, as well as weakened organ functions, adopting a universal treatment strategy. The core therapeutic approach is “tonifying the kidney and replenishing essence, strengthening the spleen and supplementing Qi.” The kidney is considered the foundation of congenital constitution, while the spleen is the foundation of acquired constitution, and together they serve as the source of Qi and blood production.

### 5.2.1. Application of herbal formulas

Shuyu Pill (from Synopsis of the Golden Chamber): This formula strengthens the body’s resistance, eliminates pathogenic factors, nourishes qi and blood in a balanced manner, harmonizes the defensive and nutritive qi, and is characterized by being nourishing without causing stagnation and warming without being drying. It closely aligns with the complex and ever-changing pathogenesis of CFS, which is marked by a deficiency in the root and an excess in the manifestation<sup>[15]</sup>. Buzhong Yiqi Decoction (from Treatise on the Spleen and Stomach): It is indicated for extreme fatigue and a lack of desire to speak due to sinking of middle qi and failure of clear yang to ascend, and has the effect of elevating yang and raising the depressed qi.

### 5.2.2. External treatment methods

- (1) Abdominal Massage: Centered on the Shenque acupoint, techniques such as abdominal rubbing and pressing are employed to directly regulate the qi movement in the middle jiao, promote the transportation and transformation functions of the spleen and stomach, and facilitate the distribution of nutrients derived from food and water. This is a direct manifestation of “nourishing the innate by regulating and replenishing the acquired”<sup>[16]</sup>.
- (2) Warm Acupuncture Therapy: This therapy introduces the warming effect of moxibustion into acupoints through the needle body, combining the meridian-unblocking effect of acupuncture with the warming

and tonifying effect of moxibustion. Selecting acupoints such as Zusanli and Sanyinjiao can significantly improve the fatigue state and immune function of CFS patients <sup>[17]</sup>.

### 5.3. Treatment based on syndrome differentiation and holistic tonification

On the basis of “differentiating constitution” to consolidate the foundation and “differentiating disease” to determine the outline, “syndrome differentiation and treatment” represents the final step in the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) diagnostic and therapeutic system for managing the dynamic evolution of diseases and achieving individualized precision treatment. It requires practitioners to focus on the patient’s most prominent syndrome complex at the current stage, conduct a comprehensive analysis, and apply flexible treatment strategies, fully embodying the “three-factor adaptation” philosophy of tailoring treatments according to the time, place, and individual. For chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), characterized by complex pathogenesis and variable syndromes, syndrome differentiation and treatment serve as a crucial bridge for translating the overarching design of “establishing the polarity of yin and yang” into specific treatment plans. Below are several common syndrome types observed in CFS clinical practice and their corresponding treatment approaches:

#### 5.3.1. Liver Qi stagnation and spleen deficiency syndrome

This syndrome is frequently observed in the early stages of CFS or in individuals who experience high levels of stress and emotional distress. The core pathogenesis lies in emotional frustration leading to impaired liver qi circulation, with the liver failing to nourish the spleen, resulting in compromised spleen function and insufficient production of qi and blood. Clinically, in addition to persistent fatigue, patients often exhibit symptoms such as low mood or irritability, distending pain in the hypochondriac region, poor appetite, and loose stools. Liver qi stagnation leads to qi blockage, while spleen deficiency results in the failure of clear yang to ascend, with both conditions mutually reinforcing each other and exacerbating fatigue.

- (1) Therapeutic Approach: Soothe the liver to relieve depression and strengthen the spleen to harmonize nutrients. This approach aims to restore the liver’s smooth flow and the spleen’s transporting and transforming functions, ensuring the smooth circulation of qi and adequate nourishment from acquired sources.
- (2) Prescription: Modified Sini San combined with Sijunzi Decoction. Sini San (Bupleurum, White Peony Root, Immature Bitter Orange, Licorice Root) serves as the foundational formula for soothing the liver and regulating the spleen, capable of dispersing stagnant yang and promoting the smooth flow of qi. Sijunzi Decoction (Ginseng, *Atractylodes macrocephala*, Poria, Licorice Root) nourishes qi and strengthens the spleen, supporting the central region. The combined use of these two formulas achieves the simultaneous regulation of the liver and spleen, as well as the replenishment of both qi and body fluids, aligning perfectly with the principle of “when the liver is diseased, knowing it will affect the spleen, one should first strengthen the spleen” <sup>[7]</sup>. For insomnia with frequent dreams, add *Ziziphi Spinosa* Semen and *Polygonum Multiflorum* Caulis; for abdominal distension and fullness, add *Citri reticulatae pericarpium* and *Pinelliae rhizoma*.

#### 5.3.2. Deficiency of both heart and spleen

This syndrome is commonly seen in patients who have overthought or suffered from prolonged illnesses that deplete the heart blood. The key pathological mechanism lies in spleen qi deficiency, leading to a lack of biochemical sources, resulting in the hidden consumption of heart blood and inadequate nourishment of the mind. Clinical manifestations include severe fatigue accompanied by palpitations, insomnia with frequent dreams, dizziness, forgetfulness, poor appetite, abdominal distension, and a sallow complexion.

- (1) Therapeutic Approach: Nourish qi and blood, strengthen the spleen, and nourish the heart. The emphasis is on replenishing the spleen and stomach from acquired sources to support the generation of qi and blood, and nourishing the mind to restore its governing function.
- (2) Herbal Formula: Guipi Decoction (*Atractylodes macrocephala*, Poria with Hostwood, Astragalus, Longan Aril, Sour Jujube Kernel, Ginseng, Aucklandia, Licorice, Angelica, Polygala) is the preferred choice. This formula treats both the heart and spleen, with a primary focus on tonifying the spleen; it nourishes both qi and blood, with a greater emphasis on boosting qi. In the formula, Astragalus, Ginseng, and *Atractylodes macrocephala* are sweet and warm in nature, tonifying the spleen and boosting qi; Angelica and Longan Aril are sweet and warm, nourishing the blood; Poria with Hostwood, Polygala, and Sour Jujube Kernel calm the heart and soothe the nerves; Aucklandia regulates qi and awakens the spleen, ensuring that tonification does not lead to stagnation. Modern research indicates that Guipi Decoction can effectively improve fatigue scores and alleviate anxiety and depression in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). Its mechanism may be related to regulating the function of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and monoamine neurotransmitters<sup>[18]</sup>.

### 5.3.3. Syndrome of mutual accumulation of phlegm and blood stasis

This syndrome often occurs in the prolonged and complex stage of CFS, where the disease progresses from the qi aspect to the blood aspect, generating pathogenic factors. Due to qi deficiency, which fails to promote the circulation of body fluids and blood, phlegm accumulates, and blood stagnates, leading to the mutual accumulation of phlegm turbidity and blood stasis. This obstructs the meridians and collaterals and hinders the flow of qi. Clinically, patients present with extreme fatigue, a heavy and sluggish body, a dull and heavy-headed sensation as if wrapped in a cloth, soreness and throbbing pain in muscles and joints, a dark purple tongue with possible petechiae, and a thick and greasy tongue coating.

- (1) Treatment Principle: Resolve phlegm and disperse nodules, promote blood circulation, and remove blood stasis. This is a syndrome characterized by a deficiency in origin and excess in manifestation. Treatment should be based on the tonifying formulas established through “constitution differentiation” and “disease differentiation”, with the flexible application of methods to eliminate pathogenic factors, ensuring a combination of attack and tonification.
- (2) Formula and Medication: On the basis of tonifying formulas such as Shuyu Pill or Buzhong Yiqi Decoction, Wendan Decoction (Pinellia, Bamboo Shavings, Immature Bitter Orange, Dried Tangerine Peel, Poria, Licorice) can be combined to regulate qi and resolve phlegm, clear the gallbladder, and harmonize the stomach; and Taohong Siwu Decoction (Peach Kernel, Safflower, *Rehmannia glutinosa*, Angelica Sinensis, Ligusticum Chuanxiong, White Peony Root) can be combined to nourish blood, promote blood circulation, and remove blood stasis. Such a combination of formulas can not only replenish the deficiency of qi and blood but also eliminate the excess of phlegm and blood stasis, dredge the meridians, and restore the body’s clarity and vitality.

### 5.3.4. External treatment as an adjunct to enhance efficacy

As an important component of comprehensive treatment, external treatment methods in traditional Chinese medicine can directly target the affected area and work synergistically with oral medications to enhance efficacy.

- (1) Acupuncture: Selecting acupoints based on syndrome differentiation is the key to achieving efficacy. For liver qi stagnation, Taichong is selected to soothe the liver and relieve stagnation; for spleen deficiency, Taibai and

Zusanli are chosen to invigorate the spleen and replenish qi; for heart deficiency, Neiguan and Shenmen are used to calm the heart and soothe the mind; for phlegm-dampness, Fenglong is selected to resolve phlegm and unblock the meridians; for blood stasis, Xuehai is chosen to promote blood circulation and remove blood stasis. By regulating the qi and blood of the zang-fu organs through meridians and acupoints, this approach is highly targeted<sup>[19]</sup>.

- (2) Cupping: It primarily acts on the Bladder Meridian of Foot-Taiyang, which serves as the defensive barrier for the yang qi of the entire body and contains the back-shu points of all five zang and six fu organs. Moving cupping or retained cupping on the back can effectively stimulate yang qi, promote yang circulation to resolve dampness, and activate blood circulation to unblock the meridians. It demonstrates remarkable efficacy in relieving muscle soreness and a heavy sensation in the body in patients with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), serving as a vivid manifestation of “promoting yang” to “resolve turbidity.”

In summary, constructing a trinity diagnostic and treatment system of “body constitution differentiation — disease differentiation — syndrome differentiation” with “the establishment of the utmost yin and yang” as its theoretical core represents an advanced approach in treating chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) through comprehensive Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) therapies. Body constitution differentiation strengthens the root (innate constitution), disease differentiation rectifies the trunk (pathogenesis), and syndrome differentiation refines the branches (symptoms). Through the organic integration of internal herbal remedies and external treatment techniques, centered around the three major principles of “nourishing the kidneys, regulating the spleen, and soothing the liver”, this approach systematically adjusts the relationship between innate and acquired yin and yang aspects of the body. Ultimately, it achieves a state of health characterized by “harmonious yin and yang, resulting in a well-regulated spirit”, providing an effective and holistic solution for CFS, a modern-day intractable disease, rooted in the ancient wisdom of TCM.

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