

ACUPUNCTURE FOR INSOMNIA

Sleep and Dreams in Chinese Medicine

In an average lifetime of seventy-five years, we spend over twenty years in sleeping, out of which one third is spent in dreaming. Sleep is as essential for maintaining life as is air, food and water. Sleep is common to all mammals, and birds, and even in many reptiles, amphibians, and fish. Science has demonstrated that regular sleep is essential for survival, although the purpose and mechanisms of sleep are only partially understood.

Sleep disturbances, in particular insomnia, have been steadily increasing in numbers, affecting almost 40% of the population and disturbingly a large proportion of children.

In spite of the great incidence of insomnia and its importance in health, the TCM text-books and literature have very little to offer in terms of diagnosis, pattern identification and individualization of treatments.

In chronic sleep problems, often several TCM patterns are present, making the treatment that much more complex. Whereas in recent sleep disturbance, there are very few symptoms suggestive of a *zang fu* disharmony pattern, leading most often to a vague label of 'shen disturbance' and to a treatment with a few standard and over rated symptomatic points.

In my understanding, sleep is the most representative of the body's circadian rhythms, hence an excellent indicator of the inner equilibrium of *yin yang* and the substances. The Eight Extraordinary vessels, acting as inner regulators, maintain the inner balance and the adaptation to external changes. Therefore, a detailed assessment of sleep patterns and dreams, can supply an accurate evaluation of a person's overall psycho-energetic state.

Normal sleep is defined by a condition of rest for the body and the mind. In TCM terms this would mean a somatic stillness of the *jin*-sinews and mental quietness of the *shen*-mind.

Various studies on sleep deprivation have shown two stages of sleep to be most important for physical and mental regeneration: deep sleep classified as N1 or slow wave sleep and REM or paradoxical sleep, which represents the dreaming stage.

When analyzing sleep, it is not the length, but the quality of sleep that is the most important factor and defines the efficiency of sleep.

In TCM, sleep could be analyzed in three ways:

- In relation to the five substances, mainly *xue*-blood and *shen*-spirit/mind;
- In relation to the movements of *wei qi*-defensive energy;
- In relation to the internal synchronizers: the Extraordinary vessels.

- Xue-Blood

The state of blood plays a central role in the physiology of sleep and therefore Blood vacuity will affect the *shen*-mind and the *hun*-ethereal soul and may cause sleep disturbances with difficulty falling asleep, classified as:

- calm insomnia: *zao* 躁 –with mental agitation or irritability, involving Heart-blood.
- restlessness: *fan* 烦 - vexation with muscular restlessness involving Liver-blood.

When blood is deficient and cannot contain Shen and Hun, there will also be easy and frequent waking and dream disturbed sleep. The person will also manifest emotional vulnerability, be easily startled and overly sensitive, needing to fidget and presenting memory loss, usually of the most recent events.

Other conditions which disturb the blood, would also disrupt sleep:

- Blood-heat: causes an agitated sleep with tendency to depression, irrationality and impulsiveness.
- Blood stagnation: with agitated sleep through common among those with severe psychological conditions with worry, anxiety or depression coupled with eating disorders or addictive behaviors as in alcoholism, drugs or sex. Blood stasis often leads to forgetfulness, dementia and even Kuang-mania.

The treatment aims at harmonizing blood by supplementing Pishu BL-20, Ganshu BL-18, Xinshu BL-15, Sanyinjiao SP-6, and moving with Geshu BL-17, Gaohuangshu BL-43, Taichong LR-3 or cooling with Weizhong BL-40, Xuehai SP-10.

- Weiqi-defensive energy

Ling Shu- spiritual axis, describes the circulation of Weiqi on the surface, predominantly in the sinew channels, 25 times during the day, penetrating at the ankle in the evening, to circulate in the Zangfu 25 cycles during the night, following the Ke- control cycle of the Five movements, and emerging at the corner of the eye, most probably at Jingming BL-1, allowing for the eyes to open. (Fig. 1)

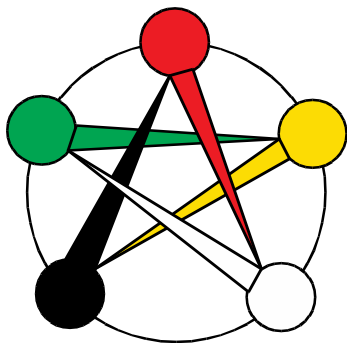


Figure 1: The internal circulation of Weiqi during sleep:
Kidney -> Heart -> Lung -> Liver -> Spleen -> Kidney,
Allowing for the liberation of retained PF and emotions through dreams.

This passage obviously relates to the sleep and wake cycle and to the movements of Weiqi-defensive energy and strongly evokes the role of Yin Qiao Mai (Yin Motility or Heel) vessel and its synchronization with Yang Qiao Mai (Yang Motility) vessel to manage the nyctemeral sleep cycle. The French school, namely N. Van Nghi, proposes this point of internalization of Weiqi-defensive energy to be Zhaohai KI-6.

Weiqi, during the day, is maintaining muscle tone and mobility, hence its internalization, which allows for the muscles to relax, is considered the first stage of sleep.

Weiqi is also responsible for the surface body temperature. It is interesting to note that modern research has shown that the body temperature also presents a rhythmic alternation, which is about 25 hours. There seems to be an interaction between sleep and body temperature rhythms. Falling asleep and deep sleep occur during the lowest temperature dip, whereas waking occurs during the ascending phase of the curve.

The relaxation of the eyes helps relax the nose and supports breathing. A difficulty of the movement of Weiqi at the eyes could cause:

- . A blockage in the nose with snoring or obstructive sleep apnea
- . A blockage at the ear with a high pitch ringing or hearing the heart beat.

Treating Jingming BL-1, which may be replaced by Yintang; together with the regulation of Yang Qiao mai, by reducing Shenmai BL-62, and of Yingqiao Mai, by supplementing Zhaohai KI-6 could help this stage with Yingxiang LI-20 or Bitong for the nasal blockage and Tinggong SI-19 for the ear manifestations.

- When Weiqi is obstructed in the throat it could cause:
 - . Snoring and obstructive sleep apnea
 - . A sensation of being choked

Helping to relax the throat with Tianding LI-17, Futu LI-18, or Lianchuan RM-23, Quepen ST-12, together with Yunmen LU-2 and Zhongfu LU-1 help this passage.

- The obstruction of Weiqi in the chest would produce:
 - . Waking up at night with feeling of heat and sweating,
 - . Chest oppression, with the sensation of something sitting on the chest

Treat with Neiguan PE-6, Geshu BL-17, Zonghui TW-7, Jianshi PE-5, Danzhong RM-17 and Gaohuangshu BL-43.

The stagnation of transport in the Fu-bowels will affect sleep. The insomnia is due to the fact that the Weiqi is released outwards by a counter-flow movement of Qi via Dazhui DM-14 towards Bahui DM-20. Additionally, there are specific signs and symptoms, which will concern the Fu-bowel involved:

- . Large Intestine: with teeth-grinding, neck and shoulder tension (also often difficult bowels in the morning)
- . Stomach: difficulty falling asleep, fan-irritability, night time food cravings
- . Bladder: difficulty falling asleep with Zao-restlessness (e.g., restless leg syndrome, calf cramping, etc.) with night time sweating
- . Small Intestine: dry mouth, night time thirst, enuresis
- . Gall Bladder: bitter taste, itching (mostly of the head), neck tensions
- . Triple Warmer: drooling, a lot of crusting around the eyes

Treat these conditions by adding the lower He-sea points of the affected Fu.

- Shen-mind

Sleep is a condition of rest for the body and the mind. The body rest reflects on the relaxation of the sinews and the movements of Weiqi. The mental relaxation is in the domain of the Shen-spirit (mind).

Shen manifests through the offices of the Hun-ethereal soul in the form of dreams, which either help release pathogenic factors and accumulated and un-resolved emotions, or are enacting and processing the challenges of our life curriculum. When there are difficulties in this processing, the dream is experienced as a nightmare.

Shen also represents the sum total of our emotions, and is responsible for their manifestation. Therefore all emotions will affect the Shen-mind and disrupt the heart, causing sleep problems:

- Anger will cause HT-Fire

- Joy/ excitement and sadness affect HT-Qi
- Pensiveness affects HT-Blood
- Fear and fright (shock) in adults affects HT-KI communication

Mental activity is the combined interaction of consciousness, Qi-energy/ function and the Nao-brain.

Calming the mind constitutes a major stage in the treatment of insomnia and at the same time it's biggest challenge as the Heart cannot be at peace, if there are disturbing emotions, either when excessive, repressed or in-adapted to the situation.

The treatment strategy aims at calming the Shen by either:

- Calming: especially with Shenmen HE-7, Tongli HE-5 or Zhaohai KI-6 (bleed) and Fenglong ST-40, mainly indicated for anxiety, over-excitement or frustration.
- Quieting involves Liver-blood, which helps soothe the Shen. Jianshi PE-5, Daling PE-7, Ximen PE-4, require the addition of Ququan LR-8 or Geshu BL-17. Shenmen HE-7 also quiets Shen-mind. Indicated for worry or anger.
- Settling or stabilising involves Kidney-yin or Lung-yin, with Yongquan KI-1, Yinbai SP-1, or Chize LU-5, indicated for fear or grief.

As mentioned above, each emotion will affect the Heart differently:

- Anger will cause Heart-Fire: use Laogong PE-8 and Shaofu HE-8
- Joy and sadness affect Heart-Qi: use Shenmen HE-7
- Pensiveness affects Heart-Blood: use Daling PE-7 and Tongli HE-5
- Fear and fright or shock in adults affects HT-KI communication: use Ximen PE-4 with Xinshu BL-15, Ganshu BL-18 and Pishu BL-20

The main challenge is to identify the offending emotion, through the analysis of the dreams and their symbolism, and to treat the emotion by addressing it's underlying cause. Unfortunately, the topic is too broad to cover in this article.

- Eight Extraordinary channels- Qi Jing Ba Mai

All Yin and Yang phenomena reflect on the "Eight Extraordinary channels, acting as reservoirs, organizing the Yin and the Yang, maintaining the internal balance and harmony as well as adapting the inner milieu, the microcosm, to the outer variations, the macrocosm. Four of these channels participate mainly in modulating (regulating) the Hereditary Qi, the Yin and the Yang.

- Yin and Yang Wei Mai/ binding channels regulate variations in Yin and Yang spaces
- Yin and Yang Qiao Mai/stepping or heel channels regulate variations in Yin and Yang rhythms (times)

A disturbance of Yin, e.g. Yin- deficiency, would suggest either a weakness of the Yin Wei (Yin Linking) vessel or the Yin Qiao (Yin Motility) vessel, or an excess of its opposite Yang Wei (Yang Linking) or Yang Qiao (Yang Motility) vessels. So in an assessment of sleep disorders, consideration of the complementary Yang vessels is also important. (Fig. 2)

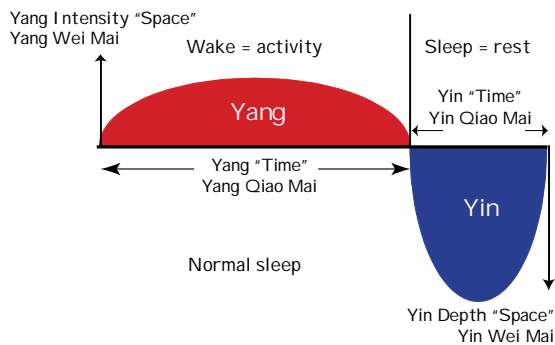


Figure 2: In normal sleep, the length (Time) and the depth (Space), of sleep is adapted to the length and intensity of daytime activity. The Qiao and the Wei Mai maintain this state of dynamic balance.

The Yin and Yang Qiao Mai have traditionally been indicated for sleep pathology, more specifically for symptoms related with day and night:

Yin Qiao Mai excess with hypersomnia and Yin Qiao- deficiency with insomnia.

Yang Qiao Mai excess with insomnia; and various pains worst at night, and Yin Qiao deficiency with daytime sleepiness

The Yin and Yang Wei Mai, are involved with the regulation of Weiqi-defensive energy and its movements between the surface and the depth, hence they play an important role in the muscular as well as mental relaxation necessary for sleep to occur:

Yang Wei Mai in excess can cause insomnia with easy waking.

Yin Wei Mai in vacuity would cause insomnia from fear.

The palpation of the Xi-cleft points of the four Extraordinary channels, helps in choosing the affected channel:

- Jiaoxin KI-8 on the Yin Qiao (Yin Motility) vessel
- Fuyang BL-59 on the Yang Qiao (Yang Motility) vessel
- Zhubin KI-9 on the Yin Wei (Yin Linking) vessel
- Yangjiao GB-35 on the Yang Wei (Yang Linking) vessel.

- Diagnosis of Insomnia

In analyzing sleep, the main concern is not the length of sleep but the state of the person upon waking. Has sleep been restful for the body and vitalizing for the mind? If the patient complains of being tired upon waking, in Chinese medicine this is considered as Insomnia, even if they have slept 12 hours!

Insomnia is a Yang condition, which in the great majority of cases is due to a disturbance of Yin. This Yin disturbance is either due to the inability of Yin to achieve a proper depth which is the case in superficial or dream disturbed sleep, or by the shortened sleep time as witnessed in problems of falling asleep and early or frequent waking. The type of insomnia, therefore, is defined by the fact that it concerns the length or the depth of sleep, or both.

A reduced sleep time may be the consequence of difficulties in:

- . Falling asleep,
- . Frequent waking for various reasons
- . Early waking. (Fig. 3)

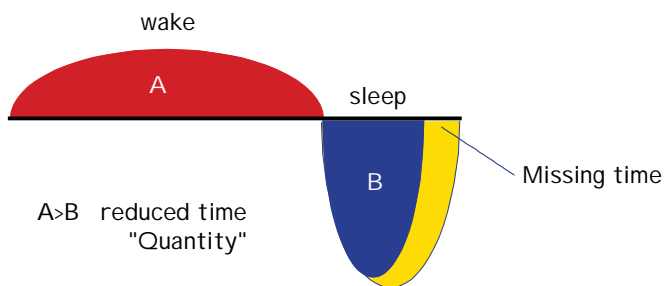


Figure 3: Insomnia through reduced sleeping time = Quantity

A non-satisfactory sleep may be due to:

- . Superficial sleep, from mental restlessness or physical agitation with visceral manifestations such as the restless leg syndrome, pruritis etc.,
- . Dream disturbed sleep, nightmares, sleep walking or sleep talking etc.
- . Other pathologies disturbing the quality of sleep, such as snoring, sleep apnea, respiratory difficulties or pain (secondary insomnia).

In all these cases sleep is not revitalizing enough, it can be said that the Yin is not reaching the appropriate depth during the night. (Fig. 4)

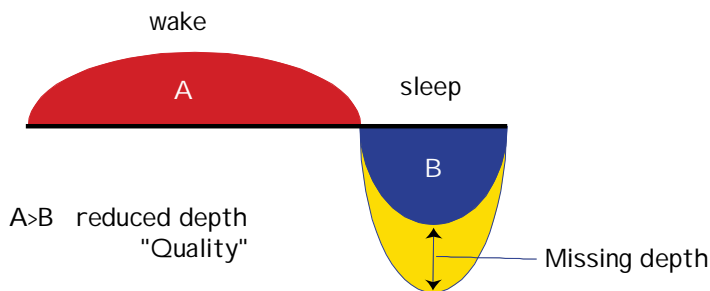


Figure 4: Insomnia through reduced depth of sleep = Quality

In most chronic cases of insomnia, both variables, that is length and quality of sleep, are affected, making the treatment that much more complex.

It has to be emphasized that, in Chinese Medicine, insomnia, is not a disease but a symptom. Any disharmony pattern producing a Yang-excess or a Yin-deficiency may produce a sleep disturbance. All emotions affecting the Shen may equally disrupt sleep or dreams.

The complexity in diagnosing the causes of insomnia is to combine the following:

- . The state of the substances has to be assessed, namely Xue-blood and the Yin, and possibly the Jinye-fluids;
- . The overall state of the mind and the emotions;
- . The movements of Weiqi-defensive energy have to be explored;
- . To identify the Zangfu-organ patterns involved.
- . And finally diagnose and treat the affected Extraordinary vessels which are attempting to harmonize the disturbed substances and organs.



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He founded the Academy of Chinese Healing Arts in Switzerland in 86.

Dr. Montakab was commissioned by the Swiss National Fond to conduct a scientific research study on Acupuncture and Insomnia.

In 95 he was the co-founder and president of the Swiss Professional Organization for TCM (SPO-TCM).

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Publications:

- Treatment of Acute ankle sprains with Acupuncture (thesis 77)
- Stresskrankheiten: co-author 2006 (Elsevier)
- Acupuncture and Insomnia/ Sleep and Dreams in Chinese Medicine 2011 (Thieme)
- Bridging the Gap/ Acupuncture Point and Channel Energetics 2014 (Kiener)
- Chinese Medicine Revisited (to be published 2015)