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Clinical Application of Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction Combined with Traditional Chinese Medicine Foot Bath and Five-Tone Therapy in the Treatment of Insomnia

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Abstract: *Objective*: To evaluate the therapeutic effect of Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction combined with traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) foot bath and five-tone therapy on insomnia. *Methods*: A total of 99 patients with insomnia admitted to the hospital from October 2023 to October 2025 were selected and equally divided using a random number table. Group A received Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction treatment, Group B received Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction combined with TCM foot bath treatment, and Group C received Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction combined with TCM foot bath and five-tone therapy. The therapeutic effects among the groups were compared. *Results*: The total effective rate in Group C was higher than that in Groups A and B. The sleep quality score and TCM syndrome score after treatment in Group C were lower than those in Groups A and B, and the scores in Group B were lower than those in Group A ($p < 0.05$). There was no significant difference in the adverse reaction rates among the three groups ($p > 0.05$). *Conclusion*: Administering Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction combined with TCM foot bath and five-tone therapy to patients with insomnia can improve insomnia symptoms, enhance sleep quality, and demonstrate high treatment safety and definite efficacy.

Keywords: Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction; Traditional Chinese medicine foot bath; Five-tone therapy; Insomnia

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1. Introduction

With advancements in technology and changes in lifestyle, the incidence of insomnia has been continuously rising, becoming one of the significant factors affecting human health. Concurrently, the number of patients with psychological disorders due to insomnia is also increasing. In ancient TCM literature, insomnia is primarily named as "insomnia, inability to lie down, inability to close eyes", etc. TCM believes that normal sleep depends on the balance of Yin and Yang energies in the human body. "When Yang enters Yin, one sleeps; when Yang exits Yin, one wakes". If this process of "Yang entering Yin" is interrupted, it leads to insomnia [1].

Western medicine is a common treatment for this condition, which can improve insomnia symptoms but has strong drug dependence and poor long-term medication safety. Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction combined with TCM foot bath and five-tone therapy is a comprehensive treatment for this condition. Through the integrated TCM approach of "treating both internally and externally, nourishing both body and spirit, and combining medication and music", it aims to re-establish the physiological state of "Yang entering Yin". The core mechanism of this combined therapy lies in simultaneous intervention at three levels: physiological (TCM), meridian (foot bath), and psychological (five-tone), collectively correcting the core pathogenesis of insomnia: disharmony between Yin and Yang and Yang failing to enter Yin. These three interventions do not simply add up but produce a synergistic effect of "1 + 1 + 1 > 3", aligning with the holistic concept of TCM and the idea of "treating the same disease differently", as well as fitting with the multi-target regulation of modern medicine. Based on this, this study selected 99 patients with insomnia to evaluate the therapeutic effect of Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction combined with TCM foot bath and five-tone therapy.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. General information

A total of 99 patients with insomnia admitted for treatment between October 2023 and October 2025 were selected and randomly divided into three equal groups using a random number table. Group A consisted of 33 patients, including 21 males and 12 females, aged between 35 and 74 years with a mean age of (52.31 ± 4.18) years, and a disease duration ranging from 6 to 37 months with a mean duration of (17.59 ± 3.17) months. Group B also had 33 patients, with 20 males and 13 females, aged between 31 and 78 years with a mean age of (52.64 ± 4.27) years, and a disease duration ranging from 5 to 39 months with a mean duration of (17.98 ± 3.54) months. Group C had 33 patients, including 18 males and 15 females, aged between 30 and 75 years with a mean age of (52.58 ± 4.41) years, and a disease duration ranging from 7 to 38 months with a mean duration of (18.06 ± 3.76) months. Comparisons of baseline data between groups showed no significant differences ($p > 0.05$).

2.1.1. Inclusion criteria

Diagnosed with insomnia based on clinical symptoms and laboratory tests; disease duration longer than 1 month; complete basic information; normal communication ability; informed consent for the study.

2.1.2. Exclusion criteria

Pregnant or lactating; concurrent dementia, delirium, or other diseases; abnormal heart, liver, or kidney function; acute infectious diseases; mental disorders; foot ulcers; withdrawal from the study midway.

2.2. Methods

Group A received treatment with Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction: 9 g of cassia twig, 12 g of white peony root, 6 g of roasted licorice, 3 slices of ginger, 5 jujubes, 30 g of calcined dragon bone (decocted first), 30 g of oyster (decocted first), 15 g of sour jujube seeds, 9 g of polygala root, 12 g of *atractylodes macrocephala*, and 15 g of *poria*. The herbs were decocted in water, and one dose was taken every night before bedtime for 4 consecutive weeks.

Group B received Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction combined with traditional Chinese medicine foot bath therapy: The herbal formula was the same as above, and the foot bath formula consisted of 15 g of mugwort leaf, 6 g of cinna-

mon bark, 6 g of safflower, and 12 g of albizia bark. The foot bath herbal package was decocted starting at 9 PM, with the water temperature maintained at 40–42 °C. The foot bath was performed once daily for 4 consecutive weeks.

Group C received Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction combined with traditional Chinese medicine foot bath and five-tone therapy: The foot bath treatment method was the same as above. In a quiet environment with soft lighting, selected Yue-mode music was played at a low volume for 20–30 minutes. After the foot bath, the warm Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction was taken, followed by going to bed to prepare for sleep, avoiding the use of electronic devices such as mobile phones. The above treatments were continued for 4 consecutive weeks.

2.3. Observation indicators

(1) Overall response rate

No sleep disturbances and nighttime sleep exceeding 6 hours indicated a significant response; mild sleep disturbances and nighttime sleep between 3 and 6 hours indicated a preliminary response; severe sleep disturbances and nighttime sleep shorter than 3 hours indicated no response.

(2) Sleep quality score

The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) was used, including 7 items such as sleep duration and sleep quality, each scored from 0 to 3, with a total score of 21. Sleep quality was negatively scored.

(3) Traditional Chinese medicine syndrome score

Before and after treatment, a 5-grade scoring method was used, including symptoms such as dreaminess and easy awakening, dizziness and blurred vision, fatigue, and palpitations and easy fright, each scored from 0 to 4, with symptom severity positively scored.

(4) Adverse reaction rate

The incidence of appetite loss, drowsiness, dizziness, fatigue, and other adverse reactions was recorded.

2.4. Statistical analysis

Data processing was performed using SPSS 28.0. Count data were analyzed using the χ^2 test, and measurement data were tested for normal distribution using the K-S method. Comparisons between groups were performed using the *F* test. A p-value < 0.05 indicated a statistically significant difference.

3. Results

3.1. Comparison of overall response rates among the three groups

The overall response rate in Group C was higher than that in Groups A and B, and Group B had a higher response rate than Group A ($p < 0.05$). See **Table 1**.

Table 1. Comparison of overall response rates among the three groups (n/%)

Group	Number of cases	Significant efficacy	Initial efficacy	No efficacy	Total effective rate (%)
Group A	33	14 (42.42)	11 (33.33)	8 (24.24)	75.76 (25/33)
Group B	33	16 (48.48)	11 (33.33)	6 (18.18)	81.82 (27/33)
Group C	33	19 (57.58)	13 (39.39)	1 (3.03)	96.97 (32/33)
χ^2					7.741
p					0.021

3.2. Comparison of sleep quality scores among the three groups

The sleep quality score in Group C after treatment was lower than that in Groups A and B, and Group B had a lower score than Group A ($p < 0.05$). See **Table 2**.

Table 2. Comparison of sleep quality scores among the three groups ($\overline{x} \pm s$, points)

Group	Number of cases	Sleep duration		Sleep quality		Sleep disturbance		Time to fall asleep	
		Before treatment	After treatment	Before treatment	After treatment	Before treatment	After treatment	Before treatment	After treatment
Group A	33	2.14 ± 0.47	1.63 ± 0.52	2.09 ± 0.63	1.59 ± 0.56	2.08 ± 0.44	1.61 ± 0.48	2.11 ± 0.69	1.66 ± 0.41
Group B	33	2.11 ± 0.41	1.37 ± 0.49	2.06 ± 0.58	1.22 ± 0.51	2.11 ± 0.48	1.38 ± 0.44	2.17 ± 0.71	1.39 ± 0.47
Group C	33	2.18 ± 0.49	1.01 ± 0.44	2.03 ± 0.61	1.04 ± 0.47	2.05 ± 0.51	1.02 ± 0.39	2.14 ± 0.66	1.03 ± 0.38
F		0.194	13.629	0.081	9.797	0.130	15.197	0.063	18.542
P		0.824	0.000	0.923	0.000	0.878	0.000	0.939	0.000

Group	Number of cases	Daytime function		Hypnotic medication use		Sleep efficiency	
		Before treatment	After treatment	Before treatment	After treatment	Before treatment	After treatment
Group A	33	2.12 ± 0.43	1.54 ± 0.64	1.87 ± 0.62	1.22 ± 0.38	2.08 ± 0.57	1.43 ± 0.42
Group B	33	2.08 ± 0.48	1.28 ± 0.59	1.83 ± 0.68	1.06 ± 0.31	2.11 ± 0.51	1.21 ± 0.37
Group C	33	2.15 ± 0.51	1.01 ± 0.42	1.79 ± 0.65	0.89 ± 0.22	2.04 ± 0.53	1.07 ± 0.31
F		0.181	7.444	0.125	9.332	0.141	5.844
p		0.835	0.001	0.883	< 0.001	0.869	0.004

3.3. Comparison of traditional Chinese medicine syndrome scores among the three groups

The traditional Chinese medicine syndrome scores in Group C after treatment were lower than those in Groups A and B, and Group B had lower scores than Group A ($p < 0.05$). See **Table 3**.

Table 3. Comparison of traditional Chinese medicine syndrome scores among the three groups ($\overline{x} \pm s$, points)

Group	Number of cases	Frequent dreaming and easy awakening		Dizziness		Mental fatigue and lack of strength		Palpitations and easy startling	
		Before treatment	After treatment	Before treatment	After treatment	Before treatment	After treatment	Before treatment	After treatment
Group A	33	3.02 ± 0.48	2.21 ± 0.39	2.87 ± 0.61	2.28 ± 0.53	3.04 ± 0.53	2.57 ± 0.46	2.76 ± 0.41	2.29 ± 0.32
Group B	33	3.04 ± 0.51	2.02 ± 0.36	2.91 ± 0.67	2.03 ± 0.49	3.09 ± 0.59	2.21 ± 0.41	2.81 ± 0.46	2.04 ± 0.37
Group C	33	3.05 ± 0.54	1.83 ± 0.41	2.84 ± 0.63	1.76 ± 0.44	2.99 ± 0.56	2.04 ± 0.37	2.73 ± 0.49	1.88 ± 0.24
F		0.030	7.946	0.100	9.370	0.263	14.034	0.261	14.238
p		0.971	0.001	0.905	0.000	0.770	0.000	0.771	0.000

3.4. Comparison of adverse reaction rates among the three groups

The adverse reaction rates among the three groups were relatively similar ($p > 0.05$). See **Table 4**.

Table 4. Comparison of adverse reaction rates among the three groups (n/%)

Group	Number of cases	Loss of appetite	Drowsiness	Dizziness	Fatigue	Incidence rate (%)
Group A	33	1 (3.03)	1 (3.03)	1 (3.03)	2 (6.06)	15.15 (5/33)
Group B	33	2 (6.06)	0	1 (3.03)	1 (3.03)	12.12 (4/33)
Group C	33	1 (3.03)	0	0	1 (3.03)	6.06 (2/33)
χ^2 value	-	-	-	-	-	1.432
p value	-	-	-	-	-	0.489

4. Discussion

Insomnia has a high incidence rate, with its causes including a decline in immunity, poor living habits, and noisy environments, among others. It can adversely affect patients' sleep quality over the long term and even lead to adverse events such as memory decline and psychological issues [2]. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) considers insomnia to fall under the category of "insomnia" (sleeplessness), with its pathogenesis involving disharmony of Qi and blood and insufficient nourishment of the mind, necessitating the adoption of comprehensive TCM therapies.

The core mechanism of Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction is to harmonize Yin and Yang and calm the mind and spirit. The core herbal pair in the decoction is "Guizhi (Cassia Twig) + Baishao (White Peony Root). Guizhi, with its pungent and sweet properties, transforms Yang and assists the defensive Qi, while Baishao, with its sour and sweet properties, transforms Yin and nourishes the nutrient blood. Together, they disperse and astringe, harmonizing the Yin and Yang Qi and blood on the body's surface and interior, creating basic conditions for "Yang entering Yin" [3]. "Longgu (Dragon Bone) + Muli (Oyster Shell)" is another core component of the decoction. Both are heavy and descending, capable of subduing the floating and hyperactive fire of the heart and liver (deficient Yang) and converging the dissipated mind and Yin fluid, directly targeting symptoms of mental restlessness such as insomnia, palpitations, fluttering of the heart, excessive dreaming, and night sweats. The auxiliary mechanism of TCM foot bath is to warm and unblock meridians and guide fire back to its origin. The feet are the convergence point of the three Yin and three Yang meridians of the foot, housing several important acupoints such as Yongquan, Taixi, Sanyinjiao, Yangqiao, and Yinqiao. Through stimulation by warm medicinal liquid, it can unblock meridian Qi and blood and remove obstacles in the pathway for "Yang entering Yin". Addressing the pathogenesis of "upper heat and lower cold", the warming effect of the foot bath can guide the deficient fire from the head and face downward, returning it to the kidneys, thereby balancing the cold and heat of the upper and lower jiao. Additionally, TCM foot bath can improve microcirculation, enabling "blood to nourish the heart" and calming the mind [4]. The regulatory mechanism of five-tone therapy is to harmonize emotions and resonate with the viscera. TCM theory posits that the five tones (Jue, Zhi, Gong, Shang, Yu) correspond to the five viscera (liver, heart, spleen, lungs, kidneys) and five emotions (anger, joy, contemplation, worry, fear). For insomnia patients commonly experiencing anxiety (hyperactivity of liver wood), overthinking (stagnation of spleen earth), and fear (deficiency of kidney water), corresponding music can be selected, such as soothing Yu tone to nourish kidney water and peaceful Gong tone to strengthen the spleen and stomach; this can dredge disordered Qi movement, calm overexcited emotions, and enable the "mind to stay in its abode".

The results showed that the total effective rate in Group C was higher than that in Groups A and B, and the sleep quality score after treatment was lower than that in Groups A and B, with Group B outperforming Group A in these indicators ($p < 0.05$). The reasons for analysis are as follows: Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction can upregulate

the levels of inhibitory neurotransmitters in the brain, such as gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) and 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT), while simultaneously reducing the activity of excitatory neurotransmitters like norepinephrine (NE) and dopamine (DA), thereby restoring the balance between brain excitation and inhibition. Chronic stress, an important cause of insomnia, leads to hyperactivity of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and elevated cortisol (stress hormone) levels. This decoction has been shown to inhibit excessive HPA axis excitation, reduce nocturnal cortisol levels, and promote bodily relaxation [5]. Furthermore, the decoction can enhance parasympathetic nerve activity and inhibit sympathetic nerve activity, slowing the heart rate, stabilizing breathing, and preparing the body for sleep. The warming effect of TCM foot bath can rapidly dilate blood vessels in the lower limbs and improve blood circulation. This moderate increase in body surface temperature helps initiate the core body temperature decline process (a crucial physiological signal for falling asleep), reshaping the normal sleep-wake rhythm. The skin of the feet can absorb active ingredients from the medicinal liquid (such as volatile oils from *Artemisiae Argyi Folium* and glycosides from *Carthami Flos*), producing mild systemic pharmacological effects. Simultaneously, thermal stimulation is transmitted to the cerebral cortex through nerve reflexes, inducing it into an inhibitory state and producing a sedative effect. The comfortable warming sensation itself is a powerful relaxation stimulus that can significantly reduce anxiety levels and prepare the mind for sleep [6]. Five-tone therapy utilizes soothing, rhythmically stable music (typically with a frequency of 60–80 beats per minute) to guide brain waves from active beta waves to relaxed alpha waves and even induce sleep theta and delta waves, directly promoting sleep. Similar to Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction, five-tone therapy has also been shown to effectively reduce plasma cortisol and adrenaline levels, alleviating the stress response. Performing foot baths and listening to specific music at a fixed time and in a fixed environment every night before bedtime can form a powerful behavioral conditioned reflex. After long-term adherence, once this "ritual" is initiated, the body and brain automatically enter a "prepare for sleep" mode [7]. The TCM syndrome score after treatment in Group C was lower than that in Groups A and B, with Group B having a lower score than Group C ($p < 0.05$). The reasons for analysis are as follows: The internal administration of the decoction harmonizes the nutrient and defensive Qi, and the subduing and converging nature of Longgu and Muli converges the floating Yang Qi. Combined with the warming stimulation and musical relaxation, it significantly reduces pre-sleep anxiety levels and sympathetic nerve tension, creating a favorable "preparatory state" for sleep [8]. The combined use of the three treatment methods demonstrates obvious synergistic effects, mainly manifested in the following aspects:

(1) Guiding fire back to its origin

The descending Yang (Longgu and Muli) of the internal decoction, the downward guidance of fire by the foot bath (*Cinnamomi Cortex* and *Artemisiae Argyi Folium*), and the nourishing of water and containing of wood by the music (Yu tone) all work in the same direction, collectively addressing the core issue of "disharmony between the heart and kidneys".

(2) Simultaneously nourishing the heart, spleen, and kidneys

The internal decoction strengthens the spleen and calms the mind (*Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma*, *Poria*, *Ziziphi Spinosae Semen*), the foot bath warms and unblocks meridians, and the music strengthens the spleen (Gong tone) and benefits the kidneys (Yu tone). These three approaches consolidate the acquired foundation (spleen) and innate foundation (kidneys), gradually replenishing Qi and blood and nourishing the mind [9].

(3) Establishing conditioned reflexes

The pre-sleep ritual of "foot bath + music" has formed a powerful behavioral suggestion, automatically inducing the body into a relaxation mode upon entering this scenario. The three methods simultaneously

improve circulation, neurotransmitters, the endocrine system, emotions, and behavioral patterns, which is unparalleled by a single therapy.

The adverse reaction rates among the three groups were similar ($p > 0.05$). The reasons for analysis are as follows: The three methods are all characteristic TCM therapies with no obvious side effects and high safety for long-term treatment. They aim to restore the body's natural sleep rhythm without the risk of addiction [10]. The excellence of this combined regimen lies in its multi-dimensional and synchronized intervention strategy.

(1) Spatiotemporal synchronicity

Approximately one hour before bedtime, patients simultaneously undergo a foot bath and listen to music, followed by taking the decoction. This process creates a highly synergistic "treatment time window", enabling physiological and psychological regulatory effects to peak within the same time frame [11].

(2) Target point complementarity

The decoction corrects neuroendocrine and neurotransmitter imbalances from within, the foot bath improves circulation and body temperature rhythm from the body surface and unblocks meridians, and the five-tone therapy regulates the advanced central nervous system functions from the emotional level. These three approaches respectively target the biological basis, physiological rhythm, and psychological inducement of insomnia, forming a perfect complement.

(3) Synergistic effect with reduced side effects

This non-pharmacological integrated therapy avoids the addictive, tolerant, and next-day drowsiness side effects of benzodiazepines and other sleeping pills, making it particularly suitable for long-term conditioning and elderly patients [12].

Clinical application of this regimen also requires attention to the following points:

(1) Accurate syndrome differentiation is the prerequisite

The success of this regimen hinges on accurately differentiating the syndrome as "disharmony between the heart and kidneys and deficiency of both spleen and kidneys", thereby formulating a highly consistent regimen for internal administration, external treatment, and music therapy.

(2) Advantages of integrated therapy

Combining immediate effects with long-term conditioning: The foot bath and music can rapidly alleviate symptoms and enhance patients' confidence in falling asleep; the decoction, on the other hand, deeply conditions the constitution and addresses the root cause [13].

(3) Individualized application

The choice of foot bath formula and music is closely tied to the core pathogenesis of "cold" and "deficiency" in patients. If a patient has insomnia due to hyperactivity of liver fire, a foot bath formula to clear liver fire and a Jue tone music to soothe the liver should be selected, and the regimen should be tailored to the individual.

This case fully demonstrates the unique advantages and immense potential of the TCM concept of "treating both internally and externally and nourishing both body and spirit" in treating complex insomnia.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the combined application of Guizhi Longgu Muli Decoction, TCM foot bath, and five-tone therapy represents a scientific clinical mechanism that synergistically acts on the nervous, endocrine, and circulatory systems, as well as advanced brain functions, through pharmacological, physical, and psychoacoustic pathways. It comprehensively regulates the sleep-wake cycle through multiple targets and levels, ultimately rebuilding a natural

and healthy sleep pattern.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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