Author’s response to reviews

Title: Treatment of Depression with Chai Hu Shu Gan San: a Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of 42 Randomized Controlled Trials

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1. Please remove this section from Background:

'Both of these primary ingredients can help Chai Hu relieve stagnation in the liver meridian, and can facilitate movement of qi. Among the formula’s three secondary ingredients, Chenpi (Citrus reticulata Blanco), Shaoyao (Chinese herbaceous peony), and Gancao (Glycyrrhiza uralensis). A combination of all the aforementioned medicinals is effective for regulating qi.'

A: Thank you for your advice. We removed the section as you mentioned.

2. Please amend the headings of the abstract (Background; Methods; Results; Conclusions) and/or of the manuscript (Background; Methods; Results; Discussion; Conclusions) in accordance to BMC CAM formatting.

A: Thank you for your reminder. We revised the headings you mentioned.

3. Please include the email addresses for all authors on the title page. The corresponding author should still be indicated.

A: Thank you for your revision. We added the email addresses for all authors.

4. Please remove the PRISMA checklist, the cover letter, the certificate of English editing and the response to reviewers from the inventory, as they are no longer necessary at this stage.
A: Thank you for your reminder. We deleted the PRISMA checklist, the cover letter, the certificate of English editing and the response to reviewers.

5. At this stage, please upload your manuscript as a single, final, clean version that does not contain any tracked changes, comments, highlights, strikethroughs or text in different colours. All relevant tables/figures/additional files should also be clean versions. Figures (and additional files) should remain uploaded as separate files.

A: Thank you for your revision. I resubmitted followed above.

Reviewer reports:

Joshua Rosenblat (Reviewer 2): The authors have significantly revised their manuscript and the quality has greatly improved. My only remaining suggestion is to strongly consider presenting an overall pooled antidepressant effect size for all studies with an active comparator. The strength of a meta-analysis is the ability to pool together study results, however, with so many subgroups, as in this study, there is minimal pooling of effect sizes. Instead, it is more like a qualitative review where the individual study results are reported with no effort to quantitatively pool together the results. I appreciate why subgrouping is important but still recommend the pooling of all studies together to get an overall effect size, even if there is heterogeneity between study protocols and samples.

A: Thank you for your revision. We revised the parts reviewer mention in Page 8-9.