

A Study of the Treatment of Disfiguring Diseases in the “Qian Jin Fang”

Yuhan Li, Yang Zhao*

The School of Acupuncture and Massage, Heilongjiang University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Harbin 150040, China

*Corresponding author: Yang Zhao, m15004601752@163.com

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Abstract: Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has been passed down for more than 2,000 years. TCM beauty products driven by the principles of identification and treatment with various dosage forms and exhibit mild and safe efficacy are bound to become a main component of the beauty industry in the future. Xu once commented that “Qian Jin Fang” is different from the traditional prescription system, which emphasizes the use of medicines. In this paper, we mainly selected the prescriptions for the treatment of disfigurement diseases such as acne, scarring, black dryness, face hyperpigmentation, black mole, and rosacea from the article titled, “Upper Seven Orifices Disease - Facial Medicine IX” in the *Bei Ji Qian Jin Yao Fang* ^[1]. By studying and analyzing the original composition of the formula, understanding the etiology and pathogenesis of the disease, and exploring the characteristics of the formula concerning the efficacy of TCM, their properties, flavors, and meridians, we summarized the characteristics of the Qian Jin Fang. It is based on the external treatment of disfigurement diseases, with a wide variety of drugs, flexibility, and accuracy. This method draws upon analogies while utilizing excipients and harmonizers to focus on the combined healing approach of treatment and nourishment.

Keywords: Qian jin fang; External treatment; Disfiguring diseases; Acne

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1. Introduction

Qian Jin Fang was written by Simiao Sun, a famous physician of the Tang Dynasty, also known as the King of Medicine. His work was divided into the *Bei Ji Qian Jin Yao Fang* and *Qian Jin Yi Fang*, where the two volumes complement each other, forming a single system. The Qian Jin Fang is a collection of pre-Tang Dynasty Chinese beauty treatments that have been passed down for generations, allowing people to receive effective treatments without discrimination until today. The therapeutic effect can be observed through the description in the text that described the prognosis such as “face as white as snow” and “no disease”. In this paper, we summarized the rules of medication and methods of treatment for disfiguring diseases to provide diagnostic and therapeutic ideas for the treatment of disfiguring diseases in modern medicine.

2. Acne

The main pathogenesis of acne is due to the deficiency of kidney yin, exuberant phase fire, and upward flow of heat in the lungs and stomach, resulting in stagnation of blood heat in the head and face. Acne, also known as pimples, refers to a chronic inflammatory skin disease that occurs mainly on the face, chest, and back. It is a common occurrence in teenagers going through puberty.

2.1. Topical application

For the treatment of facial feverish sores, Qian Jin Fang uses a combination of ceruse, *Phellodendri Chinensis* Cortex, and *Coptis chinensis* that are crushed into powder and applied to the affected area. If the sores become dry, it is coated with facial fat ^[2]. It was stated in the Bie Lu that ceruse was transformed into a cream that provided muscle pain relief, where its benefits were said to surpass expectations. Although ceruse is produced by rolling and stacking lead plates heated by charcoal refining, it does not possess a burning nature like nitrate salt. On the contrary, its cold nature is often used to eliminate heat accumulation, kill parasites, detoxify, soothe muscle, dry dampness, and prevent itching. *Phellodendri Chinensis* Cortex and *Coptis chinensis* can clear heat and dry dampness, as well as alleviate diarrhea and detoxify the body, and are especially good at treating acne. The three ingredients, combined with facial fat can moisturize and prevent dryness, promote blood circulation, and dispel wind. The mixture was then soaked in wine and water overnight to increase the drug's effectiveness. Not only does this formula purge heat and poison but it also protects the skin and relieves pain. In clinical studies, it has been shown that *Phellodendri Chinensis* Cortex the main active ingredient in *Phellodendri Chinensis* Cortex, has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. Thus, it contributes to the anti-inflammatory mechanism in the pathology of acne and the release of corticotropin ^[3]. *Coptis chinensis* also has similar pharmacological effects, hence in modern clinical practice, *Phellodendri Chinensis* Cortex and *Coptis chinensis* play an important role in the treatment of acne.

For the treatment of facial sores caused by excessive qi in young individuals, a combination of Hu powder, mercury, and pig fat is used. This concoction facilitates the dissipation of mercury, followed by applying the powder onto the face at night and wiping it away the next morning. In the Ben Cao Shi Yi, mercury was described as being able to facilitate the movement of water channels and alleviate fever ^[4]. Mercury acts as a lubricant that can be applied to remove toxins from the sores. Pig fat is sweet, cool, and can moisturize the face. It helps alleviate blockages and can be used for the treatment of yin deficiency, blood stasis, and heat accumulation. According to the chemical analysis of fresh pig fat, it has a low water content and a strong penetration and adsorption effect. It also exhibits anti-infection properties, which enables effective cleaning of the sores as the necrotic tissue and pus adhere to the fat. For young people with intense stomach heat, resulting in internal dampness and heat, and face sores, this formula is effective in reducing heat and removing blood stasis and is also moisturizing. However, it is important to note that the face should not be washed after the application of the concoction. This is to avoid the formation of mercury hydroxide when in contact with water, which is harmful to the human body and the environment.

3. Scar

Scarring refers to the formation of raised tissue and pigmentation that appears different from normal skin, following bad skin damage. TCM believes that qi stagnation and blood stasis are its main pathogenesis.

3.1. Topical application

For the treatment of canker sores and malignant sores that are prone to scarring after remission, a combination

of Benzoin, Alum Stone, wolfsbane, ground elm, Chinese azalea, mangosteen, *Angelica dahurica*, *Gleditsia sinensis*, peony, *Angelica sinensis*, red stone grease, rhubarb, *Rehmannia glutinosa*, gypsum, atractylodes, Dipsacus, podophyllum and so on is used. The concoction is pounded and then added to four pounds of pig fat. The concoction was boiled three times, where it was removed from the stove three times, and one tablespoon of high-quality salt was added to the concoction for scar application. The formula utilizes the benefits of Angelica, gypsum, dried rehmannia, mang grass, podophyllum, rhubarb, and others, accompanied by benzoin, Chuanxiong, Asarum, and Angelica. In addition, benzoin, parsnip, *Angelica dahurica*, and Asarum exhibit an aromatic smell, making the formula more attractive. Aromatic products also have the nature of opening the orifices through the meridians and channels, stimulating muscle movement to facilitate the distribution of medicine throughout the body. As stated by Rongwei, “People’s Qi and blood are revitalized by fragrance.”

^[5] According to statistics in the Qian Jin Fang, the highest frequency of antidepressants used is the *Angelica dahurica*. This ingredient also possesses various beauty properties, making it irreplaceable in TCM ^[6]. Alum stone and red stone resin are the same as the goldstone class of drugs, taste sour, and have a strong astringent effect. It can alleviate sores and muscle pain, detoxify, kill parasitic worms, and stop bleeding. It is effective for the treatment of ulcers that fail to heal. Not only does the addition of squid bone enhance the astringent pain-relieving effect, but it also complements alum stones in the treatment of eczema and wet sores by drying dampness and relieving itching. Wolfsbane, *Rhododendron mollissima*, gleditsia, Andromeda, mangosteen, and podophylloides are toxic plants with a pungent taste. However, the combination of these ingredients can dispel wind and pain, spread warmth through the meridians, kill parasitic worms, and relieve pain. Whether it is for the treatment of bruises and pummeling injuries or pain caused by wind, cold and dampness can be eliminated to alleviate swellings and raised nodules, providing rapid pain relief. As the formula consists of several drugs, its texture, taste, and flavor are different, and the active ingredients of different drugs are decocted at different speeds. The method of boiling the concoction and removing it from heat 3 times can prevent the loss of the drug’s active ingredients. This method can avoid the loss of the active ingredients of some medicines. Salt is added due to its antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties.

3.2. Ironing

Another form of treatment is by ironing with hot tiles. Ironing is an ancient Chinese traditional medical technology using herbs, tiles, stones, and other ironing equipment to heat the affected area so that the drug effect is maximized to promote blood circulation and prevent blood stasis. The ironing method was documented in the Fifty-Two Disease Formula silk book, covering various techniques like soil ironing, salt ironing, soil salt ironing, stone ironing, vinegar ironing, medicine ironing, and animal ironing.

3.3. Hyperpigmentation

During the Han Dynasty, Wang Yi noted that “Melanin deposits on the face, resulting in a sallow complexion.”

^[7] Melanin deposits on the face are a common skin pigmentation disease, equivalent to the modern medicine of hyperpigmentation and chloasma. It is considered in Chinese medicine that hyperpigmentation is caused by liver depression, heat, and insufficient water in the kidney.

4.1. Internal use

4.1.1. The medicinal wine method

Silver poplar powder consists of aspen peel, peach blossom, and white melon seeds. These 3 drugs were carefully processed and screened before being consumed together with warm wine over 3 days. Aspen peel

is bitter and cold, with the functions of dispelling wind, preventing blood stasis, and eliminating phlegm. It promotes qi and blood circulation and reduces swelling. Peach blossom acts as a beauty medicine where it can be externally applied to moisturize the skin. Internal use of peach blossom promotes blood circulation, prevents blood stasis, and dredges blood vessels. Modern research showed that peach blossom can enhance the supply of nutrition and oxygen to the skin, accelerate the excretion of lipofuscin, and prevent the chronic deposition of melanin in the skin, thus preventing and controlling chloasma, freckles, dark spots, and other skin diseases^[8]. Peach blossom is also rich in free amino acids and plant proteins, which can effectively prevent and prevent skin roughness, dryness, and wrinkles, and also reduce the risk of disfiguring diseases^[8]. White melon seed kernels can eliminate carbuncle and induce diuresis, which can dispel dampness, prevent skin pigmentation, and moisturize the skin. The three ingredients are all cold-natured and can be mixed with warm wine to promote blood circulation, prevent blood stasis, and remove beauty spots. Wine possesses characteristics of attracting medicinal properties, enhancing their medicinal effect, and promoting qi and blood circulation throughout the meridians^[9]. Drug soaking can enhance their efficacy, promote blood circulation, eliminate body dampness, and also acts as a sterilizing agent. Currently, the extraction of TCM also uses different concentrations of ethanol, which coincides with the idea of the medicinal wine method in this formula^[10].

4.1.2. Pills and powdered medicine

The peach blossom pill is produced from two liters of peach blossom, cinnamon, crow beak, and licorice which are all crushed into fine powder. White honey is then added to form pills. Take ten pills the size of soybeans for two days for facial repair in ten days. Peach blossom and cinnamon promote qi and blood circulation, eliminate blood stasis, and enhance muscle function. Crow beak prevents dampness, eliminates phlegm, breaks up hard deposits, and eliminates stubborn sores. The combination of the powder with licorice and white honey further detoxifies the body. This formula replenishes the deficiency with sweet medicines and uses pungent and bitter medicines to relieve the underlying causes, treating both the symptoms and the root of the disease internally and externally^[11]. In addition, due to the high activity of glycyrrhizic acid and photoglycyrrhizidine in licorice, not only does it act as an antioxidant but also inhibits the formation of melanin, which helps to whiten and improve skin dullness. Honey is added because of its rich nutrients and is commonly used in the beauty industry. Modern research believes that the main active ingredient of honey contains a large amount of sugar, rich in amino acids, a variety of vitamins, proteins, and effective enzyme components, contributing to its excellent moisturizing and nourishing ability, thus promoting tissue regeneration to ensure smooth and delicate skin^[12].

4.2. Topical application

Ingredients such as white aconite, oyster, lithargite, poria, and chuanxiong are ground into powder and mixed with goat milk. This concoction is then massaged onto the face left overnight, and washed with running water in the morning. The Ben Cao Jing Shu refers to white aconite as “An herb used to soothe the wind and invigorate Yang.” Because of its dry nature, pungent, and good dispersal, it has the potential to become a primary ingredient in the treatment of various diseases^[13]. White aconite and poria are white, combined with pungent and sweet yang. lithargite for mineral medicine, flavor salty, pungent, with dry dampness and insecticide, astringent antiseptic effect. External prescriptions using a combination of sheep shin bone and chicken droppings, almonds and chicken white, poria, and white honey, etc., show that Simiao Sun made good use of sweet medicine to supplement deficiencies and utilized their detoxifying properties to eliminate parasitic worms, dry dampness, and counter putrefaction. This approach targets both the symptoms and the root cause during both internal and external treatment. In addition, this formula often incorporates vinegar,

vinegar pulp, syrup, etc. for drug soaking, facial cleansing, and compresses. Modern research has shown that vinegar can effectively inhibit the production of lipid peroxide in the body, slow down skin aging, and prevent the emergence of wrinkles and pigmentation. Vinegar can also neutralize alkaline skin lesions and restore the skin to its normal pH levels. Vinegar can improve the solubility of the active ingredient of some medicines and decoctions, and also alleviate the toxicity of some drugs^[14]. Furthermore, vinegar has anti-inflammatory, sterilizing, antipruritic, and penetrating properties that can quickly relieve inflammation of the skin and hair^[14]. Lastly, vinegar has an astringency effect and facilitates the movement of drugs into the syncopal liver meridian, thus reducing swelling and astringing sores.

5. Moles

According to Chinese medicine, moles are small bumps formed when qi and blood are stagnant and blocked for a long time, causing an accumulation of yang qi. Black-colored moles are often considered the result of a weak meridian qi and poor blood circulation, along with the accumulation of wind and toxins.

5.1. Topical application

The suggested formula for addressing black moles involves washing the face with warm syrup water and rubbing the affected area with an undyed cloth until it becomes red and swollen. White sandalwood juice is then added to the affected area, followed by coating with chicken droppings to induce a “fire paralysis” effect. It was recorded in the Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing that white silkworms provided whitening effects. Kai Bao Ben Cao states that applying concoctions containing pearls onto the face can effectively moisturize and lighten dull skin^[15]. In the treatment of disfigurement diseases like acne, moles, and skin dullness, cold drugs can be used repeatedly to disperse body heat and detoxify without damaging the internal organs. In the treatment of nevus, dark spots, and other diseases with a mixture of imbalance and physical conditions treatment should emphasize both cold and warm drugs to target any underlying issues and replenish any deficiencies^[16].

6. Rosacea

Rosacea is a chronic inflammatory skin disease with main symptoms that manifest as erythema, papules, capillary dilatation, and edema. In the Wai Ke Da Cheng, it was suggested that the disease was caused by heat in the lungs and stomach, where heated blood vaporizes upwards along with cold wind constricting the skin’s surface, resulting in blood stasis and stagnation. The treatment should focus on dispersing accumulated heat in the lungs and stomach to stimulate the circulation of Qi and blood to alleviate the symptoms^[17].

6.1. Pills for rosacea

The gardenia pill is made from gardenia kernel, chuanxiong rhizome, rhubarb, black beans, magnolia bark, and licorice that were crushed into powder and mixed with honey. The pill was to be taken in tens, and depending on the observed response, the dosage may be increased to 15 pills. Gardenia is rich in flavonoids and vitamin C. It can reduce the production of melanin and whiten skin, hence it is commonly used in the cosmetics industry. The Zheng Lei Ben Cao contained magnolia bark that was bitter and cold in nature, rendering it beneficial in removing facial heat, redness, scars, and rosacea^[18]. Other ingredients like Sichuan peony, rhubarb, and black beans are used to clear heat and promote blood circulation. The formula utilizes the method of gradual administration, although the dosage of the medicine is relatively large. The medicine was made into pills with honey, the size of a sycamore seed. The total amount of pills consumed daily ranges from 30 to 45 pills, which

is suitable for the treatment of rosacea and other stubborn skin diseases ^[19].

6.2. Topical application

Tribulus seeds, gardenia seeds, black beans, and magnolia bark are crushed into powder, mixed with vinegar syrup and water to produce a mud-like texture. Gardenia kernel is bitter and cold in nature and is associated with the lungs and stomach meridian. It can reduce internal heat in the lungs and stomach, preventing inflammation, diuresis, and swelling. Magnolia bark is bitter and cold in nature. It can alleviate heat in the stomach, activate blood circulation, and prevent blood stasis. When there is excessive heat in the upper body, cold-natured drugs are often used. However, chuanxiong and tribulus seeds are warm-natured. The addition of these ingredients utilizes the concept of both warm and cold properties of different ingredients to achieve a balance of the internal body temperature for an optimal therapeutic effect.

7. Conclusion

The main ideas of treating disfiguring diseases in the Qian Jin Fang are through the use of external treatments that have a low incidence of adverse reactions, are direct and simple, and produce quick results. It also follows the principle of using a wide range of medicines that are flexible and accurate, and taking analogies. Lingtian Xu suggested that when utilizing medicinal substances, their aroma, flavor, color, shape, quality, and origin should be taken into account ^[20]. Examples include the use of aromatic drugs to promote blood circulation, the combination of pungent and sweet yang with sour and sweet yin to treat excessive melanin, and the use of whitening drugs such as white aconite, *Angelica dahurica*, and atractylodes, to lighten dull skin. Besides that, medicines rich in minerals are used to inhibit bacteria and eliminate sores, while poisonous medicines such as mercury, wolfsbane, and mangosteen are utilized to eliminate body toxins. The treatment of disfiguring diseases also repeatedly uses excipients and harmonizers. For instance, lipid medicine has a moisturizing effect, activates blood circulation, and dispels wind. As lipid medicine is a natural product derived from flesh and blood, it can help regenerate the skin. Combining minerals like gold and stone can reduce the toxicity of herbs and can be used to maintain a balance between the body's rigidity and flexibility. In addition, its good adhesive force increases adherence to the drug on the skin. The formula is also commonly combined with dispersing agents like water, pig's hoof pulp, human milk, and chicken albumen for external application and washing. Lastly, the Qian Jin Fang utilizes the combination of treatment and nourishment for the treatment of disfiguring diseases. Although the treatment of symptoms should be the main priority, Sun's formula emphasizes combining cold and warm medicine to treat both the symptoms and the root cause of the disease. Additionally, the internal and external applications complement each other to provide symptomatic relief and internal nourishment for better healing. The formula is often used to dispel dampness and swellings, clear heat and remove toxins, disperse knots, and remove dark spots, while also replenishing any deficiencies of the drug to promote nourishment and healing.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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