

Tracing the Origin of Zhu Danxi's Xianghuo (Ministerial Fire) Theory

Hanmei Xue¹, Xiaofang Ren^{2*}, Jinjin Chai¹

¹Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine, Xianyang 712046, Shaanxi Province, China

²Department of Cardiology, Xi'an Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine Affiliated to Shaanxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 69 Fengcheng Balu, Weiyang district, Xi'an 710021, Shaanxi Province, China.

Funding: Xi'an Municipal Health Commission Project (SZL201933), Xi'an Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine (YJ201922); Yang Zhen National Famous Traditional Chinese Medicine Inheritance Studio Project (National Traditional Chinese Medicine Office Education Development [2018] No. 119); Huang Yuan Yu Chang'an Academic School Inheritance Studio Project (Shaanxi Traditional Chinese Medical Letter [2018] No. 384).

Abstract: The theory of Xianghuo (lit. 'ministerial fire') was first recorded in the "Huangdi Neijing", and it was supplemented and perfected by later generations. During the Jin and Yuan Dynasties, Zhu Zhenheng refined it into "Xianghuo theory" to guide clinical treatment; modern scholars proposed the Xianghuo mechanism theory based on the corresponding characteristics of the Xianghuo theory to promote the clinical research in the Xianghuo theory. This paper discusses Danxi School's understanding of Xianghuo theory, and makes a rigorous research and summary in order to serve as a reference for Xianghuo theory.

Keywords: Xianghuo theory; Danxi school; Zhu Danxi; Yang Zhen;

Publication date: March, 2021

Publication online: 31 March, 2021

***Corresponding author:** Xiaofang Ren, 809991943@qq.com

The term "Xianghuo" (lit. 'ministerial fire') was first seen in the "Huang Di Nei Jing", "Suwen • Tianyuanji Dalun Pian (Energy Almanac)" said: "The fire of the ruler (Junhuo) is clear, and the fire of minister (Xianghuo) stays in its position"^[1]. Successive physicians continued to study, improve, and gradually expanded the scope and functions of Xianghuo. Zhu Zhenheng, a representative of the Danxi School, put

forward the theory of Xianghuo. The core viewpoint is that Xianghuo is highly mobile, and combined with Tai Chi's dynamic and static theory, he believed that Xianghuo is the fire of the six qi that generates the sun in the sky, and the evil fire of human desires on the earth^[2]. This paper expounds the use of "mobile Xianghuo" theory as a guide for clinical application by the Danxi school as represented by Zhu Zhenheng, and combines the modern theory with the Xianghuo hypothesis to summarize and compile the theory of Xianghuo in order to provide support for the research of Xianghuo theory.

1 The understanding of the Xianghuo theory by physicians in history

The "Huang Di Nei Jing" written that the Xianghuo is the basis of the six qi governing the heavens, which means that the Junhuo and the Xianghuo have their own functions, and the two are in their own place. "Suwen • Liu Wei Zhi Da Lun (The Six Atmospheric Influences)" written that: "What is the geographical position of the six qi? Qi Bo said: to the right of Xianming is the location of Junhuo; to the right of Junhuo, take a step back, is where Xianghuo governs.....^[3]" In the Song Dynasty, physicians gradually proposed the status of Xianghuo, but did not point out how it acts on the human body. Qian Yi of the Northern Song Dynasty pointed out that "the

liver has Xianghuo" and "the kidney is real water" in the "Key to Therapeutics of Children's Diseases (Xiao'er Yaozheng Zhijue)", and pointed out that Xianghuo originated in the liver^[4]. In the Southern Song Dynasty, Chen Wuzhe stated in his book "San Yin Ji Yi Bing Yuan Lun Cui", that "the five elements each have one type, but fire has two, which is the difference between the ruler (Jun) and the minister (Xiang). Xianghuo is the beauty of the five elements, it is used daily by human; whereas Junhuo is the root of the two qi, and the source of everything. Later, Chen combined the Confucian concepts of monarchy to explain the functions of Junhuo, but for Xianghuo, the only description was "the beauty of the five elements". The interpretation of Xianghuo by the physicians Liu Hejian, Zhang Zihé, and Li Dongyuan during the Jin and Yuan Dynasties laid a solid foundation for Zhu Danxi's addition to the theory on Xianghuo. In "Suwen Xuanji Bingyuan Shi", Liu Hejian derived the theory of Mingmen Xianghuo based on Yang Shangshan's annotation of "Neijing" and the understanding on "pricking the Daling acupoint, this is the source for releasing Xianghuo and small heart", and opined that "therefore there's a small heart beside Qijie acupoint, this is the Xianghuo of Mingmen"^[5]. On this basis, Zhang Zihé pointed out that the qi of three Jiao (lit. 'burners') is controlled by the Xianghuo, "the upper Jiao receives, the middle Jiao converts, and the bottom Jiao discharges", from top to bottom, Xianghuo controls the vitality fire of the internal organs, explaining the connection between the three Jiao and Xianghuo. Li Dongyuan put forward in his "Spleen and Stomach Theory (Pi Wei Lun)" that "if the heart is not in charge, Xianghuo replaces it. Xianghuo is the fire of the envelop of bottom Jiao, the thief of vitality (yuanqi)"^[6]. Using sociopolitical phenomena as an analogy for Xianghuo replacing the heart and taking over the command, Li pointed out that Xianghuo can damage the vitality (yuanqi) originating from the spleen and stomach, which belongs to the lower Jiao envelope. In the Yuan Dynasty, Zhu Danxi extended the scope and role of Xianghuo on the basis of the concepts of the three physicians in the Jin and Yuan Dynasties. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Zhang Jingyue believed that "the Xianghuo should be located at the Mingmen acupoint", and Zhao Xianke pointed out that the Xianghuo came from Mingmen, but since the three Jiao were the servants

of Mingmen, hence the three Jiao can be used by Xianghuo, thereby expanded the scope of Xianghuo.

2 The inspiration of xianghuo theory on zhu danxi

Zhu Danxi believes that Xianghuo is a part of the human body that generates heat, and normal life activities of the human body cannot be separated from Xianghuo. "According to the teachings of physicians, calm the emptiness, and guard the spirit inwardly, so this fire can be prevented from moving recklessly. Xianghuo hides in the yin division of the liver and kidney, if Junhuo does not move recklessly, Xianghuo can only guard its position according to order, how can there be burning flames, and the madness of running around?" The departure of Xianghuo from its position will cause a series of pathological changes. The theory also profoundly affects his disciples and successive scholars, so his treatment is mostly based on the method of preserving and nourishing yin, so that Xianghuo descends and stays in its original position, with meditation and nourishment^[7].

2.1 The connotation of Xianghuo. Danxi believes that Xianghuo is divided into physiological fire and pathological fire. Physiological fire is the motive force of human physiological activities, and its importance is described as "the heaven cannot create living things without this fire, and human beings cannot live without this fire". Pathological fire refers to the recklessly moving Xianghuo. Danxi proposed that "Xianghuo rises easily, when the Jueyang fire of five natures fan each other up, it will start moving recklessly. The fire starts moving recklessly, unpredictably, always present and torturing true yin. Deficiency of yin leads to illness, and exhaustion of yin leads to death." Therefore, the pathological fire is the "thief of vitality" as described by Li Dongyuan[8].

2.2 The pathological characteristics and treatment of Xianghuo. Danxi believed that "Xianghuo rises easily, and when the Jueyang fire of five nature is fanned up, then it moves recklessly. The fire starts moving recklessly, unpredictably, and constantly, torturing true yin, yin deficiency leads to illness, and yin exhaustion leads to death", "the Jueyang fire of five natures" is the "fire in the organs" caused by emotions and diet, etc. Therefore, there are various reasons for the sudden movement of

Xianghuo, and it is highly mobile which will hurt the yin easily. Based on this, Danxi focused on protecting and nourishing yin in the treatment of pathological fires, such as the Dabuyin Pills for treating yin deficiency and excessive fire, Dabu Pills for treating Xianghuo overheat and damp heat in bottom Jiao, and Fongsui Dan for nocturnal emission due to excessive Xianghuo.....emphasized on daily meditation and nourishment, the prescription aims to clear the fire, nourish yin and supplement yin.

3 Modern scholars' understanding of xianghuo theory

Mr. Yang Zhen used to study under two old gentlemen, Wang Xinwu, the heir of the Danxi School, and Ma Ruiting, the fifth generation successor of Huang Yuanyu, the imperial physician of the Qing Dynasty. He inherited the experience of his predecessors and created the theory of the qi functions of Xianghuo. Mr. Yang Zhen believes that Xianghuo is the "fire" that provides energy for the physiological activities of human body, and is carried out in the form of "tiny matter of qi" when the human body moves. Its nature can be divided into broad sense and narrow sense. The broad sense refers to the fire of life, including Junhuo and Xianghuo; the narrow sense refers to Xianghuo, which includes two types of normal and abnormal. Normal Xianghuo is "young fire", which is the general name of the body's true yuanqi (vitality), which originates from the essential qi of the lower Mingmen and the qi of the soul of the upper Mingmen, and it is stored in the heart, liver and kidney; abnormal Xianghuo is "strong fire", there are "dragon fire", "thunder fire", "yin fire" and "thief fire" depending on its site and pathological properties. Xianghuo's running paths are the "running channels of Xianghuo's qi functions", where the blood vessels, meridians, three Jiao, viscera, muscles, and orifices of the human body are all Xianghuo's running paths; when Xianghuo runs normally, that is, the Junhuo passes through the pericardium and descends to ignite the fire of Mingmen (heart-kidney intersection), thereby igniting the Xianghuo stored in the liver and kidney, where the stored Xianghuo in the liver and kidney passes through the "Dragon Tiger Loop (Long Hu Huihuan)" and the "heart/brain kidney intersection" to form the vital energy

(i.e., Xianghuo), the smooth running of Xianghuo is called unobstructed qi functions, if "strong fire" is produced, it is caused by poor qi functions. Mr. Yang Zhen applied the above theories to the treatment of liver disease, and proposed "the liver governs Xianghuo" and "there are six types of Xianghuo"^[9]. In "Reading Medicine Essays (Duyi Suibi)", it was written that "the conversion of qi of the twelve meridians of the internal organs must be driven by the conversion of qi of the liver and gallbladder", the gallbladder is used as a cardinal in the running of the qi functions, and the rise and descent of Xianghuo takes the three Jiao as its paths^[10]. The liver controls the running of the gallbladder's qi functions and the smoothness of the three Jiao, so the normal operation of the Xianghuo depends on the dredging of the liver, as the liver controls Xianghuo. According to the occurrence and development of the disease, Mr. Yang Zhen divides Xianghuo into six types, namely the Xianghuo of stagnated heat, the Xianghuo of hot blood, the Xianghuo of damp-heat, the Xianghuo of stasis and heat, the Xianghuo of yin deficiency, and the Xianghuo of deficiency and decline. Based on this, liver disease diagnosis and treatment plan was formulated, and the self-developed prescriptions were drawn up according to this, and the clinical effects were satisfactory.

4 Conclusion

The theory of Xianghuo first appeared in the period of "Neijing", and it was continuously enriched by successive physicians. In Danxi school, a relatively complete "Theory of Xianghuo" was established, which had a far-reaching influence in later studies. Modern learning is based on the experience of the predecessors, combining the theory of Xianghuo with the theory of qi functions. As Mr. Yang Zhen said, medical practice and scientific research under the guidance of theory and practice are extremely important. The Xianghuo provides energy for the human body's endless functional activities, and the Xianghuo theory provides a deeper understanding for the study of human tissue, function, life matter and energy activities. This paper summarizes and studies the Xianghuo theory of historical physicians and the experience of modern physicians, hoping to serve as a reference for the clinical application of the Xianghuo theory and provide new theoretical support for the

treatment of intractable diseases.

References

- [1] Huangdi Neijing [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2012: 354.
- [2] Zhang GS, Yi FY. Discussion on ministerial fire [J]. Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2020, 61(11): 1007-1009.
- [3] Luo GQ, Li L. Investigation on “Ministerial fire” [J]. Forum On Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2013, 28(06): 11-12.
- [4] Qian Y. Key to Therapeutics of Children’s Diseases [M]. Nanjing: Jiangsu Science and Technology Publishing House, 1983.
- [5] Song NG, Liu WS. Medical Book [M]. Beijing: China Traditional Chinese Medicine Press, 2006.
- [6] Li DY. Treatise on Spleen and Stomach (photocopy version) [M]. Beijing: People's Medical Publishing House, 1957.
- [7] Yang Z, Wang AP. Discussion on Danxi ministerial fire theory [J]. Shaanxi Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2000, (11): 506-507.
- [8] Sheng ZX. An exploration of danxi school (part 1) [J]. Zhejiang Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine, 2012, 47(11): 781-783.
- [9] Yang Z. Collection of Academic Research and Practice Records of Yang Zhenxiang’s Theory of Fire Qi Mechanism [M]. Beijing: China Traditional Chinese Medicine Press, 2019.
- [10] Hu T, Zhao H, Hao JM. Experience introduction of Hao Jianmei in treating herpes zoster of head from theory of ministerial fire [J]. Journal of New Chinese Medicine, 2020, 52(19): 196-199.