INTERNAL CANON OF THE
YELLOW EMPEROR
TCM TREATMENT PRINCIPLES

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Text reading

- S5 – Major Discussion on the Theory of Yin and Yang and the Corresponding Relationships Among All the Things in Nature
- S12 – Discussion on Different Therapeutic Methods for Different Diseases
- S14 – Discussion on Decoction and Wine
- S22 – Discussion on the Association of the Zang-Qi with the Four Seasons
- S65 – Discussion on the Transmission of Biao and Ben
- S70 – Major Discussion on the Administration of the Five-Motions
- S74 – Discussion on the Most Important and Abstruse Theory

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The concepts of treatment principles

- Composed of treatment principles and treatment methods
- Treatment principle: principle and standard for treating disease
  - Treat the root
  - Sequence of treating the root and the leaves
- Treatment methods
  - Acupuncture
  - Moxibustion
  - Herbs
  - Qigong
  - Food therapy

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S17 – Discussion on the Essentials of Pulse

"That is why [it is believed] that diseases at the early stage can be cured by acupuncture and that [if disease are very serious due to the predominance of pathogenetic factors, the use of acupuncture] should be delayed till [the pathogenetic factors are reduced]. As to the treatment of diseases, mild diseases should be treated by Yang (dispersion therapy); serious diseases should be treated by Jing (sedative therapy) [in order to reduce its severity], and [diseases marked by weakness should be treated by Zang (supplementation or nourishing therapy)]. Physical weakness [should be treated by] warming [therapy with the herbs for nourishing] Qi and insufficiency of Jing ( Essence) [should be treated by] nourishing [therapy with tonic herbs]. "

- The disease can be healed at the early stage by acupuncture
  - At the onset, the level of the pathogenic Qi is fluctuating
  - Needling when the level of pathogenic Qi is weak

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Principles

- If the pathogen has the light character (e.g. wind), it can be expelled, if the pathogen has the heavy character, it should be cleaned (e.g. dampness)
- If the vital Qi is weak (insufficient), it should be tonified.
- If the patient is physically weak (superficial insufficiency) and his Wei Qi is weak, the Qi should be tonified
- If the essence is insufficient, it should be tonified with herbs with heavy flavor
- If the pathogen is located in upper position, it can be treated by vomiting, if the pathogen is located in lower position, it can be treated by cleaning and reducing

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Principles

- For stomach distension, use the herbs with spicy and bitter tastes
- For superficial disease, use sweating therapy or hot bath therapy
- If the pathogen is strong, promote the defecation to expel the pathogen downwards
- It is important to differentiate the Yin and Yang of the syndrome, and treat Yin with Yang, and treat Yang with Yin

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Principle of treatment based on tendency

- Different pathogens have different tendencies
  - Staying location: skin – sweating, upper Jiao – vomiting, lower Jiao – urinate or defecate
  - Base on the levels of vital Qi and pathogen Qi: when the pathogen Qi is strong, wait until it is weaker

- Examples from Shanghanlun
  - Maihuang decoction: sweating for wind-cold in skin
  - Guadi powder: vomiting for pathogen in upper Jiao


S12 – Discussion on Different Therapeutic Methods for Different Diseases

- Mainly about the diverse treatment methods based on the patients living in different regions
- Highlight the triple-cause etiological principle of TCM
  - By person
  - By region
  - By time
- This chapter focus on patients living in the five locations in China: east, west, south, north
Treat patients in the east

1.2 Qibo answered, “[This is] due to the geographical differences. For example, the east is the place where [all the things in] nature start to grow[10]. The east] is near the sea and is rich in fish and salt. People there prefer fish and salty taste. They live in satisfaction and enjoy rich food. But [excessive] fish [food tends to] accumulate heat in the body and [excessive] salty flavor [is likely to] impair blood. That is why people there look black in skin and are loose in muscular interspaces. [They frequently] suffer from Yong (carbuncle) and Yang (ulcer) that can be cured by stone-needle. In fact, the stone-needle was developed in the east.”

- People living in different regions need different treatments
  - Climate
  - Habit
  - Race

- East belongs to wood
- Tendency of rising with Yang
- Diet: fish & sea food, heavily salty
- Salt (water) suppress blood (fire)
- Skin is loose and easily gets dark – easy to get skin and muscular infection
- Treated by Biaoshi (sharp stone)

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Treat patients in the west

“[The west, rich in metal, sand and stones, is the place marked by stringency[11] in nature. People there live by hillside where wind is always blowing. The water and soil in the west are hard [in nature]. People living in the west are not dressed [in silk] [12], just wear rough clothes and [sleep on] straw mat. [They eat] fresh and rich foods. [So they are] heavy [and strong]. That is why Xie (Evil) cannot attack their body. Their illness is usually endogenous[13] and can be treated by Dayao (drugs)[14]. So Dayao (drugs) was developed in the west.”

- People wearing fur and leather
- Difficult to be invaded by extern pathogen (wind)
- Tends to have internal disease (by internal harm)
- Be treated by strong herbal medicine

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Treat patients in the north

"The north is a place of closure and storage in nature."[1], The north is topographically high and very cold. People there live outside and drink milk [of goat and cow]. So they tend to suffer from [abdominal fullness and] fullness due to [invansion of] cold into the viscera. Such an illness can be treated by Jiaosan (moxibustion). So Jiaosan (moxibustion) was developed in the north.

- North belongs to water
- It is the coldest region
- People like living outside (in tents)
- Food are mainly diary products
- Diary products are cool and easy to harm the stomach and intestine

- The organs are easy to be invaded by internal coldness
- Moxibustion is develop in the north for cold disease

Treat patients in the south

"The south, [the place suitable for] the growth [of everything] in nature, is exuberant in Yangqi and geographically low. The water and soil there are soft [in nature]. The south is often foggy and dewy. People living in the south prefer sour flavor and fermented food. That is why their skin is compact and reddish. They [tend to] suffer from Luoxue (cramp) [of the sinews and vessels] and Bi (numbness) which can be cured by [acupuncture with] small needles. So [the therapeutic method of] the nine needles were developed in the south."

- West belongs to fire
- The Yang Qi is sufficient
- Dampness is common
- The people have loose and weak skin and muscle

- People like fermented food and marinated food
- Bi syndromes and spasm is common
- Acupuncture especially small need is developed
Treat patients in the center

The central region, plain and humid, is the place rich in a variety of products. People living in the central region eat various kinds of food and do not need to do much work. So they tend to suffer from Wei jue (flaccidity and coldness of limbs) and Han zhe (Cold-Heat Syndrome) which can be treated by Amiao. So Daoyin and Amiao were developed in the central region.

- Center belongs to earth
- The soil is fertile with abundant products
- People eat well and lack exercise / labor

Good practice

“The sages make use of various therapeutic methods and select the most suitable one [according to the pathological conditions of the patients]. The reason why different therapeutic methods can cure the same diseases is that the doctors have fully understood the diseases and grasped the essential principle of treatment.”

- Choose treatment based on region and climate
  - Biaoshi (sharp stone), herb, moxibustion, needle (acupuncture), and Daoyin (exercise)
- Treatment based on real condition
- A good doctor should know diverse treatments for multiple conditions
S14 – Discussion on Decoction and Wine

14.6 Qibo answered, “The sages in ancient times made Tangye and Luoli as the preparation for treating diseases. So Tangye was made in ancient times but was not used[1]. In the Middle Ages, morality declined and Xie (Evil Qi) frequently attacked human beings and caused diseases. However, these diseases can be cured by taking [Tangye].”

14.7 Huangdi asked, “Why do people nowadays cannot cure themselves by taking Tangye?”

14.8 Qibo answered, “Nowadays people have to use Duoyao (drugs) to treat internal diseases and Chunshi (spleen-shaped stone), Acupuncture and moxibustion to treat external diseases.”

- The decoction and wine made by rice were used as medicines in ancient times
- Because of the decay of morality, behavior, and natural environment, at present, people need more strong drug to maintain their health
- Internal and external health management is more important than therapies

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Treatment for edema

14.16 Qibo answered, “[The treatment of this disease should focus on] restoring harmony and eliminating stagnated water (just like cutting grass) . The doctors should slightly shake the limbs [of the patients], ask the patients to put on more clothes, use the method of Mioci(needling the opposite side) to restore the original physical condition [of the patients]. Besides, the therapeutic methods for opening Guanmen (swell pores) and cleaning the Jinglu (the bladder) can be used [to eliminate the retention of fluid]. In this way, the Jing (Essence) will flow normally, the Yang to the Five Zang-Organ will distribute smoothly and [the stagnation in] the Five Zang-Organ will be cleansed. Consequently, the Jing (Essence) is produced automatically, the body becomes strong again, the bones and the muscles maintain a normal state and the Jing (Essence) (qi) turns normal.”

- Edema mechanism: deficient Yang of organs (kidney, spleen, lung), the internal water cannot be distilled and run by Yang
- Water invades internally – asthma and breath difficulty
- Water invades externally – swelling in body and limbs
- The treatment principle is to restore the balance of Yin and Yang, to remove the water, dampness, and stagnating blood

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Treatment for edema

- Help the patient move his limbs to resume Yang Qi movement
- Dressing in warm cloth and use Liaoci (shallow needling)
- Open the sweat pores and clean the bladder meridian by diuretic herbs to warm the Yang Qi and distill the water
- Smoothing the Lung Qi to open the pathway for sweating
- Eating nutritious food to restore the Yang Qi in organs and to expel the water pathogen, and resume the Qi and blood circulation in large meridians

Summary

- The key mechanism is Yang deficiency and loss the water distill function
- Warming the Yang Qi and distill the Qi water to resume the normal water metabolism
- The retained pathogen is combined with water and stagnating blood, can be treated by needling the small collaterals for bleeding, three methods
  - Move the arms and legs to restore Yang circulation
  - Wearing warm clothes to protect the body from cold and damp pathogens
  - Apply Liaoci to needle the small vessels
  - Open the sweating pores and improve urination
S22 – Discussion on the Association of the Zang-Qi with the Four Seasons

- Zang Qi: the vitality or vital Qi of organs
- The vital Qi of organs corresponds to different seasons
  - Liver – spring
  - Heart – summer
  - Lung – autumn
  - Kidney – winter
- To treat the organ Qi disorders should follow the character of the corresponding season

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Spring and liver

- The liver pertains to spring [in the four seasons during which] Foot-Jueyin and Foot-Shaoyang[11] Channels are in predominance. The days [in which the liver and the gallbladder are in predominance] are Jia (the first of the ten Heavenly stems) and Yi (the second of the ten Heavenly stems)[11]. The liver [tends to] suffer from rapid flow of Qi which can be relieved by sweet flavor. The heart corresponds to liver Qi corresponds to spring thus its treatment follows the characters of spring: ascending, smoothing, etc.
- Adjust the liver Qi by choosing the points on the Liver (Jueyin) and the gall bladder (Shaoyang) meridians
- Choose the Jia and Yi dates based on the Chinese lunar calendar
- Liver Qi disorders featured by spasm and contraction
- Use herbs with the sweet flavor

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**Summer and heart**

Heart Qi corresponds to summer; thus its treatment follows the characters of summer.

- Adjust the heart Qi by choosing the points on the heart (Shaoyin) and the small intestine (Taiyang) meridians.
- Choose the Bing and Ding dates based on the Chinese lunar calendar.
- Heart Qi disorders featured by Qi and spirit dissemination.
- Use herbs with the sour flavor to withhold the Qi.

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**Long-summer and spleen**

Spleen Qi corresponds to long-summer; thus its treatment follows the characters of long-summer (dampness).

- Adjust the heart Qi by choosing the points on the spleen (Taiyin) and the stomach (Yangming) meridians.
- Choose the Wu and Ji dates based on the Chinese lunar calendar.
- Spleen Qi disorders featured by dampness invasion.
- Use herbs with the bitter flavor to clean the dampness.
Autumn and Lung

Lung Qi corresponds to autumn thus its treatment follows the characters of autumn (dryness).

Adjust the lung Qi by choosing the points on the lung (Taiyin) and the large intestine (Yangming) meridians.

Choose the Geng and Xin dates based on the Chinese lunar calendar.

Lung Qi disorders featured by ascending of reversed Qi.

Use herbs with the bitter flavor to descend the reversed Qi.

Winter and kidney

Kidney Qi corresponds to winter thus its treatment follows the characters of winter (withhold).

Adjust the kidney Qi by choosing the points on the kidney (Shaoyin) and the bladder (Taiyang) meridians.

Choose the Ren and Gui dates based on the Chinese lunar calendar.

Kidney hates dryness because the Kidney Yang (suppressed the kidney Yin) cannot generate enough fluid and Yin essence.

Use herbs with the pungent / spicy flavor to distill the water and activate the Yang Qi for normal fluid distribution.
Treatment flavor for organs

- Principle: contradictive to its tendency – tonify, follow its tendency – reduce
- Liver tends to distribute: use pungent to smooth and distribute, use sour to reduce
- Heart tends to be soften: use salty to reduce the heart fire, use sweet to reduce
- Spleen tends to be nourished: use sweet to nourish and bitter to reduce
- Lung tends to withhold: use sour to withhold, pungent to reduce
- Kidney tends to be firmed: use bitter to firm and salty to reduce (Xiang fire)

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Adopt proper diet

- Use poisonous drugs to reduce the pathogen
- Use cereal crop as food
- Use fruits as assisting food
- Use meat as nourishing food
- Use vegetable as supplementary food
- Use drugs to expel pathogen but use food to tonify vital Qi
- Should use proper food and drug combinations as treatment

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Summary

- The organs Qi responds to the seasons, thus their Qi follows the character of seasons (herbs have two types of characters: Qi tendency and flavor)
- For treatment, use the corresponding herbs to fit the target organ Qi
- Match the favorite Qi and flavor of organs: Liver – sweet, heart – sour, spleen – bitter, lung – bitter, kidney – pungent
- For acupuncture, use the internal – external meridian combinations – Rong, Shu, He, and back Shu
- Adjust the diet in accordance with the flavor preference

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S65 – Discussion on the Transmission of Biao and Ben

65.2 Qi Bo answered, "To do needling, [one] must differentiate [whether the disease is of] Yin or Yang, [or nature], [make sure which disease has occurred] first and [which disease has occurred] later. [so as to be clear about the progress of the diseases], [and then decides to treat the diseases with] contrary [treatment] or routine [treatment] [or to deal first with] Biao [or with] Ben [according to] the interrelationship [between diseases]. That is why it is said that sometimes Biao [diseases] are treated from [the aspect of] Biao, sometimes Ben [diseases] are treated from [the aspect of] Ben, sometimes Biao and sometimes Ben [diseases] are treated from [the aspect of] Biao and sometimes Biao [diseases] are treated from [the aspect of] Ben. So [in terms of the curative effect,] sometimes [diseases] are cured by treating [the aspect of] Biao, sometimes [diseases] are cured by treating [the aspect of] Ben, sometimes [diseases] are cured by using contrary [treatment], and sometimes [diseases] are cured by adopting routine [treatment]. If one is aware of contrary [treatment] and routine [treatment], [he is able] to take correct treatment without any hesitation. If one knows [the state of] Biao or [the condition of] Ben, [he is able] to avoid making any errors [in treating

- Ben: the first occurring disease
- Biao: the secondary occurring disease
- Ni: disease is at Biao and treatment focus on Ben, or disease is at Ben and treatment focus on Biao
- Cong: disease is at Ben and treat the Ben, or disease is at Biao and treat the Biao

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Ni and Cong in acupuncture

- Differentiate Yin and Yang
  - External and internal, Zang and Fu, upper and lower, Qi and blood
  - To treat Biao (former) and to treat Ben (latter), doctor should observe and consider thoroughly and identify the Biao and Ben of the morbid condition
- To apply the principle to different applications
- When the treatment is wrong, it is Ni; when the treatment is correct, it is Cong
- If the symptoms are caused by primary disease, treat the primary disease to control the symptoms
- If the symptoms cause secondary disease, still treat the primary disease

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Treatment orders

- Febrile disease:
  - fever first then other symptoms, treat the fever
  - Fever followed by abdominal distension, treat the distension – spleen and stomach system is crucial for life sustenance
- Diarrhea:
  - Sickness followed by diarrhea, treat the primary disease
  - Diarrhea followed by secondary problem, treat diarrhea
- Abdominal distension:
  - Primary sickness followed by distension, treat the distension
  - Primary sickness followed by emotional change (anxiety), treat the emotional problem
- Urination and defecation inconvenience, treat the symptom
- Excessive syndromes: treat the excessive pathogen first
- Deficient syndromes: treat the relatively excessive organ first (Biao), then the deficient organ (Ben)
- For emergency, treat the most urgent problem only

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Relation of Biao and Ben

- The six climates and Yin Yang
  - The climates are Ben (wind, cold, summer-heat, dampness, dryness, fire), the Yin Yang (3 Yin and 3 Yang) is Biao
- Health and treatment: health is Ben, treatment is Biao – treatment cannot replace vital Qi and essence
- Body and organs: external body is Biao, internal organs are Ben
- Relations between organs: the organ with primary problem is Ben, the organ with secondary problem is Biao
- Between disease: primary disease is Ben, secondary disease is Biao

For common condition, put Ben as priority

- Give priority to urination and defecation inconvenience to smooth the Fu Qi and ensure nutrition supply
- For emergency, give priority to maintain the vital signs

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S70 – Major Discussion on the Administration of the Five-Motions

70. 34 Huangdi asked, “Are there any rules for taking toxic and nontoxic drugs?”
70. 35 Qibo answered, “Diseases are either chronic or new; prescriptions are either large or small; [drugs] are either toxic or nontoxic. There are certainly rules for taking them. [To use drugs with] great toxicity to treat a disease, [the rule is to stop the use of it when] 60% of the disease is cured; [to use drugs with] moderate toxicity to treat a disease, [the rule is to stop the use of it when] 70% of the disease is cured; [to use drugs with] mild toxicity to treat disease, [the rule is to stop the use of it when] 80% of the disease is cured; [to use drugs with] no toxicity to treat disease, [the rule is to stop the use of it when] 90% of the disease is cured. [Then the patient should take] food, meat, fruit and vegetables to build up the health. [Care should be taken] to prevent excessive use. [Of drugs lost] Zhengqi (Healthy Qi) be damaged. [If Xie (Evil) is not fully eliminated], [drugs can be used] with the methods mentioned above. [When using drugs to treat diseases, one] must be aware of [the condition of Qi in the year, avoiding violation of natural harmony and the practice of making] predominance more predominant and deficiency more deficient’. [If such a practice is not avoided, it will] bring the patient calamities. [In addition, care should be taken] not to induce [the invasion of] Xie (Evil) and not to damage Zhengqi (Healthy Qi). [Instead] the life of the patient be threatened.”

- We mainly focus on the principle of using medicine
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Toxicity of drugs

- Drug toxicity: extreme toxic, normal toxic, mild toxic, non-toxic – should be regulated by standards
- The extreme toxic drugs should be paused then 60% pathogen removed
- The normal toxic drugs should be paused then 70% pathogen removed
- The mild toxic drugs should be paused then 80% pathogen removed
- The non-toxic drugs should be paused then 90% pathogen removed
- Drugs inevitably consume the vital Qi, if the vital Qi is sufficient to resist the pathogen, the drugs should be stopped
- Use food to nourish for 100% recovery
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S74 – Discussion on the Most Important and Abstruse Theory

To illustrate the detailed treatment strategy

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Treatment strategy

- Cold disease uses hot herbs, febrile disease uses cold herbs
- Mild disease uses counteractive treatment (without pseudo-symptoms), severe disease uses “similar” character drugs
- Mass uses reducing method, external pathogen should be expelled
- Fatigue and insufficiency should be warmed and tonified
- Stagnation, retaining pathogen should be cleaned
- Dryness should be moistened
- Spasm should be relaxed
- Flaccidity should be withheld and strengthened
- Impairment should be warmed and tonified

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Treatment strategy

- Stagnancy should be dredged
- Fright should be calmed
- Ascending is for middle (spleen) Qi descending
- Descending is for constipation
- Bathing, massage can be applied
- External medicine like lotion, pasting can be applied
- Fired needle is used to treat cold Bi syndrome
- Sweating is to open the closed pores
- This principle should be flexibly applied based on real setting

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Treatment strategy

- Ni: treat with counteractive methods – normal strategy
- Cong: treat with similar tendency methods – for extreme cases
- For combination, when the majority drugs are warm, add some cold drugs; when the majority are cold, add some warm drugs, to reduce Qi resistance
- For urination and defecation inconvenience with deficiency syndromes, use tonify method

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Treatment strategy

- For menstrual disorders with stagnation and constipation with internal heat, use reducing method
- The principle is to catch the main pathogen or main disorder
- To treat mass, can combine tonify and reduce to restore the vital Qi and blood circulation
- For heat or fire syndromes with Yin deficiency (kidney), should tonify the Yin essence

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Principle to form a formula

74. 142 Qibo answered, “[The drugs for] treating disease are called the Monarch [drugs]; [the drugs for] assisting the Monarch [drugs] are called the Minister [drugs]; [and the drugs for] corresponding to the Minister [drugs] are called the Envoy [drugs]. [These three categories of drugs in a prescription] are not the so-called the upper, medium and lower grades [of drugs].”

- Like the members in a court, the formula has different positions
- The king: to treat the disease
- The minister: to assist the king
- Envoy: following the minister to guide the effect to the due position / meridian
- Note to control the total number of herbs in a formula, least than 9 is recommended in Neijing

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Different type of composition

- Odd formula: 1 king + 2 ministers, or 2 kings + 3 ministers
- Even formula: 2 kings + 4 ministers, or 2 kings + 6 ministers
- For minor and superficial problems, use odd formula
- For serious and internal problems, use even formula
- Slow formula: to go upwards
- Fast formula: to go downwards

Forming principles

- For mild disease, use less herbs, for severe disease use more herbs
- A formula should have 2 to 9 herbs
- Chong Fang: combination of odd and even formula, to have more complicated formula
- Use contradictory herbs to lower resistance
- Use “small” formula as basis, combine small formula for more complex problems

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