

# Exploration of the Application of Treatise on Febrile Diseases Six-meridian Syndrome Differentiation in the Treatment of Skin Diseases

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## Abstract

Skin diseases are primarily characterized by localized skin lesions and few systemic symptoms, which makes it challenging to differentiate them in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). This often results in a state of "undetectable symptoms". The six-meridian differentiation system, established by the medical sage Zhang Zhongjing, provides important practical value for guiding the treatment of skin diseases. Revised 2: However, there are few explicit statements on the treatment of skin diseases in the "Treatise on Febrile Diseases" (Shanghan Lun). Nonetheless, a deep understanding of the concept of using the six-meridian syndrome differentiation, mastering the six-meridian syndrome differentiation system, and combining the principle of individualized diagnosis and treatment can fully leverage the advantages of traditional Chinese medicine in treating skin diseases. This paper aims to explore the application of syndrome differentiation of six meridians in the treatment of skin diseases, with the goal of enhancing the efficacy of traditional Chinese medicine in treating skin diseases. Reason 2: The revised text improves the clarity and readability of the original text by rephrasing certain sentences and using more precise vocabulary.

## Keywords

Skin diseases, classic prescription, hefang, Chinese medicine treatment

Skin diseases have complex etiology and pathogenesis with a wide range of clinical manifestations. External factors like wind, cold, heat, dampness, insects, and toxins, as well as internal factors such as dietary fatigue and emotional disturbances, can contribute to skin diseases [1]. Western medicine often focuses on quick relief of symptoms but may have poor outcomes. Traditional Chinese medicine, on the other hand, utilizes methods like heat-clearing and detoxification, cooling blood, and resolving stasis. However, these methods may have limited effectiveness and harm the body's fundamental yang qi. It is important to fully utilize the advantages and characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine in treating skin diseases.

*The Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon* states, "What manifests externally must originate internally." Therefore, it is not appropriate to assume that skin diseases are only superficial because they appear on the skin's surface [2]. Skin diseases are not merely superficial but are manifestations of internal imbalances within the body. Treating only the local skin lesions is often ineffective. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on overall regulation and improve the internal environment for fundamental healing. Zhang Zhongjing's system of Six Meridian Differentiation is based on the pathological changes of the organs and meridians associated with the six meridians of the body. It combines internal and external factors and relies on comprehensive analysis to provide a unique advantage in the treatment of skin diseases.

## 1. Six-Meridian Differentiation of Skin Diseases

The Six-Meridian Differentiation system, established in the Shang Han Lun, proposes the concept of observing pulse and symptoms to determine the nature of pathogenic factors and treat them accordingly. It includes methods such as Eight Principles of Differentiation, Zang Fu Differentiation, Wei Qi Ying Xue Differentiation, San Jiao Differentiation, and Pathogenic Factor Differentiation. It treats diseases arising from dysfunction of meridians and organs based on the physiological and pathological principles of the six meridians [3]. By grasping these principles, one can effectively treat various diseases. Although there may be countless diseases, their pathological mechanisms fall within the scope of the Six Meridian Differentiation and Eight Principles [4]. In general, the Six Meridian Differentiation system has wide applicability, not only for external pathogenic diseases and internal mixed diseases but also for the differentiation and treatment of skin diseases.

### 1.1 Differentiation of Skin Lesion Symptoms

In treating skin diseases using the Six Meridian Differentiation system, attention should be paid to the manifestations of local skin lesions and differentiate them based on symptoms and locations. For example, rashes on the back, posterior neck, and lateral sides of the limbs may indicate involvement of the Taiyang meridian. Rashes on the chest, hypochondrium, lower abdomen, and shoulders may indicate the Shaoyang meridian. Lesions on the head and face may involve the Yangming or Jueyin meridians [5]. When dealing with local skin lesions accompanied by fever, redness, rapid progression, and ulceration, differentiation should focus on the San Yang meridians. Conversely, if the lesions are characterized by itching worsening at night, prolonged purulent discharge, and difficult-to-heal dark-colored ulcers, differentiation should focus on the San Yin meridians [6]. Additionally, the color of local skin rashes can provide a basis for differentiation. Red rashes are associated with Yangming and Shaoyang patterns, while white rashes are associated with Taiyin and Shaoyin patterns. Swelling and exudation are associated with Yangming and Taiyin patterns, while itching is associated with Taiyang patterns. Conducting a preliminary differentiation based on these symptoms is important to guide subsequent treatment.

### 1.2 Differentiation of disease

Diseases have specificity, so identifying the type of disease is an essential and crucial step in the treatment process. Accurate diagnosis can determine the target of treatment and greatly enhance its effectiveness [7]. When treating skin diseases using the Six Meridian Differentiation system, a combination of disease identification and syndrome differentiation should be applied, using a comprehensive and flexible approach to ensure accurate syndrome differentiation and achieve satisfactory treatment results [8]. For example, wind pathogens affecting the superficial layer of the body can be treated by differentiating the Taiyang meridian. Lung and stomach heat patterns, manifesting as seborrheic dermatitis and rosacea, can be treated by differentiating the Yangming meridian. Skin diseases related to emotions and occurring predominantly on one side of the chest and abdomen can be treated by differentiating the Shaoyang meridian. Skin diseases with symptoms such as abdominal distension, diarrhea, oral ulcers, and vulvar pruritus can be treated by differentiating the Taiyin meridian. Heart-kidney disharmony, resulting in conditions like scleroderma and psoriasis, can be treated by differentiating the Shaoyin meridian. Stubborn acne and urticaria with a combination of cold and heat or advanced stages of the disease can be treated by differentiating the Jueyin meridian. However, for certain difficult diseases, the traditional Six Meridian Differentiation may not achieve satisfactory results. Therefore, when treating these specific diseases, it is necessary to consider using specialized treatments tailored to their characteristics in order to shorten the treatment cycle and achieve better results [9].

### 1.3 Differentiation of Syndromes based on Outlines

The outline of the six meridian skin diseases provides a summarized description of the common characteristics of each meridian's disease pattern. Taiyang meridian-related skin diseases are characterized by symptoms such as aversion to colds, headache, and itching. Yangming meridian-related skin diseases are characterized by symptoms such as dry mouth and rapid pulse. Shaoyang meridian-related skin diseases are characterized by symptoms such as bitter taste and alternating chills and fever. Taiyin meridian-related skin diseases are characterized by symptoms such as loose stool and aversion to colds. Shaoyin meridian-related skin diseases are characterized by symptoms such as aversion to cold and joint pain. Jueyin meridian-related skin diseases are characterized by the condition "yin and yang qi not smoothly connected". In the critical stage of severe and life-threatening diseases, these skin diseases often exhibit complex and unpredictable features, such as mixed cold and heat, recurrent heat dominance, lung heat

and spleen cold [10]. Therefore, by combining the diagnostic criteria of the six meridians, the diagnosis can be narrowed down to which meridian is involved, facilitating the precise selection of corresponding treatment strategies.

## 2. The application of formula patterns in the treatment of skin diseases

In clinical practice, patients often present with skin symptoms as their chief complaint, which may not be sufficient for a thorough differentiation and determination of the main pattern and selection of appropriate herbal formulas. When applying the six meridians differentiation in the treatment of skin diseases, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of chief complaint and the main pattern. The chief complaint refers to the most prominent symptoms, signs, and onset time that the patient needs to address. At the same time, the main pattern reflects the key manifestations of the overall pathological state. In the process of differentiating skin diseases, the chief complaint usually manifests as skin lesions, while the main pattern focuses on identifying the "key points" among various symptoms. Therefore, "first differentiate the six meridians to determine the direction, then differentiate the main pattern" has become the key principle in the six meridians differentiation treatment of skin diseases [11]. Additionally, the main pattern refers to the indications of the herbal formula, and differentiating the main pattern involves identifying the indications, evidence, and adaptability of the herbal formula. With a wide variety of classical Chinese herbal formulas, selecting the appropriate herbal medicine from the complex array of formulas requires identifying the main pattern first, determining the corresponding pattern, and ultimately selecting the appropriate herbal formula.

The application of herbal formulas is crucial in the treatment of diseases. Only by understanding the principles of applying herbal formulas can we identify the essence of the disease and accurately grasp the main pattern among complex patterns, thereby improving the accuracy of prescribing medications. There are various types of herbal formulas for the treatment of skin diseases, each with specific indications. For example, in the case of a patient with urticaria, the symptoms include the onset of wind patches, intermittent itching, accompanied by an aversion to wind and cold, a greasy mouth, and a floating pulse. Through pattern identification, it is known that urticaria is commonly seen in the Taiyang disease category. By further differentiating the pattern according to the six meridians, it can be determined as a Taiyang exterior pattern. However, Taiyang disease can be further divided into different sub-patterns, such as Taiyang windstroke pattern, Taiyang febrile disease pattern, and Taiyang exterior depression mild pattern. Among them, the windstroke pattern can be treated with the principal formula Gui Zhi Tang, while the febrile disease pattern can be treated with the principal formula Ma Huang Tang, and the exterior depression mild pattern can be treated with the formula Gui Zhi Ma Huang Ge Ban Tang. All of these formulas can be used to treat urticaria, but simply identifying the Taiyang disease is not enough to determine which specific sub-pattern is most suitable. Further pattern identification is needed. If the patient experiences sweating, aversion to wind, and a slow pulse, it indicates the windstroke pattern of Gui Zhi Tang. If there is also discomfort in the neck and back, it indicates the pattern of Gui Zhi Ma Huang Ge Ban Tang. And if there is discomfort in the neck and back without sweating, it indicates the pattern of Ma Huang Tang. Therefore, pattern identification is the core, and herbal medicine treatment is the ultimate goal. By combining the differentiation of the six meridians with the differentiation of herbal formulas, pattern identification becomes more accurate, and herbal medicine can directly target the disease, achieving the effect of one prescription being equivalent to two prescriptions.

## 3. Application of combined formulas in the treatment of skin diseases

The concept of herbal formula was first proposed by Zhang Zhongjing, and Gui Zhi Ma Huang Ge Ban Tang (Cinnamon Twig and Ephedra Decoction) was the first herbal formula used to treat skin diseases, inspiring future research and application of herbal formulas in the treatment of skin diseases. The selection of classical formulas serves as the starting point for treating skin diseases, while the application of herbal formulas is crucial for improving clinical efficacy. In the book "Shang Han Lun," each classical formula has its main indications, showing strong specificity and a relatively focused therapeutic effect. However, with the changes in society and people's lifestyles, the etiology and pathogenesis of many skin diseases have become more complex and variable, and the results of using a single classical formula for treatment are limited. In fact, for complex diseases, the use of herbal formulas offers more flexibility and better meets the individualized treatment needs of skin diseases.

The combination of classical formulas refers to the merging and application of two or more classical formulas from Zhang Zhongjing to target complex and variable patterns of diseases. The combination of formulas can compensate for the limitations of single formulas and enhance the therapeutic efficacy by promoting the specificity of each formula. Additionally, the combination of different herbs can lead to new therapeutic effects. For example, in the book "*Jin Kui Yao Lue*," the formula Gui Zhi Qu Shao Yao Jia Ma Xing Fu Zi Tang is used to treat the symptom

of "hardness below the heart as large as a plate." This formula is a combination of Gui Zhi Qu Shao Yao Tang and Ma Huang Xi Xin Fu Zi Tang, and it has the effect of "transforming fluids and promoting urination," which neither of the two original formulas has. The reason behind this is that the combination of classical formulas allows for changes in the proportions of herbs, further expanding the original formula's efficacy and generating new effects, thereby greatly expanding the scope of application for classical formulas.

In the differentiated application of combining classical formulas, for example, in skin diseases with a predominant pattern of liver depression, the pattern can be identified as Shaoyang syndrome. Si Ni San can be used as the basic formula in combination with other formulas. If liver depression is accompanied by qi deficiency, Si Ni San can be combined with Huang Qi Jian Zhong Tang; if liver depression is accompanied by blood deficiency, Si Ni San can be combined with Jiao Ai Tang; if liver depression is accompanied by yin deficiency, Si Ni San can be combined with Bai He Di Huang Tang; if liver depression is accompanied by yang deficiency, Si Ni San can be combined with Si Ni Tang; if liver depression is accompanied by both yin and yang deficiency, Si Ni San can be combined with Zhi Gan Cao Tang; if liver depression is accompanied by depressive heat, Si Ni San can be combined with Zhi Zi Chi Tang; if liver depression is accompanied by heat stagnation, Si Ni San can be combined with Da Cheng Qi Tang; if liver depression is accompanied by phlegm-dampness, Si Ni San can be combined with Xiao Ban Xia Tang; if liver depression is accompanied by blood stasis, Si Ni San can be combined with Gui Zhi Fu Ling Wan. The combination of classical formulas expands the scope of application and compensates for the limitations of single formulas, thereby improving clinical efficacy. In clinical practice, the use of combined formulas not only includes the combination of classical formulas but also the combination of classical formulas with contemporary formulas or empirical formulas, aiming to enhance treatment effectiveness. The combination of classical and contemporary formulas is not contradictory but rather a relationship of source and flow, with contemporary formulas being an extension and supplement to classical formulas. The use of combined classical and contemporary formulas opens up a new path for the development of traditional Chinese medicine.

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, the application of six-meridian syndrome differentiation in the treatment of skin diseases requires constant knowledge and understanding of the pathogenesis and treatment of all diseases. It is important to follow the principle of 'the law is established with the syndrome, and the law is derived from the law'. First, identify the six meridians. Then, identify the syndrome. In the face of complex pathogenesis, select a combined prescription for treatment. Use the classic prescription as the main guide, with the current prescription and empirical prescription as supplementary options. Use the method of using specific medicine for specific diseases to finalize the treatment plan. Through in-depth study of the application of six-meridian syndrome differentiation in the treatment of skin diseases, we can master the main syndrome differentiation and expand the application of classical prescriptions. This will help us achieve a better understanding of traditional Chinese medicine's effectiveness in treating skin diseases and improve the quality of life for patients. This will help promote the development of Zhongjing's academic thought and provide valuable guidance for clinical practice.

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