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# Acupuncture and Moxibustion in the Shang Han Za Bing Lun

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## Abstract

Although the *Shang Han Za Bing Lun* (Discussion of Cold-Induced Disorders) written by Zhang Zhong Jing (Eastern Han dynasty, 25 to 220 C.E.) is a revered historical and clinical text that has guided generations of Chinese herbal medicine practitioners, Zhang Zhong Jing's use of acupuncture and moxibustion is much less known. This article seeks to redress this imbalance and discusses Zhang's use of these methods of treatment in the *Shang Han Lun*.

**Keywords:** acupuncture, moxibustion, Shang Han Lun, Zhang Zhong Jing.

Zhang Zhong Jing was the legendary author of the *Shang Han Za Bing Lun*, establishing the system of "bian zheng lun zhi," or planning treatment according to differentiation of syndromes. Everyone is familiar with his herbal medicine, but he was also an expert in acupuncture and moxibustion, and made a great contribution to the development and refinement of these therapeutic methods in Chinese medicine.

I view acupuncture and moxibustion as the forgotten aspect of Zhang Zhong Jing's work, and in this paper I wish to present his discussion of these methods in the *Shang Han Lun* as follows:

- Acupuncture for yang syndromes, moxibustion for yin syndromes.
- Huo jiu (fire and moxibustion) contraindications for excess yang and deficient yin syndromes.
- Preventing the occurrence of disease and arresting and curing disease at its initial stage.
- Combining acupuncture, moxibustion and Chinese herbal medicine

## 1. Acupuncture for yang syndromes, moxibustion for yin syndromes

In the *Shang Han Lun*, the primary principle espoused is protecting the yang qi in the body. For shang han diseases, Zhang Zhong Jing regarded the main pathogen as cold, and when external cold invades the body it easily damages the body's yang qi. Based on the extent of yang qi damage, he created the six conformation diagnostic model for differentiating shang han diseases. In general, if the pathogens enter the three yang channels, the syndromes

are referred to as the "three yang diseases," i.e. taiyang bing, shaoyang bing and yangming bing. In these three yang diseases, as the yang qi is regarded as still sufficient in the body, the primary treatment strategy is to eliminate the invading pathogens and protect the yang qi. However, if the pathogens have left the three yang channels to enter the three yin channels the syndromes are named the "three yin diseases" i.e. taiyin bing, shaoyin bing and jueyin bing. In the case of the three yin diseases, the yang qi is in a state of deficiency, and thus the primary treatment strategy is to tonify the yang qi of the body.

There are approximately sixty-nine clauses in the *Shang Han Lun* that discuss acupuncture and moxibustion, of which sixteen refer to the correct use of acupuncture and moxibustion for treatment. Of nine clauses in the chapters on the three yang diseases of taiyang, yangming and shaoyang bing that discuss acupuncture and moxibustion, eight pertain to acupuncture while only one concerns moxibustion (clause 117 below). The main acupoints referred to include Fengchi GB-20, Fengfu DU-16, Qimen LIV-14, Juque REN-14, Dazhui DU-14, Feishu BL-13, Ganshu BL-18, Laogong P-8 and Guanyuan REN-4, totalling nine points.

### Clause 117

"When using the burning needle technique to induce sweating, if the point punctured is attacked by cold, the location will be red and swollen. It must [inevitably] turn into Ben Tun, causing the patient to feel the qi rushing up from the lower abdomen to the heart and chest. Moxa each red and swollen place one zhuang and give *Gui Zhi Jia Gui Tang*, adding 2 liang of further Gui Zhi to *Gui Zhi Tang* (Cinnamon Twig Decoction)."

This clause, recorded in the chapter on taiyang bing, describes the treatment of taiyang bing by using burning technique to induce sweating, thus leading to Ben Tun or "running piglet" syndrome. Its main pathogenesis is Heart yang qi deficiency with uprising of Kidney water. Moxibustion is recommended to warm the yang qi, dispel the cold and move the qi and blood.

Of seven clauses that discuss the application of acupuncture and moxibustion in the chapters on the three yin diseases of taiyin, shaoyin and jueyin bing, six discuss using moxibustion

as treatment, while only one concerns acupuncture. That is clause 308.

*Clause 308*

"Shaoyin disease: diarrhoea with pus and blood, can be treated by acupuncture."

In shaoyin disease, the patient has diarrhoea with pus and blood, indicating that the pathogen has damaged both the qi and blood. The presence of pus indicates that excess pathogenic heat has damaged the qi, while the presence of blood indicates the pathogen has also damaged the blood. Acupuncture can be used to reduce the heat and eliminate the pathogens.

In general, Zhang Zhong Jing used moxibustion for warming and tonifying the yang qi, thus warming the channels and dispelling cold to treat yin syndromes. On the other hand, acupuncture is employed to treat yang syndromes. The therapeutic principles of acupuncture in the *Shang Han Lun* can be summarised as follows:

**i. Reduce the Liver to rescue the Spleen**

If the Liver is in excess condition, it easily overacts on the Spleen. Puncture the front-mu point of the Liver channel (Qimen LIV-14) to reduce the Liver and supplement the Spleen.

*Clause 108*

"Shang han diseases with fullness in the abdomen, delirium, floating and tight pulse at cun kou [wrist pulse]: this is due to the Liver overacting on the Spleen. It is called 'zong', and puncturing Qimen LIV-14 is indicated."

**ii. Reduce the Liver to rescue the Lung**

When the Liver is in excess condition, it can torment the Lung, causing dysfunction of the Lung qi. The therapeutic principle is to reduce the Liver and restore the Lung's function. Puncture the front-mu point of the Liver channel, Qimen LIV-14, to reduce the Liver and rescue the Lung.

*Clause 109*

"Shang han disease with fever, aversion to cold, big thirst, a preference for drinking water, and the abdomen must be felt to be full: if the patient has sweating soon and urination is smooth the disease will resolve in a timely fashion. This is due to the Liver tormenting the Lung, and it is called 'heng'. For this syndrome puncture Qimen LIV-14."

**iii. Clear heat**

The *Shang Han Lun* also used the *Huang Di Nei Jing's* '59 acupuncture points to clear heat in febrile diseases', saying in chapter 3, clause 105: "When treating febrile diseases, one can puncture 59 points."

According to the *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen* chapter 61 "Treatise on water, heat and points", these points are:

a. To clear heat in all yang channels (25 points): Shangxing DU-23, Xinhui DU-22, Qianding DU-21, Baihui DU-20, Houding DU-19; Wuchu BL-5, Chengguang BL-6, Tongtian BL-7, Luoque BL-8, Yuzhen BL-9; Toulinqi GB-15, Muchuang GB-16, Zhengying GB-17, Chengling GB-18, Naokong GB-19.

b. To clear heat in the chest (8 points): Dazhu BL-11, Zhongfu LU-1, Quepen ST-12, Feishu BL-13.

c. To clear Stomach heat (8 points): Qichong ST-30, Zusanli ST-36, Shangjuxu ST-37, Xiajuxu ST-39.

d. To clear heat in the four extremities (8 points): Yunmen LU-2, Jianyu L.I.-15, Weizhong BL-40, Henggu KID-11.

e. To clear heat in the five zang (10 points): Xinshu BL-15, Ganshu BL-18, Feishu BL-13, Shenshu BL-23, Pishu BL-20.

**iv. Release the exterior and harmonise the interior**

When exterior and interior pathology exist simultaneously, Zhang Zhong Jing used acupuncture to release the exterior and harmonise the interior.

*Clause 142*

"Combination of taiyang and shaoyang disease: headache and stiff neck, dizziness, occasionally feeling fullness and a hard mass in the epigastric region: this is just like 'jie xiong' syndrome. Puncture Dazhui DU-14, Feishu BL-13 and Ganshu BL-18. Take care not to apply sweating methods. Inducing sweating will lead to delirium. If the pulse is wiry with delirium lasting to the fifth day without resolution, one should puncture the point of Qimen LIV-14."

*Clause 171*

"Combination of taiyang and shaoyang disease: feeling hardness in the epigastric region, stiff neck and dizziness. Dazhui DU-14, Feishu BL-13, Ganshu BL-18 should be punctured. Be very cautious, for this syndrome cannot be purged."

If taiyang exterior syndrome is not completely resolved and the pathogen has entered shaoyang, it is not suitable to use herbs to induce sweating. And although the pathogen has entered the interior, it has not yet given rise to the excess yangming fu syndrome, so it is also not suitable to use purgative herbs to purge the interior. Zhang Zhong Jing therefore used acupuncture to release the exterior and harmonise the interior in the treatment of coexisting taiyang and shaoyang syndrome.

**v. Clear heat and calm the blood palace**

The Liver channel traverses the genital area, relating the Liver to the blood palace. The blood palace always refers to the uterus and Chong Mai (Penetrating vessel) both of which are the palace of yin and blood. In febrile disease, heat often invades the blood palace. Puncture the front-mu point of the Liver channel, Qimen LIV-14 to protect the yin and blood, thus reducing the excessive yang, to calm the blood palace.

*Clause 143*

"Wind attacking women and manifesting in fever with aversion to cold, coinciding with the onset of the menses ... after seven or eight days the fever is gone but the pulse is slow and the body is cold, with delirium and fullness under the chest and ribs just like 'jie xiong' syndrome. This is heat entering the blood palace and one should puncture Qimen LIV-14, reducing it according to the excess."

*Clause 216*

"Yangming disease: bleeding with delirium. This is due to heat entering the blood palace. If sweat is only over the head, puncture the point Qimen LIV-14, reducing it according to the excess and producing sweat all over the body in order to cure it."

**vi. Clear the intestines and stop diarrhoea**

Pathogens entering shaoyin causing stagnation in the lower jiao will damage the qi and blood, leading to diarrhoea with blood and pus. Acupuncture can unblock the channels and remove the stagnation to move the qi and blood, thereby eliminating the pathogens. Typical points that might be used include Youmen KID-21 and Jiaoxin KID-8 (both mentioned in the commentary on clause 308 in *Broad Annotations on Cold Induced Pattern Differentiation* by the Qing dynasty author Wang Lingyou), Guanyuan REN-4, Tianshu ST-25, Pishu BL-20, Geshu BL-17, Dachangshu BL-25, Zhishi BL-52, to clear the intestines and stop diarrhoea.

*Clause 308*

"Shaoyin disease: diarrhoea with pus and blood, can be treated by acupuncture."

## **2. "Huo jiu" (fire and moxibustion) are prohibited for excess yang and deficient yin syndromes**

The category of 'huo jiu' includes moxibustion, fumigation by the smoke of burning herbs, hot pressing using compresses of heated herbs, warming needle, burning needle technique, etc. Although the *Shang Han Lun's* priority is to protect yang qi in the body, Zhang Zhong Jing cautioned that excess yang syndromes and deficient yin syndromes are not to be treated with "huo jiu" (fire and moxibustion).

There are 16 clauses mentioning the misuse of acupuncture and moxibustion: fifteen in the three yang diseases and only one in the three yin diseases. The causes of mistreatment are all related to huò jiù, for example:

*Clause 18*

"A floating pulse with severe fever is mistreated with moxibustion. This is an excess; excess is [wrongly] treated by using the methods of treating deficiency. Moved by fire, it causes dry throat and vomiting of blood."

*Clause 116*

"A feeble and rapid pulse: be cautious not to apply moxibustion. Using fire serves the pathogen, causing irritation and adversity. Yin deficiency with heat: using moxibustion will damage the yin, further creating more heat in the body. Blood moves in the vessels, and while the fire of moxibustion appears mild, it has the ability to forcefully attack the interior, even burning the bones and damaging the tendons, so much that the deficient yin blood can not be recovered."

*Clause 284*

"Shaoyin syndrome: cough with diarrhoea and delirium. It is damaged by the fire qi, urine must be difficult, due to forcing sweats from the shaoyin."

### **3. Prevent occurrence of disease in advance; arrest and cure the disease at the initial stage**

Zhang Zhong Jing inherited and developed the *Huang Di Nei Jing's* theory of preventing the occurrence of disease. If prevention is not possible, he advised arresting the disease by treating it in the initial stage.

In the *Jin Gui Yao Lue* (Essentials from the Golden Cabinet) Chapter 1 ('On pulse, symptom complex and transmission of diseases of zang fu jing luo'), Zhang Zhong Jing said: "A superior doctor will treat a disease before its onset. Why?" The master answered: "To treat a disease before its onset means for example, when Liver disease is evident, one should know the Liver will transmit to the Spleen, so one must first reinforce the Spleen ... The middle level doctor does not understand the transmission of diseases. When this doctor sees Liver disease, they do not understand the reinforcement of the Spleen, only treating the Liver."

If a disease has already occurred, stop and treat it as early as you can. In the *Jin Gui Yao Lue* Chapter 1 it says: "If one knows how to protect and nourish the zheng qi, avoiding external pathogens and not allowing them to invade the channels of the body, one will stay healthy and free from any disease. If the external pathogens attack only the channels, not yet transmitting to the zangfu, one should treat them immediately.

When feeling heaviness and stagnation only in the extremities, use daoyin, tu na, acupuncture, and gao mo immediately; this will prevent the nine orifices from blockage."

It is very important to treat the disease at its initial stage. As the *Jin Gui Yao Lue* emphasises, when there is heaviness and stagnation in the extremities, the external pathogen is lodged only in the channels, and immediate use of daoyin (qi guiding exercises), tuna (a kind of breathing exercise similar to qigong), acupuncture, and gaomo (a therapy consisting of massaging the skin or diseased area with ointment) is required.

The *Shang Han Lun* says:

*Clause 8*

"Taiyang disease with a headache lasting for more than seven days will recover spontaneously due to the pathogens going right through the channels. If it is going to pass to another channel, puncture foot yangming. This will cure it by preventing the pathogen from passing into another channel."

In clinical practice, it is common and satisfactory to use Zusanli ST-36 to boost the zheng qi and harmonise the ying and wei. This will prevent the pathogens from going interiorly. Modern research demonstrates that puncturing Zusanli ST-36 as well as Shangjuxu ST-37 will promote the immune function in the body.

#### 4. Combining of acupuncture, moxibustion and Chinese herbal medicine.

##### **i. Select the best treatment option according to the patient's condition**

In general, acupuncture is used to treat pathology that manifests more externally, while herbs are employed to treat pathology that manifests more internally. Zhang Zhong Jing was excellent at selecting the treatment options for the patient that best fitted his or her condition. For example in the *Shang Han Lun*, Zhang Zhong Jing treated 'heat entering the blood palace' syndrome using either *Xiao Chai Hu Tang* (Minor Bupleurum Decoction) or acupuncture. If the pathogens blocked the channels, he used acupuncture to treat the patient (see clauses 143 and 216 above), by puncturing Qimen LIV-14. If the pathogens entered deeper into the body he used a herbal formula:

*Clause 144*

"When wind attacks a woman and after seven or eight days she continues to experience paroxysmal sensations of cold and heat, coinciding with the end of the menses, this is due to heat entering the blood palace. The blood must be coagulated, causing symptoms similar to malarial disorder, manifesting paroxysmally. *Xiao Chai Hu Tang* governs it.

##### **ii. Use acupuncture, moxibustion and Chinese herbal formulas simultaneously**

As Sun Si Miao, the famous Chinese medicine doctor of the Tang dynasty (618 to 907 C.E.) said: "If applying acupuncture without moxibustion or moxibustion without acupuncture - these are not good doctors. Acupuncture and moxibustion without herbal medicine, herbal medicine without acupuncture and moxibustion - these doctors are even worse ... Knowing both acupuncture and herbal medicine - of course they are good doctors."

Zhang Zhong Jing truly understood the power of combining acupuncture and herbal medicine. He used acupuncture, moxibustion and herbal formulas simultaneously to treat a variety of conditions.

Concerning exterior syndromes, when excess pathogens have blocked the channels, making it difficult for the herbs to reach the location of the disease, using acupuncture to unblock the channels will help the herbs to disperse the external pathogens. This is highlighted in Clause 24 discussing *Gui Zhi Tang* syndrome. After the patient took *Gui Zhi Tang* (Cinnamon Twig Decoction), the problem did not resolve and anxiety occurred. Zhang Zhong Jing recommends first puncturing Fengchi GB-20 and Fengfu DU-16 to unblock the channels, then giving *Gui Zhi Tang* again to resolve the problem. After the channels have been dispersed of pathogens, the herbs will work to treat the syndrome.

*Clause 24*

"Taiyang syndrome: initially taking *Gui Zhi Tang* the syndrome is not resolved and irritation is present. First puncture Fengchi GB-20 and Fengfu DU-16 then give *Gui Zhi Tang* again; the syndrome should be cured."

For shaoyin disease involving yang deficiency with excessive cold, he recommends the use of moxibustion to warm the channels and eliminate the cold, before taking *Fu Zi Tang* (Prepared Aconite Decoction).

*Clause 304*

"Shaoyin disease: the first or second day with a normal taste in the mouth disliking any cold over the back, moxibustion should be applied. This is governed by *Fu Zi Tang*."

Liu He Jian (1110-1200 C.E.), one of the four famous Chinese medicine doctors of the Jin Yuan period, learned from Zhang Zhong Jing to combine herbal medicine with acupuncture and moxibustion to treat a variety of diseases. For example, he created the formula *Jin Ling Zi San* (Melia Toosendan Powder) to treat "re jue xin tong" or heart pain that comes and goes without resolution for some time. In his book *Su Wen Bing Ji Qi Yi Bao Ming Ji* (Collection of Methods to Preserve Life in Accordance with the Principle

of Pathogenesis; Qi Transformation as Described in the Su Wen), Chapter 20 "Treatise on Heart pain", he describes how to use this formula: first moxa Taixi KID-3 and Kunlun BL-60 to reduce both exterior and interior, pulling the heat downward. Then take the *Jin Ling Zi San*. After the pain has stopped, take *Zhi Zhu Wan* (Immature Bitter Orange and *Atractylodes Macrocephala* Pill) to eliminate any lingering pathogens. Today we also use *Jin Ling Zi San* to treat Liver constrained by heat, manifesting as heart, chest, epigastric, abdominal and/or hypochondriac pain that comes and goes with a bitter taste in the mouth, red tongue with a yellow tongue coating, and a wiry and rapid pulse.

### Conclusion

Zhang Zhong Jing's acupuncture and moxibustion profoundly influenced later generations of practitioners and there is still much for us to learn. This paper is but a modest exploration of my own learning experiences, hopefully reminding and encouraging us to continue studying more about acupuncture and moxibustion in the *Shang Han Za Bing Lun*.

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