

Theoretical Construction and Application Logic of Traditional Chinese Medicine's Holistic Concept in the Field of Anti-Aging

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Abstract:

Against the backdrop of the vigorous development of the medical aesthetic industry worldwide, the market demand for anti-aging services and products has been continuously rising in recent years. People who pursue beauty have gradually changed their core demands from pursuing instant cosmetic effects to seeking treatment methods that combine high efficacy with high safety, which has brought new challenges to the entire medical aesthetic industry. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) boasts unique advantages in providing safe and reliable anti-aging therapies. The combination of time-honored classical TCM prescriptions and modern public anti-aging demands not only creates tremendous development opportunities for the TCM industry but also puts forward higher requirements for the inheritance and innovation of TCM theories and clinical technologies. Adhering to the four diagnostic methods of inspection, listening and smelling, inquiry and palpation, TCM practitioners analyze the etiology and pathogenesis of aging from a comprehensive perspective. On this basis, a complete theoretical model centered on zang-fu organs, meridians, qi and blood, body fluids, as well as skin and hair has been summarized and refined in clinical practice. TCM adopts the treatment principle of internal and external simultaneous regulation to improve the physical appearance of beauty seekers, and its ultimate goal is to help people achieve the optimal health state of "harmony of physique and spirit". Under this treatment system, beauty seekers can not only witness obvious improvements in facial appearance and physical looks but also feel the overall rejuvenation of physical functions. Meanwhile, various abnormal indicators in physical examinations can be effectively adjusted back to the normal range.

Keywords:

Holistic Concept, Cosmetic Anti-Aging, Internal and External Regulation

1. Introduction

With the continuous improvement of people's living standards and the steady growth of average life expectancy, modern people have set increasingly higher standards for physical health and external appearance. Public attention to anti-aging has gradually shifted from superficial facial maintenance to in-depth internal physical conditioning, and the concept of integrating internal recuperation with external beauty

enhancement has gained widespread recognition. In the rapidly evolving medical aesthetic sector, conventional cosmetic technologies such as injection and filling, laser therapy, and radiofrequency beauty treatment can no longer fully satisfy the needs of most consumers. These mainstream aesthetic methods have exposed obvious drawbacks in practical application, including unstable treatment outcomes, potential adverse reactions and side effects, as well as high service costs, which make a large number of beauty seekers hesitant to choose them.

As people grow older, many individuals will find some minor abnormal results in their routine physical examination reports, and these subtle health problems often become a long-term worry in daily life. Benefiting from the rapid development of internet and digital media, the unique value and advantages of TCM have been gradually discovered, understood and recognized by the general public. TCM performs exceptionally well in improving abnormal laboratory indicators and implementing systematic overall anti-aging intervention. As a result, the new concept of TCM-based anti-aging has gradually entered the mainstream vision of the public. Characterized by low economic cost, stable clinical efficacy and extremely low incidence of side effects, TCM anti-aging has quickly occupied an important position in the medical aesthetic market. Its core intervention approaches focus on regulating the operation of meridians and the circulation of qi and blood inside the human body, stimulating specific acupoints to accelerate local blood circulation, so as to fundamentally improve various aging manifestations. This set of therapies realizes holistic conditioning of the upper and lower parts of the body, and truly achieves the therapeutic effect of internal and external rejuvenation.

2. Connotation of Traditional Chinese Medicine's Holistic Concept and Its Anti-Aging Implications

2.1. Core Connotation of Traditional Chinese Medicine's Holistic Concept

The holistic concept is one of the most basic and core academic viewpoints of Traditional Chinese Medicine. This theory clearly points out that the human body is an indivisible, complete and organic unified whole. All tissues, organs and parts of the body maintain close and intricate connections in both physiological activities and pathological changes, and this theoretical feature also constitutes the most prominent distinctive advantage of TCM when compared with modern medicine. TCM has always adhered to the classic viewpoint that "what exists inside the body will inevitably manifest on the exterior". All external aging symptoms of the human body are essentially the external reflection of functional decline and pathological changes of internal zang-fu organs. Once any single zang-fu organ is damaged or its function declines, it will inevitably involve and affect other visceral organs. Conversely, all pathological changes of internal zang-fu organs will also present corresponding characteristic symptoms on the body surface.

To take chloasma, a common facial aging problem, as an example: liver qi stagnation is a key pathogenic factor leading to the formation of chloasma. If liver qi stagnation persists for a long time, the pathological state will further spread and damage the renal function. According to TCM theories, the vitality of the kidney manifests on the facial complexion in the form of skin color, and kidney disorders tend to lead to dark skin tone. Therefore, most patients suffering from chloasma present dark and sallow facial complexion in daily life, which is a typical embodiment of the internal pathology manifesting externally.

2.2. Projection of the Holistic Concept in the Field of Anti-Aging

External aging is essentially the external projection of the functional degradation of internal zang-fu organs. The degeneration and aging of skin, hair, muscle and other superficial tissues do not happen independently. Their health status is closely related to the running state of meridians and the sufficiency of qi and blood in the body. The circulation of meridians and the abundance of qi and blood are all regulated and dominated by the zang-fu organs. When the functions of internal zang-fu organs remain normal and orderly, qi and blood will be sufficient, meridians will be unobstructed, and the human body will show moist and tender skin, glossy and lustrous hair as well as full and firm muscles. On the contrary, if the zang-fu organs are dysfunctional, the body will suffer from insufficient qi and blood and blocked meridians, resulting in dry and rough skin, withered hair, flabby and sagging muscles and a series of aging problems.

When it comes to facial aging, the correlations between zang-fu organs and external manifestations become more obvious. The heart governs the blood circulation of the whole body, and its essence and vitality manifest on the face. When heart blood is insufficient, people will present dull and lusterless facial complexion. The liver is in charge of the ascending movement of qi. Once liver qi fails to flow smoothly, the blood circulation on the face will be obstructed, which easily induces chloasma that is difficult to cure radically. The kidney governs the metabolism of body fluid. Deficiency of kidney qi will lead to aggravated eye bags, facial edema and facial sagging. It is evident that the functional state of zang-fu organs directly determines the physical state and facial appearance of human beings, and all internal problems can be observed through external physical signs.

In accordance with the Five Elements theory in TCM, all things in nature follow the rules of mutual generation and mutual restraint, and the human body is also a complete organic whole operating under this rule. Functional disorder of a single zang-fu organ will gradually affect other related organs and form a vicious cycle. As time goes by, the overall physical functions will decline continuously, and the human body will show comprehensive aging and physical exhaustion.

3. Etiology and Pathogenesis of Aging

Traditional Chinese Medicine holds the view that the occurrence and development of aging are inseparably linked to the kidney. The classic medical work *Plain Questions · Ancient Primordial Discourse* elaborates on the complete aging process of human beings. It records that men take eight years as a life cycle unit, while women take seven years as a life cycle unit. The whole life process of human beings, including growth, prime, aging and decline, is all governed by the kidney. As people age, physical functions will reach a peak stage and then begin to decline gradually. If people fail to take good care of their body and maintain physical vitality in daily life, the aging process will be significantly accelerated. A series of symptoms such as tooth loss, hair shedding, listlessness and decreased sexual function will appear one after another.

These seemingly mild symptoms are all external manifestations of internal aging. For instance, premature ovarian failure will lead to the decline of estrogen level in female bodies. Such women will face more severe facial aging problems and obvious physical strength decline compared with their peers, which will bring adverse impacts on daily life, mental state and even family harmony. It is worth noting that people's

emotional state exerts a profound influence on physical health. Many common diseases including gastric disorders, breast diseases and thyroid diseases are closely affected by mood fluctuations. Various nodules related to these diseases will also gradually aggravate with the increase of age. Such symptoms are particularly prominent among female patients in clinical practice. In many cases, reasonable emotional adjustment can even produce better effects than drug treatment. With the popularization of the internet, we hope to help the public deeply understand their own physical conditions through online resources, learn to coexist harmoniously with their bodies, and take the initiative to carry out scientific health maintenance, instead of merely relying on external auxiliary cosmetic means to delay aging.

From the perspective of modern medicine, aging is a gradual pathological process caused by the continuous accumulation of damage to cells and molecules. It is closely associated with oxidative stress, telomere attrition and chronic inflammatory reactions in the body, and will greatly increase the risk of people suffering from various chronic diseases. The kidney is one of the organs with the highest energy consumption in the human body and is rich in mitochondria. With the advance of age, mitochondrial DNA will accumulate a large number of mutations, the biosynthesis function of mitochondria will decline, and the quality control capacity will also decrease continuously. These changes will lead to insufficient production of adenosine triphosphate (ATP) and excessive generation of reactive oxygen species (ROS). Excess reactive oxygen species will further damage mitochondria, intracellular proteins and DNA, thus forming an irreversible vicious cycle, which ultimately causes renal aging and chronic kidney disease (CKD).

Based on the above theoretical research, acupuncture and moxibustion stimulation on acupoints related to the kidney can achieve satisfactory anti-aging effects. This intervention method can restore the overall physical state to a youthful level fundamentally. Different from the cosmetic methods that only improve facial appearance superficially, TCM therapies realize internal and external simultaneous regulation, and solve aging problems from the root cause of physical decline.

4. Application Logic of Traditional Chinese Medicine's Holistic Concept in Cosmetology

In clinical anti-aging treatment, TCM mainly adopts the diagnostic thinking of “inferring internal conditions from external manifestations”. Practitioners judge the functional state of internal zang-fu organs, the sufficiency degree of qi and blood, and the patency of meridians by observing various external aging manifestations of patients, so as to formulate and implement holistic treatment plans. TCM practitioners identify the root causes of aging relying on the basic four diagnostic methods, without excessive dependence on modern medical testing instruments. We always advocate that beauty seekers should pay equal attention to internal physical health while pursuing external beauty. The core treatment idea is to improve local aging symptoms through overall physical conditioning. In the field of TCM cosmetology, we expect patients to obtain a positive mental state and healthy physical condition after treatment. Achieving the harmonious state of “harmony of physique and spirit” is the common pursuit of both medical practitioners and beauty seekers.

4.1. Four Diagnostic Methods

The four diagnostic methods are the basic means for TCM to judge physical conditions, including inspection, listening and smelling, inquiry, and palpation. Inspection mainly focuses on observing the patient's facial complexion, skin texture and condition, physical shape, hair state as well as tongue manifestation. Listening and smelling is to listen to the patient's voice, tone and speaking rhythm. Inquiry involves asking patients about their feelings of cold and heat, defecation and urination conditions. For female beauty seekers, practitioners will further inquire about their menstruation, sleep quality and daily diet. Palpation refers to feeling the patient's pulse, judging the depth, strength, rhythm and other characteristics of the pulse to assist syndrome differentiation.

4.2. Constitution Differentiation

Combined with the comprehensive results of the four diagnostic methods, TCM practitioners differentiate the physical constitution of each patient, and formulate exclusive targeted treatment plans following the principles of treatment based on individual differences, regional characteristics and seasonal changes. In clinical anti-aging practice, four typical constitutions related to aging are summarized as follows.

The first is qi deficiency constitution. In inspection, such patients present pale facial complexion with lusterless and dry skin, weak physical strength, hunchback and pale tongue with thin white coating. In listening and smelling, their voice is low and feeble, and they tend to pant after slight activities. In inquiry, patients often complain of cold limbs, fear of cold and difficult defecation. In palpation, the pulse is weak, soft or thready. The treatment principle for qi deficiency constitution is to tonify qi, nourish yin to assist yang, and adopt gentle and gradual tonification. Excessive tonification must be avoided to prevent the adverse reaction of inability to absorb tonic medicines due to deficient body state.

The second is yin deficiency constitution. Inspection shows flushed facial complexion, dry skin covered with fine lines, dry lips, red tongue with little coating or tongue fissures. In listening and smelling, patients speak rapidly and often feel dry mouth without foul breath. In inquiry, they have feverish sensation in palms and soles, vexation and heat in chest, night sweats, insomnia and frequent dreams. Female patients often suffer from scanty menstruation or advanced menstrual cycle. In palpation, the pulse is thready and rapid. The core treatment principle is to nourish yin and moisten dryness.

The third is blood stasis constitution. Typical manifestations in inspection include dull facial complexion, bluish purple lips, dark purple tongue with petechiae and ecchymoses, distended and bluish sublingual collaterals, dry hair prone to shedding or premature graying, as well as dark eye sockets. Their voice sounds low and deep. In inquiry, patients have fixed pain points in the body, menstrual blood clots and dysmenorrhea for females, accompanied by insomnia and irritability. The pulse is hesitant in palpation.

The fourth is phlegm-dampness constitution. Inspection presents sallow and greasy face, obese body with flabby abdomen and mild eyelid edema, and the tongue often has tooth marks. Patients speak in a low voice, and there is obvious phlegm sound in the throat. In inquiry, they have sticky defecation with a feeling of incomplete evacuation. Female patients have profuse white and thick vaginal discharge. The pulse is slippery in palpation. The treatment principle is to strengthen the spleen and eliminate dampness.

4.3. Formulation of Targeted Treatment Plans

For patients with qi deficiency constitution, the main external aging manifestations are facial sagging, weakened facial muscles and obvious facial wrinkles. Clinically, Buzhong Yiqi Decoction is used to tonify qi and boost yang, so as to elevate the overall physical function. Modern pharmacological studies have confirmed that Buzhong Yiqi Decoction can regulate the balance of immune function, optimize intestinal flora distribution and improve mitochondrial function. In terms of acupoint therapy, we select Zusanli, Zhongwan, Daheng, Guanyuan, Pishu and Shenshu to regulate the spleen and kidney simultaneously, and tonify both congenital and acquired foundation. This set of therapies can enrich facial qi and blood and stimulate the regeneration of collagen in facial tissues. For daily health care, patients can drink astragalus water for long-term conditioning.

Patients with yin deficiency constitution are characterized by lean face and intermittent facial flushing. The treatment adopts the therapy of nourishing yin and moistening dryness, and Shenqi Dihuang Decoction is the main prescription. This formula can nourish yin, tonify the kidney and replenish essence, and has remarkable curative effect on relieving shortness of breath, lassitude, dry mouth and dysphoria due to yin deficiency. Relevant studies prove that this decoction can inhibit the corresponding signaling pathways and the expression of inflammatory factors, improve renal microcirculation, alleviate renal fibrosis, inhibit renal cell apoptosis, repair damaged renal tissues, improve renal perfusion and filtration function, and optimize various renal function indicators. Combined with acupuncture on Taixi, Sanyinjiao and Zusanli, it can fully nourish yin, relieve dryness and moisten the skin.

Blood stasis constitution is manifested as dark facial complexion and persistent body pain. Bloodletting therapy at Dazhui acupoint is commonly used in clinic. Dazhui acupoint has the effects of unblocking the Governor Vessel, promoting qi movement, activating blood circulation and removing blood stasis, which can effectively improve poor blood circulation and qi stagnation and blood stasis, and relieve the hypercoagulable state of blood. Xuefu Zhuyu Decoction is also a classic prescription for activating blood and resolving stasis, which can dredge blood vessels and regulate the circulation of qi and blood comprehensively.

Phlegm-dampness constitution usually leads to prominent eye bags, swollen eye pouches, facial sagging and tongue with tooth marks. Phlegm-dampness is the combination of phlegm and internal dampness, also known as phlegm turbidity. It is formed by the stagnation and coagulation of body fluid due to body fluid metabolism disorders, and its generation is closely related to the dysfunction of the spleen, lung and kidney. Phlegm-dampness has the properties of heaviness, turbidity and stickiness, which will hinder the normal operation of qi, blood and body fluid in the body. Clinically, Shenling Baizhu Powder is used to strengthen the spleen and resolve dampness. Selected acupoints include Fenglong, Baihui, Zusanli, Sanyinjiao, Diji and Yinlingquan, which work together to invigorate the spleen, eliminate dampness and relieve facial edema.

In the process of formulating treatment plans, we also combine seasonal and regional differences and follow the classic principle of "nourishing yang in spring and summer, and nourishing yin in autumn and winter". Facial anti-aging is the most popular project in TCM cosmetic anti-aging. The combined application of Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture can effectively delay the aging process. Contemporary medical research has verified that skin aging will accelerate the overall

aging of the human body, and mitochondrial function is the key factor regulating skin aging. Acupuncture can delay aging and improve facial state by regulating mitochondrial activity, so as to restore youthful facial features. In the current fierce competition of the medical aesthetic industry, TCM cosmetology has shown prominent advantages, including less pain during treatment, low overall investment and stable and satisfactory curative effect.

5. Conclusion and Prospect

5.1. Main Conclusions

Centering on the core theme of the theoretical construction and application logic of TCM's holistic concept in anti-aging, this research conducts a systematic discussion from three dimensions: theoretical connotation, theoretical construction and practical application logic. The research draws the following main conclusions: The holistic concept provides a fundamental theoretical framework for TCM anti-aging, which is fundamentally different from the local intervention mode adopted by conventional cosmetic treatments. Guided by the holistic concept, TCM anti-aging takes human health as the core, focuses on internal physical conditioning, rather than simply pursuing superficial cosmetic changes.

The whole application process of the holistic concept in anti-aging can be divided into three standard steps: conducting comprehensive diagnosis through the four diagnostic methods, differentiating individual physical constitutions, and formulating and implementing personalized treatment plans. This complete treatment system can reduce the psychological burden of beauty seekers, help people pursue internal health while gaining external beauty, and realize the effect of beauty generated from inside out.

5.2. Research Limitations

First of all, the current treatment plans can be further refined and optimized according to the specific physical conditions of different patients. For example, blood stasis can be subdivided into multiple subtypes such as qi stagnation and blood stasis, cold coagulation and blood stasis, as well as yang deficiency and blood stasis. Corresponding targeted intervention measures can be formulated for different subtypes, so as to further improve the curative effect and realize the preventive treatment of diseases.

Secondly, the definition of aging in the research needs to be further refined and classified. In modern medical research, aging mainly refers to the overall decline of physical functions, while anti-aging in the cosmetic field pays more attention to eliminating wrinkles, lifting sagging muscles and improving facial complexion. It is necessary to carry out targeted research for different aging manifestations, analyze the root pathogenesis of each problem combined with TCM theories, and put forward targeted solutions.

Thirdly, this research is lack of objective clinical data support. In follow-up research, professional skin testing equipment such as VISA can be used to collect and record skin state data of patients before and after treatment. Through data statistics and comparative analysis, researchers can explore the internal mechanism of TCM anti-aging. Research papers based on real clinical data will have higher persuasion than simple literature reviews.

5.3. Future Research Directions

The first direction is to carry out clinical empirical research on the existing theoretical framework. Researchers can design clinical observation trials and controlled trials to verify the actual curative effect of combined therapies of oral Chinese herbal medicine and external treatment guided by the holistic concept, and inspect the clinical operability of the complete logical chain including diagnosis, intervention, efficacy evaluation and personalized treatment.

The second direction is to deepen the in-depth theoretical research on core concepts. Further sorting and standardizing the definitions of core concepts such as holistic concept, aging and anti-aging in the modern academic context, so as to enhance the academic standardization of TCM anti-aging theories and improve the understanding and communication efficiency in interdisciplinary research.

The third direction is to explore the in-depth integration mode of artificial intelligence and TCM anti-aging. Specific research contents include developing intelligent recognition systems for tongue manifestation and facial complexion based on deep learning algorithms, building intelligent recommendation models for TCM constitution identification and anti-aging schemes, and establishing a multi-modal health assessment platform guided by the holistic concept of TCM.

The fourth direction is to promote the integrated development of traditional Chinese and Western medicine. Combine modern medical laboratory test indicators with the curative effect evaluation system of TCM, set up unified efficacy evaluation standards for integrated Chinese and Western medicine anti-aging therapies, and form systematic guidelines to guide clinical treatment work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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