

From the Perspective of Yang Transforming Qi and Yin Forming Shape: The Traditional Chinese Medicine Treatment of Malignant Ascites

Pengcheng Ge¹, Yami Zhang^{2,*}

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

²Affiliated Hospital of Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine, Xianyang 712000, Shaanxi, China

*Correspondence Author

Abstract: *Malignant ascites (MA) is one of the most common complications in patients with advanced cancer, and its occurrence often indicates that the tumor has progressed to the terminal stage. Due to its significant impact on patients' quality of life and tolerance to subsequent treatments, it has received widespread clinical attention. Western medicine currently lacks effective treatment options for MA, and there are many limitations to clinical applications, resulting in unsatisfactory overall efficacy. MA falls under the category of "phlegm-dampness" in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), and there is currently a lack of a unified understanding of its pathogenesis and treatment protocols. Our team believes that the development of this disease is closely related to the imbalance of "yang transforming qi, yin forming form." This article will start from the theory of "yang transforming qi, yin forming form" to explore the pathogenesis and clinical treatment of MA in TCM, providing a reference for clinical syndrome differentiation and treatment, with the aim of improving clinical efficacy.*

Keywords: Malignant ascites, Yang transforming qi while yin constituting form, Traditional Chinese Medicine Treatment.

1. Introduction

Malignant ascites (MA) is a special manifestation of tumor metastasis and is one of the most common complications in patients with advanced malignant tumors, often resulting from malignant exudation after tumor peritoneal metastasis. It is commonly seen in patients with abdominal and pelvic malignant tumors such as ovarian cancer, colorectal cancer, and gastric cancer [1]. The occurrence of MA in patients with malignant solid tumors often indicates that the tumor has progressed to its terminal stage, with a slim chance of cure. Relevant data show that the 1-year survival rate after patients develop MA is less than 10% [2]. A large amount of malignant ascites can cause symptoms such as abdominal bloating, poor appetite, fatigue, and shortness of breath in patients, severely affecting their quality of life and tolerance to treatment [3]. In clinical practice, conventional Western medical treatments for MA include intraperitoneal infusion therapy combined with deep heat therapy, puncture and drainage, supplementation of colloids, control of crystal intake, diuretics, etc., which can only temporarily relieve the symptoms caused by MA and cannot completely control the formation of MA. Moreover, due to the generally poor physical condition of tumor patients, they cannot tolerate chemotherapy or targeted drug infusion therapy; long-term indwelling drainage tubes also carry the risks of bacterial infection and electrolyte disorders [4]. Numerous clinical studies have shown that traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has unique advantages and significant efficacy in treating MA, which can significantly improve patients' adverse symptoms and quality of life, and has the advantages of high patient acceptance, simplicity, and ease of use. To supplement the theoretical research on the treatment of malignant ascites in TCM, this article discusses based on the theory of "Yang Qi Hua, Yin Xing Cheng" from the "Huangdi Neijing Ling Shu".

2. The Theoretical Connotation of "Yang Qi Hua" and "Yin Xing Cheng"

The "Huangdi Neijing - Suwen - The Great Treatise on the Generation and Correspondence of Yin and Yang" states: "Accumulated Yang forms the sky, accumulated Yin forms the earth. Yin is tranquil while Yang is restless. Yang gives life, Yin nurtures growth. Yang destroys, Yin stores. Yang transforms into energy, Yin forms into substance. "Yang, being restless, possesses the attribute of movement and continuously generates the clear Yang and energy required for life activities; Yin, being tranquil, forms and continuously transforms into tangible substances such as the essence of water and grains, serving as the source of power for life activities. This passage emphasizes the dynamic and complementary roles of Yin and Yang in the cosmos and within the human body, highlighting how their interplay is essential for the maintenance of life and health. Yang is the envoy of the exterior when it is outside, and it is the envoy of the interior when it is within. The two energies of Yin and Yang are interdependent and mutually foundational to each other. The two energies of Yin and Yang are interdependent and mutually foundational. Yang energy vaporizes the tangible Yin, distributing it through the Triple Burner to the organs, meridians, limbs, and bones, achieving the purpose of moistening the body. Yin energy not only serves as the material basis for the transformation of Yang energy but also plays a role in generating Yang energy [5]. As stated in "Suwen: The Great Treatise on the Generation of Qi and the Correspondence to Heaven," when Yin is balanced and Yang is secure, the spirit is well-regulated; when Yin and Yang separate, the essence and energy are exhausted. Yang resides above and Yin resides below; the two energies interact and call upon each other, using each other to generate the energy needed by the human body, ultimately achieving a dynamic

balance between the transformation of Qi and the formation of form. Under physiological conditions, the two energies of Yin and Yang are abundant and can maintain a state of constant transformation and balance. In pathological conditions, the insufficiency of Yin and Yang energies leads to a situation where without Yang, Yin cannot be generated, and without Yin, Yang cannot transform. As a result, the body manifests pathological products such as phlegm and edema [6]. Therefore, the theoretical system of "Yang Qi Hua" and "Yin Xing Cheng" runs through the entire process of the occurrence, development, and resolution of diseases.

3. Understanding the Etiology and Pathogenesis of MA Disease Through the Concept of "from Yang to Qi, from Yin to Form"

Traditional Chinese Medicine has no record of a disease named 'MA'. If classified according to clinical manifestations and etiology and pathogenesis, it can be categorized within the scope of TCM's 'tympanites' or 'edema'. The etiology of MA is due to the long-term consumption of the body's vital energy by the tumor, which prevents the yang energy from transforming yin into a useful state, leading to the accumulation of yin into evil, and thus resulting in ascites. Ascites, being a tangible and substantial evil, further obstructs the transformation and circulation of yang energy, creating a vicious cycle. As the yang energy becomes increasingly deficient, the ascites continue to worsen. Yuan Juhua and others [7] believe that the pathogenesis of MA is rooted in yang deficiency, and the primary task should be to support and strengthen yang energy. By enriching the yang energy in the middle and lower burners, the transformation and circulation of body fluids will be improved, leading to the natural resolution of edema and swelling. Cai Yong and others [8] believe that most advanced cancer patients, after receiving conventional Western medical treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy, and infusions, have to some extent consumed their own yang energy, affecting the physiological functions of the viscera and leading to a situation where evil prospers and the body's righteousness declines, resulting in spleen and kidney yang deficiency, and the internal gathering of water retention. Wu Feize and others [9] conducted an analysis of the patterns of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) syndromes in malignant ascites through literature and monographs. They concluded that MA is a syndrome characterized by deficiency at its root and excess as its manifestation, with the spleen and kidney yang deficiency being the most common syndrome observed. Yao Shukun and others [10] believe that the fundamental pathogenesis of MA lies in the deficiency of yang energy. The stagnation of qi and the obstruction of blood flow are considered as secondary aspects of the pathogenesis. In clinical practice, it is important to focus on methods that both supplement and activate qi, as well as warm yang and activate blood circulation. This approach nurtures the vital energy and disperses water retention. Although there is currently a lack of a unified understanding of the pathogenesis, it is generally agreed that the root cause is the deficiency of yang energy, with the obstruction of water retention and blood stasis as secondary factors, characterizing the disease as fundamentally deficient with excessive manifestations. Our team, based on literature

analysis and clinical experience, believes that the pathogenesis of MA is highly consistent with the theory of "yang transforming qi, yin forming shape". The imbalance of "yang transforming qi, yin forming shape" is considered the primary pathogenesis of MA disease. In the context of MA, "insufficiency of yang transformation of qi" is considered the root of the disease, and "excess of yin formation" is seen as the knot of the disease. At the onset of MA, yang qi is deficient, leading to an insufficiency in the warming, qi-transforming, propelling, and exterior-protecting functions. The transformation of substances like qi, blood, and body fluids into the subtle essences that moisten the entire body is impaired, which exacerbates the burden on the spleen and stomach to transform and transport the essence of food and drink. This can lead to symptoms such as undigested food, abdominal bloating, and discomfort. Over time, as yang qi continues to decline, qi, blood, and body fluids fail to transform into nourishing essences, and the untransformed yin (qi, blood, body fluids) accumulates and stagnates, gradually forming pathogenic factors such as water retention, phlegm obstruction, and blood stasis. These factors, being turbid and yin in nature, accumulate in the abdomen, affecting the flow of qi and further obstructing the transformation of yin by yang, leading to symptoms such as chest tightness, wheezing, abdominal bloating, and edema, which indicate a worsening of the condition. This cycle of yang deficiency and the accumulation of pathogenic factors creates a vicious circle that intensifies the condition as yang qi becomes increasingly depleted, and the edema continues to worsen. As stated in "Suwen-Pingre Disease Theory": "Where evil gathers, its energy must be deficient." Turbid and yin pathogenic factors, when stagnating in the viscera, meridians, and blood vessels, lead to the impediment of qi and blood circulation, affecting the ascending of clear yang, and further damaging the function of "yang transforming qi," thus creating a vicious cycle.

4. Based on the Theory of "Yang Transforming Qi, Yin Forming Shape," We Explore the Clinical Treatment of MA

The imbalance of "yang transforming qi, yin forming shape" is the core pathogenesis of MA. In this context, "insufficiency of yang transformation of qi" is considered the root of the disease, while "excess of yin formation" is seen as the knot of the disease. Therefore, the core treatment method is to warm yang and promote diuresis, with warming yang and boosting qi as the foundation, and diuresis and blood-activating therapies as auxiliary measures. Formulating prescriptions and dispensing medicinals to harmonize yin and yang, ensuring yang energy is replenished and turbid yin is transformed.

4.1 Warming yang and boosting qi serves as the cornerstone. The text from "Yili Zhen Chuan" states: "Yang is the master of Yin; when Yang Qi circulates, Yin Qi is unobstructed." In the context of human life activities, Yang holds a commanding position, with both Qi and Yin requiring the transformation by Yang. The root of MA lies in the insufficiency of Yang within the body, where "Yang transforming Qi" is weak, and the Qi, blood, and body fluids cannot be transformed into the subtle substances that moisten the entire body, thus becoming tangible and substantial evils.

While consuming Yang, these evils also obstruct the warming and circulation of Yang [11]. The fundamental basis of qi transformation lies in yang, with yang playing a leading role. As Wang Bing stated, "Qi flows, hence blood flows". When yang energy is abundant, the circulation of blood is smooth. Qi deficiency is the initial stage of yang deficiency, hence the approach to MA treatment should focus on replenishing qi to assist in warming yang. The overall principle in treating MA is to regard warming yang and boosting qi as the cornerstone. The treatment primarily employs Si Ni Tang (Four Counter-Flow Decoction) and Zhen Wu Tang (True Warrior Decoction), with modifications made according to the symptoms. Si Ni Tang [12] is known as the top formula for supporting yang. The main ingredient, aconite, is very hot and spicy, warming and strengthening the primary yang, and dispersing yin cold. It is paired with dried ginger to warm the middle and expel cold, restoring yang and meridian flow. Roasted licorice serves to tonify the middle, moderate the intensity of the other ingredients, and harmonize the formula. Si Ni Tang is simple, powerful, and helps to warm cold limbs and rescue reversed yang. Zhenwu Tang is a fundamental formula for warming yang and promoting diuresis. The main ingredient, aconite, warms and supports kidney yang to transform qi and warms the spleen to regulate water dampness. Poria (Fuling) helps to eliminate dampness through urination. Atractylodes strengthens the spleen and dries dampness. Ginger assists in warming and dispersing, both aiding aconite in dispelling cold and working with Poria and Atractylodes to resolve water dampness. Bai Shao, as an auxiliary herb, serves four purposes: it promotes urination to remove dampness, soothes the liver to alleviate abdominal pain, prevents aconite's drying effects from harming yin, and allows for long-term treatment. Modern pharmacological research has confirmed that Si Ni Tang and Zhen Wu Tang can be used to treat conditions such as late-stage ovarian cancer ascites and malignant ascites, with effects including cardiogenic and diuretic actions, antioxidant stress, improvement of kidney function, and regulation of adrenal cortisol.

4.2 Diuretic and blood-activating therapies as auxiliary measures "Danxi's Heart Method on Phlegm" states: "Stagnation leads to accumulation, accumulation leads to phlegm, and phlegm mixed with blood stasis forms abscesses." Chronic diseases often have stasis, and strange diseases often have phlegm. The combination of phlegm and stasis easily obstructs, causing fluid retention. MA is often characterized by the coagulation of phlegm and blood stasis, with turbid yin and substantial evils accumulating and stagnating in the abdominal cavity, exacerbating the condition [13]. It also obstructs the flow of qi and blood, further affecting the function of "yang transforming qi," creating a vicious cycle that ultimately leads to intractable conditions. These are significant pathological products that should not be overlooked in the development of MA. For conditions with stagnation, dispersing methods are used. On the basis of warming yang and transforming qi to treat MA, auxiliary treatments such as diuresis, blood-activating, and phlegm-reducing are selected based on the different pathological products to eliminate turbid yin. Ling Gui Zhu Gan Tang and Ting Li Da Zao Xie Fei Tang can be used with modifications as needed. Poria (Fu Ling) as the main herb has three effects: it promotes diuresis to reduce water retention, aids the lungs to regulate water pathways, and strengthens the

spleen. When combined with Cinnamomum (Gui Zhi), it warms yang and controls water, while also warming the heart. Atractylodes (Bai Zhu) dries dampness and helps Poria to eliminate phlegm. Licorice (Gan Cao) tonifies the spleen and supports Cinnamomum to control water evils. Descurainia sophia seeds (Ting Li Zi) drain the lungs, relieve asthma, and reduce swelling, while jujube (Da Zao) supports the spleen and stomach, balancing the elimination of pathogens with the protection of healthy qi. For MA, which involves both deficiency and excess, warming and supplementing herbs like aconite (Fu Zi) and astragalus (Huang Qi) are also used to support yang. Pharmacological research has found that Ling Gui Zhu Gan Tang and Ting Li Da Zao Xie Fei Tang can reduce abdominal fluid, have anti-inflammatory effects, help restore kidney function, and regulate energy metabolism.

4.3 Regulating Yin and Yang is a continuous process throughout the treatment. The imbalance of "yang transforming qi and yin forming shape" is the core pathogenesis of MA. Gao Shishan said, "Yin and yang are the origins of change; yang turns into qi and yin into form." Therefore, we should focus on yang's role in transforming qi and maintain the balance between yang's qi transformation and yin's form creation. "Nourishing the source of fire to dissipate yin shadows" refers to the method of strengthening yang and fire to reduce the excess of yin, ensuring that yang can warm the body and prevent excessive yin from damaging the physique. As the disease progresses, yang deficiency accumulates, and yin cold congeals. Based on the principle of supporting yang, and according to the specific manifestations of yin pathologies in patients, diuretic, blood-activating, and phlegm-reducing therapies are used in conjunction with yang-supporting treatments to quickly eliminate the excessive yin pathologies. Regulating yin and yang is a continuous process throughout the treatment of MA. The formula combines Zhen Wu Tang with Ling Gui Zhu Gan Tang and other modifications. In Shen Qi Wan, Rehmannia and Cornus nourish kidney yin and secure kidney essence; Dioscorea and Poria strengthen the spleen and eliminate dampness, while Alisma drains water evils from the kidneys; Moutan clears the fire of the liver and gallbladder; Cinnamon twig and Aconite warm and supplement the true fire of life gate. Together, they achieve the effect of warming and supplementing kidney qi. When combined with Ling Gui Zhu Gan Tang, it enhances the effects of diuresis and blood-activating while warming yang. This maintains a dynamic balance of "yang transforming qi, yin forming shape," supplementing without retaining, and expelling pathogenic factors without injuring the body's integrity. This formula embodies the profound meaning of "seeking yang within yin" by the medical sage Zhang Zhongjing, which means "those who are good at supplementing yang must seek it within yin, so that yang is assisted by yin and biotransformation is endless."

5. Case Study Example

Patient X. He, Female, 47 years old, admitted to the hospital with the chief complaint of rectal cancer with liver metastasis and a large amount of ascites. Symptoms: Lethargic, sallow complexion, poor appetite, unbearable abdominal bloating, tenderness (+), palpitations, cold extremities, oliguria, constipation for 4 days, occasional flatulence, pale tongue with peeled coating, and a deep, thin, and weak pulse.

Abdominal ultrasound indicates: Multiple liver metastases, the largest in diameter is about 6 cm, and there is a large amount of ascites, with the deepest part being about 11.6 cm. Upright abdominal radiograph: A small amount of gas is seen in the abdomen, no air-fluid levels are seen, no free gas is seen below the diaphragm, and no abnormalities are seen on the abdominal radiograph. Traditional Chinese Medicine Diagnosis: Rectal cancer with multiple liver metastases, ascites (massive). Syndrome Differentiation: Spleen and kidney yang deficiency. Treatment should focus on warming yang, replenishing qi, promoting diuresis, and eliminating blood stasis, with additional methods to resolve stasis, disperse lumps, and reduce accumulation. The formula chosen is a combination of Si Ni Tang and Zhen Wu Tang with added ingredients. Specific prescription: Black prepared rhizome of Aconitum 12 g (pre-cooked), dried ginger 20 g, Poria 30 g, stir-fried Atractylodes macrocephala 30 g, white peony root 20 g, fresh ginger 6 slices, Lycopodium 10 g, Astragalus membranaceus 20 g, Plantain seed 15 g, Aucklandia 10 g, Amomum 8 g, roasted licorice 6 g. 7 doses, decocted in water, to be taken once daily, divided into two warm administrations in the morning and evening. Second consultation: Patient's urine volume has significantly increased, and abdominal bloating has markedly improved. However, the patient still has a poor appetite and feels weak and cold in the limbs. Given the initial therapeutic response to the combined Si Ni Tang and Zhen Wu Tang, 20g of *Codonopsis pilosula* and 15g of *Salvia miltiorrhiza* are added to the original prescription. After taking this modified prescription for 7 more doses, the patient's discomfort has greatly improved, and they are now able to get out of bed and move around.

Note: The patient was alert but very weak, with a dark complexion, swollen abdomen, and cold limbs. The pale tongue and thin white coating, along with the deep, fine, weak pulse, suggested severe kidney yang deficiency. This led to a failure in the "yang transforming qi" process, where vital substances like qi, blood, and body fluids turned into harmful yin, causing an excess of "yin forming." Over time, this obstructed qi flow, stagnated blood, and led to the formation of phlegm and blood stasis, which accumulated in the body's meridians, further impairing the "yang transforming qi" function and creating a vicious cycle. The TCM diagnosis was spleen and kidney yang deficiency with internal water retention. Treatment focused on warming yang, boosting energy, and promoting diuresis and blood activation. A combination of Si Ni Tang and Zhen Wu Tang was used to regulate the internal environment and remove pathological products. The initial prescription aimed to quickly relieve the patient's discomfort by warming yang and boosting energy while also promoting diuresis and blood activation. Later, *Radix Ginseng* was added to strengthen the spleen and moisten the lungs without causing excess fire, and *Salvia miltiorrhiza* was added to activate blood and remove stasis without harming the body. This maintained a dynamic balance, treating both the root and symptoms, and combining supplementation and purgation, leading to a significant improvement in the patient's symptoms.

6. Epilogue

MA is a common complication of malignant tumors, with complex pathogenesis, frequent clinical relapses, and poor

prognosis. Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has unique advantages in treating this disease. Patients with MA often present with complex clinical manifestations, typically involving a mix of deficiency and excess. This article analyzes the pathogenesis of the disease from the perspective of "yang transforming qi, yin forming shape," considering the dysfunction of this balance as the core pathogenesis. The overall treatment principle is to "warm yang and promote diuresis," with warming yang and boosting qi as the foundation and promoting diuresis and blood-activating therapies as auxiliary measures, adjusting yin and yang throughout the entire course of MA. Based on the clinical stages and manifestations of MA, TCM's diagnostic thinking and the flexibility to adjust treatments are fully utilized to improve clinical efficacy.

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