

Research Progress in Integrated Chinese-Western Diagnosis and Treatment of Childhood Asthma During Remission

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Abstract: *Pediatric bronchial asthma is a heterogeneous disorder characterized by chronic airway inflammation, bronchial hyperresponsiveness, airflow limitation, and airway remodeling. Its cardinal manifestations include recurrent wheezing, coughing, dyspnea, and chest tightness, typically exacerbating nocturnally. While most pediatric patients achieve adequate disease control through standardized clinical management, untreated cases may persist into adulthood, leading to progressive pulmonary function decline and potential mortality. Beyond conventional pharmacotherapies-including bronchodilators, corticosteroids, immunosuppressants, and antihistamines-integrating traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) significantly reduces attack frequency, alleviates clinical symptoms, improves lung function, and enhances therapeutic efficacy. This review synthesizes recent advances in TCM etiology, pathogenesis, and syndrome-differentiation-based treatment for pediatric asthma during remission, alongside contemporary Western medical perspectives on epidemiology, diagnostic criteria, pathogenic mechanisms, and pharmacologic interventions. Our objective is to provide a theoretical foundation and clinical guidance for optimizing therapeutic strategies and improving long-term prognoses.*

Keywords: Pediatric Bronchial Asthma, Remission Phase, Integrative Medicine, Clinical Management, Pharmacotherapy.

1. Introduction

Bronchial asthma, a prevalent chronic respiratory disorder in pediatric populations, is pathologically characterized by airway hyperresponsiveness, inflammatory cascades, and structural remodeling. Clinically, it manifests as recurrent wheezing, dyspnea, chest tightness, and cough [1,2]. According to the Chinese Guidelines for Pediatric Asthma Diagnosis and Management (2025) [3], China currently has 8.69 million children and adolescents affected by asthma. Epidemiological surveillance indicates that the prevalence among urban children aged 0-14 years was 3.02% in 2010, with a progressive upward trajectory observed in recent years [4]. This trend is attributed to multifactorial etiologies including genetic predisposition, environmental triggers, respiratory infections, and neuroregulatory dysfunction. Conventional Western pharmacotherapy employs bronchodilators, corticosteroids, immunosuppressants, antihistamines, and biologics. Within the framework of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), pediatric asthma corresponds to “Xiao Zheng” (wheezing syndrome) or “Chuan Zheng” (dyspnea syndrome). TCM pathogenesis stratifies the condition into acute exacerbation phases-primarily driven by wind pathogens compounded by cold, heat, or dryness-and remission phases involving deficiency patterns of the lung, spleen, and kidney systems. Therapeutic principles emphasize addressing branch aspects during acute exacerbations while targeting root causes in remission [5]. This review critically examines the etiopathogenesis of pediatric asthma during remission, proposing that syndrome-differentiation-guided TCM combined with Western interventions enhances pulmonary function, reduces adverse events, and improves clinical efficacy. Our synthesis aims to inform evidence-based therapeutic optimization and guide clinical decision-making for remission-phase management.

2. Advancements in Chinese Medicine Research for Pediatric Bronchial Asthma

2.1 Etymological Evolution of Disease Nomenclature

The Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon (Huangdi Neijing) documented respiratory manifestations such as “chuan he” (panting with gurgling) and “chuan ming” (wheezing sounds), establishing foundational concepts for later nosological identification of asthma, though without explicit disease nomenclature [6]. Zhang Zhongjing’s Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet (Jingui Yaolüe) specified acoustic characteristics during acute exacerbations: “Cough with dyspnea and throat gurgling like waterfowl-treat with Shegan Mahuang Decoction” [7]. The term “xiao chuan” (asthma) first appeared in Danxi’s Mastery of Medicine (Danxi Xinfa) during the Jin-Yuan dynasties, which systematically synthesized its etiology, pathogenesis, and therapeutic principles [8]. Yu Tuan’s Orthodox Medical Record (Yixue Zhengzhuàn) in the Ming Dynasty distinguished: “Xiao denotes audible whistling; chuan refers to labored breathing” [9]. By the Ming-Qing period, Secret Diagnostics for Essential Treatments (Mizhuan Zhengzhi Yaojue) described: “Wheezing disorders manifest as duck-like laryngeal stridor radiating to the chest and back, breathlessness, and orthopnea-often with latent predisposition triggered by environmental changes” [10], marking the maturation of the “su gen” (latent pathogenic factor) theory. Pediatric Insights (Youke Fahui) further noted: “Recurrent attacks with intercritical remission signify an entrenched disorder” [11], a view corroborated by Hou Shuping’s clinical observation of the condition’s refractory nature [12].

2.2 Etiology and Pathogenesis

Pediatric bronchial asthma during acute exacerbations follows

the pathogenesis pattern of “wind pathogen as the initiating factor with cold/heat/dryness as secondary manifestations”, where “wind-induced phlegm ascent” constitutes the core mechanism. In remission, the principal etiology involves “triple-deficiency interplay (lung-spleen-kidney)”. Therapeutic principles equally emphasize pathogen elimination and vital qi reinforcement: acute phases prioritize pathogen clearance, while remission focuses on constitutional fortification. As stated in *Spiritual Pivot·Essential Spirit* (Lingshu·Benshen): “Lung qi deficiency manifests as nasal obstruction and dyspnea; excess causes gasping with chest distension” [13]. Feng Xinran et al. attribute vulnerability to exogenous pathogens (cold/heat/dryness) to lung deficiency impairing defensive qi. This disrupts pulmonary dispersion and descent functions, leading to phlegm accumulation-consistent with *Systematic Differentiation of Warm Diseases·Pediatric Principles*: “Children’s delicate viscera and compromised defenses facilitate pathological transmission; their fragile constitution heightens susceptibility” [13]. Chen Mei et al. identify inherent pediatric spleen deficiency as impeding transportation-transformation, causing dietary injury and damp-phlegm generation through impaired qi activity. Subsequent earth-metal axis disruption weakens lung qi defenses, activating latent phlegm upon pathogen exposure-exemplifying the classical axiom: “Spleen generates phlegm; lung stores it” [14]. *Treatment Differentiation by Category·Dyspnea Syndromes* further clarifies: “Lung governs qi movement; kidney anchors qi reception. Their synergy enables harmonious respiration.” Thus, kidney deficiency causes failure in qi reception, preventing lung qi descent and yin-yang balance, resulting in recurrent wheezing [15]. Li Mengxue et al. demonstrate that spleen-kidney yang deficiency impairs fluid metabolism, provoking upward damp-phlegm reflux that disrupts assimilation and perpetuates asthmatic recurrence [15].

2.3 Chinese Medicine Therapeutics for Remission Phase

Internal therapy represents the primary modality in Chinese medicine for disease management. During remission, deficiency patterns predominate, most notably lung-spleen qi deficiency pattern, kidney yang deficiency pattern, and lung-kidney yin deficiency pattern. Constitutional regulation through syndrome-differentiation-guided herbal protocols constitutes the therapeutic cornerstone, targeting root-pathogenesis resolution to mitigate recurrence risk and restore functional equilibrium.

2.3.1 Classical Formula Therapeutics

For lung-spleen qi deficiency, evidence-based classical formulas include *Yupingfeng San* (Jade Screen Powder) and *Liujunzi Tang* (Six Gentlemen Decoction). *Yupingfeng San*, documented in *Danxi’s Mastery of Medicine*, comprises *Astragali Radix* (Huangqi), *Saposhnikovia Radix* (Fangfeng), and *Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma* (Baizhu) to fortify qi and consolidate the exterior. *Liujunzi Tang* from *Orthodox Medical Record* resolves dampness, transforms phlegm, and reinforces spleen qi. Dong Xiaobo’s randomized controlled trial (1:1 allocation) in pediatric asthma with lung-spleen deficiency demonstrated superior total response rate in the intervention group (conventional pharmacotherapy plus *Yupingfeng San*-*Liujunzi Tang* integration) versus controls

(Western drugs alone) after 3-month treatment. The formula significantly reduced eosinophil counts (EOS), tumor necrosis factor- α (TNF- α), immunoglobulin E (IgE), and TCM symptom scores-confirming anti-inflammatory efficacy and clinical improvement [16].

For spleen-kidney yang deficiency, *Jingui Shenqi Wan* (Golden Cabinet Kidney Qi Pill) from *Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet*-containing *Aconiti Lateralis Radix Praeparata* (Fuzi), *Rehmanniae Radix Praeparata* (Shudihuang), *Dioscoreae Rhizoma* (Shanyao), *Poria* (Fuling), *Alismatis Rhizoma* (Zexie), *Moutan Cortex* (Mudanpi), *Cinnamomi Ramulus* (Guizhi), *Zingiberis Rhizoma Recens* (Shengjiang), and *Jujubae Fructus* (Dazao)-warms kidney yang and regulates water metabolism. Jiang Zhuxiu et al. verified its airway anti-inflammatory effects in yang-deficient asthmatic rats via Notch1 signaling-mediated Th1/Th2 immune rebalancing [16]. Guo Xiang et al. further demonstrated its inhibition of ferroptosis through MUC5AC/EGFR pathway modulation in kidney yang deficiency models [17].

Regarding lung-kidney yin deficiency, Wang Ting et al. attribute its pathogenesis to chronic lung yin consumption disrupting metal-water mutual promotion (“mother-organ affliction involving offspring-organ” per five-phase theory), ultimately causing dual deficiency. Modified *Maiwei Dihuang Wan* (*Ophiopogon-Schisandra Rehmannia* Pill) is indicated to nourish yin, astringe lung qi, and promote renal reception [18].

2.3.2 Expert Empirical Formulas

Insights on Syndrome Management (Zhengzhi Xinde) distinguishes two etiologies for deficient-type dyspnea, one originating from lung-spleen systems [19]. Professor Huang Chunxia’s protocol for lung-spleen qi deficiency asthma integrates qi-fortification, phlegm-resolution, and blood-activation principles. Her formulated *Qiling Zhixiao Formula*-comprising *Astragali Radix* (Huangqi), *Poria* (Fuling), *Dioscoreae Rhizoma* (Shanyao), *Coicis Semen* (Yiyiren), *Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma* (Baizhu), *Saposhnikovia Radix* (Fangfeng), *Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium* (Chenpi), *fried Perillae Fructus* (Zisuzi), *Schisandrae Fructus* (Wuweizi), *Chuanxiong Rhizoma* (Chuanxiong), and *Glycyrrhizae Radix* (Gancao)-combined with montelukast chewable tablets demonstrated superior outcomes versus montelukast monotherapy. The intervention group exhibited significantly higher clinical response rates, reduced TCM symptom scores (individual and total), improved pulmonary function (FEV1, PEF), decreased peripheral eosinophil percentages, and enhanced Childhood Asthma Control Test scores, confirming therapeutic efficacy and safety [20]. While warming yang and replenishing qi constitutes the conventional approach for kidney yang deficiency asthma, Zhang Fengchun’s *Wenyang Yiqi Formula* significantly lowered TCM symptom scores, IL-4, and IgE levels post-treatment [21]. Ding Shan et al. further validated the anti-inflammatory and lung function-improving effects of *Bufei Yishen Pingchuan Formula* in pediatric asthma with lung-kidney yin deficiency during persistent status [22].

2.3.3 External Therapies

As asserted in Systematic Differentiation of External Therapies (Li Yue Pianwen): “The principles governing external therapies mirror those of internal treatments; their medicinals are identical-only application methods differ, yielding extraordinary therapeutic versatility.” Beyond oral pharmacotherapy, Chinese medicine emphasizes the adjuvant role of external modalities in pediatric asthma management [23]. Key techniques include acupoint application, acupuncture, tuina massage, cupping, guasha scraping, auricular acupressure, and catgut embedding. These approaches enhance treatment compliance, reduce pharmaceutical reliance, and improve quality of life through both targeted symptom intervention and spleen-stomach functional restoration [23].

3. Current Research Landscape in Western Medicine for Pediatric Bronchial Asthma

3.1 Epidemiological Profile

Pediatric bronchial asthma manifests significant heterogeneity across age groups, genders, geographic regions, and seasons. According to the 2013 Third National Urban Pediatric Asthma Survey [4], the overall prevalence among Chinese children aged 0-14 years was 3.02%, comprising classic asthma (2.72%) and cough-variant asthma (0.29%). Prevalence was markedly higher in males (3.51%) than females (2.29%), peaking in preschoolers (3-5 years: 4.15%) versus school-aged children (6-14 years: 2.82%) and infants (0-2 years: 1.77%) [24,25]. Significant regional variations were observed, with East China exhibiting the highest prevalence (4.23%) and Northeast China the lowest (2.00%). City-level analysis revealed Shanghai had the maximal rate (7.57%) while Lhasa showed the minimal incidence (0.48%) [24]. Sourangsu Chowdhury et al. further established significant positive correlations between traffic related NO₂/PM_{2.5} exposure and pediatric asthma incidence [26].

3.2 Diagnostic Criteria

Per the Chinese Guidelines for Pediatric Asthma Diagnosis and Management (2025) [27], diagnosis necessitates: (1) recurrent respiratory symptoms (wheezing, cough, dyspnea, chest tightness) with documented variability; (2) ≥ 1 risk factor (asthma family history, allergic comorbidity, or prior wheezing episodes); and (3) objective assessments including pulmonary function tests (e.g., FEV₁/FVC ratio), allergen sensitization panels, and fractional exhaled nitric oxide (FeNO) measurement. Pulmonary function testing serves as a cornerstone diagnostic tool for children >5 years, whereas clinical presentation and medical history corroboration remain primary for those <5 years due to physiologically immature lung development.

3.3 Pathogenic Mechanisms

Current evidence confirms asthma pathogenesis involves allergic predisposition, elevated IgE levels, and dysregulated Th2 cytokine production. Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) by Ji Wang et al. identified multiple susceptibility loci (e.g., FLG, ORMDL3, IL33, HLA-DR/DQ) while

demonstrating maternal mitochondrial inheritance of asthma risk through mtDNA variant-mediated immune dysregulation [28]. Nicole Akar-Ghibril et al. characterized the Th2-hyperresponsive phenotype in allergic asthma by elevated eosinophils (blood/sputum), increased fractional exhaled nitric oxide (FeNO), and upregulated periostin in adults [29]. Environmental triggers-including air pollutants, allergen exposure, and respiratory infections-damage airway epithelium, inducing release of epithelial-derived cytokines and growth factors that drive downstream inflammatory cascades [24,30-32]. Aberrant neurotransmitter release (histamine, serotonin, epinephrine) further contributes to bronchospasm and airway hyperresponsiveness [33,34]. Emerging evidence implicates insulin resistance [35], dyslipidemia [36], microbiota dysbiosis [34,37], and vitamin A/D deficiency [38] as significant risk modifiers.

3.4 Western Medical Management

Per the Chinese Guidelines for Pediatric Asthma Diagnosis and Management (2025) [39], remission-phase therapeutic objectives prioritize sustained clinical control, reduced exacerbation frequency, enhanced quality of life, and prevention of disease progression. Pharmacotherapeutic strategies encompass bronchodilators, corticosteroids, immunosuppressants, and antihistamines. Beyond conventional agents, novel biologics have emerged: Omalizumab attenuates mast cell (MC) activation and histamine release, while Tezepelumab disrupts the epithelial-MC axis to indirectly suppress mediator release (e.g., histamine), thereby mitigating airway hyperresponsiveness [34].

3.5 Integrated Chinese and Western Medical Therapy

3.5.1 Earth-Fortifying Metal-Generating Therapy Combined with Western Pharmacotherapy

Shen Na et al. conducted a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in 240 pediatric patients with lung-spleen qi deficiency asthma comorbid with allergic rhinitis [39]. Participants were equally allocated to control (montelukast + baseline treatment) and intervention groups (additional Yupingfeng San). The combination group demonstrated significantly reduced symptom severity, enhanced pulmonary function, and superior clinical response rates versus montelukast monotherapy. In a parallel RCT by Gao Guiling [40], 80 children with lung-spleen deficiency asthma in remission received either fluticasone propionate alone (control) or combined with Shenling Baizhu San (intervention). The integrated therapy group exhibited significantly decreased exacerbation frequency, shorter duration per episode, and greater TCM symptom score reduction, confirming synergistic therapeutic enhancement.

3.5.2 Origin-Fortifying Earth-Supporting Therapy Combined with Western Pharmacotherapy

Wang Yongjian et al. [41] enrolled 70 asthma patients with spleen-kidney yang deficiency (35 per group). Compared to conventional Western treatment alone, the integrated therapy group demonstrated lower TCM symptom scores, shorter time to symptom relief and cough resolution, and higher

pulmonary function parameters (PEF and FEV1). These outcomes confirm enhanced efficacy for spleen-kidney yang deficiency variant asthma. In Lu Qingfang et al.'s trial [42] with 80 similar patients, both salmeterol/fluticasone monotherapy and combination with Peiyuan Butu acupuncture improved FEV1/FVC, PEF, CRP, and IgE levels. The acupuncture group showed greater reductions in these parameters alongside improved clinical symptoms and pulmonary function, demonstrating significant anti-inflammatory effects.

3.5.3 Metal-Water Mutual-Promotion Therapy Combined with Western Pharmacotherapy

Lin Weijin [43] clinically compared inhaled budesonide monotherapy versus combined therapy with oral Maiwei Dihuang Wan plus budesonide in cough-variant asthma. The integrated approach demonstrated enhanced pulmonary function (elevated PEF and FEV1) and effective cough symptom resolution. In Xu Jing et al.'s trial [44] with 60 pediatric asthma patients exhibiting lung-kidney yin deficiency during chronic persistence, both groups received fluticasone propionate, while the intervention group received additional Zuogui Wan. The combination group showed superior outcomes across multiple parameters including reduced asthma attack frequency, shorter episode duration, and improved constitutional metrics.

4. Conclusion

Pediatric bronchial asthma prevalence in China continues its upward trajectory, driven by environmental and genetic determinants. Early diagnosis and intervention remain critical for improving quality of life. During acute exacerbations, Western medicine prioritizes bronchospasm relief, inflammation control, and ventilation improvement, while Chinese medicine focuses on addressing branch manifestations. In remission, conventional management employs corticosteroids to maintain disease control and prevent exacerbations, whereas Chinese medicine adopts a root-level approach through lung-spleen-kidney axis regulation via pulmonary fortification, spleen-tonification, and kidney reinforcement. This dual strategy reduces attack frequency and ameliorates clinical symptoms. Integrated therapy offers distinct advantages: it combines holistic regulation with personalized treatment guided by syndrome differentiation during remission, demonstrating superior safety profiles versus Western monotherapy. Clinical evidence confirms significant improvements in TCM symptom scores, inflammatory biomarkers, and pulmonary function parameters. Collectively, these findings position the combination of foundational Western pharmacotherapy with TCM-driven viscera functional regulation as a highly promising therapeutic paradigm for pediatric asthma remission management.

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