

# Mechanism of Action of Danzhi Xiaoyao San in Treating Breast Cancer with Liver Depression Qi Stagnation: Based on the Theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids

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**Abstract:** *The theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids represents a significant innovation in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) theory. The Mysterious Mansion serves as the gateway for the transportation of qi and fluids within tissues and organs, and its proper opening and closing are crucial for the distribution of qi, blood, and essential nutrients throughout the body. In TCM, breast cancer falls under the categories of "stone carbuncle" (shi yong), "breast rock" (ru yan), and "breast chestnut" (ru li). Analyzed through the lens of the Mysterious Mansion theory, its core pathogenesis is Liver Depression Qi Stagnation and obstruction of the Mysterious Mansion. The therapeutic principle, therefore, should be to soothe the liver to resolve depression and to open the obstructed Mysterious Mansion. Danzhi Xiaoyao San, a classical formula that concurrently unblocks and harmonizes, regulates both the liver and spleen, and addresses both qi and blood, embodies this principle. Its effects of "dredging, soothing, and tonifying" align with the fundamental principles for treating breast cancer and resonate with the therapeutic characteristic of the Mysterious Mansion, which "functions optimally when unobstructed." Consequently, the theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids provides a vital theoretical foundation and clinical guidance for the application of Danzhi Xiaoyao San in treating breast cancer with Liver Depression Qi Stagnation.*

**Keywords:** Theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids, Danzhi Xiaoyao San, Breast Cancer with Liver Depression Qi Stagnation, Traditional Chinese Medicine Therapy, Soothing the Liver to Resolve Depression.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Epidemiology of Breast Cancer and Current Status of Western Medicine Treatment

Breast cancer ranks among the most prevalent and lethal malignancies in women, occupying the top position in the incidence rate of all female cancers and accounting for 7% to 10% of systemic malignant tumors [1]. It is characterized by high invasiveness, rapidly worsening pathological features, and a relatively low anticipated survival rate. In its early stages, breast cancer is often inconspicuous, potentially presenting with localized manifestations such as nodules or masses within the breast, bloody nipple discharge, and swollen axillary lymph nodes [2]. Modern treatment modalities have evolved from traditional surgical resection, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy towards more precise targeted therapy and immunotherapy, substantially increasing the cure rate and overall survival of patients [3]. Statistics indicate that the five-year survival rate for patients with early-stage breast cancer has reached nearly 90% or higher. However, despite these remarkable therapeutic improvements, numerous challenges persist, including the risks of developing resistance to chemical or radiotherapeutic treatments, as well as cancer recurrence and metastasis [4].

### 1.2 TCM Understanding of Breast Cancer and the Introduction of the Theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) posits that the pathogenesis of breast cancer is closely associated with functional dysregulation of the liver, spleen, and kidney, and

is linked to patterns such as Liver Depression Qi Stagnation, spleen deficiency with phlegm-dampness, thoroughfare and conception vessel disorder, internal stagnation of toxic stasis, and dual deficiency of qi and blood [5].

The theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids represents a major innovation in classical TCM. The Mysterious Mansion refers to the interstices and portals within all tissues and organs responsible for the transportation of qi and fluids. The proper opening and closing of the Mysterious Mansion is essential for ensuring the distribution of qi, blood, and essential nutrients throughout the body.

In TCM, breast cancer is categorized under terms such as "stone carbuncle" (shi yong), "breast rock" (ru yan), and "breast chestnut" (ru li). Analyzed from the perspective of the Mysterious Mansion's qi and fluids, its core pathogenesis is identified as Liver Depression Qi Stagnation and obstruction of the Mysterious Mansion. Consequently, the therapeutic principle should consistently adhere to soothing the liver to resolve depression and opening the obstructed Mysterious Mansion [6].

Danzhi Xiaoyao San is a classical formula guided by the general principle of concurrently unblocking and harmonizing, regulating both the liver and spleen, and addressing both qi and blood. Its therapeutic effects of "dredging, soothing, and tonifying" align with the fundamental principles for treating breast cancer and, simultaneously, conform to the therapeutic characteristic of the Mysterious Mansion, which "functions optimally when unobstructed" [7]. Therefore, the theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids holds significant clinical relevance for the application of Danzhi Xiaoyao San

in treating breast cancer with Liver Depression Qi Stagnation.

## 2. Origin and Development of the Theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids

### 2.1 Origin of the Theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids

The term “Mysterious Mansion” (xuan fu) can be traced back to its earliest origins in Huangdi Neijing • Suwen (Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine • Basic Questions). The chapter “On Water and Heat Points” states: “What is referred to as the Mysterious Mansion is the sweat pore” [8], indicating that the Mysterious Mansion was initially equated with the sweat pore, its connotation being relatively specific and clear.

Etymologically, “Xuan (玄)” conveys a meaning of profundity and remoteness. It describes something dark yet with a reddish hue, symbolizing secrecy and that which is covered. “Fu (府)” carries three meanings: a repository, a place of convergence, and refers to the zang-fu organs [8, 9]. Since sweat belongs to bodily fluids (water), the color of water is xuan (mysterious/dark), and the sweat is what is stored and converges there, it is therefore named the “Mysterious Mansion” [9].

In summary, the Mysterious Mansion conceptually denotes microscopic structures that are, in terms of architecture, profound, subtle, and ubiquitous throughout the body. In terms of function, they transport the essential qi, blood, and body fluids, distributing them to all tissues and organs. They are also known as the qi pores, qi gates, interstices (couli), and the “gate of the ethereal and corporeal souls” (guishenmen) [10].

### 2.2 Development of the Theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids

Liu Wansu, a renowned physician of the Jin-Yuan periods, significantly expanded the concept in his work Suwen Xuanji Yuanbing Shi (The Mysterious Mechanism of the Basic Questions and the Original Patterns of Disease). He stated: “The Mysterious Mansion exists in all things. It is present in human zang-fu organs, skin and hair, muscles, membranes, bones, marrow, nails, and teeth, and indeed in all things under heaven. It is the pathway and gateway for the inflow and outflow, ascent and descent of qi.” [11]

He further elaborated in the chapter “Six Qi as Disease”: “The sweat pores on the skin are the orifices that discharge qi and fluids. They are also called the ‘qi gates’ (气门, qimen), as they are the gates for discharging qi; they are called the ‘interstices’ (腠理, couli), as they are the fine textures and pathways through which qi and fluids move out; they are called the ‘gate of the ethereal and corporeal souls’ (鬼神门, guishenmen), symbolizing the gate to the unseen; they are called the ‘Mysterious Mansion’ (玄府, xuanfu), denoting a profound and subtle dwelling. Indeed, the Mysterious Mansion exists in all things... it is the pathway and gateway for the movement of qi.” [12] By adopting the old term “Mysterious Mansion,” Liu Wansu proposed a completely

new structural and broad conceptualization.

In Liu Wansu's theory, the Mysterious Mansion refers to extremely fine and minute channels distributed throughout the entire human body, both internally and externally. These are pores similar to sweat pores. Due to their microscopic nature and ubiquitous distribution, they serve as the connecting points and terminal ends of various pathways for qi, blood, and body fluids, such as the meridians, collaterals, triple energizer (sanjiao), and interstices (couli) [13].

The text states: “Qi is the master of form, the mother of spirit, the foundation of the three fundamental realms (Heaven, Earth, and Man), the origin of all things, and the manifestation of the Dao. Thus, Master Yuanyang, explaining the Classic of Clarity and Tranquility, said: ‘The Great Dao is formless; without qi, it is insufficient to nurture and grow all things.’ Hence, through qi transformation, things are generated; through qi change, things are altered; when qi is abundant, things are robust; when qi is weak, things decline; when qi is harmonious, things are peaceful; when qi is disordered, things become diseased; when qi is exhausted, things die.” [14] “The Classic states: ‘If the movements of exit and entry cease, then the divine mechanism is extinguished; if the activities of ascent and descent stop, then the foundation of qi becomes imperiled.’ Therefore, without exit and entry, the processes of generation, growth, transformation, gathering, and storage cannot occur. Thus, ascent, descent, exit, and entry are present in all entities. The human abilities of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind, and consciousness to function are all due to the free and smooth movement of ascent, descent, exit, and entry.” [15] This precisely reflects the physiological functions of the Mysterious Mansion in circulating qi and fluids, infiltrating and irrigating qi and blood, operating the divine mechanism, and regulating yin and yang [15].

Liu Wansu further introduced the concept of “qi and fluids” (qiye). He indicated that “qi and fluids” comprise the innate essence (kidney essence) and the acquired essence derived from the spleen and stomach's digestion and absorption. This includes essence, qi, blood, body fluids, and defensive qi, all of which have nourishing, warming, mobilizing, and moistening effects. It also encompasses various products of bodily metabolism. The Mysterious Mansion “functions optimally when unobstructed.” Only when the Mysterious Mansion is open and free-flowing can essential substances such as essence, qi, blood, body fluids, and defensive qi, propelled by qi dynamics, pass through the Mysterious Mansions distributed across the body. They are then distributed via the triple energizer to the zang-fu organs, limbs, bones, meridians, and interstices, fulfilling their roles of nourishment, warming, mobilization, and moistening. Subsequently, metabolic waste products are discharged from the body through the opening and closing of the Mysterious Mansion, via pathways such as sweat and urine [16].

If various pathogenic factors lead to obstruction and stagnation of the Mysterious Mansion, resulting in abnormal opening and closing, the metabolism of essence, qi, blood, and body fluids within the body becomes dysregulated. These substances cannot be distributed to nourish the entire body under the propelling action of qi, and metabolic wastes cannot be expelled. Pathological products such as water, dampness,

phlegm, and stasis accumulate in the body's tissues and organs, further aggravating the stagnation of the Mysterious Mansion and forming a vicious cycle. This ultimately leads to the occurrence of disease [17]. Therefore, in clinical treatment, the fundamental principle should be to open the obstructed Mysterious Mansion and promote the free flow of qi, blood, and body fluids [17].

### 3. Analysis of the TCM Pathogenesis of Breast Cancer

#### 3.1 Etiology and Pathogenesis of Breast Cancer in TCM

Breast cancer falls under the categories of “stone carbuncle” (shi yong), “breast rock” (ru yan), and “breast chestnut” (ru li) in TCM. It was first documented in Zhouhou Beiji Fang (Emergency Formulas to Keep Up One's Sleeve) by Ge Hong of the Jin Dynasty [18]. The Furen Liang Fang Da Quan (Complete Collection of Effective Formulas for Women) from the Song Dynasty records: “...This results from liver and spleen depression and rage, as well as deficiency and depletion of qi and blood. It is named ‘breast rock’ (ru yan).” This marks the first proposal of the disease name “breast rock.”

The Yi Zong Jin Jian (Golden Mirror of the Medical Tradition) states: “The pattern of breast rock... all originates from depression and failure to relax, or an impatient nature with frequent anger, which damages the liver and spleen.” This passage identifies the initial cause of breast cancer as emotional extremes—either heightened or eading to impairment of liver and spleen function.

Master Chen in Wai Ke Zheng Zong (The Orthodox Manual of Surgery) provided a more detailed description of the symptoms of breast rock: “Initially, it is like a bean, gradually becoming the size of a chess piece. For six months, a year, two, or three years, there is neither pain nor itching. It gradually enlarges, and only then does pain begin. Once pain appears, there is no relief. In time, the swelling resembles piled-up millet grains or an upturned bowl. The color becomes purplish, the qi becomes foul. Gradually, it ulcerates. The deeply eroded areas are like rocky caves; the protruding parts are like blooming lotus flowers. The pain connects to the heart. If it bleeds, the discharge is foul-smelling. At this time, the five zang-organs are all in decline. It is named ‘breast rock’” [19].

#### 3.2 The Connection Between the Theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids and the Pathogenesis of Breast Cancer

According to the TCM theory of meridians, the nipple pertains to the Liver Meridian of Foot-Jueyin, while the breast itself pertains to the Stomach Meridian of Foot-Yangming. Although the disease is located in the breast, its pathogenesis is closely related to the liver, spleen, and stomach. The pathological characteristic is a deficiency in origin and excess in manifestation. The deficiency in origin refers to qi and blood depletion and thoroughfare (chong) and conception (ren) vessel disorder resulting from impaired qi dynamics. The excess in manifestation refers to the stagnation of turbid phlegm, obstruction by stasis-toxins, and their accumulation into a mass [1].

The Mysterious Mansion serves as the portal through which all zang-fu organs distribute qi, blood, and body fluids. If the Mysterious Mansion is obstructed, qi, blood, and body fluids cannot nourish the body's tissues and organs, thereby predisposing them to disease. Master of Traditional Chinese Medicine Zhou Zhongying posits that liver qi depression and binding is the key to the occurrence and development of breast cancer [20]. If emotional depression or rage damages the liver, it impairs the liver's free-flowing function, leading to stagnant qi dynamics. This stagnation fails to propel the movement of qi, blood, and body fluids. Consequently, on one hand, the Mysterious Mansion loses its nourishment, becomes weak in opening and closing, and falls into obstruction. On the other hand, the stagnant qi dynamics cannot drive the expulsion of metabolic waste products. This leads to the obstruction of the portals for tissue metabolism by pathogenic factors such as dampness, turbid phlegm, and stasis-toxins, further aggravating the obstruction of the Mysterious Mansion and forming a vicious cycle.

The theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids, in the context of breast cancer progression, bears analogy to the function of the mammary ducts. The Mysterious Mansion can be likened to the innumerable mammary ducts within the breast. If metabolic waste products from the surrounding breast tissues cannot be discharged promptly, they accumulate within these mammary ducts, forming the initial breast nodules. As turbid phlegm and stasis-toxins continue to infiltrate the basement membrane of the ducts and proliferate extensively into the breast stroma, a tumor gradually forms into a mass and grows rapidly. This can even lead to local ischemia, necrosis, and concurrent infection within the mass.

In summary, Liver Depression Qi Stagnation and obstruction of the Mysterious Mansion constitute the pivotal pathogenesis in the occurrence and development of breast cancer.

### 4. Mechanism of Action of Danzhi Xiaoyao San

Danzhi Xiaoyao San originates from Neike Zhaiyao (Summary of Internal Medicine) by Xue Ji in the Ming Dynasty [21]. It is composed of Moutan Cortex (tree peony bark; mudanpi), Gardeniae Fructus (gardenia fruit; zhizi), Poria (hoelen; fuling), Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma (white atractylodes rhizome; baizhu), Paeoniae Radix Alba (white peony root; baishao), Angelicae Sinensis Radix (Chinese angelica; danggui), Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (licorice; gancao), and Bupleuri Radix (Chinese thorowax root; chaihu). This formula possesses the effects of soothing the liver to resolve depression, fortifying the spleen and boosting qi, and nourishing the blood and softening the liver. Its actions of “dredging, soothing, and tonifying” align with the therapeutic characteristic of the Mysterious Mansion, which “functions optimally when unobstructed.”

The pathogenesis of breast cancer primarily involves Liver Depression Qi Stagnation, thoroughfare and conception vessel disorder, spleen deficiency with dampness encumbrance, obstruction by turbid phlegm, and deficiency of qi and blood. Among these, Liver Depression Qi Stagnation is the most critical. Danzhi Xiaoyao San acts by soothing the liver and moving qi, as well as tonifying qi and blood to nourish the Mysterious Mansion, thereby preventing its

inability to open and close properly. Furthermore, it fortifies the spleen to dispel dampness and transforms turbidity to expel stasis, thereby clearing metabolic waste products and treating the obstruction and stagnation of the Mysterious Mansion. Therefore, Danzhi Xiaoyao San can be used to treat breast cancer with Liver Depression Qi Stagnation through the following pathways: “soothing the liver, resolving depression, and moving qi to open the obstructed Mysterious Mansion” and “fortifying the spleen, dispelling dampness, and expelling stasis to open the obstructed Mysterious Mansion” [22].

#### 4.1 Soothing the Liver, Resolving Depression, and Moving Qi to Open the Obstructed Mysterious Mansion

The liver is a rigid organ, governing ascending and outgoing movements. It corresponds to wood in the five-phase theory. The nature of wood is bending and straightening, and liver qi possesses the wood attributes of harmonious free-flowing, extension, and soothing. The physiological function of the liver is governing free coursing. Liver qi inherently prefers free flow and avers depression and stagnation. The ascending and effusing nature of liver qi refers to its physiological characteristic of rising upward and spreading outward to regulate qi dynamics. This is analogous to the growth, extension, and vibrant vitality of trees in spring; liver qi embodies the properties of free-flowing and soothing, ascending and generating, and full of vitality.

If emotional depression, worry, or anxiety cause liver qi to lose its free flow, qi dynamics become stagnant, and the ascending, descending, exiting, and entering movements become dysfunctional. This leads to obstruction of the Mysterious Mansion. Consequently, qi, blood, and body fluids cannot be distributed, and the breast loses its nourishment, leading to disease. On the other hand, impaired qi dynamics lose the capacity to propel the movement of substances. This results in the failure to expel metabolic waste products or internal pathogenic factors such as dampness, stasis, and toxins from the body, causing them to stagnate within the Mysterious Mansion. This stagnancy impedes blood circulation, leading to local malnourishment of the breast tissue. Furthermore, the accumulation of damp-turbidity, stasis, and toxins within the breast ducts gradually forms breast nodules, which can further develop into breast cancer.

In Danzhi Xiaoyao San, Bupleuri Radix (Chaihu) is highly effective for soothing the liver and resolving depression, thereby regulating qi dynamics and restoring the functions of ascending, descending, exiting, and entering. Paeoniae Radix Alba (Baishao), sour and sweet, nourishes the blood, regulates menstruation, enriches yin, softens the liver, and relieves pain. Angelicae Sinensis Radix (Danggui), acrid and warm, nourishes and invigorates the blood. The combination of Danggui and Baishao with Chaihu accommodates the liver's desire for free flow, vents depressed and constrained qi, thereby soothing the liver and fortifying the spleen. This, in turn, opens the obstructed Mysterious Mansion and regulates qi dynamics [23].

#### 4.2 Fortifying the Spleen, Dispelling Dampness, and Expelling Stasis to Open the Obstructed Mysterious

#### Mansion

The physiological relationship between the liver and spleen is primarily manifested in the mutual dependence between free coursing and transportation/transformation, and the coordination between blood storage and blood governance. Liver qi stagnation disrupts the spleen and stomach's ascending and descending functions, impairing the efficient digestion and absorption of food and the transportation of essential nutrients. Simultaneously, as the spleen and stomach are the source of acquired qi and blood, their dysfunction leads to qi and blood deficiency. This results in the Mysterious Mansion being undernourished, weak in opening and closing, and thus obstructed. Furthermore, liver depression invading the spleen (wood over-restricting earth) leads to spleen qi deficiency and weakened transportation and transformation, causing water and fluids to accumulate. Stagnant liver qi transforming into fire scorches fluids, producing phlegm. Phlegm-dampness and stasis-toxins obstruct the Mysterious Mansion, leading to its blockage and further exacerbating the impairment of qi dynamics, forming a vicious cycle.

In Danzhi Xiaoyao San, Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma (Baizhu), Poria (Fuling), and Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (Gancao) boost qi and fortify the spleen. This approach firstly embodies the principle from Jin Gui Yao Lue (Synopsis of Prescriptions from the Golden Chamber): “When treating liver disease, know that the liver can transmit to the spleen; therefore, one should first fortify the spleen”—strengthening earth (spleen) to prevent invasion by wood (liver). Secondly, because “the spleen and stomach are the source of qi and blood generation,” strengthening them aids the production of nutrient qi and blood. Moutan Cortex (Danpi) clears heat and cools the blood, thus clearing latent fire from the blood. Gardeniae Fructus (Zhizi) drains fire, relieves vexation, and guides heat downward. The combination of these two herbs is used to pacify the fiery heat, preventing the scenario where liver depression transforms into fire, which scorches fluids and generates phlegm.

The formula as a whole adheres to the principles from Huangdi Neijing (Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon): “For wood depression, promote its free flow” and “For fire depression, dissipate it” [24]. Together, the ingredients achieve the effects of soothing the liver and fortifying the spleen, clearing heat and nourishing the blood, dispelling dampness and expelling stasis. Consequently, liver depression is resolved, spleen deficiency is fortified, pathogenic dampness, turbid phlegm, and static blood are dispelled, and the generation and transformation of qi and blood are restored. The Mysterious Mansion becomes open and free-flowing, allowing it to be nourished by qi, blood, and body fluids, and enabling metabolic waste to be discharged. This leads to the dissipation of local breast nodules and cancerous masses.

### 5. Exemplifying Case Study

#### 5.1 Case Presentation

- Name: Ms. Zhang
- Sex: Female
- Age: 46 years old

- **First Visit:** August 26, 2023
- **Chief Complaint:** Postoperative status of 5 years after breast cancer resection.
- **History and Presenting Symptoms:** The patient underwent a total mastectomy of the right breast for breast cancer 5 years ago and has been consistently taking Tamoxifen postoperatively. In the last two to three months, she experienced distension, oppression, and pain in the (remaining) breast area. These discomforts worsened with fatigue or anger. Physical examination revealed slight distension and fullness of the right breast with notable tenderness. She also reported a dry and bitter mouth, dream-disturbed sleep easy to wake, and poor sleep quality. Her appetite was fair. Tongue presentation: pale-purplish tongue body with thin coating. Pulse presentation: wiry pulse.

## 5.2 Treatment Plan and Outcome

- **Western Medicine Diagnosis:** Postoperative status of right breast cancer.
- **TCM Diagnosis:** Breast Rock (Ru Yan) (Liver Depression Qi Stagnation pattern)
- **Therapeutic Principle:** Soothe the liver to resolve depression, clear heat, and regulate menstruation.
- **Prescription:** Modified Danzhi Xiaoyao San.
- **Herbal Composition:**
  - Moutan Cortex (Mudanpi): 30g
  - Agrimonae Herba (Xianhecao): 30g
  - Platycodonis Radix (Jiegeng): 18g
  - Astragali Radix (Huangqi): 30g
  - Codonopsis Radix (Dangshen): 12g
  - Bupleuri Radix (Chaihu): 10g
  - Gardeniae Fructus (Zhizi): 30g
  - Paeoniae Radix Alba (Baishao): 15g
  - Angelicae Sinensis Radix (Danggui): 30g
  - Atractylodis Macrocephala Rhizoma (Baizhu): 6g
  - Poria (Fuling): 9g
  - Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (Gancao): 6g
- **Dosage and Administration:** 14 doses. Prepare one dose daily by decoction in water twice, divided into two portions for morning and evening intake.
- **Second Visit:** September 9, 2023.
- **Outcome:** Breast distension and pain were markedly reduced. The dry and bitter mouth resolved. Diet and appetite were good.
- **Prescription:** Continued administration of the original formula for 14 doses, with the same decoction and administration method as before.

## 6. Conclusion

In recent years, the prevalence of breast cancer has shown a persistent increasing trend. Breast cancer exhibits highly complex morphology and numerous types. When cancer cells grow within the ducts and fill the ductal lumen, causing duct expansion, it is known as ductal carcinoma *in situ*; if they further break through the duct, they form invasive tumors. The internal ductal system of the breast is analogous to the structure of the Mysterious Mansion in the TCM theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids, as both are structures within tissues responsible for distributing nutrients and excreting metabolic waste. The Mysterious Mansion serves as

the gateway for the movement of essential substances like qi, blood, and body fluids in the human body. Only when the Mysterious Mansion opens and closes appropriately can nutrients be delivered throughout the body, preventing the accumulation of pathogenic factors such as damp-turbidity, stasis, and toxins in local areas, thereby averting disease onset. Qi and fluids, the nourishing substances for the entire body, are transported to all parts under the combined actions of a patent and free-flowing Mysterious Mansion, the free-flowing function of the liver, and the transportation-transformation function of the spleen and stomach.

In TCM, breast cancer is also called "Breast Rock" (Ru Yan). If emotional regulation fails, leading to liver qi stagnation transforming into fire, which scorches fluids into phlegm, and prolonged phlegm accumulation transforms into stasis-toxins causing obstruction, a hard mass eventually forms. Abnormal opening and closing of the Mysterious Mansion arises not only from obstruction of its portals by Liver Depression Qi Stagnation but also includes impaired free-opening and closing due to Thoroughfare and Conception Vessel disorder and qi-blood deficiency, as well as liver depression invading the spleen. The latter leads to spleen deficiency and dysfunctional transportation-transformation, resulting in water-fluid metabolism disorders and the local stagnation forming phlegm-turbidity and stasis-toxins. In summary, the core pathogenesis of breast cancer is Liver Depression Qi Stagnation and obstruction of the Mysterious Mansion [25].

Therefore, the treatment should consistently adhere to the fundamental principle of soothing the liver to resolve depression and opening the obstructed Mysterious Mansion throughout the entire therapeutic process, while concurrently fortifying the spleen to dispel dampness, tonifying qi and blood, and eliminating phlegm and resolving stasis. Danzhi Xiaoyao San is a classical formula guided by the general principle of concurrently unblocking and harmonizing, regulating both the liver and spleen, and addressing both qi and blood. Its therapeutic effects of "dredging, soothing, and tonifying" align with the fundamental principles for treating breast cancer and resonate with the therapeutic characteristic of the Mysterious Mansion, which "functions optimally when unobstructed." Consequently, the theory of the Mysterious Mansion's Qi and Fluids holds significant clinical relevance for the application of Danzhi Xiaoyao San in treating breast cancer with Liver Depression Qi Stagnation.

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