

Four Aspects of Pattern

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In TCM, pattern discrimination is the key to diagnosis, treatment and maintenance. As a matter of definition, patterns are an aggregate of clinical manifestations that reflect the current pathological status. These patterns can vary in different situations and periods due to changes in tendencies.

The four core constituents of a pattern include the **location, property, tendency, and the etiology of disease**. The language of patterns are summarized from these terms. This then becomes the central concept for treatment. Experienced practitioners keep the pattern in mind, so the correct fundamental conception will lead to a correct clinical intervention that is in accordance with the human body. This paper will provide some simple discussions for each aspect of the pattern.

Causality

Practitioners in our clinic ask a patient about the cause. A clear conception of causality is critical for an accurate diagnosis. For example, fire causes liquid depletion while cold damages yang. Overwork and taxation cause qi exhaustion. In some cases, a pattern is created by complex factors, such as bi syndrome, where wind, cold, and damp are combined with taxation from overwork. The depletion from taxation usually sets the groundwork for the invasion of external pathogens. In this case, knowing the cause of the pattern, the treatment is modified to include the 'evil qi prevention strategy.' In general, causality is the first aspect we have to identify during the clinical diagnosis.

Location

Continual vigilance is necessary to locate the trouble or pattern identified. In TCM diagnosis, patterns can occur in specific locations throughout the human body. This is the 'location of pathology,' and can always be found during the diagnostic process. For spleen qi depletion,

the location is in the spleen. For kidney yin depletion the location is in the kidney. *Yang ming* or *Shao Yang* headaches indicate that the pain occurs at the head portions of the two channels. In TCM, it is necessary to identify clearly the organ or channel in which the disharmony occurs. This makes it possible to treat the responsible organ or channel in order to restore harmony. Current biotechnological methods of diagnosis can enhance TCM pattern discrimination. For instance, if the imaging methods identify a disease process, such as nephrolithiasis or endometriosis, then treatment can be pursued from a TCM perspective.

Property

After defining the causality and the location, it is necessary to define the property during the diagnostic process. Pattern properties are defined according to the eight principles, including the Yin and Yang, Exterior and Interior, Cold and Heat, as well as the Deficient and Excessive, which is the principle for pattern property identification. Stomach Excess Fire is the heat; Heart Yin Depletion is the depletion, and Damp Heat Invading Spleen indicates the Yin evil is the Damp and the Yang evil is the Heat. The combination of Damp and Heat happens in the same Zang organ, the spleen. This is why when the Damp factor is strong, the pattern manifests as diarrhea, and if the Heat is stronger, it will manifest as constipation. This allows us to make a very detailed diagnosis as the pattern property becomes clearer. In the assessment of heat properties, a pattern can manifest as general heat, as toxic heat, or as blazing fire. Thus the pattern property gives you the clarity needed to make the treatment plan and strategy. There are distinctions in treatment, in the context of disparate pattern properties. Under these circumstances, supplement depletion to dispel Evil Qi, cool down fire or dry the dampness.

Perspective

While the pattern is important as a method of organizing information manifesting in the human body, the pattern can also be used for the purpose of identifying the individual constitution. Thus, the pattern discrimination methods of TCM have a deep connection to the individual.

The treatment strategy established through diagnosis that is inclusive of Causality, Location and Property, also allows us to see the perspective of a pattern. In the process of diagnosing to confirm a pattern, Qi Depletion in the Spleen can be general Qi depletion, Qi Sinking or Qi Collapse. Assessing the symptoms to determine the pattern allows us to see the perspective of pattern. In Lung Qi Depletion, we can find general coughing or severe asthma. So the perspective of the same pattern varies with each diagnosis. Thus knowing the pattern, without the perspective, will not reveal whether this pattern is general, slight, or severe. The patient's symptoms will vary over time, so even if the pattern hasn't changed, the perspective will shift with the symptomatic changes. Thus, changing perspectives will not only affect the treatment, but it will also affect the long term treatment policy.

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Dr. Yang will be teaching a workshop on distinguishing Shen diagnoses on Sunday, October 22.