

Original Paper

Discussion on Mechanism of Acupuncture Delaying Facial Aging Based on Meridian Theory System of TCM

Xiaoqian Jia¹ & Jianrong Hui^{1,2*}

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

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

* Corresponding Author, Jianrong Hui

Received: May 2, 2026

Accepted: May 28, 2026

Online Published: June 5, 2026

doi:10.22158/rhs.v11n2p159

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/rhs.v11n2p159>

Abstract

Purpose: Based on the meridian theory of traditional Chinese medicine, the feasibility of acupuncture delaying facial senescence was discussed. Methods: Acupuncture delaying facial senescence was demonstrated through the excavation of classical Chinese medicine theory, integrated analysis and modern research support. Results: Acupuncture promoted the balance of yin and yang of five zang-organs, promoted the filling of skin qi and blood, and adjusted the contour of skin, so as to promote the lifting and firming of the face, thus achieving the purpose of resisting senescence. Conclusion: Traditional Chinese medicine theory lays the foundation for acupuncture cosmetology in theory, and modern research provides powerful support for acupuncture cosmetology.

Keywords

Traditional Chinese Medicine cosmetology, meridians, acupuncture, anti-aging, qi and blood

1. Introduction

With the improvement of living standard, people pursue quality life more and more, and their external requirements are also raised accordingly. Therefore, people's demand for delaying aging is also increasing. Modern beauty technology has a good development in resisting aging, and traditional medicine has a good effect in delaying skin aging. This paper will discuss the delaying effect of acupuncture on facial skin aging from the perspective of traditional medicine.

Skin aging is the same as aging of other organs of the body, that is, degenerative changes in structure and function occur. Because the exposed skin of the face is easily affected by ultraviolet rays, the aging of the skin is more obvious than that of other organs, which is more likely to attract people's attention^[1]. The influencing factors of facial aging mainly include age and external environmental factors, which are

divided into internal aging and external aging. The former due to age, the metabolic capacity of the human body decreased, showing a series of aging, skin performance for fine wrinkles, dryness and roughness. Because of the growth of age, it will further cause skin relaxation, sagging and other problems^[2]; The latter is aggravated by ultraviolet rays and environmental pollution and produces aging with other characteristics, among which photoaging has the greatest influence. The main manifestations of skin photoaging are a series of clinical manifestations such as deep and coarse wrinkles, pigmentation, telangiectasia and keratinous thickening, as well as characteristic histological changes such as irregular atrophy or hypertrophy of epidermis, elastic fibrosis and reduction of collagen fibers^[3].

As an important part of traditional Chinese medicine and an effective treatment method, acupuncture plays an important role in alleviating skin aging. Traditional Chinese medicine meridians are the main basis for diagnosis and treatment of acupuncture, including the twelve meridians, the eight extra meridians, the twelve meridians, and the fifteen collaterals., twelve meridians and twelve skin areas^[4]. Each component plays an important role in responding to and treating diseases, and is closely related to the occurrence and treatment of aging. When treating facial skin aging, it can be divided into three parts, which are meridian part, collateral skin part and twelve meridian tendon part respectively. The meridian part mainly includes twelve meridians, eight extra meridians and twelve meridians, the collateral skin part includes fifteen collaterals and twelve skin parts, and the meridian tendon part includes twelve meridian tendons. The three parts act on the occurrence and treatment of skin aging in different ways.

2. Theory of Aging

2.1 Yang Deficiency Yang has an Important Impact on Aging

The entity that constitutes life is Yin essence, and the driving force that promotes life is Yan^[5]. With the growth of age, Yang gradually decreases, and its power is insufficient. It cannot effectively promote Qi and blood. Qi and blood circulation are not smooth, and skin cannot fully nourish. A series of aging symptoms will appear on the skin, including stains and dullness. On the other hand, when yang qi is insufficient, the metabolic ability of the skin slows down, and the aging cells in the stratum corneum cannot be removed in time, which will cause rough skin. Yang qi can also cause aging by acting on meridians and zang-fu organs^[6].

2.2 Meridian Ups and Downs

Meridians and collaterals can communicate with the internal and external organs and network the whole body. They can communicate with the zang-fu organs through the twelve meridians, the eight extraordinary meridians and the twelve meridians, and can also show the signs of diseases from the outside through the twelve tendons, the twelve skin meridians and the floating collaterals.

The rise and fall of the twelve meridians have an important influence on aging. When the twelve meridians are deficient and pathological products accumulate, the human body will age. "Women...the five seven Yang meridians decline, the face begins to burn, and the hair begins to fall. The six seven three Yang meridians decline in the upper, the face is burned, and the hair begins to white." Among them, the

Yang meridian has a more prominent effect on facial skin aging. The face is mainly supported by the Yang meridian. When the Yang meridian is weak, the face cannot be effectively supported, and skin aging will occur, showing a series of symptoms such as skin wrinkles and relaxation. Deficiency of qi and blood in meridians can also cause aging of the face. When qi and blood in meridians are insufficient, they cannot effectively nourish their controlled range, and the skin cannot be fully nourished. Its function is limited, showing pigmentation and dullness of the skin. Meridian obstruction and qi and blood obstruction are also important factors for accelerating aging of the body. The human body's meridians are blocked, the meridians are blocked, and qi and blood cannot be distributed to the face, which can be manifested as haggard and dull complexion^[7].

2.3 Abnormal Circulation of Qi, Blood and Body Fluid

“Su Wen·Zhi Zhen Yao Da Lun” says: “Qi and blood are in balance, and there is destiny for a long time.” Qi and blood circulation plays an important role in maintaining the normal life activities of the body. “Ling Shu·Tian Nian” says: “At the age of twenty, Qi and blood begin to flourish and muscles grow,...; at the age of thirty,..., blood vessels are full, so it is good to walk.” When Qi and blood are full, the meridians of the human body are like rivers, flowing endlessly, which can fully nourish the internal organs, limbs and five senses. The functions of the whole body are fully exerted, and the operation of the human body presents a prosperous scene. “Qi is the ancestor of God”. When qi and blood are abundant, the spirit is vigorous, and the body is less prone to aging. When blood flow is smooth and sufficient, it can fully nourish the skin, making the skin ruddy and full of luster. If qi and blood are stagnated in the pulse, the circulation of qi and blood is not smooth, and sufficient nutrition cannot be provided for the body tissues, which will accelerate the aging of the skin. Qi and blood could not be distributed, local tissues could not be nourished, blood stasis formed in the process of distribution, showing a state of deficiency and excess, finally forming a vicious circle, the function of tissues could not be brought into play, and finally aging was accelerated.

2.4 Zang-fu Deficiency

According to the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, aging is inevitable with the increase of age. It is said in “Lingshu·Tiannian” that “at the age of 50, liver qi begins to decline,... at the age of 100, all the five zang-organs are deficient, and all the vital qi goes away,...” The deficiency of the five zang-organs leads to the weakening of body functions, and “all internal organs must be formed externally”. The body's supporting substances are insufficient, and sufficient nutrients can no longer be supplied for the skin, hair, muscle, fat and bones. Externally, it will be manifested as skin aging, hair withering, facial supporting muscles and fat atrophy, bone aging and soft tissue atrophy.

Among them, the viscera closely related to aging include spleen and stomach, kidney and liver, among which spleen and stomach are the key viscera for transporting and transforming water grain, responsible for the generation and transportation of nutrients. If the spleen and stomach function is out of balance, the generation and transportation function is limited, and the facial skin and muscles cannot be nourished, it will lead to dark and loose facial skin and withered hair, showing a aging face; Kidney, as the innate

foundation, is the organ most closely related to aging. Kidney is located in the lower energizer, kidney yang warms the whole body, and it is the foundation of yang qi. Yang qi is the driving force of life activities, and kidney yang is indispensable to its supply. In addition, kidney essence and kidney qi filling to a certain extent will generate Tianguai and promote the growth and development of human body. With the increase of age, kidney qi and kidney essence gradually decline." Tianguai is exhausted and the tunnel is blocked." Studies have shown that^[8] Tianguai is closely related to ovarian function, which plays a decisive role in women's aging. Women are born with liver, mainly reflected in its function of storing blood and dispersing. When the function of storing blood is out of order, the liver blood cannot supply the face adequately. When the function of dispersing is out of order, it will lead to qi stagnation and blood stasis, causing wrinkles and stains.

3. Effect of Acupuncture on Delaying Skin Aging

Acupuncture can delay skin aging mainly through three aspects: firstly, acupuncture channels can regulate the whole body and improve yang qi; secondly, acupuncture local regulation mainly involves collaterals and skin, which can regulate local micro-circulation and skin metabolism; finally, acupuncture channels and tendons can regulate the overall contour of the face. Modern medical research has confirmed that acupuncture can regulate endocrine organs and nerve function, increase muscle elasticity, promote skin metabolism, improve skin face, texture and color^[9], and effectively resist aging.

3.1 The Overall Regulating Effect of Acupuncture Meridians on Facial Skin Aging

Twelve meridians are the main components of the meridian system. The meridians circulating in the head and face are mainly yang meridians. Acupuncture on the yang meridians of the head and face can stimulate meridian qi, promote the exuberance of yang qi, improve the metabolic ability of the skin, and promote the circulation of qi and blood in the head and face. The stomach meridian of foot yangming circulates most in the head and face, and it is rich in qi and blood. In addition, "women... five seven yangming meridians decline, the face begins to burn, and the hair begins to fall." "Women's aging begins with the Yangming Meridian, so the first intervention in facial anti-aging is the Foot Yangming Stomach Meridian. During treatment, acupuncture can be used at Sibai, Juliao, Dicang, Daying, Jiache, Touwei, etc. Because the Foot Yangming Stomach Meridian" runs along the hairline to the forehead ", acupuncture can be used along the hairline to regulate yang qi. In addition, acupuncture can also be used at Yang meridian acupoints such as Zheliao, Tinggong, Sizhu Konger and Liao to stimulate yang qi.

Acupuncture channels can regulate the corresponding zang-fu organs. The spleen meridian of foot Taiyin and the stomach meridian of foot Yangming are mutually exterior-interior and most closely related. The stomach is the place for digesting and decomposing food. The food of spleen and stomach is water and grain to nourish the whole body, which transports the internal organs internally and transports the skin pores externally. It is said in Missed Talks of Famous Doctors that "the stomach is the origin of the five zang organs and the root of the human body". When acupuncture and moxibustion are used for anti-aging, acupuncture points on the spleen meridian can be selected dialectically to increase the generation of qi

and blood and nourish the fur, providing a material basis for delaying aging^[10]. When the spleen and stomach function is strong, it can fully nourish the internal organs and skin pores, so that the facial skin can be nourished^[11], thus slowing down aging and achieving a ruddy and radiant state.

The Du meridian and Ren meridian of the eight extraordinary meridians are respectively in charge of yin and yang of the whole body. The Du meridian circulates in the face. Acupuncture on the acupoints on the Du meridian can regulate yang meridians and enhance yang qi. At the same time, acupuncture on the acupoints on the head of the Du meridian can strengthen the brain^[12] and regulate the mental state of the human body. For example: Acupuncture Yintang and Shenting can strengthen brain and intelligence, calm the mind and help sleep, and regulate spirit; Ren meridian is closely related to reproduction, and the middle part of Ren meridian can regulate qi and blood by regulating spleen and stomach, Qi sea and Guan Yuan can warm and tonify yang qi, and moxibustion on Guan Yuan is often used clinically to warm and tonify yang qi.

3.2 Local Regulation of Collaterals and Skin against Aging

3.2.1 Improvement of Local Microcirculation by Acupuncture of Fifteen Collateral Channels

"It is seen that there are floating collaterals in its parts". There are many floating collaterals running in the skin, which connect Sun collateral to the deep part. The collaterals are connected with the meridians, and the meridians belong to the zang-fu organs^[13]. The collaterals circulate meridian qi, permeate blood qi, and penetrate Ying and Wei, which play a key role in maintaining the color and luster of the skin. When the qi and blood in the collaterals are abundant and the meridian qi is vigorous, their function of transportation, infiltration and irrigation can be operated normally. The zang-fu organs and five senses can be nourished, thus moistening the skin and achieving the purpose of anti-aging^[14]. On the other hand, collateral vessels also have the function of removing metabolic waste from the body. Acupuncture of collateral vessels can improve metabolism and promote the discharge of aging cells. When acupuncture penetrates the skin, the blood flow speed is increased, local blood flow is increased, blood vessels are dilated, and the oxygen utilization rate of nerve cells is further promoted, thus effectively improving the blood flow of the face, promoting the improvement of microcirculation and promoting metabolism^[15]. Acupuncture collaterals can promote nutrient perfusion of organs, accelerate circulation and metabolism, support qi and blood circulation of the face, and make the skin maintain a good state^[16], which is of great significance for resisting aging.

3.2.2 Regulation of Local Qi and Blood by Acupuncture on Twelve Skin Regions

The skin part is located at the outermost layer of the human body. "All the twelve meridians and collaterals are also the skin part". The skin part is the skin division of the twelve meridians and their affiliated collaterals." Using needles and the like lies in regulating qi". Wei qi "circulates through the skin and divides the flesh". The skin part is the part where a large amount of Wei qi gathers. Wei qi has the function of "warming the flesh, filling the skin, enriching the skin, and opening and closing". Acupuncture on the facial skin can stimulate defensive qi, thus nourishing the skin, improving microcirculation, promoting metabolism and reducing skin edema^[15]. At the same time, it can adjust the

zang-fu organs through the "skin-collaterals-channels-zang-fu organs"^[17], thus not only promoting the filling of local qi and blood, but also achieving the function of conditioning zang-fu organs, thus realizing the common conditioning of local and overall. Shallow skin pricks stimulate the release of growth factors and activate fibroblasts, stimulating collagen production^[18].

When acupuncture collateral vessels and skin, generally select Ashi points or extra points outside the meridians, reflecting the local treatment effect, according to the specific performance of facial aging, targeted acupuncture, when the patient's face local hyperpigmentation, can be in the local surrounding acupuncture.

3.3 Acupuncture on the Twelve Meridians Tendons Elevates and Nourishes the Face

The twelve meridians are a system of qi nourishing muscles and joints, including muscles, tendons and ligaments that can generate strength. Acupuncture on the meridians and tendons is mainly reflected in the adjustment of facial contour. According to modern research, the essence of the meridians and tendons is considered to be a combination of muscles, ligaments and surrounding soft tissues^[19]. The meridians and tendons attach to the head and face and play an important role in supporting the whole face. Fascia is an auxiliary device of muscles and is distributed throughout the body. It can be divided into superficial fascia and deep fascia. Facial aging mainly involves the superficial fascia layer, also known as SMAS layer. The superficial fascia is located under the dermis and is composed of loose connective tissue and contains fat^[20]. Lifting and tightening SMAS has become the main scheme of many facial wrinkle removal operations^[21]. With the increase of age, the facial muscle content decreases, the tension between tendons and ligaments weakens, and the facial support force decreases, showing wrinkles and relaxation. Clinically, there are treatment methods for facial lifting and wrinkle removal by lifting facial soft tissue or facial soft tissue filling^[22]. Acupuncture can loosen muscle tissue and release pressure. Body fluid can accelerate circulation through reduced pressure and resonance circulation, thus increasing the activity of cell movement, promoting vasodilation and increasing the permeability of lymph and blood, accelerating body fluid metabolism, thus promoting the circulation of qi and blood throughout the body and providing sufficient nutrition for tissues^[23]. For example, the stagnation of tendons and tendons produces nodules that squeeze the meridians and affect the circulation of qi and blood, which is easy to produce acne. Acne can be treated by relaxing the meridians^[24]. During acupuncture, the starting and ending points of muscles can be punctured to relax muscles and enhance fascia tension; clinically, the temporal muscles can be relaxed by surrounding the temporal muscles to achieve the effect of improving the whole face; Acupuncture can relax the muscles and improve the mandibular margin by acupuncture at the starting point of sternocleidomastoid muscle. At the same time, it can stimulate the sternocleidomastoid muscle branch and trapezius muscle branch to improve facial blood circulation^[25].

4. Conclusion

In TCM, the human body is an organic whole centered on the five zang-organs, and each part of the human body is complete and unified in functional structure. It is hidden in the inside and manifested in

the outside. External aging is the result of internal aging. In preventing and treating aging, we should not only pay attention to local treatment, promote local qi and blood circulation, but also regulate the whole zang-organs, so that qi and blood have no lack of its source, so as to achieve youth from inside to outside, and slow down skin aging through conditioning inside and outside. From the point of view of modern medicine, facial acupuncture can improve local microcirculation, promote metabolism, improve facial skin color and texture, increase muscle elasticity, and thus delay facial skin aging.

To sum up, TCM theory provides a way of thinking for the study of acupuncture delaying facial aging, but there is little clinical textual research on acupuncture delaying facial aging, so a series of clinical and experimental studies still need to be carried out in depth to provide more objective data support for acupuncture delaying facial aging.

References

- [1] Lei Rui, & Wu Jinfeng. (2023). Characteristics and mechanism of skin aging. *Practical Geriatrics*, 37(10), 978-983.
- [2] Xu Xiaoqing, Cheng Hui, & Yang Sen. (2023). New progress in endogenous skin aging. *China Journal of Leprosy Dermatology*, 38(5), 334-337.
- [3] Lei Dongyun, Chen Jiaying, & Zhang Litao. (2023). Role of skin immune cells in the pathogenesis of photoaging. *Bulletin of Dermatology*, 40(5), 539-546.
- [4] Liu Qingguo, & Hu Ling. (2012). Meridian Acupoints (3rd ed.). *Beijing: China Press of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2012, 7-8.
- [5] Luo Jie, Liu Xiaogu, Zeng Li, et al. (2025). Experience of He Chengyao, Master of Traditional Chinese Medicine, on Differentiation and Treatment of Kidney Deficiency Syndrome of Early-onset Ovarian Insufficiency. *China Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine Information*, 32(5), 182-186.
- [6] Peng Zhen, Hui Jianrong, Xiao Yan, et al. (2024). Application of acupuncture method of "regulating yang and strengthening brain" in prevention and treatment of facial skin aging. *Journal of Hubei University for Nationalities (Medical Edition)*, 41(04), 78-81.
- [7] Jing Yuan, Zhao Biyun, & Chen Mengyu. (2022). Discussion on connotation and significance of acupuncture in delaying skin aging from meridian essence hypothesis. *Fujian Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 53(7), 35-38.
- [8] Xia Xinyu, Liang Yan, Dong Li, et al. (2024). Discussion on acupuncture treatment of premature ovarian failure from reproductive axis of " Shen-Tianguai-Chongren-uterus" and " Xuanfu theory". *Journal of Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 38(04), 87-91.
- [9] Michelotti, A., Cestone, E., De Ponti, I., Pisati, M., Sparta, E., & Tursi, F. (2021). Oral intake of a new full-spectrum hyaluronan improves skin profilometry and ageing: a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial. *Eur J Dermatol.*, 31(6), 798-805.
- [10] Shen Wei, & Zhan Xianghong. (2016). Theoretical discussion on correlation between aging pathogenesis and five zang organs in traditional Chinese medicine. *Liaoning Journal of Traditional*

- Chinese Medicine*, 43(8), 1630-1632.
- [11] Long Qing, Wang Yuming, Qu Shengyuan, et al. (2023). Treatment of atopic dermatitis with acupuncture of "treating both heart and spleen" based on "view of integration of body and spirit". *Journal of Hunan University of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 43(09), 1704-1707.
- [12] Cao, Y. Y., Hui, J. R., Wang, X. X., et al. (2024). Discussion on clinical application of Chinese medicine facial beauty manipulation of regulating yang, strengthening brain and resisting aging. *China Aesthetic Medicine*, 33(09), 74-78.
- [13] Huang Tao, Li Dun, Sun Jie, et al. (2023). Academic characteristics and treatment examples of Fu Yu's skin shallow needling method. *Hebei Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 45(06), 889-891+895.
- [14] Wu Yiling. (2005). Pathogenesis of collateral disease. *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 46(4), 243-245.
- [15] Lin Lijiao, Xu Jinsen, Zhu Xiaoxiang, et al. (2015). Research progress of acupuncture affecting microcirculation. *Acupuncture and Moxibustion in China*, 35(02), 203-208.
- [16] Zhou Wei, Liang Lina, Xu Kai, et al. (2024). Treating retinitis pigmentosa by exploring collateral theory. *Liaoning Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 51(04), 64-67.
- [17] Diabetes Society of Chinese Medical Association. (2021). Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Type 2 Diabetes in China (2020 Edition). *Chinese Journal of Diabetes*, 13(4), 315-409.
- [18] Haghiri, H., Yazdanpanah, M. J., Farahmand, S. K., Khadem-Rezaian, M., & Azizi, H. (2025). Is Acupuncture Effective in Diminishing Frown Lines? Evidence From a Randomized Controlled Trial. *J Cosmet Dermatol.*, 24(4), e70144.
- [19] Wang, Y. L., Li, Y., Tang, M. Z., et al. (2024). Etiology and pathogenesis of cervical spondylotic radiculopathy based on meridian theory. *Journal of Anhui University of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 43(02), 4-7.
- [20] Lin Xingxing, Dong Baoqiang, Ji Tianyi, et al. (2023). Discussion on meridian tendon substance from fascia continuity. *Chinese Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 38(05), 1928-1932.
- [21] Meng Gen, Jia Qiyu, Shugra Baibuti, et al. (2024). Anatomy of middle facial rhytidectomy, evolution of surgical methods and research progress of complications. *China Aesthetic Medicine*, 33(02), 186-190.
- [22] Huang Yuanning, Wu Xinmiao, Dong Fan, et al. (2023). Application of facial soft tissue absorbable lifting belt combined with autologous fat filling in facial rejuvenation. *China Aesthetic Medicine*, 32(08), 48-51.
- [23] Wu Xi, Dong Baoqiang, Lin Xingxing, et al. (2023). Diagnosis and treatment thinking and action mechanism of meridian acupuncture. *SHI Zhen Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 34(05), 1181-1184.
- [24] Liu Jianxiang, Dong Baoqiang, Wang Leichao, et al. (2025). Discrimination of Acne Treatment Thinking Based on Meridian Theory. *Journal of Practical Internal Medicine of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 39(02), 114-116.

- [25] Zhang Haihua. (2023). Clinical efficacy of acupuncture at Xiaguan point and sternocleidomastoid muscle starting point on PFP with auricular and temporal neuralgia. *Massage and Rehabilitation Medicine*, 14(02), 7-10.