

Master Cui's Four Flowers Points

Abstract

Master Cui's Four Flowers point combination is a group of non-channel points specifically described for the purpose of applying moxibustion in severe vacuity conditions. Traditionally, this group of points was located using an unusual technique, but over time some doctors simplified the point location method or equated them with channel points. The history, theory, indications, location and treatment of the Four Flowers points are discussed.

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Introduction

Master Cui's Four Flowers point combination, also known simply as the Four Flowers, is a group of points specifically used for the application of moxibustion.

Traditionally, certain points were reserved for moxibustion only. These included the Four Flowers, Gaohuangshu BL-43, Yaoyan M-BW-24 (Lumbar Eyes), Zhoujian M-UE-45 (Elbow Tip), Qizhumaxue (Extra, Ride the Bamboo Horse) and Sanjiaoju M-CA-23 (Triangle Moxibustion). Other modalities such as needling are not discussed in the context of these points.

The other unique feature of the Four Flowers is that they were located, not by anatomical landmark, but by a method of measuring one part of the body with a string or straw and comparing it to another.

This essay will focus particularly on the writings of the Four Flowers as they have been passed down by two important Ming dynasty (1368-1644) doctors, Yang Jizhou¹ and Zhang Jiebin².

History of the Four Flowers

Secret Necessities of a Frontier Official (volume 13) published in 752 AD provides us with the first extant mention of the Four Flowers³. The author, Wang Tao, listed their indications as well as location and treatment methods. Wang simply called these points the 'Four Flowers' and did not equate them with regular channel points. He attributed them to Master Cui Zhiti⁴, an earlier Tang dynasty doctor whose writings have since, unfortunately, been lost.

Over the centuries, the Four Flowers were described in a number of other books and a simplified location method evolved. This method is described in the influential text the *Classic of Nourishing Life with Acupuncture and Moxibustion*⁵ which was published in 1220 and is quoted by Gao Wu in 1537 in volume two of *Gatherings from Eminent Acupuncturists*⁶ in

his description of the Four Flowers. Gao also may have been the first to identify these points as Geshu BL-17 and Danshu BL-19. About 65 years later, Yang Jizhou cited Gao's writings as his source for the Four Flowers in the *Great Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*. Yang's *Great Compendium* is still considered today by many to be the most important handbook on acupuncture and moxibustion in the history of Chinese medicine. Modern texts generally agree with Yang and Gao that the Four Flowers correspond to Geshu BL-17 and Danshu BL-19.

Other authors, for example Li Yan⁷ and subsequently Zhang Jiebin in his *Illustrated Supplement to the Categorized Classic*⁸, remained faithful to the location method described by Wang Tao.

Indications of the Four Flowers

Yang Jizhou states, "The Four Flowers treat the five taxations and seven damages in males or females, qi vacuity and blood weakness, steaming bones, tidal fever, cough, phlegm panting, emaciation and intractable disease".

Zhang Jiebin adds to the above list, "vexing heat in the five hearts, fatigued and cumbersome limbs in emaciation and weakness patterns. These points treat all these conditions equally".

Locating the Four Flowers

Yang and Zhang locate the Four Flowers differently from one another. Zhang also states that the Four Flowers consist of six points, whereas Yang states that only four points belong to this cluster. Both doctors, however, describe a similar type of point location, traditionally used to find many moxibustion points, by using a waxed string to measure the patient's body. The string is waxed so it can stick to the flesh, which makes the measurement more accurate as the string is less likely to slip out of place.

Yang Jizhou's method of location

Yang's method is simpler than Zhang's. The waxed string is used to measure the width of the patient's mouth from corner to corner, then a paper square is cut out using the mouth width as the base measurement and a small hole cut in the center.

The patient now steps on another, longer, waxed string. Measuring from the tip of the big toe, the string is drawn under the foot and up the back of the leg, running over the curves of the leg to the popliteal crease where it is cut off. We are told to use the left leg for males and the right for females. If a woman has bound feet, the text advises to use the length from Jianyu LI-15 to the end of the middle finger as measurement.

This length of string is folded in half and its midpoint placed below the laryngeal prominence with the two ends hanging down the patient's back. The point on the spine is then marked where the strings end and the small hole in the center of the paper square is placed over this point. The four corners of the square thus form the Four Flowers and seven cones of moxibustion are applied to each of these four points.

Zhang Jiebin's method of location

Huanmen (Suffering Gate)

Zhang's method locates 'the Four Flowers and Six Points of Master Cui'. He begins with the same method as Yang, measuring from the big toe to the popliteal crease, but then uses this measurement differently to locate two additional points to the Four Flowers which he calls Huanmen (Suffering Gate)⁹. To locate Huanmen the patient sits up straight with his hair parted in the middle. One end of the previously measured waxed string is set on the tip of the nose, pressed securely in place, and guided up through the parting in the hair, over the nape and down the back. The site on the spine at the end of the string is marked.

Zhang then measures the mouth, but differently to Yang. Another small string is folded in half, the centre pressed to the root of the nasal septum and the ends cut at the corners of the patient's closed mouth. The midpoint of this string is now placed on the marked point of the spine and opened out horizontally with the two ends of the string corresponding to the two points of Huanmen.

Yang also discusses Huanmen in the same text as the Four Flowers but he does not include it as part of the latter group of points. He locates Huanmen in the same way as Zhang, except that he measures the width of the closed mouth from corner to corner without using the septum as a midpoint measurement, and he begins the leg measurement from the tip of the middle toe rather than the big toe.

Yang names Huanmen as Laoxue (Taxation point) on the basis of the Classic of Nourishing Life which states that this point treats "the condition of enduring taxation manifesting as heat of the hands, feet and heart, night

sweating, exhausted essence-spirit and pain of the bones and sinews. It initially emerges as cough, gradually leading to spitting blood and pus, thinning of the flesh, yellow face, reduced food intake and reduced strength". He bases the number of moxa cones applied to the points on the age of the patient plus one, and claims that it is always effective. Thus if the patient is 30 years old, 31 cones of moxa are applied.

Both Yang and Zhang identify Huanmen as Xinshu BL-15 and Yang notes, "the Heart governs blood. That is why moxibustion is applied to it".

Zhang's Four Flowers

Zhang then gives directions for locating the Four Flowers. The patient sits up straight with the string placed around his neck so as to hang down the front and the string is cut where the two ends reach the tip of the xiphoid process. The string is then turned around to the back with its midpoint at the level of the laryngeal prominence and a point marked on the spine at its ends.

Next, the width of the patient's mouth is measured straight across as in Yang's description, and the midpoint of this string placed over the mark on the spine and oriented horizontally. The string's ends correspond to the left and right points of the Four Flowers.

The same string which measured the patient's mouth width is now centered vertically over the same mark on the spine (whose location was measured using the xiphoid process). The string's ends correspond to the upper and lower points of the Four Flowers.

Zhang recommends applying 7, 14, 21 or even up to 100 cones of moxibustion to each of these four points as well as to Huanmen. Treatment is then suspended until the moxa sores erupt or are until they are about to heal.

Note that while all four of Yang's Four Flowers are lateral to the spine, Zhang's four points consist of two points lateral to the spine and two points right on the spine and he includes Huanmen in his description of the Four Flowers.

The Four Flowers and Yijing theory

Zhang's language and his method suggest that he bases his text on Li Yan's book *Entering the Gate of Medicine*. Li states, "altogether there are six points. They have the image of Kan and Li in *Already Completed* [Jiji]". This image refers to Hexagram 63 of the *Book of Changes* (Yijing). *Already Completed* is considered an auspicious hexagram in which every line is ordered appropriately. Fire (Li) and water (Kan) communicate with each other since water is located above and descends and fire is below and ascends. Thus they move towards each other¹⁰.

While a hexagram has six lines and the six points of the Four Flowers have only four lines, the image is there nevertheless. In Hexagram 63 *Already Completed* the top line is yin, and yin and yang lines alternate going down¹¹.

Huanmen and the two horizontal points of the Four Flowers resemble yin lines, since they are bilateral. The two spinal points of the Four Flowers resemble yang lines, as they have only one component. In addition, they are located on the Governing (Du) vessel which is the most yang part of the channel system.

Because hexagram 63 *Already Completed* has every line in its appropriate position¹², the image would be a confirmation to many Ming dynasty doctors that the six points of the Four Flowers have the ability to put all aspects of the body in proper order. The image of fire and water communicating would also signify the interaction of Heart and Kidney or the balance of yin and yang.

Treatment

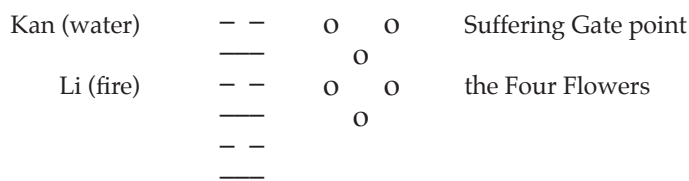
Zhang suggests applying moxibustion to the six points on fire days based on a calculation of the Heavenly Stems. He also warns that within a hundred days after applying moxibustion the patient should be careful of sexual taxation and excessive thought or preoccupation. In addition, the patient should maintain a seasonally appropriate diet, keep a balance of cold and heat and nourish and protect himself.

If the patient feels they have not recovered after the sores have healed, the treatment can be repeated. Zhang states, "No one does not recover". He adds that using up to 100 cones of moxibustion on the points lateral to the spine is especially beneficial, but warns that it is not appropriate to use a lot of moxibustion on the two points on the spine itself. On the spinal points he suggests using only 15 cones at a time since the patient may become fatigued if a lot of moxibustion is used.

He also notes that after treating the six points of the Four Flowers, moxibustion should be applied to Zusanli ST-36 to drain any fire that may have flared up from moxibustion on the upper body.

Discussion of the Four Flowers

Why was this type of method used to locate points? During the Southern and Northern dynasties (420-581C.E.), Chen Yanzhi¹³ writes that moxibustion can be used as a home remedy and that it is not necessary to be treated by a doctor. He states, "One must have a teacher before practising the technique of acupuncture, but even the ordinary person can apply moxibustion. One who has had a teacher explain the *Classic*¹⁴ can readily practise acupuncture and moxibustion. However, one who has not had a teacher explain the texts can apply moxibustion according to diagrams and explanatory texts". In other words, a person does not need to know detailed theory and surface anatomy or develop skilled hand techniques to practise moxibustion as



Hexagram 63 *Already Completed*

long as the directions are written so that a layman can understand.

Zhang notes, "Cui Zhiti did not indicate point names, but instead established the method to find the Four Flowers. He must have wanted it to be easy to explain to people, so he verified this method of point location for the spine and back".

Yang notes, "The ancients feared people did not know how to find points. That is why they established this quick method". He states that the Four Flowers are probably the same as Geshu BL-17 and Danshu BL-19¹⁵, but notes that Master Cui only called them the Four Flowers without naming them, thus implying that we cannot be sure that they are the same as these channel points. He also warns that the width of people's mouths varies, so that, "no one who tries to figure it out by feeling the vertebrae for Geshu BL-17 and Danshu BL-19 is correct".

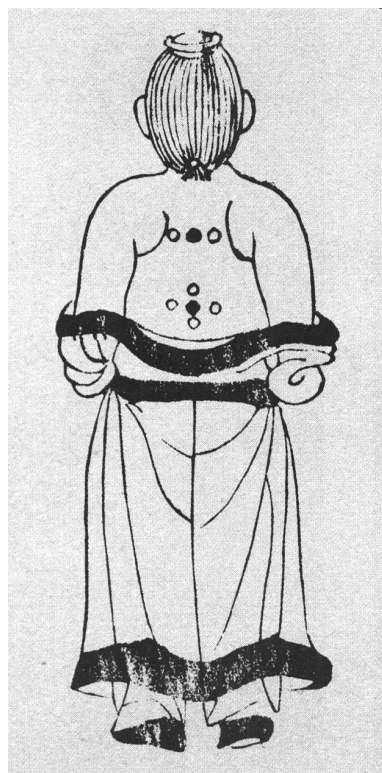
"One must have a teacher before practising the technique of acupuncture, but even the ordinary person can apply moxibustion".

Yang explains why these points are used to treat severe vacuity, indicating that Geshu BL-17 is the meeting point of blood and so treats blood disease. He adds, "Steaming bones and tidal fever are blood vacuity with excess fire. Thus we select these points in order to supplement it (blood). The Gall Bladder is the bowel of the Liver. The Liver is able to store blood. That is also why we select these points".

The Four Flowers have been used for more than 1,200 years to treat severe vacuity conditions. They may still be useful today in treating chronic degenerative diseases. We should, however, research which method of point location brings the best clinical results: the original method, the simplified method or the method which equates the Four Flowers with Geshu BL-17 and Danshu BL-19. ■



The Four Flowers and Gao Huangshu according to Yang Jizhou. (the *Great Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion*)



The location of Zhang Jiebin's Four Flowers and Six Points (illustration from the *Divinely Responding Classic*¹⁶)

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Notes

1. Yang Jizhou (1522-1620AD) is the author of the *Great Compendium of Acupuncture and Moxibustion* (Zhenjiu Dacheng), first published in 1601. The Four Flowers are discussed in Volume 9 of this work.
2. Zhang Jiebin, also known as Zhang Jingyue (1563-1640AD) is the author of the *Illustrated Supplement to the Categorized Classic*, first published in 1624. The Four Flowers are discussed in Volume 8 of this work. Zhang Jiebin is better known as the author of the *Categorized Classic* (Leijing) and *Jingyue's Complete Writings* (Jingyue Quanshu).
3. *Secret Necessities of a Frontier Official* (Waitai Miyao) by Wang Tao (670-755AD, Tang).
4. Cui Zhiti is known as the author of *Moxibustion Formulas for Steaming Bones Disease* (Guzheng Bing Jiufang).
5. *Classic of Nourishing Life with Acupuncture and Moxibustion* (Zhenjiu Zisheng Jing) by Wang Zhizhong (dates unknown, Song Dynasty).
6. Gao Wu (16th c., Ming Dynasty) is the author of *Gatherings from Eminent Acupuncturists* (Zhenjiu Juying), published in 1537AD.
7. Li Yan (16th c., Ming) is the author of *Entering the Gate of Medicine* (Yixue Rumen), published in 1575 A.D.
8. Zhang's writings on moxibustion are quite thorough, and in the opinion of the current author, deserve more attention than they have received.
9. The name Huanmen (Suffering Gate) seems to have come from Li Yan's *Entering the Gate of Medicine*. Wang Tao never gave these points a name. However, he discussed them in the same section as the rest of the Four Flowers.
10. The interaction of fire and water could be compared to a pot of water boiling on a stove. If the fire were on top, however, and the water below they would flow away from each other and there would be no interaction or circulation.
11. A yin line is broken and has two components whereas a yang line is unbroken and has one component.
12. In other words, yin lines are in yin positions and yang lines are in yang positions. The 1st, 3rd and 5th (bottom) positions are yang. The 2nd, 4th and 6th (top) positions are yin.
13. Chen Yanzhi is the author of *Short Sketches of Formulas* (Xiaopin Fang). This book was lost, although large portions of it were quoted in later works, especially in the Japanese medical classic *Medical Heart Formulas* (Yixin Fang, or Ishimpo, in Japanese). Thus we still have access to much of Chen's writings.
14. *Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon*
15. Since Zhang located the points differently, he identified the points as Ganshu BL-18 and the two points on the spine located by the string method.
16. Shenying Jing written by Chen Hui and revised by Liu Jin, published in 1425 (Ming dynasty).