

# The application of the “Treatment in Accordance with Three Categories of Etiologic Factors” theory in the prevention and treatment of epidemic diseases in traditional Chinese medicine since the Ming and Qing Dynasties

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## Author contributions

Bo-Yang Zhang conceived the original idea, drafted the paper and prepared the artwork. The author has read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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## Abbreviations

TCM, traditional Chinese medicine.

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## Abstract

“Treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors” (consideration of the climatic and seasonal conditions, environment and individual’s constitution in the treatment of diseases), that is, treatment following time, place and individual, is one of the basic principles followed by Chinese medicine in the clinical treatment of diseases. This paper analyzes the similarities and differences in traditional Chinese medicine treatment of patients with epidemic diseases in different regions and periods since the Ming (1368–1644 C.E.) and Qing (1636–1912 C.E.) Dynasties. In addition, the theory of epidemic disease prevention and control based on the application of “treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors” was discussed to inspire and guide the prevention and treatment of COVID-19.

**Keywords:** traditional Chinese medicine; treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors; epidemic diseases; COVID-19

## Background

Epidemic disease refers to a large-scale epidemic within a specific range, threatening human health and the life of infectious diseases [1]. It is an external infectious disease with epidemic poison as the cause. The clinical manifestations are different, but most conform to the law of the same kind of Qi (Chinese medicine refers to the most fundamental and subtle substances that constitute the human body and maintain life activities, and also has the meaning of physiological functions). This is usually caused by the intrusion of Pathogenic Qi (a general term for various of pathogenic factors) into the human body. Epidemic diseases are mostly widespread and contagious and include a relatively wide range of diseases [2]. The COVID-19 circulating in recent years has brought the epidemic back to the hot spot. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019, it has rapidly spread to all parts of the world, affecting global economic and social life, human life, and health standards [3]. Although most patients have similar symptoms and similar disease mechanisms, due to the large land area of China, the wide latitude and longitude spanned, the variety of climate and terrain, and the large differences in the living habits of residents, it has led to the complexity of the disease mechanism in the process of disease transmission. Based on the above differences, treatment methods that apply the principles of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)'s "Treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors" (consideration of the climatic and seasonal conditions, environment and individual's constitution in the treatment of diseases) is widely recognized and applied.

Previously, western medicine often used antiviral drugs to treat of such infectious diseases, which could easily lead to adverse reactions, and long-term use was also prone to drug resistance. In treating of previous epidemics, Chinese medicine has accumulated much anti-epidemic experience, especially in the fight against COVID-19. The participation of Chinese medicine has achieved good results, reflecting the unique advantages of TCM in preventing and treating epidemics [4]. Therefore, to explore the application of the "treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors" theory in the prevention and treatment of epidemic diseases and give full play to the characteristics and advantages of dialectical treatment in the diagnosis and treatment of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), it has important significance and value in the clinical diagnosis and treatment of epidemic diseases and also has an enlightening and guiding role in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19.

## Theory of epidemic prevention and control in the Ming and Qing dynasties

The concept of epidemic disease in the historical records before the Ming (1368–1644 C.E.) and Qing (1636–1912 C.E.) Dynasties are relatively vague and are not yet clearly defined, which can be seen in the titles of "epidemic infectious disease" and "epidemic". The Ming and Qing Dynasties were the peak of epidemic outbreaks, with an average of one major epidemic every four years [5]. Frequent outbreaks of epidemic diseases have laid a good foundation for constructing a theoretical system for epidemic prevention and control. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the theory of epidemiology gradually matured in practice, and *Shangshu Quanshu* (He-Teng Zhang, 1623 C.E.) was the first monograph on seasonal febrile disease in China, which pioneered the theory of thermal and made significant contributions to the formation of the theoretical system of epidemic prevention and control. *Wen Yi Lun* (You-Xing Wu, 1642 C.E.) is the beginning of the special book on epidemic diseases, forming the "Pestilence School", putting forward the view that "Pestilence" is the causative factor and promoting the maturity of the theory of seasonal febrile disease [6].

It is the beginning of the epidemic monograph, which forms the "Pestilence School", and puts forward the view that Pestilence (a kind of Pathogenic Qi with strong contagion, belongs to external pathogenic factors, different from the six Qi, is a pathogenic substance

that exists in nature, mainly from the mouth and nose.) is the causative factor, and promotes the maturity of the theory of Pestilence. Most of the Qing Dynasty monographs were the inheritance and development of epidemic theories, which enriched the principles and methods of treatment of the Ming Dynasty and improved the theory of epidemic prevention and control [6].

## "Treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors" and epidemics

### Clinical significance of "treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors"

The "treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors" is based on consideration of the climatic and seasonal conditions, environment, and individual's constitution, which was founded in the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic* (unknown author, 221 B.C.E–220 C.E.), advocating the combination of seasonality, disease staging, human physique, age, living habits and natural and humanistic geographical location. It is one of the basic principles followed by TCM in treating diseases, and it is the premise of dialectical treatment by the ancients. Holism and treatment based on syndrome differentiation are the two basic characteristics of the theoretical system of TCM, and these two basic characteristics are reflected in the theoretical system of "treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors", which is a powerful weapon for the precise clinical treatment of TCM. Although the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic* does not explain in detail the specific content of the "treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors" theory, it has its shadow in the works of later generations of physicians who record medical cases and cure the law, whether it is "curing the disease before it" or "curing the disease", it is inseparable from the idea of the unity of heaven and man. *Wangshi Yicun* (Yan-Chang Wang, 1875 C.E.) puts forward: "Ancient and modern diseases, clinical evidence, drug selection, cubic, be alike except for slight differences... The old and the young are different, the strong and the weak are different, the water and soil are different in different directions, and the diseases are different" [7]. Affected by age, physique, water and soil environment, old diseases, complications, that is, different seasonal, regional environments and physical conditions, there will be different changes in the pathogenesis through the discussion of diseases, evidence to grasp the patient's condition, based on the use of different treatment methods to select drugs, cubic, to achieve one person and one side of the proper treatment. The theory of "treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors" is the premise of clinical precision treatment, and the overall concept of TCM and the principle of dialectical treatment are fully reflected here. The theory has high clinical value [8]. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the application of the "treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors" theory in preventing and controlling epidemic diseases. This study is conducive to grasping the law of disease transmission and making breakthroughs in controlling the spread of epidemic diseases, thereby reducing the impact of diseases on social life, improving human quality of life, and ensuring human life and health.

### Treatment in accordance with time

As early as 2,000 years ago, China began to study the relationship between climate and disease, which was the first country in the world to pay attention to the relationship between climate and the human body. The *Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic* put forward the viewpoint of "corresponding between man and heaven and earth" and the theory of *Wuyun Liuqi* (Explore the periodic rule of natural change and its influence on human health and disease, and then study the natural dynamic cycle rule for diagnosis and treatment of disease and health "cure no disease"), and discussed the relationship between the "five elements' motion and six kinds of natural factors" and the occurrence, development, and outcome of diseases [9, 10]. "Shi" is not only the "four hours" in the *Origin of Chinese Characters* (Xu Shen, 100–121 C.E.), "shi" refers to the seasons, days and nights, and hours, and the

other refers to the different stages in the development of the disease [11]. *Su Wen • On the Four Temperaments* mentioned that “Against the spring Qi, there are Shaoyang meridians that are not born, and the liver-energy changes internally; against the summer Qi, the Taiyang meridians do not grow, and the heart-energy is in the hole; against the autumn Qi, the Taiyin meridians are not collected, and the lungs are full; against the winter Qi, the Shaoyin meridians are not hidden, and the kidney-energy is sinking alone” [10]. The change of human Yin-Yang (The combined name of Yin Qi and Yang Qi refers to the two universal and opposite attributes of things. The opposite and complementary Yin and Yang are the rules and root causes of the occurrence, development, and change of things.) are closely related to “time”. Specifically, the human organs correspond to the four seasons in nature and are closely related to birth, growth, transformation, collection, and hiding, as well as the growth of Yin and Yang in the body and the external environment. By exploring the changing laws of the five elements of Yin and Yang in nature, we can understand the changes in the human body’s own Yin and Yang to spy on the changes in the disease mechanism under the influence of Yin and Yang.

**Subject to seasonal conditions** The corresponding overall concept of human beings corresponding to heaven is the guiding ideology of TCM. However, the four seasons of the year and the reincarnation of day and night are not only the laws of nature but also affect the metabolic laws of our body organs, Yin and Yang, and saliva. *Suwen • Baoming’s Holism* mentioned that “Man is born with the Qi of heaven and earth, and the law of the four hours becomes”. The *Suwen • Six Verses of Dirty Elephant Theory* has a saying that “the heart... connect with the Qi of summer. Lungs... connect with the Qi of autumn. Kidneys... Through the winter Qi. Liver people... connect with the Qi of spring. Spleen, stomach, large intestine, small intestine trifocal bladder... connect with the Qi of autumn earth” reflects the general response law of the internal organs and the four seasons, indicating that the Qi of each organ is different in different seasons. Therefore, the changes in the Qi of the organs should be judged according to the solar terms when clinical dialectical treatment [10]. Different seasonally dominated climatic phenomena are different. The “climate of not coming on time” may be one or several of the “wind, heat, humidity, dryness and cold” invading the human body as a Pathogenic Qi, which is also reflected in the epidemic diseases since the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Meng-Ying Wang (1808–1868) pointed out that dysentery mostly occurred in summer and autumn in *Compendium on Epidemic Febrile Diseases* (Meng-Ying Wang, 1852 C.E.) which is consistent with Yi-Zhan Wang’s statistical results of dysentery medical records of various doctors in the Ming and Qing Dynasties [12]. Summer climate is humid and hot and summer humidity can easily penetrate the human body. However, damp and hot Pathogenic Qi is the cause of dysentery, which is the reason why dysentery disease is more common in summer. Therefore, the climatic characteristics of hot and humid summer should be combined in the treatment of dysentery. In addition, before the arrival of summer, the evil of dampness and heat can be avoided and prevented by adjusting diet, resting, and drinking preventive decoction. *Discussion of Epidemic Pestilence* (Feng Lei, 1882 C.E.) mainly combines the climate characteristics of the four seasons and five elements’ motion, and six kinds of natural factors to discuss the diseases of the times and proposes that “spring rain is handsome... Those who infect the Pathogenic Qi are all damp diseases” [13]. This shows that the pathogenesis of epidemic diseases is closely related to changes in five elements’ motion and six kinds of natural and external environment factors [14], that is, seeking the same spirit. His theory of seasonal diseases thoroughly explained that “sick of dampness in autumn, winter cough” and “sick of dampness in winter, spring will cause symptoms due to warm climate” [15, 16]. To further illustrate the correlation between diseases and seasons, we can achieve proper dialectical treatment by exploring the impact of seasons on diseases and clarifying the source of epidemic diseases. Zhi-Han Lin also pointed out in the *Wenyi Cuiyan* (Zhi-Han Lin, Qing Dynasty) that the onset of the epidemic is due to the feeling of the furuncle of heaven and earth. It is related to the five elements’ motion and six kinds of

natural factors, geographical environment, climatic conditions, etc., which support the influence of the season on the epidemic [6].

The specific relationship between seasons and diseases has yet to be studied and examined. By analyzing the law of climate change, while forecasting the climate, we can predict possible diseases to carry out effective prevention and achieve the purpose of “curing the disease”. We believe that in the future, we can more accurately grasp the law of climate change, find the potential law between disease and climate, and make a breakthrough in disease prevention.

**Due to the staging of diseases** Whether the disease occurs or not depends on the result of the struggle between good and evil. In addition, disease direction is also affected by changes in the strength and weakness of good and evil. At different stages of the disease, due to the trend and rise and fall of the struggle between good and evil, diseases of the exact etiology will produce different pathogenesis, reflecting different symptoms, so it is necessary to distinguish the stage of the disease’s dialectical treatment. For example, in the process of fighting SARS, it was observed that the onset of SARS might go through three stages: virus invasion, replication proliferation, excessive immune response, lung exudation injury, exudation dissipation, and organ damage repair. Clinical symptoms also have different manifestations at various stages, characterized by fever and chills, muscle soreness, wheezing, dyspnea, low-grade fever, self-sweating, and shortness of breath after activity [17]. Focusing on the staging of diseases can improve the accuracy of differentiation and the cure rate of clinical diseases. Furthermore, in the later stages of the disease, the patient’s mechanism may be hot or cold, which has a major impact on the treatment of drugs. Therefore, in clinical dialectical treatment, doctors should pay attention to the static stage of the disease and the dynamic change of the disease in different stages to accurately monitor the trend of the disease and treat the symptoms.

#### Adapt to local conditions

The first time people realized the correlation between geography and disease was in the Shang Dynasty. The *Suwen • Different Laws and Remedies* wrote: “the Yellow Emperor asked: Doctors treat diseases and take various treatment methods for the same disease, but the results can be cured. What is the reason? Qibo replied: this is because of the geographical circumstances that make it so.” This ancient dialogue sheds light on the impact of geographic location on disease and treatment [10]. “realm of the East, the birthplace of heaven and earth... The central one, whose horizon is wet... Moreover, out of the center” also shows the characteristics of prevalent diseases in different regions [18]. *Lvshi Chunqiu* (Bu-Wei Lv and his clientele, Warring States Period) mentioned, “Where there is little water, there are many people with no hair on their heads and tumors on their crowns... Where the water tastes bitter, people with many chicken breasts and curvy backs.” which reflects the critical role of the regional environment on the living habits and physique of residents [34]. Geographical location, including physical and human geography, affects residents’ physical condition. In addition, the epidemic Qi in different regions also has different characteristics of disease mechanisms.

**Due to the natural geographical location** Different natural geographical locations have different climatic conditions, topography, soil, water sources, and eating habits, which will affect the individual’s physique, personality, susceptibility to diseases and the nature of diseases, and then affect the treatment of diseases. *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic: Plain Questions* (unknown author, 221 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) “Oriental Life Wind... Southern heating... The center is wet... The West is dry... Cold in the north” can see the influence of the region on the climate [10]. As far as the north and south are concerned, taking antipyretic drugs as an example, the north is colder, the humidity is lower, and the temperature difference between day and night is large. The temperature in the south is higher, the humidity is large, and the temperature difference is small. Therefore, when using drugs, northern doctors use large amounts of drugs and mostly use drugs with strong medicinal properties, and southern doctors use small

amounts of drugs, and the drugs selected are weak. The ancients had inconvenient transportation and strong geographical restrictions, and the books written by doctors in different regions reflected the regional characteristics of their locations. Tang Wu (1758–1836) commented that most of Tian-Shi Ye's (1666–1745) treatment of febrile diseases with "Southern syndromes" in the *Wenbing Tiaobian* (Ju-Tong Wu, 1798 C.E.). This is because Tian-Shi Ye practiced medicine in the south, so most of the disease recorded was "Southern syndromes" [6, 19].

**Due to the geographical location of the humanities** Human geography includes city's industrial and agricultural development, the number of people, and the ease of transportation, which affects the stability of the society in the region and the ability of society and the people to resist the plague. In addition, the scale of population movements contributed to the spread of the plague to a large extent. In the early stage, by studying the spatial distribution of epidemics in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, we found that the epidemics in the densely populated and economically developed southeast coastal areas occurred more frequently than in the sparsely populated and economically backward northwest regions, showing a law of decreasing from the eastern coastal areas to the inland areas. Two of the peak periods of the epidemic were in the period of decline of the Ming Dynasty, with chaotic social order and poor disaster resistance [5]. From this, it can be reflected that human geography greatly influences on the time, space, and scale of epidemics.

#### Individual conditions apply

The *Theory of medical origin* (Da-Chun Xu, 1757 C.E.) proposed that "there is the same disease in the world, and the treatment of this is effective, and the treatment of the other is ineffective, and it is not invalid, and there is great harm, why not?" Because the disease is the same, but the individual is different [20]. Due to people's gender, age, eating habits, and physique differences leading to physical conditions, Yin and Yang rise and fall differently. In addition, the human physique is also closely related to intrinsic factors. On the one hand, the sperm blood given to the human body by parents determines the prosperity and decline of innate essence. On the other hand, the health state of the mother during pregnancy and the rise and fall of emotions will also affect the development of the human body in early childhood. In addition, the growth and feeding environment after birth and the family state will also affect the physical condition of the person [21]. This evidence shows that intrinsic factors will also play an important role in acquiring the human physique. When dialectical, it should be people-oriented, consider the consideration of the patient's physique, and treat according to people's conditions.

**Due to physical conditions** TCM physique is divided into nine basic types: flat quality, Qi Deficiency (Pathological changes caused by fatigue and internal injury or severe illness, lack of vitality after a long illness, a low function of viscera tissues, weakened resistance to disease.), Yang Deficiency (The pathological changes of insufficient Yang Qi in the body, decreased or weakened function, decreased metabolic activity, low body reactivity, and insufficient Yang heat.), Yin Deficiency (Yin Deficiency, blood deficit, moisture, Rongyang not enough pathological changes), phlegm moisture, damp heat, static blood, Qi depression, and special temperament [22]. Although the epidemic is an external disease and evil, it is closely related to the patient's physique, as *The Golden Mirror of Medicine* (Qian Wu, 1742 C.E.) mentioned, "Although people infect the Pathogenic Qi, because their forms are different, or from cold, or heat, or virtualization, or realization, so there are many unevenness" [23]. It shows that even if the Pathogenic Qi that causes the epidemic is no different, the disease will spread in different directions due to the different constitutions of the patients. Therefore, different clinical symptoms will appear in the same Qi. Paying attention to the patient's physique can more accurately grasp the direction of the disease. It is clinically necessary to distinguish and treat according to human conditions [24].

**Age-dependent** Patients of different ages have different physiques and different healthy Qi, so the dosage and types of medicines required are different, and the *Wen Yi Lun* has a saying that "its annual

Qi is strong, regardless of its strength or weakness, and those who righteous Qi slightly weakens are sick when they touch it" [25]. People with weak righteous Qi are disadvantaged in the struggle with Pathogenic Qi. This article takes the elderly and children as an example, the elderly are weak in their righteous Qi "over forty years old, and Yin Qi (The side of something or movement having the attribute of inwardness, downward, repressed, cloudy, shapely, etc.) is half", Yin and Yang are insufficient, so the medication should pay attention to supporting the healthy Qi; children's internal organs are immature, the physique has the characteristics of immature Yin and Yang, the healthy Qi is not enough, the Pathogenic Qi is easy to invade the body, and the treatment should use light dosage and a short course of treatment to prevent excessive medication and cause other diseases. In addition, children are susceptible to fever due to their unique physique, and Tian-Shi Ye wrote in the *Medical Records as a Guide to Clinical Work* (Tian-Shi Ye, 1764 C.E.) that children are the body of the Yang, and the disease transmission is mostly from heat. There are more fevers [26]. In summary, the age of patients has a particular impact on the transmission of diseases, and clinical diagnosis and treatment should be based on age conditions.

**Depending on gender** Women and men are generally the same in the treatment of epidemics. However, because women have the physiological characteristics of the fetal menstrual belt, the *Wenyi Mingbian* (Tian-Zhang Dai, 1675 C.E.) says that "when a woman is plagued, she is the same as a man". When menstruation is treated slightly differently, it is also related to the blood chamber. Whoever encounters a menstrual period of infection must be treated with Shaoyang. The physical condition of the woman's fetal menstrual belt is unique, and the basic prescription should be changed when taking the drug [27]. *Lingshu Five Sounds and Five Tastes*: "In the life of a woman, there is more than Qi, not enough blood, and the amount of blood is also shed" [10]. *Yixue Zhengzhuan* (Tian-Min Yu, 1515 C.E.) says: "women should adjust their blood to consume their Qi, and men should adjust their Qi to nourish their blood". It is pointed out that women take the liver as the congenital and blood-based, and men take the kidney as the congenital and the essence as the basis, so the patient's physical characteristics should be paid attention to when diagnosing and treating [28]. Women have more blood Deficiency and Yin Deficiency, so they are susceptible to Pathogenic Qi, and the transmission of Pathogenic Qi in the body differs from that of men, resulting in different constitutions [29]. Compared with men, women have more blood stasis, Yang Deficiency, Qi depression, and more peaceful quality [30].

**Due to social factors** Social factors can also affect the time, space, and scale of the occurrence of diseases. If the era is turbulent and there are many wars that disrupt the order of daily life, productivity will suffer. This will lead to an unstable food supply, and people's daily needs will not be met, coupled with the need to flee the people forced to travel long distances, so the ability to fight the epidemic will generally be reduced. The epidemic is frequent [31]. Taking *Item Differentiation of Warm Febrile Diseases* as an example, many medical books related to epidemic diseases were created amid war and chaos in response to the needs of the times [6]. The raging epidemic laid the social foundation for writing medical books and reflected the close connection between war and epidemic.

#### Thinking the application in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19

##### Adapt to the times

The COVID-19 epidemic has the characteristics of epidemic, contagiousness, and a wide range of diseases, so it belongs to the category of TCM epidemics. Its occurrence and development are related to the local climate. The epidemic first appeared in Wuhan. There is data showing that Wuhan City in December 2019 had a temperature of 22 d above 10 °C. The climate should be cold but warm and continuous rain for 19 d, accounting for 68% of the total weather in the month, winter snow but anti-rain [32], not the timely gas, abnormal climatic conditions mixed with evil led to the wide spread of

the epidemic. Through the observation and analysis of Wuhan's abnormal climatic conditions, it can be seen that its climate is relatively humid and hot, which coincides with the characteristics of the **Wet, Hot and Toxic (types of causative factors in TCM)** pathogenesis of the COVID-19 [33]. In addition, while the wet evil runs through the disease, different stages have different characteristics of the pathogenesis. Jia-Yao Yang and other studies have shown that in most patients infected with COVID-19, early symptoms are dampness-toxicity stagnation in the lung, cardinal disadvantageous, and humid poison invading the surface and lungs. At this time, the drug should be used to remove dampness and release pulmonary Qi and diaphoresis relief superficialities; in the progression period, wet toxic heat, lung obstruct fu and toxic pulmonary collateral injury. At this time, lung heat generates phlegm, and phlegm drink block Qi, resulting in dyspnea, weakening the function of raising the Qi, chest tightness, high fever, constipation, nausea and vomiting, and other symptoms; in the critical period, blocked inside, lost outside, the dispersing and descending function of **Lung Qi (the essence of the lung is manifested as the central Lung Qi, the division of respiration)** is injured, unable to regulate the Qi of the whole body, lost the function of helping the heart and blood. Therefore, Qi and blood are not passed, and symptoms include poor breathing; in recovery, the evil leaves and the healthy Qi are weak. At this time, it is necessary to promote healthy Qi and nourish the body and mind [34, 35]. Statistics from the number of days of illness, in general, patients with a disease time of fewer than three days are mainly cold and wet, attacking the lung. Patients with three to seven days of illness are a damp blockage of the middle energizer. **Spleen Qi (The vital Qi of the Spleen is the functional activity of the Spleen to transport, purify and reorganize blood. It also refers to the material basis of the physiological function of the Spleen.)** and Lung Qi deficiency is common in patients with more than seven days of illness. And symptoms are not identical at different stages of disease transmission [36]. Therefore, dialectical treatment at different stages of the disease can effectively control the development and outcome of the disease and adapt to the times is the premise of clinical precision treatment.

#### Adapt to local conditions

The causes and susceptibility of patients in different regions are slightly different, and the nature of the evil also varies from region to region. There are studies on this outbreak of COVID-19. Central China is mostly a subtropical monsoon climate, a temperate monsoon climate. The climate is warm and humid, rainy and hot at the same time, precipitation is more abundant, humidity is more significant, local patients are more humid and hot, and it is advisable to use antipyretic and detoxification drugs; south China is a subtropical monsoon climate with abundant precipitation and slight annual difference, mild and humid climate, high humidity, easy to breed damp-warm Qi, more "wet, poisonous"; the northwest region is dominated by temperate continental climates, with sizeable annual temperature differences, hot summers, cold winters, and less precipitation. Syndrome of wind-cold attacking lung in this region; the temperature in winter and spring in North China is low, evidence of cold and wet attacks; it is characterized by "wetness, poison, and disease"; South China has high temperatures and precipitation throughout year, forming the evil of damp heat; the northeast region is cold and dry, and its early illness is characterized by cold and dryness. In the later stages of the disease, it may turn hot, but the cold, dry syndrome is evident in the early period. Treatment should take into account both cold and dry. During recovery, we should use more medicine to nourish Yin and invigorate Qi; the southwest region is mountainous and cloudy, with high humidity. Because it is located in a subtropical region and the temperature is high, the obedient Qi has the nature of wet and is characterized by "wetness, heat, poison, and stasis" [37]. Due to different climates, terrain, and other factors in different regions, the patient's physique is different, and the disease mechanism is also different, so it is particularly imperative to formulate a prevention and treatment plan in combination with its environment.

#### According to individual conditions

People of different ages react differently to evil in this epidemic, and studies have shown that children have mild symptoms after illness, rarely have severe breathing difficulties, and have certain self-limitations. Middle-aged and older adults have poor physical fitness, are susceptible to diseases, and have severe symptoms. In the early stage, 42 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Nanjing were analyzed and studied. In five of the family cluster cases, the elderly had insufficient righteousness and weak ability to resist the virus, and after contact with the virus carried by patients during the incubation period more susceptible to Pathogenic Qi [38, 39]. Children are **Pure Yang Bodies (it is one of the physiological and pathological characteristics of children)**, have strong recovery abilities, and have no old diseases. So after the disease symptoms are mild and easy to recover from, they should promote the lungs as the key [40]. The elderly should help the healthy Qi to get rid of evil (Strengthen the body's ability to resist disease, eliminate diseases and evil spirits and restore people's health.), use drugs such as **Yuping Fengsan (classic ancient prescription of Chinese medicine)** to improve immunity. Suppose the patient is a depressed constitution, then, after being affected by the Pathogenic Qi. In that case, it is easy to appear that the liver loses its function of dredging, and the Qi machine is irregular, resulting in emotional depression. This makes it more difficult to cure a condition that is already lingering and repetitive. If the patient has a phlegm-wet constitution, it is easy to appear upset and vomit, chest tightness, dizziness and cough, and other symptoms when sick. Pay attention to publicizing Lung Qi when diagnosing and treating drying dampness and resolving phlegm. Suppose the patient has symptoms such as purple tongue, dull complexion, chest tightness, and breath holding for blood stasis. In that case, paying attention to clearing heat and stasis, cooling blood, and activating blood are necessary.

In the face of the epidemic, it is difficult to achieve one person, one prescription, so based on generic prescriptions, classification of prevention and treatment according to age or physique can maximize the efficiency of prevention and treatment, and some provinces and cities have launched preventive prescriptions suitable for different groups of people according to their physique and age classification now. In the prevention work, Yunnan Province proposed "distinguishing the body and implementing prevention", dividing the population into three categories: hot physique, cold physique, and peace physique; Shanxi Province is divided into partial humid heat physique and partial Qi deficiency physique; Henan Province divides preventive prescriptions into adult and children's prescriptions and subdivides them into regular and special physiques; Shandong Province adds special populations and chronic underlying disease patients prevention prescriptions [41].

#### Conclusion

Through the study of the three aspects of timely conditions, local conditions, and human conditions, the application of the theory of "treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors" in the prevention and treatment of epidemic diseases since the Ming and Qing Dynasties shows that although the symptoms caused by the same kind of Qi are similar, but affected by the region, season and physique of the patient, the symptoms of the invasion of the same kind of Qi are different. The climate, terrain, customs, and habits of different regions cause the Qi of time to be mixed with different types of Pathogenic Qi, the north is cold, the south is hot, the west is dry, and the north is wet. The timing of the disease also affects the pathogenesis and symptoms of the epidemic, such as a windy spring, a hot summer wet, autumn and winter corresponding to dryness and cold, seasonality and natural Qi, and the five viscera. The constitution, age, and sex of patients also affect the development and outcome of the disease, and the provinces and cities have made full use of the theory of individual conditions to formulate preventive prescriptions according to the classification of the population according to their constitution. Today, when COVID-19 has not yet been controlled, the role of the "treatment in accordance

with three categories of etiologic factors” theory in the prevention and control of epidemics has important contemporary significance, and the “treatment in accordance with three categories of etiologic factors” is not only an essential theoretical principle of TCM but also guides the fight against and prevention and control of COVID-19. By giving full play to the advantages of “one person has one prescription” dialectical treatment of TCM and combining TCM with Western medicine, we will surely achieve breakthroughs shortly, provide new methods for the world’s epidemic prevention and control work, and contribute to the control of the world epidemic.

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