

Facing the Vanity Calamity Using Traditional Medicine

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I have been interested in the topic of beauty for many years. Before I began my career in acupuncture and Oriental medicine, I studied issues in social and health psychology in my role as a research psychologist. One of my research areas was the study of attractiveness. According to the research, perceived attractiveness leads to positive outcomes. That is, the more attractive you are perceived to be, the more likely you are to get the job, find a mate and be considered more intelligent, kind and honest. These are called "attractiveness halo effects" because these positive characteristics are attributed to you just because you are attractive. In other words, what is beautiful is good. This means that, regardless of your IQ, if you're beautiful, people think that you are smart as well. It's a plain and simple fact that our society has placed an emphasis on beauty for a long time, and the process starts in childhood. If a youngster who is perceived as attractive is aggressive in school his or her behavior is seen as less naughty than the same behavior performed by a less attractive child.

It is unfortunate that unlike in some cultures, our society despises the effects of aging. Almost everything associated with "getting old" is perceived as unwanted and ugly. Thus the multi-billion dollar business of erasing the effects of aging was born and thrives. What I call the "vanity calamity" is our obsession with how we look, combined with our willingness to do almost anything to achieve the desired look. Our search for youth, vitality and beauty seems endless. So is the list of things that women have been willing to endure over time in the name of youth and beauty. We have willingly gone under the knife, been suctioned, injected, chemically peeled, implanted, dyed, used toxic minerals on our face as make up, and more; all to fill our need to look younger or more beautiful.

AOM supports attaining youth and beauty from the inside out. A basic tenet of the medicine is that your outside reflects the status of your health on the inside. Health is all about balance and harmony. It is the balance of *yin* and *yang* and the free flow of *qi* through all the meridians that can help keep your face and skin vibrant and glowing. For example, is your digestion in balance? Good digestion is partly why some people have skin that looks clear and vibrant. Beauty from the inside out. The problem is that people have forgotten that beauty and a youthful appearance come from within. They've forgotten that looking young is a part of having a healthy inside. Most cosmetic procedures only address the outside. It's a fact that no matter what procedure you have done, the clock keeps ticking. Your body continues to age. It makes sense then that the most effective way to get and maintain a youthful appearance is to work from the inside out or work on both the inside and the outside. What's a perfect way to do that? Use Chinese medicine.

The idea of cosmetic acupuncture is not new. Some form of it has been used in China since as early as the [Sung Dynasty](#). The *Nei Jing* explained how treating the internal organs and meridians affects appearance. The results of treating the inside show up on the outside - on your face, your lips and your skin. That is because each organ system "controls" an aspect of beauty. The lungs control the skin and

body hair; they also affect the moisture of the skin. The spleen's balanced energy can naturally affect the skin, and strong spleen *qi* fights sagginess. The status of the heart can be seen on the face. For example, if your heart energy is disturbed and you become anxious, that may present as dark circles and puffiness under the eyes. So it makes perfect sense to keep healthy and balanced on the inside if we want to look good on the outside.

Other ancient medical books besides the *Nei Jing* record the fact that the Chinese have been using acupuncture, herbs, *qi gong* etc. for centuries to help maintain a youthful appearance. During the [Western Zhou](#) period, Chinese practitioners were using food recommendations to treat skin conditions. In the [Warring States period](#), the book *Shan Hai Jing (Classic of Mountains and Seas)* described herbal remedies that could be used for cosmetic purposes. This was followed by the herbal materia medica, *Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing*, which included prescriptions for facial cosmetic results. By the time of the Sung dynasty, the use of TCM for cosmetic purposes was gaining greater popularity, partly built upon the work of Sun Si Miao who developed many modalities that he said promoted health, longevity and beauty. Li Shi Shen wrote a classic text, *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, which addressed specific parts of the face, as well as the complexion and wrinkles.

The history of cosmetic procedures in China shows that modern practitioners of acupuncture and Oriental medicine have the opportunity to educate people about the benefits of their medicine with regard to aging. We can counsel young people about food choices, meditation, herbal remedies and how therapies like acupuncture can restore balance thereby reducing the impact of stress (that leads to aging!). AOM can be positioned as the true anti-aging medicine and be a major part in our country's proposed focus on prevention and maintaining good health.

Practicing "cosmetic" procedures within AOM is perfectly appropriate when we are certain to first address the general imbalances in the patient's energy. Cosmetic acupuncture, facial acupuncture and facial rejuvenation are, as far as I know, the only cosmetic procedures that actually improve your health while you are receiving cosmetic results. First and foremost, we are good diagnosticians and practitioners. Then, we may carry on with specialized cosmetic treatments. Holding to our basic tenets about the importance of balance will continue to demonstrate how early treatment with AOM can minimize the appearance of aging. To me, that sounds like a perfect solution for looking and feeling great.

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