

## A Case Report on the Efficacy of Thunder-Fire Moxibustion Combined with Scraping Therapy in the Treatment of Facial Melanosis

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### Abstract

Melanodermatitis is a pigmentary disorder of the skin with an unclear pathogenesis [ 1 ]. This study reports a case of facial melanodermatitis treated with a combination of two traditional Chinese medical therapies: scraping (Gua Sha) and Thunder-Fire Moxibustion (TFM). A 50-year-old female patient with a history of facial hyperpigmentation for more than 20 years received four courses of combined treatment. After treatment, the patient's pigmentation was markedly reduced, skin texture improved, and no adverse reactions occurred. This case suggests that the combination of scraping and Thunder-Fire Moxibustion may be a safe and effective therapeutic option for facial melanodermatitis and warrants further clinical investigation.

### Full Text

#### Efficacy of Combined Gua Sha and Thunder-Fire Moxibustion in the Treatment of Facial Melasma: A Case Report and Mechanistic Insights

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### ABSTRACT

Facial melasma is a challenging dermatological condition with limited treatment options. This study presents a case of facial melasma treated with a combination of Gua Sha (scraping therapy) and Thunder-Fire Moxibustion (TFM), two traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) therapies. A 50-year-old female patient with facial pigmentation for over 20 years underwent four courses of combined therapy. Significant improvement in pigmentation and skin texture was observed,

with no adverse effects. This case highlights the potential of integrating Gua Sha and TFM as a safe and effective treatment for facial melasma, warranting further clinical investigation.

**KEY WORDS:** Facial melasma; Gua Sha; Thunder-Fire Moxibustion; Combined therapy; Traditional Chinese medicine; Hyperpigmentation

## 1. Clinical Data

The patient was a 50-year-old female who presented with a chief complaint of grayish-black facial discoloration of many years' duration. She denied any history of exposure to industrial oils, toxins, cosmetics, or long-term medication use. Following evaluation at the dermatology department, she received a clinical diagnosis of facial melasma. The patient experienced poor sleep quality and had a dark complexion that had been evaluated at multiple institutions, significantly impacting her quality of life. She was referred to our outpatient clinic for further management.

Current symptoms included anxiety, grayish-black facial changes that did not blanch with pressure, poor sleep quality, a dark-red tongue with a thin yellow coating, tortuous sublingual veins, and a wiry, slippery pulse. Physical examination revealed diffuse, uneven grayish-black discoloration on the bilateral cheeks, periorbital area, and perioral region, with particularly dark pigmentation around the eyes (see Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Western medicine diagnosis: facial melasma. TCM diagnosis: Li Hei Ban (dark spots), with a pattern differentiation of qi stagnation and blood stasis. As the patient declined oral Chinese herbal decoction therapy, treatment focused primarily on characteristic TCM external therapies.

## 2. Treatment Methods

### 2.1 Facial Gua Sha

Using a jade Gua Sha board, treatment was performed in the following sequence: from the center of the forehead to the temples (2-3 times); from Yingxiang (LI20) to Xiaguan (ST7) and from Dicang (ST4) to Tinggong (SI19) (2-3 times); and from Chengjiang (RN24) to Tinghui (GB2) (2-3 times). Treatment was administered once daily. Facial Gua Sha has the therapeutic effects of activating blood and resolving stasis, relaxing tendons and unblocking collaterals, and eliminating toxins [?].

### 2.2 Thunder-Fire Moxibustion

Zhao' s Thunder-Fire Moxibustion evolved from the Thunder-Fire Divine Needle technique, transforming direct pressure moxibustion into suspended moxibustion. Compared with ordinary moxa sticks, the medicinal moxa stick has a larger diameter and contains refined mugwort floss combined with herbs including agarwood, frankincense, costus root, and pangolin scales, reaching combus-

tion temperatures of approximately 240°C [?]. Through the powerful thermal radiation and far-infrared penetration released during combustion, this therapy accelerates blood circulation, promotes metabolism, and eliminates inflammation.

**Treatment areas:** Bilateral facial regions and forehead.

**Acupoints:** Sibai (ST2), Yingxiang (LI20), Jiache (ST6).

**Procedure:** The patient was placed in a supine position. A moxa stick was ignited and secured in a single-head moxibustion device, positioned 2-3 cm from the skin surface. The forehead was treated first using either horizontal or vertical moxibustion techniques, with the skin pressed after every 10 movements until the treated area became red and hot. The cheek area was then treated similarly until red and hot. Finally, a sparrow-pecking method was applied at a distance of 1.5 cm from the acupoints (Sibai, Yingxiang, Jiache), with 9 pecks constituting 1 zhuang, pressing the skin between each zhuang, and 7 zhuang applied to each point.

### 3. Nursing Education

The disease course is typically prolonged, affecting not only appearance but also potentially impacting mental health and quality of life. Psychological support was provided to address the patient's negative emotions, including counseling to avoid suspected allergens and reduce sun exposure to alleviate psychological distress and maintain emotional well-being. The patient was taught self-administered facial Gua Sha techniques for home use and advised to minimize cosmetic use and sun exposure, with emphasis on sun protection when outdoors.

### 4. Treatment Results

Comparison between pretreatment (Figure 1) and post-treatment (Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]) demonstrates significant improvement.

### 5. Discussion

#### 5.1 Synergistic Effects of Gua Sha and Thunder-Fire Moxibustion

Based on holographic Gua Sha theory applied to the face, scraping therapy not only activates and restores the physiological functions of facial skin but also unblocks meridians and collaterals, regulates visceral function, promotes local blood circulation and lymphatic drainage, and reduces pigmentation. Thunder-Fire Moxibustion warms the meridians, unblocks collaterals, activates blood, and resolves stasis through its warming action, thereby improving skin metabolism. During treatment, optimal effects are achieved when the skin becomes red and produces a warm sensation. The sparrow-pecking method is most effective at a distance of 1.5 cm from the skin surface. Moxibustion is most appropriate when the patient perceives a needle-like sensation; for areas

with thin skin, redness and slight warmth are sufficient [?]. The combined therapy produces significant improvement in facial melasma pigmentation through a comprehensive “unblocking and tonifying” action.

## 5.2 Mechanism Exploration

From a TCM perspective, the mechanisms involve unblocking meridians and regulating qi and blood. From a modern medical perspective, potential mechanisms include improving microcirculation, regulating inflammatory responses, and inhibiting tyrosinase activity.

## 5.3 Comparison with Existing Treatments

Semiconductor lasers target melanin in hair follicles as the chromophore, effectively destroying melanin-containing hair follicles in the growth phase [?]. We speculate that the mechanism may involve destroying excess melanin within hair follicles and the epidermis above follicular openings, potentially reducing keratin plugs at follicular openings [?]. Facial Gua Sha and Thunder-Fire Moxibustion do not compromise skin integrity, offer simple operation, and provide greater safety, non-invasiveness, and cost-effectiveness.

## 5.4 Study Limitations

TCM external therapies offer simple operation with greater safety and low cost. However, given the unclear pathogenesis of the disease, limited number of observed cases, and lack of control groups and large-sample data, further research is required to validate the efficacy and mechanisms.

## References

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