



Bibliometric and Visual Analysis of the Clinical Research Progress of the Classic Prescription Danshen Yin

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Abstract

Objective: Conduct a comprehensive bibliometric and visual analysis of the clinical research on the classic prescription Danshen Yin to gain an in-depth understanding of its current status and provide valuable references for its further clinical application and research. **Methods:** Covering the time span from the establishment of the database to September 10, 2024, and utilizing six major database platforms such as CNKI and SinoMed. Retrieval was performed with “Danshen Yin” and “clinical” as subject terms. The retrieved articles were imported into Endnote for manual screening. Subsequently, for the screened articles, data were sorted and statistics were conducted through Excel 2023 based on classification criteria including literature source, publication time, research type, application scope, and combination application. Visual analysis of keywords was carried out using VOSviewer and Citespace software. **Results:** After screening, a total of 444 articles were included for analysis. Regarding publication time, there is an upward trend. The number of research articles gradually increased after 2008, reaching a peak in 2018 and 2019. In terms of literature sources, it includes journal papers and dissertations. Journal articles account for 90.1%, while theses account for 9.9%. Among them, the proportion of Peking University Core Journals is 7.2%. In terms of research type, randomized controlled studies are the most numerous, accounting for 68.0%. In terms of application scope, “coronary heart disease” is the most common, followed by “gastritis”. In terms of combination application, the prescription most frequently combined with Danshen Yin is Gualou-Xiebai-Banxia Decoction. Additionally, in the co-occurrence analysis of keywords, “coronary heart disease”, “*Angina pectoris*,” “chronic atrophic gastritis,” “modified Danshen Yin,” “Gualou-Xiebai-Banxia Decoction,” and “promoting blood circulation and removing blood stasis” appear with relatively high frequencies. The time-overlay and salient analysis of keywords indicate that the research focus is gradually shifting from gastric diseases to cardiac diseases. **Conclusion:** The clinical application of Danshen Yin has drawn extensive attention from modern physicians and shows a high degree of compatibility with clinical practice. However, the quality of clinical research needs to be improved. More reasonable clinical trial protocols should be designed, and large-sample studies need to be conducted.

Keywords

Danshen Yin
Famous classical formulas
Clinical research
Bibliometrics
Visual analysis

1. Introduction

“Danshen Yin” comes from the book “Shifang Geguo” written by Chen Xiuyuan, a medical expert in the Qing Dynasty, and is commonly used in clinical practice. Its formula consists of “Danshen (*Salvia miltiorrhiza*) 30 g, Sandalwood (Tanxiang) 3 g, *Amomum villosum* (Sharen) 3 g. Decoct in 300 mL water until reduced to 210 mL. Take the decoction orally.” It is “effective for treating various pains in the heart and stomach, especially for women ^[1].” This formula promotes blood circulation to remove blood stasis and relieve pain by regulating Qi. It is mainly used to treat various pains in the heart and stomach caused by blood stasis and Qi stagnation ^[2]. Given the numerous clinical research literature on Danshen Yin, this article is based on literature data from relevant database platforms such as CNKI. From the perspective of bibliometrics and visual analysis, it deeply analyzes the current status of clinical research on Danshen Yin, aiming to provide evidence and direction for the clinical application and follow-up research of this prescription.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Literature source

Select six major database platforms including China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Chinese Biomedical Literature Database (SinoMed), Wanfang Data Academic Paper Database, VIP Chinese Science and Technology Journal Full-text Database, Traditional Chinese Medicine Database Retrieval System, and Pubmed to search for clinical research literature on Danshen Yin. from the establishment of the database to September 10, 2024.

2.2. Search method

In the Chinese database, set “Danshen Yin” and “clinical” as the subject terms for advanced search operations. In the foreign language database, use “Dan-Shen Decoction” and “clinical” as the subject terms for advanced retrieval.

2.3. Inclusion criteria

- (1) There are no specific requirements for the treatment object.
- (2) Intervention measures include the use of modified Danshen Yin, a combination of prescriptions,

synergistic effect with adjuvant therapy, or the use of Danshen Yin in self-made prescriptions.

- (3) The research results need to clearly show the clinical treatment effect of Danshen Yin.
- (4) The number of research subjects should be greater than 20.

2.4. Exclusion criteria

- (1) Research literature in non-medical professional fields.
- (2) Newspaper articles and conference papers.
- (3) Review articles, experimental research articles, empirical articles, and articles that cannot obtain the full text.
- (4) Literature with fewer than 20 research subjects.
- (5) Literature whose research results cannot reflect the clinical efficacy of Danshen Yin.
- (6) Although the name of the prescription contains Danshen Yin, the literature does not indicate the use of modified Danshen Yin.
- (7) Clinical studies that have syndrome differentiation and classification, but do not universally use Danshen Yin for treatment.

2.5. Literature screening

First, import all records retrieved from the six major database systems, such as CNKI, into the EndNote literature retrieval management tool for de-duplication; be careful to carefully check before deleting duplicates to prevent accidental deletion of eligible references. Secondly, according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, manually screen the de-duplicated literature again to obtain the required clinical research literature on Danshen Yin.

2.6. Data processing

Using Excel 2023, data extraction was performed through a pre-designed data extraction form. This was followed by corresponding data classification, management, summary, and analysis.

The filtered literature was downloaded in RIS format and imported into VOSviewer software for keyword co-occurrence analysis and time overlay analysis. This allowed for the creation of network views and clustering of keywords. In the cluster diagram, the size of the

circular nodes represents the frequency of keyword occurrence. Larger nodes indicate more frequent keyword appearance and greater representation of research hotspots in the field. The lines between nodes represent the strength of association, with thicker lines indicating stronger connections. Node colors represent different clusters, or research themes. Ultimately, corresponding visual graphics were obtained.

A new Endnote output format was written, adopting a similar “Refworks” format for export operations. Subsequently, the obtained data were imported into CiteSpace 6.3.R1 for format conversion and analysis. In terms of time partitioning, both Chinese and English literature were set from 1994 to 2024, with a time slice of 1 year. The source of subject terms was set to default (all selected). For node types, a threshold of 25 was set for keywords, and emergence analysis was performed on these keywords.

3. Results

Based on the above search steps and methods, a total of 2,165 relevant Chinese literature articles were retrieved, and no English literature was found. Following inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as deduplication using EndNote and manual screening, a total of 444 Chinese literature articles were obtained. The specific analysis is as follows.

3.1. Literature distribution trend

The chronological distribution of clinical application literature on Danshen Yin is shown in **Figure 1**. The earliest clinical research literature on Danshen Yin was published in 1984^[3]. From 1984 to September 10, 2024, a total of 444 clinical research articles related to Danshen Yin were published. Between 1984 and 2007, except for 1998, 2002, and 2004, where the number of related articles reached more than 10, the number of related articles in other years ranged from 1 to 8. From 2008 to 2023, the annual number of related research articles ranged from 13 to 26. As of September 10, 2024, 9 clinical articles have been published, showing an overall upward trend. The maximum number of clinical research papers, totaling 52, was published in 2018 and 2019, accounting for 12% of the total papers.

3.2. Analysis of journal sources

Among the 444 selected articles, 400 were from journals, accounting for 90.1% of the total literature; the remaining 44 were dissertation-type articles, accounting for 9.9%. The 400 journal articles were distributed across 152 journals, with a 7.2% proportion from Peking University’s core journals. Eighty-two journals published only one article, 58 journals published between 2 and 7 articles, and 12 journals published more than 8 articles. The journal with the most articles was “Journal of Practical Traditional Chinese Medicine,” with a total of 16 articles. The top 12 journals by publication volume are

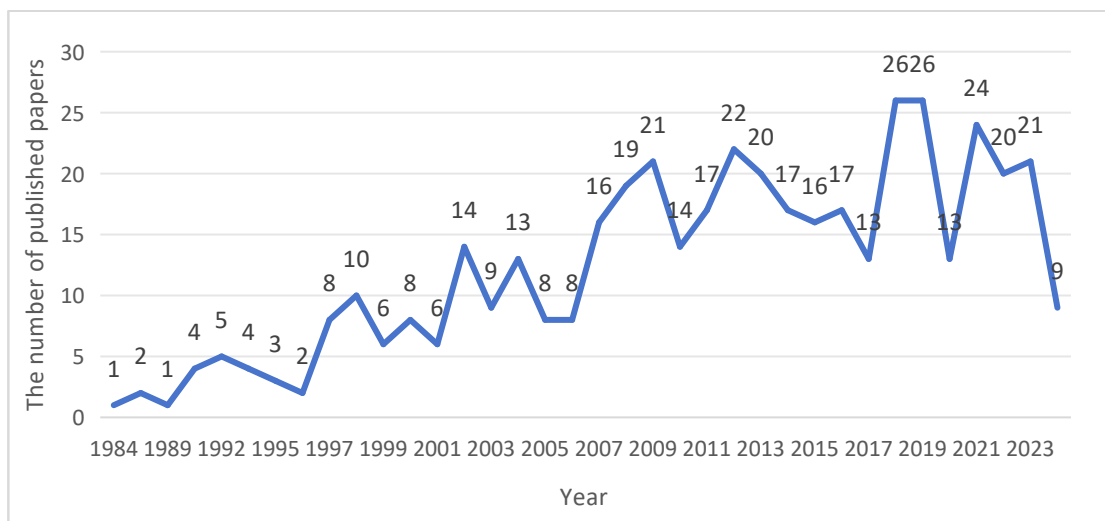


Figure 1. Chronological characteristics of literature distribution.

listed in **Table 1**. Additionally, the 44 dissertation articles originated from 17 institutions, with the top 6 institutions listed in **Table 2**.

3.3. Types of clinical studies

Based on the content of the 444 clinical research articles, they can be broadly classified into three categories: randomized controlled trials, non-randomized controlled trials, and case series observations^[4]. Among them, 302 articles were explicitly expressed as randomized controlled trials, accounting for 68.0% of the total literature; 38 were non-randomized controlled clinical trials, accounting for 8.6%; and 104 were case series observations, accounting for 23.4%. The specific breakdown is shown in **Figure 2**.

3.4. Scope of diseases treated

Danshen Yin has a wide range of clinical applications. Among the 444 articles, 17 diseases with a relatively high number of studies (more than 3 related articles) were identified, involving a total of 351 articles. The statistical analysis is presented in **Figure 3**. In terms of circulatory system diseases, it covers 72 articles on coronary heart disease and angina pectoris, 45 on coronary heart disease, 38 on angina pectoris, 20 on heart failure, 13 on chest bi syndrome, 6 on arrhythmia, 4 on hypertension, 3 on viral myocarditis, and 3 on bradycardia-tachycardia syndrome. In digestive system diseases, it includes 73 articles on gastritis, 36 on peptic ulcer, 14 on epigastric pain, 4 on esophagitis, and 3 on stomach pain. For metabolic diseases, there are 11 articles on diabetes and

Table 1. Journal sources

Journal name	Number of articles
Journal of Practical Traditional Chinese Medicine	16
Guangming Journal of Chinese Medicine	15
Journal of Practical Traditional Chinese Internal Medicine	13
Clinical Research of Traditional Chinese Medicine	11
Modern Journal of Integrated Traditional and Western Medicine	10
Shaanxi Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine	10
Hebei Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine	10
Hunan Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine	10
Sichuan Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine	10
Inner Mongolia Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine	10
New Chinese Medicine	9
Henan Traditional Chinese Medicine	9

Table 2. Dissertation institutional sources

Institution name	Number of articles
Heilongjiang University of Chinese Medicine	10
Hunan University of Chinese Medicine	8
Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine	5
Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine	3
Hubei University of Chinese Medicine	3
Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine	3

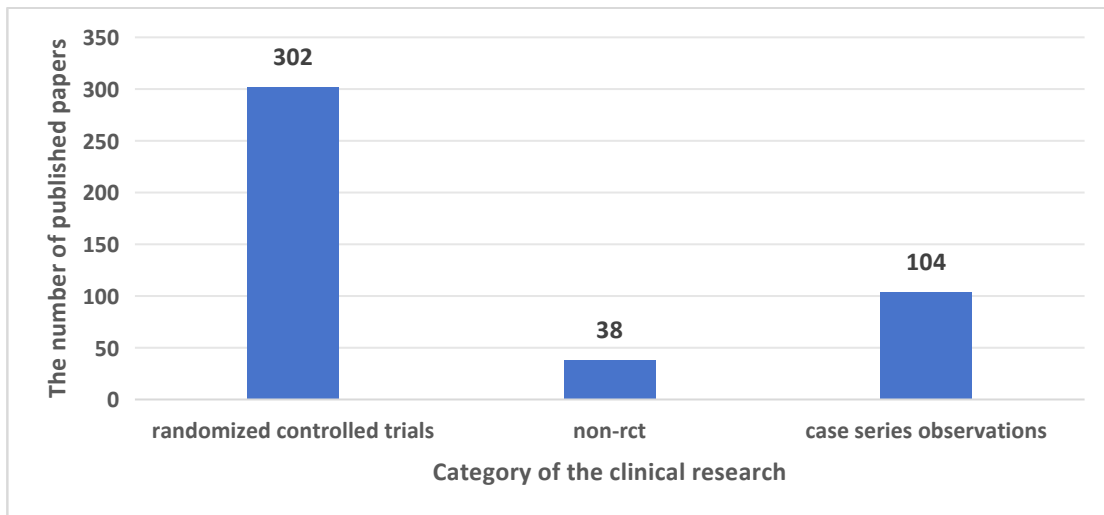


Figure 2. Distribution of clinical study types.

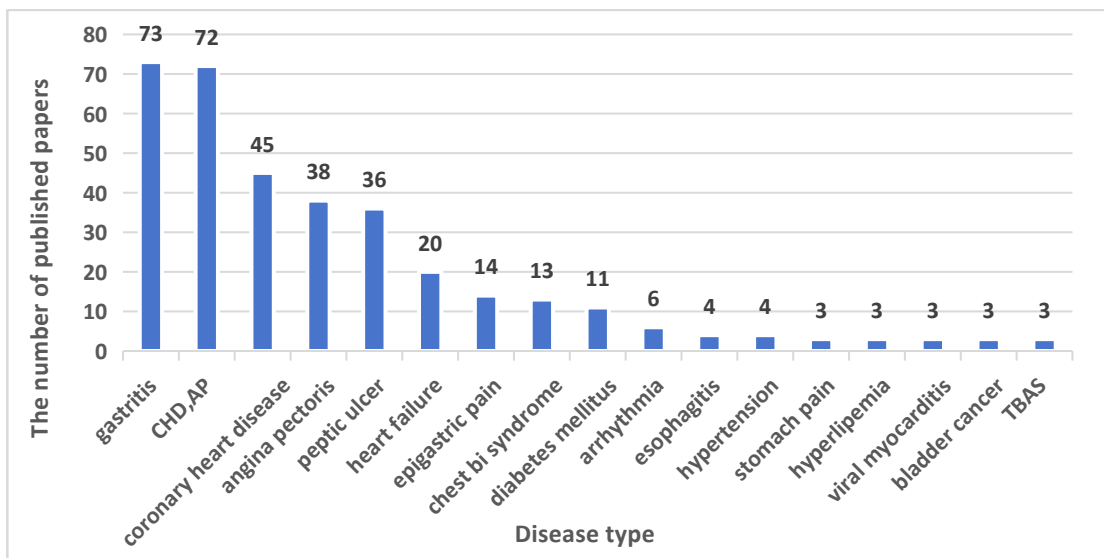


Figure 3. Types of diseases treated in literature.

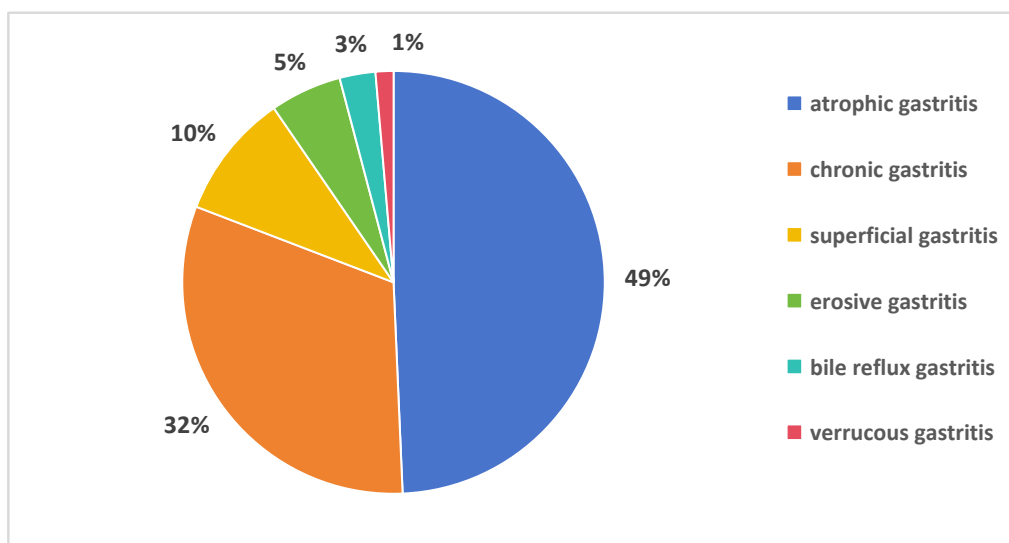


Figure 4. Proportion of different types of gastritis diseases in the literature.

3 on hyperlipidemia. In the field of malignant tumors, it includes 3 articles on bladder cancer.

Furthermore, Danshen Yin can treat different types of gastritis in digestive system diseases. Among them, atrophic gastritis accounts for 49%, chronic gastritis for 32%, superficial gastritis for 10%, erosive gastritis for 5%, bile reflux gastritis for 3%, and verrucous gastritis for 1%. The specific details are shown in **Figure 4**.

3.5. Modified combination applications

As a basic formula, Danshen Yin is often modified or combined with other prescriptions in clinical practice based on the disease. Among the 444 articles selected in this study, 133 articles focus on clinical research of Danshen Yin alone, including modified applications of Danshen Yin and its combination with other traditional Chinese medicine therapies or Western medications. The remaining 311 articles involve its use in combination with other classic prescriptions, totaling 112 combination methods. Among them, 68 combination prescriptions appeared in only one article, and 31 appeared in 2 to 5 articles. The commonly used combination prescriptions (with more than 5 articles) are: combined with Gualou Xiebai Banxia Decoction in 33 articles, Shengmai San in 22 articles, Xuefu Zhuyu Decoction in 18 articles, Shixiao San in 15 articles, Xiao xianxiong Decoction in 13 articles, Si jun zi Decoction in 10 articles, Liangfu wan, Baihe Decoction in 8 articles, Chaihu Shugan San in 8 articles, Baoyuan Decoction in 7 articles, Wendan Decoction in 7 articles, Zhenwu Decoction in 7 articles, Liu jun zi Decoction in 7 articles, and Banxia Xiexin Decoction in 6 articles.

13 articles, Sijunzi Decoction in 10 articles, Liangfu wan and Baihe Decoction (also known as Sanhe Decoction) in 8 articles, Chaihu Shugan San in 8 articles, Baoyuan Decoction in 7 articles, Wendan Decoction in 7 articles, Zhenwu Decoction in 7 articles, Liu junzi Decoction in 7 articles, and Banxia Xiexin Decoction in 6 articles. The specific details are shown in **Figure 5**.

3.6. Keyword analysis

3.6.1. Co-occurrence analysis of keywords

Keywords are a highly condensed and summarized representation of the content of literature. By analyzing the co-occurrence map of keywords, we can grasp the research hotspots in this field. High-frequency keywords are a highly refined representation of the thematic content of papers, and the research hotspots they reflect can provide auxiliary support for scientific research. Setting the keyword occurrence in the literature to more than 5 times and using VOSviewer software for analysis, we obtained a total of 671 keywords, finally including 36 keywords and forming 7 clustering labels. Among them, there are 20 keywords with a higher frequency of occurrence (frequency > 9). After eliminating basic vocabulary such as “Danshen Yin,” “clinical efficacy,” and “efficacy,” keywords such as “coronary heart disease,” “chronic atrophic gastritis,” and “angina pectoris” reflect the hotspots of Danshen

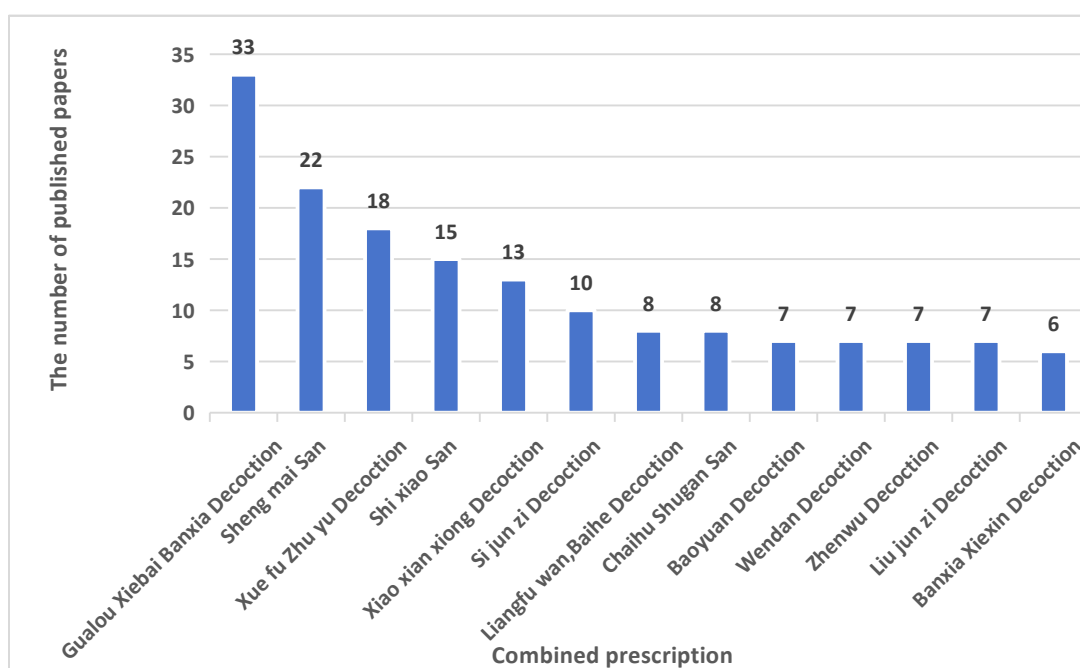


Figure 5. Frequency of combined prescriptions of Danshen Yin in literature.

the research hotspot of Danshen Yin in clinical studies, besides basic treatment application and efficacy observation, mainly focused on the treatment of gastric diseases. The commonly used combined prescription is Danshen Yin combined with Liangfu Pill and Baihe Tang (also known as Sanhe Tang). After 2010, research on the treatment of chest bi and improvement of cardiac function with Danshen Yin became more popular. The keyword “quality of life” suggests that with the deepening promotion of China’s well-off society, the use of Danshen Yin to improve patients’ quality of life may become a current research hotspot. See **Figure 8** for details.

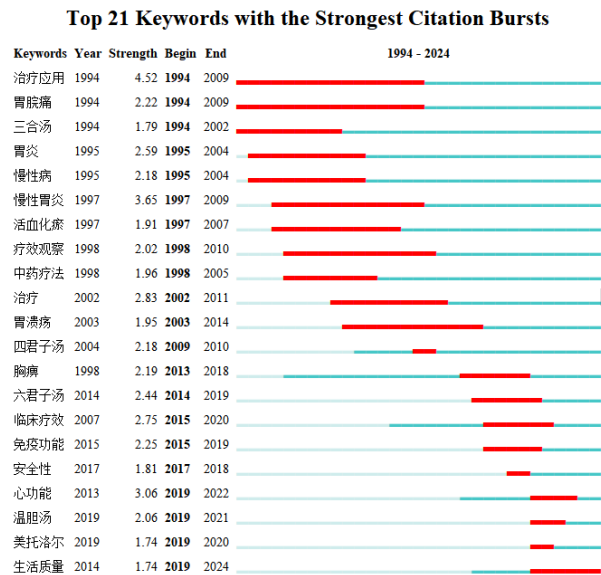


Figure 8. Citespace keyword burst.

4. Discussion

4.1. Basic analysis of clinical research on Danshen Yin

This study counted a total of 444 journal articles and dissertations, all from Chinese databases. No clinical studies on Danshen Yin were retrieved from PubMed. Since 2008, the number of published literature has been 13 or more each year, showing a clear growth trend. Especially in recent years, the number of studies has increased significantly, reflecting researchers’ increasing attention to the clinical value of Danshen Yin. Among the 400 journal articles, the proportion of core journals of Peking University is 7.2%, and only 2 of the 44 dissertations can be published in journals. The above

situation indicates that the clinical value of Danshen Yin is increasingly valued by the academic community, but the promotion of research results still needs to be further strengthened.

In this article, the criterion for randomized controlled trials is set as “the literature indicates random grouping with a control group (including semi-randomized controlled trials)”, and non-randomized controlled trials are defined as “the literature does not indicate random grouping with a control group” and a series of case observations. Among them, randomized controlled trials account for the largest proportion, which is 68.0%. However, in terms of literature research types, it is difficult to find literature that fully meets the RCT standard according to the 22 basic elements of the “Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials” (CONSORT) declaration. The quality of clinical research on Danshen Yin needs to be improved in many aspects, such as trial design and implementation specifications, to meet the internationally recognized systematic evaluation requirements ^[4].

4.2. Clinical application analysis of Danshen Yin

Danshen Yin has always been a remarkable prescription for treating qi stagnation and blood stasis syndrome. Clinically, it is often used to treat cardiovascular and digestive system diseases caused by cold dampness stagnation, Qi stagnation and blood stasis, or internal obstruction of phlegm, such as coronary heart disease, cholelithiasis, cholecystitis, hepatitis, gastritis, gastric and duodenal ulcer, etc. This study found that Danshen Yin has been most widely studied in cardiovascular diseases, followed by digestive system diseases. It has a certain curative effect on blood stasis syndromes caused by Qi deficiency ^[6,7], Qi stagnation ^[8,9], Yin deficiency ^[10,11], and Yang deficiency ^[12]. In addition, Danshen Yin has also demonstrated unique therapeutic effects in endocrine diseases such as diabetes ^[13–15] and hyperlipidemia ^[16,17], which can promote blood circulation and remove blood stasis, and relieve related symptoms. In cancer treatment, the current advantage of Danshen Yin is more reflected in its ability to help restore the body’s vital energy after chemotherapy with its powerful functions of dispelling blood stasis, dredging meridians, and relieving pain ^[18].

In clinical application of Danshen Yin, it is often

based on its role in promoting blood circulation and removing blood stasis, assisted by other prescriptions for treatment. Among the 444 selected articles in this paper, 309 articles adopted combined prescriptions as the treatment method, covering 111 types of combinations. The most commonly used combinations include Gualou Xiebai Banxia Decoction^[19,20], Shengmai Powder^[21,22], and Xuefu Zhuyu Decoction^[23,24]. The remaining 135 articles were based on syndrome types and clinical manifestations, either by modifying and adding flavors, or combining with other traditional Chinese medicine therapies^[25], or combining with western medicine to carry out integrated Chinese and western medicine treatment^[26] to obtain more ideal treatment effects.

4.3. Analysis of visualization results of Danshen Yin literature

Since Citespace software can only trace the literature back to 1994 at the earliest, which cannot cover all data, this article mainly uses VOSviewer for visualization mapping, with Citespace as a supplement and reference. Through keyword co-occurrence analysis, it can be known that the clinical application hotspots of Danshen Yin include coronary heart disease, angina pectoris, and chronic atrophic gastritis; both keyword time stacking visualization and keyword burst analysis can indicate that the research direction of Danshen Yin has shifted from

focusing on digestive system diseases to focusing on cardiovascular system diseases; with the evolution of the social and economic environment, changes in the disease spectrum of patients and their higher demands for quality of life may be the reasons for the corresponding changes in the clinical application hotspots of Danshen Yin.

5. Conclusion

In summary, through careful combing and statistical analysis of relevant literature, this study has clarified that Danshen Yin is mainly used and effective in the field of internal medicine, especially in the treatment of cardiovascular and digestive diseases. Moreover, it is often used in combination with other prescriptions such as Gualou Xiebai Banxia Tang. It is expected to become a new hotspot in clinical research in improving symptoms and quality of life. However, the level and quality of clinical research on Danshen Yin still need to be further improved, and more high-quality and standardized clinical research results are urgently needed. This article may provide clues and inspiration for clinical researchers and practitioners, further tap the clinical application potential of Danshen Yin, provide stronger support for the clinical treatment of this prescription, add more benefits to patients, and contribute to building a healthy China.

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Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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