



The Mystery of the Five Flavors Growth-Transformation in the System of *Fu Xing Jue Zang Fu Yong Yao Fa Yao*

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Abstract

The chart of *Tang Ye Jing* recorded in *Fu Xing Jue Zang Fu Yong Yao Fa Yao* holds significant academic value for analyzing the formula compatibility principles in *Shang Han Lun*. The authors constructed the chart of *Tang Ye Jing* principle *Zang Fu Yong Yao Fa Yao* based on *Tang Ye Jing* to systematically elucidate the intrinsic correlations among physicochemical properties, therapeutic functions, and flavor transformations of medicinal substances, and conduct in-depth analyses of theoretical concepts such as wood of wood, fire of water, and earth of gold within the framework of medicinal properties. Verified through long-term clinical practice, the application of formulas guided by this theoretical framework has demonstrated remarkable curative effects. This study provides a new methodological approach for deepening the interpretation of the academic connotations of the chart of *Tang Ye Jing* principle and facilitating its clinical translation.

Subject Areas

Internal Medicine

Keywords

Fu Xing Jue Zang Fu Yong Yao Fa Yao, *Tang Ye Jing* Principle, Five Flavours, Flavour Transformation, *Shang Han Lun*

1. Introduction

The *Fu Xing Jue Wu Zang Yong Yao Fa Yao Chuan Cheng Ji* (*Chuan Cheng Ji*) includes a handwritten copy of the *Fu Xing Jue Zang Fu Yong Yao Fa Yao* (*Fu*

Xing Jue), conducting a relatively indepth investigation and research on the *Fu Xing Jue* [1]. The *Fu Xing Jue* was kept in the Sutra Cave of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang. Later, a Taoist priest named Wang sold this book to the grandfather of Zhang Dachang. Although the original volume of the *Fu Xing Jue* was destroyed, the copy passed down by his disciples still retains the basic content of the original volume, which is of great significance and extremely valuable [2].

Mainstream scholarship holds that all extant manuscript copies of *Fu Xing Jue* exhibit only minor variations in content [3] [4]. The core text comprises 61 medicinal formulas, philosophical perspectives attributed to Tao Hongjing, and the chart of *Tang Ye Jing*. It is believed that *Fu Xing Jue* was compiled by Tao Hongjing based on the *Tang Ye Jing*, with reference to foundational texts such as *Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing* and *Tong Jun Cai Yao Lu*. The work was designed to serve as a practical manual for his mountain retreats, enabling him to instruct disciples in applying its methods to treat illnesses and cultivate inner vision practices. The *Chuan Cheng Ji* states: The second section documents over a dozen formulas cited by Zhang Zhongjing from the *Tang Ye Jing*. Spanning from the passage on treating externally contracted celestial epidemics with classical formulas such as the Two Dawn, Six Divine, Great and Minor Decoctions to identifying medicinal agents by their nominal attributes to infer therapeutic principles, this section conclusively demonstrates that the formulas in *Shang Han Lun* derive from the *Tang Ye Jing*. Furthermore, the 61 formulas preserved in *Fu Xing Jue* also originate from the *Tang Ye Jing*, establishing *Fu Xing Jue* as an epitome of the *Tang Ye Jing*.

The diagram of the five flavors tonifying and purging body (*Wu Wei Bu Xie Ti Yong Tu*, serves as chart of *Tang Ye Jing* principle) is the core and secret of the entire *Fu Xing Jue*, warranting focused scholarly attention. This diagram serves as a conceptual key to deciphering *Shang Han Lun* formulas through its capacity to simplify complexity. Moreover, it provides a structured framework for systematically modifying *Shang Han Lun* formulas, ensuring therapeutic adaptations remain grounded in classical principles while maintaining clinical precision [5].

The *Fu Xing Jue* points out that the *Tang Ye Jing* contains 360 prescriptions, from which 60 are selected to meet the needs of mountain cultivation. It also selects 25 of the most effective traditional Chinese medicines from the 60 prescriptions as the most essential drugs, and states: From the 25 ingredients, they are the essence of all medicines, mostly treating diseases damaged within the five internal organs and six viscera. Scholars must deeply internalize their principles. To enable these 25 traditional Chinese medicines to exert their effects of generation, restraint, control and transformation, a Diagram of the Five Flavors Functions in Tonifying and Purifying the Body is also listed, which points out they form in heaven and take shape on earth. Heaven has Five Qi, which transforms into Five Flavors. The changes of the five flavors are countless. Today, there are approximately twenty-five types listed to clarify the traces of the mutual inclusion of the

five elements and the functions of the changes in the five flavors. The following diagram of the production, inhibition and transformation of the 25 Ingredients is now collectively known as the diagram of the Functions of the Five Ingredients in Tonifying and Purging the Body, which serves as the guiding principle for the composition of the prescriptions in the *Fu Xing Jue*. Tao Hongjing said this diagram represents the essence of the *Tang Ye Jing*. Practitioners who master its principles complete their mastery of the medical art. Remarkably, this same diagram also encodes the core structural logic underlying formula design in the *Shang Han Lun*.

2. The Relationship between the Chart of *Tang Ye Jing* Principle and Zang-Fu Organs

Table 1. Comparative analysis of Five Zang Organ Supplementation-Purgation Methods between *Fu Xing Jue* and *Huang Di Nei Jing*.

Organ	<i>Fu Xing Jue</i>			<i>Huang Di Nei Jing</i>		
	Supplement	Purge	Aversion	Supplement	Purge	Aversion
Liver	Aromatic	Sour	Tension → Sweet to relax	Aromatic	Sour	Tension → Sweet to relax
Heart	Salty	Bitter	Slackness → Sour to consolidate	Salty	Sweet	Slackness → Sour to consolidate
Spleen	Sweet	Aromatic	Dryness → Bitter to dry	Sweet	Bitter	Dampness → Bitter to dry
Lung	Sour	Salty	Rebellious Qi → Aromatic to disperse	Sour	Aromatic	Rebellious Qi → Bitter to drain
Kidney	Bitter	Sweet	Dryness → Salty to moisten	Bitter	Salty	Dryness → Aromatic to moisten

This study builds upon the discovery of the *Tang Ye Jing* to unravel the intrinsic principles governing formula construction in *Shang Han Lun* and *Fu Xing Jue*, with the aim of clarifying the relationship between the diagram and the Zang-Fu organs, as well as establishing definitive correspondences among the Five Phases, Five Flavors, Five Zang Organs, and Five Fu Organs. Taking the Functional Wood Phase as an example, while some scholars associate Wood solely with the liver, the author proposes a refined categorization that Wood encompasses both Jia Wood and Yi Wood. Since in the use of the wood body, wood can correspond to the liver, and wood includes both Jia Wood and Yi Wood concepts, why can Jia Wood correspond to the gallbladder and Yi wood to the liver in the wood body? The rest can be inferred in the same way. Fire is divided into Bing fire and Ding fire, representing the small intestine and the heart respectively. Earth is divided into Wu earth and Ji earth, representing the stomach and spleen respectively. Xin is divided into Geng Gold and Xin Gold, representing the large intestine and the lung re-

spectively. The water content is Ren water and GUI water, which respectively represent the bladder and the kidney. Although the *Fu Xing Jue* only discusses the use of drugs by the Zang Organs, its title Essentials of Drug Use by Zang-Fu Organs must contain the drug use rules of the Fu Organs. After several years of research, the author has made up for the previous research and intends to improve *Tang Ye Jing* Principle, breaking down the connection barriers between the use of drugs by Zang-Fu Organs and the Five Flavors and Five Elements, to guide the innovative thinking of drug use in classic prescriptions. The *Fu Xing Jue* system demonstrates greater logical coherence compared to the seemingly fragmented principles in *Huang Di Nei Jing* (Table 1). This divergence confirms that *Tang Ye Jing* and *Huang Di Nei Jing* hold conflicting theories on flavor-organ interactions, further validating *Fu Xing Jue's* direct lineage to *Tang Ye Jing* rather than *Huang Di Nei Jing*. Despite containing only 61 formulas, *Fu Xing Jue* comprehensively addresses internal deficiency regulation, external pathogen expulsion, and critical Yang resuscitation, surpassing *Huang Di Nei Jing* in systematic rigor regarding flavor-organ correspondences.

The foundational principle governing the relationships between the Five Flavors and the Five Zang Organs/Five Fu Organs in the *Tang Ye Jing* lies in the visceral desires and aversions. Taking the liver as an example, Tao Hongjing states that the liver's virtue lies in dispersion. Thus, the *Tang Ye Jing* prescribes that supplement it with aromatic, and purge it with sour. The liver dislikes tension, urgently administer sweet to relax it, thereby harmonizing its nature and moderating excess. Here, the liver's virtue refers to its innate desire, a manifestation of the body's natural physiological law. The aromatic flavor's dispersing property aligns with this desire, hence supplementation with aromatic, where supplementation means supporting the organ's inherent function. Conversely, the liver dislikes tension reflects pathological excess, countered by the sweet flavor's moderating action. From this, we deduce that sweet restrains aromatic. Within the Wood Phase framework, sweet is the transformative flavor, aromatic is the functional flavor. In the *Tang Ye Jing* Diagram, the Wood Phase assigns aromatic to the functional aspect and sour to the constitutive aspect. From this, we deduce that the transformative flavor restrains the functional flavor. This principle extends to the other Five Phases, where each transformative and functional flavor, positioned within their conquering phases, evolves into a relationship between the functional flavor and constitutive flavor. Thus, it is established that the functional flavor restrains the constitutive flavor. In summary, the relationships among correspondence flavors, constitutive flavors, and transformative flavors are systematically derived from the interplay of visceral desires and aversions, forming the theoretical cornerstone of the *Tang Ye Jing's* pharmacological framework. Based on the original decoction meridian method diagram of *Fu Xing Jue* (Figure 1), the author has newly drawn the decoction meridian method Zang-Fu Organ medication diagram (Figure 2), providing ideas and methods for exploring the decoction meridian method diagram.

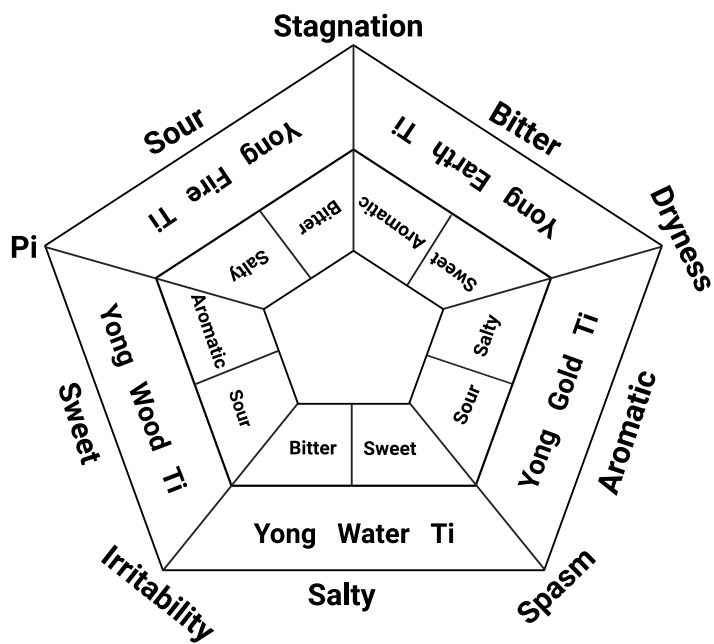


Figure 1. The original diagram of *Tang Ye Jing*.

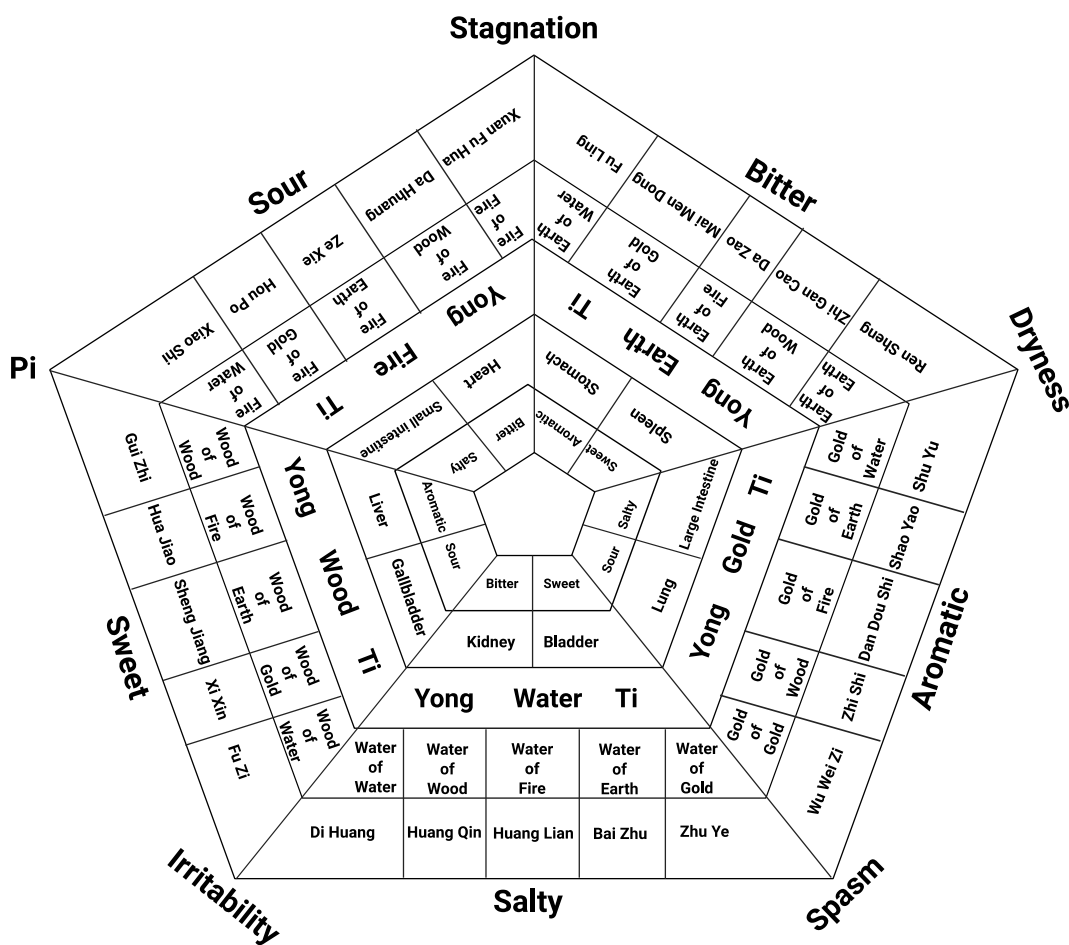


Figure 2. The mystery of the five flavors growth-transformation in the system of *Tang Ye Jing*.

3. Illustrated Guide to Herbal Applications for Zang-Fu Organs

The diagram of Zang-Fu Organ medication mainly adds the corresponding Zang-Fu Organs of body, function and taste, as well as the five elements of the 25 traditional Chinese medicines, revealing the corresponding relationship between body and taste and Zang-Fu Organs. The details are as follows.

The aromatic taste in wood corresponds to the liver and the sour taste to the gallbladder. In the fire body, saltiness corresponds to the heart and bitterness to the small intestine. The sweet in the soil corresponds to the spleen and the aromatic to the stomach. In the Gold body, the acid corresponds to the lungs and the saltiness to the large intestine. The bitter taste in water corresponds to the kidneys and the sweet taste to the bladder. The wood body is divided into five columns below, namely Wood of Wood, Wood of Fire, Wood of Earth, Wood of Gold, and Wood of Water, corresponding to Gui Zhi, Hua Jiao, Sheng Jiang, Xi Xin, and Fu Zi respectively. Similarly, with the fire element, it is divided into five columns below, namely Fire of Fire, Fire of Wood, Fire of Earth, Fire of Gold, and Fire of Water, corresponding respectively to Xuan Fu Hua, Da Huang, Ze Xie, Hou Po, and Xiao Shi. Using earth, it is divided into five columns below, namely, Earth of Earth, Earth of Wood, Earth of Fire, Earth of Gold, and Earth of Water, corresponding to Ren Shen, Zhi Gan Cao, Da Zhao, Mai Men Dong, and Fu Ling. In the form of gold, it is divided into five columns below, namely, Gold of Gold, Gold of Wood, Gold of Fire, Gold of Earth, and Gold of Water, corresponding respectively to Wu Wei Zi, Zhi Shi, Dan Dou Chi, Shao Yao, and Shu Yu. The water body is divided into five columns below, namely water of Water, Water of Wood, Water of Fire, Water of Earth, and Water of Gold, corresponding to Di Huang, Huang Qin, Huang Lian, Bai Zhu, and Zhu Ye.

When comparing the diagram of the use of Zang-Fu Organ medication diagram with the *Tang Ye Jing* Principle, the diagram of Zang-Fu Organ clearly indicates that the Flavors used and the Fu organs correspond to the body odor. There is very little guidance on the medication of the Fu organs in medical books throughout history, but the diagram of the medication of the Zang-Fu organs clearly indicates the correspondence between the fu organs and body odor as well as their relationship with the Zang-fu organs. This addresses a historical gap in classical texts, which largely neglected Fu organ therapeutics. The diagram systematically defines Fu organ-flavor relationships and their interplay with Zang organs.

The Five Phases-Five Flavors theory originates from the Hongfan chapter of the *Shang Shu*: Water moistens and descends associated with salty, Fire flares upward associated with bitter, Wood bends and straightens associated with sour, Gold yields and reforms associated with pungent, Earth permits sowing and reaping associated with sweet. This canonical framework dominated pharmacological discourse until Tao Hongjing, over a millennium later, challenged its oversimplifications through empirical refinement. By integrating constitutive-functional principles, Tao grounded abstract wuxing theory in clinical reality. His diagram re-

mains scientifically coherent even by modern standards, validating his epithet as the Hermit Statesman, a visionary who harmonized Daoist philosophy with pragmatic medical innovation.

4. The Relationship between Essence Flavors, Functional Flavors, Transformative Flavors and the Zang-Fu Organs

The transformative flavor restrains the functional flavor, while the functional flavor restrains the constitutive flavor. Here, restraint denotes suppression or moderation. This principle applies analogously to other organs. When the transformative flavor is insufficient, the functional flavor tends toward excess; when the transformative flavor is excessive, the functional flavor becomes deficient. Harmonizing constitutive and functional flavors mitigates harm caused by transformative imbalances. For example, aromatic and sweet combine to transform bitter, sour and salty combine to transform aromatic.

The Five Phases achieve equilibrium through this mutual restraint, ensuring physiological harmony and preventing pathology. However, the diagram of Zang-Fu Organ medication introduces a distinct interpretation. Taking the liver as an example, when the aromatic flavor of the liver is excessive, the functional of aromatic flavor in the stomach also tends toward excess, that the spleen associated with sweet flavor counteracts this excess via its transformative flavor. This mechanism embodies the axiom that excess causes harm, restraint enables regulation, regulation sustains life, which here diverges radically from traditional interpretations. Unlike classical theory, where restraint follows the conqueror-conquered phase cycle, this model prioritizes visceral maternal intervention. The spleen restrains liver excess not through direct phase conquest, but via transformative flavor modulation.

The principle states that purge the child in excess, supplement the mother in deficiency. The child can solidify the mother, and the mother can moderate the child. From the formulation logic of the Major and Minor Supplementation-Purgation Decoctions, we deduce that Major Purgation Decoction expands the Minor Purgation Decoction by adding the mother organ's constitutive flavor, functional flavor, and transformative flavor. This embodies that the child solidifies the mother, where purging the child indirectly reinforces the mother. Major Supplementation Decoction enhances the Minor Supplementation Decoction by incorporating two functional flavors and one constitutive flavor of the child organ. This reflects the mother moderates the child, where supplementing the mother regulates the child.

According to the definitions of deficiency and excess in *Fu Xing Jue* and the supplementation-purgation relationships illustrated in the diagram of Zang-Fu Organ medication, purging the child in cases of excess refers to targeting the Fu organs, while supplementing the mother in cases of deficiency involves reinforcing the Zang organs. The principle the child solidifies the mother implies that regulating the Fu organs strengthens the Zang organs, whereas the mother mod-

erates the child signifies that harmonizing the Zang organs alleviates Fu organ excess. For a specific Zang organ, deficiency is addressed by supplementing the Zang itself, while excess is treated by purging its paired Fu organ. This logic establishes the Zang as the mother and the Fu as the child, redefining the classical axioms deficiency treats the mother and excess treats the child within a visceral framework. Analyzing the formulation principles of the Major and Minor Supplementation-Purgation Decoctions in *Fu Xing Jue*, we infer that reinforcing the child (Fu) stabilizes the mother (Zang), while modulating the mother (Zang) restrains the child (Fu). Thus, deficiency requires supplementing the child, and excess necessitates protecting the mother, reflecting a paradigm shift that prioritizes empirical Zang-Fu interactions over abstract Five Phases theory, aligning with the text's clinical focus on visceral synergy. *Fu Xing Jue* redefines classical theory through a visceral lens, prioritizing empirical organ-flavor interactions over abstract phase cycles. This framework aligns with its clinical focus on Zang-Fu synergy, where pharmacological strategies directly address organ-system imbalances.

5. Definitions of Supplementation and Purgation and Their Relationship with the Zang-Fu Organs

The principle Yang progression signifies supplementation, marked by the number seven; Yin regression signifies purgation, marked by the number six is interpreted as follows: In the context of the *Tang Ye Jing* Principle, Yang progression as supplementation begins at the functional flavor of the Zang organ requiring reinforcement. Moving clockwise, one counts only the functional flavors of Zang organs, totaling seven flavors: two from the target Zang organ, two from its child Zang organ, and one each from the remaining three Zang organs. These seven flavors form the Major Supplementation Decoction. Conversely, Yin regression as purgation starts at the constitutive flavor of the Fu organ requiring regulation. Moving counterclockwise, one counts only the constitutive flavors of Fu organs, totaling six flavors: two from the target Fu organ and one each from the remaining four Fu organs. These six flavors constitute the Major Purgation Decoction.

Based on the *Tang Ye Jing* Principle of Yang progression for supplementation, Yin regression for purgation, it is deduced that supplementing Yang equates to reinforcing Zang organs, while regressing Yin equates to purging Fu organs. This establishes the *Tang Ye Jing's* unique framework, Zang organs are Yang, and Fu organs are Yin, contrasting with classical texts where Zang (Yin) and Fu (Yang). Here, supplementation involves increasing the Zang's functional flavors, whereas purgation involves augmenting the Fu's constitutive flavors. Increasing Fu constitutive flavors moderates Zang functional excess, paradoxically termed supplementing the Fu despite its purgative role. Thus, supplementation addresses Zang deficiency by enhancing its function, while purgation addresses Fu insufficiency by restoring balance through modulation. This redefines traditional concepts, both actions are forms of supplementation as one directly strengthening Zang, the other indirectly by harmonizing Fu. The *Tang Ye Jing's* inversion of classical Yin-Yang

organ assignments and its reinterpretation of supplementation-purgation logic underscore its distinct pharmacological paradigm, prioritizing systemic equilibrium over conventional organ-centric approaches.

6. The Relationship between Herbal Applications for Fu Organs and Their Corresponding Zang Organs

The diagram of Zang-Fu Organ medication reveals clear patterns that the liver and stomach share identical medicinal flavors, as do the spleen and bladder, the heart and large intestine, and the lung and gallbladder. Contrary to the traditional assumption that exterior-interior paired organs employ congruent flavors, the diagram demonstrates their pharmacological strategies are entirely distinct. The outer ring of the *Tang Ye Jing* Diagram displays five functions labeled as removing vexation, relieving dryness, and others collectively representing pathogen elimination. By combining two adjacent diagonal flavors, specific pathogenic factors are targeted. For instance, the previously ambiguous removing is now logically inferred as relieving convulsions based on clinical practice. All formulas in the *Shang Han Lun* adhere to this principle, with the diagram clarifying how to compose prescriptions for pathogen expulsion. Terms like Earth of Earth, Water of Metal, and Fire of Wood in the diagram reference the *Tong Jun Cai Yao Lu*, an ancient text now lost, which classified herbs into Greater and Lesser Five Phases. For example, aromatic herbs are categorized under Wood, such as Gui Zhi as Wood of Wood, Hua Jiao as Wood of Fire, Sheng Jiang as Wood of Earth, Xi Xin as Wood of Gold, and Fu Zi as Wood of Water.

According to *Fu Xing Jue*, each Zang organ possesses an inherent virtue. The liver's virtue lies in dispersion, characterized by free coursing. The heart's virtue is softening, manifesting as warmth and upward. The spleen's virtue is moderation, enabling transformation and bearing. The lung's virtue is convergence, marked by. And the kidney's virtue is fortification, associated with nourishment and storage. Herbs aligning with these virtues act through their respective organs as dispersing agents (aromatic) operate via the liver, softening agents (salty) via the heart, moderating agents (sweet) via the spleen, astringent agents (sour) via the lung, and fortifying agents (bitter) via the kidney. The diagram of Zang-Fu Organ medication illustrates that each organ excels in fulfilling its intrinsic nature, and herbs with analogous properties are catalyzed by organs sharing their virtues. This framework redefines flavor-organ correspondences as pungent enters the liver, salty enters the heart, sweet enters the spleen, sour enters the lung, and bitter enters the kidney as diverging radically from classical theories. For instance, the lung's convergent virtue conflicts with aromatic's dispersive nature, assigning sour to the lung aligns with its physiological role, whereas pungent would disrupt its function. Conversely, the liver's dispersive nature harmonizes with pungent, while sour would force it to act contrary to its virtue. This logic, prioritizing organ virtues over rigid flavor assignments, resolves contradictions in traditional paradigms, offering a pharmacologically coherent system where flavors align with or-

gan-specific functions rather than arbitrary classifications.

Herbs sharing virtues with specific Zang organs are classified into the Greater Five Phases based on their inherent properties, while their channel tropism determines their Lesser Five Phases, exemplified by terms like Wood of Earth, Fire of Metal, and Water of Wood. The Greater Phase reflects the herb's alignment with a Zang organ's virtue. Water possesses Cold, descending, moistening, and storing properties. Fire possesses transforming, ascending, warming, and illuminating properties. Wood possesses expanding, bending, and dynamic properties. Metal possesses contracting, sound-producing, and purging properties. Earth possesses bearing, nurturing, and transformative properties. Though these virtue-aligned herbs initially act through their corresponding Zang organs, their ultimate effects manifest in the organs governed by their channel tropism. This is because physiological functions, such as liver's dispersion, heart's communication, lung's convergence, kidney's fortification, and spleen's transformation are systemic necessities transcending individual organs. Upon ingestion, herbs first interact with their virtue-aligned organ for activation, then migrate to their channel-targeted organ to exert effects, and finally circulate systemically. The Lesser Phase denotes this final target organ, explaining terms like Wood of Earth is Sheng Jiang, for instance, aligns with the liver's Wood virtue but enters the spleen channel, hence Wood of Earth. This dual-phase mechanism integrates organ virtues, meridian dynamics, and holistic efficacy, redefining pharmacological action within classical Five Phases theory.

7. Conclusion

From the *Tang Ye Jing* Principle to the diagram of Zang-Fu Organ medication, a distinct and self-contained classical formula system is revealed, contrasting with the fragmented pharmacological theories of the *Huang Di Nei Jing*. The theoretical framework of the *Tang Ye Jing* demonstrates greater rigor and coherence, integrating its implicit principles with symptom-specific formula design to form a comprehensive Chinese medical formulary system. While the *Huang Di Nei Jing* is often critiqued as offering philosophical depth without practical methods and the *Shang Han Lun* as providing practical methods lacking theoretical depth, the *Tang Ye Jing* bridges this divide, unifying theory and practice into a holistic paradigm. Its systematic approach to aligning visceral physiology, flavor-phase interactions, and clinical efficacy has served as a critical theoretical foundation for deciphering classical formulas through the ages, offering enduring insights into the logic of traditional Chinese pharmacology.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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