

A Brief Analysis of the Treatment Patterns for “Abdominal Pain” in Women According to the Golden Cabinet Essentials

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Abstract: *The three chapters on women’s diseases in the Golden Cabinet Essential Prescriptions established the rudiments of diagnosing and treating “abdominal pain in women.” Based on the principles of “obstruction causes pain” and “inadequate nourishment causes pain,” this study examines the pathomechanisms underlying relevant passages concerning women’s abdominal pain. It analyzes the properties, frequencies, and special preparation methods of 11 formulas and 25 herbs mentioned. Findings reveal that Zhang Zhongjing’s diagnosis and treatment of women’s abdominal pain consistently revolved around these two principles, while also distinguishing between blood stasis, heat accumulation, blood deficiency, and yang deficiency for flexible differentiation. Therapeutic approaches adeptly targeted the pathogenesis through methods such as promoting blood circulation to remove stasis, clearing heat accumulation, and nourishing blood. “Pain arises from deficiency of nourishment.” He also flexibly differentiated patterns such as blood stasis, heat accumulation, blood deficiency, and yang deficiency. Therapeutically, he adeptly targeted the underlying mechanisms, employing methods like promoting blood circulation to remove stasis, clearing heat to resolve accumulation, nourishing blood to replenish deficiency, and warming yang to dispel cold to achieve pain relief. His formula selection embodied principles such as “preserving existing functions while eliminating pathogens,” “combining tonification with drainage to strengthen the body and expel pathogens,” “concurrently using cold and warm herbs to clear heat and warm the body,” “utilizing food-medicine duality to nourish through flavor,” “balancing qi and blood while protecting the spleen and stomach,” and “enhancing the efficacy of blood-activating agents with wine.” The herbs predominantly exhibit warm, neutral, sweet, and bitter properties, frequently employing peony root and angelica root. Emphasis is placed on qi and blood-nourishing herbs, with skillful integration of cold and warm herbs. The decoction method prioritizes warm administration, enhanced by the addition of wine to amplify therapeutic efficacy.*

Keywords: Zhang Zhongjing, Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet, Abdominal pain in women, Pain due to obstruction, Pain due to deficiency of nourishment, Principles of formula and drug selection.

1. Introduction

Abdominal pain is a common symptom in women’s menstrual disorders, leukorrhea, pregnancy, childbirth, and miscellaneous diseases, significantly impacting their quality of life. The discussion on “abdominal pain in women” in the Golden Cabinet Essential Prescriptions appears in the three chapters on women’s diseases, pioneering the pattern differentiation and treatment of gynecological disorders in China. It comprehensively addresses pattern differentiation and etiology, with complete principles, methods, formulas, and herbs, laying the theoretical foundation for subsequent research on abdominal pain in women [1]. By systematically analyzing the treatment principles, therapeutic methods, formulas, and herbs for abdominal pain in the three chapters on women, this study explores Zhang Zhongjing’s diagnostic approach and rationale for prescribing formulas and selecting herbs. It offers significant reference value for the clinical diagnosis and treatment of abdominal pain in women.

2. Exploration of Pathogenesis and Treatment Methods for Abdominal Pain in Women

2.1 Obstruction Leads to Pain

Traditional Chinese medicine posits that the pathogenesis of pain follows the principle: “Where there is pain, there is obstruction; where there is obstruction, there is pain; where there is no obstruction, there is no pain” [2]. The Suwen: On Raising Pain states: “When the meridians flow unceasingly

and circulate without rest, cold qi enters the meridians and lingers, weeping without flowing. If it lodges outside the vessels, blood becomes deficient; if it lodges within the vessels, qi fails to circulate. Thus, pain arises suddenly” [3]. Zhang Zhongjing, in his Treatise on the Essential Points of the Golden Cabinet, employed diverse therapeutic approaches to diagnose and treat abdominal pain in women caused by various excess syndromes, yet most of his methods were based on the principle of “unblocking.”

2.1.1 Blood Stasis

When blood deviates from its normal channels and fails to be expelled or dispersed promptly, it stagnates in certain areas or flows obstructively, leading to blockage of the collaterals and the formation of blood stasis. For instance, Chapter 16 of the Miscellaneous Diseases of Women states that wind combined with cold pathogens collides with blood and qi, causing blood stasis and resulting in “piercing pain in the abdomen due to blood and qi.” Chapter 10 describes a woman with retained menstrual blood who encounters wind pathogens directly invading the body, leading to blood stasis and manifesting as “fullness and pain in the lower abdomen” [4]. Chapter 6 of Postpartum Disorders states: “Postpartum abdominal pain” and “dry blood in the abdomen”—meaning that abdominal pain persisting postpartum enters the blood system, aggravating blood stasis and intensifying pain. Chapter 5 describes postpartum blood loss and yin deficiency causing liver blood deficiency, leading to liver qi stagnation and blood vessel obstruction, resulting in “abdominal pain” and “distended fullness preventing lying down.” The abdominal

pain described in the above passages all stems from stagnant blood accumulating in the abdomen, causing “pain due to obstruction.” It typically manifests as stabbing or distending pain. Therefore, the method of promoting blood circulation and removing blood stasis is employed to restore smooth blood flow, disperse stagnant blood, and achieve pain relief.

2.1.2 Heat Accumulation

When pathogenic factors inherently reside within the body, prolonged stagnation transforms into heat. This heat then combines with tangible pathogens like blood stasis or dampness, accumulating in the stomach, intestines, or bladder to form heat accumulation. For instance, Chapter 7 of the Postpartum Disorders section describes women whose heat pathogens accumulate in the stomach and intestines postpartum, while blood stasis lingers in the uterus. This coexistence of heat pathogens and blood stasis obstructs qi movement, causing “lower abdominal rigidity and pain” due to impaired organ qi. Such abdominal pain in women stems from stagnant heat pathogens causing “pain due to obstruction.” It typically manifests as hard, painful, or burning pain. Clearing and purging heat accumulation expels pathogens and alleviates pain.

2.2 Pain from Insufficient Nourishment

The normal functioning of the viscera and meridians relies on the propulsion of qi, the nourishment of blood, the moisturizing of yin, and the warming of yang [5]. The Suwen: On Raising Pain states: The meridians flow ceaselessly, circulating without rest... When obstructed outside the vessels, blood diminishes; when the vessels weep, blood becomes deficient; without nourishment, pain arises.” This describes how impaired meridian flow reduces blood within the vessels, leading to deficiency-type pain due to inadequate nourishment. The Essential Prescriptions of the Golden Cabinet often prioritizes “tonification” for women’s abdominal pain caused by “deficiency of nourishment” resulting from disharmony of qi, blood, yin, and yang, or inadequate nourishment of the zang-fu organs and meridians.

2.2.1 Blood Deficiency

When the source of blood generation is insufficient or consumption is excessive, the viscera and all meridians lose nourishment, resulting in blood deficiency. For instance, Chapter 5 of the Pregnancy Diseases section addresses women with deficiency of the Chong and Ren vessels, presenting with metrorrhagia, threatened abortion, or bleeding during pregnancy. This blood deficiency fails to nourish, causing “abdominal pain during pregnancy” [6]. Chapter 18 of the Miscellaneous Diseases section describes women with prolonged deficiency-heat conditions that deplete qi and blood, resulting in “abdominal pain in women” due to inadequate blood nourishment [7]. The supplementary formulas in the Postpartum Disorders chapter state that women after childbirth often suffer from qi and blood deficiency, leading to impaired blood circulation and resulting in “persistent stabbing abdominal pain” and “severe cramping pain in the lower abdomen”; The fourth entry in the Postpartum Disorders chapter describes women experiencing “postpartum abdominal pain” due to deficiency of blood in

the Chong and Ren vessels after childbirth, allowing cold pathogens to invade internally [8]. All the above abdominal pains in women stem from blood deficiency causing “pain due to failure to nourish,” often manifesting as abdominal cramping and dull pain. The method of nourishing blood and replenishing deficiency can be used to moisten the blood vessels and alleviate pain.

2.2.2 Yang Deficiency

When cold pathogens persistently stagnate and injure yang qi, the viscera and meridians fail to maintain proper warmth during functional activities, leading to yang deficiency and yin excess. For instance, the third entry in the Pregnancy Disorders chapter states that during the sixth or seventh month of pregnancy, kidney yang fire declines, causing internal cold due to yang deficiency. This results in inadequate fetal nourishment, manifesting as “abdominal pain with aversion to cold” and “lower abdomen feeling like a fan” [9]. Such abdominal pain in women is caused by yang deficiency leading to “pain due to failure to nourish.” It often manifests as cold pain, preference for warmth, and relief with pressure. Warming the yang and dispelling cold can restore warmth to the abdomen and alleviate the pain.

During disease progression, deficiency of the vital energy (zheng xu) and excess of pathogenic factors (xie shi) often coexist, manifesting as deficiency within excess or excess within deficiency—a state of mixed deficiency and excess [10]. If the vital energy is damaged during the course of an excess syndrome, it manifests as excess predominating over deficiency, known as “excess with intermingled deficiency.” If the body’s vital energy is severely depleted, residual pathogenic factors remain, and the body is further affected by other pathogenic factors, it manifests as deficiency predominating over excess, known as “deficiency with intermingled excess” [11]. Abdominal pain in women similarly often presents with mixed deficiency and excess patterns. For instance, Danggui Shaoyao San (Angelica and Peony Powder), which addresses deficiency with underlying excess, is used for blood deficiency-induced abdominal pain complicated by blood stasis and dampness stagnation. Fuzi Tang (Aconite Decoction) is employed for yang deficiency-induced abdominal pain accompanied by water retention and dampness obstruction. Formulas addressing both deficiency and excess within excess conditions include: - Tuguan Root Powder for blood stasis abdominal pain with concomitant qi and blood deficiency - Zhishi Shaoyao Powder for qi stagnation and blood stasis abdominal pain with concurrent blood deficiency failing to nourish. The above examples of mixed deficiency-excess pathogenesis in gynecological abdominal pain, along with the corresponding formulas that address both aspects while emphasizing different priorities, demonstrate Zhang Zhongjing’s diagnostic approach: simultaneously considering deficiency and excess, and prioritizing treatment based on urgency and severity.

3. Analysis of Prescriptions for Abdominal Pain in Women

3.1 Prescriptions with Rationale and Indications

For abdominal pain due to Yang deficiency and severe cold during pregnancy, Fuzi Tang is prescribed. Within the formula, Fuzi (Aconite) is intensely pungent and hot, capable of replenishing fire, assisting Yang, dispelling cold, and alleviating pain. Ren Shen (Ginseng) profoundly supplements original Qi, restores pulse, and consolidates collapse. Bai Zhu (Atractylodes) stabilizes the fetus, while Fu Ling (Poria) strengthens the spleen and transforms dampness. Shaoyao (Peony) benefits Yin, harmonizes the (Ying) level, and relieves pain [12]. Zhang's Medical Compendium notes, "Though all recognize aconite as a potent abortifacient, Zhang Zhongjing uniquely employs it as a supreme remedy for stabilizing pregnancy," demonstrating his unhesitating use of contraindicated herbs based on disease severity and comprehensive formula design. For abdominal pain due to deficiency-cold in the Chong and Ren vessels during pregnancy, he prescribed Gelian Decoction. In this formula, donkey-hide gelatin nourishes and stops bleeding; mugwort warms the meridians and halts hemorrhage. These two herbs are harmonized by licorice and activated by wine, thereby stabilizing the fetus and alleviating pain. This combination demonstrates Zhang Zhongjing's approach to treating pregnancy-related abdominal pain: addressing both the symptomatic manifestation (abdominal pain) and the underlying cause (pregnancy maintenance), achieving a balanced treatment that is both precise and effective.

3.2 Combining Tonification and Drainage to Strengthen the Constitution and Eliminate Pathogenic Factors

For abdominal pain during pregnancy caused by blood deficiency combined with blood stasis and dampness stagnation, use Danggui Shaoyao San. The formula heavily employs peony root (Shaoyao) to pacify the liver, while chuanxiong (Chuanxiong) activates blood circulation, regulates qi, and alleviates pain—all to resolve stasis and restore smooth flow. Angelica sinensis nourishes and invigorates blood to address deficiency. Atractylodes macrocephala, Poria cocos, and Alisma orientale strengthen the spleen, boost qi, promote diuresis, and drain dampness to eliminate retained fluids [13]. For postpartum abdominal pain in women due to qi stagnation, blood stasis, and concomitant blood deficiency, use Zhishi Shaoyao San. In this formula, charred Zhi Shi (Ziziphus jujuba) breaks qi stagnation and disperses nodules; the sour and bitter nature of Shaoyao (Paeonia lactiflora) harmonizes the interior, alleviates urgency, and relieves pain [14]. All the above formulas contain tonifying and promoting herbs. For women with abdominal pain involving both deficiency and excess, they achieve better therapeutic effects by combining tonification and promotion.

3.3 Combining Cold and Heat, Integrating Cleansing and Warming

For postpartum abdominal pain caused by the mutual entanglement of heat pathogens and blood stasis in women, Da Cheng Qi Tang is employed. Within the formula, Da Huang (Rhubarb) is bitter and cold, not only promoting bowel movement and purging heat, cleansing the stomach and intestines, but also invigorating blood and resolving stasis; Mang Xiao (Mirrh) is salty and cold, softening hardness, dispersing nodules, clearing heat, and purging; Magnolia

officinalis and Ziziphus jujuba relieve qi stagnation, eliminate fullness, disperse accumulations, and remove distension. The combination of cold-natured rhubarb and magnesium sulfate with warm-natured Magnolia officinalis ensures heat elimination and bowel movement while preserving body fluids [15]. For women with menstrual retention, blood stasis, and concomitant deficiency of qi and blood causing abdominal pain, use the Tugua Root Powder. The formula heavily employs bitter-cold Tugua root to clear heat, drain dampness, and resolve stasis; peony harmonizes the ying and alleviates pain; cinnamon twig warms yang and transforms qi; and centipede breaks blood stasis and expels stagnation. The Concept of "Simultaneous Treatment of Blood and Water" [16]. In the formula, warming Cinnamomum twig is combined with cold-natured Trichosanthes root and Centipede to moderate the bitter-cold properties of the latter, preventing gastric injury. The application of this formula for abdominal pain in women exemplifies the practical implementation of Traditional Chinese Medicine's principle of mutual rooting of yin and yang. The concurrent use of cold and hot herbs allows each to reach the affected area and exert its specific effect while also mutually restraining each other to enhance therapeutic efficacy [17].

3.4 Medicinal and Edible Substances Share the Same Origin: Supplementing Through Flavor

For postpartum abdominal pain due to blood deficiency and internal cold in women, the Angelica, Ginger, and Lamb Soup is used. In this formula, Angelica nourishes and harmonizes the blood, moistens the liver, and alleviates urgency; a heavy dose of Ginger disperses cold pathogens through pungent action; and Lamb supplements the tangible substance of blood and flesh. The combined action of these three herbs achieves warming the middle, nourishing blood, dispelling cold, and alleviating pain. This formula is applicable for abdominal conditions such as cold hernia, consumptive disease, and postpartum disorders characterized by blood deficiency and internal cold [18]. The Classic of the Golden Cabinet states: "Mutton supplements deficiency and enriches blood." The Plain Questions records: "For deficiency of form, warm it with qi; for deficiency of essence, supplement it with flavor." This reflects Zhang Zhongjing's extension and application of the traditional medical concept of "medicinal and edible substances sharing the same origin" in diagnosing and treating abdominal pain in women.

3.5 Nourishing Qi and Blood While Protecting the Spleen and Stomach

For postpartum abdominal pain due to deficiency of both qi and blood in women, use the internally tonifying Danggui Jianzhong Decoction. This formula [19] is derived from the Minor Jianzhong Decoction with the addition of Danggui. The Minor Jianzhong Decoction harmonizes qi and blood, yin and yang, and the spleen and stomach, while Danggui supplements blood, activates blood circulation, and alleviates pain. For women experiencing abdominal pain due to deficiency during pregnancy, postpartum, or menstruation, Xiao Jianzhong Decoction is used. In this formula, Cinnamomum twig (Gui Zhi), pungent and warm, promotes blood circulation; Paeonia root (Shao Yao) nourishes blood and consolidates yin. Together, they regulate the ying and wei

qi and blood. Ginger (Sheng Jiang), warming and dispersing cold, and jujube (Da Zao), tonifying the spleen, benefiting qi, nourishing blood, and calming the spirit, work together to tonify deficiency and nourish blood. Maltose (Yi Tang), sweet and warm, tonifies deficiency, alleviates urgency, and relieves pain. Licorice root, with its neutral nature, harmonizes the actions of all herbs [20]. Shen’s Gynecology states: “Excessive blood loss leads to deficiency and weakness of qi, causing stagnation and pain.” The Commentary on the Essential Prescriptions of the Golden Cabinet notes: “This refers to women’s ailments, which generally stem from blood issues, often presenting as deficiency... Since the spleen and stomach form the foundation of acquired constitution, when the stomach is harmonious and diet is normal, blood production naturally occurs and pain ceases.” “ Such abdominal pain in women is often related to qi and blood. Zhang Zhongjing addressed both qi and blood in his formula design to achieve the purpose of protecting the spleen and stomach.

3.6 Promoting Blood Circulation and Expelling Stagnation, Wine Enhances Efficacy

For women experiencing abdominal pain due to wind-cold colliding with blood and qi, use Honglanhua Wine. In this formula, Honglanhua (Carthamus tinctorius) is a blood-moving herb that excels at promoting blood circulation, expelling wind, and relieving pain; Wine possesses pungent-warm properties that promote blood circulation [21]. For postpartum abdominal pain caused by internal blood stasis accumulation, the Decoction for Expelling Blood Stasis is used to intensify stasis-expelling effects. Honey pills moderate the drug’s potency, while wine decoction directs the medicine into the bloodstream to disperse stasis, thereby relieving pain [22]. All the above cases of abdominal pain in

women stem from blood stasis. While Zhang Zhongjing employed blood-activating herbs in his formulas, he also utilized white wine to enhance the efficacy of promoting blood circulation and resolving stasis.

4. Characteristics of Medicinal Use for Abdominal Pain in Women

4.1 Statistical Analysis of the Four Properties and Five Flavors of Medicinal Substances

The concept of the Four Properties and Five Flavors first appeared in the Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica, which states: “Medicinal substances possess five tastes—sour, salty, sweet, bitter, and pungent—and four natures—cold, hot, warm, and cool” [23], forming a crucial component of traditional Chinese medicine theory. The documentation of the “four natures” reflects the tendency of medicinal substances to influence the fluctuations of yin and yang, as well as cold and heat within the human body [24]. This provided a reference basis for the clinical application of cold, hot, warm, and cool substances in subsequent generations. The documentation of the “five tastes” represents the efficacy of medicinal substances, serving as an important indicator of their therapeutic effects [25]. Statistical analysis of the properties and tastes of herbs in the aforementioned formulae from the Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica reveals that among the “four natures,” warm-natured herbs are the most diverse, with 10 varieties recorded and the highest usage frequency reaching 20 times, followed by neutral-taste herbs. Among the “five tastes,” sweet-taste herbs are the most diverse, with 11 varieties recorded and a usage frequency as high as 20 times, followed by bitter-taste herbs. As shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Frequency Summary of the Four Properties and Five Flavors of Medicinal Substances Used in Treating Abdominal Pain in Women According to the Golden Cabinet Essentials

Nature/Taste		Herb	Number of Species	Frequency
Nature	warm	Angelica sinensis, Atractylodes macrocephala, Ligusticum chuanxiong, Cinnamomum cassia, Zingiber officinale, Ovis ariana, Aconitum carmichaeli, Magnolia officinalis, Carthamus tinctorius, Maltose	10	20
		Paeonia lactiflora, Poria cocos, Glycyrrhiza uralensis, Ziziphus jujuba, Donkey-hide gelatin, Artemisia argyi, Prunus persica	8	18
	cold	Zhi Shi, Ren Shen, Gan Di Huang, Ze Xie, Da Huang, Jia Ji, Mang Xiao, Tu Gua Gen	8	12
Taste	Sweet	Dang Gui, Fu Ling, Gan Cao, Ren Shen, Gan Di Huang, E Jiao, Ze Xie, Da Zao, Yi Tang, Yang Rou, Ai Ye	11	20
	bitter	Medicinal herbs, Atractylodes macrocephala, Zhi Shi, Rheum, Peach kernel, Magnolia officinalis, Mirabilite, Trichosanthes root	8	18
	Pungent	Cinnamon twig, Ginger, Ligusticum, Aconite, Red hibiscus flower, Pinellia	6	11
	Salty	Lumbricus	1	1

Note: The following herbs were not recorded in the Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica. Their properties were summarized by reference to other ancient texts: Lamb, found in Collected Notes on Materia Medica, “Sweet, Warm”; Red indigo flower, found in Compendium of Materia Medica, “Pungent, Warm”; Maltose, found in Collected Notes on Materia Medica, “Sweet, Slightly Warm”.

4.1.1 Proficient Use of “Sweet and Warm”

‘Warm’ herbs constitute the most frequently employed category for treating women’s abdominal pain. The Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica posits that “warm” properties counteract cold pathologies, indicating that women’s abdominal pain clinically often stems from cold syndromes. Zhang Zhongjing adeptly utilized “warm herbs” to warm yang and disperse cold, thereby alleviating pain caused by cold syndromes. Sweet-flavored herbs are the most frequently used category for treating gynecological abdominal pain. Sweetness possesses tonifying, harmonizing,

and soothing properties, reflecting that gynecological abdominal pain often manifests as deficiency patterns in clinical practice. Zhang Zhongjing skillfully employed sweet herbs to achieve tonifying effects, thereby alleviating abdominal pain caused by deficiency patterns.

4.1.2 Proficiency in Employing “Bitter-Cold” Herbs

‘Bitter’ herbs rank second only to “sweet” in frequency of use. Bitter herbs possess purgative, drying, and consolidating properties. Their frequent application indicates that while gynecological abdominal pain is predominantly due to

deficiency patterns in clinical practice, excess patterns are also relatively common. “Bitter herbs” can be employed to alleviate abdominal pain caused by stasis blood, heat accumulation, and other excess pathogens. “Cold” herbs are also frequently employed in treating gynecological abdominal pain. Their efficacy is defined in contrast to warming and heating properties, indicating that while cold patterns predominate clinically, heat-induced pain should not be overlooked. “Cold” herbs can clear heat to alleviate abdominal pain caused by heat pathogens.

4.1.3 Flexible Application of “Neutral” Herbs

“Neutral” herbs are extensively documented in the Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica but remain unexplained. Li Shizhen’s Compendium of Materia Medica first introduced the five-category classification system: “Five natures: cold, hot, warm, cool, neutral” [26]. Mu Lancheng [27] suggests neutral herbs may be employed when clinical symptoms are complex and difficult to distinguish as cold or hot. Deng Jiagang [28] proposed concepts like “using neutral to counteract bias” and “harmonizing to achieve neutrality,” emphasizing their lack of inherent cold, hot, warm, or cool properties. Sun Bing [29] noted that neutral herbs can balance yin and yang through flavor combinations; when paired with cold or hot herbs, they serve a harmonizing and auxiliary role; and as tonics, they nourish deficiency syndromes and alleviate fatigue-induced damage. Zhang Zhongjing frequently employed neutral herbs in treating women’s abdominal pain. Based on the above descriptions of neutral herbs’ efficacy, this approach not only mitigates the warming and drying properties of warm herbs but also prevents bitter-cold herbs from becoming excessively potent. Ultimately, it achieves the effects of harmonizing drug properties, balancing cold and heat, and regulating yin and yang.

4.2 Statistical Analysis of Drug Frequency and Frequency Distribution

The 11 formulas for women’s abdominal pain encompass 25 herbs with a total frequency of 50 occurrences. Statistical analysis of all herbs’ frequency and occurrence count is presented in Table 2. Peony root exhibits the highest

frequency at 8 occurrences, followed by Angelica root at 5 occurrences. Thirteen herbs appear 2 or more times: Peony root, Angelica root, Cinnamon twig, Ginger, Licorice root, Ligusticum root, Poria cocos, Jujube, Atractylodes macrocephala, Ziziphus jujuba, Alisma orientale, Rheum palmatum, and Eupolyphaga sinensis.

Table 2: Frequency and Frequency Percentage Statistics of Medicinal Ingredients Used in Treating Abdominal Pain in Women from the Golden Cabinet Essential Prescriptions

Drug	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Peony Root	8	16.00
Angelica Root	5	10.00
Cinnamon Twig	3	6.00
Fresh Ginger	3	6.00
Licorice Root	3	6.00
Chuanxiong Rhizome	2	4.00
Poria Sclerotium	2	4.00
Jujube Fruit	2	4.00
Atractylodes Root	2	4.00
Zhi Shi Fruit	2	4.00
Alisma Rhizome	2	4.00
Peony Root	2	4.00
Angelica Root	2	4.00
Donkey-hide gelatin	1	2.00
Ginseng	1	2.00
Aconite root	1	2.00
Red and blue flowers	1	2.00
Maltose	1	2.00
Peach kernels	1	2.00
Dried rehmannia root	1	2.00
Magnolia bark	1	2.00
Sodium sulfate	1	2.00
Dioscorea root	1	2.00
Mutton	1	2.00
Mugwort leaves	1	2.00
Donkey-hide gelatin	1	2.00

By referencing the therapeutic indications for medicinal substances described in the Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica, it was found that the primary indications for the aforementioned 13 medicinal substances predominantly relate to qi, blood, and cold-heat conditions. The therapeutic indications for these 13 substances are summarized in Table 3 below, where qi-regulating substances appear 9 times, blood-regulating substances appear 6 times, and cold-heat regulating substances appear 8 times.

Table 3: Therapeutic Indications Statistics for the First 13 Medicinal Substances Used in Treating Abdominal Pain in Women in the Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet

Formula	Qi	Blood	Cold-Heat
Peony Root	Tonify Qi	Removing Blood Obstruction	Dispels stubborn accumulated cold and heat
Angelica Root	Coughing and retching with rising qi		Treats malaria with alternating chills and fever
Cinnamon Twig	Rising qi with coughing and retching; tonify the middle and strengthen qi	Eliminating Excess Blood	
Fresh Ginger	Treats chest fullness with coughing and retching accompanied by rising qi	Warming the Middle to Stop Bleeding	
Licorice Root	Treats cold and heat pathogenic factors in the five viscera and six bowels		Addresses cold and heat pathogens affecting the five viscera and six bowels
Chuanxiong Rhizome		Blood Obstruction	
Poria Sclerotium	Treats rebellious qi in the chest and flanks		Cold and heat with restlessness and fullness
Jujube Fruit	Harmonizes stomach qi; supplements deficient qi		
Atractylodes Root			Cold-damp arthralgia, clears heat
Zhi Shi Fruit	Tonify Qi		Resolves cold and heat stagnation
Alisma Rhizome	Tonify Qi		
ubarb Root		Primarily treats stagnant blood, blood stasis,	Cold and heat
Centipede		blood accumulation with masses, and blood stasis with obstruction.	Addresses cold and heat in the heart and abdomen

4.2.1 Frequently used with Peony and Angelica

Peony is neutral in nature and bitter in taste. The Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica [30] records: “Treats abdominal pain caused by pathogenic factors. Removes blood stasis, breaks up hard masses, addresses cold and heat with masses and masses, relieves pain, promotes urination, and benefits qi.” Thus, peony both “removes blood stasis and breaks up hard masses” to achieve “unblocking relieves pain,” and “nourishes qi” to replenish qi and blood, nourishing the vessels to achieve “nourishment relieves pain.” Peony is the most frequently used herb in Zhang Zhongjing’s treatment of women’s abdominal pain. Regardless of cold, heat, deficiency, or excess patterns, peony is invariably employed to alleviate urgency and relieve pain. Angelica sinensis is warm in nature and sweet in taste. The Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica states: “It treats coughing and shortness of breath... women’s uterine bleeding and infertility... warms the middle to relieve pain, removes stagnant blood, internal blockages, stroke-induced spasms, lack of perspiration, damp paralysis, evil qi invasion, deficiency cold, nourishes the five viscera, and regenerates flesh.” This demonstrates that Angelica sinensis can warm and unblock stasis while also warming the middle and tonifying deficiency. Peony and Angelica sinensis appear most frequently in the diagnosis and treatment of women’s abdominal pain. The combined descriptions of these two herbs’ effects reflect Zhang Zhongjing’s approach to women’s abdominal pain: addressing both deficiency and excess, combining unblocking with tonification.

4.2.2 Emphasis on Qi and Blood Medicinal Substances

Qi and blood form the material foundation for all vital activities in the body. For women, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation all rely on blood as the root and qi as the function. Only when qi is abundant can it propel the distribution of body fluids and the nourishing action of blood. Conversely, the nourishing action of blood provides a foundation for qi to adhere to. Thus, when qi and blood are harmonized, the ultimate effect of “nourishment eliminates pain” is achieved [31]. Qi-related herbs are most extensively employed, primarily addressing three functions: “primarily tonifying qi,” “primarily treating coughing and upward qi,” and “removing cold and heat pathogenic factors.” They serve to tonify deficiency and promote circulation, hence Zhang Zhongjing heavily utilizes qi herbs to enhance therapeutic efficacy. Blood-related herbs in the text address two aspects: “removing blood stasis” and “stopping bleeding.” They serve to activate blood circulation, arrest bleeding, and resolve stasis. This highlights Zhang Zhongjing’s emphasis on the influence of qi and blood on women’s health when treating abdominal pain. His heavy reliance on qi and blood herbs for tonification and dispersing nodules reflects his diagnostic philosophy of combining tonification with dispersion.

4.2.3 Skillful Use of Cold and Hot Herbs

The Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon frequently mentions “cold and heat,” which in this period was understood as human perception of thermal sensations. This encompassed awareness of one’s own yin-yang imbalances and the thermal conditions of the natural world [32]. The Essential Prescriptions of the Golden Cabinet [33] states: “Where heat

prevails, blood stagnates.” This indicates that when heat pathogens are intense, they disrupt blood flow, causing blood to overflow from vessels and slow circulation, leading to stasis. In such cases, clearing heat pathogens, dispersing nodules, and unblocking vessels is indicated. The Suwen: Treatise on Regulating the Menstrual Cycle [34] states: “Blood and qi favor warmth and abhor cold. Cold impedes qi flow; warmth dissolves and removes it.” This highlights that the circulation and distribution of qi and blood require the warmth of yang. When cold pathogens prevail, they obstruct the vessels, leading to stasis. Treating this involves warming yang, dispelling cold, invigorating blood, and unblocking vessels. Among the 13 herbs Zhang Zhongjing frequently used to treat women’s abdominal pain, 8 involve “cold-heat” herbs. This reflects the clinical tendency of women’s abdominal pain to involve “congested qi” and demonstrates Zhang Zhongjing’s skill in differentiating between cold and heat patterns.

4.3 Statistical Analysis of Medicinal Decoction Methods

In his work Essential Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet, Zhang Zhongjing not only provided the composition and dosage of medicinal ingredients but, crucially, included detailed decoction methods for their administration. Traditional Chinese medical sages have long held that the efficacy of a decoction hinges entirely on its preparation method [35], fully underscoring the critical importance of decoction techniques for therapeutic outcomes. Statistical analysis of decoction methods for Zhang Zhongjing’s formulas treating gynecological abdominal pain is presented in Table 4:

Table 4: Statistical Analysis of Decoction Methods for Formulas Treating Gynecological Abdominal Pain in the Golden Cabinet Essential Prescriptions

Formula	Take Warm	Take with wine	Take with barley gruel	Decoct with wine	Wash with wine
Aconite Decoction	1				
Minor Jianzhong Decoction	1				
Angelica, Ginger, and Lamb Soup	1				
Zhi Shi and Peony Powder			1		
Angelica and Peony Powder		1			
Angelica Jianzhong Decoction					
Gelatin and Artemisia Decoction	1			1	
Blood-Draining Decoction				1	
Red and Blue Flower Wine				1	
Dioscorea Root Powder		1			
Major Cheng Decoction	1				1

Statistics show: Administration methods include warm administration, wine administration, and wheat porridge administration. Among these, warm administration involves the most formulas—six in total: Fu Zi Tang, Xiao Jian Zhong Tang, Dang Gui Sheng Jiang Yang Rou Tang, Jiao Ai Tang, and Da Cheng Qi Tang. Except for Da Cheng Qi Tang, which uses warm administration to enhance purgative effects, the other five formulas are all related to treating cold. This demonstrates Zhang Zhongjing’s meticulous approach in

diagnosing and treating abdominal pain in women caused by cold pathogens. He skillfully combined the condition with appropriate therapeutic methods, rationally applying warm administration to invigorate yang qi, dispel cold, and eliminate pathogens. This approach safeguards the spleen and stomach, thereby enhancing therapeutic efficacy. Regarding both decoction and administration methods, six formulas incorporate “wine”: Zhi Shi Shao Yao San, Dang Gui Shao Yao San, Jiao Ai Tang, Xia Yu Xue Tang, Hong Lan Hua Jiu, and Da Cheng Qi Tang. Zhang Zhongjing explicitly stated in the *Golden Cabinet Essential Prescriptions* that “wine” possesses medicinal properties, documenting its use in formulae—thus pioneering the incorporation of wine in classical Chinese medical texts. The *Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica* states: “When the sea freezes in severe cold, only wine remains unfrozen, demonstrating its warming nature that surpasses all substances. Pharmacists often rely on it to enhance efficacy.” This highlights wine’s warming properties to amplify therapeutic effects. Considering the pathomechanisms of the formulas, Zhang Zhongjing’s treatment of women’s abdominal pain skillfully employed wine in decoction to strengthen warming, dispersing, and cold-dispelling actions [36]. Analysis of the decoction method highlights the prevalence of “deficiency, cold, and stagnant qi” in women’s abdominal pain. It also demonstrates Zhang Zhongjing’s skill in employing warm administration and wine to achieve warming tonification and warming-dispersing effects. This approach both warms the middle and tonifies deficiency, fulfilling the principle that “where nourishment flows, pain ceases,” while simultaneously warming, dispersing, and activating the collaterals to realize “where flow exists, pain ceases.”

5. Discussion

Zhang Zhongjing’s discourse on gynecological abdominal pain emphasizes the principles of cold, heat, deficiency, and excess, closely aligning with the pathogenesis. His treatment is appropriately differentiated and administered with meticulous and ingenious medication selection. Pathogenetic mechanisms revolve around “pain due to obstruction” and “pain due to deficiency of nourishment,” while also distinguishing between blood stasis, heat accumulation, blood deficiency, and yang deficiency. All approaches originate from the pathogenesis, with flexible differentiation based on the severity and urgency of the condition. Therapeutic approaches integrate pathomechanisms, employing methods like promoting blood circulation to remove stasis, nourishing blood to address deficiency, warming yang to dispel cold, and clearing heat accumulation to achieve pain relief. Prescriptions are tailored to the specific characteristics of gynecological abdominal pain and the predominant pathomechanism, reflecting principles such as “preserving what is sound while eliminating what is defective,” “combining unblocking with tonification to strengthen the body and expel pathogens,” “concurrently using cold and warm herbs to clear heat and warm the body,” and ““medicinal and edible substances share the same origin, supplementing through flavor,” “balancing qi and blood while protecting the spleen and stomach,” and “promoting blood circulation and removing stasis, with wine enhancing efficacy.” In drug selection, it centers on the pathogenesis of abdominal pain, combining unblocking and tonifying, and

applying both cold and heat. In terms of drug properties, it leans toward using “warm-natured” herbs to warm the zang organs and disperse cold to expel pathogens, while emphasizing “neutral-natured” herbs for balancing yin and yang, valuing moderation and harmony. In terms of taste, it favors “sweet flavors” to nourish both qi and blood, achieving tonification, while employing “bitter flavors” to expel stagnant blood and heat accumulation. It frequently utilizes herbs like peony root and angelica root, which combine both tonifying and promoting functions. Heavy doses of qi and blood-nourishing herbs are used to propel the circulation of qi, blood, and body fluids, achieving tonification and digestion. It skillfully employs cold and hot herbs to unblock qi and blood, activate blood circulation, resolve stasis, and disperse stagnant qi. In decoction administration, it adeptly combines disease mechanism characteristics, frequently employing warm administration methods and skillfully incorporating wine to enhance therapeutic efficacy. Through organizing Zhang Zhongjing’s treatment of abdominal pain in women from the *Essential Prescriptions of the Golden Cabinet*, his diagnostic reasoning and formula-prescribing characteristics become clearer, offering valuable insights worthy of reference and discussion.

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