

Entering Meridians for herbs and their development.

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1. Relation of five flavors to five organs and *in extenso* to all solid and hollow organs. Wood relates to Liver and Gall Bladder, Fire to Heart, Small Intestine, Heart Governor, Triple Heater etc. So if the flavor of an herb is sour, it most likely has an entering meridian of the Liver, example, Schizandra, Mume, Chaenomeles etc. The spicy/pungent flavor enters the Lung, such as in Ephedra, Cinnamon, Ginger etc. The bland flavor has a diuretic effect so bland often is associated with Kidney and Bladder. The sweet flavor enters the Stomach and Spleen (Date, Dioscorea, Codonopsis), the bitter flavor goes to the Heart (Coptis) and the salty flavor enters the Kidney (Cistanche). Often an herb has several flavors and consequently might travel to more than one organ. This is however only a first step.
2. Qi and Blood. Herbs that are dry and sweet have a tendency to increase the Qi, herbs that are moist and sweet or sour, have a tendency to increase Blood. Those that increase Qi enter the Spleen and Lung, whereas those that increase Blood enter the Liver, Spleen or Kidney. Furthermore according to *Zhang Yuansu* and the *Nei Jing* flavor may be thick or thin, and Qi may be thick or thin. A thick Qi is pure Yang and a thin Qi is Yin within Yang, a thick flavor is Yin and a thin flavor is Yang within Yin. A thick Qi increases heat, a thin Qi induces and drains, a thick flavor is draining and a thin flavor is moving.
3. Raising and sinking. Qi in general is raising, Blood and Yin in general are sinking, but that can be further differentiated, depending of the organ it relates to. The Heart is associated with thick Qi, the Lung with thin Qi, the Liver with thin flavor and the Kidney with thick flavor. Bitter flavor and salty flavor are said to be sinking, whereas sweet and spicy-pungent are raising.
4. Part of plant used: Those are generalities, but roots associate with the Kidney, stems and leaves travel to the Liver, flowers relate to the Heart, fruits belong to the Spleen and seeds to the Lung.
5. Traditional use of the herbs. Medicinal substances have been probed for ten or twenty thousand years. The indigenous people were constantly on the search for food, and experienced herbs and plants for food and healing. Gradually a body of experience accumulated. When reading the *Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing*, it says about Acorus "it is spicy/pungent and warm, it grows in pools and swamps, opens the Heart, treats cough, treats wind cold damp Bi pain, frees the nine orifices." So from this we can understand it has an entering meridian of the Heart, and it could also be extrapolated that it travels to the Lung since it is said to treat cough, but over the centuries, it has been used more commonly for opening the orifices, so it is nowadays more often said to be related to the Liver. (Spicy/pungent moves up and tonifies the Liver). The next herb in the same book is Polygala. It is said to be bitter and warm, and is said to mainly treat cough with lung Qi rebellion and secondly it opens the orifices, increases intelligence and memory and brightens eyes and hearing. Protracted intake may make the body light and prevent senility. The two herbs are obviously very similar and often prescribed together; but in this case the Lung has been clearly established as an entering channel, but due to its effects on calming the spirit and increasing intelligence, it is also associated with the Heart.
6. What *Steiner* called *doctrine of signatures*: Many indications and uses are based on the knowledge of areas where the plant grows, the growing season, what color it is, which part of the plant is used and what effect the flavor and temperature produce.
 - a) The *Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing* often indicates in which surrounding, which physical area a given herb grows. For example, Rehmannia grows in rivers and swamps, Alisma grows in

pools and swamps, Dipsacus grows in mountains and valleys etc. Some plants grow in dry areas, such as Ephedra. Some grow in very cold, harsh climates on mountain slopes such as Chinese Ginseng. The area of growth, richness or poorness of the soil, availability or lack of water all influence the effect of the herb and as such the entering channel.

b) As for the colors, Polygonum Multiflori, and Rehmannia are black in color, thick in flavor, of moist consistency, they consequently travel down, tonify, boost Blood and Yin and enter the Kidney meridian. Indigo is blue, it detoxifies fire poison and cools blood, it is said to enter the Liver. Dragon Blood is red, enters the circulatory system (Heart Governor) and blood activating (Liver).

c) Part of the plant: Flowers all travel up to the top of the body, they are all rising. The only flower that is descending is Inula. Rising flowers that are famous are all the one's that are beneficial for the eyes. Chrysanthemum, Buddleia, Scapus, Eriocaulon. Since they benefit vision and the eye is part of the Liver system, they are all associated with the Liver channel. Other flowers such as Magnolia Flower is a specific for sinus problems, so its entering channel is the Lung.

Roots have a variety of entering channels, so do the whole aerial parts of plants, but nevertheless, if the roots are cold and bitter, they often have a detoxifying effect, and enter the stomach, and intestines; if the are sweet and warm, they often enter the Stomach, Spleen and are tonic in action. If they are sweet and cold, they enter the stomach and lungs and clear heat and increase fluids.

The whole aerial part of the plant is more difficult to associate with an entering meridian, based solely on the part of plant used. The same is true for fruits, and seeds.

7. Entering channel determination based on herb category. In more recent years, herbs have been classified as to their common effect into herb categories. Based on that information, any herb, with a few exceptions, that is either a hemostatic or a blood activating substance enters the Liver meridian, this amounts to over 45 herbs. Qi tonic herbs mostly enter the Spleen and Lung, Blood tonics mostly Liver and Kidney, Yang tonics enter the Kidney, Yin tonics depending on area affected, either the Kidney, Liver or Stomach and Lungs, herbs that are pungent/spicy warm external releasing often enter the lung, purgative and laxative herbs enter the Stomach and Large intestine meridian, drastics enter the Spleen, Lung and Kidney channel. Herbs that clear heat have an entering channel based on their classification: Sweet and cold herbs enter the Stomach, Lung and occasionally Kidney, bitter cold herbs enter the affected areas, Scutellaria the Upper Burner, Coptis the Middle Burner and Phellodendron the Lower Burner, Gentiana the Liver and Gall Bladder and so on. The same is true for herbs that detoxify fire poison. They are like antibiotics, some are more wide spectrum, some more narrow spectrum, hence the entering channel depends on the affected area of infection. Anyone can go through all the herb categories and see the common entering channels.
8. Conclusions: When I studied herbs in Taiwan in the early eighties, books from Mainland weren't allowed. The main herb book that was required for the Te Kao (Taiwanese Board Exam) was the *Ben Cao Bei Yao* and all the young interns and assistants at the herb stores had to memorize it. This Qing dynasty text (late 17th century) had some entering meridians but relatively few, every 4th or 5th herb entry and it would say as an example about *Psoralea Bu Gu Zhi* "enters the Heart Governor, Ming Men, tonifies the ministerial fire and moves the monarch fire". A modern text says, entering channel is the Kidney. Another text, of Korean origin, the *Dong Yi Bo Gam* written at the end of the 16th century doesn't include entering meridians, but at the beginning of the herb section it lists herbs and their relation to organs, as well as some specific guiding herbs.

Entering channels are a relative modern addition to the materia medica and they vary

among the classical herbals. In the *Ben Cao Bei Yao* they were added when the author thought it necessary to explain the herb and differentiate it from another herb. In many instances it is not necessary to have an entering channel, because it is already clear from the category and the general theory of herbal medicine. Almost all hemostatics and blood activators enter the Liver, with only a few exceptions. It seems logical to emphasize the exception, and students or doctors should have a general understanding of the **category** entering channel. On the other hand, when an herb is clearly different from the group, let's say Bupleurum *Chai Hu*, as an external releasing herb, it should be noted that it enters the *shao yang* and the *jue yin*, GB, Liver, Heart Governor. In my personal opinion, memorizing entering channels of all the herbs is counterproductive. It is preferable to remember the herb as to its specificity, in which case the entering channels are self evident. Example Ephedra. Two main functions: 1. spicy/pungent releases exterior conditions, cough, asthma (enters Lung) 2. Bitter drying, downward draining, facilitates urination (enters Bladder). Furthermore, the same herb is often used in other cultures for a different indication. In that use it may have a completely different channel or organ associated with it.