

THAP TAM PHUONG GIA GIAM OF TUE TINH: A UNIQUENESS MEDICAL BOOK IN STRUCTURE, SYNDROME DIFFERENTIATION AND HERB MEDICINAL APPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Thap tam phuong gia giam (13 prescriptions and modifications) of Tue Tinh is a uniqueness medical book in Vietnam traditional medicine. The Nom version of the book is present in the Luc Bat Nom poems, comprising 1190 verses about 13 medicinal prescriptions originating from the books Thuong han luan and Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong. These verses describe detailed information on the ingredients, preparation, usage, indications, and modifications of the medicinal herbs in each prescription. There is a revision in the structure of most of the prescriptions with the addition of available medicinal herbs, which exhibit adaptability and appropriateness to actual conditions. All 13 prescriptions have common indications for preventing and treating cold damage and epidemic infections. The selection of 13 prescriptions has many meanings regarding eradicating the disease from the perspective of Eastern philosophy, Buddhism, and traditional medicine. Thap tam phuong gia giam is not only a medical document describing treatment experiences; it has many characteristics of a guideline for treating and preventing epidemics in the 14th century.

Keywords: *Thap tam phuong gia giam, Tue Tinh.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The book Thap tam phuong gia giam (13 prescriptions and modifications) is one of the famous books of Zen Master Tue Tinh (1330–1400).[1] Scholars have studied this book, but it still retains many unique values. [1],[2] The Nom version of the book is present in the Luc Bat Nom poems, comprising 1190 verses about 13 medicinal prescriptions originating from the books Thuong han luan [3] and Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong. [4] These verses describe

detailed information on the ingredients, preparation, usage, indications, and modifications of the medicinal herbs in each prescription. [2] The most recent Vietnamese version of Thap tam phuong gia giam is presented in the book Tue Tinh Toan Tap, translated and published by the Training Department of the Institute of Oriental Medicine Research, currently known as the Central Hospital of Traditional Medicine. [2] This work comprises an extraordinarily concise and brief

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quantity of prescriptions compared to the medical literature documenting treatment experiences in traditional medicine. Why were only these 13 prescriptions selected, what was the basis for the reduction instructions, and what is the purpose of Thap tam phuong gia giam? These are questions that have interested many researchers. This review considers the structure, syndrome differentiation, and herbal medicinal applications in Thap tam phuong gia giam of Tue Tinh to address these questions and further understand the meaning and value of this book.

II. CONTENT

2.1. The present condition of the Thap tam phuong gia giam versions

The original Han version of the Thap tam phuong gia giam, compiled by Tue Tinh, was lost due to war in the 14th century. In the 18th century, the Royal Medical Institute of the Le Dynasty recompiled this book in the Hong Nghia Giac Tu Y Thu based on the remaining woodblocks. The woodblocks and handcopies of the Han and Nom characters of Thap tam phuong gia giam are preserved in the Institute of Han-Nom Studies.[2] By 1960, it had been translated into Vietnamese by national herbalists. The translation process was completed in 1978 by the Training Department of the Institute of Oriental Medicine Research for the first time. The work continued to be researched and edited continuously until 1994 when it was published by the

Institute of Oriental Medicine Research (now the Central Hospital of Traditional Medicine) in the book Tue Tinh Toan Tap. [2] This review analyzes the content of Thap tam phuong gia giam in the book Tue Tinh Toan Tap, published by the Training Department of the Institute of Oriental Medicine Research in 1994.

2.2. The symbolic meaning of the number 13 in Thap tam phuong gia giam

Thap Tam Phuong Gia Giam includes only 13 prescriptions. Many researchers are interested in the reason behind Tue Tinh's selection of only 13 prescriptions in this book. The review focuses on understanding Tue Tinh's life and career to answer this question. Tue Tinh is the alias of Nguyen Ba Tinh, a native of Nghia Phu village, Cam Vu commune, Cam Binh district, Hai Duong province. Tue Tinh not only established the cornerstone of Vietnamese traditional medicine with the concept of "Vietnamese herbal medicine for the treatment of Vietnamese people".[1],[2] During that period, he also disseminated and promoted Vietnamese Buddhism in the Tran Dynasty by translating, from Han to Nom, the work Thien Tong Khoa Hu Ngu Luc of King Tran Thai Tong. [5] Moreover, he was a Confucian scholar. He completed the second-class examination in Giap Dan (1374) during the reign of Tran Due Tong.[1],[2] Analyzing the meaning of the number 13 in three

aspects of Eastern philosophy, traditional medicine, and Buddhism reveals that selecting only 13 prescriptions is intentional and highly symbolic.

The meaning symbol of the number 13 in Eastern philosophy. In the 64 hexagrams of the I Ching, the 13th hexagram is the Heaven over Fire hexagram, which is made up of the outer trigram, ☰ meaning heaven-the metal in five elements. Inner trigram: ☲ meaning fire-the fire in five elements. The Heaven over Fire hexagram has five yang lines and one yin line. This yin line is the main hexagram. The two lines belong to the inner trigram Ly (bright). Hexagram 13 symbolizes a man standing high, holding the light to illuminate everything.[6] In ancient Eastern culture, the number 13 signifies wisdom, illuminates society, and reflects unity, thus being regarded as the number of the emperors.[7]

In Buddhism, the number 13 is regarded as sacred and esteemed. The towers of the temple each consist of 13 floors.[7] In the Vipassanā-ñāṇa, the 13th insight outlined in the Path to Liberation (Gotrabhu ñana-Knowledge of Change of Lineage) means the knowledge of reaching Nirvana and transforming from a mortal to a saint.[8]

In traditional medicine, humans have nine sense organs (including seven in facial, anterior, and posterior sense organs) and four limbs, totaling 13 components. Nine sense organs and four limbs in

normal functioning are signs of vitality.[9]

Consequently, reviewing the symbolic meaning of the number 13 in aspects of Eastern philosophy, Buddhism, and traditional medicine indicates that selecting only 13 prescriptions in Thap tam phuong gia giam embodies numerous profound implications related to wellness, healing the ill, and combating diseases.

2.3. The similar indications of 13 prescriptions

The prescriptions in Thap tam phuong gia giam include three prescriptions from the book Thuong han luan and ten prescriptions from the book Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong. Analyzing the treatment indications of these 13 prescriptions from the original book shows that the prescriptions have many indications for different conditions. Still, they all have the exact indication of treating cold damage and epidemic disease. Among the 13 prescriptions, there are prescriptions for treating external wind-cold, such as Bat Hoan Kim, Sam To Am, Huong To Am, and Ngu Tich San.[4] The prescriptions to treat cold damage include Ngu Linh Tan, Huyen Vu Thang, Tieu Sai Ho Thang, and O Duoc Thuan Khi thang.[3],[4] Prescription to treat epidemic disease such as Thap Than thang.[4] Prescriptions to treat phlegm caused by external pathogens such as Nhi Tran Thang and Binh Vi Tan.[4] The

prescription for common colds during pregnancy that induce threatening miscarriage, such as Tu Vat Thang.[4] The prescription used to prevent cold damage in four seasons is the Tu Quan Tu Thang, and to prevent miasma (bad air) is the Binh Vi Tan.[4] These

prescriptions have similar indications related to cold damage and epidemic disease but have specific indications covering everything from disease prevention to treatment of symptoms according to the clinical stages of the disease.

Table 1. The prescription in Thap tam phuong gia giam

Prescription name	Origin book	The indications related to cold damage and epidemic disease
Bat hoan kim (bat hoan kim chinh khi tan)	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	External cold, internal damage and cold
Nhi tran thang	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	Phlegm-cold in the lungs and stomach
Sam to am	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	Exogenous wind-cold and qi deficiency
Tu vat thang	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	Common colds during pregnancy that induce threatening miscarriage
Ngu linh tan	Thuong han luan	Tai yang stage of cold damage
Huyen vu thang (chan vu thang)	Thuong han luan	Shao yin stage of cold damage
Huong to tan	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	External cold, internal qi stagantion
Tieu sai ho thang	Thuong han luan	Shao yang stage of cold damage
Binh vi tan	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	Use regularly to clear phlegm and prevent wind, cold and dampness in four seasons.
Thap than thang	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	Epidemic diseases in four seasons
O duoc thuan khi (o duoc thuan khi thang)	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	Fever due to cold damage in four seasons
Ngu tích tan	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	External wind-cold, internal damage five stagnations
Tu quan tu thang	Thai binh hue dan hoa te cuc phuong	Use regularly to prevent cold evils and bad air

2.4. The characteristic of syndrome difference in Thap tam phuong gia giam

Each prescription in Thap tam phuong gia giam described detailed information on the ingredients, preparation, usage, indications, and modifications of the herbal medicine. [2] Most of the contents of the prescription are detailed descriptions of how to add or remove herbal medicine according to possible clinical symptoms as the disease progresses, such as the Bat Hoan Kim prescription with 14 guides for adding or removing herbal medicine, Nhi Tran thang with 9 guides, or Tu Vat thang with up to 24 guides. Detailed analysis of the symptoms shows that they may occur throughout the disease's pathogenesis, from onset to end-stage. The Bat Hoan Kim prescription treats external wind-cold symptoms, internal damage, and cold. [4] According to pathogenesis, the wind-cold in the external can cause blood stasis in the meridians, headaches, body aches, and limb pain. The wind cold can attack the lungs, causing coughs and asthma. Wind-cold stagnation generates heat, causing

fever and thirst. Internal damage with cold in the spleen and stomach causes cold in the abdomen and loose stools. Internal cold damage can cause dysfunction in transporting water and dampness, causing oedema. [3] Therefore, according to the Bat Hoan Kim prescription, additional suitable medicinal herbs may be used based on the progression of the disease to treat all stages, from beginning to end. Thap tam phuong gia giam concludes: *"Concerning the 13 prescriptions mentioned, the criteria for root, tip, interior, and exterior are entirely adequate. The condition varies before and after; the weather differs, making it crucial to assess the disease individually to formulate a prescription; be careful but not too strict."*[2]

Therefore, the removal and addition components of the prescriptions show the comprehensive dialectics and detailed pathogenesis of the symptoms by the prescription's indications. Thus, the physician could facilitate and appropriately select the medicinal herbs that combine with the original prescription based on the stage of the disease.

Table 2. The number of direction removal and addition herbal medicine based on syndrome difference of prescription on Thap tam phuong gia giam

Prescription	The number of direction removal and addition herbal medicine
Bat hoan kim	14
Nhi tran thang	9
Sam to am	4
Tu vat thang	24
Ngu linh tan	18
Huyen vu thang	6
Huong to tan	11
Tieu sai ho thang	14
Binh vi tan	12
Thap than thang	12
O duoc thuan khi	10
Ngu tinh tan	7
Tu quan tu thang	13

2.5. The characteristic of herbal medicinal application in Thap tam phuong gia giam

In Thap tam phuong gia giam, some prescriptions have changed their ingredients compared to the prescriptions in the original book. Some remove some herbal medicine from the original prescriptions and replace it with readily available Vietnamese herbs such as onions (*Bulbus Allii*

Fistulosi), ginger (*Rhizoma Zingiberis Recens*), *Platycladus orientalis*. Some herbal drugs from original prescriptions may not be available or omitted during copying. Adding Vietnamese herbs to the prescription structure also reflects the spirit of "Vietnamese herbal medicine for the treatment of Vietnamese people" of Tue Tinh.[1], [2].

Table 3. Modifications in components of some prescriptions in Thap tam phuong gia giam

Prescription	Component	
	Original book	Modifications in Thap tam phuong gia giam
Bat hoan kim	<i>Cortex Magnoliae officinalis, Herba Pogostemonis, Pericarpium Citri reticulatae perenne, Radix Glycyrrhizae, Rhizoma, Atractylodis, Rhizoma Pinelliae praeparata</i>	Remove <i>Cortex Magnoliae officinalis</i> . Add <i>Fructus Ziziphi jujubae, Bulbus Allii Fistulosi, Rhizoma Zingiberis Recens</i>
Nhi tran thang	<i>Rhizoma Pinelliae praeparata, Pericarpium Citri reticulatae perenne, Poria, Radix Glycyrrhizae, Rhizoma Zingiberis recens</i>	-
Sam to am	<i>Rhizoma Pinelliae praeparata, Radix Peucedani, Rhizoma et Radix Ginseng, Fructus Perillae frutescens, Radix Puerariae thomsonii, Radix Saussureae lappae, Radix Platycodi grandiflori, Pericarpium Citri reticulatae perenne, Fructus Ziziphi jujubae, Fructus aurantii immaturus, Poria Radix Glycyrrhizae</i>	Remove <i>Fructus Aurantii immaturus, Poria, Radix Glycyrrhizae</i> . Add <i>Fructus Aurantii, Bulbus Allii Fistulosi, Radix Paeonia</i>
Tu vat thang	<i>Radix Angelicae sinensis, Radix Paeoniae lactiflorae, Radix Rehmanniae glutinosae praeparata, Rhizoma Ligustici wallichii</i>	-
Ngu linh tan	<i>Poria, Rhizoma Atractylodis macrocephalae, Polyporus, Rhizoma Alismatis, Cortex Cinnantomi</i>	Remove <i>white part of Poria</i> Add <i>red part of Poria</i>
Huyen vu thang	<i>Rhizoma Atractylodis macrocephalae, Poria, Radix Paeoniae lactiflorae,</i>	Add <i>Radix Glycyrrhizae</i>

	<i>Radix Glycyrrhizae, Radix Aconiti lateralis, Rhizoma Zingiberis recens</i>	
Huong to tan	<i>Rhizoma Cyperi, Pericarpium Citri reticulatae perenne, Folium Perillae frutescens, Radix Glycyrrhizae</i>	Add <i>Rhizoma Atractylodis, Bulbus Allii Fistulosi</i>
Tieu sai ho thang	<i>Radix Bupleuri chinensis, Radix Scutellariae, Nhân sâm, Rhizoma Pinelliae, Radix Glycyrrhizae, Fructus Ziziphi jujubae, Rhizoma Zingiberis recens</i>	-
Binh vi tan	<i>Rhizoma Atractylodis, Cortex Magnoliae officinalis, Pericarpium Citri reticulatae perenne, Radix Glycyrrhizae</i>	-
Thap than thang	<i>Rhizoma Ligustici wallichii, Herba Ephedrae, Radix Puerariae thomsonii, Bạch chi, Fructus Perillae frutescens, Radix Glycyrrhizae, Rhizoma Cimicifugae, Radix Paeoniae, Pericarpium Citri reticulatae perenne, Rhizoma Cyperi</i>	Add <i>Cacumen Platycladi, Bulbus Allii Fistulosi, Fructus Ziziphi jujubae</i>
O duoc thuan khi	<i>Radix Linderae, Herba Ephedrae, Pericarpium Citri reticulatae perenne, Bombyx Botryticatus, Rhizoma Ligustici wallichii, Rhizoma Zingiberis recens, Radix Glycyrrhizae, Fructus Ziziphi jujubae</i>	Add <i>Radix Platycodi grandiflori, Radix Angelicae dahuricae, Rhizoma Zingiberis</i>
Ngu tich tan	<i>Radix Angelicae dahuricae, Rhizoma Ligustici wallichii, Radix Glycyrrhizae, Poria, Radix Angelicae sinensis, Cortex Cinnantomi, Radix Paeoniae lactiflorae, Rhizoma Pinelliae praeparata</i>	Remove <i>Rhizoma Ligustici wallichii, Cortex Cinnantomi, Fructus Ziziphi jujubae.</i> Add <i>Rhizoma et Radix Panax Ginseng, Rhizoma Atractylodis macrocephalae, Radix</i>

		<i>Platycodi grandiflora</i> , <i>Herba Ephedrae</i> , <i>Rhizoma Zingiberis</i> , <i>Rhizoma et Radix</i> <i>Notopterygii</i> , <i>Radix</i> <i>Angelicae pubescentis</i> , <i>Rhizoma Atractylodis</i> , <i>Cortex Magnoliae</i> <i>officinalis</i> , <i>Ramulus</i> <i>Cinnamomi</i> , <i>Bulbus Allii</i> <i>Fistulosi</i>
Tu quan tu thang	<i>Rhizoma et Radix Panax Ginseng</i> , <i>Poria</i> , <i>Rhizoma Atractylodis</i> <i>macrocephalae</i> , <i>Radix Glycyrrhizae</i>	-

III. CONCLUSION

Thap tam phuong gia giam of Tue Tinh is a unique medical book in Vietnamese traditional medicine with a concise number of prescriptions. It has detailed and complete dialectics of medicinal application according to the pathology. Thus, this book is convenient and quick for doctors to apply in clinical practice. There is an adjustment in the prescription structure with the addition of available herbal medicines, showing flexibility and suitability to actual conditions. The number of 13 prescriptions has indications for preventing and treating cold damage and epidemic disease. According to Eastern philosophy, Buddhism, and traditional medicine, the number of 13 prescriptions has many symbolic meanings for eradicating the

disease. Analysis above shown that Thap tam phuong gia giam is not only a medical document describing treatment experiences; it has many characteristics of a guideline for treating and preventing epidemics in the 14th century. This point aligns with several records confirming that physicians had been applying prescriptions of Tue Tinh to treat patients in epidemics during the past decades in Vietnam.[2] Further research, review, and study are necessary to inherit and apply academic values and to clarify the profound humanistic meaning of the Thap tam phuong gia giam.

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