

**“Choose a quote from the *Huangdi Neijing Suwen* relevant to your chosen topic. Using a variety of sources, explain how this quote relates to your understanding of the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine.”**

**Commented [SA1]:** This is the assignment question.

One of the cornerstones in the practice of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is the pursuit of balance. According to Wu, Wang and Huang (1997) the human body enjoys health when there is a balanced lifestyle and succumbs to disease when there is not. An important method in the maintenance of harmony within the body is the careful observation of not only what is consumed but also how much. In TCM, all food and drink contain one or more key flavours, known as the ‘Five Flavours’, which each affect the organs of the Zang Fu (Maciocia 2015). More specifically, *The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine: a new translation of the Neijing Suwen with commentary* (1995, p. 29) states that the ‘Heart is benefited by the bitter taste, the Lung by the pungent taste, the Spleen by the sweet taste, the Liver by the sour taste, and the Kidneys by the salty taste. However, this never implies that one may overindulge’. The aim of this essay is to explain how this quote from the *Huangdi Neijing Suwen* (HDNJSW) relates to the practice of TCM. To begin, the philosophical background and the physiological functions of the Five Flavours are explored. The use of the Five Flavours in diagnosing disease is subsequently examined in brief. Finally, the practical application of the Five Flavours in modern TCM will be discussed.

**Commented [SA2]:** Background information within the introductory paragraph (helps to guide the reader into the topic). It is usually a broad or general statement relating to the topic.

**Commented [SA3]:** When there is no author, use the title of the book in italics. Do not use the translator’s name in the in-text citation but this should be included in the reference list.

**Commented [SA4]:** This is the quotation that is being used and has been included in the introduction because it is one of the marking criteria for this assignment. It is important to always check the marking criteria. Note that parts of the human anatomy are generally capitalised in the context of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

**Commented [SA5]:** If you use an acronym, write the full name or title the first time it is mentioned and put the acronym in parentheses. Only use the acronym for the rest of the paper.

**Commented [SA6]:** This is the topic of the essay. In certain assignments, it may very closely resemble the task question.

**Commented [SA7]:** This is the outline of the essay. The number of subtopics largely depends on the analytical depth the subject you are writing about and/or the length of the essay itself.

Sequential adjectives and adverbs that can be used include but are not limited to:

- Firstly, Secondly, Thirdly, Finally, ...
- First, Then, Afterwards, To conclude, ...

**Commented [SA8]:** Note the citation format used for a quotation. Use single quotation marks and include a page number for quotes. Unless required by an assignment, avoid using too many quotations and focus more on using paraphrasing.

A direct relationship can be traced from the Five Flavours to the Five Phases, which are produced when ‘the universal yin and yang transform into the five earthly transformative energies, also known as the five elemental phases’ (*The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine: a new translation of the Neijing Suwen with commentary* 1995, p. 8). Moreover, Pitchford (2002), referring to the HDNJSW, breaks down the relationship further by stating that bitter comes from fire, sweet from earth, pungent from metal, salty from water and sour from the wood element. This idea highlights the direct relationship between the Five

Zang and the Five Flavours. Within the context of the human body, the Five Flavours are separated and disseminated to their corresponding Zang organs by the Spleen from the Gu Qi which was transformed from food by the Stomach (*The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, cited in Rogers 1997, p. 25). Consequently, this understanding of the relationship between the phases, flavours and Zang organs can be utilised as a diagnostic tool when faced with certain symptoms in practice.

**Commented [SA9]:** This is one way of citing an author who, in turn, is citing someone else (secondary citation).

**Commented [SA10]:** This final part acts as a concluding sentence.

Specific organ dysfunction can usually be indicated by an overriding taste experienced by the patient. Here, the direct relationship between the Five Phases and the Five Flavours is again demonstrated. As Fire is related to the Heart, the corresponding bitter taste can be an

**Commented [SA11]:** Topic sentence

**Commented [SA12]:** Supporting sentence

indication of a Full-Heat condition in the Heart. Similarly, Spleen deficiency can lead to a sweet taste, Lung heat can cause a pungent flavour to manifest and Liver dysfunction can result in a sour taste in the mouth (*The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine: a new*

*translation of the Neijing Suwen with commentary* 1995). However, Maciocia (2015) argues that the Five Flavours theory may not always align perfectly in a clinical situation such as the fact that a bitter taste is commonly indicative of Liver rather than Heart dysfunction.

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**Commented [S14]:** Use single quotation marks and include a page number for quotations. Unless required by an assignment, avoid using too many quotations. Instead focus more on paraphrasing.

**Commented [SA15]:** Here is an example of critical reflection through synthesis of an opposing view.

**Commented [SA16]:** This is a common linking word used to conclude a paragraph.

Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that thorough application of all four diagnostic methods, clinical experience and empirical evidence remain critical for accurate assessment of a disease, although ancient texts are important in the study of TCM theory.

The Five Flavours is often mentioned in the study and classification of food and herbal medicine, in addition to their effect on diseases. However, it is essential to note that the attribution of flavours to specific foods and herbs relates to their energetic property rather than the actual taste. For instance, beef is considered sweet in TCM, despite not often being found in a dessert dish. Additionally, many foods commonly contain more than one

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**Commented [SA18]:** This is a supporting sentence, which helps clarify or expand the topic sentence.

energetic flavour, such as in the case of sardines, which are seen to be both sweet and salty (Pitchford 2002). Furthermore, each flavour possesses several therapeutic actions that counteract specific disturbances in the body. For example, sweet herbs are good for deficient conditions due to their tonifying and harmonising effects; sour herbs are stabilising and binding, which make them ideal for illnesses where there is excess fluid loss and bitter herbs possess purging and heat-releasing abilities (Chen & Chen 2014). Recent studies may have been able to prove the applicability of this TCM theory to modern medicine. Chen and Zhang (2014) investigated 81 herbal extracts to examine their anti-inflammatory effects and found that all herbs containing the pungent flavour had a strong effect on the inhibition of Nitric Oxide production, which is one of the primary steps in the pathological process of inflammation. In another study, Liao, Banbury and Leach (2007) tested 45 herbs and discovered that those that contained bitter or sour flavours had a marked effect on oxygen radical absorbance capacity or, in other words, strong antioxidant properties. The results of these two studies reveal the therapeutic applicability of the Five Flavours theory within modern medicine. They also show that this ancient system contains contemporary scientific merit as a way to classify the medicinal effects of food and medicine.

The Five Flavours link with each of the Zang organs through the Five Phases theory. The physiological explanation of this relationship allows practitioners of TCM to recognise imbalance within specific organs of the human body most of the time. Besides diagnosis, the Five Flavours is a strong foundational concept in the classification of food and herbal properties which modern science is proving to be accurate. Further study of the Five Flavours theory, such as that conducted by Chen and Chen (2004), could uncover practical ways for this ancient knowledge to assist modern medicine in the search for treatments of modern diseases.

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**Commented [SA20]:** This is called an 'author prominent' citation.

**Commented [SA21]:** The essay is summarised in these sentences.

**Commented [SA22]:** The suggestion of further study is used as a closing sentence.

## References

Chen, C.L. & Zhang, D.D. 2014, 'Anti-inflammatory effects of 81 Chinese herb extracts and their correlation with the characteristics of traditional Chinese medicine', *Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, vol. 2014, p. 985176.

Chen, J.K. & Chen, T.T. 2004, *Chinese medical herbology and pharmacology*, Art of Medicine, City of Industry, CA.

Liao, H., Banbury, L.K. & Leach, D.N. 2007, 'Antioxidant activity of 45 Chinese herbs and the relationship with their TCM characteristics', *Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 429-34.

Maciocia, G. 2015, *The foundations of Chinese Medicine: A comprehensive text for acupuncturists & herbalists*, 3rd edn, Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh.

Pitchford, P. 2002, *Healing with whole foods: Asian traditions and modern nutrition*, 3rd edn, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA.

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Wu, R., Wang, H.T. & Huang, Y. 1997, *Sun Zi's art of war and health care*, New World Press, Beijing.

**Commented [SA23]:** Note the clear differences between the different source text formatting styles in the list.

**Commented [SA24]:** Not all journal articles will specify a volume and/or issue number. However, if you cannot find one or are unsure, it is best to seek assistance from a librarian.

**Commented [SA25]:** Only one 'p.' for a single page

**Commented [SA26]:** The title of the journal article is written like a sentence. Please pay attention to capitalisation.

**Commented [SA27]:** The abbreviation 'pp.' denotes more than one page.

**Commented [SA28]:** Pay attention to the page number format.

**Commented [SA29]:** For books printed in the US, the state is written in initials. There is no need to mention USA.

**Commented [SA30]:** When the author is unknown, use the title of the book in italics.

**Commented [SA31]:** To refer to a translator, the initial comes before the surname.

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