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REVIEW

Potential herb–drug interactions between anti-COVID-19 drugs and traditional Chinese medicine



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Abstract Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has spread worldwide. Effective treatments against COVID-19 remain urgently in need although vaccination significantly reduces the incidence, hospitalization, and mortality. At present, antiviral drugs including Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir (Paxlovid™), Remdesivir, and Molnupiravir have been authorized to treat COVID-19 and become more globally available. On the other hand, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has been used for the treatment of epidemic diseases for a long history. Currently, various TCM formulae against COVID-19 such as Qingfei Paidu decoction, Xuanfei Baidu granule, Huashi Baidu granule, Jinhua Qinggan granule, Lianhua Qingwen capsule, and Xuebijing injection have been widely used in clinical practice in China, which may cause potential herb–drug interactions (HDIs) in patients under treatment with antiviral drugs and affect the efficacy and safety of medicines. However, information on potential HDIs between the above anti-COVID-19 drugs and TCM formulae is lacking, and thus this work seeks to summarize and highlight potential HDIs between antiviral drugs and TCM formulae against COVID-19, and especially pharmacokinetic HDIs mediated by

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metabolizing enzymes and/or transporters. These well-characterized HDIs could provide useful information on clinical concomitant medicine use to maximize clinical outcomes and minimize adverse and toxic effects.

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1. Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), a highly infectious respiratory illness caused by a newly discovered coronavirus, namely, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), remains a global pandemic¹. To date, more than 500 million people have been infected with COVID-19, resulting in six million deaths worldwide². As COVID-19 vaccines have been gradually rolled in the global population, the risk of infection, severe illness, and death has been reduced³. However, given the varied efficacy and duration of protection after vaccination in different populations, effective treatments against COVID-19 remain necessary. Angiotensin-converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) is the main target for SARS-CoV-2 to invade the host cell⁴. ACE2-based therapy can be considered as a potential treatment strategy for COVID-19. At present, three antiviral drugs (Paxlovid™, Remdesivir, and Molnupiravir) have been authorized to manage patients with COVID-19⁵. Paxlovid™ (Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir) is a combination therapy that showed near 90% efficacy in preventing hospitalizations and deaths in high-risk patients⁶. Nirmatrelvir is considered as a SARS-CoV-2 protease inhibitor, and Ritonavir, as an inhibitor of the prominent drug-metabolizing enzyme cytochrome P450 (CYP) 3A4, could slow down the hepatic metabolism and boost the concentration of Nirmatrelvir⁷. Remdesivir, as a prodrug, could selectively inhibit RNA-dependent RNA polymerase (RdRp), then delay viral RNA chain termination, and finally inhibit viral replication⁸. Molnupiravir and its metabolites can also inhibit SARS-CoV-2 transmission by targeting RdRp⁹.

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has a long history of being used for the treatment of epidemic diseases and it has good efficacy in treating viral infections including SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV^{10,11}. While fighting COVID-19 in China, the National Health Commission of China announced that patients with COVID-19 treated with TCM combined with antiviral drugs had their symptoms effectively relieved and recovered¹². TCM can inhibit the replication and transcription of SARS-CoV-2 by targeting 3C-like protease (3CLpro) and RdRp, and attenuate cytokine storm and immune deficiency caused by the SARS-CoV-2¹³. Early intervention with TCM in patients with COVID-19 can improve the cure rate, shorten the disease course, delay disease progression, and reduce mortality^{14,15}. Among these TCMs, three TCM decoctions and three formulated Chinese medicines, namely Qingfei Paidu decoction (QFPD), Xuanfei Baidu granule (XFBD), Huashi Baidu granule (HSBD), Jinhua Qinggan granule (JHQG), Lianhua Qingwen capsule (LHQW), and Xuebijing injection (XBJ) have been shown to be most effective in treating patients with COVID-19, which are recommended by China's National Health Commission to treat severe and critical cases of COVID-19.

Herb-drug interactions (HDIs) may occur during TCM combined with antiviral drug treatment of patients with COVID-19. HDIs are clinically insignificant, and they do not require any

special medical care, but sometimes they may become clinically relevant and require medical intervention. Generally, HDIs have two main types: pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic-based interactions. Pharmacodynamic-based HDIs occur when TCM/one drug has an additive, synergistic, or antagonistic effect or has the same drug targets or pathways as co-administered TCM/drugs¹⁶. Pharmacokinetic-based HDIs are more frequently reported, where TCM/one drug affects the plasma concentration of the other drug/TCM by modulation of their absorption, distribution, metabolism and excretion (ADME) by affecting the expression and activity of drug-metabolizing enzymes and transporters, which represent a major concern in drug pharmacokinetics¹⁶. Drug transporters including efflux transporters (*e.g.*, ABC-transporters) and uptake transporters (*e.g.*, SLC-transporters) are expressed in many tissues, such as the intestine, liver, kidney and the brain, and play a crucial role in drug absorption, distribution and excretion¹⁶. Alterations in the expression and activity of drug transporters will lead to changes in the clearance of drugs and result in varied clinical outcomes. Drug metabolizing enzymes (*e.g.*, CYPs) mainly located in the liver, intestine and kidneys, are responsible for the degradation of drugs. The induction and inhibition of CYPs are predominant mechanisms responsible for PK-based HDIs¹⁶. For example, St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) can decrease the bioavailability of numerous conventional drugs that are substrates for CYPs and P-glycoprotein (P-gp) such as warfarin, cyclosporine, digoxin, indinavir, irinotecan, midazolam, and others, resulting in their reduced efficacy¹⁷. By contrast, grapefruit juice inhibits the catalytic activity of intestinal CYP3A4, thereby altering the pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic profiles of cyclosporine and felodipine, thereby enhancing their oral bioavailability¹⁸. Because of the critical pharmacokinetic effect of the above-mentioned CYP3A4-mediated mechanism for Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir, co-administration with certain medications that inhibit or induce CYP3A4 is contraindicated and should be a concern in clinical practice. This contraindication reflects concern for potential HDIs with the potential to alter the efficacy or safety of Ritonavir/Nirmatrelvir and/or co-administered drugs metabolized by CYP3A4.

Gut microbiota alterations have been reported in hospitalized COVID-19 patients and are related to poor prognosis through complex interactions with SARS-CoV-2 and host immunity after severe COVID-19^{19,20}. More importantly, the composition of the microbial community may not be fully restored in COVID-19 patients after a 3-month recovery²¹. It was reported that ACE2 expression may be regulated by microbiota *via* their metabolites²². Numerous studies have demonstrated that TCM formulae are important in the modulation of gut microbiota, and some herbs and Western medicines are closely related to alterations in the gut microbiota²³. Thus, attention should be paid to gut microbiota-mediated HDIs between anti-COVID-19 drugs and TCM formulae.

However, information on potential HDIs between the above anti-COVID-19 drugs and TCM formulae is lacking, and thus a well-characterized HDI summary is urgently needed. This work seeks to summarize and highlight potential HDIs between antiviral drugs and TCM formulations against COVID-19, and especially pharmacokinetic HDIs mediated by metabolizing enzymes and/or transporters, which provides useful information on clinical concomitant medicine use to maximize clinical outcomes and minimize adverse and toxic effects.

2. Anti-COVID-19 drugs

2.1. Paxlovid™ (Nirmatrelvir + Ritonavir)

Paxlovid™ was issued by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and emergency use authorization for the treatment of COVID-19 in 2021. It is a therapeutic combination consisting of two compounds: Nirmatrelvir and Ritonavir²⁴. Paxlovid™ reduces the risk of hospitalization or mortality by 89% in non-hospitalized adult patients with COVID-19²⁴. Nirmatrelvir, which is designed to prevent viral replication, is a peptidomimetic inhibitor of the SARS-CoV-2 main protease (Mpro), referred to as 3CLpro or nsp5 protease²⁴. Co-administration with a low dose of Ritonavir (a potent CYP3A4 inhibitor) can slow down the hepatic metabolism of Nirmatrelvir, leading to longer periods of higher concentrations of Nirmatrelvir to combat the virus²⁴. The common adverse events of Paxlovid™ include dysgeusia, diarrhea, nausea, headache, vomiting, and pyrexia. In addition, other adverse reactions are observed such as liver toxicity and allergic reactions²⁴. In healthy subjects, the difference in plasma protein binding between Nirmatrelvir (~69%) and Ritonavir (~99%) was approximately 30%²⁴. Nirmatrelvir is excreted in feces (49.6%) and urine (35.3%), whereas Ritonavir is primarily excreted in feces (86.4%) and to a lesser extent in urine (11.3%)²⁴.

The metabolism of Nirmatrelvir was qualitatively similar in liver microsomes and hepatocytes from rats, monkeys, and humans, and its prominent metabolic pathway was CYP3A4-mediated oxidation²⁵. The oxidative metabolism of Nirmatrelvir is diminished following co-administration of Nirmatrelvir with Ritonavir^{26,27}. Nirmatrelvir reversibly inhibits CYP3A4, and it does not reversibly inhibit the activity of CYP1A2, CYP2B6, CYP2C8, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, or CYP2D6 *in vitro* at clinically relevant concentrations^{7,28}. Nirmatrelvir does not induce any CYPs at clinically relevant concentrations⁷. Nirmatrelvir is a substrate for human P-gp but not a substrate for equilibrative nucleoside transporter 1 (ENT1), ENT2, organic anion transporter polypeptide 1B1 (OATP1B1), OATP1B3, OATP2B1, OATP4C1, organic cation transporter 1 (OCT1), OCT2, organic anion transporter 1–3 (OAT1–3), multidrug and toxic compound extrusion protein 1 (MATE1), MATE2K, Na⁺/taurocholate cotransporting polypeptide (NTCP), breast cancer resistance protein (BCRP), or peptide transporter 1 (PEPT1)²⁴. Nirmatrelvir inhibits the function of several drug transporters, including P-gp, MATE1, OCT1, and OATP1B1 *in vitro*²⁹. Relatively weaker inhibition by Nirmatrelvir is noted against OATP1B3, OCT1, OCT2, OAT1, OAT3, MATE1, and MATE2K²⁵.

Ritonavir is primarily metabolized by CYP3A and, to a lesser extent, by CYP2D6. Ritonavir inhibits the activity of CYP3A4, CYP2D6, CYP2C8, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, and CYP2J2^{30–33}. In addition, Ritonavir serves as an inducer of several metabolizing enzymes, such as CYP3A, CYP1A2, CYP2B6, CYP2C9,

CYP2C19, and UDP-glucuronosyltransferases (UGTs)^{30,34}. Ritonavir is a substrate for P-gp, multidrug resistance protein 1 (MRP1), and MRP2^{35,36}. Furthermore, it inhibits the function of the intestinal transporters including P-gp, BCRP, OATP, MRP1 and MATE1^{37,38} (Table 1).

2.2. Remdesivir

Remdesivir, a broad-spectrum antiviral agent, was approved by FDA for emergency use to treat COVID-19 in 2020³⁹. Remdesivir (GS-5734) is a prodrug of a nucleoside analog (GS-441524)⁴⁰. Inside the cells, Remdesivir is hydrolyzed to GS-704277 by carboxylesterases (CES), and then GS-704277 is converted to the nucleoside analog monophosphate GS-441524-MP, and GS-441524-MP is consecutively phosphorylated into the active nucleoside triphosphate form GS-443902⁴¹. GS-443902 serves as an ATP analog to compete with endogenous ATP and selectively inhibit RdRp, which delays viral RNA chain termination and finally inhibits viral replication^{39,42,43}. Notably, CES1 (~80%), cathepsin A (~10%), and CYP3A (~10%) are the key metabolizing enzymes involved in the Remdesivir metabolism^{44,45}. GS-704277 is hydrolyzed to the monophosphate form by histidine triad nucleotide-binding protein 1⁴⁶. Although the adverse events of Remdesivir are relatively limited, an increase in transaminase was observed in patients treated with Remdesivir⁴⁷. Moreover, an Ebola phase 3 trial reported that one patient treated with Remdesivir experienced hypotension and cardiac arrest that resulted in death⁴⁸.

Given its first-pass liver metabolism, Remdesivir is administered *via* intravenous injection rather than oral delivery⁴⁴. Remdesivir has a short plasma half-life (<1 h) of the prodrug, and GS-443902 has a prolonged *t*_{1/2} (>35 h)^{49–51}. Remdesivir shows moderate protein binding in plasma, with a free fraction of 12.1% in humans. However, the metabolite of the Remdesivir, GS-704277 displays low protein binding, with a free fraction ranging from 85% to 127%⁵⁰. Remdesivir is a substrate of CYP3A4, CYP2C8, CYP2D6 and P-gp^{40,52}. Remdesivir exhibits an inhibitory effect on the activity of CYP1A2, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, CYP2D6, CYP3A4, OATP1B1, OATP1B3, MRP4, and NTCP (Table 1)⁴⁰. Remdesivir and its metabolites are primarily excreted through urine (74%) and feces (18%)⁴⁰.

2.3. Molnupiravir

Molnupiravir, an orally delivered antiviral drug, was approved and developed by Merck for the treatment of COVID-19 in 2021 in the UK⁵³. Molnupiravir is an isopropyl ester prodrug, and it is metabolized to β -D-N4-hydroxycytidine (NHC or EIDD-1931) by esterases in plasma⁵⁴. Inside the cells, NHC is converted to the active form of NHC-triphosphate (TP)⁵³. NHC-TP serves as a substrate instead of cytidine-triphosphate and uridine-triphosphate for RdRp, resulting in mutagenesis during viral RNA replication⁵⁵. Molnupiravir showed excellent efficacy against SARS-CoV-2 infection in mice implanted with human lung tissue⁵⁶. Another study also showed that treatment with Molnupiravir reduced lung viral load and alleviated lung damage in SARS-CoV-2-infected mice⁵⁷. Molnupiravir could also inhibit SARS-CoV-2 transmission in a hamster model⁵⁸. In humans, a clinical Phase III study showed that Molnupiravir was effective for the treatment of unvaccinated adults with COVID-19, which lowered the risk of hospitalization and mortality⁵⁹. The most common side effects of

Table 1 The effect of anti-COVID-19 drugs on metabolizing enzymes and transporters.

Anti-viral drug	Metabolizing enzyme					Transporter						
	CYP1	CYP2	CYP3	UGT	CES	OCT	NTCP	OATP	P-gp	BCRP	MRP	OAT
Nirmatrelvir (Refs. 7,24,25,28,29)	1A2↓	2B6↓ 2C8↓ 2C9↓ 2C19↓ 2D6↓	3A4 ^a 3A4↓			OCT1↓ OCT2↓		OATP1B1↓ OATP1B3↓	P-gp ^a P-gp↓			OAT1↓ OAT3↓
Ritonavir (Refs. 30–38)	1A2↑	2B6↑ 2D6 ^a 2D6↓ 2C8↓ 2C9↑ 2C9↓ 2C19↑ 2C19↓ 2J2↓	3A ^a 3A↑ 3A4↓	UGTs↑				OATPs↓	P-gp ^a P-gp↓	BCRP↓	MRP1 ^a MRP1↓ MRP2 ^a	
Remdesivir (Refs. 40,41,52,474)	1A2↓	2C8 ^a 2D6 ^a 2C9↓ 2C19↓ 2D6↓	3A4 ^a 3A4↓		CES1 ^a		NTCP↓	OATP1B1↓ OATP1B3↓	P-gp ^a		MRP4↓	
Molnupiravir (Refs. 64,65)					CES1/2 ^a							

↑ Indicates the induction effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

↓ Indicates the inhibitory effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

^aIndicates that the drug is a substrate for an enzyme or drug transporter.

Molnupiravir include headache and diarrhea, and 93.3% of the side effects are well tolerated^{60,61}.

A low level of Molnupiravir can be detected, but a high level of NHC can be measured in the plasma^{60,62,63}. NHC does not bind to plasma protein⁵³. Given the rapid conversion into NHC and NHC-TP, Molnupiravir is barely detected in all tissues, however, NHC and NHC-TP are observed in all tissues, primarily in the lungs and spleen, in a dose-dependent manner⁶³. Molnupiravir is hydrolyzed to NHC by CES, especially CES2^{64,65}. NHC is converted into NHC-TP by host kinases and phosphatases in cells⁶³. NHC-TP is ultimately metabolized to endogenous pyrimidine nucleosides (uridine and/or cytidine), and only ≤3% of the administered Molnupiravir is excreted through urine in NHC form⁶³. *In vitro*, NHC is a substrate of concentrative nucleoside transporter 1 (CNT1), CNT2, CNT3, and ENT2, whereas Molnupiravir is a comparatively weak substrate of CNT1⁶³. Neither Molnupiravir nor NHC is the substrate of human P-gp, or BCRP⁶⁶. *In vitro* studies demonstrated that Molnupiravir is not an inhibitor of major human CYPs (CYP1A2, CYP2B6, CYP2C8, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, CYP2D6, and CYP3A4), and neither Molnupiravir nor NHC inhibited P-gp, BCRP, OATP1B1, OATP1B3, OCT1^{63,66}. Moreover, they are not inhibitors or inducers of major drug-metabolizing enzymes or transporters, which might reduce the risk of drug–drug interactions (DDIs)⁶³ (Table 1).

3. TCMs for the treatment of COVID-19 infections

3.1. QFPD

3.1.1. Basic pharmacological information of QFPD

QFPD is listed as the first-line prescription of TCM clinical treatment in the latest *Protocol on Diagnosis and Treatment of COVID-19 (Trial Version 9)* issued by China's National Health

Commission⁶⁷. Multiple clinical reports have proven that early treatment with QFPD was associated with favorable outcomes, including faster recovery, shorter time to viral shedding, and shorter hospital stay^{68–70}. A total of nine trials, including 1108 patients with COVID-19, have revealed that QFPD combined with western medicine treatments reduced the aggravation rate by 71% and decreased the incidence of adverse events by 56%⁷¹.

Previous studies have shown that QFPD acts on several targets associated with its anti-inflammation, immuno-modulation, and anti-viral effects against COVID-19^{72–74}. ACE2, SARS-CoV-2 spike protein, and SARS-CoV-2 3CLpro, which are closely relevant to the infectivity and pathogenicity of COVID-19, are also identified as the potential targets of QFPD⁷⁵. Previous study has shown that several kinds of gut microbiota play an important role in the immune function, and QFPD decoction could restore the diversity of gut microbiota and could be used to treat coronavirus-induced pneumonia, reflected in the up-regulation of the relative abundance of *Romboutsia*, *Turicibacter* and *Clostridium_sensu_stricto_1*, and the down-regulation of the relative abundance of *norank_f_Lachnospiraceae*, which is closely related to disease severity and immune dysfunction in COVID-19 patients⁷⁶.

QFPD is composed of 20 herbs and one mineral (Ephedrae Herba, Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma Praeparata Cum Melle, Praeparata Cum Melle, Armeniacae Semen Amarum, Gypsum Fibrosum, Cinnamomi Ramulus, Alismatis Rhizoma, Polyporus, Atractylodis Macrocephalae Rhizoma, Poria, Bupleuri Radix, Scutellariae Radix, Pinelliae Rhizoma Praeparatum Cum Zingiber et Alumine, Zingiberis Rhizoma Recens, Asteris Radix et Rhizoma, Farfarae Flos, Belamcandae Rhizoma, Asari Radix et Rhizoma, Dioscoreae Rhizoma, Aurantii Fructus Immaturus, Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium, Pogostemonis Herba)⁶⁷. It was reported that a total of 195 chemical components, including 104 prototypes and 91 metabolites, were identified in mice serum after oral

administrated with QFPD decoction in mice⁷⁷. Nine of them, including ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, amygdalin, prunasin, liquiritin, hyperoside, hesperidin, baicalin, irisfloreantin, were absorbed quickly into the circulation system, subsequently distributed to heart, liver, spleen, lung, and kidney⁷⁸.

QFPD exerts regulatory effects on the metabolizing enzymes and drug transporters (Table 2). QFPD shows inhibitory effects on the activities of human CYP1A, CYP2A6, CYP3A, CYP2C8, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, CYP2D6, and CYP2E1⁷⁹ by cocktail probe substrates approach, and the potential of HDIs should be considered in the combined therapy against COVID-19. The pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic characteristics of each herb of QFPD are summarized below.

3.1.2. Pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic feature of each herb in QFPD

Ephedrae Herba (Mahuang in Chinese) is the dried herbaceous stem of *Ephedra sinica*, *Ephedra intermedia*, or *Ephedra equisetina* (Family, Ephedraceae)⁸⁰. Ephedrae Herba could disrupt the interaction between ACE2 and SARS-CoV-2 spike protein receptor-binding domain (RBD), thereby abolishing the infectivity of SARS-CoV-2 pseudoviruses⁷⁵. To date, more than 150 chemical components of Ephedrae Herba have been identified or tentatively characterized, including alkaloids, triterpenoid saponins, flavanone-*O*-glycosides, flavone-*C*-glycosides, and procyanidins⁸¹. Among them, phenylalkylamine alkaloids including ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, methylephedrine, norephedrine, and norpseudoephedrine are considered as characteristic active compounds⁸¹. Ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, and methylephedrine are possibly P-gp substrates⁸². Meanwhile, ephedrine and norpseudoephedrine were proved as substrates of OCT2⁸³. Ephedrae Herba water decoction could increase CYP1A2 activity characterized by detecting the probe substrate of phenacetin, as well as the expression of mRNA and protein, but it has no effect on the activity of CYP2E1⁸⁴. *In vitro*, it could inhibit MDR1 function in part⁸⁵. Interestingly, pseudoephedrine has an inhibitory effect on the activities of CYP1A1/2 and CYP2E1, whereas ephedrine could induce the activities of CYP2C and CYP1A1/2 by determining their probe substrates⁸⁶.

Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (Gancao in Chinese) is the dried root and rhizome of *Glycyrrhiza uralensis* Fisch., *Glycyrrhiza inflata* Bat., or *Glycyrrhiza glabra* L.⁸⁷, Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma Praeparata Cum Melle, which is used in QFPD, is processed from Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma. Studies revealed that Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma could inhibit ACE2, thereby inhibiting viral infectivity⁸⁸ and showing affinity to RdRp of SARS-CoV-2, suggesting its potential efficacy against COVID-19⁸⁹. Based on previous reports, Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma could modulate gut microbiota, thereby enhancing the immune defensive function of the human body⁹⁰. Numerous bioactive constituents have been found in Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, such as triterpene saponins, flavonoids, isoflavonoids and chalcones⁹¹. Glycyrrhizin, glycyrrhetic acid, liquiritigenin, isoliquiritigenin, licochalcone A, and glycy coumarin have been isolated from Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma⁹¹. Glycyrrhetic acid, the main bioactive constituent of Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, is primarily metabolized by CYP3A4, followed by CYP2C9 and CYP2C19⁹². Glycyrrhetic acid might be a substrate for P-gp⁹². Studies on rodents and humans demonstrated that glycyrrhizin is poorly absorbed by the gastrointestinal tract but extensively metabolized by the intestinal microflora to glycyrrhetic acid and monoglucuronyl glycyrrhetic acid, which

are readily absorbed⁹³. The transformation of glycyrrhizin in the intestine was mainly catalyzed by the intestinal bacteria *Eubacterium* L-8 and *Streptococcus* LJ-22⁹⁴. Glycyrrhetic acid and glycyrrhetic acid were mainly excreted *via* bile⁹⁵. Glycyrrhetic acid and glycyrrhetic acid bind extensively to the plasma albumin in human and rat⁹⁶. The extract of Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma could inhibit the activity of CYP2B6, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, and CYP3A4 in human liver microsomes⁹⁷. The oral administration of glycyrrhizin or Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma to mice can induce the activity of CYP3A4, CYP2B1, CYP1A2, CYP3A, CYP2A1 and CYP2B9⁹⁸. Licochalcone A could inhibit the activity of CYP1A2, CYP2D6, CYP2E1, CYP2C19, CYP2C8, CYP2C9 and CYP3A4 in human liver microsomes⁹⁹. Glycyrol, a bioactive compound isolated from Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, could inhibit human CYP2C9 activity¹⁰⁰. Moreover, licochalcone A could inhibit OATP1B1 activity¹⁰¹. Studies showed that Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma could strongly activate human pregnane X receptor (PXR) and induce CYP3A4 expression¹⁰². Using non-specific probes for UGT isoforms, glycyrrhetic acid was shown to exhibit strong inhibitory effects towards UGT1A3 and UGT2B7¹⁰³. Additionally, the treatment of Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma together with Astragali Radix significantly attenuated the decreased diversity, reduced richness, and abnormal composition of intestinal microbiota of cholestatic mice¹⁰⁴.

Armeniacae Semen Amarum (Kuxingren in Chinese) is the dried ripe seed of *Prunus armeniaca* L. var. *ansu* Maxim., *Prunus sibirica* L., *Prunus mandshurica* (Maxim.) Koehne, or *Prunus armeniaca* L.¹⁰⁵. Previously, Armeniacae Semen Amarum has shown an antiviral effect because of its strong affinity to 3CLpro and ACE2, thereby preventing viral transcription and dissemination¹⁰⁵. The pharmacokinetic characterization of Armeniacae Semen Amarum was primarily reflected by amygdalin. After oral administration, amygdalin was immediately absorbed and quickly distributed to the heart, liver, spleen, lung, and kidney¹⁰⁶. However, the absolute bioavailability of amygdalin was low⁷. Amygdalin could be effluxed by P-gp, indicating that it might be a substrate for P-gp¹⁰⁷. Moreover, amygdalin had evident inhibitory effects on the activity of murine CYP2C9 and CYP2E1¹⁰⁷. Amygdalin is considered to be toxic due to its metabolite of cyanide *in vivo*¹⁰⁸. The intestinal microbiota of *Bifidobacterium pseudolongum*, *Marvinbryantia formatexigens*, and *Bacteroides fragilis* were involved in bidirectional regulation of toxicity and detoxification of amygdalin¹⁰⁹.

Gypsum Fibrosum (Shengshigao in Chinese) is a plaster stone of sulfates of the plaster stone group, containing primarily hydrated calcium sulfate¹¹⁰. It is a common mineral TCM in *Shennong Bencao Jing* for reducing fever and alleviating thirst¹¹¹. Gypsum Fibrosum might exhibit an inhibitory effect on the activity of rat CYP1A2, which may lead to drug interactions *in vivo*¹¹².

Cinnamomi Ramulus (Guizhi in Chinese) is the dried young branch of *Cinnamomum cassia* (L.) Presl¹¹³. Cinnamomi Ramulus could inhibit the activity of Zika virus by inhibiting RdRp activity in the post-entry stage¹¹⁴. More than 121 chemical compounds have been isolated from Cinnamomi Ramulus, including volatile oils, organic acids, triterpenoid saponins, coumarins, tannins, flavonoids, flavonoid glycosides, steroids, and polysaccharides¹¹³. Cinnamic acid is a bioactive compound isolated from Cinnamomi Ramulus¹¹³. CYP1A is the main enzyme that participates in the metabolism of cinnamic acid¹¹⁵. Moreover, cinnamic acid is not a strong substrate for P-gp and MRP in Caco-2 cells¹¹⁶. In addition,

Table 2 The effect of QFPD on metabolizing enzymes and transporters.

Herb	Component	Metabolizing enzyme							Transporter					
		CYP1	CYP2	CYP3	UGT1	UGT2	UGT3	CES	OCTs	OAT	OATP	P-gp	BCRP	MRP
Ephedrae Herba (Refs. 82–86)	Water decoction	1A2↑										MDR1↓		
		1A1↑	2C↑						OCT2 ^a			P-gp ^a		
	D-Pseudoephedrine	1A2↑												
		1A1↓	2E1↓									P-gp ^a		
Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (Refs. 92,97–103,477)	Norpseudoephedrin L-Methylephedrine	1A2↓							OCT2 ^a			P-gp ^a		
		1A2↑	2A1↑	3A↑										
			2B1↑	3A4↑										
			2B9↑											
	Extract		2B6↓	3A4↓										
			2C9↓											
	Glycyrrhetic acid		2C19↓											
			2C9 ^a	3A4 ^a	1A3↓	2B7↓		CES1↓				P-gp ^a		
	Glycyrrhizin		2C19 ^a											
		1A2↑	2A1↑	3A↑										
Armeniaca Semen Amarum (Ref: 107) Gypsum Fibrosum (Ref: 112) Cinnamomi Ramulus (Ref: 115) Alismatis Rhizoma (Refs. 118,122–126,485) Polyporus (Ref: 133) Atractylodes Macrocephala Rhizoma (Refs. 137,138,140,141) Poria (Refs. 146–151)	Licochalcone A		2B1↑	3A4↑										
			2B9↑											
		1A2↓	2D6↓	3A4↓							1B1↓			
			2E1↓											
	Glycyrol Amygdalin		2C19↓											
			2C8↓											
			2C9↓											
			2C9↓									P-gp ^a		
	Cinnamic acid		2E1↓											
		1A2↓												
		1A ^a												
	Alisol acetates Alisol B 23-acetate Alisol F 24-acetate Water extract Alisol B			3A2 ^a				CES2↓						
				3A4↑								P-gp↓		
		1A2↑		3A4↑								P-gp↓		
					UGTs↓									
	Polyporus polysaccharides			3A↑										
				3A4↑										
	Atractylenolide I Atractylenolide II Atractylenolide III					2B7↓						P-gp ^a		
		1A2 ^a	2C9 ^a	3A4 ^a		2B7↓								
	Galactoglucan Polysaccharides Pachymic acid Dehydrotumulosic acid			3A4↑										
			2E1↓											
			2E1↓											
												P-gp↓		
												P-gp↓		

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Belamcandae Rhizoma (Refs. 225–228)	Isochlorogenic acid	1A2↓	2C9↓		1A6↓	2B↑								
	Chlorogenic acid		2E1↓											
	Isoflavones	1A2↓	2D6↑	3A4 ^a										
	Total isoflavones	1A2↓												
	Iridin	1A7 ^a												
Asari Radix et Rhizoma (Refs. 233–238)		1A8 ^a												
		1A9 ^a												
		1A10 ^a												
	Tectorigenin	1A1 ^a												
		1A9 ^a												
Dioscoreae Rhizoma Aurantii Fructus Immaturus (Refs. 246–254)	Asarinin	1A1 ^a	2C8 ^a	3A5 ^a										
	Sesamin			3A4↓								MDR1↑		MRP1↑ MRP3↑
	Methyleugenol	1A2↓	2C19↓											
	Safrole	1A2↓												
	Myristicin	1A2↓	2E1↓ 2C19↓											
Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium (Refs. 257–264)	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
	Ethanol extract			3A4↑								None		
	Hesperetin	1A2 ^a			1A1↓ 1A3↓ 1A4↓ 1A7↓ 1A8↓ 1A9↓							P-gp ^a ↑ P-gp ^a		
	Hesperidin													
	Naringenin	1A2 ^a			1A1↓ 1A3↓ 1A4↓ 1A7↓ 1A8↓ 1A9↓ 1A10↓	2B7↓ 2B15↓					1B1↓ 1B3↓	P-gp ^a		MRP1 ^a MRP2 ^a MRP3 ^a
Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium (Refs. 257–264)	Naringin		2E1↓	3A1↓ 3A2↓ 3A4↓ 3A4↓							1A2↓ 1A5↓	P-gp ^a ↓		MRP1 ^a MRP2 ^a MRP3 ^a
	Hesperidin	1A↓ 1B1↓												
	Nobiletin	1A2↓ 1A2↑ 1A1↑ 1B1↑										P-gp↓		

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Table 2 (continued)

Herb	Component	Metabolizing enzyme					Transporter							
		CYP1	CYP2	CYP3	UGT1	UGT2	UGT3	CES	OCTs	OAT	OATP	P-gp	BCRP	MRP
Pogostemonis Herba (Refs. 268,269)	Tangeretin	1A2 ^a		3A4↑							2B1↓			
	Patchouli alcohol		2C9↓	3A4↓								P-gp ^a		MRP ^a
	Pogostone		2E1↓											

↑ Indicates the induction effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.
↓ Indicates the inhibitory effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.
^aIndicates that the drug is a substrate for an enzyme or drug transporter.

↑ Indicates the induction effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

↓ Indicates the inhibitory effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

^aIndicates that the drug is a substrate for an enzyme or drug transporter.

the extract of *Cinnamomi Ramulus* and lactic acid bacteria could upregulate the alpha diversity of gut microbiota in mice¹¹⁷.

Alismatis Rhizoma (Zexie in Chinese) is the dried rhizome of *Alisma orientale* (Sam.) Juzep¹¹⁸. *Alismatis Rhizoma* has been reported to inhibit the infection and replication of picornaviridae¹¹⁹. A wide range of chemical compounds, including triterpenoids, sesquiterpenoids, and diterpenoids, have been isolated from *Alismatis Rhizoma*¹¹⁸. Among these compounds, alisol acetates are important bioactive triterpenoids that play various pharmacological effects¹²⁰. Under normal physiological conditions the rate of alisol acetate binding to plasma protein is between 70% and 80%¹²¹. CYP3A2 plays an important role in the metabolism of alisol acetates, which is an important factor leading to the different exposures of alisol A, alisol B, and alisol A 24-acetate between male rats and female rats¹²². Alisol B 23-acetate was identified to be the active compound of *Alismatis Rhizoma*, and alisol B 23-acetate can transactivate PXR and upregulate the mRNA levels of *CYP3A4* *in vitro*¹²³. In addition, alisol B 23-acetate could alleviate liver damage by activating farnesoid X receptor (FXR) and inhibiting CYP7A1 expression¹²⁴. Alisol B 23-acetate and alisol F 24-acetate could downregulate P-gp, and *Alismatis Rhizoma* extract could induce PPAR α downstream acyl-CoA oxidase 1¹¹⁸. Furthermore, the water extract of *Alismatis Rhizoma* could induce CYP1A2 and inhibit CYP3A4 activity in rats¹²⁵. Alisol B could moderately inhibit UGT-mediated glucuronidation in human liver microsomes¹²⁶. *Alismatis Rhizoma* can improve the changes in gut microbial structure caused by diabetes and affect microbiota-associated with lipid metabolism. *Lactobacillus* was decreased significantly by both water and ethanol extract of *Alismatis Rhizoma*, *Lachnospira* was increased by its water extract, while *Ruminococcus* was increased by the ethanol extract¹²⁷.

Polyporus (Zhuling in Chinese), a widely used and precious medicinal fungi, has been used as food, antidote, and diuretic for many years in China¹²⁸. *Polyporus* was reported to exert an antiviral effect by inhibiting SARS-CoV-2¹²⁹. Ergone and ergosterol are the main components of *Polyporus*¹³⁰. Ergone is primarily excreted in feces *via* bile, and maximum excretion is reached at 6–8 h¹³¹. As for ergosterol, it is primarily excreted by feces rather than urine and plasma¹³². Pharmacokinetic studies have shown that *polyporus* polysaccharides could increase the expression of CYP3A in carp liver¹³³.

Atractylodes Macrocephala Rhizoma (Baizhu in Chinese) is the dried rhizome of *Atractylodes macrocephala* Koidz.¹³⁴. *Atractylodes Macrocephala Rhizoma* might be a potential herb against SARS-CoV-2 through binding to ACE2¹³⁵. The main constituents isolated from *Atractylodes Macrocephala Rhizoma* include sesquiterpenoids, triterpenoids, polyacetylenes, coumarins, phenylpropanoids, flavonoids, flavonoid glycosides, steroids, and benzoquinones¹³⁶. *Atractylenolide* III is rapidly distributed into the body and eliminated¹³⁴. The P-gp inhibitor could increase the absorption rate of *Atractylenolide* I¹³⁷. CYP1A2, CYP2C9, and CYP3A4 are CYP isoforms involved in the metabolism of *Atractylenolide* II¹³⁸. *Atractylenolide* I is primarily absorbed throughout the intestine, and *Atractylenolide* III metabolites can be detected in feces, urine, and plasma in rats¹³⁹. Studies showed that *Atractylodes Macrocephala Rhizoma* could strongly activate human PXR and induce CYP3A4 expression¹⁴⁰. It has been reported that *Atractylenolide* I and *Atractylenolide* III could inhibit UGT2B7 activity¹⁴¹. *Atractylenolide* III could significantly regulate the gut microbiota which was downregulated in colitis mice¹⁴².

Poria (Fulin in Chinese), the dried sclerotia of *Wolfiporia cocos* (F.A. Wolf) Ryvarden & Gilb., has been used as a TCM for over 2000 years¹⁴³. A previous study revealed that Poria exerted an inhibitory effect on the Mpro¹⁴⁴. The main active components of Poria are triterpenes and polysaccharides^{143,145}. It has been reported that Poria polysaccharides could inhibit CYP2E1 expression in mouse liver¹⁴⁶. Poria (pachymic acid) induced CYP3A4 gene transcription by activating PXR¹⁴⁷. Poria could also induce transcriptional expression of CYP3A4 in HepG2 cells¹⁴⁸. A galactoglucan purified from Poria could reduce the expression of constitutive androstane receptor and CYP2E1 in the liver¹⁴⁹. Pachymic acid and dehydrotumulosic acid isolated from Poria could inhibit P-gp function^{150,151}. Poria polysaccharides could affect the gut microbiota and alleviate chronic non-bacterial prostatitis in rat¹⁵². Poria powder and water-soluble polysaccharides of Poria could regulate the gut microbiota to alleviate the cisplatin-induced intestinal injury in mice¹⁵³. Poria polysaccharides also could affect the diversity of gut microbiota in a non-alcoholic steatohepatitis mouse model¹⁵⁴.

Bupleuri Radix (Chaihu in Chinese) is a traditional herbal medicine derived from the dried roots of *Bupleurum chinense* DC. and *Bupleurum scorzonrifolium* Willd.¹⁵⁵. The identified bioactive compounds of the Bupleuri Radix primarily focused on essential oils, triterpenoid saponins, polyacetylenes, flavonoids, lignans, fatty acids, and sterols¹⁵⁵. Among these, triterpenoid saponins, flavonoids, and essential oil are considered as the main bioactive compounds^{156,157}. Saikosaponins are potential candidates of Bupleuri Radix for COVID-19 treatment¹⁵⁸. A previous study showed that saikosaponin b, saikosaponin b2, and saikosaponin c slightly inhibited CYP1A2 activity, whereas saikosaponin a and saikosaponin d increased CYP1A2 activity¹⁵⁹. Saikosaponin a, saikosaponin b, saikosaponin b2, saikosaponin c, and saikosaponin d slightly inhibited the activity of CYP3A4¹⁵⁹. Notably, CYP2C9 was strongly inhibited by saikosaponin¹⁵⁹. Saikosaponin a, saikosaponin c, and saikosaponin d inhibited P-gp activity in P-gp over-expressing HEK293 cells¹⁶⁰. Saikosaponin c and saikosaponin d inhibited MRP2 activity in HEK293 cells and BRL-3A cell with high MRP2 expression¹⁶⁰. Saikosaponins and their metabolites also showed a liver meridian guiding effect by inhibiting PXR/CYP3A4¹⁶¹. Furthermore, saikosaponin a, saikosaponin c, and saikosaponin d were absorbed rapidly in rats¹⁵⁵. Saikosaponins are primarily excreted through feces, bile, and urine¹⁶². It has been reported that saikosaponin d could regulate the gut microbiota in ulcerative colitis mice¹⁶³. Saikosaponin a could upregulate the abundance of *Lactobacillus* and *Prevotella* species in rats¹⁶⁴. The gut microbiota could affect the biotransformation of Bupleuri Radix¹⁶⁵, and gut microbiota plays an important role in the hydrolysis reaction of Saikosaponins¹⁶⁶.

Scutellariae Radix (Huangqin in Chinese) is the dried root of *Scutellaria baicalensis* Georgi¹⁶⁷. Over 40 compounds have been isolated and identified from Scutellariae Radix including flavonoids, terpenoids, volatile oils, and polysaccharides¹⁶⁸. Baicalin, baicalein, wogonin, chrysin and oroxylin A could inhibit H1N1 activity¹⁶⁹. Baicalin and baicalein could inhibit RdRp of SARS-CoV-2¹⁷⁰. Wogonin, a bioactive ingredient from Scutellariae Radix, has over 90% serum protein binding rate¹⁷¹. The glucuronidation of baicalein, wogonin, and oroxylin A primarily depends on UGT1A9 in the liver, and that of baicalein and oroxylin A primarily depends on UGT1A10 in the intestine¹⁷². The gut microbiota also plays an important role in the metabolism of baicalin, and baicalin could be metabolized by β -glucuronidase produced by gut microbiota such as *Escherichia coli*¹⁷³. Baicalein

is excreted into the intestine by MRP¹⁷⁴. It has been reported that the aqueous extract of Scutellariae Radix could inhibit CYP2C9 and induce CYP2E1 activity in human¹⁷⁵. Baicalein could inhibit CYP3A4 activity in human liver microsomes¹⁷⁶. Baicalin could induce CYP3A4, CYP2C9, and CYP2C19 expression in HeLa cells¹⁷⁷. Wogonin could inhibit CYP1A2 activity in human microsomes¹⁷⁸. It has been reported that baicalein could inhibit P-gp activity and expression¹⁷⁹. The extract of Scutellariae Radix could inhibit OCT1 and MATE1 activity *in vitro*¹⁸⁰. Oroxylin A might be a substrate of OATP1B1 and OATP1B3, and it can also inhibit OATP1B1, OAT1, OAT3 and BCRP activity¹⁸¹. The extract of Scutellariae Radix, salvigenin, could downregulate the activity of UGT1A8 and UGT1A10¹⁸². Polysaccharide isolated from Scutellariae Radix could upregulate the abundance of Firmicutes, Bifidobacterium, Lactobacillus, and Roseburia in mice¹⁸³. Baicalin could also reprogram the gut microbiota in chicken with avian pathogenic *E. coli*-induced lung injury¹⁸⁴.

Pinelliae Rhizoma (Banxia in Chinese) is the dried tuber of *Pinellia ternata* (Thunb.) Breit., family Araceae¹⁸⁵. Pinelliae Rhizoma Praeparatum Cum Zingibere et Alumine (Jiangbanxia in Chinese) and Pinelliae Rhizoma Praeparatum (Fabanxia in Chinese) are two of its commonly processed forms¹⁸⁵. Alkaloids, essential oils, amino acids, organic acids, and proteins are the chemical components of Pinelliae Rhizoma¹⁸⁶. β -Sitosterol is a bioactive compound in Pinelliae Rhizoma¹⁸⁷. β -Sitosterol could interact with Mpro of SARS-CoV-2¹⁸⁸. β -Sitosterol is metabolized to bile acid and goose deoxycholic acid, and is excreted in free form through bile^{189,190}. Pinelliae Rhizoma showed inhibitory effects on CYP3A activity in rat liver microsomes¹⁹¹.

Ginger is the rhizome of *Zingiber officinale* Roscoe (Zingiberaceae)¹⁹², and *Zingiberis Rhizoma Recens* (Shengjiang in Chinese) is the fresh Ginger¹⁹³. More than 100 compounds are identified from Ginger, and its bioactive components include essential oils, gingerols, shogaols, and others¹⁹³. Gingerols and shogaols are recognized as important active ingredients in Ginger¹⁹⁴. 6-Gingerol is the principal ingredient of Ginger that exerts anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects¹⁹⁵. *In silico* and molecular docking studies have revealed that 10-gingerol had an inhibitory effect on COVID-19¹⁹⁶. 6-, 8-, 10-Gingerol and 6-shogaol are quickly absorbed and detected in the serum as glucuronide and sulfate conjugates, with the majority detected as glucuronide metabolites¹⁹⁷. Intravenous bolus studies in rats indicated plasma protein binding of 6-gingerol was found to be greater than 90%^{198,199}. Over 60% of an oral dose of 50 mg/kg dose of 6-gingerol was excreted as metabolites in the bile (48%) and urine (16%)²⁰⁰. Previous studies have shown that Ginger extract could inhibit CYP2C19-mediated drug metabolism²⁰¹. 6-Shogaol could increase the mRNA levels of CYP1A1 and UGT1A1^{202,203}. Ethanol extract of Ginger activated PXR in LS-174T cells²⁰⁴. 6-Paradoal, 6-shogaol, and dihydro-6-6-gingerdione could also activate PXR²⁰⁴. The mRNA expression level of CYP3A4, CYP2C9, CYP1A2, CYP2B6, and P-gp could be increased by the extract, 6-paradoal, 6-shogaol, and dihydro-6-6-gingerdione²⁰⁴. 8-, and 10-gingerol could potentially inhibit CYP2C9 activity, moderately inhibit CYP2C19 and CYP3A4, and weakly inhibit CYP2D6²⁰³. 6-Gingerol has been reported to inhibit P-gp activity in L-MDR1 and Caco-2 cells²⁰⁵. Ginger polysaccharides may modulate immune function by affecting the diversity of beneficial and harmful gut microbiota in immunosuppressed mice²⁰⁶.

Asteris Radix et Rhizoma (Ziwan in Chinese) is the dried root and rhizome of *Aster tataricus* L. f.²⁰⁷. Shionone, astin D, and

epifriedelinol are three characteristic compounds of *Asteris Radix* et *Rhizoma*^{208,209}. The content of shionone is low in blood, and it was primarily excreted through the feces²¹⁰. Shionone had a higher protein binding rate in the plasma of rat, human, and bovine (greater than 75%)²¹¹. Astin D is considered as a potential inhibitor of CYP3A4 and CYP2D6²⁰⁹. Epifriedelanol could enhance the adriamycin cytotoxicity by the down-regulating the mRNA and protein expression of P-gp and MRP2²¹².

Farfarae Flos (Kuandonghua in Chinese) is the dried flower bud of *Tussilago farfara* L.²¹³. Previous study showed that the compounds in Farfarae Flos can bind to SARS-CoV-2 3CLpro and ACE2, thereby exerting a therapeutic effect against COVID-19²¹⁴. Tussilagone is a representative active compound in Farfarae Flos. The absolute bioavailability of tussilagone is only about 1.31%²¹⁵ in rats. Eight CYP enzyme subtypes (CYP1A2, CYP2B6, CYP2C8, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, CYP2D6, CYP2E1, and CYP3A4) were involved in tussilagone metabolism²¹⁶. Organic acids are considered as active compounds of Farfarae Flos. Isochlorogenic acid demonstrates mild inhibition the activity of human CYP2C9 and a mild suppression on the activity of UGT1A6, while slightly increased UGT2B, but no significant influence UGT1A1 and UGT1A7/8 *in vitro*²¹⁷. Chlorogenic acid, another important organic acid in Farfarae Flos, displayed weak inhibition on human CYP1A2 and CYP2E1 enzymatic activities *in vitro*²¹⁸. Chlorogenic acid could be metabolized by human gut microbiota into caffeic acid, caffeoyl-glycerol, 3-(3,4-dihydroxyphenyl)-propanoic acid, 3-(3,4-dihydroxyphenyl)-propanoyl-glycerol, 3-*O*-(3-(3,4-dihydroxyphenyl)-propanoyl)-quinic acid, 3-*O*-(3-hydroxycinnamoyl)-quinic acid, 2-(3-hydroxyphenyl)-ethanol, 3-(3-hydroxyphenyl)-propanoic acid and phenyl-acetic²¹⁹. On the other hand, chlorogenic acid regulates intestinal homeostasis under various pathological models, thus reducing the inflammatory response of the body^{220,221}.

Belamcandae Rhizoma (Shegan in Chinese) is the dried rhizome of *Belamcanda chinensis* (L.) DC.²²². Flavonoids are the main active components for Belamcandae Rhizoma pharmacological effects²²². Tectorigenin, irigenin, and irisflorelin were absorbed rapidly and they showed double peak phenomena in rat plasma²²³. Tectorigenin is widely distributed in the heart, liver, spleen, kidney, testis, small intestine, and skeletal muscle²²⁴. Irisflorelin is the compound identified in rat plasma when QFPD is given in rats, and CYP1A2 and CYP3A4 are the major enzymes responsible for its metabolism²²⁵. Moreover, the total isoflavones have shown an inhibition on the activity of CYP1A2 and an induction on the activity of CYP2D6²²⁶. The principal metabolic pathway of iridin was glucuronidation after demethylation and was mediated by UGT1A7, 1A8, 1A9 and 1A10²²⁷. UGT1A1 and UGT1A9 were the main enzymes for tectorigenin metabolism, which could be involved in DDIs²²⁸.

Asari Radix et Rhizoma (Xixin in Chinese) is the dried root and rhizome of *Asarum heterotropoides* Fr. Schmt var. *mandshuricum* (Maxim) Kitag., *Asarum sieboldii* Miq. var. *seoulense* Nakai, or *A. sieboldii* Miq.²²⁹. Sesamin and asarinin, two active compounds isolated from Asari Radix et Rhizoma, showed inhibitory potential against SARS-CoV-2 3CLpro *in silico*^{230,231}. Sesamin is excreted primarily through urine and feces²³². Asarinin is the index component for the identification and content determination of Asari Radix et Rhizoma. CYP3A5, CYP2C8, CYP1A1, and CYP4F2 are the major CYP enzymes involved in asarinin metabolism²³³. Sesamin could strongly downregulate the mRNA and protein levels of CYP3A4²³⁴, and it could increase significantly the mRNA expression of MDR1, MRP1 and MRP3,

but has no effect on the protein of P-gp²³⁵. Methyleugenol shows an inhibitory effect on the activities of human CYP1A2 and CYP2C19 enzymes²³⁶, and saffrole has an inhibitory effect on CYP1A2 activity²³⁷. Myristicin exerts some inhibitory effect on the activities of human CYP2E1, CYP2C19 and CYP1A2²³⁸. *In vitro*, sesamin promotes the proliferation and adhesion of intestinal probiotics leading to modulating gut microbiota, which is beneficial for body²³⁹.

Dioscoreae Rhizoma (Shanyao in Chinese) is the dried rhizome of *Dioscorea opposita* Thunb. (Family *Dioscoreaceae*)²⁴⁰. Polysaccharides and starch are considered as the main bioactive macromolecule in Dioscoreae Rhizoma^{241,242}. Dioscoreae Rhizoma extract could regulate intestinal flora, especially enriching the abundance of *Bacteroides* spp. and *Clostridium* spp.²⁴³. Dioscoreae Rhizoma starch could inhibit the pathogenic bacteria of *E. coli* and *Helicobacter hepaticus*²⁴⁴.

Aurantii Fructus Immaturus (Zhishi in Chinese) is the dried young fruit of *Citrus aurantium* L. and its cultivars *Citrus sinensis* Osbeck. Flavanone glycosides were determined as the active compounds in Aurantii Fructus Immaturus²⁴⁵. Naringin, naringenin, hesperidin, and hesperetin are the substrates of P-gp, whereas only naringin and hesperidin are extensively transported by the efflux transporters MRP1, MRP2, and MRP3²⁴⁶. *In vitro*, naringenin is a potential inhibitor of OATP1B1 and ATP1B3²⁴⁷. Naringin is a potential inhibitor of human OATP1A2, rat OATP1A5 and P-gp^{248,249}. Naringenin and hesperitin, the hydrolysis products of naringin and hesperidin, respectively, are substrates of CYP1A2²⁵⁰. The ethanol extract of Aurantii Fructus Immaturus could upregulate the protein levels of P-gp, CYP3A4, and PXR²⁵¹. Hesperetin strongly inhibits the activities of human UGT1A1, UGT1A3, and UGT1A9 and moderately inhibits the activities of UGT1A4, UGT1A7, and UGT1A8²⁵². Naringenin strongly inhibits the activities of UGT1A1, UGT1A3, and UGT2B7 and moderately inhibits the activities of UGT1A4, UGT1A7, UGT1A8, UGT1A9, UGT1A10, and UGT2B15²⁵². *In vivo*, naringin showed an inhibitory effect on CYP3A4 activity²⁵³, and it could inhibit CYP3A1/2 activity in rats²⁵⁴. Eight flavonoid aglycones showing anti-inflammatory activity, including eriodictyol, naringenin, hesperetin, luteolin, apigenin, chryseriol, isosakuranetin, and diosmetin, are the major metabolites of Aurantii Fructus Immaturus by human gut microbioma²⁵⁵.

Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium (Chenpi in Chinese) is the dried pericarp of the ripe fruit of *Citrus reticulata* Blanco or its cultivars²⁵⁶. Hesperidin, nobiletin, and tangeretin are the quality control index components of Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium. The absolute bioavailability of tangeretin is 27.11% because of its extensive biotransformation *via* CYP1A2 in the liver^{257,258}. Hesperidin and its metabolite hesperetin showed an inhibitory effect on the activities of CYP1A, CYP1B1, CYP3A4, and P-gp^{259,260}. Tangeretin exerts an inhibitive effect on OATP2B1²⁶¹, but can significantly increase the mRNA expression of CYP3A4 by regulating PXR²⁶². Nobiletin is both a CYP1A2 inhibitor and inducer, while tangeretin is an inducer of CYP3A4²⁶³. In addition, nobiletin induces CYP1 enzymatic activity, CYP1A1 protein, and CYP1B1 mRNA levels in MCF7 cells²⁶⁴. Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium has a regulatory effect on intestinal microorganisms, especially short chain fatty acids (SCFAs)-producing and anti-inflammatory bacteria, including *Bifidobacterium*, *Lactobacillus* and *Allobaculum*²⁶⁵.

Pogostemonis Herba (Guanghuoxiang in Chinese) is the dried aerial part of *Pogostemon cablin* (Blanco) Benth. (Family Labiatae)²⁶⁶. A study revealed that compounds in Pogostemonis Herba

can bind to the active site of SARS-CoV-2 3CLpro²⁶⁷. Patchouli alcohol and pogostone are known as the active compounds in *Pogostemonis Herba*. P-gp and MRP are involved in the transmembrane process of patchouli alcohol²⁶⁸. *In vitro*, pogostone displays inhibitory effects on human CYP3A4, 2C9 and 2E1²⁶⁹. *Pogostemonis Herba* could modulate intestinal microbiota, such as *Anaerostipes butyraticus*, *Butyivibrio fibrisolvens*, *Clostridium jejuense*, *Eubacterium uniforme*, and *Lactobacillus lactis* which are the main producing bacteria for SCFAs²⁷⁰.

3.2. XFBD

3.2.1. Basic pharmacological information of XFBD

XFBD was the first, newly formulated TCM recipe for COVID-19 treatment, which is derived from classic formulas, including Maxing Shigan decoction^{271,272}. XFBD could reduce fever, cough, fatigue, and other symptoms in mild and moderate cases of COVID-19 and prevent the transition of mild/moderate cases into severe cases²⁷³. In a randomized trial of 42 patients with COVID-19, XFBD (one bag, two times per day for 1 week), combined with conventional therapy, significantly improved the disappearance rate of clinical symptoms, increased the number of white blood cells and lymphocytes, and reduced c-reactive protein and erythrocyte sedimentation rate²⁷⁴. In a study of 280 patients with COVID-19 who were treated with XFBD, no case transformed into severe and critical condition²⁷⁵. Network pharmacology and molecular docking analysis indicated that XFBD inhibits viral invasion and viral replication by binding to ACE2 and 3CLpro of SARS-CoV-2 through flavonoids and phytosterols. Meanwhile, XFBD could affect 75 operational taxonomic units to improve intestinal flora, such as *Akkermansia*, *Muribaculaceae*, *Lachnospiraceae*, *Enterorhabdus*, and *Bacteroides*²⁷⁶.

XFBD is composed of 13 herbs including *Ephedrae Herba*, *Armeniacae Semen Amarum*, *Gypsum Fibrosum*, *Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma*, *Phragmitis Rhizoma*, *Coicis Semen*, *Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen*, *Atractylodis Rhizoma*, *Pogostemonis Herba*, *Polygoni Cuspidati Rhizoma et Radix*, *Verbenae Herba*, *Citri Grandis Exocarpium*, and *Artemisiae Annuae Herba*²⁷⁶.

Studies have proven that many herbs in XFBD play regulatory roles in CYPs, UGTs, and transporters (Table 3).

3.2.2. Pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic characteristics of each herb in XFBD

Coicis Semen (Yiyiren in Chinese) is the dried mature kernel of *Coix lacryma-jobi* L. var. *ma-yuen* (Roman.) Stapf²⁷⁷. Polyphenols and polysaccharides are considered as the major active components of *Coicis Semen*²⁷⁷. Kanglaite, an oily substance, has been reported to induce CYP1A2, but it inhibits CYP2B6, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, and CYP3A4 enzymatic activities²⁷⁸. Ethanol extract of *Coicis Semen* downregulates the protein expression of CYP1A1, CYP1A2, CYP2C6, CYP2C11, CYP2D1, CYP2E1, CYP3A1, and CYP3A2 in the rat liver²⁷⁹. In addition, *Coicis Semen* extract could change the abundance of bacteria, such as increasing *Bifidobacterium*, reducing *Lactococcus* and further affect lipid accumulation and glycolipid metabolism²⁸⁰.

Atractylodis Rhizoma (Cangzhu in Chinese) is the dried rhizome of *Atractylodes lancea* (Thunb.) DC. or *Atractylodes chinensis* (DC.) Koidz²⁸¹. The *ex vivo* study in healthy subjects suggests that the immunomodulatory activity of *Atractylodis Rhizoma* is through decreasing the levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines²⁸². *Atractylodis Rhizoma* contains rich essential oil, including sesquiterpenes and polyethylene alkynes, which are the

main active components^{283,284}. A high dose of *Atractylodis Rhizoma* produced an inducing effect on CYP1A2 but an inhibitory effect on CYP3A1 activities in rats²⁸⁵. *Atractylodis Rhizoma* can significantly induce the expression of CYP1A2, CYP2C, and CYP2E1 proteins²⁸⁶. Meanwhile, *Atractylodis Rhizoma* and *atractylodis A* could alter the composition of the intestinal flora and eight genera of intestinal flora to regulate intestinal flora homeostasis^{287,288}.

Artemisiae Annuae Herba (Qinghao in Chinese), an annual herbaceous plant, is the dried aerial part of *Artemisia annua* L.²⁸⁹. *A. annua* has an immunomodulatory effect by regulating inflammatory factors²⁸⁹. A previous study showed that *Artemisiae Annuae Herba* extracts significantly inhibit cytopathic effect caused by SARS-CoV strain BJ001²⁹⁰ and induce activity against SARS-CoV-2 in Vero-E6 cell-based cytopathic effect screening^{272,291}. *Artemisiae Annuae Herba* is rich in secondary metabolites such as monoterpenes, sesquiterpenes, and phenolic compounds²⁹². Artemisinin, a bioactive ingredient of *Artemisiae Annuae Herba*, was transformed into inactive metabolites in the liver, mediated by CYP2B6 and to a lesser extent by CYP3A4²⁹³. Meanwhile, artemisinin could induce the enzymatic activities of CYP2B6, CYP2B10, CYP1A2, and CYP2A5²⁹⁴.

Polygoni Cuspidati Rhizoma et Radix (Huzhang in Chinese) belongs to the Polygonaceae family, and it is the dried rhizome and root of *Polygonum cuspidatum* Sieb. et Zucc²⁹⁵. The extract of *Polygoni Cuspidati Rhizoma et Radix* exhibits anti-inflammatory activities via inhibiting NF- κ B and downregulating tumor necrosis factor- α (TNF- α) and interleukin-6 (IL-6)²⁹⁶. The main components of *Polygoni Cuspidati Rhizoma et Radix* include quinones, stilbenes, and flavonoids²⁹⁷. Resveratrol, a primary component of *Polygoni Cuspidati Rhizoma et Radix*, was primarily metabolized by UGT1A1, UGT1A9, and gut microbiota^{298,299}. It can inhibit the activity of CYP3A4, P-gp, MRP2, OAT1, OAT3, OATP1B1/3, OATP1A2 and OATP2B1 *in vitro* and *in vivo*^{300–302}. A high dose of resveratrol could theoretically increase bioavailability and the risk of toxicity of drugs that undergo extensive first-pass metabolism by CYP3A4²⁹⁸. Resveratrol and emodin in *Polygoni Cuspidati Rhizoma et Radix* could improve the diversity and structure of the gut microbiota in rats^{303–305}.

Verbenae Herba (Mabiancao in Chinese) is the dried aerial part of *Verbenae officinalis* L. chlorogenic acid and verbascoside^{306,307}. *Verbenae Herba* contains many constituents such as flavonoids, iridoid glycosides, phenylpropanoid glycoside, sterols, triterpenes, and glycoconjugate³⁰⁸. Human CYP2A6 and rat CYP2C11 are responsible for the metabolism of (–)-verbenone by liver microsomes³⁰⁹.

Phragmitis Rhizoma (Lugen in Chinese) is the fresh or dried rhizome of *Phragmites communis* Trin³¹⁰. The chemical constituents of *Phragmitis Rhizoma* included polysaccharides, flavonoids, steroids, anthraquinones, alkaloids, volatile components, small molecules, and other components³¹¹. The effects of *Phragmitis Rhizoma* on the drug-metabolizing enzymes and transporters are rarely reported.

Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen (Tinglizhi in Chinese) is the dried ripe seed of *Descurainia sophia* (L.) Webb. ex Prantl. and *Lepidium apetalum* Willd³¹². The bioactive components of *Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen* could regulate cytokines and exert anti-inflammatory effects³¹³. The main components of *Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen* are thioglycosides, isothiocyanates, flavonoids, lignans, nucleosides, organic acids, and amides³¹⁴. Quercetin in *Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen* was metabolized by gut microbiota, such as *B. fragilis*, *Eubacterium*

Table 3 The effect of XFBD on metabolizing enzymes and transporters.

Herb	Component	Metabolizing enzyme							Transporter					
		CYP1	CYP2	CYP3	UGT1	UGT2	UGT3	CES	OCTs	OAT	OATP	P-gp	BCRP	MRP
Phragmitis Rhizoma	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None
Descurainiae Semen	Quercetin	1A2↓		3A4↓	1A9↓					OAT3↓	1B1↓ 1B3↓ 2B1↓	P-gp↓	BCRP↓	
Lepidii Semen (Refs. 317–320)														
Atractylodis Rhizoma (Refs. 285,286)	Extract	1A2↑		3A1↓										
	Atractylósíde A	1A2↑	2C↑ 2E1↑											
Pogostemonis Herba (Refs. 268,269)	Patchouli alcohol											P-gp ^a		MRP ^a
	Pogostone		2C9↓ 2E1↓	3A4↓										
Verbenae Herba (Ref: 309)	(–)-Verbenone		2A6 ^a 2C11 ^a											
Citri Grandis	Extract	1A1↑	2B↑											
Exocarpium (Refs. 323,325–328)	Naringin	1A2↑ 1A2↓	2E1↑								1A2↓ 2B1↓	P-gp↓		
Artemisiae Annuae Herba (Refs. 293,294)	Artemisinin	1A2↑	2B6↑ 2B10↑ 2A5↑											
Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (Refs. 92,97–103,477)		1A2↑	2A1↑ 2B1↑ 2B9↑	3A↑ 3A4↑										
	Extract		2B6↓ 2C9↓ 2C19↓	3A4↓										
	Glycyrrhetic acid		2C9 ^a 2C19 ^a	3A4 ^a	1A3↓	2B7↓		CES1↓				P-gp ^a		
	Glycyrrhizin	1A2↑	2A1↑ 2B1↑ 2B9↑	3A↑ 3A4↑										
	Licochalcone A	1A2↓	2D6↓ 2E1↓ 2C19↓ 2C8↓ 2C9↓ 2C9↓	3A4↓							1B1↓			
Ephedrae Herba (Refs. 82–86)	Glycyrol													
	Water decoction	1A2↑											MDR1↓	
	L-Ephedrine	1A1↑ 1A2↑	2C↑						OCT2 ^a			P-gp ^a		
	D-Pseudoephedrine	1A1↓ 1A2↓	2E1↓									P-gp ^a		
	Norpseudoephedrin								OCT2 ^a					
	L-Methylephedrine											P-gp ^a		

Armeniacae Semen Amarum (Ref: 107)	Amygdalin	2C9↓ 2E1↓	P-gp ^a	MATE1 ^{315,316}	CYP3A4, CYP1A2, P-gp, OAT3, OATP1B1, OATP1B3, OATP2B1, BCRP, UGT1A9, and sulfotransferase family 1A member 1 (SULT1A1) ^{317–320}
Gypsum Fibrosum (Ref: 112)	1A2↓				
Polygoni Cuspidati Rhizoma et Radix (Refs. 298–302)	Resveratrol	3A4↓	1A1 ^a 1A9 ^a	1B1↓ 1B3↓ 1A2↓ 2B1↓	MRP2↓
Coicis Semen (Refs. 278,279)	Kanglaite	2B6↓ 2C9↓ 2C19↓		OAT1↓ OAT3↓	
	Ethanol extract	1A1↓ 1A2↓			
		3A1↓ 3A2↓			
		2D1↓ 2E1↓			

↑ Indicates the induction effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

↓ Indicates the inhibitory effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

^aIndicates that the drug is a substrate for an enzyme or drug transporter.

ramulus, and *Clostridium perfringens*, and it transported by MATE1^{315,316}. It inhibits the activity of CYP3A4, CYP1A2, P-gp, OAT3, OATP1B1, OATP1B3, OATP2B1, BCRP, UGT1A9, and sulfotransferase family 1A member 1 (SULT1A1)^{317–320}.

Citri Grandis Exocarpium (Huajuhong in Chinese) belongs to the Rutaceae family, and it is the immature or nearly mature dry exocarp of *Citrus grandis* “*Tomentosa*” and *C. grandis* (L.) Osbeck³²¹. The main components of Citri Grandis Exocarpium are flavonoids, including naringin, rhoifolin, and apigenin³²². Citri Grandis Exocarpium increased the mRNA expression of PXR and peroxisome proliferator activated receptor α (PPAR α) and the activities of CYP1A1, 1A2, 2B, and 2E1³²³. Furthermore, naringin in Citri Grandis Exocarpium was metabolized by gut microbiota into a number of metabolites, including 29 flavonoid metabolites and six phenolic catabolites³²⁴. It inhibits the activities of CYP1A2, P-gp, OATP1A2, and OATP2B1^{325–328}. Citri Grandis Exocarpium could increase the abundance of bacterial groups, including *Lactobacillus*, *Bifidobacterium*, and *Bacteroides*, to improve the homeostasis of the gut microbiota composition^{329,330}.

The information on Ephedrae Herba, Armeniacae Semen Amarum, Gypsum Fibrosum, Pogostemonis Herba, and Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma is summarized in Section 3.1.

3.3. HSBD

3.3.1. Basic pharmacological information of HSBD

HSBD has a remarkable clinical efficacy in the treatment of acute lung injury and was recommended for treating severe and non-severe patients with COVID-19 by China's National Health Commission³³¹. HSBD and its active constituents exert therapeutic effects on COVID-19 through inhibition of ACE2³³², and also could decrease the level of pro-inflammatory factors and decrease cell apoptosis in an inflammatory environment, showing immuno-modulation and anti-inflammation effects against COVID-19^{271,333}.

HSBD consists of 14 herbs (Ephedrae Herba, Armeniacae Semen Amarum, Gypsum Fibrosum, Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, Pogostemonis Herba, Magnoliae Officinalis Cortex, Atractylodis Rhizoma, Tsaoko Fructus, Rhei Radix et Rhizoma, Astragali Radix, Pinelliae Rhizoma Praeparatum, Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen, Poria and Paeoniae Radix Rubra)³³⁴.

The herbs and bioactive compounds of HSBD could regulate the expression or activity of CYPs and transporters (Table 4).

3.3.2. Pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic features of each herb in HSBD

Magnoliae Officinalis Cortex (Houpo in Chinese), the bark of the stems and roots of *Magnolia officinalis* Rehd. et Wils., belongs to the Magnolia genus of Magnoliaceae³³⁵. Magnolol and honokiol are the main components of Magnoliae Officinalis Cortex³³⁶. Honokiol thioethers containing 1,3,4-oxadiazole moieties were considered as SARS-CoV-2 entry inhibitors *via* binding with ACE2^{337,338}. Magnoliae Officinalis Cortex extract could markedly reverse the intestinal dysbacteriosis in mice induced by antibiotics^{339,340}. Moreover, magnolol potently inhibited the metabolic activity of CYP1A (IC₅₀ of 1.62 μ mol/L) and CYP2C (IC₅₀ of 5.56 μ mol/L), while weakly inhibited CYP3A (IC₅₀ of 35.0 μ mol/L) in human and rat liver microsomes³⁴¹. Honokiol treatment significantly inhibits the activity of hepatic CYP2E1, CYP4A, CYP3A, and CYP1A2³⁴². Honokiol could downregulate the expression of *P-gp*, *Bcrp*, and *Mrp4* and significantly upregulate the mRNA expression of hepatic *Oat2* and *Oatp2b1*^{343,344}.

Rhei Radix et Rhizoma (Refs. 352,356–359)	Extract Rhein	3A↓	OCT2↑ OAT1↑ OAT3↑	P-gp↓ P-gp↑ P-gp↑ P-gp↑ P-gp↑ P-gp↑ P-gp↑ P-gp ^a	BCRP↓ BCRP↑ BCRP↑ BCRP↑ BCRP↑ BCRP↓ BCRP↓	MRP2↑ MRP1↓ MRP2↑ MRP3↑
Astragali Radix (Refs. 365,366)		2B6↑ 2E1↑ 3A4↑ 1A↑ 1A6↓				
Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen (Refs. 317–320)	Astragaloside IV Calycosin Formononetin Quercetin	1A2↓ 3A4↓ 1A9↓	OAT3↓ IB1↓ IB3↓ 2B1↓			
Paeoniae Radix Rubra (Refs. 372,373)	Paeoniflorin Albiflorin	2D6↓ 3A4↑↓ 3A4↑↓				MRP2↑

↑ Indicates the induction effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

↓ Indicates the inhibitory effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

^aIndicates that the drug is a substrate for an enzyme or drug transporter.

Tsaoko Fructus (Caoguo in Chinese) is the dried ripe fruit of *Amomum tsao-ko* Crevost et Lemaire, which is used as both medicinal material and food additive³⁴⁵. Quercetin is an active ingredient in Tsaoko Fructus for the treatment of patients with COVID-19^{346,347}. Protocatechuic acid, the other active ingredient, significantly downregulated the mRNA expression of *P-gp* and *Oatp1a1* at a low concentration, whereas it significantly upregulated the mRNA expression level of *P-gp* and *Oatp1a1* at a high concentration³⁴⁸. Protocatechuic acid significantly upregulated the mRNA expression level of *Oct1*³⁴⁹, CYP1A2 and CYP2E1³⁵⁰.

Rhei Radix et Rhizoma (Dahuang in Chinese) is the dried root and rhizome of *Rheum palmatum* L., *R. tanguticum* Maxim. ex Balf. or *R. officinale* Baill. of the family Polygonaceae³⁵¹. Rhei Radix et Rhizoma shows evident activity against SARS-CoV-2, and it has been applied to the clinical treatment of COVID-19³⁵². Notably, anthraquinones are pivotal active components in Rhei Radix et Rhizoma. Free anthraquinones, particularly rhein, emodin, physcion, aloe-emodin, and chrysophanol, are rich in almost all species of Rhei Radix et Rhizoma^{353,354}. In addition, rhein treatment could maintain the diversity of gut microbiota³⁵⁵. Rhei Radix et Rhizoma treatment inhibits and downregulates *P-gp*^{352,356}. The extract of Rhei Radix et Rhizoma significantly suppressed CYP3A activity in hepatic microsomes³⁵⁷. Rhein could inhibit BCRP-mediated efflux transport³⁵⁸. Rhein could up-regulate the expressions of renal *Oat1*, *Oat3*, *Oct2*, *Mrp2*, *Mate 1* and *P-gp*³⁵⁹.

Astragali Radix (Huangqi in Chinese) is derived from the roots of *Astragalus membranaceus* (Fisch.) Bge. or *A. membranaceus* (Fisch.) Bge. var. *mongholicus* (Bge.) Hsiao³⁶⁰. Astragali radix and its active ingredients (SBE, baicalein, and baicalin) could inhibit SARS-CoV-2 replication and its 3CLpro *in vitro*^{361–363}. Astragali Radix also had the potential to protect from metabolic perturbation generated by gut microbiotas induced by chronic atrophic gastritis³⁶⁴. Astragali Radix considerably increases the expression levels of CYP3A4, CYP2B6, CYP2E1, UGT1A, *P-gp*, *MRP2*, *BCRP*, and *MRP3* but decreases the protein levels of UGT1A6, *SULT1A1*, and *MRP1*³⁶⁵. Astragali Radix and its main bioactive compounds, including Astragaloside IV, calycosin, and formononetin, could induce *P-gp* and *BCRP* expression³⁶⁶.

Paeoniae Radix Rubra (Chishao in Chinese) is the dried root of *Paeonia lactiflora* Pall. and *Paeonia veitchii* Lynch³⁶⁷. Paeoniae Radix Rubra could be used for the treatment of patients with COVID-19 complicated with coagulation dysfunction *via* AKT serine/threonine kinase 1, TNF, vascular endothelial growth factor A, epidermal growth factor receptor, and mitogen-activated protein kinase 3³⁶⁸. The adverse events of Paeoniae Radix Rubra primarily include gastrointestinal tract disturbances, mostly mild diarrhea^{368,369}. Meanwhile, Paeoniae Radix Rubra alleviated gut microbiota disorders in model rats, including upregulating four genera (*Coprococcus*, *Lactobacillus*, etc.) and downregulating four genera (*Bacteroides*, *Escherichia*, etc.)³⁷⁰. Paeoniae Radix Rubra contains terpenoids and their glycosides, flavonoids and their glycosides, and other chemical components³⁷¹. Paeoniflorin is a major constituent of Paeoniae Radix Rubra. Paeoniflorin and albiflorin at low concentrations could induce CYP3A4 activity; however, the regulation turned into inhibition at high concentration. Paeoniflorin has an inhibitory effect on CYP2D6 activity at high concentration³⁷². Paeoniflorin is a substrate of *P-gp*^{372,373}.

The information of Ephedrae Herba, Armeniacae Semen Amarum, Gypsum Fibrosum, Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, Pogostemonis Herba, Magnoliae Officinalis Cortex, Atractylodis Rhizoma, Tsaoko Fructus, Rhei Radix et Rhizoma, Astragali

Radix, Pinelliae Rhizoma Praeparatum, Praeparatum, Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen, Poria and Paeoniae Radix Rubra is summarized in Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

3.4. JHQQ

3.4.1. Basic pharmacological information of JHQQ

JHQQ has been recommended as a medication in the diagnosis and treatment protocol for COVID-19 in China³⁷⁴. The active ingredients of JHQQ (including 3-methoxy-glycerol, crude-glycerin, glycyrrhizin B, chlorogenic acid, forsythoside A, and ephedrine) have strong binding activity for 3CLpro and ACE2 and suppression of cytokine signaling¹²⁷¹, thereby inhibiting viral replication and binding to target cells, reducing host inflammation, and activating antiviral immunity³⁷⁵.

JHQQ consists of 12 herbs including Forsythiae Fructus, Lonicerae Japonicae Flos, Ephedrae Herba, Armeniacae Semen Amarum, Gypsum Fibrosum, Scutellariae Radix, Fritillariae Thunbergii Bulbus, Anemarrhenae Rhizoma, Arctii Fructus, Artemisiae Annuae Herba, Menthae Haplocalycis Herba, and Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma³⁷⁶.

Given the effects of JHQQ and the bioactive constituents on the CYPs and transporters (Table 5), the potential HDIs should also be of concern.

3.4.2. Pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic features of each herb in JHQQ

Lonicerae Japonicae Flos, also known as Japanese honeysuckle, Jinyinhua or Rendong, is native in East Asia³⁷⁷. In addition, Lonicerae Japonicae Flos could inhibit SARS-CoV-2^{375,378} by inhibiting Mpro activity³⁷⁹. Phenolic acids were primarily permeated via paracellular diffusion and influenced by P-gp, MRP2, and BCRP³⁸⁰. Chlorogenic acid is a substrate for P-gp³⁸¹. Chlorogenic acid significantly changed the composition of the gut microbiota and increased the abundance of SCFA-producers (e.g., *Dubosiella*, *Romboutsia*, *Mucispirillum*, and *Faecalibaculum*) and *Akkermansia*, which can protect the intestinal barrier³⁸². In addition, isochlorogenic acid A could inhibit UGT1A6 activity by 25% in mice, and it exhibited a weak inhibitory effect on CYP2C9 activity in human liver microsomes²¹⁷. Moreover, Lonicerae Japonicae Flos had no significant effect on CYP3A activity in rats³⁸³. Lonicerae Japonicae Flos substantially inhibited MATE1-mediated metformin uptake *in vitro*³⁸⁴.

Forsythiae Fructus (Lianqiao in Chinese) is widely distributed in China, Korea, and Japan. Forsythoside A, Forsythin, and Phillyrin are major components^{385,386}. Forsythoside A showed the strongest docking affinity with the proteins SARS-CoV-2-RBD-hACE2 of COVID-19 and its variants (Alpha (B.1.1.7), Beta (B.1.351), and Delta (B.1.617)), as well as neuropilin-1 and SARS-CoV-2 Mpro to interfere coronavirus entering into the human body³⁸⁷. Phillyrin could significantly inhibit SARS-CoV-2 replication *in vitro*³⁸⁸. Forsythoside A has inductive effects on the activities of CYP1A2 and CYP2C11^{389,390}. Phillyrin has potential inductive effects on rat CYP1A2 and CYP2D1 activities³⁹¹. Phillygenin could ameliorate intestinal epithelial barrier disruption, and reverse the expression of bile acid metabolism-related genes in mice with CCl4-induced liver fibrosis³⁹².

Fritillariae Thunbergii Bulbus (Beimu in Chinese) is derived from the bulbous of many *Fritillaria* species (family Liliaceae)^{393,394}. Peimine inhibited variants of SARS-CoV-2 cell entry via blocking the interaction between viral spike protein and ACE2³⁹⁵. Peimine is a substrate of P-gp. Alkaloids, including

peimine, peimisine, and imperialine, were the active ingredients for inhibiting P-gp activity³⁹⁶. Meanwhile, peimine inhibited the activity of CYP3A4, 2E1, and 2D6^{397,398}.

Anemarrhenae Rhizoma (Zhimu in Chinese), the dried rhizome of *Anemarrhena asphodeloides* Bge³⁹⁹. Anemarrhenae Rhizoma suppressed inflammation via the regulation of NF- κ B and p38 signal transduction pathways in macrophages⁴⁰⁰. *In vitro* studies showed that ethyl acetate extract of Anemarrhenae Rhizoma promoted the proliferation of *Blautia coccoides*, a bacterium with positive implication for diabetes, in a dose-dependent manner⁴⁰¹. Timosaponin A3 reverses multi-drug resistance via the downregulation of MDR1, MRP1, and P-gp expression levels^{400–403}.

Arctii Fructus (Niubangzi in Chinese), is the dry and mature fruits of *Arctium lappa* L.⁴⁰⁴. Natural lignans from Arctii Fructus could inhibit the activity of P-gp⁴⁰⁵. Furthermore, Arctiin and Arctigenin showed an inhibitory effect on UGTs⁴⁰⁶. UGT1A9, UGT2B7, and UGT2B17 were the major isoforms responsible for the 4'-O-glucuronidation of Arctigenin in human intestine microsomes⁴⁰⁷. Furthermore, Arctiin and Arctigenin showed an inhibitory effect on UGT1A9, UGT2B7, and UGT2B17^{405,407}. The purified polyphenols from Arctii Fructus could significantly improve the gut microbiota composition and ameliorate DOX-induced heart failure⁴⁰⁸.

Menthae Haplocalycis Herba (Bohe in Chinese) is the dry aboveground parts of *Mentha haplocalyx* Briq.⁴⁰⁹. Menthae Haplocalycis Herba could be further developed as plant-derived anti-SARS-CoV-2 agents⁴¹⁰. It was found that increasing the concentration of menthol could induce the expression of MDR1 and P-gp⁴¹¹. Meanwhile, an acidic polysaccharide obtained from the Menthae Haplocalycis Herba modulated the gut microbiota by reducing the ratio of Firmicutes/Bacteroidetes, promoting the proliferation of beneficial bacteria such as Bacteroidaceae and Bifidobacteriaceae, and inhibiting harmful bacteria such as Lachnospiraceae and Enterobacteriaceae⁴¹².

The information on Forsythiae Fructus, Lonicerae Japonicae Flos, Ephedrae Herba, Armeniacae Semen Amarum, Gypsum Fibrosum, Scutellariae Radix, Fritillariae Thunbergii Bulbus, Anemarrhenae Rhizoma, Arctii Fructus, Artemisiae Annuae Herba, Menthae Haplocalycis Herba, and Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma is summarized in Sections 3.1–3.3.

3.5. LHQW

3.5.1. Basic pharmacological information of LHQW

LHQW is obtained from two well-known Chinese herbal prescriptions, namely, Ma Xing Shi Gan Tang and Yin Qiao San⁴¹³. LHQW is widely used to treat patients with pneumonia caused by the COVID-19⁴¹⁴. It can effectively reduce the duration of fever, improve chest computed tomography symptoms, and increase the clinical cure rate for patients with COVID-19 by 12.7%^{415,416}. The active ingredients of LHQW, including stigmasterol, naringenin, 18 β -glycyrrhetic acid, and quercetin, can bind to ACE2 and inhibit viral replication²⁷¹. Moreover, the active ingredients of LHQW, including quercetin, lignan, baicalin, and kaempferol, showed high binding affinity to Mpro of SARS-CoV-2, which may inhibit the replication of SARS-CoV-2^{417,418}. LHQW also alleviates the widespread lung injury in COVID-19 by inhibiting the overexpression of pro-inflammatory factors and exerting immunomodulatory effects⁴¹⁹.

LHQW consists of 13 herbs including Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, Forsythiae Fructus, Rhodiola Crenulatae Radix et

Table 5 The effect of JHQG on metabolizing enzymes and transporters.

Herb	Component	Metabolic enzyme								Transporter					
		CYP1	CYP2	CYP3	UGT1	UGT2	UGT3	CES		OCTs	OAT	OATP	P-gp	BCRP	MRP
Forsythiae Fructus (Refs. 389–391)	Forsythoside A	1A2↑	2C11↑												
	Phillyrin	1A2↑	2D1↑												
Lonicerae Japonicae Flos (Refs. 217, 381, 383)	Phenolic acids												P-gp ^a	BCRP ^a	MRP2 ^a
	Chlorogenic acid												P-gp ^a		
	Isochlorogenic acid A		2C9↓		1A6↓										
Scutellariae Radix (Refs. 172, 174–182, 478)	Aqueous extract of scutellariae radix		2C9↓												
			2E1↑												
	Baicalein			3A4↓	1A9 ^a			CES1/2↓					P-gp↓		MRP ^a
					1A10 ^a										
	Baicalin		2C9↑	3A4↑											
			2C19↑												
	Wogonin	1A2↓			1A9 ^a										
	Oroxylin A				1A9 ^a			CES1/2↓			OAT1↓	1B1 ^a		BCRP↓	
					1A10 ^a						OAT3↓	1B1↓			
												1B3 ^a			
	Salvigenin				1A8↓										
					1A10↓										
	Extract									OCT1↓					
Fritillariae Thunbergii Bulbus (Refs. 396–398)	Peimine		2E1↓	3A4↓									P-gp ^a ↓		
			2D6↓												
	Peimisine												P-gp↓		
	Imperialine												P-gp↓		
Anemarrhenae Rhizoma (Refs. 400–403)	Timosaponin A3												P-gp↓		MRP1↓
Arctii Fructus (Refs. 405–407)													P-gp↓		
	Arctiin				1A9↓										
	Arctigenin				1A9↓	1A9 ^a	2B7↓ 2B17↓								
							2B7↓ 2B7 ^a								
							2B17↓ 2B17 ^a								
Artemisiae Annuae Herba (Refs. 293,294)	Artemisinin	1A2↑	2B6↑												
			2B10↑												
			2A5↑												
Menthae Haplocalycis Herba (Ref: 411)	Menthol												P-gp↑		
Ephedrae Herba (Refs. 82–86)	Water decoction	1A2↑													
	L-Ephedrine	1A1↑	2C↑										P-gp ^a		
		1A2↑													
	D-Pseudoephedrine	1A1↓	2E1↓										P-gp ^a		
		1A2↓													
	Norpseudoephedrin									OCT2 ^a					
	L-Methylephedrine												P-gp ^a		
Gypsum Fibrosum (Ref: 112)		1A2↓													
Armeniaca Semen Amarum (Ref: 107)	Amygdalin		2C9↓										P-gp ^a		
			2E1↓												

(continued on next page)

Table 5 (continued)

Herb	Component	Metabolic enzyme						Transporter						
		CYP1	CYP2	CYP3	UGT1	UGT2	UGT3	CES	OCTs	OAT	OATP	P-gp	BCRP	MRP
Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (Refs. 92, 97–103, 477)	Extract	1A2↑	2A1↑	3A↑										
			2B1↑	3A4↑										
			2B9↑											
			2B6↓	3A4↓										
			2C9↓											
	Glycyrrhetic acid		2C19↓											
			2C9 ^a	3A4 ^a	1A3↓	2B7↓		CES1↓				P-gp ^a		
	Glycyrrhizin		2C19 ^a											
		1A2↑	2A1↑	3A↑										
	Licochalcone A		2B1↑	3A4↑										
		2B9↑												
1A2↓		2D6↓	3A4↓								1B1↓			
		2E1↓												
		2C19↓												
Glycyrol		2C8↓												
		2C9↓												
		2C9↓												

↑Indicates the induction effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

↓Indicates the inhibitory effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

^aIndicates that the drug is a substrate for an enzyme or drug transporter.

Rhizoma, Ephedrae Herba, Armeniacae Semen Amarum, Loniceraceae Japonicae Flos, Gypsum Fibrosum, Pogostemonis Herba, Isatidis Radix, 1-menthol, Rhei Radix Et Rhizoma, Dryopteridis Crassirhizomatis Rhizoma, and Houttuyniae Herba²⁷¹.

LHQW could effectively regulate drug-metabolizing enzymes and transporters^{420–423} (Table 6). The pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic characteristics of each herb of LHQW are summarized below.

3.5.2. Pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic features of each herb in LHQW

Isatidis Radix (Banlangen in Chinese) is the dried root of *Isatis indigotica* Fort⁴²⁴. Isatidis Radix can effectively resist COVID-19⁴²⁵. The major components of Isatidis Radix include alkaloids, organic acids, nucleosides, amino acids, lignans, and flavonoids, of which epigotrin is the most important active component⁴²⁴. The metabolic pathways of epigotrin in rats primarily involve methylation, acetylation, hydroxylation, oxidation, reduction reactions, binding to glutathione, and binding to alanine⁴²⁶. Moreover, indirubin, another component of Isatidis Radix, could active CYP3A4 gene transcription through the activation of human PXR⁴²². Moreover, Isatidis Radix could regulate gut microbiota and restore gut SCFA-derived glucagon-like peptide-1 production and alleviate chronic relapsing colitis in mice⁴²⁷.

Dryopteridis Crassirhizomatis Rhizoma (Mianmaguanzhong in Chinese) is derived from the dried rhizome and petiole residues of *Dryopteris crassirhizoma* Nakai⁴²⁸. Dryopteridis Crassirhizomatis Rhizoma has an inhibitory activity against the Mpro of SARS-CoV-2 and also represses cytokine storm upon COVID-19^{420,429}. Previous studies have shown that the major components of Dryopteridis Crassirhizomatis Rhizoma include phloroglucinol, flavonoids, terpenoids, steroids, phenylpropanoids, and aliphatic compounds⁴³⁰. Pharmacokinetic studies of dryocrassin ABBA showed good microsomal stability and low CYP450 inhibition. *In vivo* pharmacokinetic properties of dryocrassin ABBA showed a long half-life and high plasma exposure⁴²⁰.

Houttuyniae Herba (Yuxingcao in Chinese) is derived from the aerial part of *Houttuynia cordata* Thunb⁴³¹. The bioactive compounds of Houttuyniae Herba may exert anti-SARS-CoV-2 effects by targeting SARS-CoV-2 replication and the transcription-related enzyme RdRp⁴³². The major components of Houttuyniae Herba include volatile oil, flavonoids, organic acids, alkaloids, and vitamins⁴³². Ethyl acetate extract of Houttuyniae Herba would suppress the expression of CYP2E1 and CYP4A⁴²³. Houttuyniae Herba extract also increased systemic exposure and hepatic concentrations of metformin through OCTs and MATEs in rats⁴³³.

Rhodiola Crenulatae Radix et Rhizoma (Hongjingtian in Chinese) is derived from the dried roots and rhizomes of *Rhodiola crenulata*⁴³⁴. Rhodiola Crenulatae Radix et Rhizoma may perform anti-inflammatory and immunomodulatory effects in the cytokine storm of COVID-19 by regulating the expression of inflammatory factors⁴³⁵. The major components of Rhodiola Crenulatae Radix et Rhizoma include phenolic glycosides (salidroside), flavonoids, coumarins, and amino acids, of which salidroside is the most important active component⁴³⁶. The mechanism of salidroside transport is passive diffusion with no active efflux. Salidroside exhibited inductive effects on CYP1A2, CYP2B6, CYP2C9, and CYP3A4 activities in rats⁴²¹. Meanwhile, salidroside significantly upregulated the expression of genes involved in bile acid synthesis (*Cyp7a1*, *Cyp7b1*, *Cyp8b1*, and *Cyp27a1*) and the uptake transport genes (*Ntcp* and *Oatps*) and downregulated the efflux transport genes (*Bsep*, *Ost-α*, *Ost-β*,

Table 6 The effect of LHQW on metabolizing enzymes and transporters.

Herb	Component	Metabolic enzyme						Transporter						
		CYP1	CYP2	CYP3	UGT1	UGT2	UGT3	CES	OCTs	OAT	OATP	P-gp	BCRP	MRP
Ephedrae Herba (Refs. 82–86)	Water decoction	1A2↑												
	L-Ephedrine	1A1↑	2C↑						OCT2 ^a			P-gp ^a		
		1A2↑												
	D-Pseudoephedrine	1A1↓	2E1↓									P-gp ^a		
		1A2↓												
Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (Refs. 92,97–103,477)	Norpseudoephedrine								OCT2 ^a					
	L-Methylephedrine											P-gp ^a		
		1A2↑	2A1↑	3A↑										
			2B1↑	3A4↑										
			2B9↑											
	Extract		2B6↓	3A4↓										
			2C9↓											
			2C19↓											
	Glycyrrhetic acid		2C9 ^a	3A4 ^a	1A3↓	2B7↓		CES1↓				P-gp ^a		
			2C19 ^a											
	Glycyrrhizin	1A2↑	2A1↑	3A↑										
Armeniacae Semen Amarum (Ref: 107)			2B1↑	3A4↑										
			2B9↑											
	Licochalcone A	1A2↓	2D6↓	3A4↓							1B1↓			
			2E1↓											
			2C19↓											
			2C8↓											
			2C9↓											
	Glycyrol		2C9↓											
	Amygdalin		2C9↓									P-gp ^a		
			2E1↓											
Gypsum Fibrosum (Ref: 112)		1A2↓												
Forsythiae Fructus (Refs. 389–391)	Forsythoside A	1A2↑	2C11↑											
	Phillyrin	1A2↑	2D1↑											
Rhodiolae Crenulatae Radix et Rhizoma (Refs. 421,437)	Salidroside	1A2↑	2B6↑	3A4↑										MRP2↓ MRP4↓
			2C9↑											
Lonicerae Japonicae Flos (Refs. 217, 381, 383)	Phenolic acids											P-gp ^a	BCRP ^a	MRP2 ^a
	Chlorogenic acid											P-gp ^a		
	isochlorogenic acid A		2C9↓		1A6↓									
Pogostemonis Herba (Refs. 268,269)	Patchouli alcohol											P-gp ^a		MRP ^a
	Pogostone		2C9↓	3A4↓										
			2E1↓											
Isatidis Radix (Ref: 422)	Indirubin			3A4↑										
Menthae Haplocalycis Herba (Ref: 411)	Menthol											P-gp↑		
Rhei Radix et Rhizoma												P-gp↓		

(continued on next page)

Table 6 (continued)

Herb	Component	Metabolic enzyme				Transporter								
		CYP1	CYP2	CYP3	UGT1	UGT2	UGT3	CES	OCTs	OAT	OATP	P-gp	BCRP	MRP
(Refs. 352,356–359)	Extract Rhein			3A↓										
Dryopteridis Crassirhizomatis Rhizoma (Ref: 420)	Dryocrassin ABBA		2C9↓											
Houttuyniae Herba (Ref: 423)	Extract		2E1↓											

↑ Indicates the induction effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

↓ Indicates the inhibitory effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

^aIndicates that the drug is a substrate for an enzyme or drug transporter.

Mrp2, and *Mrp4*)⁴³⁷. Salidroside is primarily excreted in the form of the original structure through urine⁴³⁸. Studies also found that salidroside could activate FXR and upregulate CYP7A1 expression⁴³⁹. Rhodiola Crenulatae Radix et Rhizoma extract could restore microbial richness and diversity, which were closely correlated with its protective effect against colitis⁴⁴⁰.

The associated information of Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, Forsythiae Fructus, Ephedrae Herba, Armeniacae Semen Amarum, Lonicerae Japonicae Flos, Gypsum Fibrosum, Pogostemonis Herba, l-menthol, and Rhei Radix et Rhizoma was summarized in Sections 3.1–3.4.

3.6. XBJ

3.6.1. Basic pharmacological information on XBJ

XBJ injection is based on the well-known Chinese herbal prescription Xue Fu Zhu Yu Tang, combined with the theory of “four evidence and four methods” and “concurrent treatment of bacterial toxicity and inflammation” refined over a period of 30 years⁴⁴¹. Based on the clinical evidence on XBJ treatment of sepsis, bacterial pneumonia, and acute respiratory distress syndrome, XBJ was recommended by China's National Health Commission to treat severe and critical cases of COVID-19, particularly during systematic inflammatory response syndrome and/or multi-organ failure⁴⁴². XBJ could inhibit inflammation in patients with COVID-19 *via* inhibiting the inflammatory mediator expression and subsequently improving lung injury in patients with severe or critical COVID-19⁴⁴³. Network pharmacological analysis showed that XBJ exerts therapeutic potential against SARS-CoV-2 infection *via* modulation of the arachidonic acid metabolic pathway⁴⁴⁴. Administration of XBJ could increase the abundance of the phylum Bacteroides and decrease the phylum Actinobacteria, and subsequently upregulate the pyrimidine metabolic pathway, the pentose phosphate pathway and the glycerophospholipid metabolic pathway in heat-shocked rats⁴⁴⁵.

XBJ injection is a five-herb combination, which is composed of Angelicae Sinensis Radix, Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, Paeoniae Radix Rubra, Carthami Flos, and Chuanxiong Rhizoma²⁷¹.

Several compounds of XBJ exhibit inhibition of the activity of CYP1A2, CYP2B1, CYP2C11, and CYP2E1⁴⁴⁶. Meanwhile, the compounds of XBJ exhibit inhibition of UGT1A1, UGT1A6, UGT1A9, UGT2B15, and OAT1⁴⁴⁶. Considering the effects of XBJ and the bioactive constituents on CYPs and transporters (Table 7), the potential HDIs should also be of concern. The general overview of each herb in XBJ is summarized below.

3.6.2. Pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic features of each herb in XBJ

Carthami Flos (Honghua in Chinese) is derived from the dried flowers of *Carthamus tinctorius* L.⁴⁴⁷. Molecular docking showed that safranal, picrocrocin, and crocin molecules found in the composition of Xihonghua might have binding modes with human ACE2 protein⁴⁴⁸. The major components of Carthami Flos include flavonoids, alkaloids, organic acids, and polyacetylenes, of which carthamin yellow is an important active component⁴⁴⁹. Safflower total flavonoids exhibited inhibitory effects on activity of CYP1A2, CYP2B1, CYP2E1, and CYP2C11 and induction effects on CYP2C19 and 2D4⁴⁵⁰. Safflower yellow, the component of Carthami Flos, could enhance liver immune infiltration through the modulation of gut microbiota⁴⁵¹.

Table 7 The effect of XBJ on metabolizing enzymes and transporters.

Herb	Component	Metabolic enzyme							Transporter					
		CYP1	CYP2	CYP3	UGT1	UGT2	UGT3	CES	OCT	OAT	OATP	P-gp	BCRP	MRP
Angelicae Sinensis Radix (Refs. 467,468,481)	Water extract		2D6↑	3A↑				CES1↓						
Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (Refs. 446,460 –462,482)	Coniferyl ferulate											P-gp↓		
	Tanshinone I	1A2↓	2C9↓					CES1↓						
	Tanshinone II A	1A2↓	2C9↓	3A4↑								P-gp↓	BCRP↓	MRP1↓
	Cryptotanshinone	1A2↓	2C9↓	3A4↑										
	Dihydrotanshinone	1A2↓	2C9↓	3A4↓										
	Salvianolic acid B				1A1↓ 1A6↓ 1A9↓	2B15↓								
Paeoniae Radix Rubra (Refs. 372,373)	Paeoniflorin		2D6↓	3A4↑↓								P-gp ^a		
	Albiflorin			3A4↑↓										
Carthami Flos (Ref: 450)	Total flavonoids	1A2↓	2B1↓ 2C11↓ 2C19↑ 2D4↑ 2E1↓											
Chuanxiong Rhizoma (Refs. 446,454,455,481)	Ligustrazine			3A4↑				CES1↓				P-gp↓		MRP2↓ MRP3↓ MRP5↓
	Senkyunolide G									OAT1↓ OAT2↓				

↑ Indicates induction of an enzyme or drug transporter.

↓ Indicates an inhibitory effect on an enzyme or drug transporter.

^aIndicates that the drug is a substrate for an enzyme or drug transporter.

Chuanxiong Rhizoma (Chuanxiong in Chinese) is derived from the dried rhizome of *Ligusticum chuanxiong* Hort.⁴⁵². *L. chuanxiong* polysaccharide, a major component of Chuanxiong Rhizoma, can significantly enhance the immune function in mice. Polysaccharides play an important role in treating COVID-19.⁴⁵³ The components of Chuanxiong Rhizoma include essential oil, alkaloids, phenolic acids, and phthalide lactones, of which ligustrazine is the most important active component.⁴⁵² Ligustrazine induces the expression of the metabolizing enzyme CYP3A4 via PXR.⁴⁵⁴ The mRNA and protein levels of MDR1, MRP2, MRP3 and MRP5 were decreased after treatment with ligustrazine.⁴⁵⁵ In addition, senkyunolide G inhibited OAT1, OAT2.⁴⁴⁶ It has been shown that Puerariae Lobatae Radix with Chuanxiong Rhizoma could remodel gut microbiota to regulate the brain–gut barriers.⁴⁵⁶

Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix et Rhizoma (Danshen in Chinese) is derived from the dried root or rhizome of *Salvia miltiorrhiza* Bge.⁴⁵⁷ Salvianolic acids, a component of Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, can inhibit the entry of 2019-nCoV spike pseudovirus into human ACE2 cells by binding to ACE2 protein.⁴⁵⁸ The major components of Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix et Rhizoma include diterpenoids, triterpenoids, phenolic acids, flavonoids, nitrogenous compounds, and lactones, of which tanshinone II A is the most important active component.⁴⁵⁹ Tanshinone IIA and cryptotanshinone could activate PXR and induce CYP3A4 expression.⁴⁶⁰ Moreover, tanshinone I, tanshinone IIA, and cryptotanshinone were potent human CYP1A2 inhibitors and medium inhibitors of human CYP2C9.⁴⁶¹ Dihydro-tanshinone was not only a potent competitive inhibitor of human CYP1A2 and CYP2C9, but also a potent noncompetitive inhibitor of human CYP3A4.^{460,461} It has been demonstrated that tanshinone IIA could down-regulate the expression of P-gp, BCRP, and MRP1.⁴⁶² Salvianolic acid B, another component of *Salvia*, could inhibit the activity of UGT1A1, UGT1A6, UGT1A9, and UGT2B15.⁴⁴⁶ The combination of probiotics and Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix et Rhizoma could modulate the gut microbiota and improve insulin resistance.⁴⁶³

Angelicae Sinensis Radix (Danggui in Chinese) is derived from the dried root of *Angelica sinensis* (Oliv.) Diels.⁴⁶⁴ The components of Angelicae Sinensis Radix have potential inhibitory effects on SARS-CoV-2 Mpro.⁴⁶⁵ The major components of Angelicae Sinensis Radix include Angelica polysaccharides, organic acids, phthalides, and flavonoids, of which ferulic acid is the most important active component.⁴⁶⁶ Coniferyl ferulate, isolated from the root of Angelicae Sinensis Radix, could markedly decrease over-expressed P-gp.⁴⁶⁷ Moreover, the water extract of Angelicae Sinensis Radix significantly increased the activities of CYP2D6 and CYP3A.⁴⁶⁸ Angelicae Sinensis Radix polysaccharide could regulate gut microbiota and improve rheumatoid arthritis.⁴⁶⁹

The associated information of Paeoniae Radix Rubra was summarized in Section 3.3.

4. Potential HDI between anti-COVID-19 drugs and the TCM recipes

4.1. Pharmacokinetic HDIs

4.1.1. Potential pharmacokinetic HDI between Paxlovid™ and the TCM recipes

Drug-metabolizing enzymes play a critical role in regulating the drug pharmacokinetic characteristics and thereby is probably a major mechanism causing HDI between Paxlovid™ and the TCM recipes.¹⁶ Nirmatrelvir and Ritonavir are primarily metabolized by

CYP3A4.²⁶ Based on a previous report, the concentration of Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir will not be increased by any strong CYP3A4 inhibitor because the maximal inhibition of CYP3A4 has been achieved by Ritonavir *per se*.²⁴ However, strong CYP3A4 inducers may potentially compromise Nirmatrelvir efficacy by accelerating the metabolism of Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir.²⁴ It is reported that many ingredients and herbs in the above six TCM recipes have an induction effect on CYP3A4. For example, Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma is an herb in QFPD, JHQQ, XFBD, LHQW, and HSBD. The bioactive ingredient of glycyrrhetic acid of Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma could induce the activity of CYP3A4.⁹² In addition, Atractylodes Macrocephala Rhizoma, an herb in QFPD, could strongly induce CYP3A4 activity.¹⁴⁰ Poria is an herb in QFPD and HSBD, and it could increase CYP3A4 gene transcription.⁴⁷⁰ Furthermore, the bioactive ingredient of Scutellariae Radix (Baicalin) in QFPD and JHQQ could induce the activity of CYP3A4.¹⁷⁷ Ligustrazine, an effective component of Chuanxiong Rhizoma in XBJ, could also induce the activity of CYP3A4.^{454,471} Tanshinone IIA and cryptotanshinone are the active ingredients of *Salvia*, an herb in XBJ, which could also induce CYP3A4 activity.⁴⁶⁰ Collectively, the metabolism of Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir may be increased, resulting in reduced plasma concentrations of Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir when Paxlovid™ is co-administrated with TCM recipes (QFPD, JHQQ, XFBD, LHQW, and HSBD), leading to the potential loss of antiviral response. Nevertheless, many herbs in TCM formulations also show an inhibitory effect on CYP3A4 activity.^{138–140} Therefore, the “net effects” of the TCM formulations on Paxlovid™ plasma concentration should be further investigated. On the other hand, Nirmatrelvir and Ritonavir are also strong inhibitors of CYP3A4.²⁴ which may increase plasma concentrations of bioactive ingredients of herbs in TCM formulations that are primarily metabolized by CYP3A4. CYP3A4 is involved in the metabolism of glycyrrhetic acid (the main active ingredient of Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma)⁹², atractylenolide II (the main active ingredient of Atractylodes Macrocephala Rhizoma)¹³⁸, irisflorein (the main active ingredient of Belamcandae Rhizoma)²²⁵. Apart from as a substrate for CYP3A4, Ritonavir is an inhibitor of CYP2D6, CYP2C8, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, and CYP2J2 and an inducer of several metabolizing enzymes, such as CYP3A, CYP1A2, CYP2B6, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, and UGTs, indicating that the plasma concentrations of the substrates for these metabolizing enzymes may be altered when co-administration of Paxlovid™.^{30–34} Several ingredients of Scutellariae Radix are substrates for UGT1A9/10.¹⁷² Asarinin, the main bioactive ingredient of Asari Radix et Rhizoma, is metabolized by CYP1A1, CYP2C8, and CYP3A5.²³³ Paeoniflorin and albiflorin, two bioactive ingredients of Paeoniae Radix Rubra, are metabolized by CYP3A4 and CYP2D6.³⁷² Nevertheless, Nirmatrelvir does not induce any CYPs at clinically relevant concentrations.⁷ Thus, based on the effect of Ritonavir on CYPs and UGTs, the plasma concentration of the bioactive ingredients of TCM recipes could be changed and should be considered during TCMs combined use with anti-COVID 19 drugs.

Drug transporters may also trigger HDIs between Paxlovid™ and the TCM recipes, resulting in their fluctuating clinical effects. Given that Nirmatrelvir and Ritonavir are substrates for P-gp^{35,472}, co-administration with any P-gp inhibitors/inducers may alter their absorption or elimination. Among six TCM recipes, QFPD contains several herbs with ingredients that show inductive effects on P-gp, such as Alismatis Rhizoma (alisol B 23-acetate and alisol F 24-acetate)¹¹⁸, Bupleuri Radix (saikosaponins a, c, d)¹⁶⁰, and

Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium (hesperidin)²⁵⁹. In addition, the herbs in QFPD such as Aurantii Fructus Immaturus could induce the expression of P-gp²⁵¹. The herb Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen in XFBD has an inhibitory effect on P-gp³¹⁸. The ingredients of Magnoliae Officinalis Cortex (honokiol)³⁴³, Tsaoko Fructus (protocatechuic acid)³⁴⁸, Rhei Radix et Rhizoma³⁵², and Descurainiae Semen Lepidii Semen³¹⁸ in HSBD could inhibit the function of P-gp. By contrast, the function of P-gp could be induced by the ingredients of Astragali Radix (astragaloside IV, calycosin, and formononetin) in HSBD³⁶⁶. Fritillariae Thunbergii Bulbus^{78,398}, Anemarrhenae Rhizoma⁴⁰³, and Arctii Fructus⁴⁰⁵ in JHQG could inhibit P-gp function, whereas the herb Menthae Haplocalycis Herba is reported to induce P-gp function⁴¹¹. Therefore, the combined use of TCM recipes (QFPD, XFBD, HSBD and JHQG) may change Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir absorption or elimination *via* altering P-gp function, thereby resulting in alteration of Paxlovid™ therapeutic effects and adverse events including dysgeusia, diarrhea, nausea, headache, vomiting, and pyrexia. On the other hand, the clearance of the bioactive ingredients of TCM recipes may be reduced given that Paxlovid™ has inhibitory effects on several drug transporters including P-gp, BCRP, MATE1, OCT1, and OATP^{29,37,38}. It was reported that the bioactive ingredients of Ephedrae Herba (L-ephedrine, D-pseudoephedrine, and L-methylephedrine)⁸², Armeniacae Semen Amarum (amygdalin)¹⁰⁷, and Atractylodes Macrocephala Rhizoma (atractylenolide I)¹³⁷ in QFPD are substrates for P-gp. Except for QFPD, Ephedrae Herba and Armeniacae Semen Amarum are two herbs that are contained in JHQG, XFBD, LHQW, and HSBD. The ingredients of Paeoniae Radix Rubra in HSBD are substrates for P-gp^{372,373}. Lonicerae Japonicae Flos in

JHQG has an ingredient (phenolic acids) that is a substrate for P-gp³⁸¹. Many ingredients in TCM formulations are also substrates for BCRP. Collectively, the absorption or elimination of bioactive ingredients that are substrates for P-gp and BCRP in above six TCM recipes may be reduced by Paxlovid™, thereby shifting the plasma concentration and therapeutic effect.

In summary, multiple metabolizing enzymes and transporters-mediated HDI between Paxlovid™ and the TCM recipes (Fig. 1A) should be evaluated.

4.1.2. Potential pharmacokinetic HDI between Remdesivir and the TCM recipes

Alterations in the expression or activity of metabolizing enzymes are of great importance in mediating potential pharmacokinetic HDI between Remdesivir and TCM. CYP3A4 is one of the important metabolizing enzymes responsible for Remdesivir metabolism⁴⁴. Multiple herbs regulate the expression or activity of CYP3A4, potentially affecting the metabolism of Remdesivir. For example, Scutellariae Radix, Asteris Radix et Rhizome and Asari Radix et Rhizoma are commonly used herbs in herbal formulas against COVID-19. These herbs or their bioactive ingredients could inhibit CYP3A4^{176,209,234}, which might delay the metabolism of Remdesivir and increase its exposure. Although the adverse events of Remdesivir are rare, transaminase increases have been reported in Remdesivir-treated patients⁴⁷. Considering that the suppression of CYP3A4 might increase the exposure of Remdesivir, liver function should be carefully monitored when Remdesivir is co-administered with these herbs and involved formulas. By contrast, some herbs such as Poria, and Astragali Radix could induce CYP3A4^{147,365}, indicating that the co-

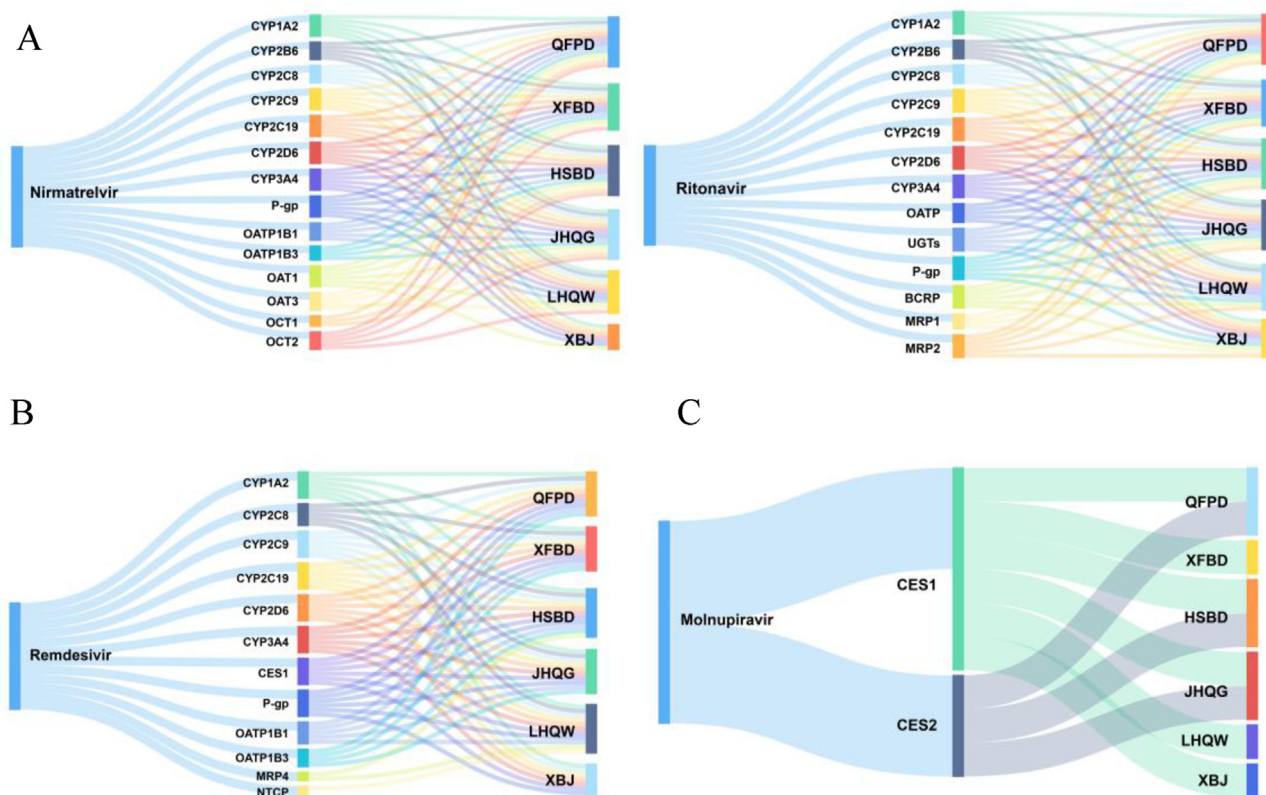


Figure 1 Potential pharmacokinetics HDIs between Paxlovid™ (A)/Remdesivir (B)/Molnupiravir (C) and TCM recipes.

administration with these drugs might accelerate the metabolism of Remdesivir. Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma is an herb in QFPD, JHQQ, XFBD, LHQW, and HSBD. A previous study demonstrated that its extract inhibits CYP3A4 activity in human liver microsomes⁹⁷. However, its bioactive ingredient glycyrrhizin could increase CYP3A4 activity⁹⁸. Apart from CYP3A4, Remdesivir is also a substrate of CYP2C8 and CYP2D6^{40,52}. Licochalcone A could inhibit CYP2C8 activity⁹⁹. Licochalcone A, astin D, and peimine could inhibit CYP2D6^{99,209,397,398}. These herbal ingredients might also affect Remdesivir metabolism. A previous study showed that QFPD has inhibitory effects on CYP3A, CYP2C8, CYP2C9, CYP2C19, CYP2D6, and CYP2E1 activity⁷⁹, indicating that QFPD might increase exposure to Remdesivir. The “net effects” of the herbal formula on the metabolizing enzymes or transporters remain to be further investigated. Thus, studies on the potential effects of herbal formulas on metabolizing enzymes are necessary. On the contrary, many herbs and their bioactive compounds are substrates of CYP3A4. Given that Remdesivir could inhibit CYP3A4 activities, the CYP3A4-mediated metabolism of these herbs might be repressed. CYP3A4 is involved in the metabolism of glycyrrhetic acid⁹², atractylenolide II¹³⁸, and irisflorentin²²⁵. Since these compounds are isolated from Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma, Atractylodes Macrocephala Rhizome, and Belamcandae Rhizoma. Remdesivir might inhibit the metabolism of these herbs, leading to potential HDIs. For example, the main side effects of Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma include hypertension and secondary disorders of hypokalemia⁴⁷³. Whether the co-administration of Remdesivir would increase the risk of occurrence of adverse events of Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma should be considered. Moreover, pharmacokinetic studies showed that tangeretin, a bioactive compound in the Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium, is metabolized *via* CYP1A2 in the liver^{257,258}. Remdesivir has been shown to inhibit CYP1A2 activity⁴⁰, which might delay the metabolism of Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium.

Apart from CYPs, CESs are responsible for the metabolic activation of Remdesivir. Many herbs and their ingredients could inhibit CES, which might repress the CES-mediated hydrolysis of Remdesivir. Remdesivir is normally administered through intravenous infusion, which delivers transient high systemic concentrations and is inheritably related to the development of cytotoxicity. A recent study showed that CES1-based hydrolysis contributes to the activation and cytotoxicity of Remdesivir⁴⁷⁴. A previous study showed that QFPD, Reduning injection, Xiangqin Jiye granules, and Jingyin granules showed weak inhibitory effects on remdesivir hydrolysis, with IC₅₀ values larger than 1000 µg/mL, indicating that Remdesivir hydrolysis is hardly affected by these four Chinese medicines^{475,476}. Moreover, glycyrrhetic acid, baicalein, and oroxylin A are bioactive compounds from Glycyrrhizae Radix et Rhizoma and Scutellariae Radix, and these ingredients might serve as CES inhibitors, leading to the inhibition of CES-mediated hydrolysis of substrate prodrugs such as Remdesivir^{477,478}. Notably, CES1 was found to be one of the most highly expressed drug-metabolizing enzymes in the liver. CES1 abundance in the liver is ~20- to 30-fold higher than CYP3A4^{479,480}. Given that Remdesivir is metabolized by CES1 (~80%), cathepsin A (~10%), and CYP3A (~10%)^{44,45}, the effect of CYP3A inhibition on the pharmacokinetic behaviors of Remdesivir might be much less compared to that of CES1 inhibition. Thus, potential CES-mediated HDIs between Remdesivir and these herbal medicines should be alerted.

Drug transporters are also important proteins that can affect the absorption or elimination of drugs. Given that Remdesivir is a substrate of P-gp, the compounds that affect P-gp activity might affect the efflux of Remdesivir. For example, herbal medicines and their bioactive ingredients including Alismatis Rhizoma (alisol B 23-acetate and alisol F 24-acetate)¹¹⁸, Bupleuri Radix (saikosaponins a/c/d)¹⁶⁰, Citri Reticulatae Pericarpium (hesperidin)²⁵⁹, Descurainiae semen lepidii semen (quercetin)³¹⁸, Magnoliae Officinalis Cortex (honokiol)^{343,344}, Rhei Radix et Rhizoma^{352,356}, Fritillariae Thunbergii Bulbus (peimisine, imperialine)³⁹⁶, Aemarrhenae Rhizoma (timosaponin A3)^{400–403}, Arctii Fructus exerts inhibitory effects on P-gp, which may suppress Remdesivir's absorption or elimination⁴⁰⁵. On the contrary, many herbs such as Aurantii Fructus Immaturus (ethanol extract), Astragali Radix (astragaloside IV, calycosin and formononetin), and Menthae Haplocalycis Herba (menthol) can increase the activity or expression of P-gp^{251,366,411}. These herbs and bioactive compounds might accelerate the absorption or elimination of Remdesivir.

Protein binding in plasma is another factor that plays an important role in DDIs. Since Remdesivir has moderate protein binding in plasma and its metabolite GS-704277 displays low protein binding⁵⁰, the risk of affecting Remdesivir's exposure *via* influencing plasma protein binding might be relatively low. On the contrary, wogonin, a bioactive ingredient from Scutellariae Radix, has over 90% serum protein binding rate¹⁷¹. The plasma protein binding of 6-gingerol, a bioactive ingredient from Ginger, is greater than 90%^{198,199}. Scutellariae Radix and Ginger are important herbs in QFPD. Whether HDIs involved in the protein binding process would occur and then affect the exposure of these compounds remains to be investigated.

As indicated in Fig. 1B, the major pathways for the potential pharmacokinetic HDIs between Remdesivir and the TCM recipes involve CES- and CYPs-mediated inhibition or induction and P-gp mediated efflux.

4.1.3. Potential pharmacokinetic HDI between Molnupiravir with the TCM recipes

Molnupiravir is hydrolyzed to NHC (the active metabolite) by CES1 and CES2. The concentration of NHC may be changed when Molnupiravir is co-administrated with drugs that can modulate the expression and activity of CES1 and CES2. It was reported that the ingredients of Salviae Miltiorrhizae Radix et Rhizoma/Radix Puerariae Lobatae in XBJ could decrease the CES1 activity in plasma, and the ingredients of Angelicae Sinensis Radix and Chuanxiong Rhizoma in XBJ could decrease the CES1 activity in the kidneys and lungs, respectively^{481,482}. Magnolol, the active ingredient of Magnoliae Officinalis Cortex in HSBD, could inhibit both hCES1 and hCES2⁴⁸³. Glycyrrhetic acid also shows a relatively weak inhibition *in vitro* (IC₅₀ > 1 µmol/L) on CES1⁴⁸⁴. A previous study revealed that triterpenoids isolated from Alismatis Rhizoma showed inhibitory activities against human CES2⁴⁸⁵. Baicalein and Oroxylin A could strongly inhibit the hydrolysis of CES-mediated hydrolysis prodrug and CES1 and CES2 activities⁴⁷⁸. A recent study proposed that Molnupiravir is a substrate of CES2 but not CES1, and the hydrolysis of Molnupiravir varies among CES2 natural variants⁶⁴. Future research should be prioritized to estimate CES2-mediated HDI between Molnupiravir with TCM recipes. Therefore, the plasma concentration of NHC may be decreased when TCM is combined with Molnupiravir. On the other hand, neither

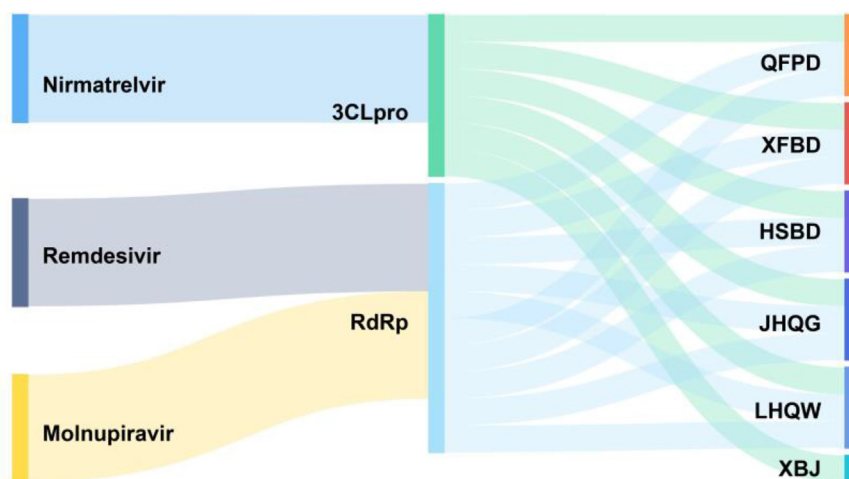


Figure 2 Potential pharmacodynamic HDIs between anti-COVID-19 drugs and TCM recipes.

Molnupiravir nor NHC functioned as substrates/inhibitor/inducer of any important transporters and enzymes that mediate drug–drug interactions^{63,65}. Thus, the effect of Molnupiravir on the six TCM recipes through a pharmacokinetic mechanism *via* drug metabolizing enzymes and transporters may not occur.

As indicated in Fig. 1C, the TCM recipes inhibit CES activity, with the potential to cause HDIs during combination of Molnupiravir and the TCM recipes.

4.2. Pharmacodynamic HDIs

Compared with the pharmacokinetic HDI, potential pharmacodynamic HDI between antiviral drugs and TCM may also occur because of the complex signaling networks of TCM. Nirmatrelvir is a SARS-CoV-2 Mpro (3CLpro) inhibitor against COVID-19. The active metabolites of Remdesivir and Molnupiravir selectively inhibit RdRp, which delays viral RNA chain termination and inhibits SARS-CoV-2 replication²⁴. Previous studies revealed that many herbs and their bioactive ingredients could bind to ACE2, 3CLpro, and RdRp and inhibit their activities^{486,487}. Compared with antiviral drug treatment alone, JHQG combined with antiviral drugs was superior in relieving fever and poor appetite in patients with COVID-19⁴⁸⁸. The active ingredients in JHQG such as chlorogenic acid, forsythoside A, and ephedrine have strong binding activity for 3CLpro and ACE2, which significantly relieves fever, cough, fatigue, and anxiety in patients with COVID-19^{271,376}. A retrospective study showed that the combination of QFPD with antiviral drugs exerted significantly better anti-inflammatory effects compared with treatment with antiviral drugs alone in patients with mild and moderate COVID-19⁶⁹. The active ingredients including glycyrrhizin, cinnamic acid, baicalin, and baicalein in QFPD can suppress SARS-CoV-2 replication *via* targeting 3CLpro and RdRp^{362,486,489}. A meta-analysis indicated that LHQW combined with conventional therapy could effectively reduce the severity in patients with mild or moderate COVID-19⁴⁹⁰. LHQW significantly inhibited SARS-CoV-2 replication in Vero E6 cells, and three ingredients (rutin, forsythoside E, and hyperoside) in LHQW were better bound to 3CLpro than Lopinavir based on the docking scores^{271,487}. Baicalein and quercetin, as the top two ingredients of HSBD, have shown high affinity to 3CLpro and ACE2, which was further suggested in a study that showed that HSFD strengthened the

efficacy of lopinavir–ritonavir in the treatment of 60 patients with COVID-19⁴⁹¹. Combined with conventional therapy, XFBD significantly ameliorates the clinical symptoms including fever, cough, and fatigue in 42 patients with COVID-19^{271,274}. ACE2 and 3CLpro were also the targets of flavonoids and phytosterols in XFBD by inhibiting viral invasion and replication²⁷¹. XBJ has been shown to effectively treat patients with COVID-19⁴⁹², particularly in patients with COVID-19-induced cardiac dysfunction⁴⁹³. In a group of 42 patients with COVID-19 treated with XBJ combined with routine treatment, their IL-6 levels and body temperature were significantly reduced⁴⁹⁴. Collectively, the combined use of the TCM recipes might exert synergistic effects and potentiate the efficacy of Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir, Remdesivir, and Molnupiravir against COVID-19 through “multi-component, multi-target, multi-pathway” pattern (Fig. 2).

5. Conclusions and perspectives

The above-mentioned anti-COVID-19 drugs and the six TCM formulae play important roles in the treatment of COVID-19 infections. As Paxlovid™, Remdesivir and Molnupiravir become more globally available and herbal medicine use varies across different regions, it is critical to clearly demonstrate potential HDIs, particularly through pharmacokinetics-based mechanisms mediated by metabolizing enzyme/transporter induction or inhibition. The present review highlights potential interactions of the six TCM formulae (QFPD, JHQG, XFBD, LHQW, HSBD, and XBJ) and three anti-COVID-19 drugs (Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir, Remdesivir, and Molnupiravir). Clinical studies and animal experiments have demonstrated that the extract of these TCM recipes, along with their bioactive compounds, exhibit synergistic effects when combined with three antiviral drugs, following a ‘multi-component, multi-target, multi-pathway’ mechanism. The potential pharmacokinetic HDIs of these TCM recipes with the anti-COVID-19 drugs are mostly *via* the regulation of CYP3A4, CES and/or P-gp. However, additional prospective and retrospective studies, as well as *in vivo* and *in vitro* experiments, are necessary to provide further elucidation on the underlying mechanisms responsible for the changes in plasma concentrations and the subsequent alteration of therapeutic response. Although COVID-19 primarily affects the respiratory system, patients with COVID-19 have shown evidence of microbial dysbiosis.

Preventing ACE2 from binding to SARS-CoV-2 is an effective approach to treat COVID-19. ACE2 plays an important role in maintaining intestinal microecology and intestinal immune regulation. Microbiota and its metabolites may also affect or modulate ACE2 expression. Although no interactions between gut microbiota and anti-COVID-19 drugs have been reported, numerous studies have demonstrated that a bidirectional regulatory relationship between TCM formulae and the gut microbiota. Thus, future studies should focus on the effect of TCM recipes and the anti-COVID-19 drugs on microbiota, which is probably a pathway mediating HDIs between TCM formulae and anti-COVID-19 drugs. Finally, for the wide use of the TCM formulae and the globally available of the anti-COVID-19 drugs, public health authorities should consider well characterizing these HDIs, creating an HDI checklist for these drugs, and raising awareness and better understanding of HDIs in order to maximize clinical outcomes and minimize adverse and toxic effects against COVID-19.

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Author contributions

Huichang Bi, Ling Ye conceived and designed the project. Ye Ling, Shicheng Fan, Pengfei Zhao, Chenghua Wu, Menghua Liu, Shuang Hu, Peng Wang, Hongyu Wang wrote the manuscript. Huichang Bi, Ling Ye and Shicheng Fan revised the manuscript.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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