## Comparing the Four and Six Levels

Comparing the Four Levels (卫气营血 Wèi Qì Yíng Xuè) and the Six Levels (六经 Liù Jīng) systems provides important insight into how Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) understands the progression of febrile diseases caused by Warm (Heat) pathogens vs. Cold pathogens. These two systems stem from different historical periods and conceptual frameworks, but they share the purpose of tracking disease progression from exterior to interior, and from mild to severe stages.

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| Aspect | Six Levels (六经) | Four Levels (四分) |
|  | Cold disease | Warm Disease |
| Source | *Shāng Hán Lùn* (Treatise on Cold Damage, Zhang Zhongjing, Han dynasty) | *Wēn Bìng Tiáo Biàn* (Treatise on Warm Diseases, Ye Tian Shi, Qing dynasty) |
| Pathogen Type | Cold invasion (Cold Damage – 伤寒) | Heat invasion (Warm Disease – 温病) |
| Mode of Invasion | Skin → Channels → Organs (Zang-Fu via meridians) | Mouth/nose → Lung → Blood and deeper levels |
| Focus | Depth, strength of Cold, transformation pattern | Depth, intensity of Heat, and Yin damage |
| Priority | Preserve Yang, expel Cold | Clear Heat, preserve Yin |
| Usage | Acute exogenous febrile illness (Cold-induced) | Febrile diseases with rapid onset, Heat (e.g. epidemics) |
| Disease Type | Cold invasion (Shang Han 伤寒) | Warm invasion (Wen Bing 温病) |
| Entry Route | Skin, meridians | Mouth/nose → Lung |
| Pathogen Nature | Cold → transforms to Heat or stagnation | Heat → consumes Yin, invades Blood |
| Primary Focus | Protect Yang Qi | Preserve Yin Fluids |
| Depth of progression | Surface (Tai Yang) → deepest (Jue Yin) | Surface (Wei) → deepest (Xue) |
| Zang-Fu Organ Focus | Channels + Zang-Fu | Zang-Fu and levels of Qi/Yin/Blood |
| Typical Diseases | Influenza, Cold, Wind-Cold, rheumatic fever | Febrile viral illnesses, epidemics (Dengue, COVID-19) |
| Shen (mind) involvement | Late stage only (e.g., Shao Yin Heat) | Early in Ying/Xue levels (delirium, insomnia) |
| Treatment Emphasis | Expel Cold, harmonize, tonify Yang | Clear Heat, nourish Yin, cool Blood |

Structural Comparison: Level by Level

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| Six Levels (Cold Disease) | Characteristics | Rough Equivalent in Four Levels | Characteristics of Equivalent |
| Tai Yang (Greater Yang) | Exterior Cold, chills > fever, no sweat | Wei Level | Wind-Heat invasion, fever > chills, slight sweating |
| Yang Ming (Bright Yang) | Full Interior Heat (4 Bigs) | Qi Level | Strong Heat in Lung, ST, Intestines, etc. |
| Shao Yang (Lesser Yang) | Half-Exterior/Interior, alt. chills/fever | Transitional — not directly matched | Pivot stage; alternating signs, like GB Heat |
| Tai Yin (Greater Yin) | SP Yang Deficiency, Cold-Damp | Later stage of Qi/Ying Level | Damp-Heat in ST/SP or Yin Fluid depletion |
| Shao Yin (Lesser Yin) | KI/HT Yang or Yin Deficiency | Ying/Xue Level | Yin damage with Heat disturbing Shen or Blood |
| Jue Yin (Terminal Yin) | Collapse of Yin & Yang, mixed Heat/Cold | Deepest Xue Level | Extreme Heat in Blood → bleeding, convulsions |

In practice, both models are valuable. Use the Six Levels when the disease clearly started from Cold exposure (e.g. winter flu, joint pain from Cold-Damp, lingering chills). Use the Four Levels in modern febrile conditions, especially when there is high fever, rapid onset, heat signs (red tongue, dry mouth, agitation, bleeding), rash, neurological involvement (Ying/Xue level). Often, a combined approach is used: for example, Wind-Cold transforming into Interior Heat, or Damp-Heat lingering in Qi level.

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| Six Levels | Four Levels |
| Cold | Heat |
| Tai Yang (Wind-Cold) | Wei Level (Wind-Heat) |
| Yang Ming (ST/LI Heat) | Qi Level (Interior Heat) |
| Shao Yang (Pivot) | Transitional (GB/LV Heat) |
| Tai Yin (SP Cold-Damp) | Qi/Ying Level (Damp-Heat) |
| Shao Yin (HT/KI Yin Xu) | Ying Level (Yin Heat + Shen) |
| Jue Yin (Collapse) | Xue Level (Bleeding, Heat in Blood) |