

For those of you who are poets at heart, there truly is a Chinese medical text for you. A Heart Approach to Gynecology: Essentials in Verse, Fu Ke Xin Fa Yao, is a Qing dynasty text that is not only written in verse for easier memorization but a very useful compilation of information on gynecology and obstetrics for modern day readers. It is translated by Shen Yu who uses it currently in practice. Each section begins with the Chinese text and pinyin with the English translation following.

A Heart Approach to Gynecology: Essentials in Verse is a significant text in its historical context. This English version is the translation of chapters 40 to 44 of The Golden Mirror of Orthodox Medicine, Yi Zong Jin Jian compiled in 1742. The Golden Mirror itself was gathered together on orders of the emperor Qian Long to both rectify and clarify earlier classical medical texts. The Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon, Huang Di Nei Jing, The Treatise on Cold Damage, Shang Han Lun and The Essentials of the Golden Coffer, Jin Gui Yao Lue, serve as the basis for much of our foundations in Chinese medicine. However, the original manuscripts were not always complete. Commentaries proliferated throughout history along with attempts to reorganize the texts. This added confusion to the proper interpretation and transmission of the original intent of the authors. It is especially true of the Shang Han Lun and Jin Gui Yao Lue which were written and copied onto bamboo strips and damaged by insects over time. The Golden Mirror of Orthodox Medicine was an attempt to gather all of the known medical texts and create a consistent presentation of the practice of Chinese medicine from herbal formulas to acupuncture and from diseases ranging from pediatrics to external disorders.

What we have here in A Heart Approach to Gynecology: Essentials in Verse is a text widely used by Chinese physicians in the Qing dynasty. It is a “heart approach” in that it is written in verse for easy memorization. The “heart approach” is a concept in which we take it to heart in the English sense and mull it over. This is a Confucian idea where mastery comes diligent reflection. Also, the verses allow for quick reference, and the annotations help to clarify the meaning. The original text, The Golden Mirror, attempts to remain true to the Yin / Yang principles of the Shang Han Lun and doctrines in the Nei Jing. A Heart Approach to Gynecology: Essentials in Verse helps to clarify important commentaries from other important physicians. For example, Zhu Dan Xi advises that women only need “great supplementation” after giving birth. This is countered by another great master during the Jin Yuan period, Zhang Zi He, who counsels not to treat all postpartum diseases as insufficiency. A Heart Approach to Gynecology: Essentials in Verse advises the physician to take all into consideration and check for the physical form, signs and pulse to make the correct diagnosis.

Practically, the text is organized under menstrual disorders, fertility, ante- and postpartum disorders, breast and genital diseases and miscellaneous disorders. It can be referenced quickly for individual cases and studied in-depth to gain insight into the range of issues regarding gynecology. A Heart Approach to Gynecology: Essentials in Verse covers a wide range of disorders such as:

Irregular Periods: Early, Late, Scant, or Excessive
Abdominal Pain during Menstruation

Menstruation after Menopause
Treatments of Pregnancy Swelling
Treatments of Retention of Lochia
Treatments for Gushing Breast Milk
Treatments for Genital Pain
Treatments for Heel Pain

The emphasis here is first on regulating menstruation. It rests solidly on the Chinese medical advice to pay particular attention to menstruation as a measure of a woman's overall health.

There is even some very interesting advice on choosing a midwife, fright birth, failure of the interlocking bones to open and labor.

“For failure of the interlocking bones to open, you must carefully ascertain [the cause]:

It is either due to insufficiency or the first childbirth.

Bone-Opening [Powder] is appropriate, for it frees yin qi:

Hand-of-Buddha [plus] tortoise shell and ashes of woman's hair.

If the cause is insufficiency, adding ginseng makes a miraculous result.

One dose will cause the bones to open immediately.”

This section gives advice on using kai gu san, Bone-Opening Powder, and fo shou wan, Hand-of-Buddha Powder plus tortoise shell, to women to allow the pelvic bones to open before giving birth. Ginseng, ren shen, can be added if there is qi and blood vacuity.

In addition, there is a useful section outlining the various reasons for menstrual disorders. It covers external causes due to weather, internal causes such as the seven affects and neutral causes like exhaustion from too many births. The section on the use of Four Agents Decoction, si wu tang, shows practically how to add in two Shang Han Lun formulas if there is an exterior pathogen. It reveals the correct usage of a wide range of formulas available to physicians at that time. There is even a section on the “pregnancy pulse.” It distinguishes between pulse qualities to help the physician in determining how far along was the pregnancy.

A Heart Approach to Gynecology: Essentials in Verse is both a historical glimpse into an important era in Chinese medicine and a very useful guide for us today. The classical formulas are instructive for modern day use. Each section contains timeless wisdom in a concise yet practical way. It will be an important classic and reference for us practicing Chinese medicine.