

Pathomechanisms of the Heart by Yan Shi Lin and Li Zheng Hua offers Western readers a unique view into an in-depth approach to how traditional Chinese medicine discusses the diagnosis of the heart organ. The discussion includes both repletion and vacuity patterns, their pathomechanisms, treatment strategies and formulas. Examples of the list of patterns discussed range from Phlegm Obstructing the Heart and Blood Stasis in the Heart to Lack of Movement in the Heart Vessels due to vacuity and Loss of Enrichment and Nourishment due to yin vacuity. A representative formula given in the text for the last condition would be Tian Wang Bu Xin Dan, the Celestial Emperor Heart Supplementing Elixir. However, Pathomechanisms of the Heart is not just an introductory text for students. It has some unique features that should draw the interest of practicing professionals.

What sets this book apart is how the authors have included the ancient Chinese medical references. This gives the reader a strong idea of the historical background to our medicine. As we continue to come into our own as a profession in this country, having an idea of the origins of our medicine is becoming increasingly important. The authors in chapter give us an interesting connection between heart qi and lung qi. They quote the Ling Shu, the Magical Pivot, as saying:

“When heart qi is tense, the airways are constrained. Constraint is inhibiting, so [the patient] sighs in order to stretch out.” p. 112

In another section on repletion conditions, the authors pull out a quote dealing with the progression of warm disease. They take this from the text, Wen Re Jing Wei, Warp and Weft of Warm Heat.

“When warm evil is contracted in the upper body, it first invades the lungs before passing abnormally to the pericardium.” p. 62

Another unique aspect to this book is the inclusion of the original Chinese text. As we move forward in our profession, this type of resource will be invaluable both as a teaching aid and as a reference. Chinese with its character driven written language reveals layers of meaning that often do not translate well into English. Take for example shén translated as spirit. The Chinese concept corresponds more to the idea of mind and that which gives us consciousness during the day. It also manifests in the physical complexion, eyes and overall physical presence of the person. Our idea of spirit corresponds at times to the idea of guǐ or ghosts in Chinese. Being able to distinguish between these concepts is key in advancing our knowledge of Chinese medical texts.

The format of the book is straight forward. Each chapter begins with an introduction, continues with a discussion of the patterns and the manifesting signs and symptoms and provides formulas for these patterns. A literature review of the classical texts follows. At the end of each chapter, the authors provide a summary of the conditions and possible further progressions of disease.

Pathomechanisms of the Heart is a book that should interest both the seasoned practitioner as well as students. The format of the book makes the information accessible for those looking for individual patterns and for the classical references. This book is one of a series of five dealing with the major yin organs in traditional Chinese medicine. It is a welcome addition to our traditional medical literature in our country.

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