

# The poetry of constipation



**By Mark Wright**

In the interests of helping medical practitioners remember medical teachings, classical Chinese medical texts were sometimes written in the form of mnemonic verse coupled with detailed commentaries (*zhu* 註). One classical text in which this form can be found is the *Yi Zong Jin Jian* 醫宗金鑒 (Medical Ancestry's Golden Mirror) by Wu Qian 吳謙 published in 1742.

THE GOLDEN MIRROR IS AN EXTENSIVE text. In some sections, for example those in which it subjects the Han dynasty writings of the *Shang Han Lun* 傷寒論 (Discussion of Injury by Cold) and *Jin Gui Yao Lue* 金匱要略 (Golden Cabinet of Essential Plans) to detailed analysis and discussion, the system of mnemonic verse with coupled commentary is not used, while in other sections, such as the *Si Zhen Xin Fa* 四診心法 (The Four Diagnoses' Core Methods), the *Za Bing Xin Fa* 雜病心法 (Miscellaneous Diseases' Core Methods) and the *Fu Ke Xin Fa* 婦科心法 (Gynaecology's Core Methods), it is. Moreover, the form of verse

is not always the same: the *Si Zhen Xin Fa* has four lines per verse, with four Chinese characters per line, while the *Za Bing Xin Fa* and *Fu Ke Xin Fa*, although still having four lines per verse, have seven characters per line – a form referred to as septasyllabic quatrains.

The septasyllabic quatrain is probably most closely associated with the Tang dynasty, the halcyon days of Chinese poetry, a time in which famous poets such as Li Bai 李白, Wang Wei 王維 and Meng Haoran 孟浩然, wrote of the blossom of winter plum trees, the gentle light of the silvering moon and mists in autumn mountains. Given the fundamentally morbid subject matter on which medical authors had to write, it is not surprising that their mnemonic poems were not especially beautiful, the system of mnemonic verse with coupled commentary being used only as a vehicle of convenience. Notwithstanding this general lack of poetic beauty, there are incidences of the use of Chinese characters in a fashion more “poetic” than was strictly necessary, so it may be that some authors expended a little effort in this regard where possible. The use of the character *Zao* 燥, the usual meaning of which is “aridity”, in

the following discussion seems to fall into this category.

The rhythm in reading each septasyllabic line of a quatrain is 1, 2 – 1, 2 – 1, 2, 3, with a slightly longer pause at the hyphen. That is to say, the first four characters are read as two pairs, and the final three as a triplet. Hence, from *Line 1*, below, *Rè Zào – Yáng Jié – Néng Shí Shù*. Being aware of this can help in the interpretation of meaning, because one knows which characters are conceptually associated.

In this paper, the treatise on the differentiation and treatment of constipation as presented in the *Za Bing Xin Fa* (Miscellaneous Diseases' Core Methods) section of Wu Qian's "Golden Mirror" is examined. The source text devotes two septasyllabic quatrains to differentiation and two, likewise, to treatment.

The following discussion adheres to that approach in presenting, first, the section on differentiation and, second, that on treatment. Since the focus of this paper is on the use of mnemonic verse in medical texts rather than on the treatment of constipation in Chinese medicine *per se*, then

whereas the mnemonic verses, as provided in the original, are presented as precise literal translations, the original "commentaries" upon them are not formally translated but are presented as an informal, general discussion of the meaning of the verses, based around the commentaries.

#### Part I

[Note: In the following, where a particular character in the Chinese text is referred to, its location is noted in the form "L.C" in which L is the line and C is the character number in that line. Hence, "2.1" is *Line 2, Character 1* and is the character *Han* 寒.]

The text is entitled *Da Bian Zao Jie* 大便燥結, which immediately attracts attention, because whereas *Da Bian* 大便 means "stool"; and *Jie* 結 means "knotting" or "binding" (also, "knotted" or "bound"), *Zao* 燥 means "dry" or "arid"; it contains the "fire" radical *Huo* 火 to the left, indicating heat, and the phonetic indicator *Zao* 燥 to the right. On the face of it, this section is about "faecal dry binding"; yet the discussion includes one type of constipation caused by heat,

#### Part I: *Da Bian Zao Jie Zong Gua* 大便燥結總括 (Stool Barren Binding Summed-up)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Literal translation
1	熱	燥	陽	結	能	食	數	
	<i>Rè</i>	<i>Zào</i>	<i>Yáng</i>	<i>Jié</i>	<i>Néng</i>	<i>Shí</i>	<i>Shù</i>	heat barrenness yang bind can eat fast
2	寒	燥	陰	結	不	食	遲	
	<i>Hán</i>	<i>Zào</i>	<i>Yīn</i>	<i>Jié</i>	<i>Bù</i>	<i>Shí</i>	<i>Chí</i>	cold barrenness yin bind not eat slow
3	實	燥	食	積	熱	結	胃	
	<i>Shí</i>	<i>Zào</i>	<i>Shí</i>	<i>Jī</i>	<i>Rè</i>	<i>Jié</i>	<i>Wèi</i>	replete barrenness food substantial-mass heat bind stomach
4	食	少	先	鞭	後	澀	脾	
	<i>Shí</i>	<i>Shǎo</i>	<i>Xiān</i>	<i>Piàn</i>	<i>Hòu</i>	<i>Táng</i>	<i>Pí</i>	food little first hard after sticky Spleen
5	氣	燥	阻	隔	不	降	下	
	<i>Qì</i>	<i>Zào</i>	<i>Zǔ</i>	<i>Gé</i>	<i>Bú</i>	<i>Jiàng</i>	<i>Xià</i>	qi barrenness obstruct diaphragm not descend down
6	血	燥	乾	枯	老	病	虛	
	<i>Xuè</i>	<i>Zào</i>	<i>Gān</i>	<i>Kū</i>	<i>Lǎo</i>	<i>Bìng</i>	<i>Xū</i>	Blood barrenness dry withered old ill depleted
7	風	燥	久	患	風	家	候	
	<i>Fēng</i>	<i>Zào</i>	<i>Jiǔ</i>	<i>Huàn</i>	<i>Fēng</i>	<i>Jiā</i>	<i>Hòu</i>	wind barrenness chronic suffer wind family indication
8	直	腸	結	鞭	導	之	宜	
	<i>Zhí</i>	<i>Cháng</i>	<i>Jié</i>	<i>Piàn</i>	<i>Dǎo</i>	<i>Zhī</i>	<i>Yí</i>	straight bowel bind hard lead it appropriate

Re 熱 (1.1), and heat can of course result in “dryness”; but one type caused by cold, Han 寒 (2.1), and another involving a “sticky” Tang 滯 stool (4.6), which can hardly be said to be “dry” or “arid”. Moreover, one of the types of constipation discussed is said to result from Blood deficiency leading to a state of “dryness”, *Gan Ku* 乾枯 (6.3 and 6.4), and both *Gan* and *Ku* most certainly do mean “dryness” in some degree.

With this in mind, one must ask whether, in using *Zao*, Wu Qian really did mean dryness/aridity or was perhaps making a poetic allusion to that which might be associated with aridity, namely “barrenness” or “unproductiveness”. It seems likely that he is not to be taken literally here, but to be taken as alluding, poetically, to “barrenness”.

*Line 1: Heat barrenness:* When excess heat is causing constipation, the disease falls into the category of “yang binding”, the patient has a good appetite and a fast pulse. The commentary mentions that the pulse is also floating and powerful (*Fu You Li* 浮有力), and notes that patients with a heat syndrome of the three yang (*San Yang Re Zheng* 三陽熱證) have the same presentation.

*Line 2: Cold barrenness:* When excess cold is causing constipation, the disease falls into the category of “yin binding”, the patient has no appetite and a slow pulse. The commentary mentions that the pulse is also deep and powerful (*Chen You Li* 沉有力). The pulse is powerful because the condition results from an attack of excess, external cold, not from deficiency of yang. The commentary notes that patients with a cold syndrome of the three yin (*San Yin Han Zheng* 三陰寒證) have the same presentation.

*Line 3: Repletion barrenness:* In the case of repletion barrenness, the cause is food accumulating in the Stomach where it generates heat; it is this heat that binds the stool. The commentary notes that patients with abdominal fullness and pain (*Fu Man Tong* 腹滿痛) have the same presentation.

*Line 4: (Depletion barrenness)* Where a patient has only a small appetite and bowel

movements characterised by producing first a hard stool and later a sticky one, this is due to Spleen qi deficiency. Although the line of verse itself does not apply any named type of “barrenness” to this description of symptoms and causation, the commentary commences with the term *Xu Zao* 虛燥 (depletion barrenness), thereby immediately clarifying the position. The commentary notes that patients with qi deficiency leading to abdominal food retention (*Shao Qi Fu Su* 少氣腹縮) have the same presentation.

*Line 5: Qi barrenness:* In the case of constipation due to qi barrenness, the qi is obstructed at the diaphragm and fails to descend. The commentary notes that patients with oesophageal constriction and regurgitation (*Ye Ge Fan Wei* 噎膈反胃) have the same presentation.

*Line 6: Blood barrenness:* In the case of constipation due to Blood barrenness, there is dryness (*Gan* 乾) and witheredness (*Ku* 枯), a condition of depletion arising from a chronic ailment. The use of the character *Ku* 枯 is particularly emphatic as regards the deep-seated nature of the “dryness”. The character is rather poetic in its imagery: *Mu* 木, on the left, is the radical for wood while *Gu* 古, on the right, not only conveys the phonetic “ku”, but also means “old”. The image is one of withered, desiccated old driftwood completely sucked dry of moisture.

*Line 7: Wind barrenness:* In this case, the constipation arises in long-time sufferers of wind and it is an indicator of the “wind family” of disorders.

*Line 8:* When the rectum is bound with a hard stool, it is appropriate to lead it out directly by use of an enema. The commentary is entirely graphic about this situation, noting that the condition arises when there is large, hard, dry excrement binding in the anus making it difficult to expel. This is not constipation due to exogenous attacks of heat or cold, or due to endogenous deficiency of blood leading to dryness, or to deficient Spleen qi causing impaired “transportation” of food through the intestines, but is a local problem of compacted stool.



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■ Mark Wright trained in Taiwan where he graduated with a Diploma of Oriental Medicine in 1986. He is a Fellow of The Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine (FRCHM) and a Member of the British Acupuncture Council (MBACC). He is the author of *An Introduction to Chinese Herbal Medicine: with particular reference to the Chinese Umbelliferae*, Greenbank Publications.

## Part II

Whereas the first pair of quatrains and their respective commentaries reveal a satisfying consistency, that cannot be said of this second pair, in which there are a number of incongruities. It is immediately conspicuous that while the first section “sums up *Zao Jie*”, in the second section, the text addresses the treatment of *Jie Zao*, no explanation is offered; one can only assume that the two terms are interchangeable, though it is preferable not to have to make such assumptions.

[Note: In the following, where the verse mentions herb names, the characters are not translated, as that would bring an unnecessary obfuscation of meaning. For example, *Da Huang* 大黃 (11.1 and 11.2) literally means “big yellow” but is the classical name of the root and rhizome of *Rheum Palmatum*.]

With this second pair of quatrains, the overall structure of the treatise falls apart somewhat. There is an expectation that the lines in the two quatrains concerning treatment should be in close correspondence with those concerning differentiation, as used in *Part I*, but that is not the case.

*Line 9*: (No commentary is given for this

line of verse). The text of the verse indicates that in cases of *Re Shi* 熱實 (heat repletion), the Spleen is constrained and it is appropriate to treat the condition with the three *Cheng Qi Tang* prescriptions; namely, *Da Cheng Qi Tang* 大承氣湯, *Xiao Cheng Qi Tang* 小承氣湯 and *Tiao Wei Cheng Qi Tang* 調胃承氣湯. It seems unnecessary to give the contents of these formulas here, as they are so well known and widely documented. Exactly what is meant by *Re Shi* is not stated. *Part I* describes constipation caused by both *Re Zao* 熱燥 (heat barrenness) and *Shi Zao* 實燥 (repletion barrenness), but not by *Re Shi*. Further, Part II offers no suggestions for treatment of either *Re Zao* or *Shi Zao*. From the context, and with a knowledge of Chinese herbal medicine, it might be concluded that *Line 9* means that both *Re* and *Shi* types of constipation can be treated with the *San Cheng Qi* formulas. However, since there is no commentary, the reader of the text is left uncertain.

*Line 10*: The line indicates treatment for *Han Shi* 寒實 (cold repletion). Again, there is a lack of correspondence with the differentiation in *Part I*, which gives, as its second type of constipation, *Han Zao* 寒燥 (cold barrenness); the reader can only assume that these two terms refer to the same con-

Part II: **Jie Zao Zhi Fa** 結燥治法 (Binding Barrenness Treatment Methods)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Literal translation
9	熱	實	脾	約	三	承	氣	
	<i>Ré</i>	<i>Shí</i>	<i>Pí</i>	<i>Yūe</i>	<i>Sān</i>	<i>Chéng</i>	<i>Qì</i>	heat repletion Spleen constrained three receive Qi
10	寒	實	備	急	共	溫	脾	
	<i>Hán</i>	<i>Shí</i>	<i>Bèi</i>	<i>Jí</i>	<i>Gòng</i>	<i>Wēn</i>	<i>Pí</i>	cold repletion essential emergency same warm Spleen
11	大	黃	薑	附	桂	草	朴	
	<i>Dà</i>	<i>Huáng</i>	<i>Jiāng</i>	<i>Fù</i>	<i>Guì</i>	<i>Cǎo</i>	<i>Pò</i>	<i>Da Huang Jiang Fu Gui Cao Po</i>
12	寒	虛	疏	半	握	藥	醫	
	<i>Hán</i>	<i>Xū</i>	<i>Liú</i>	<i>Bàn</i>	<i>Wò</i>	<i>Yào</i>	<i>Yī</i>	cold depletion Liu Ban grasping herb treatment
13	虛	燥	益	氣	稍	黃	入	
	<i>Xū</i>	<i>Zào</i>	<i>Yì</i>	<i>Qì</i>	<i>Xiǎo</i>	<i>Huáng</i>	<i>Rù</i>	depletion barrenness augment qi <i>Xiao Huang</i> put-in
14	血	燥	潤	腸	與	更	衣	
	<i>Xuè</i>	<i>Zào</i>	<i>Rùn</i>	<i>Cháng</i>	<i>Yǔ</i>	<i>Gēng</i>	<i>Yī</i>	Blood barrenness moisten intestines and change clothes
15	氣	燥	四	磨	參	利	膈	
	<i>Qì</i>	<i>Zào</i>	<i>Sì</i>	<i>Mò</i>	<i>Shēn</i>	<i>Lì</i>	<i>Gé</i>	Qi barrenness four grounds <i>Shen</i> benefit diaphragm
16	風	燥	搜	風	順	氣	宜	



dition. The remainder of *Line 10* has “*Bei Ji Gong Wen Pi*”. *Bei Ji* is a shorthand reference to the *Bei Ji Qian Jin Yao Fang* 備急千金要方 (*Essential Prescriptions for Emergencies Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold*) of Sun Si-miao 孫思邈 (ca. 652 AD). *Wen Pi* 溫脾 (warm the Spleen) indicates the prescription *Wen Pi Tang* 溫脾湯 (Warm the Spleen Decoction). *Gong* 共 means “same”. The line indicates that, in cases of cold repletion, the same “*Wen Pi*” as occurs in the “*Bei Ji*” should be used. A commentary is provided; however, the text in the commentary does not mention “*Han Shi*” (10.1 and 10.2), and it is only because both the verse and commentary mention *Wen Pi Tang* that the reader is able to realise with certainty to which line of verse the commentary refers.

*Line 11*: The line lists, in shorthand form, the ingredients of *Wen Pi Tang*. The commentary gives their names in full. This is important, as *Jiang* 薑 (rhizome of *Zingiber officinale*) could be *Sheng Jiang* 生薑 (the fresh rhizome) or *Gan Jiang* 乾薑 (the dried rhizome). Similarly, *Gui* 桂, a reference to the plant *Cinnamomum cassia*, could mean *Rou Gui* 肉桂 (bark of the tree) or *Gui Zhi* 桂枝 (twigs of the tree). The first listed ingredient is *Da Huang* (Rhei Radix et Rhizoma). *Fu* 附 (11.4) refers to *Fu Zi* 附子 (Aconiti Radix). *Cao* 草 (11.6) indicates *Gan Cao* 甘草 (Glycyrrhizae Radix). *Po* 朴 refers to *Hou Po* 厚朴 (Magnolia officinalis Cortex).

*Line 12*: This line comes as a surprise, because it concerns constipation of the type *Han Xu* 寒虛 (cold of depletion), yet that condition is not mentioned in *Part I*. Hence, there is nothing in the treatise to instruct its reader as regards the symptomatic presentation to which the treatment described in *Line 12* should be applied. Nonetheless, the commentary has much to say on the two methods (*Liu Ban* 硫半 and *Wo Yao* 握藥) mentioned.

■ *Liu Ban* 硫半 refers to *Liu Ban Wan* 硫半丸. The name alludes to the constituents of the formula; namely *Liu Huang* 硫黃 (Sulfur) and *Ban Xia* 半夏 (Pinelliae Rhizoma) which are formed into a pill. The quantities of these materials are not mentioned.

■ The *Wo Yao* 握藥 (literally “grasping

herb”) method is described as follows. Take five *fen* 分 (approx. 1.56 g) each of: *Ba Dou Ren* 巴豆仁 (Crotonis Semen), *Gan Jiang* 乾薑 (Zingiberis Rhizoma), *Jiu Zi* 韭子 (Allii tuberosi Semen), *Gao Liang Jiang* 高良薑 (Alpiniae officinarum Rhizoma), *Liu Huang* 硫黃 (Sulfur), *Gan Sui* 甘遂 (Kansui Radix), *Bing Lang* 檳榔 (Arecae Semen). Grind them equally together. Drink the aggregated amount down divided as two pills. Then, first wash the hands with *Hua Jiao Tang* 花椒 (decoction of pericarp of *Zanthoxylum bungeanum*), before smearing the palms of the hands with sesame oil and clenching the hands. The instruction is then to wait a little time until the bowels move. At the point one desires the bowel-emptying action to stop, one should wash one’s hands in cold water.

It should be borne in mind that *Gan Sui* (Kansui Radix) and *Ba Dou* (Crotonis Semen) are potent purgatives, both potentially very poisonous, so must be used with great care. *Bing Lang* (Arecae Semen) strongly moves the qi and so supports the purging action of these first two herbs in evacuating retained stool. The remaining herbs are variously warming to the Spleen and restorative to the yang, thereby treating the underlying cause of the problem.

The final character (12.7) *Yi* 醫 usually means “medicine” as in *Yi Sheng* 醫生 (medical practitioner) or *Yi Xue* 醫學 (the study of medicine) or *Zhong Yi* 中醫 (Chinese medicine). However, it can mean “treatment” and that is obviously its meaning here.

*Line 13*: For the first time in this second pair of quatrains, the opening characters, *Xu Zao* 虛燥 (depletion barrenness), correspond to a condition mentioned in *Part I* (see *Line 4*). The text indicates that depletion barrenness requires augmentation of the qi in the presence of *Xiao* 硝 and *Huang* 黃. The commentary clarifies that what is needed to remedy the problem is *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* 補中益氣湯 (Repair the Middle and Augment the Qi Decoction) with an addition of *Pu Xiao* 朴硝 (Natri Sulfas – mirabilite, i.e. sodium sulphate decahydrate) and *Da Huang* 大黃 (Rhei Radix et Rhizoma). *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang* is a classical



With this second pair of quatrains, the overall structure of the treatise falls apart somewhat.

formula for tonifying the Spleen qi, meanwhile, *Da Huang* expels the stool and *Pu Xiao* softens hardness of the stool.

A weak Spleen fails to transport food-stuffs properly; this can manifest as a lack of “push” by the bowel, so that digestate accumulates and generates heat, which binds the stool. The description in *Line 4* of the stool first being hard and then being sticky reflects this story: the digestate that has not been in the body for so long is higher up the digestive tract, has not been adequately transformed by the weak Spleen and so is still somewhat soft and sticky. In contrast, the digestate that has failed to be expelled from the body in a timely manner is subject to the heat its retention generates and so the portion of the stool further down the digestive tract becomes hard.

*Line 14*: This line corresponds by specific name, *Xue Zao* 血燥 (blood barrenness), to the type of constipation described in *Line 6*. The commentary explains that *Run Chang Wan* 潤腸丸 (Moisten the Intestines Pill) should be used in concert with *Geng Yi Wan* 更衣丸 (Change the Clothing Pill). The constituents of these two pills are listed, as follows.

■ **Run Chang Wan**: *Dang Gui* 當歸 (Angelicae sinensis Radix), *Sheng Di* 生地 (Rehmanniae Radix), *Zhi Ke* 枳殼 (Aurantii Fructus), *Tao Ren* 桃仁 (Persicae Semen), *Huo Ma Ren* 火麻仁 (Cannabis Semen). Equal amounts of each are to be taken and ground together, before mixing into honey pills. The pills are to be taken before food or drink.

■ **Geng Yi Wan**: *Sheng Lu Hui* 生蘆薈 (fresh juice of Aloe), *Zhu Sha* 硃砂 (Cinnabaris). Equal amounts are to be ground together and made into pills to be taken with liquor.

The combined use of these two formulas merits comment. *Run Chang Wan*, by itself, is very gentle in its effect so may take time to work. Its role is more focused upon restoring deficiencies of Blood and fluids that have arisen during the course of protracted illnesses. Conversely, *Geng Yi Wan* (Change the Clothing Pill), as the name suggests, tends to be fairly decisive in

its effects, and to merit a change of clothing. The strategy used here is much reminiscent of the strategies described in *Lines 12* and *13*: one element of treatment is aimed at a decisive resolution of any constipation, while another element is aimed at fixing the underlying causative phenomenon.

*Line 15*: The text is again straight-forward and corresponds by name, *Qi Zao* 氣燥 (qi barrenness) to the condition described in *Line 5*. The text indicates that the formulas *Si Mo Tang* 四磨湯 (Four Grounds Decoction) and *Shen Li Ge Wan* 參利膈丸 (*Ren Shen* Benefit the Diaphragm Pill) are appropriate. It lists the constituents of *Si Mo Tang*, but not those of *Shen Li Ge Wan*.

■ **Si Mo Tang**: *Ren Shen* 人參 (*Ginseng Radix*), *Wu Yao* 烏藥 (*Linderae Radix*), *Chen Xiang* 沉香 (*Aquilariae Lignum resinatum*), *Bing Lang* 檳榔 (*Arecae Semen*).

Since *Line 5* states that this type of constipation is due to qi obstructing the diaphragm and failing to descend, then it is no surprise to see a predominance of qi-moving herbs in this suggested formula.

*Line 16*: The line opens with the characters *Feng Zao* 風燥 (wind barrenness) and clearly corresponds to *Line 7* of the treatise. The verse instructs that where there is wind barrenness, it is appropriate to search out the wind and smooth the qi. The commentary states that one should achieve this by means of *Sou Feng Shun Qi Wan* 搜風順氣丸 (Search out the Wind and Smooth the Qi Pill), but does not state the constituents of that pill.

There is no indication as to what might be used for the enema suggested in *Line 8*.

#### Discussion and conclusion

What is evident from these verses is that there appears to be no intention to make them elegant or artistic.

#### Rhyme

There is often no rhyme between final syllables, or where there is, it is chaotic. For example, in *Part II*, all of lines 9, 10, 12, 14, 16 end with the sound “ee”, as in “qi”, but none

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Zhang Zhong-Jing 張仲景, ca. 200 AD (Eastern Han dynasty), *Shang Han Lun* 傷寒論 (Discussion of Injury by Cold).

Wu Qian 吳謙, 1742 (Qing dynasty), *Yi Zong Jin Jian* 醫宗金鑑 (Medical Ancestry's Golden Mirror).

of the other line endings has any rhyming correspondence at all, and then in *Part I*, only lines 4 and 8 have any rhyming correspondence; these again rhyme with “ee”.

In fairness, Tang poetry did not necessarily always have rhyming end syllables. Sometimes, there were none at all, other times there would be half-rhymes, such as *jian* 間 (between) and *huan* 還 (return), and other times again full rhymes such as *zhong* 中 (within) and *hong* 紅 (red). On the other hand, when rhymes were used they were strategic and tasteful rather than chaotic.

### Scansion and rhythm

Although the lines of verse in this treatise do all have seven syllables, and thereby achieve a pleasing rhythm, the septasyllabic structure is often an unsubtle contrivance. In *Lines 1* and *2*, for example, in order to meet the requirement for seven characters, key elements of pulse characteristics (i.e. whether it is floating or sinking and with or without power) have had to be omitted and placed in the commentary. In contrast, in *Lines 8* and *16*, the character *Yi* 益 (appropriate) is entirely superfluous and merely makes up the numbers. The verses are nothing more than functional mnemonics with a pleasing septasyllabic rhythm.

### Correspondence between quatrains

In this particular treatise, which was not chosen for any special reason, there is generally a poor correspondence between the two quatrains on differentiation and those on treatment:

- Some strands do not match up at all. For example, in *Line 12*, a treatment approach is offered for *Han Xu* (cold of depletion), but this is not mentioned at all in *Part I*. Conversely, *Line 8* recommends an enema, but *Part II* provides no guidance on that procedure.
- Some strands match but are out of sequence. For example, in *Part I*, *Qi Zao* (qi barrenness), in *Line 5*, precedes *Xue Zao* (Blood barrenness), in *Line 6*, whereas in *Part II* they appear in the reverse sequence and over the sixth and seventh lines. This, admittedly, is a minor incongruity that by no means obfuscates understanding.
- The reader of the treatise is left uncertain as to whether the constipation types

described in *Lines 1* and *3*, *Re Zao* (heat barrenness) and *Shi Zao* (repletion barrenness) are intended to be treated with the *Cheng Qi Tang* methods mentioned in *Line 9*. Given the ease with which this might have been conveyed: *Re Zao Shi Zao San Cheng Qi* 熱燥實燥三承氣, and Wu Qian's failure to avail himself of such an opportunity, one is driven to suppose that this meaning was not his intention.

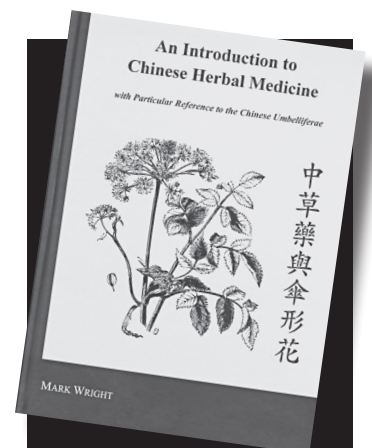
- The *Han Zao* (cold barrenness) of *Line 2* certainly appears to correspond to the *Han Shi* (cold repletion) of *Line 10*, in which case one might interpolate that the *Re Zao* (heat barrenness) of *Line 1* corresponds to the *Re Shi* (heat repletion) of *Line 9*; though if this is the case, the reader is left with no suggested treatment for the *Shi Zao* (repletion barrenness) of *Line 3*.

### Constituents of formulas

Although it seems reasonable not to list the constituents of the *Cheng Qi Tang* group of formulas or of *Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang*, as they are so well known and widely noted in herbal texts, it seems rather remiss not to list the herbs used in *Sou Feng Shun Qi Wan* (*Line 16*) and *Shen Li Ge Wan* (*Line 15*), especially given that the constituents of more widely known formulas, such as *Run Chang Wan* (*Line 14*) and *Wen Pi Tang* (*Line 11*), are provided.

### Are mnemonic verses helpful?

In fairness, and notwithstanding all of the criticisms levelled at forced scansion, lack of congruity between related sets of verses and lack of artistic rhyming, it does seem that as a pithy overview of a subject for a Chinese medical practitioner, the verses do “work”. One can see at a glance, in bite-sized phrases of not more than seven characters, the outline portrayal of the differentiation and then treatment of a particular type of health problem. One can then move from that bite-sized overview into a more detailed discussion. The fact that this particular treatise has irregularities, omissions and non-correspondences says more about the author of the verses than it does about the technique itself, and any judgment of the value of this approach should not be clouded by that point.



■ “A considerable and original publication. It is well placed to be the standard text for Chinese herb students in the West to learn some of the plant sciences relevant to studying the subject to a professional level, and perfectly fills a key gap in the market.”

– Charles Buck, Northern College of Acupuncture, review in the JTCM.

■ See ad on page 60 for more details on this text.