



Tidbits

from an experienced gynaecologist

In 1990-1991, while in Hangzhou, I had the opportunity to sit in clinic with the famous gynaecologist Qiu Xiao-Mei (1910–2001).

By Sharon Weizenbaum

I WAS PRESENTED WITH A COPY of her gynaecology text, *Qiu Xiao-Mei Fu Ke Lin Chuang Jing Yan Xuan*, (Selections from Qiu Xiao-Mei's Experience with Gynaecology) to study after I left. The only problem was, at that time I could not read Chinese! My study of the Chinese language began because I so wanted to know what that book said. It was definitely worth the effort.

Qiu Xiao-Mei Fu Ke Lin Chuang Jing Yan Xuan, (Selections from Qiu Xiao-Mei's Experience with Gynecology) is rich with Dr Qiu's experience and wisdom. I would like to share some tidbits that are especially interesting, useful and representative of her creative use of herbs and formulas.

It is typical of Chinese doctors to develop their own experiential formulas later in their careers. Dr Qiu devotes a section of her book to such formulas. Unlike many gynecology experts, Dr Qiu was also very experienced in obstetrics. One experiential formula of hers called *Bu Jue Tang* (Supplement Certainty Decoction) treats premature separation of the placenta from the uterine wall. Here is what she writes about this formula:

Bu Jue Tang

(Supplement Certainty Decoction):

Huang Qi 30g (Astragali Radix)

Ren Shen 9g (Ginseng Radix)

or

Dang Shen 24g (Codonopsis Radix)

Bai Ji Mo 6g (Bletillae Rhizoma Powder) (stir in)

Function: Consolidate qi, conserve blood, “expel the old to bring forth the new”, stop bleeding and engender flesh.

Principle use: Early detachment of the placenta

Explanation: This prescription contains *Huang Qi*, which has a warm quality and a sweet bland flavour. It is able to raise yang and supplement qi, as well as heal wounds and engender flesh. It is also able to absorb blood and stop bleeding, consolidating so that the bleeding spontaneously stops. *Ren Shen* or *Dang Shen* increases strength, supplements the middle and boosts the qi. *Bai Ji* is sticky and pasty, takes in and closes and repairs damage. Therefore this prescription is called Supplement Certainty Decoction. It has a very good effect for early detachment of the placenta.

I have not seen any other doctor write about this issue. Though I have not had the chance to use this formula in my own practice, I am glad to have it there in my pocket of tricks in case this issue comes up. Premature rupture of the placenta can lead to death of the baby and possibly the mother. In addition, Western allopathic medicine has nothing to offer except bed rest.

Another example of a respected physician's creative use of herbs is how Dr Qiu developed an expanded use of the herb *Mai Ya* (*Hordei Vulgaris Germinantus, Fructus*) in the treatment of various gynecology disorders. Steven Clavey, who also had a chance to study with Dr Qiu, writes “One of my lecturers in gynecology in China was Qiu

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Xiao-Mei, well known throughout Hangzhou and the Jiangnan area of China for her expertise in the use of herbs for gynecological problems. In one lecture she mentioned that she often used *Mai Ya* (*Hordei Vulgaris Germinatus, Fructus*) in the standard way (fried, 60–120g decocted and taken like tea) for reducing milk flow and breast discomfort in weaning but that she also extended this reasoning to apply it for breast lumps and distension, and again further for lumps in general such as ovarian cysts and even uterine fibroids. She would use 30 to 60g of *Mai Ya* included in a standard formula for such purpose, and found that in all of these cases she obtained better results.”¹

Mai Ya is included in another of Dr Qiu’s experiential formulas named *Ji Mai San* (*Tribulus* and *Germinated Barley Decoction*).

<i>Bai Ji Li</i>	9g (<i>Tribuli Fructus</i>)
<i>Ba Yue Zha</i>	9g (<i>Akebiae Fructus</i>)
<i>Mai Ya</i>	12g (<i>Hordei Fructus Germinatus</i>)
<i>Qing Pi</i>	3g (<i>Citri Reticulatae Viride Pericarpium</i>)
<i>Ju He</i>	3g (<i>Citri Reticulatae Semen</i>)
<i>Ju Luo</i>	3g (<i>Citri Reticulatae Vascularis</i>)
<i>Pu Gong Ying</i>	9g (<i>Taraxaci Herba</i>)

Function: Course the Liver, rectify the qi, disperse knots.

Principle use: Liver constraint breast lump, amenorrhea, painful menses and infertility.

Formula breakdown: *Bai Ji Li*, *Qing Pi*, *Ba Yue Zhi*, *Ju He* and *Ju Luo* all dredge the Liver and regulate the qi, resolve constraint and break down knotting. *Pu Gong Ying* softens and disperses knots. *Mai Ya* opens the Stomach and fortifies the Spleen. Altogether this formula dredges the Liver, regulates the qi and breaks down knotting.

Application: The Liver belongs to Wood and likes orderly reaching. The Liver values happiness and ease and fears constraint and knotting. Women easily develop constraint, which gives rise to Liver constraint and qi stasis. This causes many pathologies relating to menstruation, pregnancy, birth and development. This is why the ancients said “For women, the Liver is the Pre-Heaven.” This clearly means that there is a close relationship between the Liver and women’s physiology and pathology.

Ji Mai San is an experiential formula for Liver constraint leading to breast lumps, painful menstruation, amenorrhea and infertility. As long as the differentiation of patterns is precise the effect is outstanding.²

I have used this formula frequently in my own practice. The way I think of it that helps me know when it is appropriate is as follows: If a woman has fullness in the breasts manifesting as pain, swelling and/or lumps along with dysmenorrhea, amenorrhea, scanty or late menstruation or infertility, there is a blockage between the upper, the breasts, and the lower, the womb. The congestion above is preventing the blood from flowing downward. A key to this dynamic is the middle warmer Spleen and Stomach. Food and fluids are transformed in the Spleen and Stomach. The Stomach governs the descending. When there is blockage in the middle, there can be a failure to both transform the food and fluids into blood and to descend toward the womb. *Mai Ya*, by opening the Stomach, both unblocks and assists the descending of the Stomach. In addition, it diminishes the secretion of fluids into the ducts of the breast.

Dr Qiu also sometimes uses a unique method to write prescriptions in the clinical setting. Often, when we consider a prescription for our patients, we think of one formula that we may then modify by making additions and subtractions. Dr Qiu often does this but at times she will also combine two or three formulas. Sometimes she will add as few as two herbs of a formula and consider that she has included the essential components of the formula.

In the first case study below she used *Bo He* (*Menthaie Herba*) and *Chai Hu* (*Bupleuri Radix*) and, though she has not included any other herbs from the formula, she would, in the clinic, say that she has used *Xiao Yao San* (*Relaxed Wanderer Powder*). The use of *Xiang Fu* (*Cyper Rhizoma*) and *Qing Pi* (*Citri Reticulatae Viride Pericarpium*) with *Chai Hu* (*Bupleuri Radix*) integrates the use of *Shu Gan San* (*Dredge the Liver Powder*). She used the whole of *Jin Ling Zi San* (*Melia Powder*) and finally she used *Wu Wei Zi* (*Schisandrae Fructus*), *Gou Qi Zi* (*Lycii Fructus*) and *Tu Si Zi* (*Cuscutae Semen*) and that is enough to say she used modified *Wu Zi Yan Zong Wan* (*Five Seed Extend the Lineage Pill*).

She finds the key energetic of a formula and integrates its dynamic without using the entire formula. It was not until I read Jiao Shu-De’s *Case Studies in Pattern Identification* that I learned there was a name for this method, called “stringing”.

“Stringing” refers to taking the essential portion of two or three, sometimes three or four, formulas and weaving them together to create one prescription, simultaneously considering the primary and secondary roles for each formula.³

I have included below case examples in which Dr Qiu used this “stringing” method.



When one cannot perform three of the four examinations (inspection, smelling-listening, inquiry, and palpation), even a superb doctor cannot fully utilize his skill. This has been the problem from ancient times until now. This explains why they say that treating women is not easy. Is it not true?

1. Clavey, S. (second edition 2003). *Fluid Physiology and Pathology in Traditional Chinese Medicine*, London: Churchill Livingstone.

2. Qiu Xiao-Mai, (1981). *Qiu Xiao-Mei Fu Ke Lin Chuang Jing Yan Xuan* (Selections from Qiu Xiao-Mei’s Experience with Gynecology).

3. Kuchinski, Lynn (2006). *Case Studies on Pattern Identification from the Personal Experience of Jiao Shu-De*, Taos: Paradigm Publications.

Case 1: Early menstruation

In this case Dr Qiu “strung” together the formulas listed above: *Xiao Yao San*, *Shu Gan San*, *Jin Ling Zi San* and *Wu Zi Yan Zong Wan*.

Ms Qian was 25 when she came for her first visit on November 27, 1978. Her menses had been coming early, every half month, for half a year. The amount was scanty and after her period she felt lower abdominal distention and pain. Her last period was November 11. Usually her menstruation was accompanied by back soreness, dizziness and stomach duct pain. Her pulse was thin and moderate and her tongue was red and moist. Dr Qiu diagnosed her with Kidney deficiency Liver constraint. For treatment Dr Qiu coursed the Liver and boosted the Kidney to regulate her menses. She had seven packages of the following formula:

<i>Chai Hu</i>	9g (Bupleuri Radix)
<i>Zhi Yan Hu Suo</i>	4.5g (Corydalis Rhizoma prep.)
<i>Wu Wei Zi</i>	2.4g (Schisandrae Fructus)
<i>Zhi Shou Wu</i>	9g (Polygona Multiflora Radix preparata)
<i>Bo He</i>	2.4g (Menthae Herba)
<i>Gou Qi Zi</i>	9g (Lycii Fructus)
<i>Tu Si Zi</i>	9g (Cuscutae Semen)
<i>Da Shu Di</i>	30g (Rehmanniae Radix prep.)
<i>Chao Chuan Lian Zi</i>	2.4g (Toosendan Fructus, dry fried)
<i>Zhi Xiang Fu</i>	9g (Cyperii Rhizoma)
<i>Qing Pi</i>	15g (Citri reticulatae viride Pericarpium)

After the herbs Ms Qian's menses became regular.

Case 2: Infertility

In this case Dr Qiu strung together the essential components of three formulas: her own formula *Gui Xian Tang* (Cinnamon Immortal Decoction),⁴ *Ji Mai San* (Tribulus and Germinated Barley Decoction) and *Si Wu Tang* (Four Substance Decoction).

Ms Qu was 30 years old when she came for her first visit on April 5, 1977. She had been married for three years without becoming pregnant. The iodised oil roentgenography revealed that both fallopian tubes had inflammatory changes, so that the liquid passed through but not smoothly. Her menstruation came only every several months, and then only after using artificial hormones, and

4. *Gui Xian Tang*

<i>Xian Ling Pi</i>	9g (Epimedium Herba)
<i>Ba Ji Tian</i>	9g (Morinda Radix)
<i>Xian Mao</i>	9g (Curculiginis Orchioideis Rhizoma)
<i>Zi Shi Ying</i>	9g (Fluoritum)
<i>Rou Gui</i>	1.5g (Cinnamomi Cassiae Cortex, powdered), stirred in

even then the amount was very light. She experienced dull pain on both sides of her lower abdomen. Her pulse was deep and thin and her tongue moss was thin and white. This appeared to be a case of Chong and Ren Mai deficiency cold and Liver qi depressive knotting, and thus Dr Qiu decided to warm her uterus and dredge her Liver using modified *Gui Xian Tang*, (Cinnamon Immortal Decoction) as the principle formula:

<i>Zhi Shi Ying</i>	15g (Fluoritum)
<i>Yin Yang Huo</i>	9g (Epimedium Herba)
<i>Xian Mao</i>	9g (Curculiginis Rhizoma)
<i>Rou Cong Rong</i>	12g (Cistanches Caulis)
<i>Ba Ji Tian</i>	12g (Morinda Radix)
<i>Rou Gui Mo</i>	3g (Cinnamon Powder Cortex, stir in)
<i>Da Mai Ya</i>	15g (Massa Fermentata Hordei)
<i>Chao Dang Gui</i>	9g (Angelica Sinensis Radix, dry fried)
<i>Chao Chi Shao</i>	15g (Peoniae Rubra Radix, dry fried)
<i>Chao Chuan Xiong</i>	4.5g (Chuanxiong Rhizoma, dry fried)
<i>Ju He</i>	4.5g (Citri Semen)
<i>Ju Luo</i>	4.5g (Vascularis Citri Fructus)
<i>Tu Hong Hua</i>	4.5g (Carthami Flos)
<i>Pu Gong Ying</i>	12g (Taraxum Herba Cum Radicis)
<i>Bai Mao Teng</i>	30g (Solanum Lirati Herba)

Thereafter she used the same prescription, modified in accordance with the symptoms. Ms Qu intermittently took the herbs for a period of close to a year. In April of the next year she fell pregnant.

For me, the idea of stringing formulas gives an added cachet to short, focused formulas such as *Si Jun Zi Tang* (Four Gentleman Decoction) or *Sheng Mai San* (Generate the Pulse Decoction). We can always combine them to create longer formulas. When we know the essential short formulas, we also start to see them within larger formulas. This then helps us understand the components and intention of a large formula. I can remember, as a fledgling herbalist, looking at long formulas such as the one in case two above, in confusion. “Why all *these* herbs?” I asked myself. Breaking a long formula down into the component formulas helps to understand a doctor's intention. Knowing component formulas helps immensely in the writing of formulas.

These are just a few of the juicy tidbits that can be gleaned from a book such as *Qiu Xiao-Mei Fu Ke Lin Chuang Jing Yan Xuan*. Her book is full of suggestions based on her experience many of which I use often and successfully in my own practice. When a practitioner has a basic understanding of diagnosis, herbs and formulas, and a real live practice in which to apply it, information such as this becomes even more welcome and useful.