

Book Reviews

Jin Gui Yao Lue: Essential Prescriptions of the Golden Cabinet

By Zhang Ji (Zhang Zhong Jing)

with translation and commentary by Nigel Wiseman and Sabine Wilms

Paradigm Publications, 2013

ISBN 9780912111919

A tremendous amount of work, time, and thought goes into a text of this kind and Western readers have been doubly blessed by being presented with two versions of *Jin Gui Yao Lue* in recent years. The first is entitled *Understanding the Jin Gui Yao Lue: A Practical Textbook*, published by PMPH, and authored by Sung Yuk-ming PhD. When I reviewed this for *The Lantern* in 2009 I used a Chinese version for comparison and found it stood up to the test of scholarship very well indeed, and credit goes to the editor, Harry Lardner, for the flow and clarity of the text. Now, hot off the press, another publication has fallen onto my desk seeking a review. This is *Jin Gui Yao Lue: Essential Prescriptions of the Golden Cabinet*, translated and compiled by Nigel Wiseman and Sabine Wilms, and published by Paradigm Publications. I cannot but compare it with the earlier Sung text.

Both texts could be criticised by serious scholars of the classics for not including a fuller commentary: beyond occasionally noting that there have been various interpretations, there is no specific or detailed comparison of the various opinions which inevitably arise. However, in my opinion, for the Western target readership, this can be seen more as a boon than a failure. I say this only because in the West, most graduates have had but a scant introduction to *Jin Gui Yao Lue*, and so the old rule of 'less is more' most definitely applies as the next step in familiarising ourselves with

this classic text at a basic level, before we proceed to attempt scholarly mastery.

The subject matter of both texts is the same. In fact, such is the coincidence of the information covered, that they are clearly based on the same original Chinese text and commentary. There are, however, some important differences, and I will comment on the following aspects: the translation, clarity and readability of comments and explanations, the inclusion of additional material or information, structure, and bibliography.

Both texts present accurate translations. Sung's version presents a very true translation in readable English, and Wiseman and Wilms have chosen to adhere more strictly to the original Chinese syntax, providing additional words in brackets to enhance intelligibility. Thankfully, both achieve excellent translations reflecting the true meaning without resorting to waffle or paraphrase.

In reading both texts, the first thing I observed in regard to the comments and explanations was that the newer text by Wiseman and Wilms strays from the rule of good clear expression, sometimes becoming more complex and convoluted than necessary. This can give the impression to some readers that it must, indeed, be a scholarly work – for it takes some effort to understand it. But it is only the wordiness which makes it appear complex; the complexity does not spring from erudition or complexity

of ideas, but from complexity of expression. When one reads the same commentary in Sung's version, he and his editor have really hit the mark – everything is so clear, so fluid, and all is expressed in fewer words. The lucidity of the Sung text makes the ideas easy to grasp. Succinctness is sometimes hard to achieve. I fall into the trap myself at times and am therefore loath to point the finger at others. That having been said, however, my honest observation is that this is sadly the downfall of the Wiseman and Wilms version.

When I read the comments and explanations in the Wiseman and Wilms text, although they are not wrong, they do not offer as complete an explanation as provided by Sung. To cite an example, the text notes on *jue yang* (厥阳) or 'reversing yang' in Chapter 1, Line 10, p 19 of the Wiseman and Wilms text reads: 'Reversal yang 厥阳 *jue yang*: "Reversing" here means counterflow rising.' On p 21 of his text, Sung offers more information: 'Reversal yang: In this case "reversal" means counterflow due to a relative exuberance of yang qi, also known as solitary yang flow.' As we know, 'counterflow qi' or 'rebellious qi' can be caused by any of a number of things, so it is a useful clarification. Random opening of the two books has shown me that Chapter 10 Line 1 and Chapter 17 Line 19 are but two more of many instances where the Sung text offers clearer and more complete analysis and comment.

Other examples include the simple fact that *Bai He Bing* is thus called because *Bai He* was used to treat the condition – mentioned by Sung but not in the Wiseman and Wilms text; and in regard to the use of *Shu Qi* (Chapter 16 Line 12), often avoided because of its close association with *Chang Shan*, Sung (p 442) appropriately includes some results of modern research validating its use, and also advocates that *Shu Qi* should be prepared in ginger in order to reduce its emetic properties. This important clinical information is absent in the Wiseman and Wilms text. These are but a few examples and, in addition, the Wiseman and Wilms text unfortunately fails to provide material on clinical applications, case studies and modern research, all of which can be found in the Sung text.

In regard to structure, the Wiseman and Wilms text includes a detailed schematic overview following the introduction of each chapter, outlining the contents as a useful guide and preview. But it does not contain tables or the conclusions found at the end of each chapter in the Sung text, which provide a summary of key points,

and which I personally find are wonderful for review and quick reference.

Looking at both texts, of course, is a fillip to linguistic curiosity, particularly as one considers the different explanations given by each text in regard to the word 'ku' (哭) for instance, most commonly translated as 'cry' when studying modern Chinese. This appears in Chapter 25, Line 18. The text note in the Wiseman and Wilms version says: 'Crying 哭 ku' then adds 'Another version of this text has 笑 xiao (laughing) instead.' Sung's text note offers the explanation that 'ku' (哭) may also refer to laughter.

My curiosity thus piqued, I checked a dictionary recording older meanings of Chinese characters and found that 'ku' (哭), rather than specifically meaning weeping, referred to making a hoarse sound like the baying or barking of a dog, thus explaining the 'dog' component in the character 犬. It further explained that the two 口 or 'mouth' components meant that there was increased volume – i.e. a loud 'crying out' in the general sense of the word 'crying' – but not necessarily in the sense of 'weeping'. I have been unable to

find confirmation, and so to what extent this is the correct explanation I am unsure, but it certainly offers an explanation for the interpretation of 'ku' (哭) as 'laughing'. (I hope I will be forgiven the diversion, but this is just one of the fascinations that classic literature holds for me.)

In conclusion, the Wiseman and Wilms version of *Jin Gui Yao Lue* offers accurate translation and is by no means incorrect; unfortunately, however, many explanations lack the lucidity and more complete information one might hope for. Furthermore, it has not included clinical applications, modern research, and case studies, all of which facilitate modern clinical application of this age-old knowledge; nor does it have a herb index, which is a significant omission. The lack of simplicity in many explanations tends to make the subject matter appear more complex than it is, and the lack of flow does not allow for enjoyable osmotic consumption. It was also disappointing to find no reference list or bibliography. It does, however, have a very thorough general index.

Reviewed by Robin Marchment