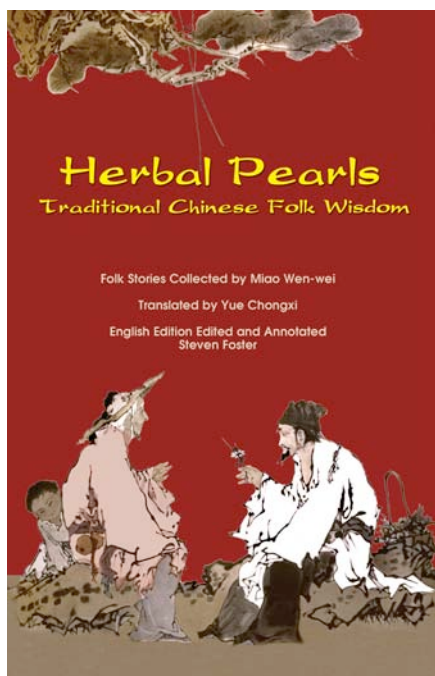




## What's Inside?

*Herbal Pearls* culls drama, mystery, romance and morality from ancient tales passed down orally through the generations. More than a manual of herb names and uses, *Herbal Pearls* reveals the plight and cunning of the distraught, diseased, or impoverished who came in contact with herbalists in ancient rural China.

How did garlic come to be used as a treatment for dysentery in Traditional Chinese Medicine? How did kudzu come to be known as ge-gen in China? You will discover the answers in *Herbal Pearls*.



# HERBAL PEARLS

## TRADITIONAL CHINESE FOLK WISDOM

**Translated by**

Yue Chong-xi

**Edited and Annotated by**

Steven Foster

Hidden within the great treasure house of Traditional Chinese Medicine are many gems of folk wisdom. One form is oral folk tales about origins of plant names or how a plant came to be used as a drug—perhaps by chance discovery, intervention by immortal beings, or simply observing a diseased animal eating a plant and returning to health.

For hundreds, if not thousands of years, peasant storytellers passed down these tales from one generation to another. This rich oral tradition conveys much about Chinese culture, folk customs, social habits, history, medical knowledge, mythology, and wisdom. Many of the stories reflect how the repressed poor labor class of feudal China valued, even revered, those who could cure their illnesses. Many of the stories include profiles of sages, who through acts of kindness, earned the heart-felt respect of peasants oppressed by tyrant overlords.

From 1934 to 1980 Chinese folklorist Miao Wen-wei collected these stories from farmers, peasants, and traditional doctors in the central coastal region of China's Jiangsu, Anhui and Zhejiang provinces. A collection of fifty-three folk tales, collected over the forty-two year period, was published in Chinese in 1981.

We are pleased to offer an English-language edition of these fifty-three classic folk stories.

## Sample Chapter

### Japanese Honeysuckle

#### *Jin Yin Hua*

#### *Lonicera japonica*

Japanese honeysuckle is known in the American South as an invasive weed rather than a useful herb that snakes over native vegetation, choking it out. . .

In China, however, it is an important herbal plant producing two drugs— *jin yin hua*, the flowers, and *ren dong*, the stem with leaves attached, which means “stands in winter” referring to the evergreen nature of the leaves . . . The medicinal use of the flowers is mentioned in early Chinese herbals including *Ming Yi Bei Lu*, attributed to Tao Hong Jing, and *Lu Chan Yan Ben Cao (Materia Medica from Steep Mountainsides)* attributed to Wang Jie, dated about 1163–1224 CE. from the Nan Song dynasty. Only one hand-written copy of the book survives from the Ming Dynasty.

This story, collected in 1964 from medicinal herb farmer Lao Liu, at Yang-Tian Commune, Qing Yang County, Anhui Province, shows how the Chinese name and use of the flowers came into being. In China, Japanese honeysuckle is known as gold and silver flower (*jin yin hua*).

Long, long ago, there was a little village with a kind-hearted husband and wife. One year the couple brought twins into the world—two lovely daughters. The father and mother were very happy and called the first one Golden Flower. The younger daughter was called Silver Flower.

Golden Flower and Silver Flower gradually grew up. Not only were the sisters identical

twins, they were inseparable in body and shadow. They were always together. The sisters were as close as two people can be. They sewed together, embroidered together, and always talked with one another. They made their parents very happy. They loved them dearly. All of the village people and neighbors delighted in the sisters, too.

When Golden Flower and Silver Flower turned eighteen, they were as beautiful as a flower. Many young men were interested in marrying one or the other. There were so many suitors that their sheer numbers wore down the threshold of the front door. However, the sisters were not interested in marrying. They wished to spend all their time with one another. The sisters vowed that as long as they were alive, they would sleep in the same bed, and when they died, they would be buried in the same grave.

The good times lasted only a short time. Golden Flower developed a serious illness. Her whole body had fever and swelling. All she could do was lie in bed. She could not get up. Her parents sent for the doctor. The doctor examined her in the four ways (visually, smell, pulse and questions). The doctor concluded that she had intense evil heat. Since ancient times, nobody had been able to cure this disease. The doctor sadly informed her parents that he could do nothing.

Silver Flower overheard the doctor's comments. All she could do was stay with her sister. She cried and cried.

Golden Flower begged, “Please leave me and go far away. If you touch me you will get the disease, too.”

“My dear Golden Flower, I

wish I could take your illness and bear it instead of you. I am not afraid.”

“I cannot live, but you have a long time to live,” Golden Flower pleaded.

“Why do you forget our vow? We will always sleep in the same bed, and when we die, we will go to the same grave. If something happens to you, I do not want to live,” Silver Flower cried.

Silver Flower lay upon the bed next to her sister.

Several days passed. Golden Flower's condition took a turn for the worse. Silver Flower became sick, too. They summoned their parents.

“After we die, we will become an herb that can cure the intense evil heat disease. We don't want other people to suffer from this disease.”

The girls closed their eyes and died at the same moment. The village people helped the parents bury the two sisters in the same grave.

The following spring, when the grass turned green and flowers started blooming, only a single plant grew on the grave of the two sisters. It was a small climbing vine with green leaves.

One year passed. Two years passed. The green vine became luxuriant. Finally, in the third spring, buds began to form on the vine. The plant started blooming. At first, the flowers had a silver-white color. On the second day, they turned golden yellow.

The village people found the flower to be very beautiful, but it evoked deeper feelings. Then they remembered what the sisters had said before they passed away. The village people collected the flowers, and since that time the flowers have been used as a cure for the intense evil heat fever. •



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—Gayle Engels  
Education Director  
American Botanical Council

*Herbal Pearls* includes forty-eight short stories on name origins and discovery of use of traditional herbs. The other five stories discuss animal or mineral drugs, such as cinnabar, snake venom, dried scorpions and other medicinal items, many still official drugs in China's Pharmacopeia. Of the forty-eight plants, most are well known to Americans—plants cultivated in American gardens, sold in health food stores, and even weeds such as Kudzu, Japanese Honeysuckle, Perilla, Plantain and Jimsonweed.



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