

MENOPAUSAL PROBLEMS

“Menopause” indicates the complete or permanent cessation of menstruation: an interval of 6-12 months is usually necessary to establish the diagnosis.

“Climacteric” indicates the phase in a woman’s life during which she makes the transition from a reproductive to a non-reproductive stage: this transition is a period of declining ovarian function which usually spans 2-5 years around the menopause.

Thus, when we refer to the discomfort and symptoms appearing during these years, it would be more appropriate to call them *climacteric syndrome* rather than *menopausal syndrome*.

Menopause usually occurs between the ages of 48 and 55 and the median age in industrialized countries is about 51. The very first chapter of the “Su Wen” describes the 7-year cycles of women, according to which menopause occurs at 49 (7x7): this is not far from the above-mentioned median age of 51.

Furthermore, data analyses indicate that the menopausal age has remained unchanged for centuries. Indeed, the mean age at menopause is just over 50 and this is remarkably constant not only throughout the Western world but also other countries.

A survey of Malaysian women showed a mean age at menopause of 50.7 years, and another of seven Asian countries found that most women reached menopause at around 50.



Su Wen chapter 1

For a woman, at the age of 14 Tian Gui arrives, the Ren Mai is open and the Chong Mai flourishing. Menstruation begins and she is able to conceive.....

At the age of 49 the Ren Mai becomes deficient, the Chong Mai is depleted, Tian Gui dries up, menstruation stops, she becomes weak and can no longer conceive.

TIAN GUI

The term “*Tian Gui*” is difficult to translate because “*gui*” indicates the 10th Stem that pertains to Water and it therefore has no meaning outside that context. “*Tian*” means “heaven” or “heavenly”.

The term “*Tian Gui*” appears in the very first chapter of the Su Wen just mentioned.

Therefore, the Tian Gui is clearly related to conception and fertility. It is the vital substance that makes a woman fertile. But it is also the substance (or the lack of it) that may cause menopausal problems when it dries up.

From a Chinese perspective, *Tian Gui* is a manifestation of Kidney-Jing that makes a woman fertile and the lack of which causes menopausal symptoms.

The character 天 (Tian) is written in a traditional, slightly calligraphic style. It consists of a horizontal top bar, a vertical stem, and two diagonal strokes that curve downwards and outwards at the bottom.

Heaven, Heavenly

“Heaven” suggests the cosmic influence on hormonal cycles, 7 years for women and 8 years for men. Tian Gui arrives at 14 in girls and 16 in boys and dries up at 49 and 64 respectively.

The character 癸 (Gui) is written in a traditional, slightly calligraphic style. It features a complex top structure with multiple strokes, including a central vertical stroke and several diagonal strokes, all supported by a base that resembles the character 天 (Tian).

10th Stem (pertaining to Water)

The fact that the Gui Stem pertains to Water suggests the origin of Tian Gui in the Kidney-Water.

The name “Tian Gui” has interesting correlations. Let us start from “Gui”. The fact that the 10th Stem pertains to Water is not coincidental: it indicates that Tian Gui is related to Kidney-Water. Fu Qing Zhu, a gynaecologist of the Qing dynasty, stressed this a lot when he said that “*menstrual blood is not Blood but Water*”.

Ancient books stated that menstrual blood is Tian Gui. In other words, in women, the Blood that nourishes the tendons, eyes and hair and that houses the Hun is “Blood”, while menstrual blood is Tian Gui, i.e. it derives from Kidney-Water.

Obviously, from a Western perspective, it is not menstrual blood that determines fertility but the female hormones. Thus, “Tian Gui” is menstrual blood but it is also (and primarily) the female hormones, oestrogen and progesterone and the ovarian follicles.

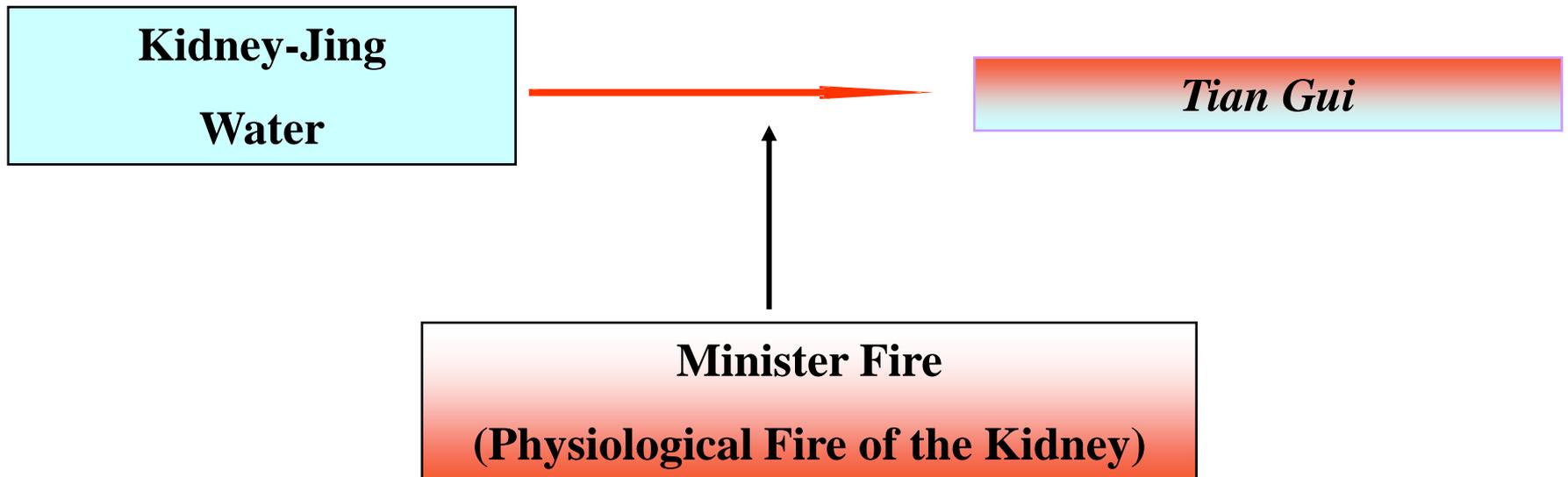


*Menstrual blood is not
Blood but Water*

Fu Qing Zhu, 1607 - 1684

Origin of *Tian Gui*

Although *Tian Gui* originates from Kidney-Water, it does need the participation of the Minister Fire of the Kidneys to mature.



While the Water of the Kidneys is the origin of Tian Gui, the Kidneys are also the source of physiological Fire, which also plays its part in the menopause.

The Fire of Ming Men represents the Fire within the Kidneys, it arises from the area between the two kidneys and is closely related to the *Yuan Qi* and the Motive Force (*Dong Qi*) from which the Du, Ren and Chong originate.

Under physiological conditions, the Fire of Ming Men warms the Uterus and balances the Yin influences: it makes conception possible and is related to sexual desire. In fact, some doctors say that "*it is through Kidney-Yang [and therefore the Fire of Ming Men] that the Tian Gui turns red [i.e. it turns into Blood]*".¹

1. Cong Chun Yu 1989 Chinese Medicine Gynaecology (*Zhong Yi Fu Ke Xue*), Ancient Chinese Medicine Texts Publishing House, Beijing, p. 11.

The Fire of Ming Men is the origin of the "formless" Minister Fire which also generates Water, hence the Kidneys are the source of both Water and Fire. The Minister Fire is called "formless" because it is a non-substantial Fire which actually generates Water rather than overcoming it. It is a Pre-Natal type of Fire formed at conception on the Du/Ren vessel axis.

In fact, the "Golden Mirror of Medicine" (1742) says: "*The Pre-Natal Tian Gui originates from the mother and father, the Post-Natal Jing and Blood are derived from food and water. A girl's Tian Gui matures at 14, the Ren Mai is open, the Chong Mai is flourishing and the periods arrive.*"²

The commentary then explains: "*At 7 the Motive Force [Dong Qi] is flourishing. At 14 the Tian Gui matures: this is the Motive Force [i.e. the Minister Fire] within the Pre-Natal Water of Tian Gui, crystallizing in a girl's uterus.*"³

2. Wu Qian 1977 Golden Mirror of Medicine (*Yi Zong Jin Jian*), People's Health Publishing House, Beijing, Vol. 3, p. 7. First published in 1742.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

This last passage is interesting as it highlights the close integration of the Minister Fire and the *Tian Gui* (the Yang and Yin aspects of the Kidneys). Zhang Jing Yue says: “*The Ming Men is the Root of the Yuan Qi and the residence of [both] Water and Fire. The Yin of the 5 Zang cannot nourish without it and their Yang cannot develop without it*”.⁴

This passage clearly shows how the Fire of Ming Men can be the source of both Fire and Water, Thus, the Minister Fire is the Fire within Water, interdependent with Water and inseparable from it.

The Emperor Fire (of the Heart) is called "with form", i.e. it is a substantial Fire which overcomes Water, is formed after birth and is therefore post-natal. The Minister Fire pertains to Heaven and the Emperor Fire to Human Beings.

For these reasons, menopausal symptoms may occur with both Kidney-Yin and Kidney-Yang deficiency.

4. Zhang Jing Yue 1986 The Complete Works of Jing Yue (Jing Yue Quan Shu), Shanghai Science and Technology Press, Shanghai, p. 19. First published in 1624.

From the perspective of Western medicine, the primary basis for the progressive decline of reproductive power in women is in the ovary itself, as ovarian follicles are greatly depleted by the time of the menopause.

It is interesting to note that there is a progressive decline of follicles even from the time before birth. In fact, at the time the ovaries are formed in the foetus, there are approximately 6,000,000 primordial follicles, which decrease to about 600,000 at birth, to 300,000 at menarche and to about 10,000 at the time of the menopause.