

P.Y. Ho and F.P. Lisowski, *A Brief History of Chinese Medicine and Its Influence*. 2nd ed. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 1998. xii, 114 pp.

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The history of medicine in China is still a relatively young field and one glance at the bookshelves on the history of medicine at any library will reveal the paucity of books on Chinese medicine and its history in the English language. That is why this book is a welcome addition to the scholarship on the history of medicine in China. This book is a revision of Ho and Lisowski's previous work titled *Concepts of Chinese Science and Traditional Healing Arts: A Historical Review* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 1993). The thinness of this volume belies the ambition of its authors and the comprehensive nature of its contents. In 114 pages, they strive to introduce the basic concepts of traditional Chinese medicine, outline the major historical development of medicine in China from the 29th century BC to the 20th century, and investigate the influence of Chinese medicine on the outside world. The authors make it clear that this book is intended as an introduction to the field, hoping to stimulate readers to pursue further research.

Early works on the history of medicine have generally portrayed Chinese medicine as an inert and static body of knowledge. For example, in *A Short History of Medicine*, Erwin H. Ackerknecht claims that both Indian and Chinese medicine "froze relatively early into rigid dogmatism and continued in this static form throughout the centuries to the present time."<sup>1</sup> Ackerknecht also believed that Western interest in acupuncture was merely a fad and any efficacy from treatment was due "through suggestion."<sup>2</sup> More recent works have done much to revise this picture and paid more attention to tracing and elaborating on the theory and practice of traditional Chinese medicine.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Erwin H. Ackerknecht, *A Short History of Medicine*, revised edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 45-46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Lois N. Manger, *A History of Medicine* (New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc., 1982) and Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997).

The recent growth of interest in Chinese medicine as an alternative to Western biological medicine has generated a proliferation of works on the subject. Most popular English language books on Chinese medicine tend to provide a general outline of the theories of *yin* and *yang* and *qi*, focusing particularly on the practice of acupuncture, but little attempt is made to place the development of Chinese medicine within the intellectual and social background from which it emerged. Academic works which attempt to situate medicine within the intellectual and social landscape are few. For readers who are looking for more than just a narration of the basic concepts in Chinese medicine, this brief introduction to the history of Chinese medicine will provide a better understanding of the intellectual and social forces that helped to shape medical tradition in China.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I gives an overview of the major concepts and history of Chinese medicine. Part II looks at the influence of Chinese medicine outside of China. For Part II, the authors have chosen to focus on Japan and the Islamic world.

Traditional Chinese medicine is based upon an elaborate set of theories. The discussion on the basic concepts of traditional Chinese medicine draws much on Ho's earlier work *Li, Qi and Shu: An Introduction to Science and Civilization in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985). Here again the authors explain the concepts of *li* 理, *qi* 氣, and *shu* 數 as the basic principles under which operated "from astronomy to astrology, from alchemy to magic, from ethics to politics, and from philosophy to the art of healing" (p. 15). It is from these basic principles that *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 and *wuxing* 五行 are born. The fundamental principles that permeate Chinese science and medicine originate from the traditional belief in the harmony of nature and the close relationship between heaven (*tian* 天), earth (*di* 地), and man (*ren* 人).

In this small volume, the authors provide a glimpse of the rich canonical tradition of Chinese medicine. Two of the earliest works of Chinese medicine are attributed to ancient legendary sages, lending them authority and prestige. These are the *Shennong bencaojing* 神農本草經 (Pharmacopoeia of the Heavenly Husbandman) and the *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經 (The Yellow Emperor's Manual of Corporeal Medicine). Both were compiled over a period of time by different authors and reached their final forms probably some time during the Western Han dynasty (206 BC - 24 AD). The *Shennong bencaojing* is China's earliest pharmacopoeia and predates Greek and Roman texts by many centuries.

Shennong (The Heavenly Husbandman) is considered the legendary founder of Chinese medicine and represented the earliest phase of medicine among the Chinese people. Early medicine was closely intertwined with magic, but by the time of the Zhou 周 dynasty (11th to 3rd centuries BC) they had separated. It was also during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods of the Eastern Zhou that the earliest medical writings were compiled. These were finalized during the Western Han dynasty and attributed to the legendary Huangdi (Yellow Emperor). The *Huangdi Neijing* (The Yellow Emperor's Manual of Corporeal Medicine) remains the most authoritative of medical writings, and, together

with the pharmacopoeia, provided the foundation for the medical canonical tradition.

Scholars traditionally accept as genuine the two parts of the *Huangdi Neijing* that are extant: the *Suwen* 素問 (Questions and Answers about Living Matter) and the *Lingshu* 靈樞 (The Vital Axis). There have been attempts at translation of the *Huangdi Neijing*, the earliest being *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* by Ilza Veith, though contrary to the belief of the authors he did not translate the entire work, only chapters 1-34. A relatively new translation is Ni Maoshing's *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Medicine* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1995). For anyone interested in the evolution of the *Huangdi Neijing*, the work of Donald Keegan remains indispensable (*The Forms of a Tradition: The Structure and History of the Huang-ti nei-ching*, PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1986).

The earliest medical writings, however, are those discovered in a tomb at Mawangdui in 1974. Donald Harper has recently published *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), which examines the seven medical manuscripts discovered there. These reveal much about the medical knowledge of the 3rd and early 2nd centuries BC.

Ho and Lisowski introduce the reader to the textual tradition all the way through to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) as they discuss important developments in medicine through the centuries. Chinese medicine made important advances during the Later Han dynasty (25-220 AD), and the *Shanghan zabinglun* 傷寒雜病論 (Discourse on Fevers and Miscellaneous Illnesses) written by Zhang Ji 張機 (150-219), considered next in importance to the *Huangdi Neijing*, was produced during this time. The textual tradition continued to flourish with works on various different aspects of medicine. For example Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 of the 3rd century wrote *Zhenjiu jiyijing* 針灸甲乙經 (Systematic Manual of Acupuncture) which became a classic on acupuncture. Later Wang Shuhe 王叔和 (265-317) wrote the *Maijing* 脈經 (Manual on the Pulses), which became a canon on pulse reading. The Song Dynasty 宋 (960-1279) government was closely involved in the publication of pharmacopoeias and medical texts. Physicians such as Liu Wansu 劉完素 (1110-1200) and Zhang Congzheng 張從正 (1156-1228) not only wrote commentaries on the medical canons, but also initiated new directions in treatment. The Ming 明 (1368-1644) and Qing 清 Dynasties also saw important developments in medicine, not least being the publication of Li Shizhen's *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (The Great Pharmacopoeia).

Surprisingly, however, they make no mention of the development of *wenbing* 溫病 (warm factor disorder) in late imperial times, nor Wu Youxing's 吳有性 seminal work *Wenyilun* 溫疫論 (Treatise on Heat Factor Disorders). This was a major development in medical theory and treatment and a separation from the *shanghan* 傷寒 (cold damage) tradition which had been dominant until the early Ming. The origin of the term *wenbing* can be traced back to the *Huangdi Neijing*

*Suwen*, which not only provided this term used for warm factor disorders, but also dealt with the relationships of the causes of the diseases and their relationship to epidemics. All the way through to the Song Dynasty, even though separate methods of treatment were developed for *wenbing* and *shanghan*, the former was always placed within the category of the latter. The first systematic advocacy of a new category for warm factor disorders began with Liu Wansu of the Jin period (1115-1234). The major theoretical advance concerning the infectious nature of *wenbing* was provided by the late Ming physician Wu Youxing, who personally experienced a series of epidemics that ravaged the empire around 1408-1643. Wu argued that epidemics were not to be explained solely by reference to the year and season, nor were they caused by the invasion of the *liuyin* 六淫 (six excesses), but rather they were caused by *liqi* 疠氣 (pestilential *qi*) which entered the human body through the nose and mouth. The emergence of the *wenbing* school is also closely tied to the formation of a medical community in the lower Yangzi region in late imperial times. Those interested in the *wenbing* school will find Marta Hanson's dissertation, titled *Inventing a Tradition in Chinese Medicine: From Universal Canon to Local Medical Knowledge in South China, the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century* (University of Pennsylvania, 1997) helpful.

One of the main focuses of Ho and Lisowski is the exchange of medical knowledge between China and the outside world, indeed, Part II of this book provides separate discussions on the history of medicine in Japan and the Islamic world, giving additional information on these two medical systems that were influenced by China. They believe that there is "one unitary science of Nature," therefore "one can expect to trace an absolute continuity between the first beginnings of medicine in ancient Babylonia, through the advancing natural knowledge of historic China, India, the Islamic world and the classical Western world to modern times" (p. 2). Prior to the European Renaissance, Asia possessed the most advanced systems of medicine. It was Chinese, Indian (Ayurveda), Arabic (Unani) and Persian medicine that laid the basis for the formation of modern European medicine. Chinese medicine in particular had a significant impact on her neighbors and in turn was influenced by them.

Ho and Lisowski mention that Emperor A'soka (273-232 BC) of the Mauryan empire sent Buddhist monks to China but were rebuffed by Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝. It is regrettable that they did not provide the textual reference source for this encounter. The Tang Dynasty (618-907) was one of the most cosmopolitan dynasties in China and it was during this time that there was extensive contact with the outside world, both to the east and the west. The authors believe that the idea of examinations was borrowed from China first by the Arabs, and finally reached the West in the 12th century, when Roger of Sicily passed laws for the state examination of physicians. This was followed in 1224 by the medical school in Salerno granting students who passed an examination the title of *Doctor Medicinae*. Thus, they believe that, "[i]t would hardly be possible to imagine a deeper effect of the enviroing culture on

medicine than this 'bureaucratization' of medical knowledge, which had the extremely happy effect of protecting people at large from the activities of ignorant physicians" (p. 33).

The Tang was also the time when there was frequent contact with Korea, Japan and Vietnam, in addition to exchanges with India and the Arab world. The influence of Chinese medicine is still strong in these countries. The Nestorians who arrived in China in the 7th century also translated works on medicine, introducing the Greek Four Elements theory. When the Mongols conquered China in the 13th century, cultural exchanges between the East and West intensified, and the Mongol rulers in China were particularly interested in medicine.

After reading *A Brief History of Chinese Medicine and Its Influence*, however, one might come away with the impression that it was classically trained physicians who dominated health care and medical practice in traditional China. This was far from the case. Although the presence of these physicians is most pronounced in the dynastic histories and local gazetteers, most people in late imperial China probably consulted folk healers and visited temples in seeking treatment for the ailments they suffered. Religious healing was a prominent part of the medical landscape. Sources and information on folk traditions are scarce, but we can gain a glimpse of their significance through the writings of physicians, who constantly complained of the "superstition" of the common people and the latter's tendency to use divination and religious prayers to heal illnesses. Even though these elite physicians felt morally superior to the folk and religious healers, they still had to compete with them for patients.

As a book that is intended to stimulate the readers to pursue the study of the history of medicine in China, it is unfortunate that the authors did not provide a more extensive and updated bibliography of works in the field in the section on "Further Reading." For example Nathan Sivin's works, though mentioned in the text, were not listed. For anyone interested in the history of Chinese medicine, the first six chapters in Sivin's *Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan Press, 1987) are invaluable. Also, even though Paul Unschuld's *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) has some problems in interpretation, it is still useful as an example of linking the development in medicine to larger social and intellectual forces. There is also an excellent article by Francesca Bray on "Chinese Medicine" in *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, edited by W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 728-754. For a discussion of epidemics and medicine, there is Carol Benedict's *Bubonic Plague in Nineteenth-century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

There are also minor oversights, such as the date for the Song Dynasty on p. 10. But aside from its over-emphasis on the elite tradition and the need for a better reading list, this book is well-written and impressive in its attempt to be comprehensive. It serves well as an introduction to the history of Chinese medicine.

