

Benjamin A. Elman, *Antiquarianism, Language, and Medical Philology: From Early Modern to Modern Sino-Japanese Medical Discourses*, Leiden: Brill (Sir Henry Wellcome Asian Series; 12), 2015, viii+232 pp.

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Reframing with Medical Philology

Edited volumes are well-known among scholars and academic publishers for a tendency towards eclecticism, given the unique challenge of assembling a group of individuals around a set of questions, let alone the follow-up difficulties of maintaining deadlines, and making sure that the subsequent papers address the collective themes. Given these types of problems, the volume under review here is to be commended for the high degree of specificity maintained in its self-imposed challenge, examining the impact of long-term medical contact between China and Japan, beginning as early as the Song for the former, and continuing as late as the Qing and early Meiji, reaching until about the mid-nineteenth century. Within the breadth of this ambitious periodization, covering roughly seven to eight hundred years, there is the potential for extremely wide coverage over the space of the nine papers, but the book approaches its task with a focused set of questions, in particular, looking at the dynamics of medical exchange from the Early Modern to the Modern in East Asia. As the volume recognizes that China and Japan had a great deal to learn from each other, the same observation holds equally true for neighboring parts of the larger Sino-centric world, at least by implication, even if this last claim cannot be fully examined.

In terms of method and approach, editor Benjamin Elman lays out his explanatory bases for the title in the first chapter, explaining the use of "philology," which he mobilizes initially as "an umbrella term for any and all activities involving the study, the deployment, or evaluation of ideas contained in classical texts" (p. 2). The term is consciously meant to possess a wide range as an analytic category, in other words, addressing the vari-

ous things that scholars might seek to do or accomplish through the use of texts, perhaps most frequently searching the literature to clarify a difficult concept, or similarly, to find a means of resolution for a particular instance of a disease. At the same time, Elman notes, this terminology does not convey everything it needs to in terms of serving as the focal point of the eight content essays following his, which leads to a discussion of “medical philology,” and also, “antiquarianism,” with this second term reaching out for a comparative dimension in terms of its appeal to a common or global culture of books and medicine.

Originally presented within the context of a 2012 workshop, the eight content papers focus largely upon an Early Modern East Asian medical world, specifically, the transitional period from manuscript as written text to one of print and books, covering the period from approximately 1600-1800, with the primary emphasis resting here much more than on the earlier period. Viewed in these terms, it is clear that the editor, along with the participants, has in mind a project of potentially greater scope, and this justifies the use of the two additional terms in the title. By way of “global comparison” (p. 3) Elman invokes the Early Modern world of Latin and the philological practices of Renaissance Europe, with scholars reaching back to the classics in revising, seeking to get the best possible versions of key medical texts. The story of print for East Asia precedes that for Europe by several centuries, of course, but the analogy works effectively as a means of re-conceptualizing and comparing the respective medical worlds.

While not contributing to the volume, a diverse group of scholars, including Harold Cook, Anthony Grafton, Shigehisa Kuriyama, and Heinrich von Staden, among others, participated in the event as commentators and in related roles, with many of these figures coming primarily from the Western medical and literary tradition in their scholarship. Again, this explains the project’s effort to assemble an East Asian project, but one framed with a highly conscious, comparative dimension; and moreover, one positing a hybrid medical culture emerging out of a lengthy conversation between Chinese and Japanese scholars, in much the same way that “Western” medicine possesses a high degree of hybridity, certainly prior to the recent advent of scientific biomedicine.

Precisely how far the editor is willing to push this suggestive claim remains to be seen, and some of the Meiji-era papers, especially the one by Federico Marcon, hint at an alternate reading for a very different version of Japanese “biology,” at least in the form of natural history, even while acknowledging the counterfactual nature of the argument. In any case, the larger volume sets up a contested, deliberative world of China and Japan scholarship, with some holding deep reverence for the past and its texts, while others in the mix quite openly challenge and dispute their predecessors. Even as this work calls out to a largely East Asian readership, we can

see in its ambitions an appeal to a much larger audience. The references to “Galen’s corpus” and the assemblage of a Western tradition through Greek, Latin, and Arabic texts accomplishes a great deal by way of analogy, and reaches out to “scholars of medicine in other cultures who value comparative perspectives” (p. 2). Far from the staid “traditional” – an uncomfortable terminology imposed from without – this volume offers an East Asian medicine almost willfully impure, emphasizing the “changing nature of medical knowledge” (p. 4) for much of the early modern period.

Reasoning with the Case

If much of this frame is implicit – outlined in the introductory chapter, and then only hinted at in some of the papers – what appears more obvious from the start is the organizing rubric of approximating a rough chronology, starting with the Song, and moving forward until the transition point of Meiji. In a similar fashion, the China-centered papers tend to be clustered at the start, with the focus shifting to Tokugawa Japan for much of the volume’s latter half. Starting with the Song, Asaf Goldschmidt’s paper presents a twelfth century practitioner, Xu Shuwei 許叔微, whose situation illustrates the dilemma of “the interaction of the medical canon and doctrinal issues” (p. 7). More specifically, Xu faces a challenge in dealing with the outbreak of epidemics, and the effort to handle these circumstances with a set of classical texts at hand. In this situation he finds the *Treatise of Cold Damage Disorders* (*Shanghan lun* 傷寒論) wanting, or certainly he notices the accumulation of a good deal of annotation and theoretical material attached to the text, which he views as impractical for his immediate purposes.

Goldschmidt’s depiction of Xu as interested in practical matters, or as he puts it, “the problem of transmitting practical knowledge” (p. 19), provides a concise introduction to many of the volume’s recurring themes. For readers wondering about a related cluster of issues for other parts of the non-West, Elman calls our attention to the presentation of a paper on South Asian manuscript culture (Dominic Wujastyk, University of Vienna), which did not make the final volume for thematic reasons. Similarly, an essay by Soyoung Suh of Dartmouth, also on the *Treatise of Cold Damage Disorders*, and this time set in the Korean context, was published elsewhere, and might have provided an added push beyond the dominant Sino-Japanese thread of the volume. For interested parties, a version of the Suh essay appears in a recent special edition of *Asian Medicine* (Brill, Number 8, Volume 2, 2015), and in many ways, this journal edition serves as a fitting complement to Goldschmidt’s chapter and in some sense, the project of the entire volume, extending the discussion around this core text, and including Japan (via Keiko Daidoji) and Korea for context.

In his chapter on the Danxi 丹溪 synthesis, Fabien Simonis brings us further chronologically, covering roughly from about the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. In this case, the thicket of an intertextual web grows more complex, and Simonis seeks to illustrate how these issues play out over time in the creation of a historiography, with individual writers alternately choosing strategically to either “split” or “lump” (p. 9) in Elman’s terms, selecting from a group of texts, and following the rise and fall of reputations in context, depending on those whom they select to foreground. In compiling past texts and seeking to apply them to medical questions, a scholar might attempt to reconcile seemingly conflicting views, thereby carrying forward a select number of different thinkers in syncretistic fashion. Alternatively, one can choose to highlight and possibly exaggerate the perceived differences between accounts in order to praise a certain viewpoint, with the simultaneous effect of reducing or marginalizing the less favored among the accounts.

In Simonis’ hands, the textual politics hinted at here prove illuminating, as he ultimately makes the case for a syncretistic approach as the dominant interpretive mode between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, suggesting that strong traces of this tendency remain in present-day Chinese medical and reading practice in the form of an anthology impulse. In these first two chapters, the main body of questions focuses largely within an exclusively Chinese world, and it is only with succeeding chapters that the turn to the volume’s focus on China-Japan begins to make its presence felt. In the succeeding chapters, a strong focus on Tokugawa medicine under various guises appears, with Daniel Trambaiolo, Mathias Vigouroux, and Susan Burns each offering a distinct take on the period, and the use of Chinese ideas, practice, and texts in dialogue with Japanese scholars. The introduction is careful to highlight the relevant historical background framing the movement of these ideas and texts, especially the intense period of conflict at the end of the sixteenth century, and carrying over for nearly half a century in the form of the increased contact brought on by war, certainly in contrast to earlier periods of relative isolation.

Federico Marcon’s chapter takes the turn to Japan to its furthest degree, both in terms of the chronology and the argument for the larger collection, offering a possible reframing of the narrative concerning bioscience in Japan, and hinting at the argument contained in his own recent work, *The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan* (University of Chicago Press, 2015). Tracing the institutionalization and eventual waning of the field of *honzōgaku* 本草學 (*materia medica*) in Tokugawa Japan, Marcon’s version of events complicates a reading in which *rangaku* 蘭學 (Dutch learning) and German academic medicine form the major constituents in the well-known story of the rise of a Japanese biomedical and bio-scientific culture in the nineteenth century. In the mild

form of the argument, *honzōgaku* represents a critical context for linking and bridging ideas drawn from different traditions, serving to motivate the process of transition to biomedicine. If pushed to a further degree, the field's presence after the turn to biology offers an alternate reading of a counterfactual Japanese bioscience, one Marcon characterizes as "the possibility of an alternative modernity" (p. 160), as viewed from the perspective of his major actors, Asada and Mori.

The final two chapters, by Anglea Ki Che Leung and Mayanagi Makoto, continue this thread of a dynamic between Japanese and Chinese sources, and Elman notes this emphasis in his introduction. Leung gives us the history of beriberi, to use the modern biomedical term, citing the lengthy predecessor legacy of *kakke* 腳氣 (as rendered via *kanpō* 漢方) and *jiaoqi* 腳氣 (similarly, for imperial China). If beriberi can be understood as a vitamin deficiency, a story well-known for its implications for Japanese Empire, and as retold by a number of different scholars, including Alex Bay in his *Beriberi in Modern Japan* (University of Rochester Press, 2012), Leung is not necessarily interested in this version of events. Rather, she aims to restore the cultural and historical contexts in which the *kanpō* understanding first emerged, making a case for a distinct historical understanding. Although Leung does not appear to be pushing for a radical incommensurability, she is also not comfortable with assuming a facile equivalence, and this impulse motivates a project of reclamation.

Working on the Kojima 小島 family's library, Mayanagi provides a sense of return in the volume's final chapter, offering a close reading of the texts obtained by Yang Shoujing 楊守敬, a Chinese diplomat, while in contact with Meiji Japan, living there for nearly half a decade (1880-1884). In a chapter co-written with Mathias Vigouroux (also this volume) and Takashi Miura, Mayanagi looks at the books Yang brought with him following his period of residence, as well as their possible influence on other scholars as the texts later circulated. Many of these works ended up in the National Library in Beijing by the late 1920s, and still later following another move, the National Palace Museum in Taipei. Along with this careful documentation of the journey of a set of texts, the chapter posits a speculative narrative concerning the dialogue between *kanpō* and Chinese medicine, with the library collection offering a point of contact for Republican-era Chinese scholars in the 1930s. Presumably the chapter receives placement at the end not just for its late periodization, but also for its timely reminder of the dialogue inherent to much of medicine, with traffic going in both directions.

Assessing Comparative Possibilities for Qing and Tokugawa

If this collection works in the fashion of as a single-author monograph, and I think it does, it posits a world of Qing and Tokugawa medicine very

much in contact with each other, and presumably set in contrast to an older literature, one more dominated by an almost exclusively Sino-centric account. At its most adventurous, this set of essays takes the transition to Meiji and complicates the account offered in the work of Japan scholars of science, technology, and medicine, including James Bartholomew and Tessa Morris-Suzuki. If their version of Meiji is one motivated by extensive contact with Bismarck's Germany, it is only fair that their models are looking forward to the modern, with an implicit comparison of German unification in the nineteenth century and Japan's claim to national renewal. This style of trope is made even more explicit in Hoi-Eun Kim's *Doctors of Empire* (University of Toronto Press, 2014), which offers a rich and nuanced version of the challenge posed by cultural encounter, especially by Japanese students abroad in the unfamiliar environment of the German lecture hall, and even the rooming house.

In contrast, this work poses an account centered comfortably in late Tokugawa, with Meiji lying just at its outer margins. Where there is transition, it takes place at a measured pace, with Japanese practitioners maintaining close contact with their Chinese sources. In a separate article, contributor Daniel Trambiaolo has begun to explore the work of these "late" *kanpō* practitioners, reminding us in his "Native and Foreign in Tokugawa Medicine" (*Journal of Japanese Studies* 39.2 (2013), pp. 299-324) of the complicated mix of sources and materials available to Japanese practitioners in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When there is an impulse to engage with the modern, as in Marcon's chapter, it involves a consideration of the alternatives, counterfactual possibilities made available through *materia medica*, and again, not simply rendered through the Meiji enthusiasm for the foreign. As the volume closes, it posits an East Asian system very much in flux, but this is a reflexive, contemplative style of change, and not one imposed from without, brought about by the power of external forces.

In this respect, the work leaves us with a series of provocative openings, and is more interested in raising these new questions than in addressing them. The comparisons with the Early Modern and the Renaissance are interesting, and even if the comparison has been made elsewhere, here it is handled more systematically. The internal East Asian dynamic of China-Japan proves even richer in its potential, and as the introduction highlights, might go further with the addition of Korea, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, looking at a larger story within and across regions. I suspect some scholars of China will embrace this more speculative take, while others, deeply invested in their training and in Sinology as a discipline, will likely raise questions here, especially for the linguistic and cultural difficulties likely to arise in a project of such scope. As a modernist, who works more on biomedicine than on Asia per se, I find the risk well worth pursuing,

and sympathize with the volume's impulse to continue pushing the comparative.