
Review

Reviewed Work(s): Chinese Medicine and Healing: An Illustrated History by T. J. Hinrichs and Linda L. Barnes

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T. J. Hinrichs and Linda L. Barnes, eds. *Chinese Medicine and Healing: An Illustrated History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013. x + 464 pp. Ill. \$45.00 (978-0-674-04737-2).

This volume covers Chinese medicine in the broadest possible sense from about 1500 BCE to the present-day United States, not to mention Iraq, Tanganyika, and Argentina. Just over two hundred pages are devoted to premodern China, and a little less than a hundred each to the twentieth century and to Chinese medicine abroad.

This is the first book on its topic to use recently excavated documents alongside transmitted sources to reconstruct medicine's evolution to the present. Its chapters, in chronological order, are written by nine well-known specialists. In addition, there are about fifty contributions of one to three pages by experts on narrower topics, generally based on their previous publications.

The words "and healing" in the title signal an important new approach. Almost all scholarship on Chinese medicine so far has studied the work of physicians near the top of the social scale, trained in the early medical classics, therapists to the aristocracy and gentry. Their role in caring for the poor and illiterate majority of the population was negligible.

It is natural to ask who cared for most Chinese. The publications of Judith Boltz, Edward L. Davis, C. Pierce Salguero, Michel Strickmann, and a few others have made it clear that popular, Buddhist, and Daoist priests largely shouldered that burden. This book is the first general introduction to take this wider view, although it does not give religious therapy much space. Only the chapter on the Qing dynasty discusses self and family therapy.

This is, broadly speaking, a social history. It stresses, in China, books, governmental institutions, and policies. In the rest of the world, it pays most attention to figures who succeeded in establishing Chinese medicine, and how local recognition and official accreditation came about. Linda Barnes's account of Chinese medicine in the United States traces influences from France, Vietnam, Romania, Canada, England, Japan, Sri Lanka, as well as China.

Some readers will also be curious about how doctors and others diagnosed disease, how they made therapeutic decisions, what their professional rituals were, and how all of these changed over time. They will have to wait for a more broadly oriented history. So far, only Volker Scheid's books on the last five centuries leave behind the old external-internal dichotomy.

Readers unfamiliar with recent research on this topic will find much to intrigue them. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the government was collecting, editing, and printing medical books. It was also operating pharmacies in order to keep the prices of drugs affordable. Still earlier, it ran a school to train officials for the palace medical service. Despite the American tendency to think of Chinese medicine as acupuncture, that therapy was marginal through most of history, revived as an important part of the physician's armamentarium less than a century ago. By 1900, "for many acute, chronic, and contagious illnesses, in fact, Western methods were neither more nor less effective than Chinese ones" (p. 203; the author does not explain the basis for this comparison).

The book provides a good selection of pictures to illuminate its text. A few are unreadable on the book's ill-sized paper (pp. 46, 85, 113, 118, and 274). A good many expressions, lacking explanation, are incomprehensible, including "methods of fetal instruction," "primordial emanations of the Dao," and "viceroys of Liangguang" (pp. 43, 83, and 197, respectively). The editing is not consistent; "moxibustion" is sometimes misspelled as "moxabustion." The authors variously translate *wu* as "shaman," "popular, illiterate healer," "ritual healer," and "spirit medium" (pp. 10, 136, 136, and 166, respectively). No one informs the reader that these terms all refer to the same people.

There are dozens of factual errors. For instance, the chapter on the tenth to thirteenth centuries claims that "religious Daoist texts, diagnosing illness as divine punishment, also told the sick that taking food and medicines would interfere with the process of recovery, which must be based on purification and prayer." This approach was true of theocratic communities before ca. 500, but is irrelevant here. For another example, "Zhang Ji . . . wrote two works on febrile disease. . . . The treatises were later amalgamated to form the *Treatise on Cold Damage Disorders (Shanghan lun)*." Actually he wrote one book, *Treatise on Cold Damage and Miscellaneous Disorders (Shanghan za bing lun)*, that was later divided into the *Treatise on Cold Damage Disorders* and *Essentials in the Golden Casket (Jin kui yao lue)* (pp. 110 and 40, respectively).

The editors made sure that most book titles were translated the same way throughout. Oddly, however, they usually disregard established translations, sometimes for the worse. Thus the title of the celebrated painting *Qingming shang he tu* does not mean "Qingming on the River" (p. 117). *Shang* is verbal, hence the usual translation is "Going up the river on the Spring Festival." The book title *Bencao gangmu* is, as usual, "Systematic materia medica" on page 149, but "A classification of materia medica" on page 186.

It is hard to tell what audience the book was designed for. Its bureaucratic and bibliographic detail seems mainly aimed at graduate students and specialists, but they will find the documentation of some chapters inadequate (for instance, that on the Qing dynasty gives page references for only half a dozen of the many books it cites). Specialist readers may also be put off by the many small errors of fact, and by the many omissions in the index. On the other hand, some of the sidebars will be useful in medical history course readings for undergraduates. The book is well printed and hardbound, and at eleven cents a page, its price is on the low side. Readers will find it valuable for its overview of Chinese healing traditions and their present-day global vicissitudes.

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