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Imagining Chinese Medicine

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Dedication and Acknowledgements

Vivienne Lo 羅維前

This book is dedicated to the life and work of Professor Ma Jixing 馬繼興, a researcher and teacher whose combination of academic achievements and spirit of generosity make him the scholar who has exerted the greatest influence worldwide on generations of historians of Chinese medicine. On 15–17 September 2005, I.M. Pei’s iconic Fragrant Hills Hotel in the mountains to the north-west of Beijing was the setting for a conference, convened by Ma Jixing’s former student Wang Shumin 王淑民 and me, held in honour of the 80th birthday of the venerable professor.

The conference was a part of a longer-term, and ongoing, collaborative project on the visual cultures of medicine sponsored by UCL’s former Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine and the Zhongguo Zhongyi yanjiu yuan 中國中醫研究院 (Academy of Chinese Medicine, now the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences).1 Since the inauguration of the Academy in the early 1950s, when the Chinese government endorsed a wide-ranging

1 Zhongguo Zhongyi kexueyuan 中國中醫科學院.
programme of research into local medicines, Professor Ma has specialised in understanding the ways in which medical knowledge was constructed by analysing the ever-increasing quantities of early and medieval manuscript sources re-discovered through archaeological projects in 20th to 21st century China. At over 90 years old now he is still publishing prolifically, with his most recent magnum opus being the three-volume, 2,000-page, *Zhongguo chutu guyi shu* (Ancient Medical Texts Excavated in China), complete with photographs and full transcriptions, published in 2015.

While at medical school in north China during the second Sino-Japanese war (1936–45), Professor Ma chose to specialise in traditional medicine. As a medical graduate in revolutionary China, he was then allocated a position teaching physiology in Peking Medical College (Beiyi Xueyuan, 北醫學院), which allowed him ample time for reading the medical classics, a pursuit that he found suited him better than clinical work. Trained in both modern and traditional Chinese medicine and self-educated in reading ancient texts, he was well placed thereafter to join the first team of historians at the Institute for the History of Chinese Medicine and Medical Literature at the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Life wasn’t always easy at the Academy, and during the years of the Cultural Revolution, he found himself denounced, criticised and sentenced to periods of isolation and self-examination. There was little freedom, but a lot of time to further his reading and to wait for the moment when he could resume his research. Throughout, he was working on multiple projects. In 1990 he was finally able to publish his bibliographical work on the history of Chinese medical writing, which remains a first port of call for contemporary researchers into pre-modern medicine. When I first visited his office in the Dongzhimen district of central Beijing in the early 1990s, he proudly showed me how one whole wall was lined with notebooks for an unfinished history of acupuncture that he was still busy researching. What was holding him up was the ancient manuscripts excavated in the previous decade from tombs along the Yangzi river, manuscripts which were revolutionising people’s understanding of the history of the formation of a ‘Chinese’ medical identity and the grounding of that identity in unique styles of medicine: acupuncture, pharmacotherapy, nutrition and self-care.

In the 1990s Professor Ma published the first annotated transcript of the most significant of those medical manuscripts that were known at that time, excavated from the Mawangdui tombs, and it was his commentaries that helped me translate and analyse contemporary manuscripts from other Han dynasty tombs during my PhD years at the School of Oriental and African Studies. Soon after graduating, my attention turned to some 100 and more medical manuscripts that had been discovered among the tens of thousands of religious texts in Grotto 17 at the Dunhuang Mogao caves at the eastern end of the Silk Roads, only to find that Professor Ma and his colleagues had been working on those same manuscripts for 10 years and had just produced the first, and still the only, comprehensive volume of transcripts of that material in 1998.

As the balance of global power moves south, and central Asia is mined for its rich mineral resources, the imagination of the Silk Roads connecting north-eastern China to the Mediterranean and north Africa has become synonymous with the political intention to foster future commerce and scientific knowledge exchange. Dunhuang with its religious, military and commercial networks is historically and philosophically at the centre of the project to position China once more as Zhongguo (the Middle Kingdom). An open-minded and welcoming man, despite his modest, unassuming disposition, Professor Ma has always been at the cutting edge of successive waves of academic interest in the historical creation of China’s national medicine.

It is no wonder then that from as early as 1985, he pioneered the use of medical images as an important source in the writing of medical history. The contribution he made to our 2005 conference to celebrate his work, ‘Historical Images from the Pharmaceutical Culture of the Emperor Yan’, represented an early stage in his project to collate all the iconography relating to Shen Nong (the Divine Farmer), selfless empiricist and legendary patron of the pharmacological arts. Professor Ma’s work includes all manner of material culture, taking in stone, wood and ivory sculptures, clay and wooden effigies with depictions of the viscera, ceramic and bronze statuary, illustrated poetry and essays, temple iconography, painted scrolls and eponyms of Shen Nong that stretch to media logos for drugs, and trademarks for food and beverage packaging. All of these media are represented by authors in the chapters of this edited volume.

Our conference in Beijing was convened at the end of a Wellcome Trust project for which Wang Shumin, now retired Professor of the History of Medicine at the Academy, and I had bought the digital rights to 1,400

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2 Ma Jixing 1988.  
3 Ma Jixing 1992.  
4 Ma Jixing 1988; Ma Jixing, Wang Shumin et al. 1998. See also Despeux (ed) 2010.  
5 Ma Jixing 2012.
medical illustrations from the library at the Academy on behalf of the Wellcome Collection, fully catalogued and described them, translated them with Penelope Barrett, and put them online for Wellcome Images. From there you can download high-resolution digital copies free of charge to use in academic and educational publications.⁶ In 2007 we published the conference proceedings with the People's Medical Publishing House – a book that, according to Professor Li Jianmin 李建民, at Academia Sinica, Taipei, has become a mainstay of the reading lists of history of medicine courses throughout the Sinophone world.⁷ It is currently being translated into Korean.

The current English language edited volume is based on the earlier proceedings, but much expanded now to 35 chapters and two long introductory pieces.⁸ It has been accomplished with the help of numerous patient individuals with whom we have translated, edited, and reorganised and laid out the chapters, as well as all those who inspired, participated in, funded and ran the conference in the first place. These include Professors Wang Shumin, Liu Changhua 柳長華, Zheng Jinheng 鄭金生, Francesca Bray, Hal Cook, Shigehisa Kuriyama, Andrew Wear and Geoffrey Lloyd, librarians and researchers John Moffett, Lois Reynolds, Lu Di 蘿笛, David Dear, Emma Whittaker, Josephine Turquet, Akio Morishima and Gu Man 顧漫. I am also very grateful for the help received from the Wellcome Collection and specifically Catherine Draycott and her team at Wellcome Images. Last, and far from least, I am indebted to the Wellcome Trust, who made the project image-making in medicine. We are grateful for the support of the Wellcome Trust for this volume, which has enabled it to be Open Access from the point of publication.

This has been a labour of love for us all. Not only were the original conference papers submitted in five different languages, but there were an equivalent number of academic styles to weave into a coherent volume. The original submissions were also extended from conference drafts into full academic articles and another eight chapters were commissioned especially for this volume. I have also learnt a lot in the interim period, and have grown to appreciate more fully the value of this collection in ways that I will elaborate in the introduction.

Like Ma Jixing’s complete history of acupuncture, our work will never be done. There are constantly new excavations that recover artefacts and manuscripts, which promise to enrich our knowledge and understanding, but also call into question previous findings. In light of the multiple sources that, we argue in these pages, can be analysed as the visual cultures of medicine, there are many lifetimes of research to contemplate. I hope the reader of this volume will appreciate the passion that exists in Chinese studies for the History of Medicine, the extraordinary visual record that survives from the ancient world onwards, and the contemporary significance of all that has been achieved, and all that remains to be done.

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