

PROJECT PROPOSAL

“Body Wholes, Body Parts: A Cultural History of the Body in Chinese Medicine”

We encounter the human body as metaphor for the body politic and the social body when we read about the “head” of state or the “members” of any “organ”ization. The body has been and remains a useful tool for conceptualizing and understanding aspects of human society and experience. The body as a bureaucracy in Han China, as a mountain or even the cosmos in Taoist religion, as inhabited by spirits in meditative practices, and imbalanced by emotions in Chinese medicine have all been well documented and studied. Discourses on the Chinese medical body have also revealed various aspects of a culture coming to terms with difference, conflict, and tensions in society writ large. Yet how various “body parts” have played a role in Chinese medical thought and have changed in meaning over time has not yet been systematically examined. The proposal is to bring together several scholars who are working on various aspects of the body in Chinese medicine—Bones, the Gate of Life, Blood, Breasts, Nerves, and Hands—for a planning meeting to both present their own research in progress on this theme and organize a workshop centered on the idea of “Body Wholes, Body Parts” in Chinese medical history. The following are the abstracts of the proposed papers for this planning meeting.

Chang Che-chia, "On Human Bones"

Compared to other specialties, the lack of textual sources has made osteology in Chinese medicine difficult to study. Bones are doubtless an important part in human body for any civilization. Although the traditional Chinese medicine does not grant bones a significant theoretical role like organs, blood, or *qi* do, still, they are considered as the deepest parts of the body, thus the essence of the energy, marrow, is preserved in the bones, and the virulent poison will also reflect on the surfaces of bones. For this reason, the interests toward osteology are shared by the practitioner, osteopathy, nourishing-life specialists (*yangshengjia*), and forensic examiners. In this study, I would like to cut in by observing these three aspects and see how their ideas complement one another to construct a full scale picture of Chinese medical ideas toward bones.

Chang Chia-Feng, "Mingmen in Traditional Chinese Medicine in the Ming"

This paper discusses the ideas and significance of *mingmen* (the gate of life) in traditional Chinese medicine in the Ming Dynasty (1328-1644). *Mingmen* was first mentioned in two medical classics, *Huangdi neijing* and *Lingsu*, which were at least dated back to the Han dynasty (206 BC-220AD). It was simply another name for eyes. Later medical generations used *mingmen* to indicate different parts of the body. At least eight kinds of *mingmen* were found in various medical texts. Although physicians held various opinions about the position, nature of *mingmen* and its relationship with other visceral systems and circulation tracks in the body, from the Jin and Yuan periods

onwards, they mainly viewed *mingmen* as the origin of the body and life. Many Ming physicians further developed this idea, and formed a new theoretic and therapeutic principle in their practice. This group of physicians were called the *wenbu xuepai* (warm and replenish medical school), and were popular after the mid-Ming periods. They emphasized that owing to the fact that *yin* and *yang* in the body were often insufficient, it was necessary to warm and replenish the *mingmen*, in order to keep the *shui* and *huo* (water and fire phase) in balance in the kidney visceral system. In so doing, the body would not only regain health, but also enhance the ability of conception.

Yi-Li Wu, "The gendered breast in medicine and art"

Although art historians have argued that the body is invisible in Chinese painting, images of nude and semi-nude male and female bodies abound in other visual contexts, notably medical works, erotic sculptures and prints, and accounts of saints and hells. This essay uses the bare chest as a case study for analyzing the significance of human nudity in Chinese visual culture. It finds that while bare male breasts evoked religious enlightenment and intellectual iconoclasm, female breasts were associated with disease, fertility, and sexual desire.

Bridie Andrews Minehan, "Blood in Late Imperial Chinese Medicine"

Several of the most popular recipes today for 'stagnant blood' conditions were formulated in the late Qing period by Wang Qingren (1768-1831). Wang had seen clots of coagulated blood in the thorax and abdomens of corpses abandoned after an

epidemic, and deduced that stagnant blood had contributed to the mortalities. As the first wave of information about western medicine was made available in Chinese, mainly through Benjamin Hobson's translations of the 1850s, Chinese medical writings on blood amalgamated Wang's insights and Hobson's accounts, creating a new sensibility of the roles, importance, and disorders of blood. In this paper I examine these new perceptions of blood using such texts as Tang Zonghai's *Treatise on Blood Conditions* (血証論) of 1884.. I hypothesize that viewing diseases as disorders of the blood facilitated a new axis of clinical intervention; it also resonated with some popular medical beliefs; and further stimulated a new market in tonic medicines for the blood.

Hugh Shapiro, "The Discourse of Nerves and the Modern Transformation of the Chinese Body."

By focusing on the rise of a discourse of nerves in modern China, I aim to show that the integration of biomedical ideas with medical practice in China was based, in the formative years, on shared intuitions regarding how the body works. To this end, I connect the notion of nervous weakness (neurasthenia, *shenjing shuairuo*) to the radical transformations of physical and psychic distress in modern China. I argue that the roots of neurasthenia in China and in the West go deeper than the problem of modernity. True, modernity's alleged pathology constituted the principal etiology of the disorder, as popularized by the elector-therapist, George M. Beard, in the 1870s. Doctors in the United States and Europe, then in Russia and Japan, then in China

pondered the stress of modern life, observing that its destructive rage sapped brain and nerve. From this perspective, the spread of neurasthenia to China can be seen as one aspect of the spread of modernity to China. Yet I propose another way of thinking about neurasthenia. The sources for its prevalence in China and in the West, I argue, are rooted in shared intuitions about depletion and about the brain's connection to sexuality, and specifically the kidney. This resonant idea about depletion also helps explain the longevity and ubiquity in twentieth-century China of what was originally the foreign idea of nervousness.

Marta Hanson, "Hands as Medium for Memory and Therapy"

When medical authors included diagrams of hands with characters inscribed on them, the hand itself became a *tu* — diagram — that represented knowledge in a form more concrete, succinct, visual, and potentially kinesthetic, than the written or spoken word could possibly be. Illustrations of hands as *tu* may also be read as traces in elite medical texts of a broader popular practice in Chinese culture whereby the hands were used as a means for intervening, learning, calculating, diagnosing, interpreting, confirming, and measuring. In medical texts, we find the hands presented as powerful agents for exorcising demons, as diagnostic tools for determining the illnesses of infants, as surfaces for therapeutic intervention, as a microcosm of the cosmos, as a gauge of distance between points on the body, and, finally, as mnemonic instruments.

This paper will examine the hand as medium for both memory and healing in Chinese medicine.