

BOOK REVIEW

Patrick Chiu, *A History of Western Pharmacy in China* (Singapore: Springer, 2023), pp. xxxii+219, EUR37.99, hardback, ISBN:9789819986347.

Pharmacy students predominantly prioritise courses perceived to enhance their pharmaceutical and clinical skills. Concurrently, public expectations of pharmacists' technical proficiency remain steadfast. It is rare for these students to show interest in social sciences or humanities courses, largely due to the lack of public support for such subjects. This trend persists in both Western and Eastern pharmacy education and societies, as evidenced by the limited availability of library pharmacy history collections. Consequently, interest in the history of pharmacy is scarce. Unlike recent reforms in medical education that emphasise empathy and humanistic skills, pharmacy curricula often overlook these critical competencies. Thus, there is a pressing need to align pharmacy education and social expectations with modern healthcare by integrating technical expertise with medical humanities. This issue is particularly pronounced in the Eastern perspective, where resources on the history of pharmacy are even more limited than in the West.

Recent developments in the historiography of medicine and increased public attention offer potential models for writing the history of pharmacy, with implications for both professional and public perspectives. Such an approach could focus on the individuals and factors that have shaped the pharmaceutical profession and precipitated significant societal changes. Patrick Chiu's *A History of Western Pharmacy in China* exemplifies this methodology, emphasising the integration of Western pharmacy into Chinese society as a crucial development. Moreover, his work effectively utilises historical figures and events to enhance public awareness and appreciation of the evolution of pharmacy and healthcare practices in China. This book, structured into nine chapters, presents a comprehensive examination of Western pharmacy's evolution in China from the Song Dynasty to the twentieth century. The author addresses a wide range of topics, including the introduction of overseas materia medica, trade, and conflicts in Western pharmacy, pharmaceutical education, Western chemists' enterprises in China, and the institutionalisation and professionalisation of Chinese pharmacy. Through this extensive chronological and thematic scope, Chiu reveals the multifaceted nature of modern pharmacy development in China.

Upon opening the book, readers are immediately engaged by a fluid narrative chronicling the evolution of Western pharmacy in China. This account is substantiated by extensive citations from historical archives and scholarly research. Several distinctive features characterise this scholarly contribution. The author employs a diverse array of primary source materials including newspapers, journals, advertisements, textbooks, official reports, and personal memoirs. This methodological approach enhances the work's empirical foundation and provides a rich tapestry of historical evidence. This book caters to both academic and general readers, reflecting a paradigm shift which emerged in the 1990s when medical historians advocated narrative historiography amid a landscape of scholarly fragmentation. The author endeavours to promote multicultural understanding by transforming the traditionally esoteric professional history of pharmacy into an accessible cultural narrative. While professional histories often tend toward structural description and may fail to encapsulate the full spectrum of human diversity and idiosyncrasy, the author's approach provides an incisive analysis of macro-level economic and political structures, as well as the sociocultural contexts of the society in focus.

This review is jointly written by Michael SY Liu, Distinguished Professor, The Department of History, Shanghai Jiao Tong University; Affiliated to Asian Studies Center, University of Pittsburgh and Enchao Yang, PhD candidate, School of History and Culture of Science, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China.

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To compose this book, the author adopts a historical lens, adeptly employing diverse archival materials to unfold the narrative of Western pharmacy in China from approximately the eleventh century to the present. Chiu not only illustrates how Western pharmacy has ‘collectively driven the dramatic transformation and modernisation of China’s pharmaceutical industry and the pharmacy profession’ (p. 205) but also subtly connects the arguments of the ‘sinification’ of foreign pharmaceutical sources with broader socio-economic contexts, providing a nuanced response to the unique historical circumstances in Chinese history. This perspective elucidates the multifaceted ramifications of Western medicine’s introduction to Chinese society. For instance, in the fourth chapter, the author vividly portrays Western chemist-entrepreneurs in China who ‘adeptly aligned with local customary practices and flourished in free market economies with their “opium cures”, anti-wormer bonbons, soda water, photographic supplies...’ (p. 86). Such evocative descriptions serve to enrich the historical imagination and contextualise the experiences of contemporary consumers patronising establishments like Watson’s stores throughout China. This approach offers a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between Western pharmaceutical practices and Chinese cultural norms. The author has thus created a work that not only advances scholarly discourse but also enhances public understanding of this crucial aspect of Sino-Western cultural exchange in modern pharmacy. Furthermore, the author demonstrates particular adeptness in analysing processes of translation and public awareness. For example, Rendan, a Chinese duplicate of the Japanese product Jintan, illustrates the nuanced transition from traditional Chinese herbal pill to scientifically wrapped Japanese over-the-counter (OTC) pharmaceuticals, highlighting the complex interplay between public perception and legal frameworks such as trademark law (176–82). This case exemplifies that the acceptance of Western pharmacy in China was not a simple, linear process of adoption, but rather a dynamic process of change involving social and political construction.

A History of Western Pharmacy in China makes substantial contributions to the study of Chinese medical history. The author provides valuable insights into the mechanisms of cultural adaptation and transformation of Western medicine in China. The book represents a significant addition to the historiography of medicine and pharmacy in China. It should appeal not only to historians of medicine and pharmacy but also to various educated audiences. However, despite its many strengths, certain aspects could be enhanced. While the author adeptly explores historical narratives and *de facto* occurrences, there is a notable absence of interpretation regarding the disjunction between current technological limitations and unrealistic public expectations. *C’est-à-dire*, the work could benefit from a more in-depth examination of how pharmaceutical professionals of different nationalities interacted and perceived one another amidst the struggles of modernisation. In sum, while there are areas where the analysis could be deepened, this book represents a major step forward in our understanding of the complex interplay between Western pharmaceutical practices and Chinese society. It not only advances scholarly discourse but also provides an accessible entry point for general readers interested in this fascinating aspect of cross-cultural exchange.

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