Medical history is a complex tapestry of the history of ideas, practical and cosmological knowledge concepts, frameworks and practices. Considering its foundation in practice, medicine needs to be investigated first and foremost in terms of concrete actions and practices. The issue of practice demarcates domains of everyday care as well as of extraordinary events and crisis. As such, practice is about insecurities and tribulations, attempts and doubts much more than any clear-cut theory would allow. So important is the issue of practice in the domain of medicine that one can hardly avoid it when doing any kind of historical or anthropological research in this domain.

Previously, historical research in Chinese medicine was largely concerned with reconstructing the main systems of knowledge. By the 1970s, this process of collecting, evaluating and systematizing historical sources, although far from finished, was being challenged by an orientation towards the varieties of medical practices.

*Chinese Medicine and Healing* is the outcome of such concerns. Taking into account the divergent implications of medical practices for the social
realm, this book revisits the crossroads of particular moments of change over the course of two thousand years, spanning huge local distances within changing Chinese borders, as well as Europe, America, Africa and Australia. The introduction by the two editors, Linda L. Barnes and TJ Hinrichs, is followed by ten sections that are subdivided into contributions, a bibliography and a carefully compiled index with terms and concepts including Chinese characters. The first eight of the ten parts of the book follow a diachronic perspective, chronologically covering the time span from pre-Han times (going back as far as the second millennium BC) through the People’s Republic of China in the twentieth century. The final two sections deal with contemporary processes, with a special focus on the waves of migration of Chinese medical practice into different parts of the world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Illustrated with geographical maps and chronological timetables as well as pictorial material, the individual subsections are easy to access. They are complemented by short pieces, highlighted in gray, that offer particular views on related issues, topics and places in terms of “fine grained knowledge.” All in all, the book assembles 52 contributions. Despite spanning almost three millennia and vast geographical distances within China and beyond, the book nevertheless manages to be much more than an encyclopedic anthology. It can be seen as a well-arranged assemblage of single pieces that together and on their own tell a story from particular perspectives grounded in basically existential issues, such as concerns over medical care, and the solution of physical and social crisis and problems. Readers are invited to explore the history of Chinese medicine as a highly sophisticated academic field grounded on an explorative and solution-oriented approach. Due to the afore-said practical dimension, the individual contributions in the book avoid “certain conceptual frameworks that had traction in earlier scholarship on medicine” (p. 3). This is a clear statement against often unspoken, yet longstanding bifurcations, such as “sacred” and “secular,” “science” and “religion,” in academic approaches to historical research in general.

Section one, introduced by Constance A. Cook, discusses the domains in which medicine in ancient China, was acted out: shamanism, divination, exorcism and life-cultivating practices. She presents the ways Shang and Zhou people conceived of individual lives, human bodies and a whole variety of ghosts and demons surrounding them, through analysis of divination and exorcism practices. These were the primary diagnostic and treatment methods for illness on both the individual and the state level. Pointing to the ways the microcosmic and macrocosmic dimensions were intermingled (to drive out one’s enemies from the country and to exorcise disease from the body were part of one and the same reality), she introduces the use of bone and tortoise shell for communication with spirits
throughout the period. A short extract from an oracle bone inscription shows the concrete practice of this (Ken Takashima, p. 8). However, by the sixth century BC, cosmologies based on qi, the vapor taken to constitute the essence of all matter, and the concepts of yin and yang emerged, and with them herbal preparations with the use of alcohol and meat for nurturing the sick and elderly.

In the second section on the Han Period (206 BC-220 AD), Vivienne Lo first of all contextualizes the development of authoritative medical writing, e.g. its standardization and canonization, and the emergence of acupuncture, that is needles, stones and Artemisia, as means of treatment. A large number of medical manuscripts from this period evidence the co-existence of highly diverse forms of healing that related to magic and religious world-views as much as to very particular and locally practiced ways of diagnosis and healing.

This foundational period for the history of Chinese medicine in terms of content, canonization and standardization saw the emergence of superficial surgery, therapeutic exercise and sexual and breath cultivation, as well as the treatment of women and their specific vulnerabilities during and after childbirth. The latter is described by Lisa Raphals in a short insertion. From this section the reader gains insights into the interactions between experts’ practices for nourishment and longevity and the knowledge frameworks these experts relied on. These included: the culture of calculation, the importance of the reckoning arts for connecting human bodily processes with cosmological signs and processes, the social positioning and cultural meaning of these experts in diverse contexts, and faith in the power of numbers (numerology). Another short interwoven chapter deals with the late Han masters of healing that were seen as eccentrics with superhuman abilities, and divine teachers (TJ Hinrichs).

Section three on the period of division and the Tang dynasty (220-906 BC), introduced by Fan Ka-wai, provides detailed information on the changing social and institutional contexts of medicine. Pointing to the significance of traders, students, envoys, Buddhist monks and Daoist priests for the ongoing exchange and mutual incorporation of medical knowledge, practices, books and drugs with the Korean peninsula, on one hand, and with South and Central Asia on the other, this section consists of a multitude of short “thick descriptions.” These include Shamans (Lin Fu-shih), Prerequisites for Treating Childlessness (Jessey JJ.C. Chao), Nurturing the Fetus (Sabine Wilms), Childbirth (Jen-der Lee), particular practices of Daoist cultivation (Gul Raz), iatromantic diagnosis and treatment (Donald Harper), and the life and work of the eminent physician, herbalist, and Daoist Sun Simiao (Victor Xiong).

Section four continues with Song and Jin period (906-1234) extensions of medical policies, institutions (medical schools, regularization of medical
relief) and state publishing of medical texts under the Bureau for Editing Medical Treatises. Hinrichs does not leave out any of the attempts by the Song state to produce and disseminate medical knowledge for the purpose of rectifying commoner customs. Her introduction is interrupted by short descriptions of the Plague God Cults (Paul R. Katz), Legendary Daoist Women (Catherine Despeux), and Song Printed Medical Works and Medieval Japanese Medicine (Andrew Edmund Goble).

The introduction to section five, on the Yuan and Ming Periods (1206-1368), by Angela Ki Che Leung is just as detailed and comprehensive. Here again the whole range of healers and physician types and their social positions, which were intimately entwined with ongoing negotiations with elite learned traditions, are discussed. Interspersed into this are short contributions on Arabic Medicine in China by Paul D. Buell, Vietnamese Monk-Physicians at the Ming Court (C. Michelle Thompson), medical synthesis in Chosön Korea (Soyoung Suh), the temples established by the Yuan government for medical schools (Reiko Shinno), Children’s Medicine (Hsiung Ping-chen), the work of famous late Ming physician Li Shizhen (Kenneth J. Hammond), and finally Variolation (Chang Chia-Feng). All these cohere around medical concerns, social necessities and societal hierarchies in a way that could not be better done.

Yi-Li Wu in her introduction to the Qing Period (section six) describes the whole range of cultural, social and intellectual trends of the dynasty: the gentrification of medicine, the relation of medicine and secret societies, medical charity and philanthropy, medical publishing and government medicine, global medical exchanges, including the Jesuits and the introduction of European medicine in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, acupuncture in Europe, the Protestant medical missionaries in late nineteenth-century China, Chinese views of Western medicine, and last but not least the relation of Western medicine in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century China to the Chinese Self-strengthening movement. Again this is complemented by short contributions on Fertility Control and Demographics (Francesca Bray), Female Alchemy (Elena Valussi), the Nineteenth-century Bubonic Plague Epidemic (Carol Benedict), the Emperor’s Physician (Chang Che-chia), medical and martial arts in late imperial vernacular fiction (Paize Keulemans), Eighteenth-century European Views of Gongfu (Linda L. Barnes), and finally the “Warm Diseases” Current of Learning (Marta E. Hanson).

Section seven addresses the Republic of China (1912-1949), Dealing with the creation of modern Chinese medicine, which was closely linked to a move to abolish traditional Chinese medicine, and introducing public health and the establishment of a modern state, Bridie Andrews opens up with a whole range of illuminating photographs. These depict mission hospitals (old and modern), street doctors, a group picture of traditional mid-
wives after training in sanitary delivery methods (1929), and a picture of Dr. Wu Liande (1911), the well-known co-author of one of the first monographs on the history of modern medicine in China, who was appointed as the first director of the Manchurian Plague Prevention Service in 1911, and nominated for the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1935. This section is interspersed with short pieces on Dissection in China (Larissa Heinrich), Neu- rasthenia (shenjing shuairuo) in China (Hugh Shapiro), and Advertising Hygienic Modernity (Ruth Rogaski).

Section eight on the People’s Republic of China (1949 to the present) addresses the entirely new struggles for legitimation of Chinese medicine, as Volker Scheid points out in his introduction to this section. He painstakingly and meticulously traces the changing realities, political decisions and discussions from the 1950’s through to today, concluding that the current pluralistic health care system is becoming a highly fractured field of medical practices, with no longer any need for a clear-cut dichotomy of “Chinese medicine versus Western medicine.” This section is dedicated to Propaganda and Health (Stefan R. Landsberger), Folk Nutritional Therapy in Modern China (Eugene N. Anderson), Inventing Qigong (David Ownby), Chinese Medicine as Popular Knowledge in Urban China (Judith Farquhar), Seal Penis, Viagra, and Sexual Potency in Post-Mao China (Everett Zhang), Religious Healing in the People’s Republic of China (Thomas DuBois), and SARS, Bird Flu, and Media Transparency in China (Hepeng Jia).

Section nine and Section ten, entitled A World of Chinese Medicine and Healing: Part I and Part II, both introduced by Linda L. Barnes, deal with the spread of Chinese medicine to the world outside of China. Tracing the multiple paths of migration through France, Vietnam, Québec, Harlem, England, Japan and Sri Lanka requires first of all looking back into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is what the individual items in the first part are about. Historical accounts again alternate with shorter texts marked in gray on Acupuncture in Argentina (Bettina Freidin), Acupuncture in Germany (Gunnar Stollberg), the particular situation of Chinese medicine education in the U.S. (Sonya Pritzker), Acupuncture in Iraq (Lazgeen Ahmad, Interview by Douglas Newton), sub-health and preventive medicine (Mei Zhan), and Placebo-controlled Randomized Trials and Chinese Medicine (Ted J. Kaptchuk). Section ten presents an even more diverse world of practices in Chinese Medicine, which, for instance, in African contexts comprises everything practiced by a Chinese physician (also biomedicine), as well as medicine that comes from China (Chinese medical drugs, and Chinese-manufactured Western biomedical drugs). This section addresses the multidirectional migrations of Chinese life, medical, spiritual and religious knowledge and practice in and outside the Asian geographic area. There is a rich tradition of practices that all somehow refer to a Chinese ideosphere, and that are not easily distinguished via the bifurca-
tion of “expert” or “layperson.” This section, therefore, is highly amorphous due to the interplay of past and present, national and regional, local and global. It sheds light on the entanglements of diverse fields, such as food and herbal therapies in current Chinese and non-Chinese contexts, the issue of general social care and charity practices in clan halls and associations, new organizations for self-cultivation in the PRC, newly emerging preventive spiritual and divination practices, dream interpretation and fengshui, face reading, and the diverse meanings of qi in the PRC, Taiwan and other parts of the world. This multi-layered section moreover is supplemented by two shorter essays on the qi-visualizing discourse and practice past and present (Nancy N. Chen), and Taiji in America (Elijah Singer).

This last section most explicitly exemplifies the balancing act required when presenting both detail and a comprehensive narrative. The authors and editors of the book have succeeded admirably in arranging scattered pieces of specific knowledge into a cohesive whole. This has saved them from having to reduce highly complex and multiple processes, events and discourses to one single (meta)-narrative. The short and concise “thick descriptions” blend with the larger “space of narrative,” creating a whole in which the assemblage of diverse pieces, voices, practices, elements and perspectives in the field of Chinese medical history illuminate the given time and place in new and unexpected ways.

This book, in terms of theory, systematic knowledge, ‘fine grained’ knowledge, and format, is innovative in its scope and in its methodological practice. Firstly, because it takes into account a great many variables when dealing with medicine and healing from an historical as well as a contemporary perspective. Far from avoiding the many ambiguities around Chinese medicine, “China” and Chinese medicine are treated as flexible concepts rather than as objectively continuous and fixed terms. Secondly, the contributions to the anthology to a great extent are concerned with the actors’ and the patients’ own understandings of what they are doing, and of what they are looking for. This is the way the various and differing demarcations of what “medicine” and “medical” are presented through times and regions can reveal today. Finally, the gray-marked short texts that intersperse the single sections in varying number and length, in each case describe a singular moment in time and place. To be sure, one might question the significance of some of these moments for the whole story. On the other hand, these short pieces provide glimpses of an encyclopedic whole. As such, some of them will serve as seeds for future research of highly complex and multi-layered material. In sum, the book provides a solid basis on which students can track the history of Chinese medicine, it points to so far unknown fields of knowledge and practice as important parts of a multi-faceted and multi-layered story.
Students and teachers of Chinese medical history have long waited for this masterpiece.