Pordié, Laurent (ed.) 2008, *Tibetan Medicine in the Contemporary World: Global Politics of Medical Knowledge and Practice*, London and New York: Routledge. ISBN: 0-415-44789-5 (hbk), 0-208-93254-4 (ebk)

This edited volume on Tibetan medicine stands on a par with the recently published volume *Soundings of Tibetan Medicine*, edited by Mona Schrempf (2007), although it is not based on conference proceedings. The papers are of a great variety, incorporating views from the practical clinical side of Tibetan medicine (Tokar) as well as contemporary anthropological studies. The studies range from Ladakh (Pordié), Nepal (Craig, Aumeeruddy-Thomas and Lama), Mongolia (Janes and Hillard), China (Hua), the Tibet Autonomous Region (Adams and Li), the UK (Millard), to the USA (Vargas). The variety of papers reflect the position that Tibetan medicine has attained over the past decade, that of an expanding Asian medical system with an international and plural character.

The articles are well framed by an interesting introduction by the editor and a thoughtful summary and concluding notes by Geoffrey Samuel. These two pieces place the presentations in a broader context, which adds much value to the book.

In his introduction, Pordié not only critically contextualises what we call ‘Tibetan medicine’ or ‘Sowa Rigpa’ (Science of Healing), but also proposes a descriptive model, namely ‘neo-traditionalism’, as an analytical tool. For him, neo-traditionalism marks those new Tibetan medical practitioners who are open to innovation, are usually part of urban institutionalised medical structures, and apply their ‘traditional’ knowledge in innovative and accentuated ways on a global scale.

His model remains somewhat isolated since none of the other authors directly take up the editor’s analytical perspective on neo-traditionalism (in fact the term does not appear in any of the chapters until Samuel’s conclusion on page 255). Nevertheless, the ethnographic contributions elucidate the various issues that Pordié outlines in his introduction as being an integral part of a neo-traditional movement in Tibetan medicine. Samuel picks up the thread again in the conclusion of the book, not to elaborate further on neo-traditionalism, but to sketch the more global perspective of the entire situation of Tibetan medicine. His main question is how and in what way Tibetan medicine can be a meaningful object of study. He critically points out how Tibetan medicine has often been perceived as isolated from the larger context of Tibetan culture and reduced to ‘*Rgyud bzhi* medicine’, in which textual medical knowledge as taught at a medical institution is seen as central to the know-how of Tibetan medicine. He elucidates the conflicting discourse between *amchi* (Tibetan medical practitioners) and anthropologists, in which ethnographic studies of *amchi* medical practices on the village level are seen by institutionally-trained *amchi* as a ‘waste of time’.

The current volume offers views that contrast with what many Tibetan medical practitioners believe is ‘real’ Tibetan medicine. A number of the papers draw detailed pictures of diverse and complex social and political landscapes in which Tibetan medicine is practised today, often in non-institutional settings. To bridge the gap between *amchi* and anthropologists, most of whom do not have the time and opportunity to study Tibetan medicine in depth, the perspective of a Tibetan practitioner would have added valuable balance to the volume. Tokar, a Westerner trained as a Tibetan medical practitioner, offers reflections ‘from the inside’ (Chapter 10), but as a New York-based practitioner trained privately with senior Tibetan *amchi*, he has a unique standpoint, which might not necessarily be shared by other Tibetan *amchi*.

The different views presented make the book an interesting read. The three main parts of the book cover modern institutionalisation, the politics of knowledge, and the relationship between Tibetan medicine and the West. Each part covers diverse practices of Tibetan medicine in several countries.

Part One begins with a paper that compares Tibetan medicine in Mongolia (where it is termed 'Mongolian medicine') with Tibetan medicine in the TAR (this section is mostly based on Janes' previous papers). Medical practices at both sites have been impacted by socialist modernities. The paper concludes from its comparison that while Tibetan medicine in Tibet has become an important component of primary rural health care, in Mongolia traditional medicine has emerged largely as an 'urban health care resource offered to relatively affluent patients in private hospitals and clinics' (Janes and Hilliard, p. 49). Since research on Mongolian medicine is still in its infancy, it has to be seen if the authors' generalised conclusions hold. They do not correspond to my own personal experience of Mongolian medicine (Gerke 2004). I believe there are still plenty of possibilities to discover a more varied picture. Craig presents an interesting ethnography of the Himalayan Amchi Association (HAA), which highlights the dynamics between the Nepali nation-state and *amchi* Tibetan identity. Craig's material spans more than a decade, from the foundation of the HAA in 1998, when Nepali officials did not know what an *amchi* was, to 2006, when the HAA was granted support and recognition from the Ministry of Education, an important step towards state-certified practitioners. 'Tradition' and 'modernity' are rightly critiqued as being limiting dichotomous labels for the plural diversity found in Tibetan medicine. Craig suggests looking at 'tradition' in its own right, 'not only as a product or reflection of modernity' (p. 81), but in relation to *amchi* lineage systems as one of the main ways in which tradition links the past with the present. 'Tradition' can also be seen as part of the *amchi* identity that they actively shape. Unlocking the polarities of such labels seems necessary to understand the complexities Tibetan medicine has to offer. Hua's paper on the diffusion of Tibetan medicine in China is carefully announced as 'descriptive', so the reader does not expect analytical expertise. It nevertheless provides new information that has previously not been available in English. One wonders when *amchi* and scholars from the Tibetan communities will join such edited volumes with their perspectives. They are still painfully absent from the scene.

Part Two, on the politics of knowledge, offers three critical papers that unravel the often silenced and hidden agendas of political power structures behind Tibetan medical knowledge. Pordié's paper on intellectual property rights in Ladakh deals with especially sensitive issues and exposes a number of events that have been upsetting the collaboration between foreign researchers and Ladakhi *amchi*, who have become extremely suspicious of foreign interest in their *materia medica*. Not only does this paper present a social analysis of intellectual property rights, it also clearly shows the underlying currents of identity and nationalist political agendas benefiting from international movements concerning intellectual property rights. Unfortunately, even though no names are mentioned, from disclosed hints insiders will easily recognise the people Pordié talks about. The anonymity of certain people related to sensitive key issues could have been dealt with more carefully, either preserving their anonymity fully or giving them a voice by mentioning their names. The approach taken opens wider questions of an ethical debate for anthropologists writing on sensitive issues that often remain unaddressed.

Part Three enlarges the book's scope by introducing Tibetan medical practices in the UK and the USA. Millard analyses those parts of the tradition that had an easy transition to the UK and those in which adjustments have been more difficult. The overall movement shows that Tibetan medicine is being increasingly aligned with biomedical concepts, neglecting more traditional understandings of disease processes. The author believes that these would have a chance of being scientifically investigated in order to show the validity of certain Tibetan medicines or, for example, pulse reading as a diagnostic method. Vargas, in her analysis of Tibetan medicine in Massachusetts, shows that Tibetan medicine in the USA has taken on a 'distinctly Western form'. Tokar urges more collaboration among those practising Tibetan medicine in the West. He argues that since *amchi* in the West lack an organisation, certain institutions have more power to control the globalisation of Tibetan medicine.

This book leaves the reader with a plethora of new information as well as an updated global, pluralistic picture of the continuing process of change that is transforming Tibetan medicine in the twentieth-first century.

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Gerke B. 2004, 'Tradition and Modernity in Mongolian Medicine', *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 10: 743–9.

Schrempf M. 2007, *Soundings in Tibetan Medicine: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives*, Leiden and Boston: Brill. (PIATS 2003: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003).