Leung, Angela Ki Che 2009, *Leprosy in China: A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, Pp. xi, 373. US\$55.00 (hbk). ISBN 978 0 231 12300 6

Angela Leung's *Leprosy in China* is a pioneering contribution to the history of illness and healing in East Asia, as it is the first book to trace the history of a single disease from its earliest surviving records to the present day. Although numerous historians of Western medicine have exploited the possibilities of viewing history from the perspective of a single disease, historians of Chinese medicine have by contrast tended to shy away from such narratives. Historians of East Asia have produced valuable studies of diseases such as plague, smallpox and tuberculosis in the modern period, but until now there has been a notable lack of narratives detailing the changes and continuities of cultural responses to specific diseases over a longer time scale. In this book, Leung both shows the way forward and sets a high standard for future historians of medicine who may wish to write in the same genre.

In Chapter 1, Leung presents a lucid exposition of the complex disease terminology of her sources (including *li* 厲, *lai* 癩, *dafeng* 大風, *mafeng* 癩瘋, *Guangchuang* 廣瘡); throughout the book, she scrupulously retains the sources' original terminology in order to highlight subtle conceptual distinctions and to illustrate shifts in the ways that Chinese society conceived of the disease. Despite their differences, Leung seems justified in grouping these concepts together as 'leprosy', because this grouping enables us to see the full range of prophylactic, therapeutic and emotional responses to these similar ailments among patients, doctors and government officials.

In Chapter 2, Leung describes changing concepts of the disease, from vague references in the Han Dynasty medical classics and in Buddhist and Daoist legends, to the increasingly precise descriptions of disease in Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasty medical writings. Leung argues that the thirteenth century represented a turning point in the way that Chinese society conceived of and responded to the ailments she groups together as 'leprosy'. From the thirteenth century onwards, doctors placed less emphasis on the origins of the disease as a form of Wind damage, coming to view the disease more specifically as an ailment of the skin. At the same time, medical and popular imagination began to associate the disease ever more closely with the miasmatic southern regions of China, and sexual contact became increasingly feared as a possible source of transmission. This shift in understandings of the disease came about simultaneously with the spread of syphilis, and the diseases were often assimilated in the popular imagination.

Having set the stage with this survey of the earlier background, Leung enters into her richly detailed narrative of leprosy's social history in the Late Imperial period (Chapter 3). Since the leprosy body came to be seen as both a mark of moral pollution and a dangerous source of contagion, regions of endemic leprosy in southern China began to develop institutional structures for the isolation of lepers. Leung draws on a rich variety of sources for her description of these asylums, including locally-produced gazetteers and the writings of visitors to these regions from China and further abroad. She provides a wealth of fascinating detail on the ways in which sufferers were brought to the asylum and on the management of the asylum themselves.

A notable contribution of the book is Leung's exploitation of legal case records from Qing Dynasty archives. These archives, which are becoming increasingly accessible and are likely to provide rich material to future generations of medical historians, contain records for a number of cases relating to the murder of leprosy sufferers. Since these leper murders tended to occur precisely in the regions where leprosy asylums were most numerous, Leung argues that the overlapping geographic patterns of leprosy asylum foundation and leper murders reveal a deep fear of leprosy contagion among inhabitants of these regions.

During the nineteenth century, the notion of leprosy as a 'Southern' disease was gradually displaced by a more crude concept of leprosy as a 'Chinese' disease. The emergence of this view may have been influenced by the fact that foreign traders and missionary doctors came to China through the southern coastal regions where leprosy was the greatest endemic problem, but Leung

argues that the actual extent and distribution of leprosy do not in themselves provide a sufficient explanation for the emotional impact carried by fears of ‘Chinese leprosy’. A crude and reflexive association between leprosy and the Chinese race came to dominate nineteenth-century discourse, influencing immigration policies in Europe, Australia and the Americas and eventually shaping government policy in China itself.

In the Republican period, the notion of leprosy as a national disease requiring ‘extermination’ encouraged harsh government policies. Whereas responses to leprosy in Late Imperial China had implicitly assumed that the disease would continue to exist, Republican policy regarding leprosy was explicitly directed towards elimination of the disease from Chinese society, while the welfare of leprosy sufferers became a marginal concern. At the same time, the loss of confidence in traditional Chinese culture meant that the very existence of Chinese traditions for the segregation and treatment of leprosy was forgotten. Even chaulmoogra (*da feng zi* 大風子), a remedy whose moderately effective use in the treatment of leprosy had been known in China since the thirteenth century, came to be viewed as a ‘Western’ medicine introduced into China by missionary doctors.

In her final chapter, Leung shows that although the struggles against leprosy after 1949 followed the same guiding principles as those of the Republican period, they met with much greater success. This came about in part because authoritarian state power facilitated the maintenance of strict segregation regimes, but also because new sulfonilamide drugs meant that much more effective therapy had become possible. Despite the incomplete accessibility of relevant sources, Leung displays in this final chapter the same meticulous attention to local detail that enriches her narrative of the earlier periods. The success of the struggle against leprosy may have owed much to the availability of new antibiotics and to the Communist state’s expanded capacity for engineering social change; however, Leung demonstrates that doctors in a variety of contexts continued to use traditional remedies such as chaulmoogra and viper wine alongside the new antibiotics, and that the ability of Communist state to enforce its segregation policies was much less than might be expected. The social context of leprosy in the early decades of the PRC was radically different from that in the Qing, but the historical depth of Leung’s narrative allows us to see these subtle strands of continuity running across the fault-lines of history.

Leung’s book condenses an extraordinary range of materials into an admirably concise and fluent narrative. It will be read and enjoyed for many years to come not only by scholars of Chinese medical history, but by a wide range of readers wishing to understand the history of interactions between disease and human culture.

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