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This is the author’s fourth book on the history of medicine in premodern Asia. His first three books include textual studies of the Sanskrit medical texts *Siddhasāra* and *Jīvaka-pustaka* and a thematic investigation of medical texts discovered in Central Asian and Western China. In the book under review, Chen shifts focus from India and Central Asia to China itself, and asks how the rich medical theories and practices found in Central Asia—the origins of which could have been Greek, Indian, or Arabic—interacted with Chinese medicine, both in theory and in practice.

This hefty volume is divided into twenty-eight sections. Since many of the sections were originally published individually, one may read this book as a collection of twenty-eight articles. Chen helps his readers by organizing them into six thematic chapters, with three to eight sections in each chapter. The themes dealt with include the interactions between Chinese and non-Chinese medical theories (Chapter 1), medical practice from the perspectives of physicians and patients (Chapter 2), knowledge about and commercial use of non-Chinese medicines in China (Chapter 3), the use of specific non-Chinese prescriptions (Chapter 4), interactions among religion, medicine, and non-Chinese cultures (Chapter 5), and medicine on the “Silk Road” (Chapter 6).

Chen’s use of sources is impressively exhaustive. His Chinese sources go well beyond official histories and well-known medical texts, extending to literary sources, inscriptive sources, and excavated texts from Dunhuang, Turfan, Khotan, and other sites of western China and Central Asia. Chen’s use of these sources not only allows him to access more examples for the exchange of medical cultures; more importantly, it provides perspectives not found in traditional sources. For instance, inscriptive sources such as tomb epitaphs often describe the diseases experienced by the deceased, thus providing real-life examples of how people dealt with illness (78–84). Excavated texts from Dunhuang and other locations far from the center of the Chinese states can be read as local manifestations of imperial systems of knowledge.

Perhaps more importantly, Chen follows the pattern of his earlier more philological writings by making extensive use of non-Chinese sources in Sanskrit, Khotanese, Tibetan, and Arabic. Because of his familiarity with Sanskrit medical texts, he is able to discern possible connections between these Sanskrit texts and Chinese excavated texts, even when the Chinese texts are extremely fragmentary. A good example is his identification of three Sanskrit medical
terms in a tiny piece of Chinese text with only a few characters extant (509), thus turning this otherwise easily ignored fragment into a tantalizing piece of evidence for the exchange of medical cultures in medieval China. Chen's mastery of multilingual medical texts is nowhere seen more clearly than in Section 5 of Chapter 3 (187–223), where he traces the use of the single medicinal plant *bhallātaka* in Sanskrit (both Vedic and Buddhist), Khotanese, Tocharian, Arabic, and Chinese sources. It is particularly interesting, as Chen points out, that the same item was introduced to China twice: first in the Buddhist context in the Tang and the Song dynasties, and then in the context of Islamic medical texts during the Mongol rule of China. Chen’s approach of tracing a single item in a bewildering array of multilingual sources can also be seen in Chapter 6 (Sections 1, 4, 5, and 6; 405–19, 466–523). Collectively, these sections successfully demonstrate the translingual porousness of medical cultures in pre-modern Eurasia.

The author’s command of multiple types of sources allows him to go beyond merely describing transcultural interactions in medicine in theoretical terms. Instead, he paints a rich and multilayered picture that encompasses theory and practice, physicians and patients, medicines and toxins, and much more. The most interesting parts of the book include sections where Chen places the history of medicine in the broader social and cultural worlds of medieval China. For instance, in his section on *Haiyao bencao* (121–51), Chen analyzes this text of non-Chinese medicine in several different contexts, including the life and the poetic compositions of its author, its comparison with the works of Al-Bīrūnī, its relation with other Chinese *materia medica* texts, its relation with Daoist alchemy, and common items found both in *Haiyao bencao* in Dunhuang and Turfan medical texts. In this way, Chen offers an episode in the history of knowledge of medieval China that goes well beyond the realm of medicine. With a different approach, in Chapter 3 (Section 3; 152–78) on the role of non-Chinese medicines in commerce, Chen zooms in on ambiguities about the value and efficacy of non-Chinese medicines inherent in such cross-cultural exchanges. By collecting and discussing cases of how such ambiguities were dreaded, negotiated, and exploited, he paints an astonishingly rich picture of exaggerations and deceptions regarding the efficacy of non-Chinese medicines on the part of their advocates, and the ways Chinese practitioners and patients tried, and often failed, to elucidate the confusion resulting from such exaggerations and deceptions. In this case, medical knowledge becomes the lens through which medieval Chinese attitudes towards the ethnic and cultural other can be examined.

In the last two sections of the book (524–65), Chen offers some preliminary remarks on the compositional structure and writing strategy of excavated