Editorial

Geoffrey Samuel

This is officially the first issue of the new editorship of *Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity*. Vivienne Lo and I congratulate the new editorial team, Marta Hanson and Mona Schrempf, and wish them good fortune with their new task. With two experienced scholars at the helm, and a more solid financial basis than the journal has had for some years, we feel confident about the future of IASTAM’s journal. Editing *Asian Medicine* has been an extraordinary and very positive experience for both Vivienne and I; not least, in my case, because of the opportunity it has afforded to get to know personally so many of the leading scholars in this field, but it is time for both of us to move on.

The present issue is however transitional, in that Vivienne and I are still involved, though in the capacity of guest editors. The issue derives from a panel, ‘Cultivating Perfection and Longevity’, which we jointly organised in September 2009 at the Seventh International Conference on Traditional Asian Medicine (ICTAM) in Thimphu, Bhutan. Of the ten papers in that panel, revised versions of five are included here, along with three additional papers. The issue also includes a practitioner’s report and two book reviews.

‘Cultivating Perfection and Longevity’ was intended to be a theme that could encompass approaches from both the Sinitic and Indo-Tibetan cultural regions. Five of the academic articles here refer to forms of self-cultivation within Chinese traditions. The other three are on Tibet (two) and India (one). A third Tibetan presentation at the conference, my own contribution (‘Tibetan Longevity Practices: The Body in Buddhist Tantric Ritual’), is being published elsewhere.1 The wide spread of material in this issue brings to the fore a couple of questions that have been around for a while: are the Indian and Tibetan practices doing ‘the same thing’ as the Chinese ones? What, if any, is the historical relationship between them?

Neither question can be given a conclusive or straightforward answer at this point in time, but exploring them provides some important context for the

1 Samuel, forthcoming; see also Samuel 2012.
articles in this issue. To begin with, it is worth looking at the history of these practices in the two regions separately, since the development of the practices is complex in both cases. In both regions, too, the practices tend to cut across the standard categorisations of contemporary thought. Are these practices medical or religious? Do they relate to health, physical exercise, alchemy, erotic science, martial arts or spiritual cultivation? In both the Indo-Tibetan and East Asian traditions we can find elements that might be classified in any of these ways. It is also evident that practitioners at various times might be more concerned with one or another dimension. A key issue for all of these practices though is that they would seem to involve concepts and experiences that might be seen as located between our modern concepts of mind and body, in what is often referred to as the ‘subtle body’. On the Chinese side, a central concept here is *qi*, on the Indic and Tibetan *prāṇa* (Tibetan *rlung*). In both cases these terms form part of a complex and sophisticated body of concepts, which can be encountered in a variety of different forms and expressions.

The early forms of the Chinese practices, until fairly recently, were known primarily from a body of texts that might easily be categorised as ‘religious’, since they formed part of the complex current of Chinese thought and practice known as Daoism. While the Daoisms traceable back to the Celestial Masters (Tianshi 天師) or Orthodox Unity (Zhengyi 正義) schools of the 2nd century CE and the Upper Clarity (Shangqing 上清) and Numinous Treasure (Lingbao 靈寳) schools of the 4th century CE, have taken mainly pejorative stances towards *yangsheng* 养生 in their early centuries, over the years Daoist catalogues incorporated and preserved *yangsheng* materials as a process of accretion. One important text which collected excerpts from early scriptures dating back to the 2nd Century CE is the *Yangsheng yaoji* 养生要集. Now lost, it is preserved in other texts, primarily the *Yangxing yanming lu* 養性延命錄, the *Zhubing yuanhou lun* 諸病源候論 and the *Ishinpō* 醫心方. A key element of many of these scriptures were processes of self-cultivation which utilised exercises and practices intended to direct and harmonise the *qi*. Arguing against the accepted academic view, Stanley-Baker’s article shows how body-focused techniques, often directed towards the healing of illness, were not just preparatory exercises but a feature of all levels of higher spiritual practice. The ultimate aim was to purify the internal flows of *qi* 氣, which many considered to grant the state of a *xian* 仙, a transcendent immortal.

The discovery of 2nd century BCE manuscripts in Han dynasty tombs at Mawangdui and elsewhere, from the early 1970s onwards, led to a substantial

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2 Samuel and Johnston 2013.
3 Vivienne Lo is responsible for the following brief survey of Chinese practices.