

Linda Barnes, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts: China, Healing and the West to 1848*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005, 480 pp.

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Barnes' study does not claim to be a history of Chinese medicine. It is instead a history of the imagination of China, of the Chinese, and of their healing traditions by the West, with "West" in this analysis including Europe and the United States. The analysis focuses on three major tropes that characterized this Western imagining: the racializing, religionizing, and medicalizing of the Chinese, all in the context of emerging and transforming representations of what Barnes calls "humankinds" in Western writings. These tropes are explored in the course of several different kinds of European and American encounters with China and their representations, from accounts of Mongolian *qaghans*, to colonial exploration of ginseng and rhubarb, to experiments with the practice of acupuncture in Europe and the Americas.

The coverage of the book extends from the thirteenth century through the middle of the nineteenth century. This wide span is made manageable by being broken up into five units, each the focus of a chapter. After a methodological introduction, then, we read in Chapter 1 of "First Impressions" from the height of the Mongol empire through the late fifteenth century. Chapter 2 extends from 1492 to the middle of the seventeenth century. The next three chapters span increasingly short periods of time, before ending in a conclusion that returns us to the major themes of Barnes' analysis.

Barnes' work will potentially appeal to many different types of reader, from interested readers outside of the academy, to undergraduates beginning their college careers, to academically-trained historians of medicine. The book integrates material from an impressive range of European-language sources and is undoubtedly a contribution to the field of European intellectual history and the history of health and healing. Each reader's evaluation of the nature of that contribution will ultimately depend on what she is looking for in a historical analysis. In the spirit of a

book on the history of imagination, let us conjure some of those possible readers.

X is a dedicated but casual reader of European history. He reads Barnes' book to relax on the weekend with a cup of tea, or perhaps on the subway, or quietly in the evening. The dichotomies that undergird the account presented in the book (China/West, Chinese thought/Western thought) accord with what he has read in other histories, and the focus on healing offers a new lens through which to view a story of European Orientalism that is familiar enough to not be jarring. The book brings texts on medicine and religious worship to his attention for the first time. He enjoys that the approach reads as a kind of historical ethnography, a guided and carefully curated tour of an archive of material that is full of engaging anecdotes and long quotations from primary sources (or English-language translations thereof). He learns to situate his modest working knowledge of acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine within a longer historical framework that places the emergence of those ideas within a larger frame of changing notions of humanity in history. He enjoys the book and recommends it to his friends.

Y is an advanced undergraduate student. She has read the book in the context of a seminar on the history of medicine. This is her first time encountering many of the texts or authors included in the study, and she is fascinated and resolves to read more about figures that are of particular interest to her. (She finds the book invaluable as a primer to help her narrow in on a more focused topic for a final research paper, or even perhaps for a future honors or MA thesis.) She learns from Barnes that histories of healing, broadly defined, include attention to more than just medical practices. She jots down the brief arguments mentioned in the introduction to the book, and then reads the rest by browsing through the chapters for stories and quotes that strike her interest. She keeps the book on hand and consults it as a textbook over the course of the semester, especially as she works on her course essays. She comes out of the experience believing that she now understands Chinese medical history from the authoritatively-delivered contextual background that Barnes provides in many of the chapters. She finds the book fascinating, and recommends it to her colleagues.

Z is a professor of history, specializing in East Asian science, technology, and medicine. She has read the book as a recent scholarly contribution to her field. Though C appreciates the synthetic accomplishment of the work, she finds it somewhat difficult to read: there are so many quotations, lists, and examples in each paragraph that (aside from the very first and last pages of each chapter) the narrative and argumentative threads tend to get lost. She worries that the book does little to undermine the coherence of

Chinese healing, Chinese thought, China, and the West as objects of analysis, and that it preserves, at times, a narrative of incommensurability between West and East. She is somewhat disappointed that more careful attention to the craft of historical analysis has not been more thoughtfully attended to. In particular, she notices an odd mixture of credulity and skepticism in the way that Barnes deals with her sources: while the content of the European accounts is generally treated skeptically as an object of analysis, there tends to be an attitude of credulity toward the descriptions offered in secondary literature on Chinese health and healing. (Is not this oft-cited secondary literature, the reader wonders, another kind of Western imagination of China that Barnes' analysis might have benefitted from treating more critically?) She reminds herself that history can look many different ways, however, and that she has learned a good deal from the book about texts that are outside of her temporal specialization. She considers assigning it in graduate seminars on world history and on global histories of medicine and health.

These are only three of many possible readers of and reactions to *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*. Its ability to appeal to a wide readership that includes medical practitioners and scholars of many humanistic fields is a testament to the strength of the work. Whether or not the book speaks to these readers is going to depend on what each is looking for in a history. As is appropriate for a multi-sited story of plural approaches to an imagined object, Barnes' book offers many different gifts depending on the frame from which it is approached.