

The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine. by Manfred Porkert

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Book Reviews

People's Republic of China will become most formidable." One must join in this assessment, but also share Mr. Swetz' misgivings about the continued advance of the various branches of the discipline in China. Since the conclusion of the book the Cultural Revolution has continued to produce change, with renewed discussion of the need for some kind of discipline-centred examinations. Perhaps mathematics teachers and professors are maintaining the forward movement of their specialty in that third of their professional time designated for research.

To write a definitive treatise on Chinese mathematics education one would want access to official reports and the opportunity actually to work in a variety of Chinese schools and colleges. These opportunities have not been open to Mr. Swetz, but using information available to him, he has produced a useful addition to our knowledge of education in China.

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THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CHINESE MEDICINE. Systems of Correspondence. By Manfred Porkert. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press. 1974. 368 pp. \$13.95.

DR. MANFRED PORKERT, who is Privat-docent in Sinology at Karl Wilhelms Universität in Munich, has written a work which in the Foreword is described as "the first truly scholarly book on Chinese medicine in a Western language"—a statement which this reviewer has considerable difficulty in accepting. For what Dr. Porkert has done is to discuss, yet once again, the philosophical concepts which have been developed over the centuries to attempt explanations for the empirical discoveries of the ancient (and indeed modern) traditional Chinese physicians.

Speaking only from the scientific and not from a philosophical or philological point of view, I find it difficult to be convinced that Dr. Porkert has made a significant contribution to scholarship by producing this work. In addition to the fact that the ground has been gone over many times before, criticism on at least three points appears justified. I may focus upon two of these by a quotation: "In certain folds or interstices of the extremities (Chinese: *hsi*, Latin: *rima*, English: fissure, cleft) physiological energy may accumulate and stagnate." The concept of "energy" flowing (or stagnating) in some mysterious channels in the body surely is one which cannot be seriously countenanced today, and it should not, in my view, be allowed further publicity. The manner in which the material is presented implies that Dr. Porkert believes that it is a currently valid hypothesis, and he certainly does not suggest that in this, as in other instances throughout the book, he is discussing a philosophical thesis several centuries old. The above quotation also introduces a Latin terminology, and thereby illustrates my second criticism, which is that the author, by translating Chinese terms and

concepts into Latin, has sought to give them a medical respectability which is quite unjustified.

Finally, and perhaps most damaging to Dr. Porkert's viewpoint, is the fact that in modern China the philosophical basis for traditional medicine is no longer even mentioned. That there is medical validity for some and perhaps much of the traditional practice, both in the use of acupuncture and in the treatment of disease by the remedies contained in the vast pharmacopoeia which has been built up, cannot now be doubted; but the search for an understanding of the underlying mechanisms and the integration of the techniques into "western" medical usage are not advanced by books such as this one.

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MODERN CHINESE SOCIETY: AN ANALYTICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY. Vol. 1. PUBLICATIONS IN WESTERN LANGUAGES, 1644-1972. *Edited by G. William Skinner.* Vol. 2. PUBLICATIONS IN CHINESE, 1644-1969. *Edited by G. William Skinner and Winston Hsieh.* Vol. 3. PUBLICATIONS IN JAPANESE, 1644-1971. *Edited by G. William Skinner and Shigeaki Tomita.* Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1973. Vol. 1, 802 pp. \$35.00. Vol. 2, 801 pp. \$38.00. Vol. 3, 531 pp. \$32.00.

IN MY OPINION, the Skinner bibliography is well worth the great expenditure needed to produce it and the long delay in its appearance. Because we now have it, social science research about modern China can become much more precise and efficient than before. Properly used, it should revolutionize the field of modern Chinese studies. For providing this service, Skinner and his colleagues deserve our deepest appreciation.

This is a bibliography of 31,000 books and articles that the compilers deemed of greatest research value to Modern China social science. The basic organization is according to 72 coded subject-categories, many of which are further subdivided. Within each subject-category there are breakdowns by historical period. The real marvel of these volumes is their massive, computerized cross-indexing system, which allows access from several approaches and provides so much cross-referencing that an intelligent user can quickly pick out everything related to his topic while avoiding the further winnowing of items that at first seemed useful but proved not to be. Besides the usual subject and author indexes there are locational indexes to the provincial level, as well as rural-urban index which identifies all items focussing on one village only, all focussing on a market-area, etc. There is also a coding-device which indicates the research-base of each item: personal observation, primary-source research, etc. Thus, for example, if one wishes to study rural economic life at the market area level in Kwangtung province between 1911 and 1949, using as his sources items based upon fieldwork and research in pri-