

CHAPTER ONE

論大醫習業

Lùn dà yī xí yè

ON THE PROFESSIONAL
PRACTICE OF THE
GREAT DOCTOR

CHAPTER ONE

SECTION ONE

(一) 凡欲為大醫，必須諳《素問》、
《甲乙》、《黃帝針經》、明堂流
注、十二經脈、三部九候、五臟六腑
表裡孔穴、本草藥對、張仲景、王叔
和、阮河南、范東陽、張苗、靳邵等
諸部經方。

(二) 又須妙解陰陽祿命，諸家相
法，及灼龜五兆、《周易》六壬。

(三) 並須精熟，如此乃得為大醫。

(Yī) Fán yù wéi dà yī, bì xū ān «Sùwèn», «Jiǎyǐ», «Huángdì zhēnjīng», míng táng liú zhù, shí èr jīng mài, sān bù jiǔ hòu, wǔ zàng liù fǔ biǎo lǐ kǒng xué, běn cǎo yào duì, Zhāng Zhòngjǐng, Wáng Shūhé, Ruǎn Hénán, Fàn Dōngyáng, Zhāng Miáo, Jìn Shào děng zhū bù jīng fāng.

(Èr) Yòu xū miào jiě yīn yáng lù mìng, zhū jiā xiàng fǎ, jí zhuó guī wǔ zhào, «Zhōuyì» liù rén.

(Sān) Bìng xū jīng shú, rú cǐ nǎi dé wéi dà yī.

(1) No matter what, if you want to become a Great Doctor, you must intimately familiarize yourself with the *Sùwèn*, *Jiǎyǐ*, and *Huángdì zhēnjīng*; with the flow [of Qì] in the Hall of Light, the Twelve Channels, the Three Positions and Nine Indicators; with the [acupuncture] points of the five *zàng* organs and six *fǔ* organs on the exterior and in the interior; with the materia medica and the [craft of] combining medicinals; and with the classical formulas in the various specialties, by Zhāng Zhòngjǐng, Wáng Shūhé, Ruǎn Hénán, Fàn Dōngyáng, Zhāngmiáo, Jìnshào, and others.

(2) In addition, you must comprehend the subtleties of Yīnyáng fortune telling, of the various schools of physiognomy, and of plastromancy and the Five Omens, *Yījīng*, and Six *rén* Stems methods.

(3) All of these you must master with sublime proficiency. It is only in this way that you can become a Great Doctor.

Discussion

Before we can explore the rich meaning of these first three lines, let me explain the specific references, sentence by sentence and phrase by phrase.

In Line 1, *Sùwèn* 《素問》 (Plain Questions), *Jiǎyǐ* 《甲乙》 (A to Z Classic), and *Huángdì zhēnjīng* 《黃帝針經》 (Yellow Emperor's Classic of Needling) refer to three famous medical classics from the first few centuries CE. The two titles *Sùwèn* and *Huángdì Zhēnjīng* indicate the two parts of the *Huángdì nèijīng* (Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor), which were compiled around the last century BCE. *Jiǎyǐ* (commonly translated into English as *A-Z Classic*) is the abbreviated title of a text called *Huángdì sānbù zhēnjiǔ jiǎyījīng* 《黃帝三部針灸甲乙經》 (Yellow Emperor's A-Z Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion in Three Sections), composed around 259 CE by Huángfǔ Mí 皇甫謐. It is the earliest complete text on acupuncture and moxibustion; it discusses the channels, theory of pulse diagnosis, location of acupoints, acupoint techniques and prohibitions, and etiology, diagnosis, and point selection of diseases.

The phrase 明堂流注 *míngtáng líuzhù*, which I have

chosen to translate literally as “flow [of Qì] in the Hall of Light” can be interpreted in three different ways: First, we can read it as a book title, referring to the *Huángdì míngtángjīng* 《黃帝明堂經》 (Yellow Emperor’s Classic of the Hall of Light), a now lost text on acumoxa point location and treatment. Alternatively, we can read this phrase as referring to a group of acumoxa point charts that were summarily known as *Míngtáng rén xíng tú* 明堂人形圖 (Hall of Light Charts of the Human Body) and have also not survived the vicissitudes of time. Lastly, the phrase can be read in the most general sense as referring to knowledge of the flow of Qì in the human body in the context of acumoxa treatment and point location. No matter how we read the phrase, it clearly states the need for practitioners to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the details of Qì flow in the channels and accurate point locations, for the clinical purpose of treatment with acupuncture and moxibustion.

Still in the same line, the phrase “Three Positions and Nine Indicators” 三部九候 *sān bù jiǔ hòu* is a technical term related to the traditional nine indications used in pulse diagnosis. Specifically, it can refer either to the three positions of the top (head), middle (arms), and bottom (feet) in combination with the three indicator locations related to Heaven, Earth, and Humanity in each of these, or, as explained in *Nànjīng* 《難經》 18, to the floating (*fú* 浮), central (*zhōng* 中), and sunken (*chén* 沉) pulse qualities in the three positions of *cùn kǒu* 寸口 at the wrist, namely *cùn* 寸, *guān* 關, and *chǐ* 尺.

In the following phrase, the addition or elimination of an innocuous comma can make a bit of a difference: This difference depends on whether we separate the expression “five *zàng* organs and six *fǔ* organs” from the following phrase “with the [acumoxa] points on the exterior and in the interior” or not. The first version translates into English as “with the five *zàng* organs and six *fǔ* organs, and with the [acumoxa] points on the exterior and in the interior.” Alternatively, in the way I have chosen to render it, we get a slightly different meaning: “with the [acumoxa] points of the five *zàng* organs and six *fǔ* organs on the exterior and in the interior.” Fortunately for us, this small difference does not alter the general meaning of this text to an extent that it would require a definite decision one way or the other. While I have chosen one interpretation in my translation above, the reader is free to make their own choice. As a reminder to readers unfamiliar with classical Chinese literature, punctuation did not exist in traditional Chinese texts and is therefore always something that is added by modern editors, whether you are reading classical Chinese versions of the source texts or translations into modern Chinese or any other language. For this reason, it is important for inexperienced translators in particular to work with critical editions of the highest quality. I personally do sometimes disagree with the punctuation choices of the modern editions I work with, and never do so lightly, but trust that my particular background, training, and decades of experience in reading Sūn Sīmiǎo’s writing has given me the skill to make my own informed decisions.

Moving on to medicinal treatment, the phrase 本草藥對 *běncǎo duìyào* can be translated literally, as I have done, as “materia medica and the [craft of] combining medicinals.” Alternatively, but less likely from my experience of references to these texts, we can interpret it as the abbreviated titles for two famous classics of medicinal literature, the *Shénnóng běncǎojīng* 《神農本草經》 (Divine Farmer’s Classic of Materia Medica) from the Hàn dynasty and the *Duìyào* 《對藥》 (Combining Medicinals), a text in two volumes by Xú Zhīcái 徐之才 from the sixth century. Either way, this phrase suggests that the educated doctor must be thoroughly familiar with these two key genres of early Chinese medical literature: materia medica and formularies.

The last list of characters that requires an explanation for the non-historian reader is a list of names, from which you may be familiar with the first two. They are all famous medical authors and doctors from the late Hàn 漢 to Jìn 晉 periods, i.e. second to fifth centuries CE: Zhāng Zhòng-jǐng 張仲景 is the author of the *Shānghánlún* 《傷寒論》 (Treatise on Cold Damage) and *Jīnguì yàoliùe* 《金匱要略》 (Essentials from the Golden Coffer), and Wáng Shūhé 王叔和 is the author of the *Màijīng* 《脈經》 (Pulse Classic). The following names all refer to historical doctors who were famous for their efficacious treatments and whose prescriptions are quoted in various medical classics of the following centuries. Ruǎn Hénán 阮河南 refers to the doctor Ruǎn Bǐng 阮炳 and Fàn Dōngyáng 范東陽 to Fàn Wāng 范汪. Zhāng Miáo 張苗 was a doctor known for his

skills in pulse diagnosis and in treating difficult cases, and Jin Shào 靳邵 was known for his in-depth knowledge of classical prescriptions and materia medica.

As a whole, this first section thus lays out what strikes me as a fairly comprehensive and well-rounded clinical curriculum that would still be useful for any student of Chinese medicine today. Starting with the theoretical classics, the Great Doctor's training next involves studying the flow of Qi in the channels for the purpose of treatment by acupuncture and moxibustion, pulse diagnosis and point location in relation to the *zàngfǔ* internal organs, and lastly, knowledge of medicinal substances and the art of combining them into formulas.

Line Two is where this essay gets interesting to me, as we quickly realize that our standard clinical curriculum is only the very beginning of the Great Doctor's training: In addition to the practical and tangible clinical literature listed in Line One, Sūn Sīmiǎo now expands the requirements of medical training far beyond what modern institutions of Chinese medicine teach, both in China and anywhere else.

Line Two describes a very different set of skills that will strike most modern readers as unfamiliar and obscure: "Yīnyáng fortune telling, the various schools of physiognomy, and plastromancy and the Five Omens, Yìjīng, and Six *rén* Stems methods" all constitute traditional arts of medical diagnosis that were eliminated in the late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century. Especially during the Communist modernization and systematization of Chinese

medicine as “TCM” in the second half of the Twentieth Century, references to non-material entities, processes, or skills that were not scientifically provable and measurable were intentionally scrubbed from the official Chinese government-sanctioned training program. This modernized and “scientized” (科學化) reinvention of Chinese medicine, somewhat confusingly called “Traditional Chinese Medicine” in English, was then in turn exported to the rest of the world. Fortunately, expertise in some of these non-material traditional arts, like facial diagnosis, *Yijing* readings, and astrological or “*bāzì*” predictions, has been preserved in orally transmitted family traditions, both in China and abroad, and these are now becoming popular again and even reincorporated into mainstream Chinese medicine due to the heroic efforts of individual teachers. It is my hope that historical sources like this chapter by Sūn Sīmiǎo demonstrate to modern practitioners that although these more esoteric and non-materialistic skills may not fit the modern scientific paradigm of medicine, they were part and parcel of standard Chinese medical practice in the seventh century, rather than obscure fringe practices.

Without going into the complicated details, these practices are all old Chinese techniques of divination. Perhaps the oldest among these, plastromancy, here literally called “burning turtles” 灼龜, refers to the practice of drilling holes into turtle shells, heating the shells, and reading the resulting cracks. The “five omens” 五兆 was a divinatory technique similar to the *Yijing* method wherein 36 bamboo sticks were counted in six changes on the basis

of Five Dynamics relationships. It was widespread during the Hàn and Táng periods but fell out of use thereafter. Zhōu Yì 周易 is the method of yarrow stalk divination by means of the Yìjīng 《易經》 (Book of Changes). The “six *rén* stems” 六壬, lastly, was a method of prognosticating the future on the basis of the six occurrences of the *rén* heavenly stem in the calendrical system of the ten heavenly stems and twelve earthly branches (*tiāngān dìzhī* 天干地支).

Line Three makes it clear that these esoteric arts were just as important to the skillful practice of an educated, literate, elite doctor as familiarity with theoretical classics, channel and point location charts, and materia medica and formula literature! Considering how often traditional arts like divination or face reading are still referred to in secondary literature in a somewhat derogatory fashion as “folk knowledge” or “popular practices,” this mention here in the very first chapter of Sūn Sīmiǎo’s grand opus is an important reminder, for each of us, of the need to look critically at all of our modern biases when studying historical medicine. As any historian exposed to postmodern theory should know by now, contemporary descriptions of historical circumstances can so easily tell us more about our own biases than about the actual reality they intend to describe, if the author of this description lacks such an awareness and the training to critically reflect on their own writing.