Fall 2016

HIS 403 Special Topics in History of Medicine

Medicines, Poisons, and Foods: Material Culture of Medicine in China and Europe

Time: Thur. 9-11:40 AM
Location: Park 532
Professor: Yan Liu
Office: Park 580
Email: yliu253@buffalo.edu
Office hours: Wed. 3-5, or by appointment

Course Description:
What is a medicine? The question seems simple, yet the answer is elusive. If a medicine’s function is primarily to cure, what gives it that special power? How to understand its material basis? What makes it different from a poison, or a food?

These are some of the fundamental questions to the history of medicine, and driving ones for this course. Focusing on the history of drug culture, we will explore the complexity of drug materiality by contemplating the intimate relations between medicines, poisons, and foods. We will learn how the experiences of the body shaped the conceived values of medicines. We will examine the circulation of medical knowledge across social and geographical domains. One key aspect of the course is to introduce a comparative perspective to the study of medical history. By studying above topics in both Chinese and European contexts, we will identify surprising parallels, striking differences, and hidden connections between the two traditions. We will also see the formation and evolution of pharmacological ideas and practices within each tradition. And finally, we will ponder how medical knowledge in the past illuminates our notions and habits of ingesting and experiencing medicines here and now.
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Learning Outcomes:
The course aims to not just offer students the basic knowledge of the history of pharmacology, broadly defined, in China and Europe, but more importantly, help students develop important skills of conducting historical research and making exciting discoveries. The latter is manifested in three aspects. First, historical study is all about sources. Here you will learn how to read primary and secondary sources critically, identify meaningful connections between them, and express your ideas in class. Second, you will learn how to produce research papers by effective collection of sources, logical thinking, and compelling writing. Third, you will develop the skills of oral communication, by both participating in class discussion and presenting your research in a coherent and accessible manner.

Requirements:
This is a weekly seminar course, and your attentive reading of the assignments and active participation in discussion are essential to your learning. In each week, one of you will be the discussion leader. You will give a short presentation (~15 minutes) on the theme of the week based on the assigned readings, summarizing the key arguments, and offering your critical thoughts on them. You are welcome to use a text, an object, an image, or a short video clip—either from the readings or from other sources related to the topic—as the springboard to lead the discussion. In addition, the course will open a discussion board on the Blackboard where you are encouraged to offer your reflections on the readings and share additional materials you find that could facilitate the discussion in class.

There are three short writing assignments (800-1000 words for each):

- Paper 1 is based on a piece of reading from Prelude. You will summarize it and offer your understanding of the piece that connects to the general theme of the course.

- Paper 2 is a primary source analysis. You will select a primary source from Part I, examine it in its historical context, and show its significance in medical history.

- Paper 3 is based on two readings from Part II that examine a topic in China and Europe respectively. You will analyze these readings and offer your comparative insight.

One key goal of the course is to promote active and collaborative learning as well as sharpen skills of presentation. In the “Thing Project,” you will be paired up and collectively work on a research project that centers around a thing in a broad sense—a historical substance, a museum object, a text, an image, etc. This material-oriented exercise seeks to formulate exciting questions and open new horizons in your historical analysis. You will present your discoveries in the last session of the course (Dec. 8) with the aid of PowerPoint or Keynote, and write a paper (about 2,000 words) based on your research.

Course policies:
- Prepare well before you come to the class. Finish all required readings before class.
- Please submit your assignments on time. Late submission will incur a penalty of one-third a letter grade per day of lateness.
- Academic integrity. Any use of another source’s words or ideas—Internet included—without acknowledging the source is plagiarism. If you have any questions about UB’s policies on plagiarism, please consult me or refer to http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/course/integrity.html
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Assessment:
  Discussion leading: 10%
  Three short papers: 10% each (due on Sept. 22, Oct. 13, and Nov. 3 respectively)
  Thing Project presentation (team work): 10% (presented on Dec. 8)
  Final paper: 20% (due on Dec. 15)
  Participation: 30%

Books on course reserve:
  • For a general survey of Chinese history:
  • For a general survey of the history of Chinese medicine:
    *Medicine in China, A History of Ideas*, Paul Unschuld, 1985

Schedule:
Note: All readings are available on the course Blackboard. [P] refers to primary sources in English translation.

PRELUDE

Week 1 (Sept. 1): General introduction

Week 2 (Sept. 8): What is a thing? Philosophical reflections
  • Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* 1967, pp1-54

Week 3 (Sept. 15): “Material Turn”: Historical reflections

PART I: Ambiguity of Things

Week 4 (Sept. 22): Implications of *Pharmakon*  
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Week 5 (Sept. 29): Power of Poisons
- Selections from *De Materia Medica*, from “Corn poppy” to “Meadow saffron,” trans. Lily Beck, 2005, pp273-284

Week 6 (Oct. 6): Foods for Thought

PART II: Medicines and the Body

Week 7 (Oct. 13): The body experienced
- Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, 1993, Ch. 6, “The Inner Landscape,” pp100-112
- Selections from *Huangdi neijing suwen (The Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic, Basic Questions)* in Livia Kohn, *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology*, 1993, pp163-8

Week 8 (Oct. 20): Alchemy and self-transformation
- Selections from *Baopuzi neipian (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity, Inner Chapters)* by Ge Hong, 4th century, in Livia Kohn, *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology*, 1993, pp305-313
- Selections from Paracelsus’s alchemical writings in *Paracelsus Alchemy*, 2012
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Week 9 (Oct. 27): On taste and smell
- India Mandelkern, “Taste-Based Medicine,” *Gastronomica*, 2015, pp8-21

PART III: Medicines in Circulation

Week 10 (Nov. 3): Medicines in local practice
- Martin Booth, *Opium, A History*, 1999, Ch. 1 & 5

Week 11 (Nov. 10): Women’s medicines
- Alisha Rankin, *Panacea’s Daughters: Noblewomen as Healers in Early Modern Germany*, 2013, Ch. 3

Week 12 (Nov. 17): Global circulation of medicines
- Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination*, 2008, Ch. 2, pp50-75

Happy Thanksgiving!

CODA

Week 13 (Dec. 1): Rethinking medicines in our own world
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- Marta Hanson, “Is the 2015 Nobel Prize a turning point for traditional Chinese medicine?” The Conversation, Oct. 5, 2015

Week 14 (Dec. 8): Project presentation

Final paper due by 4:30 PM, Dec. 15