

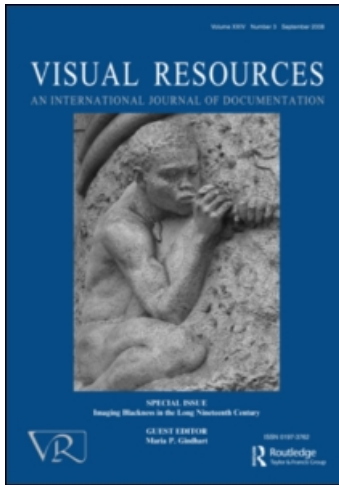
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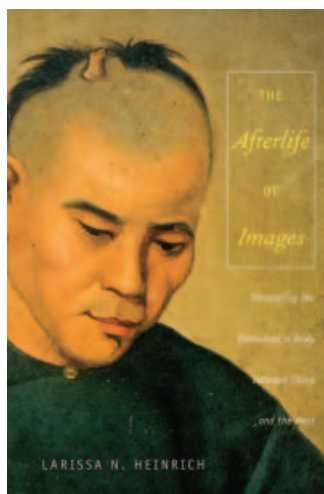
# Book Review

## **The Afterlife of Images: Translating the Pathological Body between China and the West**

by Larissa N. Heinrich

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008

248 pp., 42 illus., 8 in color, \$79.95 (cloth), \$22.95 (paperback). ISBN: 0-8223-0-8223



Larissa Heinrich's book, which builds to a small degree on my early work on medical imagery in China in *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), is perhaps the most important contribution to the study of Chinese medical representation since Shigehisa Kuriyama's brilliant *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (New York: Zone Books, 1999). It is actually an answer in part to Kuriyama's central thesis. Heinrich's argument is quite extraordinary: she wishes to illustrate how the rhetorical commonplace of "China as the sick man of Asia" is historically structured with the tension between Chinese high culture (including medicine) and Western claims on

the inherent inferiority of that culture and Western superiority in all media of expression and representation. It is the re-reading of a "sick" China through Western medicine and its illustrations that preoccupies Heinrich and as such she provides an important corrective to Kuriyama's view that argued for an inherent antithesis between "Western" (Greek) and "Eastern" (Chinese) images of the body and therefore its very nature. Thus for Kuriyama the "model" body type in classical Chinese medical literature and culture is described as rotund, as opposed to the muscular and svelte bodies of Greek art and medicine. Heinrich shows how Western models of the "sick" Chinese body come to be accepted within China as an adequate representation of the very nature of what it meant to be Chinese. The difference between Kuriyama and Heinrich, of course, lies in the historical periods examined by both—Kuriyama's view looks at the ancient roots of both the West and the East, where contact was extremely limited; Heinrich's book examines the post-Enlightenment world, the height of massive colonial expansion into Asia.

Beginning with a study of the image of smallpox as a "Chinese" illness in Western medicine, Heinrich presents her argument as a series of case studies. The first and without a doubt the most telling case is her examination of a series of images of smallpox sufferers sent to Paris from Beijing by a Jesuit missionary in the 1770s

(pp. 15–38). Here the teasing out of the claims of a specific Chinese vulnerability to smallpox and the differing approaches to its management is done with a rather extraordinary skill. It is the image of Chinese children with the disease that provides a means by which the French author can dismiss the Chinese approach of variolization as a means of prevention as ineffective. Given that smallpox was seen in the time as a “Chinese” disease and the specific approaches in China were seen as inherently less effective because of the widespread presence of the disease, the charge of a Chinese “fatalism” is lodged here as a means of “understanding” the Chinese attitude toward illness. The irony of course is that the “Western” approach advocated by the British physician Edward Jenner (1749–1823), some twenty years after the French images were sent to Paris, had its origin in the Ottoman court—seen in England, at least, as inherently “Oriental.”

In her second chapter Heinrich turns to the times of the Opium Wars (1839–1842) and the introduction of Western portraiture into Canton. Central to this chapter is the work of Lam Qua (1801–1860), trained in both the Western and traditional Chinese means of portraiture, in representing cases of illness for use by the American missionary Peter Parker (1804–1888) in raising funds from American donors for his medical work in China. The politics of representing China as ill here continued the French model, but within a very different political environment. Heinrich brilliantly uncovers the worldview of both the “heroic” medicine of the West and its implications for Western political and cultural expansion into China. Here the volume parallels the most recent radical reinterpretation of this period in *Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004) by Frank Dikötter, Lars Laamann and Zhou Xun in which the criminalization of opium use through Western medical perspective nullified the medical use of the drug, which had dominated the Chinese image of such drug use before the Opium Wars. Western medical interests and Chinese practices came into conflict over the meanings attached to opium as an addictive substance as opposed to it as a curative one. The politics of illness, cure, addiction and moral decay parallel Heinrich’s examination of the representation of the ill body of the Chinese as in need to cure from outside.

Heinrich’s third chapter examines the explosion of medical photography in China. Unlike the earlier images, which were intended for consumption outside of China, these photographs had a double purpose: to represent the illness of China (and the Chinese) abroad as well as to educate the local physicians and medical students about how one looked at illness. The huge output of such photographs and their seemingly endless reproduction in a wide range of venues made them the most effect means of representing the “sick man of Asia” as pathological. Lam Qua painted a hundred plus images; here we are dealing with tens of thousands. The Chinese case is not unusual. If one examines the history of medical photography in the second half of the nineteenth century in Western Europe or North America, the huge number of photographs and the development of in-house photographic studios in medical schools and hospitals is telling. The range of dissemination presented by Heinrich is extraordinary as it extends both within and beyond the borders of China and becomes a database for images of China in a multitude of venues. Here, too, there are

ample Western parallels. Dr. Thomas Barnardo raised money for his London orphanages in the 1850s by photographing his charges “before” and “after.” “Before” pictures stress their diseased states; “after” images were of healthy children. Likewise images of famine and disease in China populated medical textbooks, such as Jeffrey and Maxwell’s *Diseases of China* (1929), which was part of that new field of “tropical medicine” but was also used by medical missionary societies to represent their “good works.”

The fourth chapter of Heinrich’s study looks at the important cultural problem of “translation.” How was Western medicine made accessible to Chinese physicians and through them to the general culture in the course of the nineteenth century? Beginning with the translation of Benjamin Hobson’s anatomy in 1851, access to Western models of the body enables and/or forces Chinese modernizers to rethink the very nature of the body. Imaging and representing the body within China moved from systems of the distribution of *Qi* to new concepts such as “muscles” and “nerves” over a fifty-year span. It impacted also on what is now called “traditional Chinese medicine,” forcing it to rationalize hundreds of competing systems into a single and unitary notion of an indigenous medical system of “equal” value to Western medicine. The politics of this competition between a truly Chinese national medicine and a Western allopathic medicine can be seen at the bedside of the dying Sun Yat-sen in 1925. The “father of modern China” was a trained Western physician who studied medicine at the Guangzhou Boji Hospital (in what was then called “Canton”) under the medical missionary John G. Kerr (1824–1901) and was one of the first two graduates from the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese in 1892. On his deathbed, however, he was treated by traditional therapists as a sign of his Chinese national identity.

This restructuring of the body in China in light of Western medicine meant a rethinking of the very nature of what it meant to be human. How this impacted the rise of a Chinese modernist culture is exemplified by Heinrich’s reading of the poetry of Lu Xun (1881–1936), who also trained as a Western physician and whose poetry heralded the beginning of a vernacular literature in China: the May Fourth movement. His first story “A Madman’s Diary,” first published in 1918 in *New Youth* magazine, reprinted in his collection *Call to Arms* (1922), is rated as the very beginning of modern Chinese literature. The centrality of Lu Xun’s work is demonstrated by Gang Zhou in her original and daring work on the raise of vernacular literature in China, “Language, Myth, Identity: Writing the Vernacular in Early Twentieth-Century China” (PhD dissertation, University of California-Davis, 2002). She writes that “standing at the core of Lu Xun’s story, the disturbing image of a man struggling with words, I suggest, may indicate how traumatic it was for those May Fourth writers to take on the vernacular as the very means of expression” (p. 84). The impact of Lu Xun’s work changed the very nature of writing in Chinese. Heinrich’s reading of Lu Xun’s poetry seconds this view. Gang Zhou shows how this arose out of the debates about the nature of language and expression; Heinrich shows that part of that debate had to do with the absorption of a Western vocabulary of images for the very anatomy of the body. The re-reading of the modernist May Fourth movement begun by Lu Xun in the light of both models of linguistic

change—both the language politics and the medical images and language—are complementary and show the intrinsic change that internalization of these notions of a Western idea of improvement had for the “sick man of Asia” in every possible cultural register.

Heinrich’s book is an important addition to a growing interest in medical images in China. There is now a Web site devoted to this sponsored by the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London (Search for ‘Zhongguo’ at <http://medphoto.wellcome.ac.uk/>). Studies such as Paul Unschuld’s *Medicine in China: Historical Artifacts and Images* (Munich: Prestel, 2000) and *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* by Ruth Rogaski (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2004) should be mentioned in this context. However, Heinrich’s work shows that the cultural importance of such images and their history transcends the boundary of clinical medical practice and helped shape the very nature of expression in China in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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