

Review Article

Chinese translation of English textbooks on internal medicine from the 1850s to the 1940s

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Abstract

During the 100 years from 1850 to 1949, six English textbooks on internal medicine were translated into Chinese and published. Publication of these books was a response to the increased demand for Chinese textbooks after the opening of several Western-style hospitals and medical schools in China where the instruction was in Chinese. Throughout this period, textbooks translated from English were regarded as symbols of mainstream and authority within medical communities in China. There was a shift of translators from British and American medical missionaries to Chinese medical elites. Publishers also changed from missionary hospitals or missionary organizations to the Chinese Medical Association, which was led by ethnic Chinese. After the 1950s, translation activity continued in Taiwan, but it was halted in China until after the Cultural Revolution. This paper provides bibliographic information about these books. The transition of medical authority in China during this 100-year period is also reviewed through the successive publication of translated textbooks on internal medicine.

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1. Introduction

The 1850s was a difficult time for China. Some historians consider it as the start of modern China.¹ Unable to recover from the defeat of first Anglo–Chinese War, China suffered massive further destruction because of the Taiping Rebellion. From then on, the glories of ancient China were critically challenged by Western superpowers, while the traditions of Chinese culture were radically changed by the incoming flow of Western civilization.²

Medicine was an integral part of this change. Catholic Jesuits brought European medical knowledge to China in the

17th and 18th centuries. However, they made little impact on the ideals and practice of medicine in China.³

In the 19th century Protestant missionaries began extensive and intensive activities in China. British and American missionaries had the most important role in facilitating changes in every aspect of medicine.⁴ In 1807, the London Missionary Society sent Robert Morrison, the first of these Protestant missionaries, to China. Morrison translated the *New Testament* into Chinese and published the first English–Chinese and Chinese–English Dictionary.⁵

Thomas Richardson Colledge was a ship surgeon serving in the British East India Company. He opened a dispensary for Chinese people in Macao in 1827, and then another dispensary in Canton (now called Guangzhou). Both dispensaries received outpatients, but the former also admitted inpatients. Colledge was the first physician to propose the idea of making the practice of medicine an auxiliary in introducing Christianity to China.⁶

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Peter Parker, a Yale graduate in medicine and in theology, was the first medical missionary to China. In 1835, he founded the Canton Hospital, which was the first Western-style hospital in China.⁷

Increased numbers of medical missionaries came to China to build Western-style hospitals and teach Chinese students Western medicine. There was a demand for Chinese medical textbooks translated from Western languages. Because British and American Protestants predominated among the missionaries, medical books translated from other European languages were comparatively small. Even after the role of missionaries faded away, leading Chinese physicians continued to translate English-language medical books into Chinese until China instituted a full-scale policy against the United States in the 1950s.¹

There is little literature providing bibliographic information on these books with the exception of some brief surveys.⁸ Early translators rarely cited the sources for their translations. The dynamic interrelationship between the translated books, the translators, and the historical events in China also have not previously been analyzed. The purpose of this paper is to review the progression of medicine in China during this 100-year period through the successive publications of translated textbooks on internal medicine.

The term “internal medicine” did not appear in the title of any English books being translated. However, it appeared in all Chinese editions. Books with “medicine” in the title were generally and historically understood as books on internal medicine in China and in Europe. The first book in China with the distinctive title of internal medicine appeared in the 16th century.⁹ Translators of the following books designated the title of “internal medicine” with the understanding that only topics on internal medicine were covered in these books.

2. 1858: *Practice of Medicine and Materia Medica* (內科新說) by Hobson¹⁰

In 1839, Benjamin Hobson came to China. He served for the London Missionary Society in Macau, Hong Kong, and Canton. He married the only daughter of Robert Morrison after the death of his first wife.¹¹ In 1851 in Canton, Hobson published his first Chinese medical book, *Treatise on Anatomy and Physiology* (全體新論).¹² In 1855, he published his second book, *Treatise on Natural Philosophy and Natural History* (博物新編).¹³ In 1856, he left Canton for Shanghai because the hospital he founded in Canton was burned during a wave of Chinese hostility towards foreigners during the second Anglo–Chinese war. In 1844 in Shanghai, he worked with William Lockhart, who opened the first Western hospital, Renji (仁濟).⁶ Renji Hospital is now part of Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

In 1857, Renji Hospital published Hobson’s *First Lines of the Practice of Surgery* (西醫略論).¹⁴ In 1858, *Treatise on Midwifery and Diseases of Children* (婦嬰新說)¹⁵ and *Practice of Medicine and Materia Medica*¹⁰ were published. In addition to the five medical books in Chinese, Hobson compiled *A Medical Vocabulary in English and Chinese* (醫學

英華字釋).¹⁶ This was the first English–Chinese medical dictionary. *Nei Ke Xin Shuo*, the Chinese title for *Practice of Medicine and Materia Medica* means “New Sayings in Internal Medicine”. This book was divided into two parts, the first part was an introduction of diseases and treatment, and the second part was the materia medica.

Like Hobson’s other medical books, *Practice of Medicine and Materia Medica* was not a translation of any one English work in particular. As Hobson explained in the preface: “Methods for disease diagnosis and drug treatments discussed in this book were taken from European medical books. Key points of them were picked up and translated into Chinese”. Hobson authored all of his medical books and Mao-Cai Guan (管茂材) coauthored the three books published in Shanghai. Guan was born into a scholar’s family; he moved to Shanghai as a refugee of the Taiping Rebellion. He was interested in traditional Chinese medicine and in Western medicine. Thanks to his literary skill, Hobson’s medical books were translated in an elegant style that was easy to understand and interesting to read.

Except for the *Treatise on Anatomy and Physiology*, Hobson’s books were not revised, but all were reprinted repeatedly. Renji Hospital had a policy allowing anyone who wanted to read these books to make a copy from the original printing plates, which were stored at the hospital: “if he carries his own paper and ink ... the hospital will not charge a penny”. There were also reprints of these books in Japan.¹⁷

3. 1883: *Theory and Practice of Medicine* (西醫內科全書) by Kerr¹⁸

In 1854, John Glasgow Kerr, a graduate from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, PA, USA came to China. In 1855, he succeeded Peter Parker as the leader of the Canton Hospital. The following year, the hospital was burned during the second Anglo–Chinese War.⁶

In 1859, Kerr reopened the hospital and named it “Boji” (博濟) in Chinese. In 1866, he moved Boji Hospital to its current site. A medical school affiliated with the hospital was opened during the same year. In 1886, Sun Yat-Sen, founder of the Republic of China, studied in this school for 1 year before he went to Hong Kong to study in the newly opened Hong Kong Medical College for Chinese, the predecessor of the Medical Faculty of the University of Hong Kong.^{19,20} Boji Hospital is currently the Second Affiliated Hospital of Sun Yat-Sen University.

With the progress of the medical school, there was a lack of adequate Chinese textbooks. Kerr commented in 1870 that “the time has arrived when medical students need fuller treatises on each branch”.⁶

In 1883, the first Chinese edition of such a book was published by Boji Hospital in a set of six volumes. Its Chinese title was *Xi Yi Nei Ke Chuan Su* (i.e., “Complete Book of Internal Medicine in Western Medicine”). Qing-Gao Kong (孔慶高) translated it and Kerr proofed it. Because Kerr had the idea to translate this book and gave Kong the English texts, it is justified to regard Kerr as the compiler of the book.

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