

Book Reviews

is no modern English word for this ancient concept, but in western literature it appears as *pneuma* in Antiquity and during the Middle Ages right up to and including the Renaissance. If he felt that the general reader was not sufficiently acquainted with this term it would have been better to retain *ch'i* and put a explanatory note at the beginning of the book or at the first mention. He may have chosen the word "influences" in connexion with astrology but the latter plays a very small part in his description of Chinese medicine, and *ch'i* appears quite apart from astral speculations.

The book, which is part of the series *Comparative studies of health systems and medical care*, is informative on the swing of the pendulum in modern times, in accordance with government directives, between partial adherence to the Confucian system including shamanistic and demonic features on the one hand, and the Legalist system including rational experimental medicine and the findings of modern science on the other. But such a simplification cannot do justice to the detailed study of the subject contained in this beautifully produced work.

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C. G. URAGODA, *A history of medicine in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Sri Lankan Medical Association (6 Wijerama Mathawa, Colombo 7), 1987, 8vo, pp. ix, 326, illus., US \$20.00.

The intention of the author—a distinguished local chest physician—was to write a short history, as he states in his preface, at a leisurely pace. Two equally distinguished and influential colleagues encouraged him to complete it in time for the centenary of the Sri Lankan Medical Association (formerly the Ceylon Branch of the British Medical Association until independence in 1948).

After a short introduction, the book begins with ancient medical practices, which embrace Ayurveda and Siddha—a similar system practised only by the Tamils.

The first foreign influence was that of the Portuguese, who arrived in Colombo in 1505. As they occupied only the coastal areas, their occupation was marked by incessant hostilities with the Kandyan kings of the interior. The Portuguese medical influence—although Western—had an Oriental flavour as well. They were responsible for Mannar and Jaffna Hospitals. They were subsequently expelled by the Dutch in 1658, who, in turn, occupied the maritime provinces. They governed their territory through the Dutch East India Company, founded in 1602. This company built the Colombo Hospital, whose walls were over 50cm thick, not for the local population, but for its own European employees. It was restored in 1985. The Dutch were also responsible for introducing a system akin to the present-day barefoot doctors to cater for the health needs of the local villagers.

Dutch rule ended in 1796 with the British capture of the coastal provinces, and the annexation of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. The author gives credit to the British for creating a sound basic structure of medical care which, after independence, was comprehensive enough to continue despite having changed little in outline up to modern times. The teaching of medical students was at first based on the Bengal Medical College, Calcutta, founded in 1839. Students continued to go there until 1870, when the Colombo Medical School was established.

A miscellany of diseases and disciplines completes the text. The former includes opium addiction, smallpox, leprosy, and tuberculosis; the latter ophthalmology, dermatology, and occupational medicine.

There is a table of contents, an index, and an excellent bibliography of nineteen pages. Each chapter ends with its own notes and references.

This is a first-class single-author short history, chock full of facts. It also illustrates the effects of Western influences, both good and bad, on a small island. It still has lessons for us in the West today.

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