

# book reviews

## Medicine in China

*Medicine and Public Health in the People's Republic of China.* Edited by Joseph R. Quinn. Pp. xii+333. US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, National Institutes of Health: Bethesda, Maryland, 1973.)

THIS is not a very satisfactory book on three grounds. First, it suffers from the usual disadvantage of a multi-authored book in which no editorial attempt has been made to avoid redundancies and overlap. Second, although the title implies an up-to-date coverage of the subject, this is really only true of two or three out of the fourteen chapters. In fact, of the fourteen authors only two (Dr and Mrs Seidel) wrote out of personal knowledge based on recent visits to the People's Republic of China (PRC). At the time of publication (June 1972 for preliminary soft cover edition) none of the other authors seemed to have visited the PRC during the preceding two decades. Third, it is simply not clear for whom this book was envisaged in spite of the introductory statement that "inasmuch as the audience for this document is intended to be those persons with a general interest in the subject of China medicine rather than the biomedical specialist, the lack of confirming evidence by on-site observation or experimentation was not considered a deterrent to the preparation of this document". This may not have been a deterrent for the authors, but it is likely to deter many readers.

I myself had been unfamiliar with the state of medicine and public health in the PRC prior to a lecture visit in 1973. In preparation for that visit I had skimmed over this book, but had read carefully only two chapters ("Pharmacology" by J. Y. P. Chen and "Population Dynamics" by L. A. Orleans) because they were directly related to my own interests. Only Orleans's chapter proved to be instructive. Upon my return, I reread carefully the entire book and reached the conclusions that as a primer for prospective visitors to the PRC, no more than a third of it is relevant to the present scene and reasonably up to date. The rest is history and much of it so superficial that its main utility is the list of references at the end of most chapters. Specific mention of a few chapters will suffice to illustrate the pros and cons of this book.

R. C. Croizier's chapter on "Traditional Medicine as a Basis for Chinese Medical Practice" offers a brief but reasonably good background to why traditional Chinese medicine with its theoretical basis should be distinguished from ordinary folk medicine. Croizier also explains why this was retained by the Communist regime and integrated into their current medical system together with Western medicine: "After all, if an engineer could learn from a coolie, and an agronomist from an old peasant, why not have a modern medical specialist learn from a native herbalist?" The brief description of the dual forces of the universe, *yin* and *yang*, together with the vital life force, *chi*,—though necessary to an understanding of traditional Chinese medicine—is repeated in three other chapters. Even a minimal editorial effort could have avoided some of this duplication. Perhaps the most appropriate place for a discussion of this philosophical basis of Chinese medicine is the longest chapter of the book, "Acupuncture" by J. Y. P. Chen. Although its length is appropriate in view of the importance of acupuncture in China, both past and present, it overdoes the detailed operational aspects at the expense of an adequate discussion of its theoretical basis and of current work on the mode of action of acupuncture anaesthesia.

The other chapter by Chen entitled "Pharmacology" is based primarily on a perusal of Chinese journals published until 1967 and subsequently upon newspaper accounts. Its list of plant and animal drugs ranges from the superficial to the ridiculous (for example, grasshoppers and locusts "have the effect of calming the nerves and stopping coughs and they are used in whooping coughs and tetanus. Grasshoppers are said to be specific for cases of pertussis and asthma"). By contrast, China's modern pharmaceutical industry rates only one page. Yet this is one of the most impressive achievements of the PRC. Few Western visitors are prepared for the total self sufficiency of the PRC in terms of modern drugs—ranging from all currently used antibiotics to steroid oral contraceptives which are synthesised on a scale which is hardly equalled in the United States. No mention is made of the first class work on the isolation and chemical characterisation of traditional Chinese herbal medicines at the Institute of Materia Medica in Peking. Nowhere in this chapter, or in-

deed anywhere else in this book is there any description of the rather impressive labelling practice in the PRC—each drug container listing the date of manufacture, name of factory, name (in Latin for "Western Medicines") of drug, quantitative analysis, and so on. In fact, V. Seidel's chapter on "Medical Personnel and their Training" with his table (pages 169–171) listing the contents of a "barefoot doctor's" bag is much more instructive in giving the reader a view of the state of today's drug development in the PRC.

By far the most readable chapter in the entire book is the one on "Population Dynamics" by L. A. Orleans, which deals in an authoritative way with demographic aspects, family planning programmes and public health. What is not clear to the uninitiated reader is that it reflects accurately the state of affairs up to the Cultural Revolution, but that much has changed in the PRC during the past five years in the field of birth control (see C. Djerassi, *China Quarterly*, 57; 1974). Curiously enough, this best chapter is the only one which lacks references.

The price of this book is not indicated but is likely to be relatively cheap since it is published by the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Nevertheless I am hard pressed to guess for whose library it should be purchased.

CARL DJERASSI

## Rare earth magnets

*Rare Earth Intermetallics.* By W. E. Wallace. (Materials Science and Technology.) Pp. xii+266. (Academic, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich): New York and London, September 1973.) \$22.50.

THE extraordinary magnetic properties of the rare earth metals—which are not really rare—have only been appreciated during recent years, and the time is ripe for a concise appraisal. Herein lies the great value of this monograph which provides a fascinating, orderly and critical presentation of the properties of rare earth intermetallic compounds, collated up to the summer of 1971.

The authors give a useful, short table of symbols to describe the main types of magnetic order and paramagnetic behaviour. They discuss types of magnetic interaction and the Rudermann-Kittel-Kasuya-Yoshida concept of indirect exchange interaction between rare earth ions through conduction elec-