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Nan-chingThe Classic of Difficult Issues (Comparative Studies of Health Systems and Medical Care)

Paul U. Unschuld

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Although the study of traditional Chinese medicine has attracted unprecedented attention in recent years, Western knowledge of it has been limited because, until now, not a single Chinese classical medical text has been available in a serious philological translation. The present book offers, for the first time in any Western language, a complete translation of an ancient Chinese medical classic, the *Nan-ching*. The translation adheres to rigid sinological standards and applies philological and historiographic methods.

The original text of the *Nan-ching* was compiled during the first century A.D. by an unknown author. From that time forward, this ancient text provoked an ongoing stream of commentaries. Following the Sung era, it was misidentified as merely an explanatory sequel to the classic of the Yellow Emperor, the *Huang-ti nei-ching*. This volume, however, demonstrates that the *Nan-ching* should once again be regarded as a significant and innovative text in itself.

It marked the apex and the conclusion of the initial development phase of a conceptual system of health care based on the doctrines of the Five Phases and yinyang. As *the* classic of the medicine of systematic correspondence, the *Nan-ching* covers all aspects of theoretical and practical health care within these doctrines in an unusually systematic fashion. Most important is its innovative discussion of pulse diagnosis and needle treatment.

Unschuld combines the translation of the text of the *Nan-ching* with selected commentaries by twenty Chinese and Japanese authors from the past seventeen centuries. These commentaries provide insights into the processes of reception and transmission of ancient Chinese concepts from the Han era to the present time, and shed light on the issue of progress in Chinese medicine. Central to the book, and contributing to a completely new understanding of traditional Chinese medical thought, is the identification of a “patterned knowledge” that characterizes—in contrast to the monoparadigmatic tendencies in Western science and medicine—the literature and practice of traditional Chinese health care.

Unschuld’s translation of the *Nan-ching* is an accomplishment of monumental proportions. Anthropologists, historians, and sociologists as well as general readers interested in traditional Chinese medicine—but who lack Chinese language abilities—will at last have access to ancient Chinese concepts of health care and therapy. Filling an enormous gap in the literature, *Nan-ching—The Classic of Difficult Issues* is the kind of landmark work that will shape the study of Chinese medicine for years to come.

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