Introductory Note

Gunnar Stollberg and Elisabeth Hsu

In this special issue of Medical Anthropology on “Globalizing Chinese Medicine,” Elisabeth Hsu, Linda Barnes, and Mei Zhan discuss the “worlding” of human experience through and with medicine in East Africa, the United States, and the People’s Republic of China based on research they originally presented at the panel on “Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda Outside Their Home Regions” at the 22nd International Congress of History of Science in Beijing in 2005.

Chinese medicine has a longstanding and continuing travel career and has become a ubiquitous feature of medicine worldwide. Hsu discusses a Chinese anti-malarial treatment that was obtained through chemical procedures applied to a traditional Chinese medical drug. She highlights how the biomedical profession’s insistence to uphold the distinction between “traditional” and “modern” medicine works to its advantage as it appropriates as its own those aspects of other medicines that are safe and efficacious.

Barnes makes an inquiry into motivations of practitioners, East and West. She focuses on the Chinese medical concept xin 心 (heart) and makes it into a concept that should explain the motivations that led Chinese medical practitioners into their profession in the United States and in China.

Zhan aligns herself with anthropologists and feminists who consider analyses of late capitalism and globalization to have overemphasized

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economic processes and describes the significance of a cultural logic that skirts the Pacific rims in Shanghai and San Francisco, respectively, within which preventive medicine is celebrated. However varied their theoretical frameworks, the three authors have in common a bottom-up perspective on the globalization of Chinese medicine.