



A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine

C. PIERCE SALGUERO

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In her review of C. Pierce Salguero's 2014 book *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China*, Janet Gyatso observed: "There has been a small explosion in the study of Buddhist medicine in the last several years" (Gyatso 2017, 96). This boom has since expanded even further, being felt primarily in the fields of Asian medicine and Buddhist studies. It has become increasingly clear to people within the field that the time has come to "leave the ghetto," to quote a remark by Gyatso on another occasion¹—that the subject of Buddhist medicine is relevant beyond its own confines. It is relevant also for historians of medicine, for historians of Asia, and for historians in general. Hence the need, and the huge challenge, to provide a general history of Buddhist medicine, something that *A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine* set out to accomplish. And it has definitely succeeded.

If there is anyone who is up to this momentous task, it is Salguero. He has spearheaded many endeavors related to Buddhist medicine for almost two decades. The present book is, in many respects, an outcome of several of these initiatives.

Salguero has written extensively on Chinese Buddhist medicine and Thai medicine, edited two monumental collections of premodern and modern primary sources on Buddhist medicine, and set up a Facebook discussion group. He started the Blue Beryl podcast (Salguero 2022) and is also the editor-in-chief of *Asian Medicine: Journal of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine* (formerly *Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity*). There are other undertakings to his credit, but for lack of space these will suffice to give the overall picture.

Spearheading the above efforts has meant, first, that Salguero has for quite some time probed and written about the tricky question of what "Buddhist medicine" might mean, and indeed how difficult it is to define. Buddhist medicine is not really a field in any static, potentially comforting manner, but rather—as Salguero himself has defined it in several of his publications—a "moving

1) Janet Gyatso, opening address to the 11th seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies, Bonn University, August 2006.

target.” There is no potential comfort in ever knowing the field, since one can never even define it, let alone cover it. But one can probe it and explore its multiple facets, and this is precisely what Salguero has been doing. He is a pioneer, sufficiently content to dwell in uncharted territory.

Scholarship aside, the ubiquity of the fascination with mindfulness in today’s world is reason enough for a need for a history of Buddhism and medicine that is academically rich, readable by a general audience, as well as useful for teaching. And so, as Salguero states in his introduction, the primary motivation of his book is to situate this contemporary fascination within the long, multifaceted history of the myriad ways in which Buddhism and medicine have intertwined.

The field of Buddhist medicine—if we zoom out to observe where this “moving target” is roaming—covers nearly two and a half millennia and most of the inhabited world. To be sure, the focus is predominantly on Asia, but in the modern period it has extended also to Europe and North America. In any case, the breadth of the field is enough to keep an army of scholars busy for a long time.

Salguero realized early on that compiling a history of Buddhist medicine on his own would be impossible, that it would have to be a collective endeavor. And so, a decade or so ago, he took on the momentous task, working together with a few dozen people. A major part of the process involved enlisting a host of scholars to translate and introduce a breathtaking collection of primary sources from the entire expanse of the Buddhist world dealing with medicine, health, and healing (broadly conceived) in the premodern age (Salguero 2017) and the modern age (Salguero 2020). The 2017 anthology included 62 contributions from leading scholars across the fields of Buddhology and Asian medicine in an impressive linguistic variety: Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, Pāli, Khmer, Thai, Burmese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Mongolian. The 2020 anthology, again with leading scholars but shorter with 35 chapters, was also remarkably varied in both its geographical expanse and its types of sources: it started with Buddhist monastic physicians’ encounters with Jesuits in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japan and ended with “Conversations about Buddhism and Health Care in Multiethnic Philadelphia.” Both anthologies followed a similar format: each chapter included a text (or interview, sometimes a few short texts), preceded by an introduction contextualizing the source and followed by a short list of suggested readings.

From the outset, Salguero envisaged the project as a trilogy: the two anthologies, with their breathtaking wealth of material, would serve as the basis for the volume under review here, which is a general overview of the topic. *A Global History of Buddhism and Medicine* is thus the third part of the three-stage project. Building on the two books that he edited, Salguero has woven an effective and readable synthesis of a wealth of primary and secondary sources covering the entire Buddhist world. The outcome is a history of almost two and a half millennia of links between Buddhism and medicine in Asia, Europe, and North America, a very much needed and readable introduction to the field. It is essential reading for anyone interested in Buddhism, the history of medicine, or both. The breadth of the book makes it useful for both students and scholars.

Salguero provides plenty of food for thought on the complex question of what we might call Buddhist medicine, a discussion that continues previous ones by him and others. While the book's title avoids the impossible-to-define "Buddhist medicine," the book itself begins with a succinct discussion of the term, its problematics and usefulness.

The first part of the book provides an overview of the relevant doctrines and practices as found in the three divisions of Buddhism, termed here as Nikāya, Mahāyāna, and Tantric Buddhism. Salguero masterfully presents the essence of these three contexts in an accessible way, suitable even for those with no background in Buddhism, and provides the backdrop for the topics discussed in the second part of the book. The second part is devoted to the myriad forms of transformation undergone by the ideas and practices discussed in the first part. The author frames this part of the volume under the rubrics of circulations, translations, localizations, and modernizations. He eloquently steers us through both the macro-level processes and micro-level examples. We get a clear sense of what Buddhist medical networks consisted of and the multiple ways in which knowledge moved. In the chapter devoted to translations, Salguero discusses the key texts that were translated and adapted across the Buddhist world, and how through this tracing of the movement of texts across time and space—observing not just straight-up translations but also cultural translations and adaptations—we are able to understand the ways in which people understood and practiced Buddhist medicine. The author then moves on to the specifics of some aspects in his discussion on domestications, displacements, and "translocations"—cases where ideas originating from India planted seeds that grew into Buddhist-related and culturally specific medical traditions. He has chosen two case studies within this overall category: Tibet and Southeast Asia, each having its own trajectory of development.

The last two chapters, "Modernizations" and "Contemporary Buddhist Medicine," bring us to the present. The historical background and the analysis of key themes discussed up to this point serve as a strong base for these two fascinating chapters. These chapters help the reader appreciate and reflect on contemporary Buddhist medicine, mostly likely to be found in a local clinic or school, no matter where one is.

So when, for example, Salguero discusses both the enthusiasm and the backlash of mindfulness in the "Contemporary Buddhist Medicine" chapter, and more generally the links between Buddhism and biomedicine of our time, it is thanks to the principles, histories, and analyses that he has dealt with up to this point that we can understand these links as yet more cases of the complex multidirectional processes "entangled in complex feedback loops" (p. 167) that the book has discussed throughout.

Salguero points out that while "the history of Buddhist medicine in previous historical periods is enormously complex," the contemporary ocean of practice, with its "fractal swirl of currents and counter currents," is even more chaotic (p. 174).

The author provides plenty of food for thought on how Buddhism and medicine have interacted

and how they continue to do so. This overall theme is relevant not only in the history of Buddhism and medicine but also in the more general questions of relationships between religions and medicine, questions that have been discussed more at length with regard to other religions—primarily Christianity, but also Islam and to a lesser extent Judaism. In this sense, too, this book is important as it brings the discussion of Buddhism and medicine within the playing fields of relevant mainstream disciplines where Buddhism and medicine are still not sufficiently known, taught, and researched. With this excellent volume at hand, we are in a much better position to hope that Buddhism and medicine will become better known in contexts and disciplines where they are not yet well known.

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Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia

KAREN STRASSLER

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It took a decade for Karen Strassler to come up with her second and much-awaited book. Indeed, it could have taken much longer to do the ethnographic fieldwork, converse with a whole gamut of sources, and finally put together a monograph that sustains her analysis of the productive work of images in contemporary Indonesia. *Demanding Images* is a fascinating study that younger scholars can only aspire to do. The author introduces the concept of the “image-event” or “a political process set in motion when a specific image or set of images erupts onto and intervenes in a social field, becoming a focal point of discursive and affective engagement across diverse publics” (p. 8) to help us analyze Indonesian visual culture in the wake of Suharto’s downfall.