

Siraporn Thitathan
Sukhothaimathirath University
Nonthaburi 11120 / Thailand

MULHOLLAND, JEAN. *Medicine, Magic and Evil Spirits. Study of a Text on Thai Traditional Paediatrics*. Faculty of Asian Studies Monographs: New Series No. 8. Canberra: Australian National University, Faculty of Asian Studies, 1987. xi/316 pages. Appendices, tables, bibliography. Paper Aus. \$15.00 (approx. US\$10.00); ISBN 0-7315-0016-4, ISSN 0729-363. (Distributed by Bibliotech. Australian National University, Box 4, Canberra 2601, Australia)

Mulholland's book is the first translation and detailed study in English of a Thai medicinal text (besides the articles which she has published earlier). The text studied—*khamphē prathom chindaa* (KPC)—is a traditional text on paediatrics compiled in 1871 from earlier texts of unknown origin. The text is today incorporated in the syllabus used at the various schools of traditional medicine throughout Thailand.

Being a compilation of several texts the organization of KPC is confusing. Mulholland has, very sensibly, translated relevant sections of the original (—a full translation will be published later—) and then rearranged them so that information on the same topics—otherwise scattered about in the original—now are presented together. Thus quotations relevant to the aetiology, the description of the disease concepts and the diagnosis are presented and analyzed in chapters 4–7, while the prescriptions, the ingredients, the therapeutic uses of the drugs and the prescribing patterns are examined in chapters 8–11. The study is preceeded by an introduction, and chapters on the history of Thai medical texts, education of traditional doctors and the composition of the text (chapters 1–3). After the conclusion (chapter 12) follow several glossaries of Thai words and of medicinal substances, as well as a substantial bibliography. Thai words are, besides being transcribed, also written in Thai.

While Thai medical manuals normally concentrate on the prescriptions, and have but little to say about the diseases and the principles behind the tradition, the nearly 200 pages long KPC describes a whole field of diseases in great detail, namely childrens' diseases (*saang*) and their treatment.

The *saang* concept includes parasitic diseases, minor childrens' diseases, diseases vaguely connected with abnormalities in the four elements, and birth *saang*. Birth *saang* are in turn accompanied by minor *saang* (complications), the (mouth) disorders *la* and *la-ong*, and wind (*lom*) involving the nervous system. The birth *saang* and the accompanying diseases are related to specific weekdays. Thus there appears to be seven birth *saang*, seven minor *saang*, seven *la*, seven *la-ong* and seven *lom*, each a product of the weekday one was born or conceived. This absolute correlation between time and disease—although diagnostically unsatisfactory, and done at the expence of consistency and clarity—is clearly an attempt to establish a norm or a model. That this relationship is an ideal one is underscored by Mulholland's own observations that in actual practice “the birth *saang* did not appear to be taken seriously” (258). In fact, the information about which weekday a sick child was born seems only to be used to establish the name of the disease (259). Such pro-forma naming links practice to theory and can be seen as establishing a reciprocal legitimacy: practice justifying the model, and the model lending authority to practice.

After a thorough presentation of the data, Mulholland notes that we still do not obtain a clear picture of the child diseases, because of (1) lack of consistency in differentiation of the diseases, (2) inadequate system of classification, and (3) several ways of diagnosing birth *saang*, based on distinctly different medical theories.

Mulholland's aim is to study "the ideas underlying the practice of medicine of the traditional Thai doctors" (5), although she also makes it clear that her study is "an examination of the theory of the texts, not a study of actual practice" (4).

Mulholland finds three theories at work in the text:

—First the theory that *saang* is a congenital disease closely related to the state of health of the mother during pregnancy, but in the end a product of the weekday the child was conceived or born. This theory is considered to be of Thai or Southeast Asian origin.

—The second theory regards the elements and the *tridosā*. These Ayurvedic ideas appear to be secondary and superimposed on the first theory.

—The third approach is similar to the first, except that it is pragmatic and symptomatic, and thus overcomes the rigidity of the *saang*—weekday relationship.

Thus she finds that "Thai traditional medicine is a unique system of medicine based on assimilation of elements of a theory borrowed from Indian Ayurvedic medicine with a system which is in all probability indigenous and derived empirically" (1).

These historical conclusions are both general and tentative. This is quite natural because of the lack of genuinely old medical texts. Still I feel that a number of observations which she herself makes could have led to further fruitful reflections on the nature and history of the medical tradition. I am thinking of statements regarding the incomprehensibility and unintelligibility of the texts to most Thais; the fact that the texts in question are of court origin and probably had a very limited circulation before they were printed (what impact did they actually have on practice?); the fact that the text is compiled and that compilation seem to be a traditional way of 'creating' manuals (what consequences does this have for the transference of the body of medical knowledge?); the fact that medical knowledge was made public in the middle of the last century for the first time (how did printing affect the manual tradition?); the fact that there so many alternatives, variants, so many answers to the same question (what is the impact of this on theory? and practice?); the fact that royal manuals because the only manuals used at the traditional medical schools and that these schools are the only ones legally recognized by the state (are we here confronted with a process leading to the establishment of a new orthodoxy?). The list could be prolonged. I hope that Mulholland, with her experience and expertise, will take up some of these questions in her future studies.

Mulholland does discuss "the overwhelming number and variety of the ingredients in the prescriptions, the lack of uniformity in the choice of drugs to treat the same symptoms . . . and the wide range of symptoms and conditions for which individual prescriptions are used" (228). She therefore wants to "find a way to discover which of the many ingredients in any one prescription are the active or effective drugs . . ." (229). First she argues against a purely statistical approach, which the reviewer once proposed, as unsatisfactory, and suggests instead a more subtle analysis of the prescriptions. Understandably, Mulholland does not arrive at a clearcut solution to this complicated problem, and has in the end to settle for a rather vague conclusion: "It is therefore necessary to assess each prescription on its own merits, taking into account its purpose as well as the accepted therapeutic uses of each ingredient, in order to understand what the prescribing doctor had in mind" (237). The important implication in this conclusion, as I see it, is that one cannot rely on texts only to resolve the

problem; it requires indeed a study of practice. The book shows that the author is thoroughly familiar with the text she analyzes, as well as with related texts. Mulholland proves herself to be equally at home in the fields of medicine, botany and pharmacology, and deals competently with the linguistic problems of a difficult text. The result is a detailed, solid and well argued study, which should be read by anyone interested in Thai or Southeast Asian traditional medicine, and which is invaluable for anyone who wants to study Thai medical texts.

Viggo Brun
East Asian Institute
University of Copenhagen

INDIA

DUBUISSON, DANIEL. *La légende royale dans l'Inde ancienne, Rāma et le Rāmāyaṇa* [The royal legend in ancient India, Rāma and the Rāmāyaṇa]. Paris: Éditions Economica, 1986. xii+296 pages. Bibliography. Paper FFr 145; ISBN 2-7178-1095-1. (In French)

Of the two Indian epics, the *Mahābhārata* has received greater attention from scholars in comparative mythology and Indo-European studies, than has its counterpart, the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In *La légende royale* Daniel Dubuisson sets out to show that the *Rāmāyaṇa* no less than the *Mahābhārata* contains a structural core that is a reflex of the Indo-European ideology proposed by the comparative mythologist Georges Dumézil. Dubuisson's study demonstrates both the benefits of applying the Dumézilian theory in its general outlines to the Sanskrit epics and their descendants, and the serious limitations of any study which argues for the primacy and superior value of Indo-European ideology as the conceptual framework for these texts, which cannot be fully understood with reference to this ideology alone.

In his analysis of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Dubuisson uses the methods of contemporary French theories of narrative and discourse to expand on the structuralist theory of Dumézil, in which he argues that the myths and early epics of the Indo-European-speaking peoples express a tripartite and trifunctional ideology that pervaded every aspect of Indo-European culture and thought (136-139). Dubuisson suggests that the Indo-European ideology is exemplified and played out on two planes of the *Rāmāyaṇa*: the narrative plane, and the "plan actantiel," a paradigmatic structural design. In the "plan actantiel" the three Dumézilian ideological functions (moral sovereignty; physical strength and valor; and fecundity and productivity) are transposed from mythic to epic material, so that epic characters such as Rāma systematically manifest the 'functional' personality traits of mythic (in this case Vedic) divinities or personages such as Indra. On the narrative plane, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as in other Indo-European epics, a series of events—e.g., the errors (*fautes*) of the hero—tie together the threads of the narrative at three "nodal" points which form a structure of their own.

In the first part of the book, Dubuisson tackles the "plan narratif," isolating as the "nodal points" three problematic deeds of the hero Rama, at least two of which have troubled scholars and pious exegetes alike, all of whom would like to establish the morally exemplary nature of Rāma as the "prince sans blame" and an *avatāra*, an incarnation of God: the slayings of the monkey Vāli and the quasi-brahmanical demon Rāvaṇa, and the double repudiation of the chaste queen Sītā. Through a series of comparisons of the treatment of the above episodes in Indian and Southeast