

Health Care and Daoism

Nathan Sivin

Abstract

Almost all historical studies of pre-modern Chinese medicine are about classical physicians and their work. Nevertheless, the classical art's role in the health care of China as a whole was practically negligible. The great majority of the population of China before modern times—rural, illiterate, and poor—had no access to elite practitioners. Most depended instead on care within the family, on healers who employed mostly local drugs, or on ritualists of the popular religion—and to a much smaller extent on Buddhist or Daoist masters, whose resources were also mainly ritual. Ritual and religious healing are effective because their symbols and performances convey powerful meanings to patients. That is why they survived in ancient times, and why they flourish today in competition with modern medicine. Popular therapies succeeded in China (and elsewhere) mainly because their power over meanings affected people and the relations between them. That in turn influenced health. Daoists were in no sense unique in treating illness. Most of their methods were adapted from those of popular religion and Buddhism, which in turn drew on Daoist practices. This paper tentatively surveys the role of Daoist masters in health care, which changed greatly over the centuries. Its conclusions are very tentative. The history of health care in China is poorly developed. A great deal more research in this field is needed to understand the diverse roles of Daoism.

Keywords: medicine, health care, Daoism, ritual

Nathan Sivin is Emeritus Professor of Chinese Culture and of the History of Science in University of Pennsylvania and Honorary Professor in Chinese Academy of Sciences.

醫護管理與道教

席文

摘要

對古代醫學所進行的歷史研究，幾乎都是關於傳統醫師及其工作的。然而，整體看來，傳統醫學在中國醫護管理中的角色簡直微不足道。古代的大部分中國百姓——農民、文盲和窮人——並不具備請醫師治病的經濟條件，他們更多地依靠家庭醫護，或是那些使用地方藥物的醫療者，或是精通儀式之民間宗教人士，也有較少部分人依靠主要提供儀式服務的僧伽或道士。

儀式以及其他宗教治療之所以有效，是因為它們的象徵和表演，向病人傳達了強而有力的意義。這就是它們得以從古代延續至今、甚至面對現代醫學的挑戰仍具活力的原因所在。民間療法在中國（以及其它地方）的成功，主要是由於它們在意義上的力量影響着人們及人際關係，這也相應地影響了人體健康。在治療疾病方面，道教並非一枝獨秀，其運用的許多方法也借鑒了民間宗教與佛教，反之，後二者也吸收了道教的技術實踐。

本文探討道士在醫護服務中所擔當的角色，而這種角色在幾個世紀間經歷了重大轉變。論文的結論也是嘗試性的，對於中國醫護服務歷史的挖掘研究尚未完備，我們須要對這個領域作出更大量的研究，以了解道教在其中扮演的不同角色與作用。

關鍵詞：醫學、醫護管理、道教、儀式