

Seminar History of Science, History of Text
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Texts as documents

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*What do citations tell us on the medical culture of the far south?
What do medical literature tells us on the practice of citation?*

Before the mid 20th century, medical experts working on the Chinese soil were not submitted to a codified medical curriculum. A central medical institution existed, though, from the 6th century to the first years of the twentieth century. Bearing different names in its long history, it used to deal with medical matters, medical education, and publishing. But, at no time, had it the means to educate, control or sanction the entire population of medical experts. Until the mid twentieth century, medical apprenticeship usually took place in private contexts of learning, with a master, a father, or with books, and often with a mix of masters, ancestors and medical books. And until the mid twentieth century, no bureaucratic law had defined a medical profession that could claim for a monopoly on the practice of medicine which, therefore, was shared between a wide range of actors. What did these actors, living in Yunnan, Guangxi, and Guangdong, that is in some of the most peripheral areas of the empire, know about medicine in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ? One way to answer this issue is to track down citations in the local medical books that have survived. In the first part of this talk, I present the results of a first browsing through the twenty of medical texts that are still extant. In the second part of the talk, and informed by some major works made by historians, linguists and sociologists of science, I decide to pay a close attention to the citation process in these medical texts in order to shed light on the different uses and functions of citations in medical literature.