

Book Reviews

A Medical History of Hong Kong: The Development and Contributions of Outpatient Services. By Moira M. W. Chan-Yeung. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2021. 412 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 978-988-237-220-7.

Reviewed by Yip Ka-che

With the publication of this book, Moira Chan-Yeung adds a third volume to her historical survey of Hong Kong's medical history from 1842 to 2015. While the first two volumes cover medical and healthcare developments chronologically around major themes and events, including, for example, the establishment of medical institutions and hospitals, as well as the government's policies to improve public health and combat emerging infectious diseases, this book is an in-depth study of a relatively unexplored yet critical constituent of the healthcare system: the development and contributions of outpatient medical services that deliver valuable and, for many, indispensable medical care. As in the case of her two previous volumes, Chan-Yeung has provided careful and extensive documentation of her story based on government archives and publications, scholarly literature, and media sources—there is indeed a wealth of data that will allow other researchers to explore further specific aspects of the history of healthcare in Hong Kong.

Within the broad chronology covered in this book, Chan-Yeung carefully traces the continuities and changes of ambulatory care provided by general outpatient and special outpatient services. The racial prejudice of the British and the prioritizing of continual economic growth of the colony resulted in woefully inadequate investment in healthcare and public health improvements for the general population. It would be the local Chinese elites who spearheaded and funded the Chinese Public Dispensaries (CPDs) that provided Western medical care and midwifery services to the poor Chinese community. Moreover, they promoted preventive care, including public health education and vaccination. After World War II, these CPDs became Government Outpatient Centers, and together with other new government clinics added over time, these government clinics

became the mainstay of primary care for a vast majority of the population, providing general as well as special services such as social hygiene, tuberculosis services, school health, and dental health services. Chan-Yeung demonstrates how local voluntarism was able to overcome the inaction of the government to remedy, at least partially, the deficiencies of colonial health policy, and how local Chinese elites and community organizations such as Kaifong Associations, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local and foreign philanthropies, combined efforts to enable segments of the population to receive affordable medical care.

The government modified its policies, especially after World War II, to meet the challenges of political and social developments, the epidemiological transition, and demographic changes. By analyzing developments over a long historical period, Chan-Yeung examines changes over time—during the colonial period and after 1997, when Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region within the People's Republic of China. What is particularly illuminating is her discussion of how global medical advancements and treatment paradigm shifts for certain diseases helped to highlight the need for establishing specific special outpatient clinics in Hong Kong. For instance, the development and widespread use of effective anti-tuberculosis drugs negated the need for tuberculous sanatoria and inpatient therapy, which led to the shift to ambulatory care for tuberculous patients. In fact, the government tuberculosis service pioneered a program of supervised treatment in the early 1950s based on special tuberculosis outpatient clinics, a model that was later adopted by the WHO. The management of mental illness in Hong Kong also, as in Western countries, progressed from “institutionalization, rehabilitation” to “community-based services” (220).

While the government's special outpatient clinics increased in number and expanded to multiple locations, one major problem persisted into the post-colonial period: the inadequacy of outpatient clinics in the private sector. Before 1997, despite studies that had identified the misguided health policy of the colonial government that prioritized economic growth and the public health sector, little investment was allocated to primary medical care, which remained largely in the private sector. The post-colonial government not only failed to rectify this bias but continued to adopt, except for limited interventions, a more or less *laissez-faire* approach to the private sector, resulting in the reluctance of many patients to use the fee-for-service private clinics and crowding instead the over-subscribed Accident and Emergency Departments of public hospitals. It was only in the past two decades that the government began to institute a series of reforms in the private sector to ensure quality assurance of

medical services and to be more proactive in promoting preventive care, especially for the elderly. Chan-Yeung is certainly correct in asserting that “the private sector [...] would need to take up its share of responsibility in the prevention of prevalent diseases, especially noncommunicable chronic disease and cancer” (318). There is, however, a chronic shortage of doctors in Hong Kong, a situation that has been exacerbated by the exodus of medical personnel in the past two years. As far as the private sector is concerned, as Chan-Yeung points out, in 2015, “doctors in the private sector accounted only for 54.2% of all registered doctors.” That was a significant drop from 70.2% in 1990 (309–10). Hopefully, the government’s passage of the Medical Registration (Amendment) Bill of 2021 that allows qualified, non-locally trained doctors to obtain full registration in Hong Kong will help to alleviate the situation. Yet, at the same time, instead of continuing to apportion the lion’s share of its healthcare budget to hospitals and advanced medical technologies, should the government also allot more funding for the promotion of health education as well as for the establishment of easily accessible channels for preventive care for the population?

The book touches only briefly on the role of Chinese medicine in the provision of ambulatory medical care. The colonial government did not recognize Chinese medicine, although its practitioners continued to serve the majority of the Chinese population. After 1997, the then Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa began the process to accredit Chinese medicine practitioners and regulate Chinese medicines. From 2003 to 2014, the government established a total of 18 Chinese Medicine Centers for Training and Research, and starting in March 2020, these centers were transformed into Chinese Medicine Clinics to provide the general public with Chinese medicine outpatient services. Certainly, as Chan-Yeung points out, “it would be worthwhile to bring in the CM [Chinese medicine] doctors who are responsible for the primary care of 15% of the population” to augment Western medicine practitioners in delivering preventive care as well as health education, especially with regard to chronic noncommunicable diseases (315–16). There might be issues of interface and collaboration between Chinese medicine and Western medicine practitioners, and there is still no hospital dedicated to Chinese medicine for the training of doctors. The announcement in 2015 that a site would be reserved for the development of a Chinese medicine hospital was certainly a step in the right direction, even though it is not expected to be completed until 2025.

The book’s conclusion is sobering: Chan-Yeung warns that a major factor that adversely influences health is poverty, and in Hong Kong, the wealth gap between rich and poor has increased. In 2017, “1 million (14.7%)

people in Hong Kong lived in poverty,” yet the “government’s spending on social services has declined from 70% to about 50% of total expenditure—especially on housing and education” (319). It is important to remember that the paltry amount of funding for social services, especially housing, in the colonial days was a major factor causing the high rates of morbidity and mortality as well as deep social malaise. Hopefully, history is not going to repeat itself.

Hong Kong Popular Culture: Worlding Film, Television, and Pop Music. By Klavier J. Wang. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. XXI, 523 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 978-981-13-8817-0.

Reviewed by Hercules Chu Kok-yin

The culture of Hong Kong was famous worldwide for its unique mixture of different elements, such as using mass media to promote Kung Fu to the world. However, previous analyses of Hong Kong culture mainly focused on individual industries or sectors without discussing them in tandem or holistically. Klavier J. Wang’s book ambitiously draws out the core features of Hong Kong culture while giving readers spectacular insight into the local community. The book provides a comprehensive overview of the development of Hong Kong popular culture and the reasons for its rise to become one of the most influential cultures in the Asia-Pacific region and among Chinese communities around the world.

In this book, the author discusses three aspects or industries of Hong Kong popular culture: Film, Television, and Pop Music. In each, she discusses how each of these aspects grew and interacted with the world, while offering thoughts on their future development under the influence of the Sino-sphere. Wang draws on major companies in each industry to discuss how they contributed to the birth and growth of Hong Kong popular culture. Particularly valuable are several extensive interviews that show how “cultures” were created by certain visionaries who then helped promote Hong Kong to the world. While it might have been difficult for Hong Kong to go beyond the Chinese influence due to its geographical location, Hong Kong culture did spread to the world successfully thanks to the work of many people and industries. The book shows us new insight into Hong Kong studies, especially the revival of Hong Kong’s culture.

The chapters on Hong Kong’s film industry show that Hong Kong films benefited from the Southeast Asian market and the larger diasporic