



Shén Nóng Bēncǎo Jīng: The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica

By Sabine Wilms

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This long-awaited English translation and critical edition of The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica by well-known medical historian and translator Dr. Sabine Wilms is a product of her triple engagement with the worlds of applied Chinese medicine, academic sinology, and sustainable agriculture. The 365 substances covered are categorized in three books, associated with Heaven, Humanity, and Earth respectively. Coming from the perspective of alchemy and the pursuit of health and longevity, treating disease and expelling pathogens by ingesting substances that have a strong directly-discernible effect on the body is viewed as the lowest goal. By contrast, the higher-ranked medicinals often have no discernible effect when ingested, but especially when taken over long periods of time have such ambitious and intangible goals as connecting the human spirit to heaven, lightening the body, or staving off aging. The information contained in this book and the vision of the world and of the effect of natural substances on the human body expressed here are bound to inspire any practitioner of the Chinese art of yǎngshēng ("nurturing life").

The present edition is aimed primarily at modern students and practitioners of Chinese medicine, but also at academic researchers and students of medical history, Chinese classical literature, and natural science. To make it as useful as possible for these audiences, this book to include the following features:

- 50 pages of prefatory matters, including a foreword by Dr. Eugene Anderson and a preface and introduction by Sabine Wilms.
- 469 pages of text in both classical Chinese and contemporary English.
- A critical edition of the Chinese source text, based on the leading current Chinese editions and incorporating philological, etymological, and archaeological findings.
- A literal yet elegant translation into English, crafted with careful attention to different possibilities inherent in the classical Chinese but also to readability, to reflect the elegance of the original.
- A crisp clear layout, featuring the Chinese text immediately above the English translation in a structure that makes cross-referencing easy even for a beginning student of medical Chinese. Click this link for a sample of two minerals from

Book Two.

- 15 gorgeous illustrations (3 linoleum prints and 12 sketches) of medicinal substances by Maria Hicks
- Endnotes that discuss such diverse topics as medicinal identification, grammar questions, and character variations, based on extensive research in historical and contemporary commentaries.
- Explanations of ancient disease names on the basis of classical medical texts, most notably S?n S?mi?o's ??? Bèi Jí Qi?n J?n Yào F?ng ?????? and Cháo Yuánf?ng's ??? Zh? Bìng Yuán Hòu Lùn ?????.
- References to modern clinical TCM, for example in regards to the usage of medicinals and disease names.
- A glossary with explanations for diseases, an index of both historical and contemporary references, and a general index.

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Editorial Review

Review

By Z'ev Rosenberg, L. Ac. (Professor, Alembic and Xinglin Institutes, and Chair Emeritus, Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, San Diego, Ca.:

The most recent addition to our 'embarrassment of riches' in English translations of Chinese medical classics is Sabine Wilm's latest work, ????? Shen nong ben cao jing/The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica.

With the publication of this work, a complete set of Han dynasty medical classics is now available for the serious student and practitioner. What is special about this translation, and text, can be summed up in the word 'core'. It is the earliest compilation of the internal medicine tradition, including 365 herbs, minerals and animal parts divided into three categories, ?? shang yao/superior/upper medicinals, ?? zhong yao/middle-grade medicinals, and?? xia yao/lower (inferior) medicinals. What is quite interesting about this classification is that the medicinals that are the least ? du toxic/imbalanced are in the superior category, suitable for ?? yang sheng/nourishing life, supplementing qi, blood and ? jing/essence, and maintaining health and longevity. The middle and inferior categories contain more 'medicinally active' herbs that must be combined with other medicinals to balance their extremes or reduce toxicity and side effects, and are more suitable for treating illnesses. This reminds us that the vast system of Chinese/Asian medicine in its foundation is about preserving, nurturing and maintaining health, and only secondarily about treating disease. As it says in the preface to book one, 'Upper Medicinals', "The upper-level medicinals consist of 120 types. These function as rulers. They are in charge of nurturing ? ming/destiny and thereby correspond to Heaven. They are non-toxic and (even) when taken in large quantities or over a long time, do not harm the person. If you want to lighten the body, boost qi, avoid aging, and extend your lifespan, root your prescriptions in the upper (section of the) Classic." Section two discusses the fundamental rules of combining medicinals into formulas, in their mutual relationships, as "rulers, vassals, assistants, and messengers". Section three of the preface discusses the flavors of the medicinals, harvesting, processing, delivery systems (pills, powders, decoctions) and preparation of the medicinals. The remaining sections (four through seven) cover dosages, categories of illness, and diagnostics.

Happy Goat Productions has produced this book in a physician's desk-friendly format, compact, easy to carry and access, and with clear, readable fonts. The woodcuts and drawings that illustrate the text are a delight as well. For those of us who are practicing wild-crafters or gardeners, or 'whose hands are constantly busy with herbs', the simple, precise discussions of the 365 medicinals is a sheer delight, and constant inspiration.

What would I recommend for future editions? Sabine had a monumental job putting together this text, it was no walk in the park. In fact, it was often written in a cabin warmed by a wood-burning stove, in the howling frigid winds that blow down the Columbia gorge from the east in the wintertime. But I'd personally love to see commentaries on the text in an expanded edition, along with more numerous illustrations. Otherwise, this text should be on every herbalist's desk, and would also serve as an excellent introduction to herbal medicine for acupuncture/ 'moxabustionists' as well. I'm looking forward to taking the Shen nong ben cao jing into the forests, as I commune with the plants and minerals in the fields. Or as Zhuangzi once said, 'cloud hidden, whereabouts unknown'.

Sabine, what a marvelously beautiful & tremendously gorgeous production! I am thoroughly impressed and so delighted to have my copy as of today. A treasure for me in multiple ways: as translation reference; as

teaching & learning material; and for pure enjoyment as well. Opened it after washing my hands but with dirty nails (I rarely clean them) and smiled when I felt the love you have put into it. Thank you! (by Herman Oving, fellow translator, happy farmer, and teacher of classical Chinese)

"Just got my copy! Until I was holding it in my hand, I didn't realize how important aesthetics is in influencing one's relationship with a book and its content. Its surprising petite size fits snugly in my palm. The clean one-herb-per-page layout makes it a delight to read. The artworks are beautiful. All these make the superb translation & the richly informational footnotes that much easier to absorb. I simply didn't want to put it down!" (anonymous)

"The *Shén Nóng Běncǎo Jìng* continues to be a major resource of classical inspiration for modern-day practitioners of Chinese herbal medicine. Sabine Wilms has accomplished the difficult task of producing a translation that is both academically meticulous and clinically useful!" Dr. Heiner Fruehauf

From the Author

It is not just because I am a farmer with dirt under my nails that the "Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica" has always been one of my favorite books. As a critical historian and teacher of classical Chinese medicine at the National College of Natural Medicine and elsewhere, I firmly believe this little book to be one of the most important, foundational texts of this medicine that I love so dearly and have dedicated my life to. For this reason, Happy Goats Productions has decided to produce a literal and clean translation, with the earliest currently available Chinese source text side-by-side with my English rendition.

My intention is two-fold: On the one hand, I want those of you with no access to a solid edition of the Chinese source text or no ability to read classical Chinese on your own to enjoy this gem with as little outside interpretation or alteration as possible. For this reason I have chosen a faithful and very literal translation of the text over an elegant and perhaps more easily digestible interpretation. On the other hand, I hope that the bilingual layout encourages those of you who possess some background in classical Chinese to look at the Chinese text while reading my translation, so that you can gain a deeper understanding of the text than any translation could ever offer.

After decades of struggling with translating philosophical, cosmological, and medical literature from classical Chinese to English, I have come to the conclusion that no translation could ever do justice to the depth of the original source. The gap between early Chinese and modern English culture is simply too large to find direct equivalents for too many terms and phrases, from *qì* to *shén* ("spirit/s," if you must give it an English word). Moreover, any translation will always by necessity be limited by the translator's own level of cultivation and understanding of the material, and when it comes to the pursuit of immortality or harmony between Heaven and Earth, we modern people are not even scratching the surface of what the ancient texts have to offer us. For this reason, I encourage all my readers to make friends with the Chinese part of the text as well, to engage with it in whatever way you can, to write it out in calligraphy, have a native speaker read it out loud for you, run it through a Chinese translation software, memorize it, sleep on it, or read it to your dog. For many entries, the grammar patterns are not that difficult and quite repetitive. For this reason, this book is actually an ideal text to study classical Chinese with, especially if you are a practitioner of Chinese medicine. May this book encourage you to dip your toes in the "bubbling spring" (as in 玉泉, *yùnguán*, a.k.a. KI-1) of the medical classics so that they become a frequently-visited source of rejuvenation and joy for yourself and of inspiration and clarity for your clinical practice.

Whether you are a practicing physician or pharmacist, a fellow "herb head" and plant lover, a historian of early Chinese culture and natural science, or just curious about one of the most ancient texts from early Chinese literature, I sincerely hope that you will enjoy this text as much as I do!

From the Back Cover

On these pages, Sabine Wilms has provided us with an elegant translation of one of the cornerstone classics of the medical traditions of China. This in itself would be a true gift to all of us but she has provided so much more: an informative foreword by Dr. E.N. Anderson; a helpful preface and introduction by Dr. Wilms herself; a critical edition of the original Chinese alongside the annotated translation; a glossary of disease names with clarifications from a wide range of medical texts; indexes of medicinals in English, Latin, and Pinyin; and gorgeous artwork by Maria Hicks. This book deserves the attention of every health practitioner and medical scholar--or of *anyone* with an interest in herbal lore and in living a life rooted in the natural world, in all of its richness and fullness.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Linda Pinkerton:

Reading a book tends to be new life style on this era globalization. With looking at you can get a lot of information that can give you benefit in your life. Having book everyone in this world may share their idea. Ebooks can also inspire a lot of people. Plenty of author can inspire their particular reader with their story as well as their experience. Not only the storyline that share in the guides. But also they write about the information about something that you need case in point. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your sons or daughters, there are many kinds of book which exist now. The authors on this planet always try to improve their skill in writing, they also doing some research before they write to their book. One of them is this Shén Nóng B?nc?o J?ng: The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica.

Ronald Hopkins:

Shén Nóng B?nc?o J?ng: The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this reserve has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in words, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to place every word into delight arrangement in writing Shén Nóng B?nc?o J?ng: The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica yet doesn't forget the main place, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be certainly one of it. This great information can certainly drawn you into brand-new stage of crucial contemplating.

Roy Hanson:

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Gladys Jackson:

Do you like reading a guide? Confuse to looking for your favorite book? Or your book has been rare? Why so many problem for the book? But virtually any people feel that they enjoy for reading. Some people likes reading through, not only science book but also novel and Shén Nóng B?nc?o J?ng: The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica as well as others sources were given understanding for you. After you know how the truly amazing a book, you feel would like to read more and more. Science reserve was created for teacher or maybe students especially. Those ebooks are helping them to put their knowledge. In some other case, beside science e-book, any other book likes Shén Nóng B?nc?o J?ng: The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica to make your spare time more colorful. Many types of book like here.

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