FREE · 10 ANNOTATED TITLES

Begin with better questions.

A short, opinionated shelf for anyone beginning to read Chinese medicine. No miracle claims and no impossible canon. Just a path through history, primary texts, and careful translation.

01

ORIENT

Vocabulary and context

02

READ

Classics and translations

03

COMPARE

History and difference

INSIDE THE GUIDE

A reading path, not a prescription.

10 annotated books · suggested order · primary-text warnings

A one-page method for reading translations with care

Start with orientation

First establish the vocabulary and historical frame, then meet the foundational texts. Read slowly enough to notice the difference between a classic and a claim about it.

01

ORIENTATION

The Web That Has No Weaver

Ted J. Kaptchuk

A readable orientation to Chinese medical reasoning. Begin here for the vocabulary, then move on before treating it as a complete history.

02

HISTORY

Medicine in China: A History of Ideas

Paul U. Unschuld

A historical frame for competing traditions, institutions, and ideas. It keeps 'ancient China' from becoming one undifferentiated claim.

03

PRIMARY TEXT

Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen

The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic, Basic Questions

A foundational compilation, best approached with a named translation, introduction, and notes. Read the framing as carefully as the passages.

04

PRIMARY TEXT

Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu

The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic, Spiritual Pivot

The companion classic. Especially relevant to channel and acupuncture traditions, but not a stand-alone clinical manual.

05

PRIMARY TEXT

Nan Jing

The Classic of Difficult Issues

A compact classical text built through questions, commentary, and later interpretation. Compare editions and notes rather than seeking one plain meaning.

Then compare traditions

Formula literature, materia medica, later warm-disease traditions, and social history show how many different projects have lived under the name Chinese medicine.

06

FORMULAS

Shang Han Lun

Zhang Zhongjing

Treatise on Cold Damage. A pillar of formula literature and clinical reasoning; its terms and categories belong to a specific historical system.

07

FORMULAS

Jin Gui Yao Lue

Zhang Zhongjing

Essential Prescriptions of the Golden Cabinet. A broader clinical companion to the Shang Han Lun.

08

MATERIA MEDICA

Ben Cao Gang Mu

Li Shizhen

The Compendium of Materia Medica. Read for world-historical scope and classification. It is not a modern safety or dosage manual.

09

LATER TRADITION

Wen Bing Tiao Bian

Wu Tang

Systematic Differentiation of Warm Diseases. A later tradition with its own logic and vocabulary; do not flatten it into an earlier classic.

10

CONTEXT

A Flourishing Yin

Charlotte Furth

Gender, medicine, and history in China, 960-1665. A vital check on claims that one model describes every body in every period.

How to read well

The aim is not to memorise a system. It is to notice where an idea came from, what problem it answered, and what the translation asks you to accept.

01 **Name the edition.**

Record translator, editor, year, and whether the text is complete or abridged.

02 **Separate text from tradition.**

A classical compilation, a later commentary, and a modern textbook are different kinds of evidence.

03 **Read the introduction twice.**

Translators make choices. Their framing tells you what the translation is trying to make visible.

04 **Keep chronology intact.**

Ask when an idea appears. Do not project a later school backwards onto an earlier classic.

05 **Treat claims with proportion.**

Historical importance is not proof of clinical effectiveness or safety. Check modern evidence separately.

A NOTE ON CARE

This guide is an educational reading map, not medical advice. It does not recommend herbs, formulas, acupuncture, or self-treatment. Consult a qualified clinician for health concerns and check interactions before using any remedy.

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