

## **Medical Knowledge and the Circulation of Islamic Texts in China, 1642-1900**

*A research proposal for The Thomas Arthur Arnold Fund for Excellence in Historical Research Postdoctoral Fellowship in The Zvi Yavetz School of Historical Studies, Tel Aviv University*

This project proposes to research the juxtaposition of medical theory and practice as it was embedded in the body of Islamic literature that circulated in China during the 17th-19th centuries. Arabic and Persian texts, and their Chinese translations and commentaries circulated in China from as early as the mid-fourteenth century, and have reached by the seventeenth century the attention of considerable large parts of society, from local practitioners of Islam to non-Muslim officials and literati. The corpus of these Arabo-Persian texts and its Chinese extension covered a variety of fields, such as medicine, cosmology, linguistics, logic and Islamic jurisprudence. An estimate of the scale of use of these texts in late imperial China can be deduced from the hundreds of early manuscripts and printed works still extant in libraries, museums and mosques around China.

Two main bodies of Islamic literature that circulated in China will be the focus of this proposed project. The first corpus includes Islamic texts, which were translated into Chinese or composed in China by Islamic scholars from the mid-17th century onwards. This body of texts includes expositions on Cosmology, Islamic law and praxis, as well as vernacular manuals for the local Muslim practitioners; The second body of literature is comprised of texts in Arabic and Persian that circulated as manuscripts in their original languages throughout the late imperial period. These texts covered a variety of themes, with special gravity on Islamic substantive law, and theology. Parts of both bodies of literature involved theoretical discussions of natural phenomena and their relation to the human body, as well as specific precepts on issues daily praxis and behavior. Both aspects carried strong scientific applicability, and can be read in terms of embedded medical knowledge.

Juxtaposing anthropological methods of analysis (e.g., History of the Body, Gender and Identity formation) with intellectual history, this project argues that Arabo-Persian scholarships, and especially the movement evolved during the mid-seventeenth century, constructed a space in which theories on nature and man were translated into daily routine, such as hygienic practices and dietary restrictions. The proposed project will analyze the relation between the theories and their application. Moreover, it will analyze the scientific and medical knowledge in these texts against the contexts of contemporary medical knowledge in China and the West. In addition, it will investigate how theories and practices that originated in other geographical and social circumstances were transfigured in order to meet late imperial China socio-cultural reality.

The proposed project will be divided into three parts: (a) the movement of theories; (b) the transformation of theory into praxis; and, (c) methods of knowledge dissemination. The first part will concentrate on theories regarding natural phenomena and processes. It will describe how Islamic theories based on the Aristotelian four elements were brought into harmony with the contemporary Chinese models. It will explore the conception of human body, and the distinction between humans and other creatures and objects, as these appear in the Chinese-Islamic literature; The second part will be concerned with three main issues: (1) the perception of cognitive operations: the organs involved in the process of cognition, and the translation of Islamic models of cognition to the Chinese theories on the Heart/Mind; (2) the perception of physiological structure: the conceptualization and visualization of bodily organs and their function, bodily operations, the conception of gender and ethnic distinction between people; (3) perceptions of hygiene and medical care: the translation of the Islamic no-

tion of purity and humorism, the implementation of dietary restrictions; The third part will explore the methods applied in the study of natural phenomena, as well as methods of translating and proliferating Islamic medical and medicinal texts in China. This part will bring to light the complex network of authors, translators, publishers and readers, which underlay the circulation of Islamic text in general, and medical knowledge in particular, in late imperial China.

During my fellowship I hope to work under the guidance of Prof. Asaf Goldschmidt (of the Department of East Asian Studies, Tel Aviv University), a leading expert on the history of Chinese medicine. Prof. Goldschmidt's extensive expertise regarding dissemination of medical and medicinal knowledge in China will be, without doubt, of great value to my proposed project.

As part of the School of Historical Studies, and a participant in the Values, Materials and Interests: On Cultural Encounters and Historical Memory" seminar, this project will be able to create fruitful dialogs with several of the on-going projects. It will bring to light aspects of global and cross-cultural movements of knowledge, and the construction of local modes of application. It will discuss the scope and forms of cross-fertilization with other contemporary medical traditions, and the socio-cultural settings that facilitated the circulation in different parts of society. This project will be able to provide the 'missing link' between projects on European, and Islamic science, and those on East Asia. In addition, the project will address issues of methods of translation, vernacularization, transliteration and transfiguration of medical phenomena and praxis.