A great deal of material that is highly relevant to the history of Indian medicine can be found embedded within Buddhist texts that were translated into Chinese over the course of the first millennium C.E. Among the many Chinese Buddhist scriptures and parts thereof that discuss medicine, the *Sutra of Golden Light* (Skt. *Suvarṇa[pra]bhāsottama-sūtra*; Ch. *Jin guangming jing* 金光明經) surely ranks among the most well-known. The text contains a chapter that briefly summarizes the basic principles of Indian medicine. Since the seventh century at least, the Chinese Buddhist tradition has held this chapter to be a foundational statement of Buddhist healing wisdom. Today, it continues to be widely cited in virtually all sectarian and scholarly works discussing Buddhist medicine.

The textual core of the *Sutra of Golden Light* is thought to have been composed in Sanskrit in the first centuries C.E., though the earliest received text that is extant in that language dates no earlier than the mid-fifth century. Complete or fragmentary translations also exist in Sogdian, Xixia, Mongoli-
an, Old Uighur, Khotanese, and Tibetan. Three Chinese versions of the text are included in the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 edition of the Sino-Japanese Buddhist canon. These are as follows:

1. *Jin guangming jing* 金光明經, T. 663: a version produced in 414–421 by Indian monk Dharmakṣema 崇無懺 (385–433) that predates the earliest extant Sanskrit version of the text;
2. *Hebu jin guangming jing* 合部金光明經, T. 664: a composite text created in 597 that collated together sections from several independent Chinese translations of the sutra that were available at that time, which contains Dharmakṣema’s chapter on medicine; and

Both Dharmakṣema’s and Yijing’s translations contain chapters called “On Eliminating Disease” (*chubing pin* 除病品) that differ significantly from the extant Sanskrit version. Dharmakṣema’s translation is closer to the Sanskrit, but diverges in the details of the medical doctrines it introduces. Yijing’s translation appears to have been heavily influenced by Dharmakṣema’s earlier efforts, as the two texts use similar language in many passages. However, it differs in many respects from the other versions. It is more concise in its telling of the narrative that frames the chapter, is longer and much more detailed in its summary of Indian medical thought, and contains a number of departures from the source text. It is also important to note that Yijing was more familiar with the doctrines of Indian medicine than other Chinese translators, as he had studied medicine at the monastic university at Nālandā during his 24-year-long pilgrimage to South and Southeast Asia. While still abroad, he sent reports of monastic life—including copious notes on Indian medical and hygienic practices—back to China. Thus, his version of the chapter “On Eliminating Disease” represents one of only a small number of Chinese translations of Indian medicine by an author intimately familiar with both its doctrines and its practice.

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Despite its significance for the history of both Buddhism and medicine, however, to my knowledge no Chinese version of the *Sutra of Golden Light*’s chapter on medicine has ever been translated into English. The purpose of the present article is to provide such a resource. Below, I offer translations of both Dharmakṣema’s and Yijing’s versions of the chapter side-by-side to facilitate comparison. In presenting this English translation of a Chinese translation of a Sanskrit text, I have chosen to render terminology (including names) in English whenever possible rather than speculatively back-translating. In the notes I have provided clarifications of the specialized medical terminology with reference to Sanskrit terms, which I hope will be a useful starting point for those who may be interested in the connections between the sutra and the larger Indian medical literature.

As the main purpose of this article is to make these translations available to scholars of South Asian medicine, I will avoid taking up here questions concerning the translation, reception, and circulation of the text in China. I have discussed some of these topics elsewhere, and further discussion is better left for publication in a journal related to the Chinese cultural and historical context. Nor will I discuss here the broader implications of the medical chapter for the history of medicine in India, or compare the chapter point by point with the Āyurvedic medical literature. These topics were long ago broached by Johannes Nobel and should be further analyzed by historians of Indian medicine. However, before proceeding with the translation, I do feel that a brief remark about the context in which this chapter of the *Sutra of Golden Light* should be read is warranted. Though it has become routine both within academic scholarship on Indo-Sinitic crosscultural exchange and within the East Asian Buddhist tradition itself to treat this chapter as an important summary of a tradition of Buddhist medical knowledge, this is a misconception. It is imperative to note that the text at no point claims a Buddhist origin for any of the knowledge it presents. Though the protagonist sets out to practice medicine based on a feeling of compassion for the suffering of the multitudes—a state of mind that the text surely wants us to interpret as a Buddhist virtue—the narrative never portrays him as

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6 A full English translation from the Sanskrit is available in Emmerick 2004. A full German translation of Yijing’s text is available in Nobel 1958.

7 On the treatment of the *Sutra of Golden Light*’s medical chapter by medieval Chinese commentators, see Salguero forthcoming.

8 Nobel 1951.

9 The role of this text in the canonization of Buddhist medicine is discussed in Salguero forthcoming.
anything other than a lay physician and never attributes his knowledge to a Buddhist source. An unbiased judgment on the basis of the contents of the text suggests that the chapter should be read as a précis of the main ideas and practices of mainstream Indian medicine, rather than a testament to an independent Buddhist medical tradition.

This reading of the text in no way diminishes its historical value. While it might not tell us anything about the practice of healing among Buddhist monastics or devotees, the various extant versions of the medical chapter—edited and translated in different geographical contexts and historical periods—offer glimpses of the development of Indian medicine that merit further exploration. In contrast to the creative approaches taken by many Chinese translators to render their source texts in ways they thought would fit with native medical and cultural expectations, Dharmakṣema’s and Yijing’s translations of the medical content in the Sutra of Golden Light are devoid of interpolated references to indigenous Chinese medical and cosmological ideas and afford us relatively unobstructed views “through the Chinese looking glass.” It is my hope that making the contents of the Chinese versions of the medical chapter available in English might encourage and facilitate further comparative research in the future.

Dharmakṣema’s Version of “On Eliminating Disease” (Taishō Tripitaka vol. 16, no. 663, pp. 351b23–352b09)11

Yijing’s Version of “On Eliminating Disease” (Taishō Tripitaka vol. 16, no. 665, pp. 447b21–448c21)

佛告道場菩提樹神：「善女天！諦

佛告菩提樹神：「善女天！諦聽！

10 As I discuss in detail elsewhere, many Chinese translators felt the need to creatively reinterpret the medical content in Buddhist texts in order to force it into indigenous frameworks (see Salguero 2009, 2010, 2010–11, and forthcoming).

11 The following translations are based on the corrected, punctuated, annotated edition of the Taishō Tripitaka made available by the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Texts Association at http://www.cbeta.org and on their jCBReader desktop application. I have adjusted the punctuation in many places without noting these instances. When I have used a variant character other than the one selected by the Taishō Tripitaka’s editors, I have provided the latter in braces { }. 
The Buddha addressed the assembly and the Goddess of the Bodhi Tree thus:

Noble goddess, listen well! Listen well! Pay attention as I relate to you this tale about vows taken long ago. Incalculable, inconceivable, infinite eons ago, a Buddha appeared in the world that was named Bejeweled Excellence Tathāgata, Worthy of Respect, Perfectly Enlightened, Consummate in Wisdom and Actions, Well-Accomplished, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed One, Tamer of Men, Teacher of Gods and Humankind, World-Honored Buddha.

Noble goddess, listen well! Listen well! Pay attention as I now tell you this tale about the former vows taken by the ten thousand divine sons. Noble goddess, incalculable, inconceivable, infinite eons ago, a Buddha appeared in the world that was named Bejeweled Topknot Tathāgata, Worthy, Perfectly Enlightened, Consummate in Wisdom and Actions, Well-Accomplished, Knower of the World, Unsurpassed One, Tamer of Men, Teacher of Gods and Humankind, World-Honored Buddha.

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13 This story is being told as part of a longer narrative sequence that spans several chapters concerning the former lives of various characters including the Buddha, the goddess whom he is addressing, and the ten thousand divine sons.
善女天！爾時是佛般涅槃後，正法滅已，於像法中，有王名曰天自在光王，修行正法，如法治世，人民和順孝養父母。是王國中，有一長者名曰持水，善知醫方，救諸病苦，方便巧知四大增損。善女天！爾時持水長者家中，後生一子，名曰流水，體貌殊勝，端正第一，形色微妙，威德具足，受性聰敏，善解諸論，種種技藝書疏算計，無不通達。

Noble goddess, when this Buddha had passed into Nirvana and the true Dharma had disappeared, in the period of Semblance Dharma, there was a king named Heavenly Omnipotent Radiance who practiced the true Dharma and ruled according to the Dharma, and his people were filial in caring for their parents. In this kingdom, there was a layman named Water-Bearer who was very knowledgeable in the practice of medicine.

善女天！時彼世尊般涅槃後，正法滅已，於像法中，有王名曰天自在光，常以正法化於人民，猶如父母。是王國中，有一長者名曰持水，善解醫明，妙通八術，眾生病苦，四大不調，咸能救療。善女天！爾時持水長者，唯有一子，名曰流水，顏容端正，人所樂觀，受性聰敏，妙閑諸論，書畫算印，無不通達。

Noble goddess, when this World-Honored One had passed into Nirvana and the true Dharma had disappeared, in the period of Semblance Dharma, there was a king named Heavenly Omnipotent Radiance who educated his people in the true Dharma and was just like a parent [to them]. In this kingdom, there was a layman named Water-Bearer who was very knowledgeable in the science of medicine.

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14 Emmerick 2004, p. 76, has Sureśvaraprabha.
15 Emmerick 2004, p. 76, has Jaṭīṃdhara.
16 Medicine was traditionally counted as one of the Five Sciences (Skt. pañcavidyā; Ch. wuming 五明) of ancient India. The others included grammar, technical arts, logic, and philosophy. See discussion in Zysk 1998, pp. 46–9. Dharmakṣema uses the more conventional “practice of medicine” (yifang 醫方) as do several variant versions of Yijing’s translation.
He could cure all ailments, and could skillfully determine the fluctuations of the Four Elements.\textsuperscript{17} Noble goddess, at that time, there was born into the layman Water Bearer’s family a son named Flowing Water.\textsuperscript{18} He was of extraordinary appearance, exceedingly handsome, with exquisite features, dignified, and of intelligent character. He understood well all the texts, and of all the various fine arts, literary pursuits, and mathematics there were none he did not thoroughly understand.

\textsuperscript{17} Both Chinese translations refer explicitly to the Four Great Elements (Skt. \textit{mahābhūta}; Ch. \textit{sida} 四大)—i.e., Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind—the constituent parts of the human body and the rest of the material world, as understood by many Indo-European medical and philosophical traditions. (See discussion of the appearance of this doctrine in Chinese Buddhist texts in Demiéville 1985, pp. 65–76.) Emmerick 2004, p. 76 n 150, points out that his Sanskrit text reads \textit{dhātu}, and suggests that the reference to Four Elements is a mistranslation on the part of the both Dharmakṣema and Yijing. However, \textit{mahābhūta} and \textit{dhātu} are often used interchangeably in Buddhist and medical texts. From the context, it is most likely that this part of the sutra in fact intended to refer to the Four Elements, which are widely considered to fluctuate with the seasons, resulting in disease.

\textsuperscript{18} Emmerick 2004, p. 76, has Jalavāhana.

\textsuperscript{19} The Eight Branches (\textit{bashu 八術}) of medicine, which are listed by name in the verses below. The list given in this sutra is close, but does not exactly match, the classical eightfold division of Āyurvedic medicine (Skt. \textit{aṣṭāṅgāyurveda}). As they appear in the \textit{Śusrutasamhitā}, the Eight Arts are surgery (\textit{salya}, lit. “the scalpel”), treatment of the head and neck (\textit{sālākya}, lit. “use of the needle”) treatment of the body (\textit{kāyacikitsā}), demonology (\textit{bhātavidyā}), pediatrics (\textit{kaumārabhrtya}), toxicology (\textit{agadatantra}), longevity (\textit{rasāyanatantra}, lit. “science of elixirs”), and aphrodisiacs (\textit{vājīkaraṇatantra}). See Emmerick 2004, p. 76 n 151; Vogel 1963; Chen 2003.
At that time, the heavens sent down an epidemic to that country, and incalculable hundreds of thousands of people were unable to escape it. Everyone was plagued by all kinds of suffering.

Noble goddess, when Flowing Water the layman’s son saw these incalculable hundreds of thousands of people experiencing much suffering, he gave rise to a feeling of great compassion for these people, and he had the following thought: “Now, incalculable hundreds of thousands of people are being afflicted with much suffering. Although my father excels in the practice of medicine, can cure many ailments, and can skillfully...
determine the fluctuations of the Four Elements, he is already frail, elderly, and withered. His skin and face are wrinkled, and his body is weak and trembles. He relies on a cane to walk around and gets exhausted. He is unable to go to the cities, towns, and villages. Though there are incalculable hundreds of thousands of people that have come down with serious diseases, he will be unable to help them. I should now go to my father, the great physician, and ask him his disease-curing medical secrets. Once I have understood these, then I should go to the cities, towns, villages, and hamlets to cure any kind of serious diseases the people may have, and bring them relief from their inestimable suffering.

時長者子思惟是已, 即至父所, 頭面著地為父作禮, 叉手却住, 以四大增損而問於父, 即說偈言:

Once the layman’s son had had this thought, he went to his father, paid homage by touching his head to the ground, placed his hands together and stood aside. He then asked his father about the fluctuations of the Four Elements, speaking this verse:

Once the layman’s son had had this thought, he went to his father, paid homage by bowing his head to [the father’s] feet, placed his palms together in respect, and stood to one side. Then, he spoke in verse, asking his father:
“How should we understand the fluctuation of the Four Elements and the faculties, and how these lead to various illnesses? How should we understand the [proper] seasons for drink and food, so that while eating or after eating the bodily fires will not be extinguished? How should we understand the treatment of vāta, pitta, śleśman, and their combination? Which season arouses vāta, pitta, śleśman, and their combination?”

“Kind father, please take pity. I wish to help the people. Please will you now explain to me the practice of medicine? Why does the body break down, and why do the Elements fluctuate? And, in what seasons can diseases arise? How can one take food and drink and maintain well-being, while ensuring that the power of the fire inside the body is not deplet-
which season arouses pitta, which season arouses ślesman, thereby harming people?”

People have four illnesses: vāta, pitta, ślesman and the combination of illnesses.22 How can these be treated? In what season does vāta arise? In what season does pitta emerge? What season arouses ślesman? In what season does the combination occur?”

Then the father promptly replied in verse, explaining the practice of medicine in answer to his son:

Then the father promptly replied in verse, explaining the practice of medicine in answer to his son:

Upon hearing his son’s request, the layman replied with these verses:

『三月是夏, 三月是秋, 三月是冬, 三月是春。是十二月, 三三而說, 從如是數, 一歲四時。若二二說, 足滿六時。三三本攝, 二二現時, 隨是時節, 消息飲食, 是能益身, 醫方所說。』

『我今依古仙, 所有療病法, 次第為汝說, 善聽救眾生。三月是春時, 三月名為夏, 三月名秋分, 三月謂冬時。此據一年中, 三三而別說, 二二為一節, 便成歲六時。初二為花時, 三四名熱際, 五六名雨際, 七八謂秋時, 九十是寒時, 後二名水雪。既知如是別, 授藥勿令差。』

“I now will explain to you step by step all the methods of treating ill-

“Three months are summer, three months are autumn, three months

factors in Chinese Buddhist texts, see Demiéville 1985, pp. 65–76; Salguero 2010–11.

22 Yijing’s translations of the four causes of disease literally read “wind,” “yellow heat,” “phlegm congestion,” and “combination of illnesses.” The differences between these terms and those chosen by Dharmakṣema are consistent with changes in translation norms over the interim between the fifth and eighth centuries (see chart and discussion in Salguero 2010–11, pp. 64–65).
are winter, and three months are spring. When counting these twelve months by threes, a year has four seasons. If counting by twos, that would make six seasons.\textsuperscript{23} On the basis of either three-[month periods] or two-[month periods], ingesting food and drink in accordance with the seasons can benefit the body. This is what is explained by the practice of medicine.

Cf. translation of this passage in Emmerick 2004, p. 78. As Emmerick notes, the Sanskrit is “defective” and the Tibetan and Khotanese versions are of little assistance in interpreting this passage. Dharmakṣema’s Chinese is also rather opaque. My translation here is informed by a sidelong glance at Yijing’s version of the sutra, which seems to me significantly clearer. The six-fold periodization of the year commonly used in Indian medicine (Skt. \textit{ṛtu}) includes \textit{śiśra} (late winter), \textit{vasanta} (spring), \textit{grīṣma} (summer), \textit{varṣā} (rainy season), \textit{śarad} (autumn), and \textit{hemanta} (early winter).
“In accordance with the seasons of the year, the faculties and the Four Elements fluctuate between excess and depletion, causing the body to become ill. A good doctor will nurture and balance the Six Elements in accordance with the four seasons of three months each, and [give] drink, food, and medicines that are appropriate for the illness.

“You ought to, in accordance with these seasons, regulate the drink and food so that whatever enters the belly will be properly digested, and the various diseases will therefore not arise. When the seasonal influences change and the Four Elements fluctuate, if at that time medicines are not given, ailments will definitely arise. If a doctor understands the four seasons and knows the six periods, and has trained in the body’s Seven Constituents, then food and medicine will be employed without error. [The Seven Constituents] are namely: rasa-dhātu, blood, flesh, fat, bones, marrow, and brain. When an illness enters into these, he will know whether or not he can cure this.

24 The Chinese term liuda 六大 typically refers to the Four Elements, plus Space (Ch. kong 空; Skt. ākāśa) and Consciousness (Ch. shi 識; Skt. vijñāna).

25 While Yijing uses the word qi 氣, a central concept of Chinese medicine and cosmology, we should not read this as an interpolation of indigenous Chinese doctrine. He is using a common word to refer to the predominant climactic influences arising in different seasons and to suggest that these can affect the body’s health detrimentally, as is consistent with Indian medical doctrine.

26 In Indian medical texts, the Seven Constituents (sapta-dhātu) are most commonly understood to include rasa-dhātu (see next note), blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow, and semen. Yijing’s text includes “brain” as the last item instead of semen.

27 Sometimes rendered in English translations as “chyle” or “chyme,” rasa-dhātu is the essence of digested food and drink. It is the most subtle of the Seven Constituents, is the most refined product of digestion, and is of utmost importance to the health and vitality of the body.
病有四種別，謂風熱痰癊，
其熱病者，秋則發動，
等分病者，冬則發動，
其肺病者，春則增劇。

有風病者，夏則應服，
肥膩醎酸{酢}，及以熱食；
有熱病者，秋服冷甜；
等分冬服， 甜酢肥膩；
肺病春服， 肥膩辛熱。

“There are four categories of illness—namely vāta, pitta, śleṣman, and the combination of these illnesses—and one ought to know the season in which they emerge. In the spring śleṣman arises, in the summer vāta illnesses come, in the autumn season pitta increases, and in winter season the three arise together. In the spring, eat Astringent, Hot, and Pungent. In the summer, Oily, Hot, Salty, and Sour. In the autumn season, Cold, Sweet, and Oily. In the winter, Sour, Astringent, Oily, and Sweet. If in these four seasons, one administers medicines, drink, and food in accordance with the Flavors like this, illnesses will not have cause to emerge.

28 The effects of the medicinal Flavors on the vāta, pitta, and śleṣman constitute a major part of Indian therapeutic reasoning (see Wujastyk 2000). The Flavors mentioned in Chinese Buddhist texts usually do not match the basic six most commonly found in the Āyurvedic texts (Sweet, Sour, Salty, Astringent, Bitter, and Pungent), nor do they follow the expected seasonal correspondences. Note that Dharmakṣema’s and Yijing’s translations are unsurprising in this regard, and in the fact that they differ from one another.

29 The Taishō Tripitaka editors note that one source has Bitter 苦 here instead of Hot.
飽食然後，則發肺病；
於食消時，則發熱病；
食消已後，則發風病。
如是四大，隨三時發。

“Śleṣman illnesses emerge immediately after eating. During digestion, pitta illnesses emerge. After digestion is finished, vāta illnesses emerge. This is how the Four Elements emerge at three different times.”

食後病由瘧，食消時由熱，
消後起由風，消時須識病。
識病源已，隨病而設藥。
病令患狀殊，先須療其本。

“[Immediately] after eating, illness comes from śleṣman. During digestion, it is from pitta. After digestion, it arises from vāta. If you ascertain the time [of onset], you will be certain to understand the disease. Once you understand the origin of the illnesses, then you can establish the medicine appropriate for it. Supposing [the patient] is afflicted with various different conditions, you must first treat the root.

風病羸損，補以酥膩；
熱病下藥，服訶梨勒；
等病應服，三種妙藥，
所謂甜辛，及以酥膩；
肺病應服，隨能吐藥。
若風熱病，肺病等分，
違時而發，應當任師，
籌量隨病，飲食湯藥。

“For the depletion that accompanies illnesses of vāta, fortify [the patient]”

For vāta illnesses, give oils and fats. For afflictions of pitta, purgatives

30 This final line implies a connection between the Four Elements on the one hand and the vāta, pitta and śleṣman on the other. The standard formulation in Āyurvedic texts is that śleṣman relates primarily to the Water Element, pitta relates primarily to Fire, and vāta relates primarily to Wind. What is meant in this particular passage is not entirely clear. (See discussion of how other Buddhist texts deal with these correlations in Demiéville 1985, pp. 65–76.)
with ghee. For a purgative of pitta, give yellow myrobalan.\(^{31}\) For the combination of illnesses you ought to give the three kinds of wondrous medicines—that is, Sweet Flavor, Pungent Flavor, and ghee. For ślesman illnesses, you ought to give medicines that induce vomiting. If vāta, pitta, ślesman, or combination illnesses emerge in contradiction to their [expected] time, one should trust the doctor to determine the drink, food, and medicine that are suitable for the illness.”\(^{32}\)

are beneficial. For ślesman illnesses, you ought to induce vomiting. For the combination you must use all three medicines. If there are vāta, pitta, and ślesman together, this is what is meant by ‘combination.’ Although you know the season in which this disease arose, you ought to contemplate its root nature. Once you have contemplated thus, give medicines according to that season.\(^{33}\) One who [administers] drink, food, and medicine without error is called a good doctor.

復應知八術, 總攝諸醫方,  
於此若明閑, 可療眾生病。  
謂針刺傷破, 身疾並鬼神,  
惡毒及孩童, 延年增氣力。

“Moreover, you ought to know the Eight Arts, and fully absorb all of the practices of medicine. If you are trained in these, you can heal the diseases of the people. [The Eight Arts are] namely the use of needles, traumatology, bodily illnesses, de-

\(^{31}\) Terminalia chebula (Skt. haritakī) is a panacea frequently encountered in Buddhist scriptures as well as secular medical texts. For a brief comparison of sources, see Dash 1974.

\(^{32}\) Curiously, this last sentence seems to be addressed to a hypothetical patient rather than to the physician-to-be listening to his father’s instructions.

\(^{33}\) In other words, in cases involving a combination of illnesses, treat the root cause rather than the cause indicated by the time of onset.
monology, toxicology, pediatrics, longevity, and increasing vitality.  

First observe [your patient’s] form, speech, and habits. Then, ask him about his dreams to know his peculiarities of vāta, pitta, and śleṣman. If there is dryness, emaciation, loss of hair, an unsettled mind, too much talking, or dreams of flying, then he has a vāta constitution. If he has hair that turned white while he was young, sweats too much, gets angry often, is intelligent, and in his dreams sees fire, he has a pitta constitution. If he has a stable mind and an even-keeled body, he is cautious, his head exudes oil, and in his dreams he sees water and white

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34 On the Eight Arts, see note 19.

35 Of course, the Chinese is not gendered here.

36 Unlike the earlier translation by Dharmakṣema, Yijing’s version of the chapter categorizes people according to their predominance of vāta, pitta, or śleṣman. On the development of the idea of constitutions in Āyurvedic literature, see Scharfe 1999, p. 618).
things, you should know he has a śleṣman constitution. Although a combination constitution can include either two or all three [of the above], there will still be one that predominates, and this ought to be considered his [root] constitution. Once you know his root constitution, you can evaluate the illness and give medicines.

驗其無死相，方名可救人。
諸根倒取境，尊醫人起慢，
親友生瞋恚。是死相應知：
左眼白色變，舌黑鼻梁攲，
耳輪與舊殊，下脣垂向下。

“Check that he does not have the death-signs. If all is right, that is a person that can be helped. If you do not properly perceive this situation or arrogantly pursue the admiration of others, the friends and family [of your patients] will become angry. These are the death-signs you should know: the white of the left eye changes color, the tongue turns black, the bridge of the nose becomes crooked, the ears rotate abnormally, and the lower lip droops down.

37 While Yijing’s list is quite short here, the topic of death-signs (Skt. riṣṭa) was of great concern to early Indian doctors, and lengthy discussions of the visible omens of impending death are found in the major Āyurvedic treatises. In such texts, the reader is implored not to take up a case where the death-signs are present, as the patient’s inevitable death will only lead to the tarnishing of his own reputation.
“One yellow myrobalan seed contains all the Six Flavors and can eliminate all diseases. Among the medicines that are not prohibited, it is the best. There also are the Three Fruits and the Three Spices. Among all medicines the easiest to obtain are granulated sugar, honey, and buttermilk. These can cure all diseases. Using medicines other than these may result in the illness increasing.

先起慈愍心，莫規於財利。我已為汝說，療疾中要事，以此救眾生，當獲無邊果。”

38 Though six medicinal Flavors are mentioned here, more than six were mentioned above. The mention of prohibited medicines in the following sentence is likely referring to monastic disciplinary regulations on allowable medications. On medicines mentioned in various Vinaya, see Jaworski 1927; Zysk 1998, pp. 73–83; Thānissaro Bhikkhu 2007, pp. 54–68.

39 Triphalā is a common Indian medicinal compound mentioned repeatedly in Buddhist and medical texts alike. The ingredients are Terminalia chebula (Skt. harītaki), Emblica officinalis (āmalaki), and Terminalia bellirica (bibhīaka). In the Indian medical literature, this remedy is used in treatments for many disorders, though it is most well known for its role in promoting vitality.

40 Another common Indian medicinal compound, trikaṭu is composed of ginger, black pepper, and Piper longum (pippalī or pippala). It is said to alleviate śleśman, promote digestion, and treat a host of disorders.
“The primary thing is to generate a compassionate and sympathetic heart, and not to be guided by profit. I have now told you the essentials of curing illness. With this you can help people and obtain limitless success.”

Noble goddess, because the layman’s son Flowing Water asked his father the physician about the fluctuation of the Four Elements, he then came to understand the entirety of the practice of medicine. Once the layman’s son understood the practice of medicine, he went among the cities, towns, and villages all over the kingdom. Wherever the sick people were, he consoled them with gentle words, saying: “I am a doctor! I am a doctor! I excel at prescribing medicine. I now will come to your rescue and treat your diseases, and I will completely cure you.”

善女天！爾時流水長者子，問其父醫四大增損，因是得了一切醫方。時長者子知醫方已，遍至國內城邑聚落，在在處處隨有眾生病苦者所，軟言慰喻，作如是言：『我是醫師！我是醫師！善知方藥，今當為汝療治救濟，悉令除愈。』

Noble goddess, when the layman’s son Flowing Water asked his father about the essentials of the Eight Arts, the fluctuations of the Four Elements, the differences in the seasons, and the methods of administering medicines, he understood well and became himself capable of curing myriad diseases. Then, he went among the cities, towns, and villages all over. Wherever the hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, millions of sick, suffering people were, there he went. With well-spoken words he consoled them, saying: “I am a doctor! I am a doctor! I excel at prescribing medicine. I now will treat your many diseases, and I will completely cure you.”
Noble goddess, when the people heard the layman’s son’s gentle words of consolation promising to cure their diseases, their minds gave rise to boundless happiness and elation. When the incalculable hundreds of thousands of people who had contracted grave diseases truly heard these words, because of the happiness in their hearts, all of their afflictions were immediately eliminated, and they regained their full strength.41 And likewise, noble goddess, when incalculable hundreds of thousands of people with ailments that were grave and difficult to cure all rushed together to the layman’s son, the layman’s son right away gave them a dose of his wondrous medicines. After taking this dose, they were cured and back to normal. Noble goddess, that layman’s son in

41 Note that many of the patients are cured not by Flowing Water’s medical ministrations, but by hearing his proclamations. On the power of his words as an allegory for the miraculous potency of the sutra itself, see Gummer 2000, pp. 258–62.
that kingdom treated every ailment the people had, completely curing them.

hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, millions of people, completely curing them.

References


