

## TIBETAN MEDICINE

**The Knowledge of Healing**

A FILM BY FRANZ REICHIE



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BROOKLYN, NY 11201  
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**T**he *Knowledge of Healing* is the first cinematic effort to record and introduce time-tested, mysterious Tibetan medicine to a Western audience. The film, through interviews with Tibetan doctors, patients, scientists, and the current Dalai Lama, explains the philosophic aspects of Tibetan medicine and the methods of Tibetan treatments, as well as the extraordinary effectiveness of Tibetan medicinal herbs.

The film begins with illustrations of Tibetan medicinal plants. Yuthog from Gyantse wrote an original book on Tibetan medicine during the eleventh century. *The Tantra of Instructions*, the third volume of his writing, contains *Gyuschi* or *The Knowledge of Healing*, the four-part fundamental text. Desi Rinpoche of the seventh century used the *Tantra* as a base to describe 1,600 illnesses and illustrated the medical knowledge on seventy-nine thangkas.

It's believed that at the beginning of a life and at the center of the fetus, three vessels in three directions respectively form the brain, the sexual organ, and the blood. In addition, some 24,000 channels and three different things govern the human body: bile, phlegm, and movement, which respectively represent heat/fire, fluids/earth, and water/wind. When these elements are out of balance, disease results. Tibetan physicians diagnose the disease of a patient by reading the pulses at three positions on both wrists of the patient with three left fingers and three right fingers. Each position is read at a minimum of six levels or depths.

Tibetan medicine, which grew in parallel with and has similarities to both Ayurvedic and Traditional Chinese Medicine, has several major treatment methods, such as cupping (evacuating the air from an upside-down cup by burning a small piece of paper inside, then quickly placing the cup over a selected area on the skin), and the use of moxa (holding the burning tip of an incense-stick-type stick of garlic-glued moxa, an herb, over specific points on the body).

The film informs about the remarkable healing power of "Gem Pills." The medicine cured a patient with a deteriorating kidney, allowed a paralyzed girl, assisted by her own hands, to sit up

and move her legs, and healed some fourteen patients out of twenty-two who were exposed to radiation during the nuclear catastrophe of Russia.

Among thirty-five Tibetan plants and fruits with known healing effects is myrobalan, known to be a universal cure for all kinds of diseases and to act as a catalyst for other herbs to work. Scientific research also demonstrates that the Tibetan plant padma has proven effective in healing atherosclerotic plaque and malignant tumors, several examples of which are shown in the film.

Franz Reichie has made an obvious effort to meticulously and objectively record Tibetan medicine. The filming purposely followed the life rhythm of the Tibetan people, slow and plain by western standards, and there is no English narrator. While English subtitles are provided, the white or bright background often makes them blurred or invisible. The film often zooms in for long minutes on the dull motion of an iron wheel grinding herbs. All require audience patience. *The Knowledge of Healing* is an excellent documentary film for medical and biochemical students as well as for those interested in Tibetan culture. ■

**C. X. GEORGE WEI** holds a PhD from Washington University. He teaches East Asian History at Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania, and is Department Head and Co-Director of Asian Studies. He is the author of the book *The Sino-American Economic Relations, 1944-1949*, and more than a dozen articles in both English and Chinese, as well as the co-editor of two books on Chinese nationalism, *Chinese Nationalism in Perspective: Historical and Recent Cases* and *Exploring Nationalisms of China: Themes and Conflicts*. Currently he is working on a book about Chinese women.

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