

The Translation and Dissemination of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japan and America

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Ben Cao Gang Mu (*Compendium of Materia Medica*), written by Li Shizhen, an outstanding medical expert in the Ming Dynasty, lasted 27 years and had three drafts changed. Once published, it was translated to all over the world with its great influence and spread in many countries in Asia, Europe, and America successively, becoming one of the best medical works ever and translated into different foreign languages. This paper focuses on the dissemination of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in America and Japan to explore the differences between the Japanese world and the English world in the translation and introduction of traditional Chinese medicine classics.

Keywords: *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, translation, overseas dissemination

Introduction

Ben Cao Gang Mu, completed in 1578, contains 52 volumes, including 1,897 kinds of medicines, which can be regarded as a comprehensive work of ancient materia medica. In this book, Li Shizhen proposed the method of species classification, which inherited the achievements of herbology before the 16th century and paved the way for the development of traditional Chinese medicine and natural history. After *Ben Cao Gang Mu* was published, it quickly spread all over the world. It was republished many times and translated into various foreign languages translations. It had a wide influence abroad and was called “the ‘uncrowned king’ of Chinese naturalists” (Needham & Ling, 1976, p. 216) by the British historian of Chinese science Joseph Needham (1900-1995).

The following focuses on the translation and introduction of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japan and America and the differences in the process. Japan and America are chosen as the focus of the study because: Japan is one of the countries with the most studies and publications on the *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, which is very representative in the world. In addition, the author has the experience of studying Japanese and has advantages in collecting and sorting materials related to *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japanese. Moreover, the existing Ming and Qing editions of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in America were originally introduced from Japan, and some collections still have comments on the book by Japanese scholars. Japan and America are eastern countries and western countries respectively. The study of the translation, introduction, and dissemination of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in these two countries can well reflect the differences in the dissemination of Chinese medical culture in similar cultural environments and different cultural environments, and provide a new direction for the communication strategy of traditional Chinese medicine culture.

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Translation, Introduction, and Dissemination of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japan

The appearance of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* promoted the development of herbology in China and other countries. Japan is one of the earliest countries to introduce *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, under the inspiration of this book, honzōgaku [a field of study of Chinese origins ancillary to medicine, devoted to the pharmacological properties of minerals, plants, and animals (Marcon, 2015, p. 10)] in Japan developed vigorously and related works emerged in an endless succession. Yashima Yuri, a Japanese historian of science, once commented that *Ben Cao Gang Mu* had influenced Japan's honzōgaku and natural history for two centuries (Jian & Quanxi, 2018).

In 1607, only 11 years after the publication of the first edition of *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, Japanese scholar Hayashi Razan (1583-1657) acquired the first edition in Nagasaki (長崎), a commercial port, and presented it to Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616), the founder of the Bafuku (the military governments ruling Japan during most of the period from 1192 to 1867), who placed it on his desk. Thus this book quickly gains the attention from all walks of life in Japan.

In 1612, Hayashi Razan wrote five volumes of *Tashikihen* (《多識編》), which extracted and annotated the names of medicines in the *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. In 1631, the book was published in Kyoto, listing the names of various medicines in Japanese and revising them. As the first study of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, the book was highly praised by the Japanese academic community and published many times under different names.

In 1608, Japanese scholar Manase Gensaku (1549-1632) published a book titled *Yakusei nōdoku* (《藥性能毒》), which was a revision of *Nōdoku* (《能毒》) written by his adoptive father Manase Dōsan (1507-1594). Manase Gensaku revised it according to the *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, and this book can be regarded as the first reference to *Ben Cao Gang Mu*.

After it arrived in Japan, *Ben Cao Gang Mu* was valued by the dominator, studied, and promoted by many scholars, and several versions were introduced. Such as the Jinling version, Jiangxi version, Hangzhou version, and Nanjing Weiguzhai version, were able to cross the sea to the east, and introduced to Japan. However, the imported quantity was limited after all, unable to meet the domestic demand for *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japan, so Japan began to appear the Japanese version of it.

In 1637, based on the first Nanjing edition, the first edition of *Honzō kōmoku* (*Ben Cao Gang Mu* printed in Japan) was printed in Kyoto by Noda Yajiemon. This is the earliest codified edition of *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. In addition, eight editions of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* were published by Japanese bookstores and all of them were based on the Hangzhou version and Nanjing version. These editions greatly promoted the dissemination of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japan.

In addition to the re-engraved *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, the translation of it also appeared in Japan. In 1934, Japan's Shunyoudou (春陽堂) press published the *Tōtyuu kokuyaku Honzō kōmoku* (《頭註國譯本草綱目》), which was collectively translated and annotated by experts such as Shirai Mitsutarō (1863-1932) and Makino Tomitarō (1862-1957). This is also the only full translation of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* overseas.

In addition, the introduction of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* also promoted the development of honzōgaku in Japan. In 1680, Kaibara Ekiken (1630-1714) compiled to *Honzō kōmoku wamyō* (《本草綱目和名》), which is convenient for readers to search when reading *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. Matsuoka Joan (1668-1746) is a famous honzōgaku educator, based on his lectures on *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, he published books called *Honzō ishi* (《本草彙志》). In 1744, Matsuoka Joan, who was 74 years old, still taught *Ben Cao Gang Mu* to his disciples. It can be

said that Matsuoka Joan made great contributions to the dissemination and development of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japan.

Honzōgaku scholar Ono Ranzan (1729-1810) also took *Ben Cao Gang Mu* as the focus of his lectures. In 1799, when Ono Ranzan was 71 years old, he served as the medical officer of the Bafuku. At the same time, he taught Chinese herbal works such as *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in the medical center. During this period, he also published many works about *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, such as *Honzō kōmoku kibun* (《本草綱目記聞》) and *Honzō kōmoku keimō* (《本草綱目啓蒙》) and so on. In *Honzō kōmoku keimō*, Ono Ranzan explains *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japanese with personal comments. His works provided convenience to Japanese herbology researchers.

In addition to the scholars of Kyoto honzōgaku school, there was also another school named Edo honzōgaku school at that time. Inspired by the policy of “colonization, production and industrialization” of the Bafuku, the Edo honzōgaku school focused on the collection and planting of medicines and emphasized the practicability of honzōgaku research. The representative figures of Edo honzōgaku school, Taki Motoyasu (1755-1810), and Sō Senshun (1758-1834) both carried out investigations and studies on *Ben Cao Gang Mu* and wrote many books about it. In 1837, *Teiho yakusei teiyō* (《訂補藥性提要》) was published, it was written by Taki Motoyasu. This book is a brief compilation of *Zhenglei Bencao* (《证类本草》) and *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. More than 400 kinds of drugs are selected, and the nature, taste, and efficacy of the drugs are verified based on the actual situation. It is concise and easy to understand and widely spread. In 1798, Sō Senshun wrote *Honzō kōmoku Sansho* (《本草綱目纂疏》). In this book, he selected more than 1,600 kinds of medicines from Volume 5 of *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, verified and commented on the selected medicines, and paid attention to the name of drugs, efficacy, and collection methods.

After it arrived in Japan, *Ben Cao Gang Mu* exerted a great influence on Japanese society and attracted the attention of many scholars. As a textbook of the Japanese honzōgaku, several generations of herbologists have written numerous works about it. In addition, Li Shizhen’s research method also influenced the scientific research methods of countless Japanese scholars of natural history and herbology. In the 200 years before the introduction of Western learning, *Ben Cao Gang Mu* had an unshakable position in Japanese medicine, science and technology.

Translation, Introduction, and Dissemination of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in America

In the 18th century, *Ben Cao Gang Mu* was spread to America via Japan. The Library of Congress of the United States has the 1596 Jinling edition and the 1603 Jiangxi edition of *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. In addition, the Ming and Qing editions of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* were also found in the libraries of universities such as Yale University, Harvard University, the University of Chicago, and Columbia University in New York, proving that *Ben Cao Gang Mu* had been spread throughout America in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The research on *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in America began in the 20th century. Ralph Mills, an American, translated more than 40 volumes of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* with his Korean colleagues. When he returned to America, he handed over the manuscript, along with the collected specimens, to Bernard Emms Read (1887-1949), an Englishman. Based on Mills’ research and the cooperation of Chinese and Korean scholars, Bernard Emms Read selected the contents of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* from Volumes 8 to 37 and Volumes 39 to 52. Although it is not the whole translation of *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, it provided a way for Western readers to understand *Ben Cao Gang Mu*.

In the early 20th century, George A. Stuart (1858-1911), an American missionary doctor, compiled the

Chinese Materia Medica Vegetable Kingdom based on Frederick Porter Smith's (1833-1888) *Contributions towards the Material Medica & Natural History of China* (most of which were translated from *Ben Cao Gang Mu*) and published it in 1911. People who studied traditional Chinese medicine at that time said that this book was the most valuable masterpiece (Jimin, 1942).

In 1919, Berthold Laufer (1874-1934), a German-American scholar, published his book *Sino-Iranica*, which explored the history of plant cultivation in China and cultural exchanges between China and Iran based on *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. Laufer pointed out that he referred to Li Shizhen's work *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, which was written in 1578 (Laufer, 1963).

After the 1970s, American historians of science turned their attention to traditional Chinese medicine. Among them, Nathan Sivin (1931-) was the leader in the study of *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. In 1973, Siven and William C. Cooper published a paper named "Man as a Medicine: Pharmacological and Ritual Aspects of Traditional Therapy Using Drugs Derived from the Human Body", in which they referred to Li Shizhen's *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. Then Svien wrote a biography dictionary of Scientists, in which he gave a detailed description of Li Shizhen's life and works.

In the 21st century, the study of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in America did not stop. In 2014, *The Dictionary of the Ben Cao Gang Mu, Volume 1: Chinese Historical Illness Terminology*, co-authored by Chinese and American scholars Zhang Zhibin and Paul U. Unschuld, published by the University of California Press, is the first volume of the *Dictionary of the Ben Cao Gang Mu* series, which focuses on examining the meanings of more than 4,500 disease terms found in the *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. In 2016, co-edited by Hua Linfu, Paul D. Buell, and Paul U. Unschuld, the *Dictionary of the Ben Cao Gang Mu, Volume 2: Geographical and Administrative Designations* was published. This volume conducts detailed research on 2,158 administrative and geographical names that appear in *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. In 2018, *Dictionary of the Ben Cao Gang Mu, Volume 3: Authors and Book Titles*, edited by Zheng Jinsheng, Nalini Kirk, Paul D. Buell and Paul U. Unschuld, was published. This volume examines the names and sources of documents appearing in *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. At present, three volumes of the *Dictionary of the Ben Cao Gang Mu* have been published, and the fourth volume is in preparation. The first three volumes of the dictionary are indispensable reference materials for Chinese medicine researchers and natural history historians, and enthusiasts interested in Chinese material culture and natural knowledge also benefit from this series of books.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the translation and dissemination of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japan and America, we find that the dissemination validity, research depth, and research direction of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in the Japanese world and the English world are different.

First of all, the introduction of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* into Japan and America has differences in transmission validity. It can be seen from the above that the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* was introduced to Japan as early as the beginning of the 17th century, received widespread attention from the political and academic circles, and aroused enthusiastic responses from the Japanese society. The *Ben Cao Gang Mu* spread to America more than a century later than Japan, and it was first passed to America through the hands of Japanese scholars, and the systematic study of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in the United States began in the 20th century, and most of the related research in 20th century is to introduce or use part of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* as reference material. Although it is an important way for American readers to understand the culture of traditional Chinese medicine, compared

with the research on this book in Japan, the research depth is insufficient, and the research direction also has obvious limitations.

In contrast, the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* was able to travel east to Japan just 10 years after its publishing, and the reasons behind it are worth a glimpse. *Ben Cao Gang Mu* was written in the late Ming Dynasty, the heyday of Confucianism, at this time, Sino-Japanese trade was mainly private trade, but frequent trading commodities involving all walks of life, *Ben Cao Gang Mu* was discovered by the Japanese scholar Hayashi Razan in the commercial port of Nagasaki and dedicated to Tokugawa Ieyasu. In addition, the diaphragm between Chinese and Japanese cultures is smaller. As early as the Han Dynasties, China and Japan have begun cultural exchanges. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, Japan sent emissaries to China, the cultural exchanges between China and Japan brought a great impact on Japan, and the food, clothing, housing, transportation, every aspect of culture were affected by China. In the 12th century, Zhu Zi's theory and Yangming's theory crossed to Japan, and gradually precipitated into part of the core of the Japanese spirit, and the Japanese glyph pronunciation was also borrowed from the shape and sound of Chinese characters, and most Japanese readers can read Chinese classics, and there is not much gap in terms of cultural background, so they can grasp and appreciate the connotation of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* very well.

In addition, the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* was introduced to Japan and America with differences in depth of study. After the introduction of *Ben Cao Gang Mu* to Japan, the relevant translation studies can be divided into the following categories: First, the Japanese engraving and translation of *Ben Cao Gang Mu*. According to statistics, between 1637 and 1714, there were eight kinds of Japanese engravings; in addition, there were two full translations of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in Japan, which are unique in the world. The second is based on the content of *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, combined with ancient Japanese books and natural conditions. Among them, the representative works are *Honzō kōmoku keimō* (《本草綱目啓蒙》) by Ono Ranzan, and *Yamato honzō* (《大和本草》) by Ekken kaibara and so on. Most of the above works are the works of scholars of the materia medica, and the content is substantial, accompanied by quotations, supplemented by research, and has made great contributions to the development of Japanese medicine, materia medica, and naturalism. In contrast, the study of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* in America is thinner, although this book was transmitted to America through Japan in the 18th century, there was no complete translation, and American scholars always select parts of the content to introduce, until 21st century, the study of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* began to thicken, and there were many researches work on this classic.

Finally, the introduction of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* to Japan and America has different research directions. Since the introduction of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* into Japan, Japanese scholars have carried out multi-faceted research around it, and some scholars have carried out investigation and research on indigenous drugs modeled on Li Shizhen to enrich the knowledge of Japanese materia medica; Some scholars conducted literature examination against the *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, supplemented by field work, which broadened the path for the development of the Japanese textual research school. After the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* was circulated to America, American scholars mostly discussed and introduced some of its contents, or focused on a certain point to carry out research, and after entering the contemporary era, comprehensive and meticulous investigation and study of the *Ben Cao Gang Mu* began to appear. In general, Japanese research on this book is biased towards materia medica and forensics, and the research is more in-depth and practical, and the research results are concentrated before modern times. America is more inclined to study and introduce its details, and the research results are concentrated in modern times.

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