

Yanfang Xinbian—new compilation of empirical formulas

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Yanfang Xinbian (驗方新編) is a well-known collection of effective Chinese medicine formulas and remedies for diseases and symptoms. A revised abbreviated edition published by Tung Wah Hospital in 1905 is preserved at the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences (Fig 1). The original edition was compiled by Bao Xiang-ao (鮑相璈) in 1846.

Bao was born in Shanhua (善化, now Changsha 長沙), in Hunan Province, China, and worked as a government official in Guangxi. Back in the 19th century, it was not easy for people to find a doctor for medical treatment, especially for those living in remote areas or experiencing poverty. Since Bao was young, he had been aware that some people tend to keep efficacious treatment a secret, which he disapproved of. In order to help those in need, he thought that it would be best to spread the knowledge about simple and effective treatment.

Thus, he dedicated himself to collating efficacious treatments for different health problems.¹

After 20 years of hard work, Bao had established a huge library of remedies for a wide range of symptoms and diseases. From these, he endeavoured to select the most simple, low-cost, and efficacious treatments, and compiled them into *Yanfang Xinbian*.

In the first half of the book (Chapter 1 to 8), treatments for symptoms and diseases occurring in different parts of the body are sorted into chapters. Readers can easily find the relevant body part through the table of contents, including the head, face, eyebrows, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, tongue, teeth, throat, shoulders, hands, heart, lungs, stomach, abdomen, legs, feet, and anus, as well as problems with urination and bowel habits (Fig 2).

In the second half of the book (Chapter 9 to 16), the chapters are organised according to different specialties, covering treatments in specialties including gynaecology, obstetrics, paediatrics, dermatology, emergency medicine, and injuries, as well as some other medical conditions, such as stroke, jaundice, and plague (Fig 3).

Yanfang Xinbian includes a wide diversity of treatment methods, including oral medicine, topical medication, acupuncture, moxibustion, tuina (推拿, massage), cupping, blood-letting, guasha (刮痧), hot bath, steam bath, and chest compression. Various treatments are provided for each health issue. For example, there are around 20 remedies for indigestion of different causes. If someone feels full after eating lychee, it is suggested to use a decoction with lychee husk. If the indigestion is caused by eating noodles, two remedies are offered: the first is a cup of hot wine blended with ginger juice; the second is a decoction with white radish juice. To prevent indigestion, the book recommends adding vinegar to the noodles when eating. Many formulas and remedies in the book are very effective, and practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine are still using them in practice. One of the remedies for treatment of menorrhagia (崩漏) is to apply moxibustion at an acupoint at the big toe. This is still one of the most commonly used acupoints in the treatment of dysfunctional uterine bleeding.

Yanfang Xinbian was a comprehensive guide to



FIG 1. Photograph of a revised abbreviated version of *Yanfang Xinbian* (驗方新編) published by Tung Wah Hospital in 1905. This book is currently in the collection at the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences

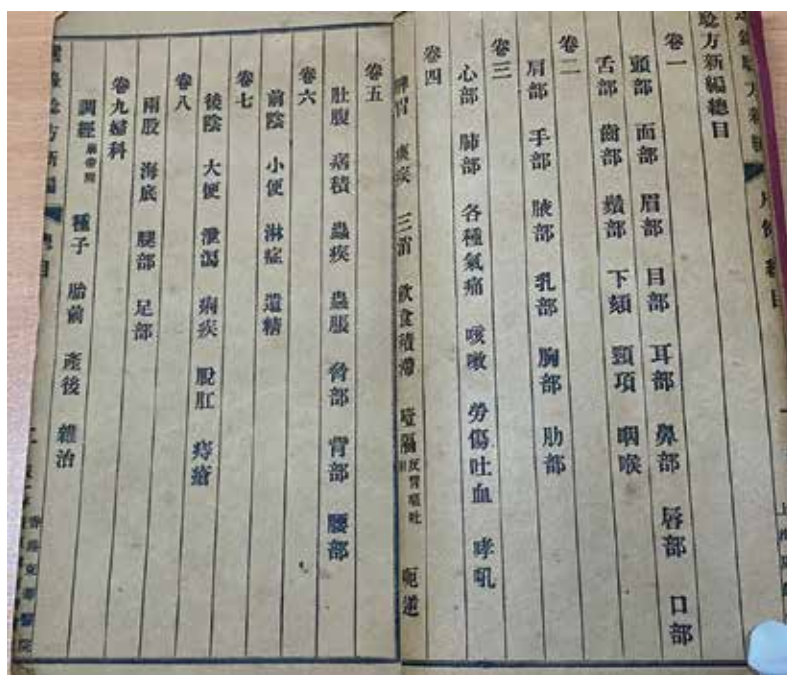


FIG 2. Photograph of the contents page of the first half of *Yanfang Xinbian* (驗方新編), showing that treatments are arranged into chapters according to the part of the body afflicted. For example, Chapter 1 (卷一) includes treatments for conditions of the head (頭部), face (面部), eyebrows (眉部), eyes (目部), ears (耳部), nose (鼻部), lips (唇部), mouth (口部), tongue (舌部), teeth (齒部), beard (鬚部), chin (下頰), neck (頸項) and throat (咽喉). Chapter 2 to 8 (卷二至卷八) cover the shoulders (肩部), hands (手部), heart (心部), lungs (肺部), spleen and stomach (脾胃), abdomen (肚腹), legs (腿部), feet (足部), anus (肛門), as well as problems with urination (小便) and bowel habits (大便)

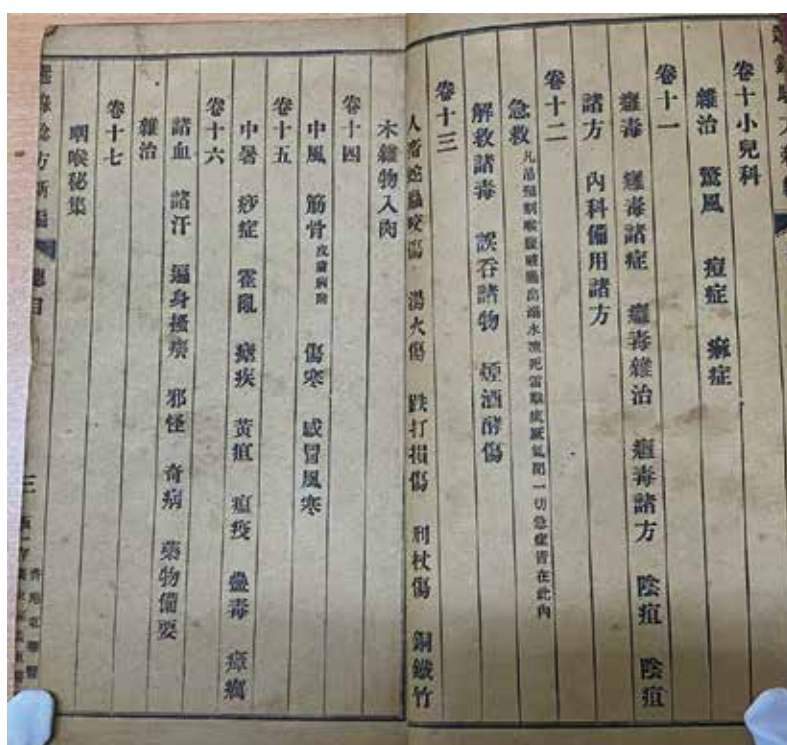


FIG 3. Chapter 9 to 16 (卷九至卷十六) of *Yanfang Xinbian* (驗方新編) are organised according to different specialties, including gynaecology (婦科), paediatrics (小兒科), dermatology (皮膚), emergency medicine (急救), and injuries (跌打損傷), as well as some other medical conditions, such as stroke (中風), jaundice (黃疸), and plague (瘟疫). Chapter 17 (卷十七) is some extra content added to this version of *Yanfang Xinbian*, concerning about the diagnosis and treatment for medical problems at the throat

treatment for health problems throughout the whole body, including >6000 remedies. The book provides a large number of formulas still used by practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, together with many simple remedies for nearly any symptom or health issue. In the opinion of some Chinese medicine

experts, the content of the book may be criticised for being too simplified and non-systematic, and lacking the support of medical theories. However, the information of Bao's book was so extensive and most of the remedies were easy to apply, so the name and reputation of the book spread.

As time passed by, *Yanfang Xinbian* reached and impressed some well-known public figures across mainland China. They took different roles in the promotion of the book. Some funded its publication; some distributed it to the public for free; some shared their high praise and recommendations in the preface of new editions. Since the 1860s, *Yanfang Xinbian* has become more widespread and recognised not only within mainland China but also overseas. Chinese people who travelled abroad found it very useful, and it has also been published in various regions, including Japan, Canada, and Hong Kong. Between 1846 and 1949, more than 160 editions of the book were published. It is an astonishing case in the history of medical-related publication in China.²

The stereotype (lead printing plates) of the revised abbreviated edition of *Yanfang Xinbian* was donated to Tung Wah Hospital by the Canadian Chinese (said to be Mexican Chinese in the preface) Lee Mong-kow (李夢九, 1863-1924).^{2,3} Lee was an interpreter in the Canadian Customs House and Immigration Office. He devoted himself to the promotion of education and welfare of the Chinese community, gaining himself high reputation in Victoria, Canada.

Yanfang Xinbian was the most widely circulated collection of traditional Chinese medicine remedies between the late 19th century and the early 20th century. The purpose of the abbreviated edition might have been for a more convenient edition to carry while travelling.⁴ Lee wanted to promote the free circulation of a reliable edition of the book and he chose this revised and abbreviated edition. He raised

funds for purchasing a set of three stereotypes and donated them to Tung Wah Hospital in Hong Kong, Guangji Hospital (廣濟醫院) in Guangzhou and Kwong Siew Association (廣肇會館) in Shanghai.³

Tung Wah Hospital was founded in 1870. It was one of the earliest Chinese medicine hospitals and it was the first hospital of Tung Wah Group of Hospitals. Before the establishment of Tung Wah Hospital, most Chinese people in Hong Kong would not go to a Western hospital or choose Western medical treatment even when they were very ill. That was why influential Chinese community leaders in Hong Kong urged the government to support the establishment of a Chinese medicine hospital. Tung Wah Hospital has been providing Chinese medicine in-patient and out-patient services since it was established. The hospital has expanded its services to other sectors, such as education, elderly services, funeral and burial services, and other community services.

The establishment of Tung Wah Hospital marked a new era in providing Chinese medicine services in a modern setting. It gained a high reputation in southern China and overseas for gathering the strength of the community to help those in need. There were frequent collaborations between Tung Wah Hospital and other charitable organisations in Guangdong Province and overseas. Over the years, so many people like Lee Mong-kow were willing to contribute their wealth and influence in enhancing the health and welfare of the community. It is a crucial factor in the continual growth of this oldest and largest charitable organisation in Hong Kong.

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