

## The Berlin Collections of Chinese Medical Manuscripts of the 17th through 20th Century

Until now, printed sources provide the basis for most research in the history of medicine in China. We have drawn attention, in recent years, to two additional realms of primary sources. These are, first, historical objects and images, and, second, medical manuscripts. We may assume that the theories and practices laid open in China by authors of the past centuries, if not millennia, reflect the medical reality of a very small elite in society. A first survey of about 830 handwritten volumes of medical contents in the Berlin State Library suggests that through these manuscripts historians will have access to a much broader segment of the Chinese population of the past four centuries and their health care practices and beliefs. These handwritten books served families, medical practitioners of various types, and pharmacists to record certain aspects of their knowledge and practices. Many of these manuscripts were not written to be published; others are copies of printed books with private commentaries. A third group includes manuscripts that may have been meant to be published but were never printed for reasons unknown today. In all, these manuscripts are an invaluable treasure permitting many fascinating new insights into health care reality in China of the past centuries.