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Nicolas Langlitz. *Neuropsychedelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research since the Decade of the Brain*.

Neuropsychedelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research since the Decade of the Brain by Nicolas Langlitz

Review by: Chris Elcock

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stood: rural China's barefoot doctor system, which began in 1968 during the Cultural Revolution and came to an end around 1983 in the early reform era.

The dominant image of the barefoot doctor is captured in the 1972 propaganda poster appearing on the book's cover. The visual focus of the poster is a large basket of flowered herbs that a young woman barefoot doctor is presenting to a cadre and an old peasant. The sense that the barefoot doctor program essentially served to promote "one silver needle and a bunch of herbs" (i.e., what in English is called "Traditional Chinese Medicine") is enhanced by the hand-powered mortar and grinding wheel in the foreground. But Xiaoping Fang would have us shift our gaze to more subtle clues in the image, especially the red cross—emblazoned medical kit slung across the woman's back. This kit, its Western pharmaceutical contents, and the increasingly biomedical training that barefoot doctors received helped the barefoot doctor program succeed where none had before in securing the dominance of Western biomedicine in rural Chinese communities. Thus, far from being a romantic tale of state support for folk medicine, or a simplistic story of static "integration" of Chinese medicine and Western biomedicine, the barefoot doctor program was an arena for dynamic struggle between the two medical systems, with biomedicine winning the decisive victory.

This is but one of several important interventions *Barefoot Doctors and Western Medicine in China* makes. Fang further argues that the barefoot doctor system should not be regarded nostalgically as a fleeting innovation of the Mao era, sadly lost in more recent decades—to the detriment of rural health care. He demonstrates not only the lasting impact that barefoot doctors made in bringing biomedicine to rural China, but also the continued local influence of many barefoot doctors themselves: even as reform-era proficiency standards caused the overall number of barefoot doctors to decline, many met these qualifications and became "village doctors" with considerable influence and enviable incomes by local standards. Fang argues that the professionalization of barefoot doctors was produced over time by the state, which penetrated and remade rural medical practice, along with rural society more generally, to an unprecedented degree during the Cultural Revolution. These state efforts were then cemented by the positive experiences rural people had with the barefoot doctors. A related argument is that the success of the barefoot doctor system at the grassroots level effectively outcompeted the middle (commune-level) layer of the "three-tier" medical system, creating

a "dumbbell"-like structure with strength at the village and county levels but little in between.

Fang engages with a great number of scholarly writings on medicine in China, including in the areas of state medical policy, the changing relationship between Western and Chinese medicine, and (following Arthur Kleinman) the social contexts of "medical pluralism." Because the barefoot doctor system has previously been treated largely at the policy level, Fang's grassroots approach, based on oral history interviews and archival materials, fills an important gap, bringing to light the social and cultural significance of barefoot doctors in their communities. Fang's analysis would be even stronger if he spared more of his copious energy for mining secondary sources to engage more deeply with scholarship outside the field of medicine. In particular, given his emphasis on the state's role in reshaping village life, he could have situated his argument in relation to the debate over whether Mao-era policies increased or decreased state penetration into rural society.

The human face Fang affords his subject emerges from his focus on a single village; here Fang's ability to speak the local dialect and his memories of his own early encounters with barefoot doctors are tremendous assets. In drawing data more broadly from seven counties, and in selecting an "ordinary" prefecture (rather than one of the "models" for the barefoot doctor program promoted during the Cultural Revolution) for his research, Fang further succeeds in offering an analysis of the barefoot doctor program as it was experienced more broadly. However, Zhejiang is itself a very distinctive, coastal province and one of the most prosperous in the country: while Fang was wise to limit his scope, we should exercise some caution in extrapolating from villages in Zhejiang to the whole of rural China.

One other caveat arises from the strength of Fang's conviction that the dominance of Western biomedicine represents an "irreversible global trend" (p. 186). While he has persuaded me that barefoot doctors played a vital role in establishing Western biomedicine in rural China, I will look elsewhere to understand the significance that Chinese medicine continues to have for rural people I encounter—though again I have learned from Fang to expect that significance to exist in complex, dynamic relation, rather than simple, static integration, with Western biomedicine.

SIGRID SCHMALZER

**Nicolas Langlitz.** *Neuropsychedelica: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research since the De-*

*cade of the Brain*. ix + 316 pp., illus., bibl., index. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. \$65, £44.95 (cloth); \$29.95, £19.95 (paper).

In the aftermath of the prohibition of LSD and other major psychedelics in Western countries, psychedelic research came to a virtual standstill, but it was seemingly resurrected in the mid 1990s. For his book *Neuropsychedelia* the anthropologist Nicolas Langlitz has conducted fieldwork in Swiss and California laboratories that work on the scientific potential of psychedelics in order to characterize this renaissance from a transnational perspective and to study the historical continuity of this research. He traces the genesis of psychedelic psychiatry and the rise of important nonprofit organizations that, thanks to sympathetic wealthy philanthropists, have been funding psychedelic research. He shows that the renaissance was somewhat easier in Switzerland, which did not have a full-blown counterculture in the 1960s and has a more liberal approach to mind-altering drugs, than in the United States, where it was impeded by legalism and bureaucracy.

Langlitz suggests that the popularization of neurosciences in the 1990s offered a favorable cultural substrate for psychedelic research to resume and flourish. Psychedelics now offered the promise of further mapping the human brain, probing the biological origins of schizophrenia, or offering greater medical assistance to war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. What's more, the idea that schizophrenia and psychosis could be the result of a dopamine imbalance was called into question in the 1980s, allowing researchers to invoke the power of psychedelics to induce a model psychosis so as to study mental illness; this theory had largely been discarded in the late 1960s.

Psychedelic researchers are well aware of their controversial past and tend to adopt a detached scientific approach to their object of study. Yet a closer inspection reveals "a form of laboratory life that continues to be suffused with the peculiar kind of mysticism that emerged from the psychedelic culture of the 1950s and 1960s" (p. 2). In the neuroscientific field this has led to a tension between spirituality (psychedelics as consciousness expanders) and science (psychedelics as hallucinogens) that was very tangible in the 1960s and is echoed today in the opposition between Aldous Huxley's perennial philosophy (with the hypothetically universal core of the mystical experience) and the detached universalism of neuroscientific studies into brain functions.

This tension is present throughout most of Langlitz's account, which reveals how the psychedelic experience continues to stimulate important ontological debates among researchers. In the rare occurrences when he tries to expand this opposition into contemporary psychedelic culture, however, neuropsychedelia tends to come out as more legitimate than other supposedly less orthodox approaches. For instance, Langlitz argues that efforts to relegitimize psychedelic substances are part of a strategy that is confined to the realm of science, not religion (p. 17). This claim overlooks the fact that the spiritual justification for the use of psychedelics is still very present in the contemporary "lay" psychedelic culture. Many authors (Graham Hancock, Richard Doyle, and Stanislav Grof, to name a few) are indeed arguing that humanity is faced with a deep spiritual crisis that can be solved through the use of psychedelics; it may be more correct to suggest that both the scientific and the lay psychedelic cultures are aware of the need to move away from any hedonistic use and conception of psychedelics if they are to regain legitimacy. Langlitz further shows his preference for the language of neuroscience in defining the new era for psychedelics by referring to one of his psychedelic experiences as "deeply delusional" (p. 14) and to members of the larger psychedelic community as "psychedelic geeks" (p. 26). Perhaps a similar study on psychedelic communities would balance this understanding and pay more attention to the meaning of psychedelic drug users who are far removed from any scientific setting.

Overall, some readers might struggle to grasp fully what Langlitz is trying to achieve with this book, which delves into complex issues and offers eclectic and interdisciplinary analyses. While it is intended as an anthropology of science, he seems to be more interested in asking bigger epistemological questions that relate to the unique nature of the psychedelic experience. Some of the more absorbing sections are those that deal with actual laboratory tests and the ethical and scientific dilemmas scientists are faced with, such as the welfare of animals used in testing or the perennial problem of objective data measurement—many scientists have ended up becoming frustrated by the limits of their research and the lasting utopian heritage of psychedelia. But for a topic that is too often ignored in the humanities, this sophisticated account will surely spark interest and lead to equally sophisticated research.

CHRIS ELCOCK