



Alternative Medicine?: A History

Roberta Bivins

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Walk into the local health food shop or pick up today's paper and the chances are that you'll see adverts for acupuncture and herbal medicine, hypnotists and homeopaths. Some doctors and scientists mourn the lost lustre of mainstream medicine and complain about a new breed of 'irrational' consumer.

But what exactly is 'alternative' medicine? Is the astonishing popularity of alternative and multicultural medicine really such a recent development? And, given the success story of modern biomedical science, why are alternative and traditional treatments now so fashionable? Has the impersonal chill of high-tech medicine driven consumers into the arms of charismatic quacks? Or is it the cost of western medicine that makes its competitors look so attractive? Do patients seek hope, holism, or just the thrill of rebellion?

This book seeks answers to all these questions and more. Comparing the medical systems of China, India, and the west - both mainstream and alternative - Roberta Bivins shows how medical expertise has migrated from one culture to another. From acupuncture in Regency England to homeopathy in the 'Wild West', Bivins unearths the roots of today's distinctions between alternative, complementary, and orthodox medicine, and shows how popular interest in medical alternatives - often of exotic origin - is a phenomenon with a long and fascinating pedigree.

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