

Gong Y, Gluud C (2003). Commentary on the Ben Cao Tu Jing (11th century). Atlas of Materia Medica. Song Dynasty (960-1279).



© Christian Gluud, Copenhagen Trial Unit, Centre for Clinical Intervention Research, Department 3344. Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen University Hospital Blegdamsvej 9, DK 2100, Copenhagen, Denmark. E-mail: cgluud@ctu.rh.dk

The *Ben Cao Tu Jing (Atlas of Materia Medica)* was first published in 1061 in China, during the reign of Ren Zhong, one of the emperors of the Song Dynasty (907 to 1279 AD). It is the earliest documented Chinese government-organised pharmacopoeia (Yin et al. 1993). It was the result of a directive from the central government requesting officials throughout the country to collect and provide specimens of plants, animals, and minerals which were believed to possess medicinal properties. Nearly one thousand samples were collected, together with relevant information about them, such as explanations of their therapeutic properties, illustrations and sketches.

The *Ben Cao Tu Jing* was compiled and edited by Song Su (1020–1101 AD), a classic Confucian official-cum-statesman who was a renowned administrator, diplomat, and military strategist. Song Su was also an expert in medicine, astronomy, mathematics, mechanics, and engineering.

Although the original text of the *Ben Cao Tu Jing*, published in 21 volumes, was lost, 780 entries and 933 illustrations were documented in various later publications. The images used in the *James Lind Library* were published in an edition published in 1994 (Zhijun Shang 1994).

We do not know where the idea of a controlled experiment using individuals came from, but it may have reached China through the Silk Route from Persia (Gluud and Wang 2002).

References

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Cite as:

Gong Y, Gluud C (2003). Commentary on the Ben Cao Tu Jing (11th century). Atlas of Materia Medica. Song Dynasty (960-1279). JLL Bulletin: Commentaries on the history of treatment evaluation (www.jameslindlibrary.org).