Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim is, in my opinion, one of the most interesting and significant historians of Asian medicine active today. Most scholars of Asian medicine have tended to confine themselves to a single geographic region, focusing on China, Japan, Tibet, India, or another location. A few have ventured out to explore regional trade networks—Sino-Japanese exchanges, for example—but have limited themselves to a single linguistic context. On the whole, the field has tended to focus on depth, encouraging researchers to drill down further and further into local contexts, addressing narrower and narrower timeframes. It is exceedingly rare that a historian of Asian medicine has attempted to pull off a monograph like this one. Spanning many centuries, dozens of languages, and a huge expanse of geography, Yoeli-Tlalim’s work is a master class in how to do a completely different style of historiography. As someone who has recently been attempting to figure out how to write a broad synthesis myself, I am aware of how difficult it is to pull it off. There is no doubt that Yoeli-Tlalim’s efforts have been successful.

The central argument of this publication is that Eurasian medicines cannot be considered as separate isolated phenomena, but rather have always been closely interconnected. “It is high time,” she writes, “for cross-cultural approaches to premodern medicine, in line with current approaches in global history, in the history of science and the history of ideas” (22). Also calling this a “Eurasian approach” and “globalized medicine,” Yoeli-Tlalim does away with the outdated method of simply comparing European and Asian medicine side-by-side. Instead, she closely examines specific instances of translation, encounter, and exchange. The results are nothing short of a tectonic shift in the field. After this, no historian of Asian medicine will be able to justify treating their particular tradition in isolation again.

There is much in this book that will interest readers of *Buddhist Studies Review*. Chapter 1 starts by comparing Hebrew and Tibetan accounts of the origins and history of medical knowledge. Yoeli-Tlalim draws our attention to how narratives “exemplify different ways of managing relationships between foreign and local knowledge, and of negotiating cultural differences” (39). Chapter 2 then zooms into the heart of Central Asia, with particular focus on the so-called “Bower Manuscript” discovered in a stupa at Kucha. Placing the manuscript’s medical and divinatory contents alongside analysis of artifacts from around the nearby region,

Keywords: Buddhism, Medicine, historiography, trans-regional, Eurasia
the chapter demonstrates the importance of understanding Kucha as a “contact zone” at the center of the Eurasian exchange of medical knowledge (44). In chapter 3, the celebrated myrobalan fruit (Skt. harītakī)—known to scholars of Buddhism due to its frequent mention in scriptures as well as its appearance in the Medicine Buddha’s hand in Tibetan iconography—comes to the forefront. Yoeli-Tlalim tracks the spread of this “Eurasian panacea” across the continent, and traces its etymological history across ten different languages. Next, chapter 4 centers on Dunhuang, exploring intersections between Tibetan, Turkic, Uighur, and Chinese moxibustion texts at this location as well as at nearby Turfan. This chapter also compares a number of archaeologically recovered moxibustion charts that depict important therapeutic locations on the body. Finally, chapter 5 focuses on the cosmopolitan character of Islamic medicine during the Mongol Empire. Here, Yoeli-Tlalim focuses on the work of the physician Rashīd al-Dīn (1247–1318) and “Buddhist Iran” as a node in a vast trade network of medical ideas stretching from China to England.

As anyone who has attempted to write global history knows only too well, there is a persistent tension in such projects between offering enough specific local detail to keep the story grounded in facts, versus the need to provide a big-picture summary and analysis that allows those pieces to come together to form a larger narrative. Yoeli-Tlalim threads this needle with aplomb. She is most at home with the Tibetan and Middle Eastern sources, but throughout these pages also draw together materials from across Eurasia. Importantly for a project with such a large-scale ambition as this one, she has also synthesized a formidable amount of secondary scholarship (the bibliography is 36 pages of fine print). The pages of the book contain block translations from primary sources, reproductions of manuscript sources, maps, and a total of 20 full color images. She brings these pieces together in chapters that focus on particular texts, artifacts, or historical contexts but also provide a range of comparable materials from around Eurasia—all the while fitting each chapter’s discrete examples into the larger arc of the book’s argument. This is no small feat.

Due to the diversity of topics discussed in this book—the use of divination dice for prognostication along the Silk Roads, a twelfth-century shopping list of Asian goods sold in Egypt, the central role of paper in cross-cultural exchange, and much more—there really is something here for everyone. In my view, Yoeli-Tlalim’s work is particularly important for researchers of medical history, and I want to urge every scholar of premodern medicine working on any part of Eurasia to pay close attention to it. At the same time, this book contains important lessons for specialists and researchers of Buddhism. Unlike in the history of Asian medicine, we are quite accustomed to thinking of Buddhism as a trans-regional phenomenon, but I think we have yet to fully appreciate how significantly Buddhism was historically entangled with medicine. Some readers might be surprised at just how much attention Buddhism receives throughout these pages. “Buddhism” and related words are mentioned 160 times, an indication that the religion was significantly implicated in cross-cultural medical exchanges across Eurasia.

Happily for scholars in any discipline, while ReOrienting is both informative and theoretically sophisticated, it is also quite readable. Because of this—and due to the
availability of a reasonably priced paperback—I will certainly be assigning it in my undergraduate classes on history of Asian medicine, and significant sections of it in my classes on Buddhism. I think it also would be a stimulating reading assignment for anyone teaching world history or other courses that could emphasize the interconnectivity of Eurasia. Yoeli-Tlalim paints a clear picture of the entangled history of the premodern world that will both complement our syllabi and inform our own understanding of religion and medicine. I therefore highly recommend this title and commend the author on its completion.