INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

SCIENCE ACROSS CULTURES: THE HISTORY OF NON-WESTERN SCIENCE

In 1997, Kluwer Academic Publishers published the *Encyclopaedia of the History of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Non-Western Cultures.* The encyclopedia, a collection of almost 600 articles by almost 300 contributors, covered a range of topics from Aztec science and Chinese medicine to Tibetan astronomy and Indian ethnobotany. For some cultures, specific individuals could be identified, and their biographies were included. Since the study of non-Western science is not just a study of facts, but a study of culture and philosophy, we included essays on subjects such as Colonialism and Science, Magic and Science, The Transmission of Knowledge from East to West, Technology and Culture, Science as a Western Phenomenon, Values and Science, and Rationality, Objectivity, and Method.

Because the encyclopedia was received with critical acclaim, and because the nature of an encyclopedia is such that articles must be concise and compact, the editors at Kluwer and I felt that there was a need to expand on its success. We thought that the breadth of the encyclopedia could be complemented by a series of books that explored the topics in greater depth. We had an opportunity, without such space limitations, to include more illustrations and much longer bibliographies. We shifted the focus from the general educated audience that the encyclopedia targeted to a more scholarly one, although we have been careful to keep the articles readable and keep jargon to a minimum.

Before we can talk about the field of non-Western science, we have to define both non-Western and science. The term non-Western is not a geographical designation; it is a cultural one. We use it to describe people outside of the Euro-American sphere, including the native cultures of the Americas. The power of European and American colonialism is evident in the fact that the majority of the world's population is defined by what they are not. And in fact, for most of our recorded history the flow of knowledge, art, and power went the other way. In this series, we hope to rectify the lack of scholarly attention paid to most of the world's science.

As for defining science, if we wish to study science in non-Western cultures, we need to take several intellectual steps. First, we must accept that every culture has a science, that is, a way of defining, controlling, and predicting events in the natural world. Then we must accept that every science is legitimate in terms of the culture from which it grew. The transformation of the word science as a distinct rationality valued above magic is uniquely European. It

is not common to most non-Western societies, where magic and science and religion can easily co-exist. The empirical, scientific realm of understanding and inquiry is not readily separable from a more abstract, religious realm.

Medicine Across Cultures is the third book in the series. It includes about 20 chapters. Most deal with medical systems as they are perceived and practiced by different cultures: Australian Aboriginal people, Native Americans, Samoans, Indians, etc. The book also contains a variety of essays on related subjects, such as Religion and Medicine or Chinese and Western Medicine.

We hope the series will be used to provide both factual information about the practices and practitioners of the sciences as well as insights into the worldviews and philosophies of the cultures that produced them. We hope that readers will achieve a new respect for the accomplishments of ancient civilizations and a deeper understanding of the relationship between science and culture.