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psychiatry in pictures

The first psychiatric hospital in China

Jie Li



Founder of the first psychiatric hospital, Dr John G. Kerr (back row, left) and the male patients (1898)

The development of modern Chinese psychiatry was influenced by both Western medicine and colonialism. During the 19th century, Western psychiatrists and ministers established asylums for refugees and mentally ill people in Asia. One of them was Dr John Glasgow Kerr (1824–1901), a Presbyterian medical missionary, who in 1898 founded in Canton (now Guangzhou) the first psychiatric hospital in China. It was called Hui Ai Hospital, which means the fraternity from Christianity. Between 1898 and 1927, the hospital admitted 6599 individuals with mental disorders (4428 male and 2171 female). After Dr Kerr died in 1901, the hospital was renamed John Kerr Hospital. Since its founding, many other hospitals have been established in other places in China, such as Beijing (1906), Suzhou (1923) and Shanghai (1935). Patients with mental disorders gradually received humane solicitude and modern Chinese psychiatry has been developed. John Kerr's hospital is still in existence, now under a new name, Guangzhou Psychiatric Hospital. Dr Kerr, a pioneer of mental healthcare in China, is worthy of praise.

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