

Foreword

As a historian who has spent more than a decade on historical documents pertaining to the recent past of Chinese medicine, I was deeply moved to find that Yaron Seidman and his team have translated almost one thousand pages of them into English. In his preface to this book, Seidman briefly tell us what motivated him as a clinical practitioner to take on this unusual task.

What he has gleaned from these “inner documents” are surprising historical facts that, if used effectively, can help bring about a liberating development of Chinese medicine. Since in the preface he does not provide any concrete case to elaborate this vision, I invite anyone with curiosity about these facts and their liberating potential to read the following statement and ask him- or herself two questions: When and why did practitioners of Chinese medicine make such a radical statement? How could thousands of statements like this have influenced the contents of Chinese medicine as taught and practiced around the world at this time?

While Chinese and Western understandings are different and have their own drawbacks and strengths, there is no way that both are simultaneously true. Some people... suggest a compromise formula, saying that Western medicine is good at anatomy but Chinese medicine is good at qi-transformation. ...We should know that one specific disease is a specific thing. Therefore, there is only one understanding that can be true 真是 (zhenshi). There is no way that both understandings can be simultaneously true.

This statement was made by Lu Yuanlei 陸淵雷 (1894–1955) in 1932, in response to an assignment by the quasi-official Institute of National Medicine to formulate a set of guidelines for the task of “scientizing” Chinese medicine—the task that the Republican government demanded of this institute and the very rationale for founding it in the first place. Before delving into substantive issues, Lu outlined five principles as indisputable points of departure for this task, and the above-cited statement stood out to be the principle that generated the most heated debates at that time.²

² Note from the book's authors: For the Great Debates of the era, see pp. 374–583; for Tan Gizhong's counter argument to Lu Yuanlei and summary of Lu's five points, see pp. 542–553; A letter from Mr. Lu, see p. 487; for an excerpt from Lu's official proposal, see p. 340

While this statement might sound self-evident or even naïve to us, it was the first time that some practitioners of Chinese medicine began embracing the zero-sum game of scientific realism. To highlight the historic status of this decision, Lu took as his target the famous contrast between Chinese qi-transformation and Western anatomy, thereby pitting his own position against that of Tang Zonghai 唐宗海 (1851–1908), the late Qing physician who had coined the precursor of this contrast in the early 1890s and the widely acclaimed founder of the School of Converging Chinese and Western medicine (*Zhongxiyi huitong* 中西醫匯通). Instead of treating these two concepts as incommensurable, however, Tang had used it to create communication and even convergence between the two styles of medicine. Not knowing the monotheistic conceptions of truth, reality and science, Tang would have had a hard time comprehending why “there is no way that both understandings can be simultaneously true.” To abolish once and for all the kind of non-modernist syncretism represented by Tang and his followers, Lu insisted on imposing this principle as the indisputable foundation for creating a nationally unified, scientized Chinese medicine.

I have basically answered the first question I posed above, about when and why Chinese medicine practitioners began embracing the Modernist idea that there exists only one reality, one science and one truth (*zhenshi*). I believe that it is Yaron’s intention to invite you, the reader, to answer the second question, concerning the effects of this situation for contemporary Chinese medicine developments, for yourself, not with the help of a historian’s narrative but with the original documents prepared in this collection. By allowing the reader to engage directly with these crucial debates and struggles, whose results have given shape to a modern Chinese medicine but have been made invisible in TCM textbooks, these documents open up the valuable possibilities to rethink these historic decisions and to reshape the future of Chinese medicine.

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