The Role of the “Traditional Chinese Medicine Proclamation” in Cholera Prevention and Control in Modern China

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Abstract

During the period of social transformation in modern China, the sudden onslaught of malignant infectious diseases, the helplessness of the public, and the impact of the modern Western medical system promoted the profound self-revolution of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Multiple factors, including politics, economy or religion contributed to the formulation of paper-based “TCM proclamation”. This paper, based on the prevention and control of cholera advocated in TCM proclamation, analyzes the new ways of cholera spread in China in early modern times and the complicated “country-region-medical institutions-other institutions-individuals” correlations.

Keywords: Cholera, epidemic prevention and control, traditional Chinese medicine, proclamation

In modern China, the TCM proclamation played an important role in preventing and controlling the spread of major diseases in various regions.

INTRODUCTION

The term “cholera” can be derived from Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu “Wu Luan” (《黄帝内经灵枢·五乱》Miraculous Pivot of the Huangdi’s Canon of Medicine “The Five Disturbances.”) Cholera was called “Chu E (触恶)” in this book, which referred to the disease of sudden and violent vomiting and angina pectoris.[1] It can be regarded as an acute gastroenteritis in Western medicine.

Scholars believe that from 1817 to 1823, British colonists invaded Burma from India, and spread cholera into the southern Yangtze region in 1820. At that moment, the “cholera” defined in Western medicine appeared in China.[2] Cholera is an acute and fast-spreading infectious intestinal disease caused by

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Vibrio cholerae. It is a Class A infectious disease in China and a quarantine infectious disease in the world. What the Chinese in erarly modern times named “Huo Luan (霍乱)” is exactly the same disease as cholera.

The government and public institutions joined hands with TCM practitioners to build hospitals and treat patients nationwide. A large number of TCM prescriptions and methods for the prevention and control of the spread of infectious diseases emerged, such as “Bi Wen Pill (避瘟丹)” and “Moxa fumigation.” Local governments and social organizations at all levels used print media to popularize the knowledge of these prevention and control methods, publishing medical books and newspapers, issuing proclamations, etc.

**The Role of the “TCM Proclamation” in Cholera Prevention and Control**

The TCM proclamation was the most effective and most widely used tool in epidemic prevention. It included information on disease diagnosis and treatment, and prescriptions and preventive measures formulated by national medical institutions or donated to the government or the public by local medical institutions and individuals. It was usually a single-page print that included simple but complete TCM medical information, especially the methods of prevention and treatment of epidemic diseases recommended by the government, TCM doctors and even the folk. It was simple to read and easy to carry, so it has various kinds of readers from all walks of life, including those who were suffering from epidemic diseases.

The “TCM proclamation” usually comprises the name of the disease, main symptoms, prescription (name and dosage), medication method, nursing method, the recording date, the spreading place, and the contributors who came from state and county government, temples, pharmacies, and charity organizations, and who are individual practitioners of TCM (prestigious doctors, travelling doctors, and doctors who learned medical knowledge from the older generations of the family) [Figure 1].

**The Application of the “TCM Proclamation” in the Prevention and Control of Cholera**

Application of “TCM proclamation” by social groups in the prevention and control of cholera

In the late Qing Dynasty, various organizations participated in epidemic prevention, such as the government, the medical institutions like Imperial Academy of Medicine, and the others. In modern times, the social structure has been transformed, and new social groups such as chambers of commerce and cleaning committees emerged. At the same time, medical institutions in various regions (pharmacies, charity organizations, publishing houses, and other social institutions), as well as religious institutions (Buddhist temples, Taoist temples) used paper media (TCM proclamation) to assist the prevention and control of the regional spread of infectious diseases.

More TCM proclamations were published in the pharmacies. The TCM proclamation became the main paper-based channel for cholera prevention and control. Shao Cheng Road Pharmacy and Zhejiang Shaoxing Pharmacy jointly published Lei Gong Pi Li Wan (《雷公暴雳丸》) which recorded the treatment plan of “Diao Jiao Sha (吊脚痧 cramp in cholera morbus).” Predicted from the textual content, there were two purposes for the publication of the proclamation: One was to publicize the TCM prescription for cholera prevention and control, and the other was to advertise the pharmacies to establish the public image [Note 1] [Figure 2].

Social charity groups seeking to prevent and control the spread of cholera also focused on TCM. They collected and published the prescriptions of local prestigious doctors. The prescriptions described the usage accurately, so that the general public could obtain them easily. The TCM proclamation Le Shan Hui Zhi Yi Lang Fa Biang Zhiang (《乐善会治疫良方两种》Two Effective Prescriptions for Epidemic Diseases from Le Shan Committee) was based on the TCM prevention and control plan for cholera in Chengdu, which described how cholera was transmitted in detail, reflecting the active participation of social charity groups in the prevention and control of the spread of cholera [Note 2] [Figure 3].

The TCM proclamation Hu Yi Zhi Jian Dan You Xiao Zhi Fa Bing Shi She Ling Yao (《虎疫之简单有效治法并施舍灵药》Simple and Effective Treatment and Medicine for Cholera) published by the Taiyuan Branch of the World Red Swastika Society introduced the experience and prescriptions of a doctor named Zhang Mingxuan (张明轩) [Note 3]. In this TCM proclamation, the treatment methods of “Shi Huo Luan (湿霍乱 damp cholera),” “Gan Huo Luan (干霍乱 dry cholera)” and “Huo Luan Zhan Jin (霍乱转筋 cholera with muscular spasm)” were introduced, with relevant medicines for patients included [Figure 4].

Figure 1: Traditional Chinese medicine proclamation Bi Luo Sha Fang Zhi Fang An (《毕罗痧防治方案》Cholera Prevention and Control Plan), 51 cm × 35 cm, in “Jing He Zhai (景和斋)”

Figure 2: Traditional Chinese medicine proclamation Le Shan Hui Zhi Yi Lang Fa Biang Zhiang (《乐善会治疫良方两种》Two Effective Prescriptions for Epidemic Diseases from Le Shan Committee)

Figure 3: Traditional Chinese medicine proclamation Hu Yi Zhi Jian Dan You Xiao Zhi Fa Bing Shi She Ling Yao (《虎疫之简单有效治法并施舍灵药》Simple and Effective Treatment and Medicine for Cholera)
Application of “TCM proclamation” in cholera prevention and control by traditional Chinese medicine practitioners

In early modern times, few people were aware of epidemic prevention. The governments were corrupted and alternated frequently, hence the prevention and control of the epidemic diseases were merely slogans. However, from the TCM proclamations, we can find out that TCM played a role in the prevention and control of regional epidemic diseases. TCM proclamations recorded the occurrence of epidemic diseases and the prevention and control methods as well. The main prescriptions and dosages of cholera treatment, as well as the specific prevention methods were elaborated in detail.

In 1938, a doctor surnamed Xu (许) recorded the prevention and treatment of cholera during the cholera epidemic in Hong Kong, including the TCM syndrome differentiation.
method “Huo Luan Zheng Yan Fa (霍乱症验法 cholera testing method),” TCM treatment method “Huo Luan Ji Jiu Fa (霍乱急救法 cholera first-aid method)” and prevention method “Ji Shi (急食 taboo food)” [Note 4] [Figure 5].

Cao Bingzhang (曹炳章), a prestigious doctor in Shanghai, introduced the treatment of cholera in his proclamation Cao Bingzhang Xian Sheng Huo Luan Fang Zhi Fa (《曹炳章先生霍乱防治法》 Sir Cao Bingzhang’s Cholera Prevention and Treatment Methods). The proclamation included internal treatment and external treatment for cholera. At the same time, it portrayed the differentiation of the cold and heat of cholera syndromes, and made a detailed identification of cholera from tongue coating, lips and mouth, eyes, limbs, fingers, chest and stomach, voice, spontaneous sweating, vomiting, abdominal pain, dysentery and diarrhea, urination, spasm, and pulse. The application of Chinese and Western medicine in cholera treatment at that time was also differentiated [Figure 6].

**The New Form of Cholera Transmission Caused by the Development of Modern China**

Yu Xinzhong (余新忠) pointed out that “the introduction and repeated epidemics of cholera were related not only to the Western expansion to the East, but also to the regional characteristics of the southern Yangtze, the social and economic development in the late Qing Dynasty, the prosperity of maritime and inland river traffic, the increasingly serious environmental damage and pollution.”[6] As a result, “traffic” became another important way to spread the epidemics.

**Epidemic transmission radiating from a population center**

With its important geographical location, epidemics in the capital often spread to other provinces. At the same time, prevention and control methods could also be conveyed to other provinces and become effective ways to treat epidemic diseases. These contents were also reflected in the TCM proclamations. In describing the epidemic, the TCM proclamation often recorded details of the prescriptions used in treating the epidemics in the capital. Lei Gong Pi Li Pill was a prescription that was transmitted from Beijing to Guizhou, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang. After being examined and approved effective in many places, this prescription was finally formed and published as a TCM proclamation in Zhejiang Province.

Another prescription was originally handed down from Xu Hengchang (徐恒昌), a doctor in Paifang Street, Laohekou City, Hubei Province. It was used in combination with acupuncture and was published in many places as a part of the TCM proclamation Huo Luan Zhan Jin Zhi Fa (《霍乱转筋治法》 Cholera Spasm Treatment Methods). This proclamation recorded the full text of Xu’s prescription to save the people in Tianjin County [Figure 7].

**Rapid epidemic transmission after railway construction**

From the geographical point of view, the ancient mode of epidemic transmission was contact diffusion. With the emergence of modern transportation in China such as trains and ships, the mode of the spread of epidemic diseases changed to hierarchical diffusion in a much higher speed. The diseases travel among regional central cities, along with railway lines and wharfs. For example, in the late Qing Dynasty and during the period of the Republic of China, the construction of railway lines promoted economic development and facilitated the spread of epidemic diseases. Epidemics were widespread in China during the period of the Republic of China. Epidemics occurring in one county could infect another 100 counties due to the development of modern transportation.[7] In her study, Shan[8] mentioned the influence of the modern transportation system on the spread of cholera. Cholera germs entered Tianjin from the port, and then spread to Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Beijing, Hebei, Shandong, and other places through railways and ships. The transmission path of cholera became very complex and wide. The TCM proclamation Huo Luan Fang Zhi Fang (《霍乱防治方》 Cholera Prevention and Control Prescriptions) published by Longhai Railway Accounting Office recorded this phenomenon [Figure 8].

**Conclusion**

In the period of social transformation in modern China, the sudden malignant infectious diseases, the helpless state of the
public, and the impact of the modern Western medical system promoted the profound self-revolution of TCM. We can see not only the TCM self-revolution, but also the tremendous efforts TCM made to adapt to the modern social transformation. TCM practitioners and social institutions made considerable contributions to this process. Faced with foreign epidemics, TCM doctors found their own ways and methods not only to continue their traditional mode of treatment, but also to standardize it. TCM became favored by more and more patients due to its simplicity, convenience, low cost, and effectiveness.

Notes
Note 1: According to Li Wenbo’s “Zhong Guo Huo Luan Fen Sheng Tong Ji Biao (中国霍乱分省统计表 Statistical table of cholera in different provinces of China)” in Zhong Guo Chuan Ran Bing Shi Liao (《中国传染病史料》 Historical Materials of Infectious Diseases in China), from 1840 to 1949, there were 39 cholera epidemics in Zhejiang Province, second only to Shanghai.

Note 2: In this paper, “Sheng Men (省门)” refers to the provincial capital. At the end of the paper, we can find that “Ri Xin Industry Organization (日新工业社)” was a famous modern printing factory in Chengdu, also known as “Ri Xin Printing Industry Organization (日新印刷工业社).” A large number of books were printed and published by it.

Note 3: In September 1922, the preparatory meeting of the World Red Swastika Society was held in Daming Lake, Jinan City. After being approved and filed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Beijing government, the Chinese Federation of the World Red Swastika Society was officially established in Beijing in 1922. The World Red Swastika Society originated from Daoyuan (道院). Daoyuan was a folk religious organization founded by Liu Fuyuan (刘福缘) and others in Jinan City. It was named Daoyuan because of its “purpose of promoting morality and charity.” The purpose of the Chinese Federation of the World Red Swastika Society was to “promote world peace and relieve disasters.” It founded the Wan Zi Ri Xin Wen (《卍字日日新闻》 卍Daily News) and the TZU CHI Printing Office (慈济印刷所) to print charity materials. In addition, it also carried out a wide range of charity activities, such as donating gruel, clothes, diagnosis, and coffin for poor people.

Note 4: On April 9, 1938, Shun Pao (《申报》) reported that in 1937, Hong Kong experienced a cholera pandemic. Therefore, the whole of Hong Kong attached great importance to the epidemic, and all social classes participated in cholera prevention and control.

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Conflicts of interest
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