

# SCRAPS OF HISTORY

## FAKED ILLNESS IN ANCIENT CHINA

The renowned Chinese physician of the Ming (明) Dynasty Zhang Jie-Bin (張介賓, A.D. 1563-1640; alias Jing-Yue 景岳) recorded 4 cases of faked illness in his "Jing-Yue's Complete Works" (景岳全書·詐病) which we may label as hysterical stupor. #

One of these case records is quoted below with a rough translation. Zhang gave a detailed description of the case, his observation and how he finally handled it.

在都中時，一相契金吾公畜二妾，其一則燕姬也，有母隨之。一日二妾相競，燕姬理屈，其母助惡，叫跳撒賴，遂致氣厥若死。乃令一婢抱持而坐，自暮及旦絕無蘇意。清晨延予療之，予初入室，見其肉厚色黑，面青目瞑，手撒息微。及診其脈則伏渺若脫，亦意其真危也，斯時也欲施溫補，則慮其大怒之後，逆氣或有未散；欲加開導，則慮其脈之似絕，虛極有不能勝。躊躇未決，乃請複診。及入室再見則不若前次之撒手，而十指交叉抱腹，仰坦於婢者之懷，因疑其前番撒手，今既能叉手，豈他人之所為乎。及着手再診，則似有相嫌不容之意，而拽之不能動，此更可疑也。因出其不意卒猛一扯，則頓脫有聲，力強且勁，由是前疑始釋。其將死之人，豈猶力有如是乎？乃思其脈若此者，或以肉厚氣滯，此比人稟賦多有之也。或以兩腋夾緊，此奸人狡詐亦有之也。若其面青息微，則怒氣使然，自不足怪。識見既定，因聲言其危，使聞灸法，以恐勝之，遂先投一劑，到咽即活。次日會公，因詢予曰：“日昨之病，因料其勢必危矣，然謂其為真邪，則何以藥甫及唇而效之峻速有如此；謂為假耶，則何以能終夜做作而形證之肖似有如此？昨公所用之藥果亦有何玄秘否，是皆不能無疑也。”予曰：“子之玄秘，秘在言耳，亦不過借藥為名耳。但使彼懼，敢不速活。”經曰：“憂可勝怒”正此謂也。是可見人情之巧，其有最難測者皆如此。使昨非再診而再察之，則予亦幾為所誑矣。是以凡遇此類，不可不加之詳審。

**[Translation]** A friend of mine in the Capital was an official of the Royal Guard. He had two mistresses. One of them was Yan-Ji who was accompanied by her mother. One day the two women had a quarrel and Yan-Ji, running out of reasons and with her mother pouring oil on the flames, threw her temper all out by yelling and jumping about. Finally she passed out and became unresponsive as

if dead. She was sat up by a maid but there was no sign of her coming round from dusk to dawn. I was sought to treat her early in the morning. When I went in, she was plump and her skin was dark. Her face looked pale and her eyes close. Her arms were limp and her breath shallow. When I took her pulse it was feeble and weak as if it was to disappear any moment. These were really serious signs and I was uncertain about what treatment I should offer her. Giving some tonic to supplement her deficiency might not be good if her anger was not yet dispersed; if I gave her drug to sweat she might not tolerate it since her pulse was so feeble. Puzzled and undecided, I asked to examine her again. But when I saw her this time, her arms were no more hanging limp. Instead she was lying supine in the maid's lap with her fingers interlocking before her belly. I wondered whether someone had moved her. I became more suspicious when she seemed to resist my attempt to examine her and I was unable to move her arms. Hence I unexpectedly gave her a quick pull on the arm. She gave off a cry and pulled back strong and hard! My last bit of doubt was swept away. How would a dying person's pull be so strong? So I reckoned that the feeble pulse might be due to her inborn plump body build or cunningly induced by pressing both arms tightly against the body. Her pale face and shallow breath were not uncommon findings in an angry person.

Having made up my mind, I then exaggerated about the danger of her condition and deliberately talked about the need of carrying out moxibustion before her, ensuring that she would be frightened to death. Then I suggested to try a dose of drug before the moxibustion and as expected, she came round right away.

The next day my friend asked me, "My mistress seemed so sick yesterday. But if her illness was genuine, how would it be relieved so quickly the instant moment your drug touched her lips? But if it was not real, how could she behave so convincingly and hold up for the whole night? I cannot but suspect that there was some secret in the drug you prescribed to her yesterday." This I replied him, "The secret is in the words I said. The drug was only a pretence, How would she dare not to come round right away as I had her really scared?"

This is what the Canon meant by "Fear can override anger." So one can see that the most unpredictable thing is the complexity of human emotions. If I did not go back and reexamine her a second time, I would have been fooled by her too. The lesson to learn is that one must observe closely in cases like this.

# Quoted in M.Q. Wang's "Psychological Therapy in Traditional Chinese Medicine" (中醫心理治療·王米渠編著), 1986, Chong Qing Publication.