

Epidemic Control by and Educational Activities of Tianjin Physicians in the Late Qing: Using the Iron *Ruyi* Hall and Prudence Health Clinic as Example

Cheng, Wing-cheong
Department of Rare Books and Historical Documents
National Palace Museum

Abstract

Around the latter part of the Guanxu reign (1875-1908) in the late Qing dynasty, the Tianjin area witnessed epidemics of the plague and cholera. Due to poor personal hygiene among the people in the area and circumstances beyond their control, such as seasonal changes in their environment, contagious diseases quickly spread there and led to considerable loss of life. Due to a combination of a weak government, economic hardship, and interference from foreign powers, local gentry in the Tianjin area joined together to work in epidemic control and teaching about personal hygiene. From the materials surviving today, records left of the Iron *Ruyi* Hall (Tie ruyi xuan) opened by the local physician Xu Yanzuo and the Prudence Health Clinic (Jingshen yishi) established by the doctor Ding Guorui reveal greater information. They show that when people in the Tianjin area faced disastrous epidemics during the late Qing era, local gentry played an important and leading role in the process of social reorganization, educating the people, and providing local health services.

Besides the introduction and conclusion, the present study consists of three parts, the first of which deals with the cholera epidemic of 1902 and the plague of 1910 which struck Tianjin in the last years of the Qing dynasty. After delving into the influence of these Tianjin epidemics on society in the late Qing, the study then addresses related research on hand combined with other local Tianjin information, such as literary collections and notes, gazetteers, and locally published newspapers, to introduce the personal background and medical experience of two figures, Xu Yanzuo and Ding Guorui, who were prominent during these two epidemics. Finally, through the process of their activities in epidemic control and educating the people, we can better understand the complex relationship between the Qing government and foreign powers, Chinese and Western medicine, and national and local society as seen in Tianjin at this time as well as the difficulties faced by and important epidemic control measures taken by local physicians.

Keywords: Late Qing, Tianjin, physician, Xu Yanzuo, Ding Guorui, Iron *Ruyi* Hall, Prudence Health Clinic, epidemic control, cholera, plague

(Translated by Donald E. Brix)