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Zhang Yuansu, a famous physician in the Jin and Yuan dynasties

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Zhang Yuansu (courtesy name Zhang Jiegu) was from Yi County, Hebei province. At the old age, he called himself “Yishui old man”. He was a famous medical scholar in the Jin and Yuan dynasties and the founder of the “Yishui school”. He was the author of the *Origins of Medicine (Yi Xue Qi Yuan)*, *Medicinals for Zang-fu Organ Disorders (Jie Gu Jia Zhen)* and *Pouch of Pearls (Zhen Zhu Nang)*.

Zhang was very smart and fond of study. At the age of nine he took the examination for selection of wonder child. It was a pity that when he wanted to take the imperial examination he was disqualified for some indescribable reasons. He felt aggrieved at the unfair treatment and found that there was no hope to realize his ambition. Then he decided to pursue a new career. He gave up imperial examination and started to learn medicine. He did his most in study of medicine. Books were his teacher and after twenty years accumulation, he was skilled in clinical medicine.

Although he was not famous at that time, many patients went to ask help from him. His communication with Liu Wansu made him enjoy tremendous popularity in the world. Liu Wansu, Zhang Congzheng, Li Gao and Zhu Zhenhen were four celebrated physicians in the Jin and Yuan dynasties. They established their own medical schools, which made great impact on development of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Liu became famous earlier than the others, so he ranked the first among them.

It is stated in the preface of the *Origins of Medicine (Yi Xue Qi Yuan)* written by Zhang Jiegu that once Liu Wansu was ill with cold-induced disease. As the saying goes, “doctor does not treat himself”. But when Liu treated himself, he committed mistakes. Symptoms were not removed and severe condition set in with headache, vomiting and poor appetite. At the moment other physicians and his pupils were at a loss what to do. Then Zhang Yuansu was invited to treat him. When Liu heard of this invitation and faced the physician inferior to his reputation, he turned his body to face the wall and neglected Zhang. In such a situation, Zhang couldn't help saying “there is no need to look down upon me!” Liu heard what Zhang said, but he kept silent. For fear of hurting Zhang's feeling he received Zhang's treatment. After diagnosis, Zhang described Liu's

symptoms and the medicinals given to him. He especially pointed out the erroneously used medicinals. At the moment Liu immediately got out of the bed and humbly asked about the reasons. Zhang explained in detail about his treatment thought and the principles of treatment, which made Liu to fill with admiration. He was determined to take the medicinals prescribed by Zhang and he was cured after taking one dose. Zhang's medical skills conquered Liu and since then Liu made an utmost effort to recommend Zhang. Very soon Zhang enjoyed tremendous popularity. They laid down the former different ideas and kept frequent communication to promote good ethos of the medical circles.

Alongside the arising influence many patients went to him for help. In new times more newly-found diseases appeared, and the old remedies failed to deal with them. At that time, Liu Wansu advocated cold-natured medicinals in treatment of patients, and many physicians blindly followed his style, which became a fashion. Zhang did not go with the stream and he subtly noticed more patients be nursed back to health. He believed it was necessary to learn from the famous physicians on one hand and on the other it was essential to innovate boldly. Then he developed the concept of “application of different therapies in different eras and “differentiation of patterns according to the pathological changes of the zang-fu organs”. With great courage and wisdom he dared to challenge authority at that time.

In addition, Zhang made great contributions to the field of materia medica. He found that some medicinals had the action to lead other medicinals' action to the lesion and improve effectiveness. These medicinals were known as “guild herbs”, which are similar to the modern target drugs. He listed the knowledge of every medicinal in the *Pouch of Pearls (Zhen Zhu Nang)*, which still has clinical guidance value up to now. Zhang wrote the book the *Origins of Medicine (Yi Xue Qi Yuan)* based on his years clinical experience, the TCM classics of the Qin and Han dynasties and the theories of physicians of the Tang and Song dynasties, in which he expounded in detail his new understanding of the zang-fu organs and how to identify cold, heat, deficiency and excess patterns of the zang-fu organs. All of these made great influence on his pupils Li

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Gao and Wang Haogu. His work laid the theoretical foundation for the later growth of new medical schools.

Since he lived in Yishui, he was respected as the father of the “Yishui school”. Li Shizhen, the famous medical scholar of the Ming dynasty praised Zhang in his book the *Compendium of Materia Medica* (*Ben Cao Gang Mu*) that Zhang was the second best scholar who expounded and innovated medical theory after *The Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine* (*Huang Di Nei Jing*), the monumental work of the TCM theoretical system.

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Yongxuan Liang: Conceptualization, supervision, and writing – original draft. **Yinghua Huang:** Data curation and writing – original draft.

Declaration of competing interest

None declared.