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Chunyu Yi and his pioneer case records

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Chunyu Yi (215 BC–150 BC) once served as an official of granary in the Qi State. So he had a nickname of granary chief. His ancestral home was Linzi (present Linzi, Shandong Province). He was a celebrated practitioner of the Western Han Dynasty. His 25 case records, the extant earliest ones in China, were listed in *The Historical Records (Shi Ji)*.

Since childhood Chunyun was fond of healing arts. At first he was formerly apprentice to Gongsun Guang, specialized in ancient medical formulas. Gongsun thought Chunyu was naturally bright and talented, and someday he would become a great master, so Chunyu was recommended by him to Gongcheng Yangqing, a local famous practitioner. At that time Gongcheng was old and he was eager to seek for a pupil to inherit his medical skills. He found that Chunyu treated him with profound respect and humility, so he was very fond of his new pupil. Then he decided to pass all his medical skills to him. Within a year Chunyu mastered the essence of *Pulse Classic, Two Volumes (Mai Shu Shang Xia Jing)*, *Five-Color Inspection (Wu Se Zhen)* and *On Medicinals (Yao Lun)*. Afterwards Chunyu began his medical career, and 3 years later he was a skilled practitioner.

Because of his exquisite art of healing, the mother and grandson of the Duke, ministers and other higher officials of the Qi State all went to him for help with success. All the government higher officials wanted him to serve them. But Chunyun was not willing to serve them and he moved to other place to practice medicine. At the same time he looked for famous practitioners and learned from them to improve his medical skills.

The higher officials held grudge against him because he offended them. They finally trumped up charges to frame up him. He was arrested under the order of the emperor and sentenced to have corporal punishment. Chunyun only had daughters without sons.

He wailed with grief that at this critical moment no one could help him. But his little daughter Tiyang decided to go with him and looked after him all the way when he was escorted to Changan, the capital. After arrival his daughter Tiyang submitted a written statement to the authority to redress the wrong done to her father. She also exposed the malpractice of corporal punishment. To save her father she volunteered to be a maid servant of the local authority to atone for her father's crime. The emperor took pity on her and pardoned his father. In addition the corporal punishment was abolished. Her magnificent feat has become a much-told tale known throughout the ages.

When the emperor investigated and handled Chunyu's case, Chunyu described his life experience about how to learn and practice medicine and wrote the book *Case Records (Zhen Ji)*, all of which were recorded in Sima Qian's *The Historical Records (Shi Ji)*. Nobility, common people and servants were among the 25 case records, including 18 males and 7 females. Each record had patient's name, gender, profession, address, main complaints, symptoms and signs, disease name, treatment, prognosis, formulas and medicinals given. Disorders covered internal medicine, external medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, oral cavity and mental problems. It is commendable that the author made an objective record of the therapeutic effect. For example, he undisguised the fact that 10 cases died and 4 cases had poor prognosis, which reflects his rigorous scholarship.

About the diagnostic methods in the case records, the 4 examinations were mentioned. Pulse-taking was used in 20 cases, which showed he advocated to pulse diagnosis. For example, a man named Poshi (a military commander) was ill and came to him for help. After pulse-taking he concluded the man suffered from lung injury beyond cure. He was sure the man would have hematuria and die 10 days later. On the 11th day, the man died as expected, which proves his accurate pulse-taking ability.

Chunyu was also skilled in making use of formulas and medicinals. He treated patients with oral taking or external application medicinals, including pills, powder, decoction and tincture.

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Acupuncture and moxibustion were also used. Some of the medicinals he used remain available today, for example, medicated liquor for dispelling wind.

His case records are the reliable written documents literature, which is helpful in study of his medical achievements and the medical level of the Han Dynasty. They are of higher research value. Chunyu deserves the title of medical master of the Han Dynasty was written into the annals of history, and he is engraved in the mind of later generations.

Translated by Tingyu Fang.

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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.