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## DOCUMENTARY RECORDS OF THE PREVENTION OF *SCHISTOSOMIASIS* IN CHINA

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*Schistosomiasis japonica*, a water-borne and snail-transmitted parasitic disease, has a long history in China. According to archaeological studies, the disease can be traced back to 2000 years ago. *Schistosomiasis japonica* eggs were found in a female corpse excavated in the Mawangdui tomb in Hunan province in 1973. In recent years, due to the Three Gorges Dam construction on the Yangtze River, *schistosomiasis* spread widely again.<sup>1</sup> The disease has become a hot issue in China. It is estimated that over eight hundred thousand people were infected with *schistosomiasis* and 6.5 million people were at risk in 2005. More importantly, the number of people being infected by the parasite is increasing every year.

*Schistosomiasis japonica* is a disease of tropical and subtropical areas where water snails, an intermediate host, live. After the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), southern provinces such as Anhui, Fujian, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Zhejiang, regions where the disease prevails, began a campaign against it. In 1956, Mao Zedong started a mass campaign to fight *schistosomiasis*, adopting the slogan "*Schistosomiasis* has to be eliminated." On 30 June 1958, Chairman Mao read in the *People's Daily* news from Yujiang county (in Jiangxi Province) about the elimination of *schistosomiasis*. Mao was so happy he could not sleep, and then wrote a poem, entitled "Farewell to the Plague Spirit," to commemorate the campaign in Yujiang county. During the period from the 1950s to the 1970s, no one would believe that the PRC could eliminate the disease in all provinces.<sup>2</sup> However, by the 1970s, the disease had been brought under control in some counties and provinces, due to Mao's political will. The achievement made by the PRC in controlling *Schistosomiasis* startled the world.<sup>3</sup>

How was the PRC able to control *schistosomiasis*? How did provincial governments and local communes become involved in the campaign against the disease? How did the PRC central and provincial governments mobilize the masses and educate people? How was control achieved, especially in light of the fact that today *schistosomiasis* is common again in China? When researching and trying to answer these questions about *schistosomiasis* in China, scholars seldom resort to two kinds of records. One of them is usually called "xue fang zhi", a simplified name which means "record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis*" or "record of anti-*schistosomiasis*", and the other, "xue xi chong bing liu xing qing kuang he fang zhi gong zuo zi liao hui bian," which means "collected data on the prevalence and prevention of *schistosomiasis*."

Chinese historians have a long tradition of writing local history, which is usually called "di fang zhi" or "local gazetteer," a type of writing that records the history, people, geography, and customs of a province, a county or a city. The "record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis*" is unique in the way it focuses on a single disease. China does not have records of the prevention of smallpox, cholera, and leprosy.

In my research, I found 31 records of the prevention of *schistosomiasis*, which can be categorized into three levels.

Provincial level:

- 1.) Editorial team (ed), 1990. *Anhui xue xi chong bing fang zhi zhi* (Record of the prevention and history of *schistosomiasis* in Anhui province), Hefei: Huang Shan shu she.
- 2.) Committee for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Zhejiang province (ed), 1992. *Zhejiang xian xue xi chong bing fang zhi shi* (History of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Zhejiang

<sup>1</sup> *Schistosomiasis* in China project, UC Berkeley. Visit URL: <http://ehs.sph.berkeley.edu/china/>.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of the history of fighting *schistosomiasis* in China, see F. R. Sandbach, "Farewell to the god of plague - the control of *schistosomiasis* in China," *Social Science and Medicine* (11)1977, pp. 27-33. Warren, Kenneth, "Farewell to the plague spirit: Chairman Mao's crusade against *schistosomiasis*," in John Bowers, William Hess and Nathan Sivin (eds), *Science and Medicine in Twentieth-century China: Research and Education*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1988, pp. 123-140. Also see Fan Ka Wai and Hon Kei Lai, "Mao Zedong's Fight against *Schistosomiasis*," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup> Dirk Engels et al, "Control of *schistosomiasis* in China," *Acta Tropica* 96(2005), pp. 67-68.

province), Shanghai: Shanghai ke xue ji shu wen xian chu ban she.

3.) Zhang Xianqing (ed), 1992. *Yunnan sheng xue xi chong bing fang zhi shi zhi* (Record of the prevention and history of *schistosomiasis* in Yunnan province), Volume 1, Kunming: Yunnan keji chubanshe. Zhang Xianqing (ed), 2000. *Yunnan sheng xue xi chong bing fang zhi shi zhi xu bian*, Volume 2, Kunming: Yunnan keji chu ban she.

County Level:

4.) Li Yezhi (ed), 1980. *Nan xian xue fang zhi* (Record of the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Nan County [Hunan province]), no place of publication or publisher.

5.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Yuanjiang County (ed), 1981. *Yuanjiang xian xue fang zhi* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Yuanjiang County [of Hunan province]), no place of publication or publisher.

6.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Yueyang County (ed), 1983. *Yueyang xian xue fang zhi* (Record of the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Yueyang County [Hunan province]), no place of publication or publisher. (Part of Dongting Lake, prevelant region of *schistosomiasis*, is located at Yueyang county.)

7.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Yujiang County (ed), 1984. *Jiangxi sheng yujiang xian xue fang zhi 1953-1980* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Yujiang county, Jiangxi province). No place of publication or publisher.

8.) Office for the Elimination of Pests and Diseases of the People's Government of Yingde County and Station for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* of Yingde county (ed), 1985. *Guangdong Sheng Yingde Xian xue xi chong bing fang zhi gong zuo zi liao hui bian* (Collection of working data of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Yingde county, Guangdong province, 1956-1985), no place of publication or publisher.

9.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Rudong County and the Station for Public Health and Hygiene of Rudong County, Jiangsu province (eds), 1987. *Rudong xian xue fang zhi 1957-1986* (History of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Rudong county [Jiangsu province]), no place of publication or publisher.

10.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Ningguo County and the Station for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Ningguo County (eds), 1988. *Ningguo xian xue fang zhi* (Record of the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Ningguo County [Anhui province]), no place of publication or publisher.

11.) Zhou Yongzeng (ed), 1989. *Wuxi xian xue fang zhi* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Wuxi County [Jiangsu province]), no place of publication or publisher.

12.) Editorial team for Record of the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Huarong County (ed), 1990. *Huarong xian xue fang zhi* (Record of the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Huarong county [Hunan province]), Shanghai: East Normal University Press.

13.) Editorial team for Record of the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Kaihua County (ed), 2004. *Kai hua Xian xue xi chong bing fang zhi shi* (History of the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Kaihua county [Zhejiang province]), Hangzhou: Zhejiang ren min chu ban she.

14.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Jiangdu County (ed), 1982. *Jiangdu xian xue fang zhi* (Record of the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Jiangdu county [Jiangsu province]), no place of publication or publisher.

City Level:

15.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Nanjing city (ed), 1983. *Nanjing shi xue fang zhi 1950-1980* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Nanjing city), no place of publication or publisher.

16.) Zhai Ximing, 1984. *Yunnan Sheng Gejiu shi xue fang zhi shi zhi* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Gejiu city, Yunnan province), Gejiu City: Department of Health, Gejiu City, and Station for the Prevention of Plague in Gejiu City.

17.) Lin Guinan (ed), 1984. *Anqing shi xue fang zhi* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Anqing city [Anhui]), no place of publication or publisher.

18.) Qiu Yici, 1997. *Qu zhou xue fang zhi* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Quzhou city [Anhui province]), no place of publication or publisher.

19.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control and Endemic Diseases Appointed by the Communist Party of Yancheng city (eds), 1986. *Yancheng shi xue fang zhi 1954-1986* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Yancheng city [Jiangsu province]), no place of publication or

publisher.

20.) Wong Xuede (ed), 1995. *Nanjing xue fang zhi* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Nanjing city), Nanjing: Jiangsu ke xue ji shu chu ban she.

21.) Wu Shengwei (ed), *Kunshan Shi xue fang zhi* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Kunshan city), Shanghai: Shanghai ke xue ji shu wen xian chu ban she.

22.) The Editorial Team of the Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* of Wujiang city (ed), 2001. *Wujiang shi xue fang zhi* (Record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Wujiang city [Jiangsu province]), Jin ri chu ban she.

In addition, the author also collected six books about the prevention of *schistosomiasis*, called “zi liao hui bian” or “zi liao tu biao ji,” which usually have the same written pattern as “record of prevention of *schistosomiasis*”, although they do not necessarily carry the title “xue fang zhi.”

23.) The Leading Group Office for Endemic Disease Control. *Data for schistosomiasis in Guangxi, 1956-1991*. Nanning: Government of Guangxi, 1991.

24.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Huanggang county and Station for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Huanggang county (eds), 1980. *Hu bei sheng Huanggang Xian xue xi chong bing liu xing qing kuang he fang zhi gong zuo zi liao hui bian 1955-1979* (Collected data of the prevalence and prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Huanggang county, Hubei province), no place of publication or publisher.

25.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Huangmei county and Station for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Huangmei county (eds), 1980. *Hu bei sheng Huangmei Xian xue xi chong bing liu xing qing kuang he fang zhi gong zuo zi liao hui bian 1953-1979* (Collected data of the prevalence and prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Huangmei county, Hubei province), no place of publication or publisher.\*

26.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Qichun county and Station for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Qichun county (eds), 1980. *Hu bei sheng Qichun Xian xue xi chong bing liu xing qing kuang he fang zhi gong zuo zi liao hui bian 1956-1980* (Collected data of the prevalence and prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Qichun county, Hubei province), no place of publication or publisher.

27.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Xinzhou county and Station for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Xinzhou county (eds), 1980. *Hu bei sheng Xinzhou Xian xue xi chong bing liu xing qing kuang he fang zhi gong zuo zi liao hui bian 1956-1980* (Collected data of the prevalence and prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Xinzhou county, Hubei province), no place of publication or publisher.\*

28.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Huanggang county and Station for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Huanggang county (eds), 1981. *Fang zhi xue xi chong bing zi liao hui bian 1955-1979* (Collected data of the prevalence and prevention of *schistosomiasis* [in Huanggang county, Hubei province]), no place of publication or publisher.

29.) The Leading Group Office for Endemic Diseases Appointed by the Communist Party of Yanbian county and Station for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Yanbian county (eds), 1986. *Sichuan sheng Yanbian Xian xue xi chong bing liu xing qing kuang he fang zhi gong zuo zi liao hui bian 1958-1984* (Collected data of the prevalence and prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Yanbian county, Sichuan province), no place of publication or publisher.

30.) The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control Appointed by the Communist Party of Jiangsu province and Station for the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Jiangsu province (eds), 1983. *Jiangsu sheng xue xi chong bing fang zhi zi liao tu biao ji 1952-1980* (Collection of statistics and charts data of the prevention of *schistosomiasis* in Jiangsu province), no place of publication or publisher.

31.) The Institute of the Prevention of *Schistosomiasis* in Shanghai City (ed), 1985. *Shanghai shi Xiao mie xue xi chong bing zhi liao tu biao ji* (Collection of statistics and charts data of the elimination of *schistosomiasis* in Shanghai city), no place of publication or publisher.

Most of these materials are for “internal use only.” They were not formally published, and most were marked “internal publication”<sup>4</sup> (or even “confidential”) and have no publication data. They were

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<sup>4</sup> If a book is marked “internal publication”, it means that its contents may be related to a sensitive political issue which can not be disclosed and the book can not be sold to ordinary people.

usually published by the local Department of Health or The Leading Group Office for Schistosomiasis Control; they were not formally circulated and were only served as reference for local departments, due to the fact that the PRC regarded the epidemic of schistosomiasis as top secret.<sup>5</sup> It is not easy to obtain these materials because of their limited circulation and the limited number of copies, but it is not impossible to obtain them when Internet rose as an important commercial tool. According to the author's investigation, these materials have been ignored in the past. Actually, these materials are very important for medical researchers and epidemiologists attempting to trace the history of campaigns aiming to eliminate or reduce the prevalence of *schistosomiasis* in provinces in the past 50 years.

Any document that constitutes a "record of the prevention of *schistosomiasis*" usually has its own written pattern which includes the following chapters: geography, climate, map and environment of the place; organization of campaign for the prevention of *schistosomiasis*; history of prevalence of *schistosomiasis*; investigation of patients of *schistosomiasis*; investigation of the distribution of fresh water snails and work done to eliminate the snails; methods taken to protect humans and animals; health education about *schistosomiasis*; research into treating the disease and elimination of the snails; and experience and contribution of those fighting *schistosomiasis*. These materials are useful for anyone who wants to understand how provinces, counties and cities in China went about preventing and treating the disease and educating people.

Having seen these records, I suggest that the following kinds of important data can be obtained:

First, for medical researchers and epidemiologists the interest lies in the access these records provide to many surveys and statistical analyses carried out by local experts, based on local achievements. These allow many questions to be asked, such as: How many people need to be mobilized to fight the fresh water snails in a province, county or city? Over how wide an area are snails to be eliminated? How many people (rates of male and female) are infected and needed treatments? How much is the approximate cost for the prevention of the disease?

Second, these books usually have documents attached to them about anti-schistosomiasis measures delivered by the Central Government or by local government in of the PRC.

Third, these books usually have illustrations attached through which we can easily understand what methods were used to eliminate snails.

For health science researchers the interest in these records lies in their ability to answer questions such as how did the PRC and local government went about educating farmers and the illiterate common people to help prevent *schistosomiasis* through movies, education seminars, slide shows, illustrated booklets and primers? How did they mobilize bare-foot doctors to treat the disease? Taking Anhui as an example, in order to communicate word about the menace of *schistosomiasis*, Anhui province played anti-schistosomiasis movies over 5400 times all over the province during 1964-1985. Among the movies, "Ku mu feng chun" (getting a new lease of life) was a famous one, which told the story of two lovers, who became infected with *schistosomiasis* and found themselves in a difficult situation. Due to Mao's campaign against *schistosomiasis*, people were treated with the aid of the Communist Party and the Central Government. Needless to say, one of the purposes of the movie was to praise the Communist Party and the PRC; however, it cannot be denied that the movie also communicated the news of the menace of *schistosomiasis*.

For historians, the history of diseases in the People's Republic of China is still virgin soil. The historical records of *schistosomiasis* should help construct the historical picture related to how the PRC government, central and local, dealt with such a fatal disease.

Some scholars may be of the view that any data disclosed by official institutes in China should not be totally trusted. I agree that these data should be considered with caution, but I also believe that no researcher can afford to ignore these materials if he or she wants to study efforts at controlling *schistosomiasis* in China in the past 50 years.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, American *Schistosomiasis* delegation went to China for investigation on the epidemic of schistosomiasis in 1975. PRC set many obstacles so that the delegation could not investigation deeply. George Bush, *Looking Forward*, New York: Doubleday, 1987, p.136-137.