

Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science and Pseudosciences in China

Chen Danyang

I think Chinese people didn't know Martin Gardner's name before the end of 1970s, because we lived in the different sides of iron curtain. This situation had been changed in 1979 when China and USA established diplomatic relations. After that more and more American books and magazines were translated into Chinese. Just in that year, the Chinese version of *Scientific American* was began to published in China.

The first article introduced Martin Gardner himself to Chinese general public may appeared in 1981. The author said that although there wasn't Chinese version of Martin Gardner's book at that time, people had known his name from Chinese version of *Scientific American*.

After that, the first Chinese version of Gardner's book, *Aha! Insight* was published in this year. After that, a lot of Gardner's book was introduced into China. *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*, which I will discuss in the following, was published in 1984.

March 1979, one newspaper in Sichuan province published an essay about a boy named Tang Yu. In this essay the author said this boy had an exceptional function that he could read Chinese characters by his ears. After that there were more than 10 children who had the same ability were reported all over the country in one or two months. The authoritative newspaper, *People's Daily*, published one scholar named Ye Shengtao's two articles in May. In these articles he said all these exceptional functions are frauds. He thought it was a shame for China in this modern times. But other newspapers and magazines still published news about ESP. *Nature magazine* in Shanghai (It was a Chinese magazine, not the Chinese version of the famous magazine *Nature*), published an article about the science detection of two children. From 1979 to 1982, this magazine published 53 articles about ESP.

From 1980, a lot of seminar of ESP were held all over the country. In this year, the famous Chinese scientist Qian Xuesen, who was Theodore von Kármán's student, who got his Ph.D in Caltech and was already a famous scientist before he came back to China in 1955, wrote a letter to *Nature magazine* told them he thought ESP was really exist. In shadow of Qian's encouragement, more and more people began to study ESP. In 1981, another scientist, Yu Guangyuan, who was well-known as an anti-pseudosciences fighter after that, made a public announcement of his negative attitude about ESP. In this period scientists who approved ESP and who opposed it made a big controversy. In April 1982, Chinese government made an announcement asked people don't argue about ESP in public any more, regardless of their standpoint.

Also in the spring of 1982, there was a movie named *Shaolin Temple* released. It created a Kung Fu fever. At the end of this year, a monk named

Haideng was described as a Kung Fu master by an article of the Sichuan newspaper which reported Tang Yu 3 years before. Haideng's name appeared everywhere in the summit of the Kung Fu fever. There were movies, documentaries, TV play series, books, or even many cartoons about him. In one documentary, Haideng performed two finger zen, which means handstand in a posture of two forefingers prop up all body. I was a gloss because his feet was hanged by rope as a matter of fact.

At that time, Qigong, one kind of Kong Fu became more and more popular, because it was easier to train for average person. There were many kinds of magazines about Qigong, such as *Qigong and Science*, *Chinese Qigong*, *Chinese Somatic Science*. Somatic Science was the name of a new kind of science advocated by Qian Xuesen from 1985. There were also many many organizations about Qigong or Somatic Science all over the country, from north to south, from metropolis to small town. At the end of 1986, people said there were over 10,000,000 persons training Qigong.

This was the circumstances of China when *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science's* first Chinese version was published. Although Chinese government didn't support ESP in public, Qigong, under the cover of Somatic Science, seems would became a new kind of ESP. This really happened soon. I think *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* made some persons got a clear understanding of Qigong and ESP, but most persons were confused by this fever.

In the second half of 1980s, there were a lot of persons who acted as Qigong masters said they had ESP. Yan Xin was one of them. He was a doctor and became a Qigong master in 1984. His biggest performance was happened in 1987, in which year he said he used Qigong to quench the big fire of Greater Khingan Mountains from 2000 kilometres away. In 1990s he migrated to USA or Canada.

A lot of universities and institutes wanted to analyse Qigong and ESP, included my academy, Chinese academy of sciences. Maybe these scientific research institution had a mind to verify ESP exist or not, but at the end ESP masters told general public that there ESP had scientific background because a lot of scientists was researching it.

In 1990, another Chinese version of *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* was published. I think this version maybe the most popular one of all Martin's book in China, because this book was in a series of books named *50 cents series*. It was very cheap and sold well. But in this series there was another book named *The Chinese Supermen*, introduced a lot of Qigong masters and described their ESPs. It looks like a bad joke of Martin's book.

In 1990s, several writers wrote a lot of books about how miraculous the Qigong master were. One of them named Ke Yunlu, his books affected many persons and made the protagonist of his book, Qigong master Hu Wanlin, became a miracle-working doctor. When Hu Wanlin's frauds was uncovered and arrested by police, Ke Yunlu even held a lot of news

conferences for the sake of saving him. Some scientists who had no experience about psychology and magic also wrote many reports about ESP. All these made things badly.

Although Many scientists wanted to uncover the frauds of ESP, Qigong fever was not finished until 1999. In that year Falun Gong was baned by Chinese government. Unlike other persons, I think the most important thing which made Qigong and ESP declined was not political power, but the popularize of internet, which was happened at the end of last century too. From that time, Chinese people could get more informations from a wilder way than before. When young people who borned in 1980s or 1990s learned more knowledge than elders, they would not be easily persuaded by these cheaters. However,at the same time, new kinds of pseudosciences are still wildly exist in China now.

I read *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* in 2005.It attracted me soon.I think although we have different cultures, different histories and different religions, the pseudosciences between both side of Pacific Ocean may looks like similar. Whenever anybody asks about my opinion about pseudosciences, I will tell them to read Martin Gardner's *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*. I think after that they will know, the same tricks which are been used in China in these years, had been applied by American cheaters more than 60 years before.