**Feeling the Qi: Authenticity, Translation, and Textuality in California Chinese Medical Education**

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**Abstract**

This poster demonstrates some of the multiple voices participating in the semiotic structuring of “authenticity” in the context of California Chinese medical education. Texts and teachers differ in their representations of “real knowledge,” and students, who do not learn Chinese, are guided to interact with their books in various ways. Some teachers, for example, invoke the authenticity and authority of Chinese source texts over poor English translations. Other teachers invoke the importance of embodied experience over any textual source. The students are thus left with an ambiguous sense of what constitutes authenticity in Chinese medicine. They navigate this ambiguity over time, forging their own idea about authentic knowledge in Chinese Medicine, through interaction, embodied experience, and deeply moral engagement with the material.

### Cultural Context: The Power of Authenticity in California

**Spirituality and the quest for authentic self**

This is the powerful mental id that has come down to us. It asserts crucial moral importance to a kind of encounter with oneself, with our own inner nature. (Taylor 1991: 39)

For example, one instance, one of the students asks a question about how to treat a condition, “theem,” that he has never heard of before. This is the students’ third quarter in a four-year program, and they have just been introduced to the concept of theem as a category of illness. None of their primary textbooks include it as a category. Their teacher, who is Chinese, argues that it is a core concept in the Chinese texts, and that they should therefore know it. In so doing, he invokes the authority and the authenticity of the Chinese texts above and beyond the English texts that the students use.

### The Search for Real Chinese Medicine in California

California students are often attracted to Chinese medicine as an authentic spiritual path, a path that leads to deeper self-knowledge, awareness, and personal transformation.

Many students in California also see Chinese medicine as an authentic science of the body, a perfect complement to biomedicine.

### Multiple Translations: Finding The Authentic Language Of Chinese Medicine

The students for the most part do not study Chinese, so what is the authentic way to translate Chinese medicine?

The textbooks all represent Chinese medicine in different ways, and the translators all have strong opinions regarding the authentic language of the medicine. Everybody is seeking to represent Chinese medicine authentically, but the way they choose to do so differs.

- Some authors argue for a standardized “unencircled” translation that conveys precisely what the classical Chinese author meant. They claim, furthermore, that Western “alternative health-care values” predispose students and practitioners to ignore precise terminology (Wisman 2000).
- Others insist that there could ever be standar “translation in a medicine that is constantly changing, that must change to fit the cultural context in California (Rosendal & Keesen 2001).
- Still others argue for a scientific translation of Chinese medicine (Xie 2003).

Clearly, this debate over authenticity and translation is intimately linked to debates over authority. Which book or translation is right? How are students guided to relate to such different representations?

### What Happens in the Classroom?

**During class time, interaction with teachers and peers offers opportunities to learn what type of textual information is authentic:**

[Insert Table: What Happens in the Classroom?]

### Preliminary Conclusions and Questions to Consider

- The translation of Chinese medicine into a California context involves multiple, divergent voices, all vying to represent Chinese medicine through various lenses.
- Students learning Chinese medicine must rely upon their interactions with teachers, texts, and peers; their embodied experiences; and their moral engagement with the material to construct their own sense of authentic knowledge.
- This raises several questions regarding authenticity and meaning in California Chinese medicine. For example, is it possible to honor students’ need for authentic experience at the same time as expecting the need for accurate translations? What are accurate translations and for whom? Finally, at what point does a students’ experience become more authentic or authoritative than the book?

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**References Cited**


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