

1954

Speeches/Documents

Title: Speech at a Standing Committee Meeting of the Central Committee of the CPC (Excerpts)

Author: Mao Zedong

Date: Winter 1954

Source: The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976: September 1945 - December 1955
Pg 508-509

Description:

1. I believe that China makes great contributions to the world, and one of these is Chinese medicine. Chinese medicine was born on the basis of handicraft and agricultural production. Theories regarding gold, wood, water, fire and soil may be criticized, 1 but precious experiences must be protected and promoted. Those who make criticism must understand this. What is science? Correct and systematic knowledge is called science. Isn't Western medicine a science? It is also somewhat idealistic. Mechanical materialism, for instance, must be transformed. China should have one medical service, and not two medical services, as they have existed for a long time. The term doctor of Western medicine is improper; as materialist dialectics would have it, there should be one unified term for doctors. It is wrong for some to over exaggerate the importance of Chinese medicine. Traditional Chinese hospitals should be run experimentally at key points. 2 In regard to the question of further training of traditional doctors, it is right and proper to require them to study fundamental subjects and to exchange experiences. It may be difficult, I am afraid, for them to learn the pharmacology of Chinese medicine.

2. From now on, graduates from medical programs in the universities must study traditional Chinese medicine for two years.

3. China ought to have one [integrated school of] medicine, and not two [schools of] medicine [coexisting] over a long period of time. The terms Chinese medicine and Western medicine are inappropriate; there ought to be [only] one [integrated school of] medicine [based on] dialectical materialism. The health of the six hundred million people in China primarily relies on Chinese medicine, and not on Western medicine.

4. To look down on traditional Chinese medicine is a slavish bourgeois mentality.

Notes

1. Mao is referring here to the ancient Chinese cosmological theory that the universe is made up of these five fundamental elements or forms of matter (wu xing). In the traditional sense of the words, jin, here translated as "gold," is more appropriately translated as "metal," and tu as "earth" rather than "soil." The earliest written formulation of this theory appears in the ancient book "Hongfan (Framework of the Cosmos)" in Shangshu (Book of History).

2. While we do not have the Chinese text, we believe that the term here is shidian (translatable as "spot experimenting"). This term appears often in CPC usage and in Mao's own writing in the years ahead and refers to the practice of doing experimentation in selected key areas in order to develop prototypes for emulation on a broader scale.