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RECOLLECTION

Zan Ding: founder of medical psychology in China

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Professor Zan Ding (1910–1968) (Fig. 1) is a distinguished psychologist, the founder of medical psychology in China, and one of the important founders of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in practice, even though his name is known to few of us.

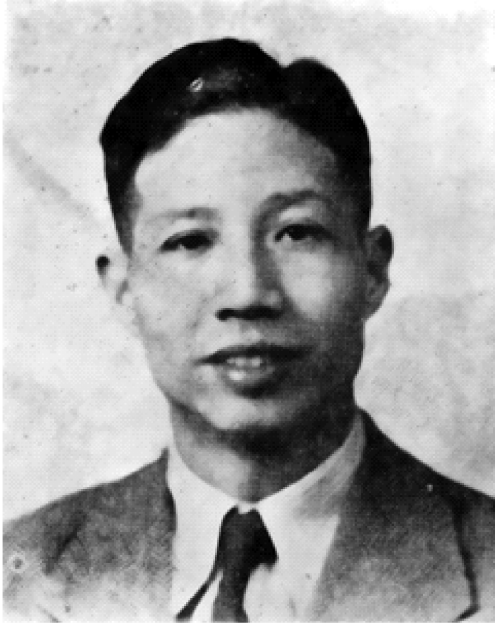

Figure 1. Professor Zan Ding (1910–1968).

Born in Nantong, Jiangsu Province, Zan Ding went to the National Central University (NCU) (now the Southeast University) in Nanjing to study psychology. During his four-year study at NCU, he learned a broad range of various schools of psychology and received rigorous training in the psychological labs, and was particularly interested in disease-related mental health. In his junior year, he and his friend Zuyin Ding translated "The Psychology of Adolescence" by Fowler D. Brooks. The translation was published and was the first introduction of adolescent psychology to Chinese readers.

After he graduated from NCU, Zan Ding continued his graduate study under Professor R. S. Lyman at the Department of Brain Science of Peking Union Medical College (PUMC). After he finished his three-year graduate training, he was offered a teaching position by the department. He accepted the offer and continued his medical psychological research in every possible way. While he was teaching the medical psychological course at PUMC, more and more colleagues from other departments of PUMC started to accept the concepts of disease-related mental health and medical psychology. Working together with Drs. Xiaoqian Zhang, Qiaozhi Lin and Futang Zhu, Zan Ding was able to carry out psychological diagnosis and treatment for patients from the departments of Internal Medicine, Obstetrics and Gynecology, and Pediatrics of the PUMC Hospital (PUMCH). Meanwhile, he also went to public clinics, schools and even factories, to provide counseling service and sometimes diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders. In 1936, he founded the Chinese Association for Mental Health in Beijing.

In 1940, Zan Ding had to give up his research work in Beijing due to the War of Resistance against Japan and moved to Chongqing and later to Nanjing. Even during the war, he kept on teaching medical psychology and providing counseling services whenever possible. In 1944, he established the first laboratory of medical psychology in China, which also had affiliated counseling offices and clinics. He also published two books based on his public speeches and clinical cases: "Essays on Mental Health" in 1945 and "Mental Cultivation of Youth" in 1947. These are the earliest publications of medical psychology in China.

In 1947, Zan Ding went to the United States to continue his psychological research at the University of Chicago and Michael Reese Hospital as a visiting scholar, supported by the

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World Health Organization (WHO) Scholarship. Before he returned to China in late 1948, he also visited Europe to attend the International Conference of Mental Health. During these two years in the US and Europe, he not only made major progresses with his research projects, but also met and befriended a lot of Chinese scientists who lived and worked abroad.

Shortly after he returned to China, because of his extensive contacts with Chinese scholars, Zan Ding was appointed to participate in the establishment of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (formerly known as Academia Sinica), working with the famous physicist Sanqian Qiang (San-Tsiang Tsien), chemist Ziqiang Yun, et al. It was right around the time of the establishment of the People's Republic of China and many patriotic scientists came back to China from the US and Europe, some of whom were persuaded by Zan Ding during his tour in 1947 and 1948. Thousands of S&T elites were ready to work for their home country, but it was not an easy task to organize these scientists into different disciplines and different institutes. After half year of hard work (which meant working from 6 AM to 2 AM next day, according to Ding's driver), the Chinese Academy of Sciences was established on November 1, 1949, and Zan Ding was later appointed as one of the leaders of the Academy.

When the Academy was founded, it had 17 institutes and preparatory offices of three more institutes. The Institute of Psychology was one of the three institutes to be established. The idea of establishing the Institute of Psychology was proposed by Zan Ding. Many people, including some scientists, were skeptical about the idea and even against it. Some felt that psychology was more in the category of philosophy and was not as important as classical disciplines such as mathematics and physics; others questioned the practicability of psychology. After decades of war and turbulence, the top priority of the new government was to improve people's livelihood. Would psychology give people food and clothing? The answer was No. But Zan Ding withstood the huge pressure from others, even from his friends, and the Institute of Psychology was finally established in December, 1951 (Xue, 2006).

From the very beginning, the Institute of Psychology went through a lot of ups and downs because of political reasons, so did Zan Ding himself. No matter how hard the external conditions were, he kept on with his research until he passed away in 1968. In 1958, Zan Ding proposed a model which stated that one's health was determined by social, psychological and biomedical factors combined. The model was quite ahead of the time and 19 years later a similar model, the Biopsycosocial (BPS) Model, was proposed by psychiatrist George L. Engel in 1977. In the same year of 1958, Zan Ding organized a mass prevention and treatment for neurasthenia at the Peking University, which was unprecedented in China and rarely seen internationally. He also established the first community clinic for prevention and treatment of mental disorders in China. Unfortunately, his research findings did not get published due to his early death. It was part of the reason why very few people know Zan Ding as a psychologist and the founder of medical psychology in China. His contribution to the establishment of the Chinese Academy of Sciences should not be forgotten, either.

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