



Letter to the Editor

1918 influenza pandemic origin in Chinese laborers/soldiers: Medical historical analysis



To the Editor,

The recent article on “1918 influenza pandemic origin in Chinese laborers/soldiers” is an interesting publication.¹ This is an exact medical historical analysis, which is a type of research rarely seen in medical literature. Shanks¹ mentioned that there was “no evidence of 1918 influenza pandemic origin in Chinese laborers/soldiers in France” and noted that “this finding does not support a Southeast Asian importation of lethal influenza to Europe in 1918.” Most certainly, when working with the various tools associated with historical research, it is very hard to control the reliability of the available records. For example, if there is an indication of “no record”, that does not necessarily mean there has been no case. In the present day, the problem of underreporting remains commonplace.² Nevertheless, if we consider the natural history of influenza and relate it to the situation as it existed in 1918, we might find some areas of concern. In 1918, the overall transportation system was poor, and it took many weeks to travel from China or Southeast Asia to Europe. Based on the fact that influenza has a short incubation period (less than 1 week),³ it is unlikely that the illness first appeared in Europe. In the past, the occurrence of worldwide pandemic infection seemed to involve more barriers to transmission and thus was more difficult to spread than in the present day.

References

1. Shanks GD. No evidence of 1918 influenza pandemic origin in Chinese laborers/soldiers in France. *J Chin Med Assoc* 2016;**79**:46–8.
2. Cohen S, Alper CM, Doyle WJ, Treanor JJ, Turner RB. Positive emotional style predicts resistance to illness after experimental exposure to rhinovirus or influenza avirus. *Psychosom Med* 2006;**68**:809–15.
3. Combadière B, Sibérlil S, Duffy D. Keeping the memory of influenza viruses. *Pathol Biol* 2010;**58**:e79–86.

Viroj Wiwanitkit*

Tropical Medicine Unit, Hainan Medical University, Haikou, China

Department of Biological Science, Faculty of Medicine, University of Nis, Nis, Serbia

Joseph Ayobabalola University, Ikeji-Arakeji, Nigeria

Department of Community Medicine, Patil Medical University, Pune, India

Public Health Curriculum, Surin Rajabhat University, Surin, Thailand

*Corresponding author. Dr. Viroj Wiwanitkit, Wiwanitkit

House, Bangkhae,

Bangkok 10160, Thailand.

E-mail address: vwiroj@yahoo.com.

Conflicts of interest: The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest related to the subject matter or materials discussed in this article.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jcma.2015.12.005>

1726-4901/Copyright © 2016, the Chinese Medical Association. Published by Elsevier Taiwan LLC. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).