

EDITORIAL

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I've often noted how discussions of the evidence suggesting postmortem survival fail to consider adequately alternative interpretations in terms of dissociative processes, and in particular the apparent ease with which dissociation either facilitates the operation of living-agent psi or unleashes otherwise latent creative capacities that might suggest survival to the unwary (see, e.g., Braude 2003). I suppose it should come as no surprise that a related phenomenon sometimes occurs as well—namely, that evidence suggesting dissociative processes might in fact be evidence for the operation of psi. An interesting recent paper by Hong Wang Fung in the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* illustrates the point (Fung 2018).

Fung's paper is titled "The Phenomenon of Pathological Dissociation in the Ancient Chinese Medicine Literature." And I commend Fung for unearthing some interesting material. He summarizes six obscure, old cases described originally in terms antedating the development of present-day psychological concepts. One case in particular stood out for me. Fung reports it as follows.

Gui, aged twenty-something, was a farmer's son from Dantu. He had gotten married and had a son. During one winter, he acquired an unusual illness, sighed all day long, and did not eat and drink. His wife felt dissatisfied; Gui sought for solutions but [they] did not work.

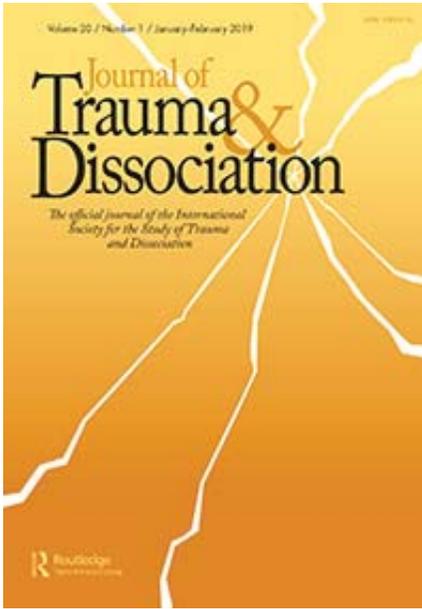
One day after an afternoon nap, he suddenly looked around and spoke with a Lu accent, saying, "Strange! Where is this place? Why am I here?"

After speaking, he ran quickly to the door and wanted to go away. His wife was shocked and stopped him by dragging on his clothes.

Gui spoke angrily, and said, "What do you want? I am not a person belonging to here, it is not good to stay."

After speaking, he attempted to go again. His wife cried and said, "You are mad, how come you cannot even recognize the one who sleep[s] with you in the same bed (i.e., herself, his wife)?"

Gui laughed and said, "Strange! How could I have such a yellow-face (i.e. ugly) wife?"



His wife became more scared, asked “So, who are you?”

Gui said, “My family name was Lee, and I am a Shandongese” (a Lu accent is the accent from Shandong). “You do not know me, why do you see me as your husband?”

His wife said, “You are named Gui, and I am your wife, everyone living here knows that.”

She also pointed to the 3-year-old crying boy and said, “This boy who is learning to speak is our son and is yours and mine. Even if you do not care about the love between husband and wife, don’t you consider this boy (your son)?”

At that time, other villagers came and said the same thing to Gui, consistent with what his wife said. His wife said, “If you don’t believe, why don’t you look in the mirror?”

Gui said “good” and did so. He was shocked and said, “Strange! Today’s me is not the ‘me’ from yesterday. Where is the original me?”

Both of them cried. The villagers thought it was strange too and discussed what happened.

Gui said, “I also don’t know what happened. Just a while ago, I was in Shandong and napping.”

The villagers and his wife thought he was just talking nonsense after being ill, and tried to give comfort to him. Yet, Gui argued that he had a wife and a concubine, several beautiful houses, and a lot of books, and said, “How can I stay in this dirty house?”

He still wanted to leave. His wife cried and tried to follow him. Without other ways to intervene, the villagers then sent him to the government official/court. While Gui originally was illiterate, he wrote the deposition himself, he wrote several thousand words and displayed remarkable literary talent. Finally, in the document, it is suggested that this may be the case of “li hun,” in which another person’s soul/spirit is possessing one’s body.

In this case, it appears that the experience of Gui is consistent with contemporary clinical presentations of pathological dissociation. He suffered from amnesia as he did not remember his past and could not recognize his wife and son. He also suddenly became another person (assumed a new identity) and behaved differently, and did not recognize himself in the mirror.

Readers familiar with the parapsychological literature will see much in this case that reminds them of more familiar ostensible reincarnation and possession cases. Although Fung notes that the author of the source document considers that it might be a case of possession, Fung doesn't pursue that line of thought, and in fact he doesn't raise the question of whether anyone made an effort to confirm the current or prior existence of Lee, Gui's apparent alternate identity. On the contrary, Fung asserts that Gui "was *very likely* to have suffered from dissociative amnesia and identity alteration; he could not recognize his family members, and he did not even know his identity" (p. 84, emphasis added). I'm presuming, by the way, that Fung would, quite properly, not consider genuine possession to be a dissociative process. Now, granted, the concept of dissociation is difficult to unravel precisely (for a discussion of the concept of dissociation, see Braude 2009). But whatever, exactly, we take dissociation to be, presumably it should be analyzed entirely in terms of processes happening within the person. By contrast, possession (if genuine) requires the causal intervention of an outside agent.

It's regrettable that Fung (and evidently the original author) failed to consider the seemingly crucial piece of information concerning Lee's identity. One naturally would like to know whether the original author had some basis (other than mere theoretical possibility) for considering possession as an option. And since many elements of the case parallel familiar features of ostensible reincarnation cases, it's likewise somewhat surprising that neither author considered that as well. Nevertheless, this case—frustrating though it may be—reminds us that older documents may be a rich source of information concerning the operation not just of dissociation but also of psi in everyday contexts. And that latter possibility remains an important avenue of inquiry if we're ever to have a decent idea of what it is we're trying to study in more formal, experimental contexts and whether those contexts are even appropriate for eliciting the phenomena.

—STEPHEN E. BRAUDE

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