For most of the twentieth century, the racist trope “Sick man of Asia” haunted Chinese rulers and people alike; now, the roles have reversed with all the healthcare problems in the US that the Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare. “Sick Uncle Sam” is the new focus of the world’s concern over a what appears to be a declining superpower. How did this happen?

This talk will provide some ways to consider answering this complex question from a historical perspective. Additionally, this talk will focus on the current debates over the use of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for integrated treatments of Covid-19 patients in mainland China and compare them with those debates over 17 years ago about using TCM for treating SARS. This comparison allows one to examine thematic continuities in medical skepticism and highlight what has changed in terms of clinical practice, Chinese government support, and media coverage of the phenomenon.