



## **Medical Ethics in China and the West**

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**Take the Test**

Both Chinese and Western medicines have ethical traditions going back literally thousands of years. It is amazing how closely these traditions parallel each other. This course examines our common ethical traditions and compares and contrasts them with modern medical practices, which, regrettably, often diverge from the ethical underpinnings of our ancestors.

By reminding ourselves of their wisdom, we modern practitioners get to benefit from the peace of mind, love, and kindheartedness which flow from the practice of their long and deeply considered ethical approach to medicine.

The famous Oath of Medical Ethics first articulated by Hippocrates in his lifetime between 460 and 377 B.C. is similar in many ways to the views expressed by Confucius between 551 and 479 B.C.

An even greater congruence of thoughts on medical ethics between East and West occurs by the 7th century A.D. with the publication of Qianjinfang (Prescriptions worth a Thousand Gold) written by the famous physician Sun Simiao (581-682). In the two chapters titled “Perfect Proficiency of a Great Doctor” and “Practising and Conducts of a Great Doctor”, expresses standards for traditional Chinese medical ethics very similar to those of Hippocrates.

In the Western tradition, the famous quotation, “Life is short, art is long” actually was originally spoken by Hippocrates as a commentary only on the healing arts, not other artistic pursuits. This course illuminates the long reach these principles of our medical past have on our present. It also contrasts these with modern medical practice which often sadly does not approximate the spirit of our ancestors.

In the ensuing passages you will read the Oath of Medical Ethics first articulated by Hippocrates in his lifetime between 460 and 377 B.C. It is worthwhile to compare the views of this ancient Greek doctor with those of the present day. You will also read The Hippocratic Oath – Modern Version, written in 1964 by Louis Lasagna, Academic Dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University, and used in many medical schools today. Please compare and contrast Dr. Lasagna’s version of medical ethics with that of the ancients – a bit watered down, wouldn’t you say?

Following that you will read A Historical Overview of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ancient Chinese Medical Ethics written by Cai Jingfeng of The China Institute for History of Medicine and Medical Literature at the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Beijing. This text summarizes the thoughts on medical ethics of both Confucius and Sun Simiao. It is worthwhile to compare the views of these ancient Greek and Chinese thinkers.

Finally, offered for your consideration is an interesting essay written by the New Zealander Keith Blayney on The Caduceus vs. the Staff of Asclepius (Asklepian). This provides historical insight into two different symbols of Western medicine, what these symbols truly represent, and the attendant shift in medical ethics brought about by the adoption of a more mercantile view of the healing arts.

Today we think of the Nazi Dr. Mengele as being the nadir of medical ethics, someone who would perform torturous experiments on unwilling patients. However, have the modern medical

**Take the Test**

professions really been practicing with a significantly higher standard of ethics than Dr. Mengele? This statement is not intended as hyperbole. Consider the following breaches in modern medical ethics and their costs to humanity:

- Sixty million (60,000,000) Chinese girls are missing from the general mainland Chinese population because of female infanticide made possible by medical procedures.
- Fully 20% of all children under 21 in mainland China have been infected with Hepatitis B because of reuse of unsterile hypodermic needles.
- Twenty thousand (20,000) Americans die each year from nosocomial infections picked up in hospitals. Only 40-50% of M.D.s wash their hands between patients.
- Ionizing radiation from medical imaging (X-rays, CT Scans) has been documented by Dr. John Gofman, M.D. to be the essential co-factor in 50% of all deaths from cancer and 60% of all deaths from heart disease in the U.S.A. in the 20th century. In 2002 there were 553,251 deaths from cancer – half of which may be attributable directly to ionizing radiation. In 2001 there were 725,192 deaths from heart disease – 435,115 of which may be attributable directly to ionizing radiation.
- A 1998 study by California researcher Richard Ko, Pharm.D., Ph.D. for the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) of Chinese patent herbal remedies imported into the U.S. offers some disturbing news. The report reveals that of 260 traditional Chinese patent medicines tested, 32% contained unlabeled and potentially harmful ingredients. Twenty-four of these remedies tested with high levels of lead; 36 contained unacceptable levels of arsenic; 35 were contaminated with the poisonous heavy metal mercury; and 17 contained unlisted pharmaceutical drugs. Is this ethical manufacturing, labeling, and prescribing?
- Shocking statistical evidence is cited by Gary Null PhD, Caroly Dean MD ND, Martin Feldman MD, Debora Rasio MD and Dorothy Smith PhD in their recent paper *Death by Medicine* - October 2003, released by the Nutrition Institute of America. "A definitive review and close reading of medical peer-review journals, and government health statistics shows that American medicine frequently causes more harm than good. The number of people having in-hospital, adverse drug reactions (ADR) to prescribed medicine is 2.2 million. Dr. Richard Besser, of the CDC, in 1995, said the number of unnecessary antibiotics prescribed annually for viral infections was 20 million. Dr. Besser, in 2003, now refers to tens of millions of unnecessary antibiotics. The number of unnecessary medical and surgical procedures performed annually is 7.5 million. The number of people exposed to unnecessary hospitalization annually is 8.9 million. The total number of iatrogenic deaths shown in the following table is 783,936. It is evident that the American medical system is the leading cause of death and injury in the United States. The 2001 heart disease annual death rate is 699,697; the annual cancer death rate, 553,251.

Health Care expenditures in the US have reached 14% of the Gross National Product and a staggering \$1.6 trillion in 2003. No wonder, one might be tempted to say. With such an appalling record of efficacy and such an unbelievable death rate for the treatments routinely administered, the current medical system can only be said to be in great need of deep reform.

Please consider such points when reading the following essays.

## Hippocratic Oath -- Classical Version

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I swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will fulfill according to my ability and judgment this oath and this covenant:

To hold him who has taught me this art as equal to my parents and to live my life in partnership with him, and if he is in need of money to give him a share of mine, and to regard his offspring as equal to my brothers in male lineage and to teach them this art - if they desire to learn it - without fee and covenant; to give a share of precepts and oral instruction and all the other learning to my sons and to the sons of him who has instructed me and to pupils who have signed the covenant and have taken an oath according to the medical law, but no one else.

I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm and injustice.

I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy. In purity and holiness I will guard my life and my art.

I will not use the knife, not even on sufferers from stone, but will withdraw in favor of such men as are engaged in this work.

Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick, remaining free of all intentional injustice, of all mischief and in particular of sexual relations with both female and male persons, be they free or slaves.

What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep to myself, holding such things shameful to be spoken about.

If I fulfill this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honored with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot.

*Translation from the Greek by Ludwig Edelstein. From The Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation, and Interpretation, by Ludwig Edelstein. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943.*

## Hippocratic Oath—Modern Version

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I swear to fulfill, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant:

I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.

I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures [that] are required, avoiding those twin traps of over treatment and therapeutic nihilism.

I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.

I will not be ashamed to say "I know not," nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery.

I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know. Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. If it is given me to save a life, all thanks. But it may also be within my power to take a life; this awesome responsibility must be faced with great humbleness and awareness of my own frailty. Above all, I must not play at God.

I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick.

I will prevent disease whenever I can, for prevention is preferable to cure.

I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.

If I do not violate this oath, may I enjoy life and art, respected while I live and remembered with affection thereafter. May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of healing those who seek my help.

*Written in 1964 by Louis Lasagna, Academic Dean of the School of Medicine at Tufts University, and used in many medical schools today.*

# A Historical Overview of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ancient Chinese Medical Ethics

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Cai Jingfeng

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has a time-honored history of several thousand years. It is the sum of knowledge gained by all the nationalities of our country in fighting disease and maintaining good health in the course of a considerably long historical period. As pointed out by the first theoretical medical classic, the Internal Classic of Yellow Emperor, the human body is built upon two opposing aspects, the yin and the yang, which are interdependent and interrelated. TCM aims at maintaining the harmonious relationship between these two aspects so as to achieve physical health and longevity. In a chapter of the above-mentioned classic, it is stated that “when one masters the mystery of the yin-yang principle, one can even enjoy a life as long as nature itself” [21]. The lofty goal of TCM is thus matched and in line with what the W HO defines for “health” in 1948 as “a state of optimum physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity”.

TCM, being one of the world's oldest medical systems with remote antiquity and opulent contents, has made brilliant achievements and contributed significantly to the health of the Chinese people and the whole world in the course of its historical development. It features a series of theoretical systems and practical experience.

Under special natural conditions, our ancestors gradually accumulated some primitive medical experience through continuous practice. Early in the New Stone Age, they learned how to treat disease with stone tools and this eventually led to the invention of acupuncture therapy. Our ancestors discovered, through the production process, that movements of the body and extremities are capable of conquering fatigue and exhaustion, and even curing some diseases. Furthermore, this greatly promoted the condition of the body. Such activity, on the other hand, led to the invention of the art of Dao Yin, or what are known today as Qigong (breathing exercises) and Tai Ji Quan (shadow boxing).

The vast territory and wide diversity of natural conditions bestows our motherland with rich resources of materia medica, including herbal plants, animals and minerals. As early as the start of the agricultural period, our ancestors had already gathered rich experience in the application of herbal drugs. Early developed civilization ultimately led to the making of wine and the improvement of food-cooking techniques, including dietotherapy which, in turn, was the foundation of the invention of decoction treatment, a specialized compound herbal remedy characterized by the combination of multiple herbal drugs compounded together to produce its therapeutic effect. This is one of the important features of TCM.

For the time being, we can only present the most important achievements and characteristics of TCM from our rich treasure house.

## **A Unique System of Medical Theory**

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Compiled in around the fifth century BC, the first monograph of medical theory of TCM now extant, the Internal Classic of the Yellow Emperor, laid the foundations for TCM theory.

Making use of the archaic philosophical thinking of ancient China, the nucleus of this medical theory is made up of the yin-yang and “five phases” principles, which explains quite uniquely physiology, pathology and etiology, guides the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease, and provides the, criteria for the application of drugs. The theory of the yin-yang principle holds that the internal viscera, both functional and corporeal, are of the counter-reacted aspects of the yin and yang which are interdependent, inter-supporting and inter-consuming and in a harmonious state. Loss of this harmony would result in the occurrence of disease. The goal of treatment aims at restoring such harmony to the body.

The five-phases theory, somewhat similar to the humourism theory, is made up of five elements, wood, fire, earth, metal and water. There are inter-promoting, counteracting and harmonious relationships between them. The visceral phenomena, physiology and pathology of the body can be well explained by the harmony or disharmony of the five phases.

TCM maintains that the causes of all diseases can be grouped into three categories: the exogenous, endogenous, and the intermediate (miscellaneous) causes. An endogenous cause consists of over stimulation of emotion, including joy, anger, melancholy, fear, fright, meditation and grief. Exogenous causes consist of unseasonal changes of climatic factors, such as evil wind, cold, summer heat, dampness, dryness and fire, while the intermediate cause refers to burns, frostbite, bites from snakes, insects and other animals, injuries by metals and, last but not least, irregular and inadequate or intemperate food eating and drinking habits, as well as sexual activities.

TCM holds that disease is a state, under the influence of etiological factors, in which the body loses its harmonious relationship with the environment and within the body itself. Based on the symptoms and the underlying relationship between the body and the disease, TCM applies the “eight key principles” for judging the conditions, i.e. for diagnosis, namely, surface and interior, cold and hot, sthenia and asthenia and yin and yang. The last two comprise the general key-principle, while the first two refer to the site of disease. Cold and hot refer to the nature of the disease, while sthenia and asthenia refer to the severity of disease evils and the condition of physical resistance, respectively.

There are also four kinds of diagnostic method in TCM, namely, inspection, inquiry, auscultation and olfaction and palpation; of these, palpation, or feeling of the pulse and inspection of the tongue, are the most important ones, with distinctive characteristics. Nevertheless, a final and accurate diagnosis can only be reached by an overall analysis and a comprehensive judgment combined. None of them alone can give a correct diagnosis.

Combining, or holistic treatment, is generally adopted in TCM. It is emphasized that the patient's body should be viewed as an organic whole rather than individual parts functioning separately during the course of treatment. Emphasis in TCM is not laid on the disease itself, but rather the patient is considered as an organic whole and integral part of nature and treatment measures

should be varied according to differences in the individual patient's inhabited location and seasons, in order that the balance and harmony of the bodily functions can be restored. This is what we call “treatment on the basis of differential diagnosis of symptoms and signs (known in TCM terms as Zheng)”. As to the concrete treatment measures, there is a wide variety. A few might be mentioned here, namely dietotherapy, drug therapy, acupuncture and moxibustion, massage, breathing exercises, and spiritual therapy, etc. The first choice of these is dietetic therapy due to its convenience, easy mastering, economical and practical application, inter alia, lack of side effects. Then comes acupuncture and moxibustion. Drug therapy is to be applied in cases where these measures fail or prove ineffective. However, TCM holds that prevention should be put first, just as the Internal Classic of Yellow Emperor states it: “A superb physician 'treats' before the ailment occurs”, which laid down the precious and active prophylactic conception in TCM.

## Achievements in Clinical Practice

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TCM, being one of the integral parts of Chinese ancient culture as a whole, always stood at the forefront of the world's medical domain in ancient history.

Sphygmology in TCM is the earliest in the world's medical history. Early in the Jin Dynasty (third century AD), Wang Shuhe's Classics of Sphygmology mentioned that the Cunkou (the site at the wrist where the radial artery can be felt pulsating) is the place for taking the pulse. At that time, 24 different kinds of pulse could be distinguished:

<i>fu</i> (floating),	<i>xian</i> (string tight),	<i>wei</i> (faint),	<i>san</i> (scattered),
<i>kou</i> (hollow),	<i>jin</i> (tense),	<i>se</i> (sluggish or	<i>huan</i> (moderate),
<i>hong</i> (full),	<i>chen</i> (deep),	hesitant),	<i>chi</i> (slow),
<i>hua</i> (smooth),	<i>fu</i> (hidden),	<i>xi</i> (minute),	<i>jie</i> (slow with irregular
<i>su</i> (rapid),	<i>ge</i> (hard and hollow),	<i>ruan</i> (soft),	intervals),
<i>cu</i> (running),	<i>shi</i> (forceful),	<i>ruo</i> (weak),	<i>dai</i> (intermittent) and
		<i>xu</i> (feeble),	<i>dong</i> (tremulous).

In fact, these pulses touch subjects concerning heart rhythm, rate, elasticity of the artery, position of the vessels, the flowing condition of circulating blood (hemorrhology), viscosity of blood and its rheological characteristics. By in depth exploration of knowledge about the pulse, TCM is able to judge the condition and resistance of the patient, the severity of the ailment and the condition of the internal viscera. Thus, it affords rather accurate and reliable information for correct diagnosis. Once the compilation of the Classics of Sphygmology was completed, it spread into the ancient Tibet region between the seventh and eight centuries AD [1]. Ultimately, passing through many places. This classic was introduced into the Arabian countries via ancient India. The famous Avicena's Canon of Medicin [3] mentioned more than 40 kinds of pulse in which some 20 kinds are believed to be cited from the same classic work of Wang Shuhe.

On the recognition and treatment of diseases, again, TCM made dramatic achievements. Early in the eleventh century BC, the oracle of tortoise shell or animal bones mentioned diseases of the head, the ear, the eyes and the nose. Dental caries and intestinal parasites were also recorded, which showed undoubtedly that our ancestors recognized such diseases at that early stage. One



of the prominent achievements in TCM is the recognition and treatment of infectious disease which were termed “seasonal febrile disease” or simply “febrile disease”. In the second century AD, the distinguished physician of the Eastern Han Dynasty, Zhang Zhongjing compiled a famous medical classic titled *On Febrile Diseases and Miscellaneous Diseases*, which laid down the compact and rigorous rules and, in addition, recipes for therapeutic compounds for the treatment of infectious disease, of which some are still effective and applicable today with satisfactory results. For instance, a decoction known as “White Tiger Decoction” (composed of gypsum fibrosum, rhizoma anemarrhenae, radix glycyrrhizae, semen oryzae nonagglutinosa) for B-encephalitis, decoction of rhei and paeonia for acute appendicitis, decoction of ephedra, gypsum, Glycyrrhiza and almond for acute pneumonia, decoction of Artemisia for acute viral hepatitis, etc.

Living around 281-341 AD, the well-known physician and alchemist of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, Ge Hong, made prominent contributions to the knowledge of infectious disease. In his famous medical book entitled *Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergency Treatment*, he mentioned a kind of sand flea. According to his description concerning the symptoms and course of this disease, he was referring to what we call tsutsugamushi today. In the same work, he also pointed out a kind of acute infectious disease manifesting skin eruption, pustules and pigment-free scars or pit formations. This, again, is believed to be the earliest record of smallpox in the world's medical history.

For the treatment of acute infectious diseases, Ge Hong proposed some valuable opinions and concrete methods. In treating hydrophobia (rabies), he suggested the application of the brain tissue of the same rabid dog that had bitten the patient on the patient's wounds as treatment. This method, based on the archaic concept of “like cures like” or “poison attacked by poison”, might be considered as the beginning or birth of the primitive concept of immunity. Moreover, such a concept was so highly developed that it eventually led to the invention of variolation with a humanpox vaccine and is the predecessor of the cowpox vaccination. According to historical records, in no later than the sixteenth century, our ancestor began to inoculate the humanpox vaccine for the prevention of smallpox. It should be emphasized that the virus is attenuated by passing through several generations of inoculation in the human body, and yet the immunity of the virus is still preserved intact as a prophylaxis against smallpox. This measure is comparable, and quite similar in principle, to the preparation of attenuated viral vaccines in modern times. Medical documentation indicates that Jenner's invention of vaccination was enlightened by the variolation technique.

In TCM, another well-known physician of world renown is Hua Tuo. Living in the later Han Dynasty, Hua Tho invented Ma Fu powder, which was taken with wine as an anesthetic for performing surgical operations, including abdominal operations. Some researchers maintain that the powder might contain rhododendron molle (B 1) G. Don or Datura metel (L.). The prestige of Hua Tuo for the invention of anesthetics and the role they played may be understood by quoting what Lawall wrote in his “Four Thousand Years of Pharmacy”, published in the US in the 1920s: “Some of the Arabian authorities speak of a form of anesthesia by inhalation. This was probably derived from Chinese, for Hua Tuo, the Hippocrates of China, is said to have taught this practice and used for the purpose a combination of aconite, datura and herbal”.

Another distinguished contribution of TCM is the establishment of Tai Yi Shu (Imperial Academy of Medicine) which is believed to be the first of its kind in history, devoted exclusively to the teaching of medicine, in which some 300 faculties are divided into four departments: internal medicine for adults, pediatrics, massage and incantation. The institution embraces a system of academic professionals including doctors, assistants, practitioners and technicians. There is a very rigorous system of examination every month, season and year. Only those who pass the examinations may qualify for clinical practice. Of course, the Academy also includes a department for the training of students qualified in the identification, cultivation, preservation and processing of Chinese material medica. Turning to medical jurisprudence, a book entitled Washing Away the Wrong Cases (xi yuan lu), compiled by Song Ci of the Song Dynasty in 1247, described the examination of the corpse, identification and analysis of death caused by mechanical wounds, causes of poisoning and antitoxicity, and on-the-spot examination of criminal cases. This work is recognized by medical professionals as the first monograph on legal medicine. This monograph was introduced abroad and has been translated into various languages, including Korean, Japanese, Russian, English, German, French and Dutch and spread all over the world.

In the area of clinical medicine, the techniques for the treatment of foreign bodies in the esophagus and artificial respiration are noteworthy. For instance, Ge Hong advocated swallowing a bundle of *bulbus allii macrostemi* fibres for small foreign bodies in the esophagus, or a sophisticated technique of pushing rosary beads through the hock string remaining in the mouth cavity to treat children having accidentally swallowed fish-hooks into the esophagus. Meanwhile, Zhang Zhongjing recorded the method of artificial respiration for the emergent treatment of a suicide attempt by hanging. Moreover, there are records of enemas with bees honey or animal bile. Abdominal paracentesis was also mentioned in the fifth century BC.

## **Achievements of Acupuncture, Moxibustion and Chinese Pharmacology**

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TCM features the art of acupuncture and moxibustion, which originated in the New Stone Age with stone needles and knives as its predecessor. In the Bronze Age (sixteenth to eleventh century BC), our ancestors applied metal needles for treating disease. Through the manipulation of acupuncture and moxibustion, knowledge about vessels or channels gradually developed and became complete. Acupuncture and moxibustion, by adjusting the yin-yang principle of the body itself by means of a manoeuvre, could cure many kinds of disease, ranging from microbial infection to diseases of the nervous system and functional diseases, and are especially effective for relieving pain. Owing to its capacity to relieve pain, ancient medical workers applied acupuncture to suppress pain prior to minor operations. And this eventually resulted in the invention of acupuncture analgesia (acupuncture anesthesia). The art of acupuncture and moxibustion was spread abroad in the early period. In the East, Japan and Korea were the two countries that first came into contact with the Chinese art of acupuncture and moxibustion. Early in 562 AD, a Chinese scholar, Zhi Cong, took Illustrated Channel and Point Chart to Japan. Thereafter, the Japanese authorities stipulated that the Classic of Acupuncture and Moxibustion, the earliest work of its kind now extant, be a required course for medical study. In 1673, W. Rhijne, a physician of the East Dutch India Company, introduced acupuncture/moxibustion into France. Meanwhile, E. Kampfer, a German physician, introduced it

into Germany. The science of acupuncture/moxibustion flourished in Europe thereafter and made its contribution to the health of the people in all European countries.

Chinese pharmacology is another important contribution made by the Chinese people to the world's medical arsenal. The Shen Nong's Classics of Materia Medica, the earliest pharmacological work now existent, was written in around the second century AD. It recorded 365 kinds of materia medica. Although its classification of drugs is rather primitive and clumsy, it contains many highly effective remedies, among them herba ephedrae for asthmatic coughs, radix dichroae as an anti-malarial drug, rhizoma coptidis for dysentery, radix et rhizoma rhei as a cathartic agent and sargassum as an anti-goiter drug are the famous ones, which have been proven by modern scientific methods to be effective. Perhaps the most prominent and influential work in this field is the Compendium of Materia Medica, written in 1593 by Li Shizhen, which embraces 1892 kinds of herbal drugs divided into 16 categories: water, fire, earth, metal and stone, grass, cereal, vegetable, fruit, wood, utensil, worm, scale, shell, bird, beast and man. The classification applied by this work appears to be fairly advanced when compared with contemporary works in the same field. This naturalist work embraces achievements in biology, chemistry and other natural sciences, in addition to its classification. For example, Shizhen mentioned the phenomena of genetics, correlative variation and the adaptation of animals to their environment. He also mentioned the extraction of mercury from herba portulacae and gallic acid from galla chinensis. For the preparation of certain drugs, he adopted various ways in which distillation, evaporation, sublimation, precipitation, burning and efflorescence were applied. No wonder this work has drawn the attention of many scientists in foreign countries with ever-increasing enthusiasm. Domestically, this voluminous work has been republished and reprinted in some thirty editions so far, and it has been translated, partially or completely, into foreign languages including German, French, English, Latin, and Russian for Europe and Japanese and Korean in the East, the latter two appearing even earlier than the former. The most prominent evolutionist, Charles Darwin, cited some material, either directly or indirectly, from Li Shizhen's work. It is quite natural that Li Shizhen became one of the most prominent and well-known scientists in the history of ancient natural science in the world.

## Medical Ethics in Ancient China

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In tandem with the advent of medical activities in remote antiquity, ethical problems appeared, albeit in a very primitive form. Based on the economic infrastructure of the society, medical ethics is a particular social ideology reflecting the mutual relationship between different people and communities and maintained by the inner belief of medical workers, social opinion and medical professional tradition. During the middle stage of primitive society, when the professionalization of medical workers and the medical profession appeared, the idea of medical ethics began to take shape, which is, in fact, a historical category. As the main subject of medical ethics, the doctor adjusts the mutual relationship between himself and his patients, the society and doctors themselves constituting the main body of the domain of medical ethics.

China is a time-honored civilization with several thousand years of history of medicine; thus it follows that it also has a long history of medical ethics. However, the ethical knowledge in the medical world at this early stage was by no means complete or systematic, but rather fragmented and trivial. During the Zhou Dynasty 3000 years ago, doctors were divided into different groups according to their responsibility, namely, *ji yi* (doctors for curing internal disease) *yan yi* (doctors

for external disorders), *shou yi* (veterinary doctors), and *shi yi* (dietetic doctors). To determine their salary, the various doctors had to undergo examinations at the end of each year, judged in terms of the effectiveness of their treatments. The reward system for these examinations was: full salary for a 100% cure rate, and decreased salary based on the percentage of treatment failure. Thus, doctors were urged to improve their medical skill in order to achieve better compensation for their profession.

As is generally known, Confucianism, the ruling and guiding philosophical ideology of Chinese feudal society for over 2000 years, established by the great educationalist, thinker and philosopher, Confucius, was also the guiding principle of medical ethics in ancient China. The core of Confucian thinking is “benevolence” or “love and kindheartedness”, “humanity”, maintaining that “those who are kindhearted or benevolent love the people”. In other words, all people should love one another, not alone doctors their patients. As a motto for doctors, Confucianists advocate that “medicine is a benevolent art” or, as a technical art for saving life and curing disease, doctors should have a kind heart. Confucius also pointed out that he who does not have perseverance is not qualified to become a doctor. These are the minimum qualifications for a doctor. In summary, this benevolent art, as the core of Confucian medical ethics, embodies the spirit of humanity and reflects the social responsibility of medicine and the characteristics of the medical profession.

The Internal Classic of Yellow Emperor, the earliest medical classic now extant and written about 2500 years ago, instructs doctors to focus their attention, in addition to their skill, primarily on the prevention of disease, instead of focusing on treatment after the onset of disease. He who is conversant with the prevention of disease is a “superior worker” in the medical province. It also states as a prerequisite that a doctor should be erudite, with extensive knowledge regarding “astronomy, geography and worldly affairs”. Only those with such immense erudition and great originality can serve their patients well and combat and conquer disease.

About half a century after the advent of the Christian era, Buddhism was introduced into China. This religion exerted certain influences on medical morality in our country. The concept of samsara, or transmigration due to causality and retribution, advises people to do only good deeds in this world, to their credit in the next, meaning that a doctor could have a magnificent and glorious next-life. Naturally, the medical profession is an ideal profession to satisfy such a demand. On the basis of the old ethical tradition, this new idea helped to shape a primitive standard for medical ethics between the third and fifth centuries AD, including three aspects: careful examination and consideration when dealing with disease, diligent manner when dealing with medical art and careful and appropriate administration when prescribing a recipe or drugs.

The seventh century saw the maturity of medical ethics in ancient China, embodied in two special chapters regarding the requirements for a doctor in the book *Qianjinfang* (Prescriptions worth a Thousand Gold) written by the famous physician Sun Simiao (581-682). The titles of the two chapters are “Perfect Proficiency of a Great Doctor” and “Practicing and Conducts of a Great Doctor”, respectively. These formulated the standards for ancient traditional medical ethics, including:

1. Be erudite in medical knowledge and diligent in learning: all doctors should progress constantly and keep improving their skill of the medical art and technical know-how.

2. Be sympathetic to patients and serve them wholeheartedly. Serve all patients equally, regardless of their age, sex, wealth, rank, nationality and intelligence. Treat all patients as if they were your own relatives and their illness as if it were your own suffering. Meet the patient at any time or any place when a doctor's help is needed, notwithstanding any danger.
3. Be painstakingly careful in diagnosing a disease. Think carefully when prescribing treatment. Be objective and avoid any personal considerations of responsibility or being swayed by personal feelings.
4. Be solemn in one's conduct without making any personal demands: no humor, demands for money, or sexual issues should be raised.
5. Be respectful to one's tutor and profession. Avoid any arrogance and rashness. Do not criticize other doctors' skill or conduct in the presence of a patient. Do not be arrogant about one's own achievement. Learn from other doctors to ensure one's own progress, only charlatans are jealous of other doctor's superb skills.

This is the ancient Chinese manifesto on medical ethics, embracing almost all aspects of present day medical morality, and becoming the standard motto for Chinese traditional doctors to follow. Even so, the author summarizing this glorious chapter on medical morality had his own limitations, personal and historical. He was a devotee of Buddhism, so much so that he advised a “standard” or model doctor not to apply drugs of animal origin in order to observe the Buddhist taboo regarding the taking of life, by saying that “it is far from saving (patients’) life by killing (animals’) lives, because all animals, man and domestic animals, have pity on their own lives”. He even emphasized that, when using snake drugs, one must purchase those dead ones sold in the market, and he was even very reluctant to use hens' eggs for medicinal purposes, because the egg, in his opinion, was already a potent life. Ironically enough, in Sun's text mentioned above, he applied a lot of animal drugs in his thousands of recipes, indicating that the Confucian idea of whole-heartedness is far more important than and superior to Buddhist taboos, a pragmatic concept to meet the demands of patients' practical needs.

In summary, ancient Chinese medical ethics was standardized in the seventh century and further developed to its complete form thereafter. Though it is far later than the Hippocratic oath, Sun's chapter on medical morality may be boasted as the earliest complete text of morality in China.

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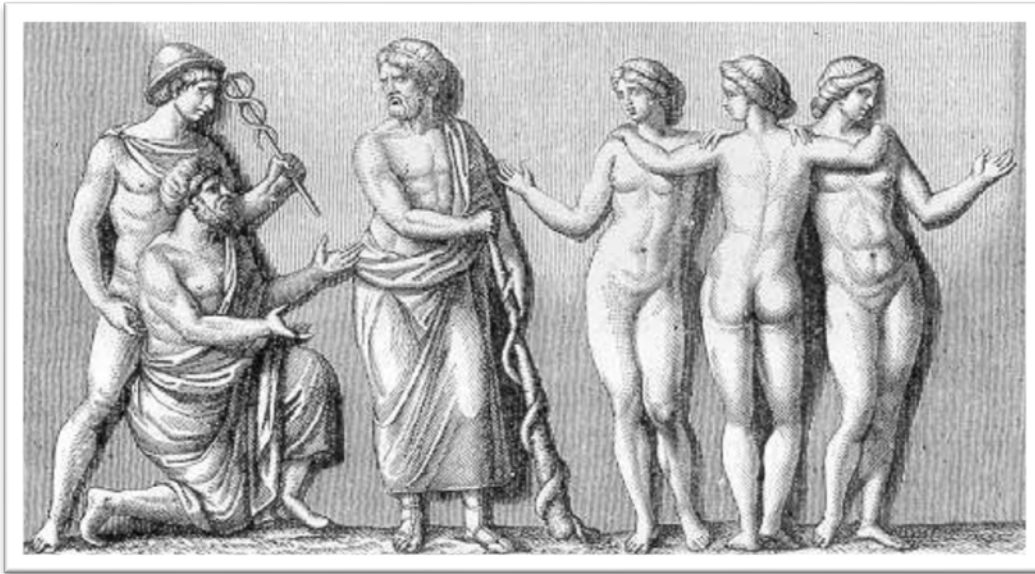
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## The Caduceus vs the Staff of Asclepius (Asklepian)

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Keith Blayney Sept 2002, revised Oct 2005



Mercury (Hermes) & merchant approach disapproving Asclepius (Physician) and the naked Graces (Medicine, Hygieia and Panacea) [Engraved from an original in the then Museum Pio Clemens in Rome. *Galerie Mythologique, Recueil de Monuments* by Aubin Louis Millin, Paris 1811.]

- Asclepius dealt with patients - merchants make deals with clients
- Asclepius is linked with a constellation of idealistic medical ideas
- Hermes is linked with hermetic occultism
- Mercury is identified with mercantile mercenary views

## The Caduceus of Mercury (Roman) and the Karykeion of Hermes (Greek)

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Many “medical” organisations use a symbol of a short rod entwined by two snakes and topped by a pair of wings, which is actually the caduceus or magic wand of the Greek god Hermes (Roman Mercury), messenger of the gods, inventor of (magical) incantations, conductor of the dead and protector of merchants and thieves. It is derived from the Greek karykeion = “herald’s staff”, itself based on the word “eruko” meaning restrain, control.

It is interesting to see that most of organizations using this symbol are generally either commercial or military (or American). New Zealand examples include drug and pharmaceutical companies. A study by Friedlander confirms this impression.



The link between the caduceus of Hermes (Mercury) and medicine seems to have arisen by the

[Take the Test](#)

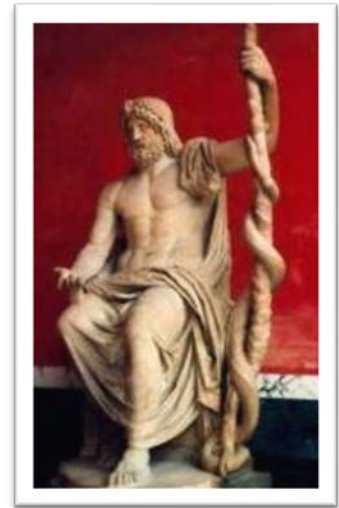
seventh century A.D., when Hermes had come to be linked with alchemy. Alchemists were referred to as the sons of Hermes, as Hermetists or Hermeticists and as “practitioners of the hermetic arts”. There are clear occult associations with the caduceus.

The caduceus was the magic staff of Hermes (Mercury), the god of commerce, eloquence, invention, travel and theft, and so was a symbol of heralds and commerce, not medicine. The words caduity & caducous imply temporality, perishableness and senility, while the medical profession espouses renewal, vitality and health.

## **The Staff of Asclepius (Æsclepius, Asklepios)** [Personification of Medical or healing Art and its ideals]

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Professional and patient-centered organizations (such as the NZMA, in fact most medical Associations around the world including the World Health Organization) use the “correct” and traditional symbol of medicine, the staff of Asclepius with a single serpent encircling a staff, classically a rough -hewn knotty tree limb. Asclepius (an ancient Greek physician deified as the god of medicine) is traditionally depicted as a bearded man wearing a robe that leaves his chest uncovered and holding a staff with his sacred single serpent coiled around it, (example right) symbolizing renewal of youth as the serpent casts off its skin. The single serpent staff also appears on a Sumerian vase of c. 2000 B.C. representing the healing god Ningishita, the prototype of the Greek Asklepios. However, there is a more practical origin postulated which makes sense [See *Dracunculus medinensis*].



## **Asclepius and His Staff**

### **Who was Asclepius?**

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Asclepius was most probably a skilled physician who practised in Greece around 1200BC (and described in Homer's Iliad). Eventually through myth and legend he came to be worshipped as Asclepius, the (Greek) god of Healing.



Medical schools developed, which were usually connected to temples or shrines called Asclepiions (Asclepieia) dedicated to Asclepius. The Asclepion became very important in Greek society. Patients believed they could be cured by sleeping in them. They would visit, offering gifts and sacrifices to the god, and be treated by priest healers (called the Asclepiadae). The worship of Asclepius spread to Rome and continued as late as the sixth century.

The Asclepiadae were a large order of priest physicians who controlled the sacred secrets of healing, which were passed from father to son. Harmless Aesculapian snakes were kept in the combination hospital-temples built by

the ancient Greeks and, later, by the Romans in honor of the god. The snakes are found not only in their original range of southern Europe, but also in the various places in Germany and Austria where Roman temples had been established. Escaped snakes survived and flourished.

Smooth, glossy, and slender, the snake has a uniformly brown back with a streak of darker color behind the eyes. The snake's belly is yellowish or whitish and has ridged scales that catch easily on rough surfaces, making it especially adapted for climbing trees. Scientific classification: The Aesculapian snake belongs to the family Colubridae. It is classified as *Elaphe longissima*.

## The Myth

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Asclepius is the god of Healing. He is the son of Apollo and the nymph, Coronis. While pregnant with Asclepius, Coronis secretly took a second, mortal lover. When Apollo found out, he sent Artemis to kill her. While burning on the funeral pyre, Apollo felt pity and rescued the unborn child from the corpse. Asclepius was taught about medicine and healing by the wise centaur, Cheiron, and became so skilled in it that he succeeded in bringing one of his patients back from the dead. Zeus felt that the immortality of the Gods was threatened and killed the healer with a thunderbolt. At Apollo's request, Asclepius was placed among the stars as Ophiuchus, the serpent-bearer.

The children of Asclepius included his daughters Meditrina, Hygeia and Panacea who were symbols of medicine, hygiene and healing (literally, “all healing”) respectively. Two of the sons of Asclepius appeared in Homer's Iliad as physicians in the Greek army (Machaon and Podalirius).



Note that the classic Hippocratic Oath is sworn "by Apollo the physician, by Æsculapius, Hygeia, and Panacea..."

The probable medical origin of the single serpent around a rod: In ancient times infection by parasitic worms was common. The filarial worm *Dracunculus medinensis* aka “the fiery serpent”, aka “the dragon of Medina” aka “the guinea worm” crawled around the victim's body, just under the skin. Physicians treated this infection by cutting a slit in the patient's skin, just in front of the worm's path. As the worm crawled out the cut, the physician carefully wound the pest around a stick until the entire animal had been removed. It is believed that because this type of infection was so common, physicians advertised their services by displaying a sign with the worm on a stick.

## The Staff as a Medical Symbol

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From the early 16th century onwards, the staff of Asclepius and the caduceus of Hermes were widely used as printers' marks especially as frontispieces to pharmacopoeias in the 17th and 18th centuries. Over time the rod and serpent (the Asclepian staff) emerged as an independent symbol of medicine.



Despite the unequivocal claim of the staff of Asclepius to represent medicine (and healing), the caduceus, a rod with two entwined serpents topped by a pair of wings appears to be the more popular symbol of medicine in the United States, probably due to simple confusion between the caduceus and the staff of Asclepius, the true symbol of medicine. Many people use the word caduceus to mean both of these emblems.



## The Caduceus of Hermes

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The Greek Hermes found his analogue in Egypt as the ancient Wisdom god Thoth, as Taaut of the Phoenicians and in Rome as the god Mercury (all linked with a magic rod with twin snakes).

The mythical origin of his magic twin serpent caduceus is described in the story of Tiresias. Poulenc, in “Les Mamelles de Tiresias” (The Breasts of Tiresias) tells how Tiresias--the seer who was so unhelpful to Oepidus and Family- found two snakes copulating, and to separate them stuck his staff between them. Immediately he was turned into a woman, and remained so for seven years, until he was able to repeat his action, and change back to male. The transformative power in this story, strong enough to completely reverse even physical polarities of male and female, comes from the union of the two serpents, passed on by the wand. Tiresias' staff, complete with serpents, was later passed on to Hermes...

## Occult Hermetic Connection

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An occult description of the Caduceus of Hermes (Mercury) is that the serpents may represent positive and negative kundalini as it moves through the chakras and around the spine (the staff) to the head where it communicates with MIND by intellection, the domain of Mercury [wings].

## Caduceus Power Wand

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This wand is sold at occult, new age & witchcraft stores such as Abaxion with descriptions such as “Its central phallic rod represents the potentiality of the masculine, and is intimately surrounded by the writhing, woven shakti energies of two coupling serpents. The rod also represents the spine [sushumna] while the serpents conduct spiritual currents [pranas] along the ida and pingala channels in a double helix pattern from the chakra at the base of the spine up to the pineal gland”.

According to occultists, there are three principal nadis (Sanskrit for channel) in the human body. The sushumna (the spinal column through which the life-forces flow), by which means we enter and leave the body, the Ida (refreshment and stimulation of spirit), which is associated with the higher mind or manas and the

Pingala, (reddish-brown), associated with kama or the force of desire. (G. de Purucker “Man in Evolution” ch. 15 & 16; and “Fountain-Source of Occultism”, pp. 458-63).

## Hermetic

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There are few names to which more diverse persons and disciplines lay claim than the term “Hermetic”. Alchemists have applied the adjective “Hermetic” to their art, while magicians (not the entertaining type) attach the name to their ceremonies of evocation and invocation. Followers of Meister Eckhart, Raymond Lull, Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme, and most recently Valentin Tomberg are joined by academic scholars of esoterica, all of whom attach the word “Hermetic” to their activities.

The most abiding impact of Hermeticism on Western culture came about by way of the heterodox mystical, or occult, tradition.

Renaissance occultism, with its alchemy, astrology, ceremonial magic, and occult medicine, became saturated with the teachings of the Hermetic books. This content has remained a permanent part of the occult transmissions of the West, and, along with Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, represents the foundation of all the major Western occult currents. Hermetic elements are demonstrably present in the Rosicrucian and Theosophical movements.



## The Caduceus in Pseudo-Science

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There are amazing claims that a Cadeuceus Power Wand has zero impedance and infinite resonance!

## The Caduceus as a Medical Symbol

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The link between Hermes and his caduceus and medicine seems to have arisen by Hermes links with alchemy. Alchemists were referred to as the sons of Hermes, as Hermetists or Hermeticists and as “practitioners of the hermetic arts”. By the end of the sixteenth century, the study of alchemy included not only medicine and pharmaceuticals but chemistry, mining and metallurgy. Despite learned opinion that it is the single snake staff of Asclepius that is the proper symbol of medicine, many medical groups have adopted the twin serpent caduceus of Hermes or Mercury as a medical symbol during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Like the staff of Asclepius, the caduceus became associated with medicine through its use as a printer’s mark, as printers saw themselves as messengers of the printed word and diffusers of knowledge (hence the choice of the symbol of the messenger of the ancient gods). A major reason for the current popularity of the caduceus as a medical symbol was its ill-informed [03] official adoption as the *insignia* for the Medical Department of the United States Army in 1902.

## Friedlander

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Take the Test

Friedlander surveyed 242 logos or insignias of American organizations relating to health or medicine in which the caduceus or staff of Asclepius formed an integral part dating from the late 1970s to early 1980s. He found that professional associations were more likely to use the staff of Asclepius (62%) while commercial organizations were more likely to use the caduceus (76%). The exception is for hospitals, where only 37% used a staff of Asclepius versus 63% for the caduceus [but remember that US hospitals are usually commercial ventures]. Friedlander notes that while the prevalent use of the caduceus for the commercial aspects of medicine might be seen as “more -or-less appropriate”, he thinks the reason is that professional associations are more likely to have a real understanding of the two symbols, whereas commercial organizations are more likely to be concerned with the visual impact a symbol will have in selling their products. “Friedlander, Walter J. *The Golden Wand of Medicine: A History of the Caduceus Symbol in Medicine.*” New York, Greenwood, 1992

Further information on the two symbol confusion at:

- [01] Bruce Grainger “A Survey of Symbols of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine” and
- [02] Darren Nichols “Walk Among Gods -The Symbols of Medicine” and more recently,
- [03] Wilcox, Robert A and Whitham, Emma M “The Symbol of Modern Medicine: Why One Snake Is More Than Two” *Ann Intern Med.* 2003;138:673-677. [www.annals.org](http://www.annals.org)

## And to Add Some Biblical Confusion, We Have...

And the Lord said unto him [Moses], What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it. And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand and caught it and it became a rod in his hand. Exodus 4:2-4

And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten [by a serpent], when he looketh upon it, shall live. Numbers 21:8.

*The etching “The Brazen Serpent” (to the right) by Schnorr von Carolsfeld shows this as only one snake, suggesting he interpreted this as a medical rather than mystical or magical symbol.*



Apparently an Israelite cult subsequently formed worshipping Nehush'tan, the serpent Moses made (apparently twin snake images were inscribed on standards of the time) but the cult was eventually suppressed (over 600 years later) by King Hezekiah – “He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. 2 Kings 18:4

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up. John 3:14-15

Now just in case you thought you had it all sorted out about which was the “good” symbol.... nothing is that simple, take a look at this interesting painting of Adam & Eve.....



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