

For the health of the people—commemorating the 135th anniversary of the founding of the *Chinese Medical Journal*

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The year (2022) marks the 135th anniversary of the founding of the *Chinese Medical Journal*. Over the past 135 years, the journal has witnessed tremendous changes in the health conditions of the Chinese people, the important role of modern medical technology in improving health, reducing diseases, and extending the life span, and the continuous improvement in medical and healthcare services and social security systems.

The 135 years of the history of the *Chinese Medical Journal* can be divided into five stages. The first stage spans from 1887 (when the *China Medical Missionary Journal* [CMMJ] was first published) to March 1907 (when it was renamed the *China Medical Journal*). The second stage spans from 1907 to 1932 (when the *China Medical Journal* merged with the *National Medical Journal of China*). The third stage spans from 1932 to the end of 1951 (when the Editorial Board was relocated from Shanghai to Beijing). The fourth stage spans from 1952 to 1966 (when the journal was suspended). The fifth stage spans from 1973 to the present day.

Soon after its founding in October 1886, the Medical Missionary Association of China decided to publish a quarterly medical journal to help unite missionary physicians working at hospitals and dispensaries across China. The journal aimed to introduce knowledge of scientific medicine and a rational system of medical practice, and to publish the latest findings in diagnosis and treatment of diseases. The journal would also include items relating to the influence of climate on health and information encouraging the private practice of medicine for study and reference by missionary physicians in China.^[1] As can be seen from the early papers published in the journal, a series of serious infectious and parasitic diseases, such as smallpox, plague, cholera, leprosy, malaria, kala-azar, trachoma, schistosomiasis, hookworm,

filariasis and roundworm were the most common health concern for the general population, while puerperal fever, tetanus, scarlet fever and measles particularly affected women and children.^[2,3] Diseases caused by opium smoking and foot binding were also typical issues.^[4] The journal published experience in surgery, anesthesia, microscopy research, and other aspects,^[5] and encouraged scholars to pay attention to local surgical diagnosis and treatment,^[6] as well as traditional Chinese medicine knowledge in China.^[7]

One of the most important tasks of the journal is to introduce the latest advances in medical science and clinical diagnosis and treatment. The journal had a column, at first named “Therapeutic Notes” and later renamed “Progress of Medical Science” or “Medical and Surgical Progress.” The column introduced the latest achievements in major British and American medical journals, such as *BMJ*, *Lancet*, and *JAMA*. The application of anesthetics and disinfection and antiseptic techniques represented the most important advancements in the field of surgery in the late 19th century. Almost every issue of the journal introduced related advancements, such as a speech^[8] on the antiseptic treatment of wounds delivered by Joseph Lister at King’s College Hospital, the introduction of iodine^[9] and iodoform disinfection,^[10] abdominal surgery disinfection and antiseptic techniques,^[11] and others. A series of breakthroughs were also made in the prevention and control of infectious diseases. The journal included information on the etiology of infectious diseases and their classification,^[12] Laveran’s research on plasmodium,^[13] and the application of infectious disease prevention and clinical diagnostic techniques, such as the Widal test, serum therapy,^[14] and X-ray diagnosis.^[15] Additionally, the journal published the establishment and development of medical and health systems, such as life and health statistics and urban health.

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At the second stage, the sponsors of the journal proposed that the medical and scientific characteristics of the journal should be highlighted more. In 1907, the Editorial Board of the journal published an editorial and pointed out that the original intention of the founder of the CMMJ was to attach equal importance to spreading medicine and religion. However, CMMJ was in fact still a medical journal and was well acknowledged by international peers. With the rapid development of medical technology, missionary doctors who came to China generally realized that the journal should be changed to a scientific journal rather than a vehicle for missionary propaganda. Therefore, they decided to rename the CMMJ to the *China Medical Journal*.^[16] In fact, in order to follow the development of medical technology, missionary doctors did pay more attention to medical science and achieved certain results, for instance, Logan's research on subtropical parasitic diseases was well recognized by the international peers.^[17]

Another important event that occurred at the second stage was the prevention and control of a pneumonic plague in Northeast China during 1910 to 1911. The journal reported the International Plague Conference in great detail and published the speech delivered by Lien-teh Wu at the closing ceremony of the conference. Wu indicated that medical scientists had collected a lot of important information about the epidemic in the hope of providing it to the international medical community for further research and clarification of some issues that were still unclear at that time.^[18] Another major event during the stage was the founding of the Chinese Medical Association in 1915. Wu introduced the founding process of this association in the *China Medical Journal*. Wu said a large number of ambitious students returned to China upon completing their medical education in European and American countries, and took on the mission to prevent and treat diseases domestically together with their foreign peers who came to China. However, the progress in improving the health conditions of the nation was slow, partly due to the lack of proper professional organizations or cooperation among physicians across the country. However, the spread of the pneumonic plague in Northeast China from 1910 to 1911 led to more attention being paid to health affairs and disease control. In 1915, the Chinese Medical Association was established. As one of the leaders, Wu suggested that the Chinese Medical Association and the China Medical Missionary Association would combine their efforts to ensure that medical science benefited the Chinese people.^[19]

In the third stage (1932–1951), to adapt to the development of institutionalization of modern medicine in China, the Chinese Medical Association merged with the China Medical Missionary Association in 1932. Additionally, the English section of the *National Medical Journal of China* (NMJC) and the *China Medical Journal* were combined into the *Chinese Medical Journal*, further highlighting the dominant position of Chinese scholars. The Chinese name of the journal was “中华医学会英文杂志”, and its volumes continued the sequence of those of the CMMJ founded in 1887. The Chinese section of the NMJC merged with *The Tsinan Medical Review* and its volumes continued the sequence of those of the NMJC.^[20]

Leprosy is an infectious disease that seriously endangers public health in China in the 1930s. In 1932, the first national conference on the prevention and control of leprosy was held by the Chinese medical community.^[21] At this conference, the spread of leprosy and its multi-faceted effects on people's health, society, politics, and the economy, the government's measures on the prevention and treatment of leprosy, and the problems it faced were reviewed.^[22] Following a severe flood that occurred in central China in 1931, medical staff from Beijing, Jinan, Hankou, and other locations actively participated in post-disaster epidemic prevention tasks. These tasks included setting up quarantine hospitals, conducting disinfection and sterilization, and implementing cholera vaccinations, to prevent the spread of gastrointestinal infectious diseases.^[23]

After the outbreak of the January 28th Incident in 1932, the Editorial Board of the journal published an article condemning the damage caused by the Japanese invading army to medical institutions and schools in Shanghai. The Editorial Board encouraged the medical professionals to join in the battlefield rescue and to control the epidemic.^[24] At the beginning of the outbreak of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the journal continued its publication in Shanghai, Chengdu, and Washington D.C. to maintain academic continuity.^[25] Hengbi Zhu reviewed the difficulty of medical education in pursuing its development during this war. He pointed out that 11 medical schools (the Central University Medical School, Tung-chi University Medical School, Cheeloo University Medical School, Hsiang-Ya Medical School, the Chung Cheng Medical College, the Shanghai National Medical College, The Kiangsu Medical College, the Army Medical School, the Chekiang Provincial Medical School, the Medical College of the Peiping University, and the Shantung Provincial Medical School) were relocated to inland areas because of the invasion of the Japanese army. These medical schools were still striving to train medical students under the poor conditions of school buildings, faculty resources, and equipment.^[26] After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Editorial Board of the journal was relocated to Beijing in 1951.

In the fourth stage (1952–1966), since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country has witnessed a rapid development of medical and health undertakings and the gradual improvement of public health. In 1953, Naiquan Gong stated in an article that, within only a few years of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the national medical and health systems had been established. Furthermore, public health facilities had been gradually improved, healthcare security systems had been formed, training programs for medical professionals had been developed on a large scale, and environmental sanitation had been improved greatly. Remarkable achievements had also been made in the prevention and control of infectious diseases, hygiene of industrial and mining enterprises, and the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, among others.^[27] Chuankui Hu *et al* introduced the achievements made by China in the prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases after 1949.^[28] Huilan Zhong *et al* stated the value of the complement fixation test in the

diagnosis of schistosomiasis,^[29] and Zongchang Hou *et al* described the achievements made in the prevention and control of parasitic diseases.^[30] In 1957, Feifan Tang, Xiaolou Zhang, Yuantong Huang, and Keqian Wang published a study on the pathogen of trachoma.^[31] This study represented an important contribution made by Chinese medical scientists to the field of pathogen biology.

At the 10th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1959, Dequan Li^[32] introduced the achievements made by China in public health. Additionally, Kahti Lin, Yingkun Feng, and Cheng-Hsiang Hu *et al* described the research progress of obstetrics and gynecology,^[33] neuroscience,^[34] and pathology,^[35] respectively. In 1965, Yingkai Wu introduced a series of important results^[36] achieved in the field of surgery regarding the treatment of severe burns, replanting of severed fingers, integration of traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine, cardiovascular surgery, and others. Futang Chu introduced the achievements made in the prevention of infectious diseases in children.^[37] Qi He summarized the experience gained in epidemiological research and the eradication of malaria.^[38] With regard to research on combined traditional Chinese and Western medicine, Ankun Kuang made remarkable achievements in research on the pharmacological mechanism of the traditional Chinese medicine *Liuwei Dihuang* decoction.^[39]

Improving rural health services constitutes the basis for improving the overall health status of the public. With social and economic development, the Chinese government have focused on how to improve health work in rural areas. In 1965, the Editorial Board of the journal published an editorial that emphasized the need for the medical community to pay more attention to health conditions of farmers.^[40] Zikuan Zhang introduced the measures taken by China to gradually improve the medical service level in rural areas. These measures included organizing the Chinese medical community to prevent and control schistosomiasis, dispatching traveling dispensaries to diagnose and treat diseases for farmers, and training rural healthcare workers.^[41] In 1966, the journal was renamed *China's Medicine* and continued its publication, but it was suspended.

In the fifth stage (from 1973 when the journal was republished to the present day), the journal gradually resumed normal publication and its international influence is growing. In 1972, the journal resumed its publication with the approval of the State Council of the People's Republic of China with the efforts of the medical community. After republication of the journal in 1973, it published a series of papers that reflected the progress of contemporary medical research, such as replanting of amputated limbs,^[42] the treatment of acute abdominal conditions through a combination of traditional Chinese and Western medicine,^[43] and acupuncture and anesthesia.^[44] Following a reform and opening-up, the journal was restored from a bimonthly to monthly publication in 1979. Journal publication expanded to semi-monthly in 2005 to meet the needs for the development of medical and health services in China.

With the transformation of the disease spectrum, infectious and parasitic diseases that previously endangered public health have been effectively controlled. Linhua Tang summarized the major achievements made by China in malaria control over the past 50 years. With the participation of the primary health care networks and the community, large-scale malaria control has been conducted and has been remarkably successful. By the end of 1998, there were 31,300 malaria cases in China, with an incidence rate of 0.25/10,000, which showed a decrease of 99% compared with that in 1950.^[45] Cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, malignant tumors, and mental illness have become major disease burdens. To reduce the harm of chronic diseases, Chinese medical scientists have carried out successful research on the risk factors for chronic diseases and the discovery of traditional medicine for cancer treatment. Xinzhi Weng reported a national epidemiological survey on smoking,^[46] and Xiaojun Huang reviewed investigation by Chinese scholars on the study of traditional Chinese medicine for leukemia treatment and the experience that they gained.^[47] Additionally, Longde Wang introduced the initial establishment of a stroke management model in China.^[48] With regard to the prevention and control of chronic infectious diseases, Hong Shang introduced the experience gained by China in the prevention and control of acquired immune deficiency syndrome over the past 30 years.^[49] Yihua Zhou described the progress of eradicating chronic hepatitis B in children by preventing mother-child transmission of this disease.^[50]

Since the beginning of the 21st century, emerging infectious diseases have become a major risk, endangering public health. After the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome in 2003, our medical community made a swift response. Nanshan Zhong *et al* compiled an expert consensus on the management of severe acute respiratory syndrome.^[51] Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019, medical scientists have performed in-depth research on the clinical characteristics of patients, the time and risk factors of viral clearance, developed experts' consensus, and have made important progress.^[52-54]

Throughout the 135-year history of the *Chinese Medical Journal*, the journal has not only witnessed tremendous changes in the health status of the Chinese people, but has also shown important contributions made by Chinese medical scientists in studying disease and health issues. With reflection on the past, the development of modern medicine in China has evolved, from the introduction of Western medicine to the present day, when China also has assumed its responsibility for the global health cause and played a vital role in solving global health concerns. History has proven that China can creatively respond to increasing health challenges with the aid of leading medical and health knowledge. Additionally, China can propose relevant "Chinese solutions" for effectively responding to global health challenges on the basis of achieving the goal of the Healthy China initiative.

Conflicts of interest

None.

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