

# A Study of Shi Pei's Medical Ethics in "Yi Yi"

Heqing Lei, Xinjun Fu\*

School of Humanities and Management, Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine, Xianyang 712046, Shaanxi, China

\*Correspondence Author

**Abstract:** "Yiyi," one of the six types and seven volumes of "Linglan Chuji," is a treatise specifically discussing medical ethics, compiled by Shi Pei in the late Ming Dynasty, and is currently housed in the Cabinet Library of the National Archives of Japan. "Yiyi" is a specialized book with significant bibliographical and medical ethical value. This paper conducts a comprehensive study of its compilation background and the medical ethical thought it contains. The conclusion is that Shi Pei, in "Yiyi," extensively cited works and treatises on medical ethics by medical practitioners and scholars from successive generations before the late Ming Dynasty, as well as relevant thoughts from the three schools of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, especially Confucianism. This was integrated with his experience accumulated during his long-term medical practice, providing an important and detailed reference for later generations to systematically study medical ethics. The traditional medical ethics described by Shi Pei in "Yi Yi" can be summarized into three aspects: Excellent skills and professional dedication, meaning that superb medical skills and a dedicated heart for practicing medicine serve as the foundation of medical ethics. Physicians should thoroughly study medical theories, improve their medical skills, and be prudent in medical practice; only then can they fulfill the responsibilities of a physician. Self-rectification of one's own virtue, meaning that a physician's moral cultivation must be noble, and they must possess a heart of universal love and benevolence for the world, never forgetting that medicine is fundamentally a benevolent art. Warnings and admonitions. Shi Pei cited Daoist and Buddhist doctrines to warn and admonish physicians to always remember their original intention of saving lives and healing the wounded.

**Keywords:** Medical ethics, Shi Pei, Medical ethics philosophy, Citation, Medical ethical values.

## 1. Introduction

"Yi Yi" was compiled by medical practitioners Shi Pei in the late Ming Dynasty, and is one of the subsidiary works of "Linglan Chuji", completed during the Chongzhen period. It is a systematic treatise on medical ethics. Due to reasons such as war, both the First and Second Collections of the Linglan Collection were lost overseas. Later, the Huating Shi Yase Zhai Collection Edition, published in the late Chongzhen period of the Ming Dynasty, was relatively completely preserved in the National Archives of Japan Cabinet Library. Through the unremitting efforts of scholars such as Zheng Jinsheng, "Yi Yi" was included in the "Overseas Returned TCM Rare Ancient Books Series Volume 9" [1].

## 2. The Author and Writing Background of "Yi Yi"

"Yi Yi" was compiled by medical practitioners Shi Pei of the late Ming Dynasty. Shi Pei (1585–1661), with the courtesy name Peiran and pseudonyms Li Ze Jushi and Yi He Daoren, was the son of Shi Dajing, a bibliophile of the Ming Dynasty. A native of Huating (now Songjiang District, Shanghai), his studio name was Li Ze Caotang. He was a medical practitioners of the late Ming Dynasty who studied Confucianism and medicine from a young age and was a Gongsheng (tribute student). In the early years of the Tianqi reign, he was appointed Tongpan (assistant magistrate) of Lianzhou, Henan, and later transferred to Qinzhou as acting official. He once served as Tongzhi (prefectural magistrate) of Nankang Prefecture, holding the title of Fengzheng Daifu [2]. He was proficient in medicine, especially skilled in differential diagnosis, and adept at treating typhoid fever. He had close interactions with contemporary renowned Confucian physicians in Shanghai, Li Zhongzi and Qin Changyu [3]. The frontispiece of "Yi Yi" is marked with "Compiled by Shi Pei (courtesy name Peiran) of Huating Lizhe; Reviewed by Qin Changyu (courtesy name Jingming),

Guanyeshanren, and Li Zhongzi (courtesy name Shicai), Nian'e of the same society." Therefore, both of them participated in reviewing Shi's two books, "Yi Yi" and "Shuo Liao". "Zu Ji" (Ancestral Formulas), written by Shi Pei, is the earliest specialized work on "ancestral formulas" and "category formulas" in the field of traditional Chinese medicine formularies in China. He also compiled and wrote books such as "Jing Xue Zhi Zhang Tu" (Diagrams of Acupoints in the Palm), "Zang Fu Zhi Zhang Tu Shu" (Diagrams of Zang-Fu Organs in the Palm), "Yi Yi", and "Shuo Liao". He was well-versed in classical TCM texts and works by renowned masters, and also had a broad understanding of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The numerous citations in "Yi Yi" demonstrate the depth of his reading and the breadth of his knowledge.

Shi Pei was transferred to Qinzhou during the Chongzhen period to serve as a Tongpan (Assistant Prefect). He personally experienced the drastic historical changes at the end of the Ming Dynasty and deeply felt the hardships of people's lives amidst social unrest. His compiled work, "Yi Yi", was completed at the end of the Ming Dynasty during the Chongzhen period, a time when disasters and epidemics were frequent, and famines were incessant, coupled with peasant uprisings, which led to social turmoil and unrest. For example, according to the 'Treatise on the Five Elements' in the 'History of Ming': "In the second year of Chongzhen, Shanxi and Shaanxi suffered from famine; in the fifth year, Huai and Yang prefectures suffered from famine, with starving people filling the roads... in the seventh year, Taiyuan experienced a great famine, where people resorted to cannibalism; in the ninth year, Nanyang suffered a great famine, with a mother even cooking and eating her daughter, and Jiangxi also experienced famine; in the eleventh year, Zhejiang suffered a great famine, where fathers and sons, brothers, and husbands and wives ate each other" [4]. The common people starved, and hungry villagers gathered to become bandits. The government repeatedly suppressed them, which consequently led to large-scale peasant uprisings. Furthermore, the 'Baishui

County Annals' record: "In the second year of Chongzhen, Wang Er and Zhong Guangdao from north of the Luo River initiated a rebellion. The government troops were defeated due to their unfamiliarity with the terrain, and later allied with various bandits from Yan and Qing, spreading their destructive influence across the land" [5]. The peasant rebel army in the late Ming Dynasty originated in Shaanxi, crossed the Yellow River from Shanxi southward, entered the Central Plains, and fought across several provinces including Henan, Hubei, and Sichuan, gradually forming an irresistible force. The simultaneous occurrence of disasters and wars often leads to the emergence of epidemic diseases. The 'Shangshui County Annals' record: "In the spring of the fourteenth year of Chongzhen, a major epidemic disease broke out, which only ceased in autumn. Countless people died. Initially, bodies were still placed in coffins, then later, thin mats were purchased for burial, and eventually, entire households perished, with no one left to bury them" [6]. The 'Tongzhou Annals' record: "In the seventh month of the Guiwei year, the sixteenth year of Chongzhen, a major epidemic disease occurred, named 'Geda disease', spreading from house to house, with entire families dying and no one left to collect the bodies" [7]. The demand for physicians who possess both superb medical skills and noble medical ethics is immense during turbulent times. On the other hand, during the Ming Dynasty, the government revered Confucianism, and many Confucian scholars were influenced by the thought of Fan Zhongyan, a great Confucian scholar of the Northern Song Dynasty, who said, "If one cannot be a good prime minister, one should be a good physician." Consequently, a great number of Confucian physicians emerged, and Shi Pei was one of them. Confucian physicians integrated Confucianism into their study of medical principles, incorporating benevolence and righteousness into medical ethics. The Confucianism ideals of "cultivating oneself," "preserving a benevolent heart," "filial piety towards parents," and "serving the world" permeated all aspects of medicine, not only promoting the traditional medical philosophy that "medicine is a benevolent art" but also elevating the humanistic realm of medical practitioners. Shi Pei's work, "Yi Yi", was not only written during the social unrest of the late Ming Dynasty but also rooted in Confucianism doctrine. Guided by the core Confucianism idea of "benevolent love," it thoroughly explained and discussed China's traditional medical ethics thought. The background of its writing is inextricably linked to both of the aforementioned aspects.

### 3. The Textual Studies and Medical Ethics Value of "Yi Yi"

"Yi Yi" is a literary compilation from the late Ming Dynasty that systematically discusses medical ethics thought. It has the nature of a compendium and is an excellent ancient document for medical ethics thought education, thus possessing very high documentary value. According to our statistics, this book cites over thirty ancient documents related to medical ethics thought. Moreover, the words of "Li Zhongyi" cited in the text had already been lost, and their preservation thanks to this book further highlights its documentary value. These thirty works include seventeen medical treatises and thirteen non-medical treatises, including Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism classics, literary works, and laws. The richness of its citations is thus apparent. We believe that this book is one

of the important references for contemporary people to study medical ethics thought, and its documentary value is self-evident. And as a treatise focusing on medical ethics, the book "Yi Yi" undoubtedly also possesses significant medical ethics value, which is mainly reflected in three aspects: 1. "Patient-centered" approach: Shi Pei consistently emphasized in "Yi Yi" that physicians treat sick people, not merely the disease itself, requiring physicians to be patient-centered in diagnosis and treatment, meticulous in their approach, conduct detailed examinations, and treat according to the specific symptoms. 2. "Respect for life": that is, saving patients' lives is the primary starting point for medical practitioners, and the paramount importance of life has always been a central idea throughout medical ethics. 3. "Noble character and conduct": that is, physicians should possess basic character cultivation such as purity of thought, self-reflection, integrity, thorough examination of diseases, and a humble yet confident demeanor, practicing self-discipline and regulating their behavior at all times and in all places, enhancing personal cultivation and moral character, harboring a benevolent heart, employing benevolent art, and benefiting humanity, thus becoming a "great healer of humanity."

## 4. Key Characteristics of "Yi Yi"

### 4.1 Emphasis on Medical Ethics, Elaborated in Points

"Yi Yi" is a work that systematically expounds on medical ethics. Shi Pei focuses on medical skills, moral conduct, and warnings, dividing medical ethics into ten chapters for detailed discussion, specifically: (1) Mastering the Profession, (2) Upholding Overall Principles, (3) Embracing Universal Benevolence, (4) Detailed Diagnosis and Treatment, (5) Guard against Paranoia, (6) Discernment of Medicines, (7) Dealing with Self and Others, (8) Cherishing Life, (9) Prudence in Writing, and (10) Understanding Retribution. By quoting previous scholars' discussions and his own accounts, Shi Pei thoroughly expounded on the central idea of each chapter and its position in medical ethics thought. Through this method of discussion, he profoundly and comprehensively explained the intrinsic meaning and function of medical ethics.

### 4.2 Comprehensive in Its Citations and Incisive in Its Analysis

"Yi Yi" extensively cites numerous discussions on medical ethics from pre-Qing dynasty medical practitioners, scholars, laws, and classics of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. medical practitioners include Zhang Zhongjing, Tao Hongjing, Xu Yinzong, Sun Simiao, Kong Zhiyue, Su Song, Kou Zongshi, Chen Wuzhe, Zhang Jiming, Li Dongyuan, Zhu Danxi, Yang Renzhai, Chen Jiamo, Wang Shaolong, Li Zhongyi, Shi Song, and others; scholars include Confucius, Zhang Zhan, Dai Shuluan, Shang Lu, Lu Zhi, Su Dongpo, Wang Ao, Shen Lianchi, Tan Jingsheng, Cheng Huangdun, and others. The cited literary classics include "Huangdi Neijing" (The Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon), "Shennong Ben Cao Jing" (The Divine Farmer's Materia Medica), "Yiyi" (Medical Intent), "Xu Yishuo" (Continued Medical Discourses), "Quanshan Lu" (Records of Encouraging Goodness), "Zhou Li" (Rites of Zhou), "Tanzi Huashu"

(Book of Transformations by Master Tan), “Taishang Ganying Pian” (Treatise on the Response and Retribution of the Most Exalted One), “Taiwei Xianjun Gongguo Ge” (The Merit and Demerit Record of Immortal Lord Taiwei), “Qiaotan” (Woodcutter’s Talks), and others. Laws cited include “Da Ming Lü” (The Great Ming Code). Shi Pei presented his corresponding self-narratives in five chapters, including “Mastering the Profession,” “Detailed Diagnosis and Treatment,” “Guarding Against Paranoia,” “Prudent Writing,” and “Cherishing Life,” to expound his own views. Taking the chapter “Mastering the Profession” as an example, Shi Pei quoted Zhongjing: “Heaven spreads the Five Elements to operate all things; humans are endowed with the Five Constants, thus having the Five Zang-organs. Meridians, collaterals, acupoints, and viscera; yin and yang converge and communicate. Profound and subtle, its transformations are boundless. Unless one possesses exceptional talent and profound insight, how can one truly fathom its principles?” Confucius said: “Those who are born with knowledge are the highest; those who learn it are next; those who acquire knowledge through extensive learning and broad experience are secondary. I have long esteemed medical arts, and I wish to apply these words.” This highlighted the complexity and obscurity of medical principles, and the difficulty and arduousness of studying medicine, advising medical practitioners to be broadly learned and knowledgeable in medical skills. Subsequently, Tao Hongjing was quoted: “Nowadays, mediocre doctors in their treatment all disdain to consult the materia medica or rely on outdated prescriptions. If after ten days or a month the patient has not recovered, they then claim the root cause of the illness is deeply entrenched, completely failing to reflect on themselves or carefully consider their successes and failures. They fabricate claims and collect much gold and silk. Not only should they be openly blamed, but they will also surely incur condemnation in the afterlife.” The author intends to point out that nowadays there are many quacks who do not seek to improve their medical skills, are all profit-driven individuals, and are despised by the world. Moreover, citing the words of medical practitioners and scholars such as Sun Simiao, Chen Wuzhe, Shi Song, and Dai Shulan, Shi Pei concurs with the arguments of the predecessors, and emphasizes that for medical practitioners, the importance of studying is paramount. If one wishes to become a great physician, one must read extensively, diligently and tirelessly, study ancient classics, thoroughly read specialized works by various authors, explore academic pursuits, and be rigorous; only then can one be considered deeply proficient in this art.

Taking the chapter “Mastering Medical Practice” as an example, Shi Pei quotes Zhang Zhongjing: ‘Heaven distributes the Five Elements to govern all creatures; man inherits the Five Constants to possess the Five Viscera. Meridians and collaterals, viscera and bowels, yin and yang converge and communicate—mysterious, profound, and subtle, their transformations are unfathomable. Unless one possesses exceptional talent and profound insight, how could one possibly fathom their principles?’ [3] Confucius declared: ‘Those born with innate knowledge rank highest; learning comes next; extensive learning and broad knowledge rank third. I have long cherished the arts of healing; let me apply myself to these words’ [3]. This reveals the complexity and obscurity of medical principles, the arduousness of medical

study, and admonishes practitioners to pursue extensive learning in medical arts. He further quotes Tao Hongjing: ‘Today’s mediocre physicians, when prescribing treatments, disdain consulting the Materia Medica, or rely on outdated formulas... If a patient shows no improvement within ten days or a month, they declare the disease’s root is deeply entrenched, never reflecting on their own shortcomings, carefully considering their successes and failures. They fabricate claims, extort large sums of money, and deserve not only public censure but also divine condemnation in the afterlife’ [3]. This serves to highlight the prevalence of incompetent practitioners who, driven solely by profit, neglect to refine their craft and are thus despised by society. Citing further the words of medical masters and scholars such as Sun Simiao, Chen Wuzhe, Shi Song, and Dai Shulan, Shi Pei concurred with the predecessors’ arguments. He emphasised that for physicians, the importance of reading books outweighs Mount Tai. To become a great physician, one must widely read books, study diligently without fatigue, learn ancient classics, thoroughly read the specialised works of various masters, and approach scholarship with exploration and rigour. Only thus can one be considered truly versed in this art. In his treatise ‘Diligent Study of the Profession,’ Shi Pei states: “The Supplement to the Expanded Meaning of the Imperial Academy notes that while practitioners who wield their skills for diagnosis and treatment do exist in this age, how rare are those who seek teachers to engage in scholarly discourse! Our founding emperor established the Imperial Medical Academy within the capital and medical colleges in prefectures, counties, and districts, naming these institutions “medical” to gather practitioners for instruction. Upon successful completion of their studies and passing examinations, they were entrusted with the responsibility of safeguarding public health in their respective regions. Progressing thus, they became state physicians, bestowing profound benefits upon the people. I have examined why the Zhou dynasty termed them “physicians” and why our dynasty established medical colleges. Carefully selected officials of the rank of judge or higher gathering physicians from across the land to instruct and nurture them. They studied the classics of Huangdi and Qibo, mastered the techniques of Zhang Zhongjing and Sun Simiao. Only after passing examinations were they granted positions, specialising in their strengths and having their salaries determined by their performance. Thus, all people were spared untimely suffering and attained longevity. This too was one aspect of the benevolent governance of a sovereign [3]. This passage indicates Shi Pei’s belief that beyond individual diligence, the government should establish official medical education institutions to standardise and professionalise medical training. Such measures would not only advance medical education and enhance diagnostic and therapeutic capabilities but also provide the populace with safeguards for life and health. The chapter concludes with a quotation from Cheng Huangdun: ‘In recent times, certain renowned Confucians have put forth theories dismissing the works of Dongyuan and Danxi as unworthy of attention, arguing that these two schools constantly cite the Suwen and Nanpin, much as Confucians constantly invoke the Tang, Yu, and Three Dynasties—to what practical benefit? Alas, those who speak thus are profoundly mistaken”’ [3]. This once more underscores the pivotal importance of studying ancient classics for those pursuing medical scholarship. The above quotations

demonstrate Shi Pei's profound understanding and mastery of the theoretical foundations and specialised works of his predecessors.

The most distinctive feature of Medical Ethics lies in Shi Pei's meticulous selection of earlier scholars' writings, which he elaborates upon point by point to expound on medical ethics. Integrating these with his own perspectives, he bridges ancient and modern thought, offering detailed exposition on: mastering one's craft, conducting thorough diagnoses, guarding against bias, discerning medicinal substances, exercising caution in scholarly works, upholding fundamental principles, managing relationships with others and oneself, preserving universal benevolence, cherishing life, and recognising karmic consequences.

## 5. Medical Ethics in Medical Discourse

The medical ethics expounded by Shi Pei in Medical Discourse may be summarised under three headings: mastery of technique and dedication to one's vocation; self-cultivation and moral integrity; and admonition and caution. By extensively citing earlier treatises and discourses on medical ethics, he provided a significant and comprehensive reference for subsequent generations seeking systematic study in this field.

### 5.1 Mastery and Dedication

Mastery of medical skill forms the bedrock of medical ethics and constitutes the very foundation of a physician's ability to treat illness and save lives. In his chapter 'Detailed Diagnosis,' Shi Pei quotes Sun Simiao: 'The difficulty in mastering classical formulas has long been acknowledged. Now, diseases may share internal similarities while presenting external differences, or exhibit internal differences alongside external similarities... The skin, muscles, bones, and tendons vary in thickness, density, and resilience. Only those who apply meticulous attention can truly engage with these subtleties'" [3]. This underscores the complexity of classical formulae, the difficulty in distinguishing disease patterns from their underlying mechanisms, and the enduring challenge for practitioners to master these principles. Shi Pei thus advocated that physicians should: Firstly, discern the hierarchical structure of classical formulae—the sovereign, minister, assistant, and messenger herbs—regulate the appropriate warmth, coolness, dryness, and dampness of medicinal substances, understand the internal and external applications of formulas, and comprehend the principles governing the creation and transformation of life. Thus, even potent toxins become harmless; Second, epidemics arise in all seasons, stemming not only from the six celestial energies—yin, yang, wind, rain, gloom, and light—but also from the six human afflictions—cold, heat, superficial symptoms, abdominal pain, mental confusion, and heart disorders. Thus, physicians must not only meticulously examine the root causes of these six afflictions and harmonise with the movement of the six energies, but also align with the unity of heaven and humanity to discern epidemic diseases; Thirdly, to practise medicine without error, one must use the five flavours and five medicinal substances to nourish deficiencies; observe the five energies, five sounds, and five colours to discern the patient's excesses, deficiencies, and

states of vigour or decline, thereby predicting their prognosis; examine the nine orifices to understand the transformations within the nine viscera and the conditions of obstruction or unimpeded flow; and discern the pulse's movement across the superficial, middle, and deep layers. Fourthly, practising medicine is difficult, yet treating ulcers is more so. Therefore, when addressing sores and abscesses, one should first employ the five toxic medicines—cinnabar, alum, realgar, magnetite, and cinnabar—to attack the affliction. Subsequently, nourish the patient with the five grains—rice, millet, foxtail millet, wheat, and beans—and regulate them with the five flavours—sour, bitter, sweet, pungent, and salty. Fifth, one must not heed but a single opinion, nor prescribe the same remedy for a thousand patients. Treatment must be centred on the individual, tailored to the specific presentation. Only thus can one avoid reducing 'matters of utmost subtlety and precision' to 'thoughts of utmost crudeness and superficiality.' Shi Pei affirmed Yang Renzhai's assertion that 'treating illness is like steering a boat: when the helm is in hand amidst the onslaught of wind and waves, the slightest shift may capsize the vessel'" [3]—that is, the principle of balancing medicine and treatment—all hinge upon the physician alone. One must neither blindly follow the patient's wishes nor panic and alarm them. When confronted with complex symptoms, repeated analysis is essential; doubt must never linger. Should a disease recur, its causes must be thoroughly inquired into before administering medication. Moreover, Shi Pei asserted that 'medicinal application mirrors military strategy: while warfare inherently claims lives, skillful command preserves them; similarly, medicine's purpose is to sustain life, yet improper application proves fatal' [3]. Thus, physicians must meticulously examine the Four Diagnostic Methods and Nine Signs, alongside the Five Specialties and Eight Essentials, exercising utmost caution. To neglect diligent practice and familiarity in daily life, only to conduct casual examinations at critical moments, is to treat life as a jest. Shi Pei demanded that physicians apply meticulous attention and thorough examination, aiming to prevent them from endangering patients through oversight of symptoms during medical practice.

Shi Pei concurred with the assertion that 'medicines should be appropriately priced, and methods must adapt to circumstances,' citing Wang Wenkè in his treatise 'Against Prejudice' [3]: Yet illness arises from change, and when it defies the standard techniques of practitioners, the medicine too must change. To be capable of change yet fail to adapt is to sit idly awaiting demise; to alter by the slightest measure is to hasten death. Both are equally unacceptable. Hence it is said: one may be entrusted with fixed principles, but not with discretion. Medicine that can exercise discretion may be called marvellous" [3]. Shi Pei further contends that physicians must not cling to fixed views when treating illness, prescribing either warming or cooling medicines according to personal preference. To become a competent practitioner, one must assess the patient's deficiency or excess, the yin or yang nature of the condition, and then adjust the decoction—whether tonifying or purging—in accordance with the syndrome pattern. Shi Pei remarked: 'In my humble view, the wise physicians of antiquity often employed both cold and hot herbs in their prescriptions, combining purgative and tonic actions. They might treat one condition by first purging then tonifying, or address a single illness with an initial hot

treatment followed by a cold one' [3]. He maintained that the formulas of ancient master physicians contained exquisitely crafted combinations of herbs, and that proper pairing significantly influenced a formula's efficacy. Thus, mastery of formulae necessarily entailed mastery of herbal combinations. In the chapter "Discerning Medicinal Substances", Shi Pei also drew upon extensive medical literature detailing the four natures and five flavours of substances, their processing methods, regional origins, and the distinct applications and distinctions between fresh and aged forms. This serves to instruct practitioners that they must master the application of medicines, exercise caution in their use, adapt to the changing symptoms, and not rely solely on personal preferences. Prescribing treatment with the slightest error can lead to grave consequences; only through careful deliberation and syndrome differentiation can one be considered truly responsible towards the patient.

Shi Pei, citing Chu Cheng and Xu Chunfu as examples, states in his Treatise on Prudent Writing: "In my humble view, the principles of medicine are fully expounded in the *Ling Shu* and *Nan Jing*. Master Xuan Yan's profound mastery was so extensive that he was widely known as a bibliophile. Yet even he drew from these very texts. Subsequently, later generations developed divergent interpretations. For instance, Chu Cheng proposed the location of women's pulses, equating the cun measurement to the chi. Xu Chunfu claimed the large and small intestines could be diagnosed at both cun positions. Both deceive the world to steal fame, disrupting the classics. Truly, they are sinners against our ancestors. As for those who have not glimpsed the door of Qibo, yet wish to pick up spittle, discard delusions, label names, and deceive novice scholars — can they not be laughed at by their descendants?" [3] He maintained that while medical authorship is fundamentally a noble endeavour to perpetuate medical knowledge, those who write to deceive and steal fame are disrupting the classics and deserve universal contempt. Thus, authorship demands rigorous diligence, unflinching labour, extensive erudition, and the complete abandonment of vulgar notions and preconceptions.

Medical skill forms the bedrock of medical ethics; mastery of the craft and a dedicated heart in the practice of medicine constitute vital components of this ethical foundation. Thus, physicians must diligently study medical principles, refine their techniques, and exercise prudence in imparting knowledge, thereby fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

## 5.2 Cultivating One's Own Virtue

Physicians must exercise self-restraint and maintain integrity in solitude. Shi Pei concurred with Sun Simiao's requirements for the 'essence of the great physician' as outlined in his Treatise on the Great Physician's Sincerity within the Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Pieces of Gold for Emergencies. Thus, in the chapter Preserving the Essence, he quoted Sun Simiao: "The essence of the great physician lies in clarifying the spirit and turning inward. To behold him, one perceives solemn dignity, a serene and expansive demeanour — neither overly bright nor dim... It is most unkind to disregard matters of life and death, to act rashly in pursuit of personal brilliance, or to seek fame through reckless means!"

[3]. Shi Pei uses this to instruct physicians that they should cultivate fundamental moral character: purity of thought, self-reflection, uprightness, meticulous examination of illness, and maintaining dignity without arrogance or servility. They must practise self-restraint and regulate their conduct at all times, thereby enhancing personal cultivation and virtue.

Medicine is practised with the heart to save lives, hence it is called the benevolent art. Skill refers to masterful medical techniques, while benevolence denotes compassion and sympathy for patients. In his treatise "Preserving Knowledge for Universal Relief", Shi Pei quotes Sun Simiao: 'When a great physician treats illness, he must first calm his spirit and steady his resolve, free from desire or expectation. He must first cultivate profound compassion and vow to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings... Whether Chinese or barbarian, wise or ignorant, all are equally dear, cherished as one's own kin' [3]. This admonishes physicians to cultivate noble character and personal refinement, to empathise with patients' suffering as if it were their own, thereby stirring compassion. They must resolve to deliver all living beings from affliction, never seeking personal glory or material gain. Shi Pei's teaching emphasises that physicians must cultivate noble character and a heart of universal compassion for the world, never losing sight of the fundamental principle that medicine is an act of benevolence.

The benevolent heart of the physician, consistently emphasised in traditional medical ethics, embodies compassion. "Benevolence" constitutes the core value of Confucian thought, while "compassion" represents the central tenet of Confucian culture — extending love from one's kin to all humanity. Traditional medical ethics demand that practitioners treat patients with this compassionate spirit, requiring them to possess a profound sense of social responsibility and moral duty. Benevolence constitutes the fundamental principle of China's traditional medical ethics and the essential virtue of practitioners. The ethical demands of traditional Chinese medicine extend beyond merely curing illnesses and saving lives; they require physicians to perpetually maintain a heart dedicated to alleviating suffering and healing the world. Thus, practitioners must cultivate benevolence, employ compassionate techniques, and serve humanity — only then can they truly be regarded as 'great physicians for the common people'.

## 5.3 Admonitions

Dealing with others entails treating them appropriately, while dealing with oneself involves cultivating one's character. 'Dealing with others and oneself' signifies that physicians must learn how to treat patients and how to cultivate themselves. In his treatise 'Dealing with Others and Oneself,' Shi Pei quotes from the Daoist classic *The Supreme Master's Treatise on Spiritual Resonance*: Follow the Way and advance; abandon the Way and retreat. Tread not the path of wickedness, nor deceive in the dark chamber. Accumulate virtue and merit, nurture compassion for all beings... Sympathise with others' misfortune, rejoice in their virtue, relieve their urgency, rescue them from peril [3]. To follow Heaven's principles and harmonise with human hearts, to be upright and impartial, is the Way; whereas to defy Heaven's principles and offend human hearts, to tread thorny paths and

face perilous obstacles, is not the Way. For physicians, saving lives and healing the wounded, practising medicine to benefit the world, is the Way; whereas seeking fame and fortune, amassing wealth through cunning schemes, is not the Way. To advance where the Way lies is to seek good fortune; to retreat where the Way does not lie is to avoid misfortune. Only thus does one align with Heaven's principles. Here, Shi Pei employs Daoist principles to admonish physicians that healing the sick and saving lives is inherently the Way. By rectifying one's conduct, upholding one's true nature, and accumulating virtue through benevolent deeds, one earns universal respect, receives heavenly protection, and attracts blessings and prosperity.

Traditional Chinese medicine has always emphasised that saving the patient's life is the primary concern for the physician. Treating illness involves addressing the sick person and their life, not merely the disease itself. Thus, the paramount importance of life has consistently been the central tenet of medical ethics. In his treatise *Cherishing Life*, Shi Pei states: "In my humble view, the True Master declared that killing to save others is impermissible—how then could killing for one's own sustenance be permissible? Lianchi remarked: "If killing to sacrifice to the gods is impermissible, is killing to sustain medical treatment permissible?" The saying goes: "To prolong life, one must abstain from killing." Let us all strive together in this endeavour [3]. 'The words of the True Man referred to by Shi Pei are those of Sun Simiao: 'To kill in pursuit of life only distances one further from life itself' [3]. 'Sun Simiao maintained that although' beasts are lowly and humans noble, 'both share an equal reverence for life. Harming others for personal gain is universally abhorred by all living creatures, let alone humans. Thus, using life to make medicine to save others in dire need is 'seeking life through killing, which distances one further from life' [3]. Building upon Sun Simiao's foundation, Shi Pei further expanded the concept of killing to seek life, shifting the focus from mere survival to the cultivation of health. He argued that killing to save others is unacceptable, and killing to sustain oneself is equally impermissible. That is to say, killing to cultivate health only distances one further from life itself. Using living creatures in medicine for health preservation may appear to strengthen the body, yet the very moment the intent to kill arises, the purpose of health cultivation is already lost. True nourishment of life manifests in the benevolent virtue of becoming one with heaven, earth, and all beings. Treating all creatures with compassion, harmonising with nature, and cherishing all things is to cherish oneself. Nourishing life begins with nourishing the heart; only when the heart is virtuous can the body be robust. Shi Pei refers to Master Lianchi, also known as Yunqi Honghong, Buddhist name Hongen, courtesy name Sanhuai (alternatively Huai or Huai), pseudonym Xuelang, lay surname Shen, one of the 'Four Great Monks of the Ming Dynasty' [8]. Moved by the fundamental oneness of all existence, Master Lianchi composed the *Treatise on Abstaining from Killing*, enumerating seven prohibitions against taking life. Shi Pei refers to one such prohibition: "Sacrificial rites should not involve killing. When afflicted by illness, people sacrifice living beings to deities in supplication for blessings, yet fail to consider that their own worship of deities seeks to avert death and attain life. To prolong one's own life by extinguishing another's defies heaven and contradicts reason, nothing could

be more contrary to heaven and reason than this" [3]. Shi Pei affirmed Master Shen Lianchi's stance, asserting that sacrificing life to deities is impermissible, as is killing to prolong medical treatment. 'To prolong life, one must abstain from killing' [3], for taking another's life to extend one's own compounds the karma of killing and defies heaven and reason. He not only instructs physicians to respect life but also issues a warning: 'Seeking life through killing defies heaven and reason; retribution will surely follow' [3].

Shi Pei quoted Sun Simiao: 'When one practises overt virtue, others will repay them; when one practises hidden virtue, the spirits will reward them; when one commits overt evil, others will repay them; when one commits hidden evil, the spirits will harm them... Therefore, physicians must not rely on their own abilities to pursue wealth and material gain, but should cultivate a heart dedicated to alleviating suffering. In the course of the unseen forces of fate, they will naturally attract abundant blessings'[3]. This passage from the chapter "Understanding Retribution" serves to admonish physicians that all phenomena in the world are governed by cause and effect. By performing virtuous deeds and sowing wholesome causes, one will naturally reap wholesome fruits. As physicians hold sway over matters of life and death, harbouring malicious intent will inevitably endanger patients' lives. Thus, physicians are admonished not to exploit their medical skills to harm others. Evil deeds will inevitably be repaid with evil consequences. Therefore, one should simply do good deeds without concern for future prospects, accumulate blessings through virtue, and remain true to one's conscience.

Shi Pei drew extensively upon Daoist and Buddhist doctrines in his three treatises—*On Conducting Oneself and Others*, *On Cherishing Life*, and *On Understanding Karma*—aiming to admonish physicians that 'misfortune and fortune have no fixed doors; they are summoned by human actions alone.' He urged them to remember the fundamental purpose of medicine: to save lives and heal the wounded.

## 6. Conclusion

Medical Ethics stands as a profound and systematic exposition of traditional Chinese medical ethics, representing the culmination of Shi Pei's extensive scholarly research. The text cites medical works thirty times and non-medical works twenty times, all drawing upon the theories and ideas of physicians and scholars from the late Ming dynasty and earlier concerning the cultivation of medical ethics. The five annotations by Shi Pei, located respectively in the sections "Diligent Study of the Profession", "Avoiding Prejudice", "Prudence in Writing", and "Cherishing Life", clearly demonstrate his conviction that masterful medical skill, meticulous diagnosis, treatment tailored to the condition, cautious writing, and the sanctity of life are paramount to medical ethics. Detailed Diagnosis, Avoiding Prejudice, Prudent Writing, and Cherishing Life. This demonstrates his conviction that masterful medical skill, thorough diagnosis, treatment tailored to symptoms, cautious writing, and the sanctity of life constitute crucial components of medical ethics. Organised into ten chapters, this work comprehensively illustrates how traditional Chinese medical ethics is grounded in masterful medical skill, with a

human-centred approach, respect for life as its ideological foundation, benevolent heart and skill as its core essence, and benefiting the people and saving lives as its noble ideal. It constitutes a vital foundation for traditional Chinese medical ethics, encompassing the three processes of learning medicine, practising medicine, and transmitting medical knowledge. As a relatively comprehensive and detailed treatise on medical ethics, it retains significant contemporary relevance. Consequently, this work holds considerable value for research in medical ethics and textual studies.

## Fund Projects

2024 University-Level High-Level Key Discipline in Traditional Chinese Medicine – History and Literature of Traditional Chinese Medicine (2024XKZD13), Shaanxi University of Traditional Chinese Medicine Science and Technology Innovation Talent System Construction Programme (2024-CXTD-02).

## References

- [1] Zheng Jinsheng, Zhang Zhibin. Catalogue of Rare and Valuable Overseas Chinese Medical Classics [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2017.
- [2] Yang Yiwan, Wu Hongzhou. Unravelling the Academic Thought of Ming Dynasty Physician Shi Pei [J]. Journal of Chinese Medicine and Pharmacy, 2011, 29(10): 2268-2270.
- [3] Shi Pei (compiled and authored), Zheng Jinsheng (edited and annotated). Medical Treatise [M]. Beijing: People's Medical Publishing House, 2003: 771–792.
- [4] Zhang Tingyu et al. (compiled). History of the Ming Dynasty [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1974.
- [5] Baishui County Local Chronicles Office. Annotated Baishui County Chronicles [M]. Xi'an: Sanqin Publishing House, December 2013.
- [6] (Qing dynasty) Gao Xing, revised; Guo Tianxi, compiled. Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles 34: Henan Prefecture and County Chronicles Collection. Facsimile Edition: Shunzhi Shangshui County Chronicles [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2013.
- [7] Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, ed. Compilation of Chinese Local Chronicles: Beijing Prefecture and County Chronicles, Vol. 6. Republican-era Miyun County Chronicle, Republican-era Shunyi County Chronicle, Kangxi Tongzhou Chronicle, Republican-era Tong County Chronicle Essentials [M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, October 2002.
- [8] Wu Liwei. Interactions between the Buddhist and Catholic Sects in Late Ming Hangzhou: The Case of Yunqi's Hong and His Disciples [Journal Article]. Chinese Historical and Literary Studies, 2014, (01): 325-357+395.