

Ole Döring and Chen Renbiao (eds.), *Advances in Chinese Medical Ethics: Chinese and International Perspectives*. Hamburg: IFA, 2002, xxvii, 470 pp.

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With increasing globalization the exchange between different cultures becomes more and more important within biomedical ethics. Traditionally, the international exchange of concepts and ideas was limited to the Western hemisphere, not least because of the predominance of the English language. However, the world is changing rapidly. Due to the fast growth of their economies, South and East Asian nations gain increasing global influence. This process of globalization has not bypassed the field of biomedicine. There is an increasing exchange of knowledge, technologies and products with the sphere of biotechnology, medicine and health care. New biomedical technologies open up new possibilities to intervene into both the human body and social life. It is widely acknowledged that these developments both aggravate traditional ethical problems and raise new issues, especially in rapidly transforming and evolving East Asia.

Against the background of these developments, the importance of the work edited by Ole Döring and Chen Renbiao cannot be overestimated. China has become an important global player and it certainly makes sense to improve understanding of, and cooperation with, China. With their book *Advances in Chinese Medical Ethics: Chinese and International Perspectives* they provide a collection of forty papers covering an impressively wide array of different health-related ethical issues. Scholars from various countries—the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, New Zealand, the USA, Austria and Germany—and from several different disciplines provide a rich and multifaceted picture of the history, present situation and future of Chinese medical ethics. The book is not a single “stand alone” project, but rather part of a continuous effort to promote international exchange with China in the field of biomedical ethics. The work presented here goes back to a pilot research project “Medical Ethics in Contemporary China” at the Hamburg Institute of Asian Affairs in 1995. The underlying philosophy of this project has also shaped the collection of papers in the book. The goal of the enterprise was not to study developments in China based on remote observation, but rather to engage scholars from various disciplines and countries, especially from China, in a mutual exchange of thoughts, concepts and ideas. Apparently, these efforts have been quite successful. Under the unstinting leadership of Ole Döring, an ongoing cooperation and dialogue has been estab-

lished between biomedical scientists, social scientists and philosophers from China and several “Western” countries. An international and interdisciplinary symposium on aspects of medical ethics was held first in Hamburg in 1998 to initiate the debate. This book now presents the proceedings of the “Second Sino-German Interdisciplinary Symposium about Medical Ethics in China” that took place in Shanghai, October 19-23, 1999 (cf. the appendix of the book for more information). For the organizers it was clear that China should not simply follow “Western” lines of thought in bioethics. Rather, China should use its rich resources to create its own approaches to ethical issues in biomedicine and health care that take into account the specific cultural, political and philosophical traditions as well as problems of China. It was, therefore, one of the goals of the Shanghai Symposium to engage as many Chinese scholars as possible in a dialogue with “Western” colleagues, “thereby learning from and contributing to the experiences of the world” (p. xx).

The Shanghai Symposium followed a hermeneutical approach to medical ethics. According to this approach, the first task of ethical inquiry is to understand what other people say and do, and thus to provide a factual basis for the discussion of the underlying normative issues: “In order to advance in medical ethics, we need sound empirical facts (including accurate accounts of the relevant historical and present situations) as well as creative vision, which together help to make practical sense of the tension between *what exists* and how it ought to be.” (p. xxii) According to this framework, the primary purpose of the papers presented in this volume is not to critically evaluate their ethical arguments but rather to document current developments in Chinese medical ethics. Covering diverse perspectives, disciplines, styles and concerns was therefore more important than developing a systematic and uniform account of Chinese medical ethics. The resulting collection of papers provides an enormously rich body of study material for philosophers as well as biomedical, social and cultural scientists, bringing to the fore such questions as: What are current ethical issues in the field of biomedicine and health care in China? How do the ethical arguments proceed? How are these arguments related to traditional Chinese thinking and to “Western” approaches to biomedical ethics? Thereby, this book is also a very valuable source and study object for a more general systematic issue: Is there a universal morality? Are at least some moral principles, norms and values accepted around the world? Both on a theoretical and a practical level, the papers in this volume provide many important insights for cross-cultural bioethics.

The 40 papers in this volume are “loosely” structured into eight chapters. The first section contains four papers that provide an introduction to the history and place of Chinese medical ethics in the context of international ethical guidance issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The second chapter provides a collection of papers that discuss different ethical issues in an international and historical context: the epidemic spread of HIV infection and AIDS, the history of informed consent in Germany, the international eugenics movement

1900-1945, and the tension between individual autonomy and community values in the field of reproduction. The third chapter is devoted to ethical issues in the field of human genetics: gene therapy and human enhancement, informed consent in genetic counselling in Hong Kong, European perspectives and genetic counselling and abortion, concluded by a brief report on ethical implications of genetic information and genetic manipulation. Chapter four proceeds further into the cultural roots of medical ethics. The first paper develops the ethical implications of a Confucian concept of personhood, the second a Confucian approach to moral development which may be informative for education in medical ethics, and the third a Confucian concept of the physician-patient relationship. Subsequent papers explore the impact of religious emotions in bioethics, approaches to health in ancient China, the tradition of Chinese medical ethics with medicine as a virtuous conduct, euthanasia in the context of traditional Chinese culture and the concept of “the art of humaneness” (*renshu* 人术) in medical ethics. Chapter five includes seven papers that discuss controversial issues in China: Abortion, homosexuality, prevention of HIV infection, withholding medical treatment, public welfare payments for the disabled, family planning and reproductive health in China, and the regulation of population growth and reproduction. Chapter six is devoted to social issues in medical ethics. The first paper discusses Taiwanese experiences with medical negligence. Other papers in this section argue that patients are not ordinary consumers, discuss the role of the media for medical ethics in China, elaborate ethical issues of blood transfusion and bone marrow transplantation in China, and reflect on how the good of elderly patients can be determined. Chapter seven is devoted to the important field of medical ethics education. The first paper gives an overview of the history, present situation and future of medical ethics education in China, complemented by a paper that stresses the importance of humanity in medical education. The final chapter documents a unique feature of the Shanghai symposium and really anchors the book to practice. On the last day, ten cases from various fields in medical practice were presented and discussed from ethical perspectives. Five case discussions are included in this volume, together with a general introduction to the methodological framework. They cover issues like terminal sedation in a patient with terminal lung cancer, genetic counselling and termination of pregnancy, physician-assisted suicide, caring for dying patients, and informed consent for psychiatric patients.

As one can easily see from the list of topics and perspectives covered in the volume, the editors are certainly right when they claim in their introduction that this collection of papers is both evidence of the improving situation of medical ethics in China and itself a contribution to this process. It is my hope that this important book will have as many readers as it deserves!