

FOREWORD

China is currently undergoing another revolution. Unlike the Communist revolution that led to the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949 and the notorious Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), this revolution, while no less dramatic, is economic and social, not political. China is changing, and fast. The effects of change are most obvious in the big cities and their glittering shopping malls. These beckon the newly rich with their luxury goods and make them forget the long years of hardship under stern Party rule. Evidently, not all Chinese have benefited from the country's embrace of capitalism and consumerism. The economic miracle has largely bypassed the countryside and its several hundred millions of workers, small farmers, and peasants.

Healthcare is one sector in which the ambiguities of change are felt most severely. While market forces have modernized the healthcare system and increased its efficiency, they seem at odds with the traditional values of care that have shaped Chinese medical practice for two and a half millennia.

Attention in medical ethics is usually focused on the interplay among physicians, patients, healthcare policies, and the healthcare system. The other major healthcare provider is often ignored: the nurses. Samantha Meiche Pang's penetrating study of the value perceptions and the roles of nurses in the delivery of healthcare in contemporary China is therefore of great significance and fills an unfortunate gap in bioethical research. It represents the first major study on nursing ethics in China that draws on the rich textual resources written in Chinese and on the results of extensive field studies, through which the voices of the nurses can be heard, perhaps for the first time. The author's ability to interpret these resources against a cultural backdrop that ranges from the Confucian classics to Mao Zedong and from Sun Simiao's concepts of *jing* (excellence in practice) and *cheng* (sincerity in the relationships with patients) to codes of practice in the Republican and Maoist eras generates remarkable insights into the long tradition of Chinese medicine and ethics.

Publication of this book is also quite timely, since the tension between traditional and modern values in the actual delivery of healthcare is of grave concern in China and the West. The author's personal and professional familiarity with nursing cultures in the West, most notably in the United States and Britain, in Hong Kong and China uniquely position her to approach the topic in a cross-cultural and comparative perspective. Her reflections about a perceived shift from a rule-based to a virtue-based ethics with its greater emphasis on the ever-changing contexts of healthcare practice, merit careful attention for anyone participating in the current ethical debate.

The author expertly combines moral theory with empirical investigation, yet she avoids sociological jargon and unnecessarily complicated terminology. Beneath the language of objectivity and sober

reflection, the reader will notice another dimension of this important study: that of great appreciation of the extraordinary work of the nurses in contemporary China and of sympathy with their plight.

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