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Speeches/Documents

**Title: Directive on Work in Traditional Chinese Medicine**

**Author: Mao Zedong**

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**Source:** The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976: September 1945 - December 1955  
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**Description:**

[Traditional] Chinese medicine has made great contributions to the people of our country. With a population of six hundred million, China is the most populous country in the world. Of course, there are many factors contributing to the ability of our country's people to multiply and prosper day by day, but of these, the part played by health care must be one of the [most] important. In this respect, we must give credit first to [traditional] Chinese medicine.

If we compare Chinese and Western medicine, [traditional] Chinese medicine has a history of several thousand years, whereas Western medicine was introduced into China only a few decades ago. To this day, there are still more than 500 million people in the entire country who rely on [traditional] Chinese medicine for the diagnosis and treatment of their illnesses, while those who depend on Western medicine number only several tens of millions (and most are in big cities). Therefore, if we speak of China's health care since the beginning of history, the contributions and accomplishments of [traditional] Chinese medicine are very great.

For a number of years, not only has our homeland's medical heritage not been developed, but on the contrary, it has been slighted and repudiated. (For instance, examinations given to practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine cover the subjects of physiology and pathology. Those who fail these subjects are not given certificates. In addition, there are regulations such as those prohibiting practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine from joining hospital staffs.) The Central Committee's directive on uniting doctors of the traditional Chinese school with doctors of the Western school has not been fully carried out, and a true unity between the two sides remains unresolved. This is a mistake. This problem must be resolved; this mistake must be corrected. It requires first of all that the health care administration departments at all levels should change their way of thinking.

Henceforth, the most important thing is to first ask practitioners of Western medicine to study [traditional] Chinese medicine, and not for practitioners of [traditional] Chinese medicine to study Western medicine. First, we must transfer a hundred to two hundred graduates of medical institutes or colleges, handing them over to some well-known doctors of [traditional] Chinese medicine so that they can study their clinical experience. Furthermore, they should assume an attitude of great modesty in their studies. It is a glorious [endeavor] for practitioners of Western medicine to study [traditional] Chinese medicine, because after studying and promoting it they will be able to remove the boundary between [traditional] Chinese medicine and Western medicine and form a unified Chinese medical science as a contribution to the world. Second, all hospitals must systematically invite doctors of [traditional] Chinese medicine to come to the hospitals to give medical treatments to patients and hold consultations, and permit hospitalized patients to take [traditional] Chinese medicines. Furthermore, all sorts of regulations should be laid down to ensure systematically that respect be shown to doctors of traditional Chinese medicine so that they may not encounter difficulties or have a feeling of apprehension when they do their work of treatment in the hospitals. Third, Chinese medicine [itself] should be well-protected and developed. Our

country's Chinese medicine has a history of several thousand years, and it is an extremely precious asset of our homeland. If we simply let it decline it would be a crime on our part. Therefore, we should investigate and protect the growing of medicinal herbs in the various provinces, encourage their production, facilitate their shipment, and improve their marketing. For instance, some medicinal herbs, because of their relatively long growth period, require from planting and cultivating to harvesting a period of more than two or three years. For instance, the white peony [*Peonia albiflora*] is a plant that matures in four years, and the *huanglian* [*Coptis japonica*] is one that matures in six years. Individual peasants often do not have the resources to plant them. Furthermore, in some herb-producing areas such as Gansu and Qinghai, the herbs produced cannot be shipped out in time because of the inconvenience in transportation, and the peasants often use them as fuel. In the past, there was a great wastage of some Chinese herbs because the processing and preserving techniques were deficient. Packaging and storage methods were not good, and losses from mildew and spoilage were severe. [The situation] should be improved. Institutions in charge of such work should henceforth adopt a joint state-private form of management. Personnel who process medicinal herbs should be classified according to their technical levels and be considered technical cadres. As for research in Chinese [herbal] medicine, it is not sufficient merely to conduct chemical analysis. We should go one step further and carry out pharmacological and clinical experiments. In particular, we should pay special attention to the compound effects of the Chinese [herb] medicines. Fourth, we should begin to sort things out and put together writings on [traditional] Chinese medicine. In the past nobody put together [such texts] because they were difficult to comprehend and were not valued. Medicinal books on [traditional] Chinese medicine will soon cease to exist if we do not collect them together. We should organize learned physicians of traditional Chinese medicine to, first of all, systematically but also selectively translate those useful [texts on traditional Chinese medicine] from ancient Chinese into modern Chinese. When the time is right we should further organize [these physicians] to summarize their own experiences and compile a set of systematic texts on [traditional] Chinese medicine.

To realize the various tasks mentioned above, we must first rectify bourgeois, individualistic, and sectarian ideology. Only when there is a change in ideology can the tasks mentioned above be carried out thoroughly. <sup>1</sup>

From now on, [personnel] at any level of administrative departments in public health will be dismissed if they do not do well in carrying out these tasks.

## Note

1 Mao is apparently fighting certain tendencies within the leadership of the health care department that looked askance at the idea of unifying the traditional Chinese and "modern" Western schools of medicine. In 1953, Mao had berated He Cheng, the deputy minister of health care, for providing no leadership (or the wrong leadership) for the Department of Health Care. See text 1953 (1). In February 1955 the then deputy director, Yu Bin, was criticized for his opposition to the unification of the two schools, and on November 19, 1955, He Cheng's self-criticism was published.