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Problematic Ethics Statements on "Chinese Medicine"

Problematic ethics statements are found in multiple articles on "Chinese Medicine", a Springer Nature title. Here are some examples:

10.1186/s13020-026-01337-9

In-consistent ethical approval numbers are disclosed at two separate parts of this article. First time, it is disclosed on the "Materials and methods" section, and it reads "All animal experimental procedures were strictly conducted in accordance with protocols approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine (Ethics Approval No.: 2021DW256)". Second time, it is disclosed on the "Ethics declarations" section, and it reads "All mouse protocols were approved by the Animal Welfare Committee of Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine (no. 2019DW233)".

10.1186/s13020-026-01337-9

Inconsistent Ethics Statements

Materials and methods

Animals and ethics

Male C57BL/6 mice (6–8 weeks old, weighing 18 ± 2 g) under specific pathogen-free (SPF) conditions were purchased from Vital River Laboratory Animal Technology Co., Ltd. (Beijing, China; Animal Production License No.: SCXK(Jing) 2022-0006). The mice were reared in the experimental animal facility of Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine, under controlled conditions with a temperature of 23 ± 2 °C, relative humidity of 40–60%, and a 12-h light/dark cycle. All mice underwent a 1-week acclimatization period prior to the formal experiments. All animal experimental procedures were strictly conducted in accordance with protocols approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine (Ethics Approval No.: 2021DW256) and conformed to *the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* by the National Institutes of Health (1996).

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethics approval and informed consent: All mouse protocols were approved by the Animal Welfare Committee of Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine (no. 2019DW233).

10.1155/2022/3684899

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2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Animals. Forty healthy and clean C57BL/6J male mice (4–6 weeks old, body weight 16–18 g, $n = 40$) were purchased from Beijing Vital River Laboratory Animal Technology Co., Ltd. (Beijing, China) (Animal laboratory license number: SCXK Beijing 2016–0006).

All the mice were raised in the Key Laboratory of the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhengzhou University, with a light-dark cycle of 12/12 hours, an ambient temperature of 22–25°C, a humidity of 45 ± 10%, and free feeding and drinking. In addition, all operations on mice were authorized according to ethical regulations and the Animal Care Ethics Committee of Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine (License number: 2019DW233).

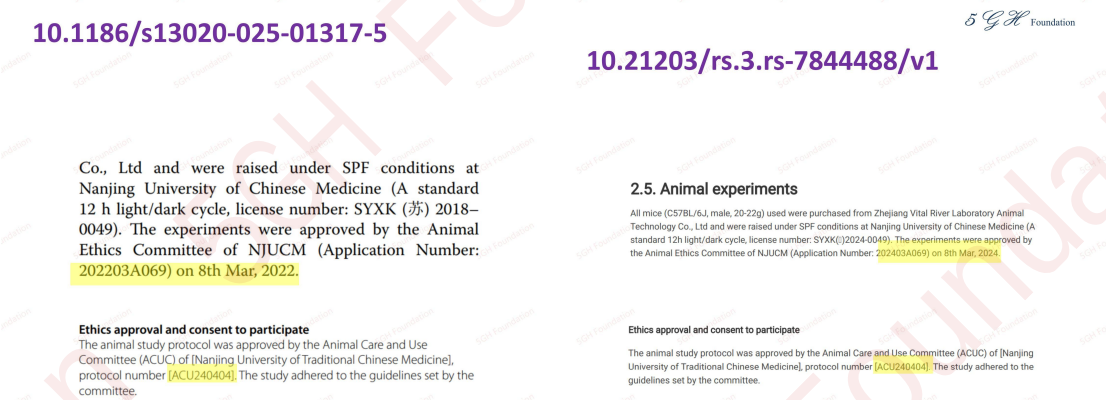
We also note that the approval number 2019DW233 is also cited by another article [1], sharing the same first author with this article. However, in article [1], authors state that the animals were raised at the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhengzhou University, while the ethical approval was granted by the committee at the Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine. This is also very weird.

10.1186/s13020-025-01296-7

The authors state on the "Ethics declarations" section that "All animal experiments were performed in accordance with the guidelines of the National Institutes of Health Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals and were approved by the Experimental Laboratory Animal Committee of the Institute of Medicinal Plant Development, Peking Union Medical College (approval number: SLXD-20180706)". However, no author from Peking Union Medical College is listed on this article. The authors are ether from Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, or Capital Medical University. On the other hand, no experiment is claimed to be conducted at Peking Union Medical College.

10.1186/s13020-025-01317-5

In-consistent ethical approval numbers are disclosed at two separate parts of this article. First time, it is disclosed on the "Materials and methods" section, and it reads "The experiments were approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of NJUCM (Application Number: 202203A069) on 8th Mar, 2022". Second time, it is disclosed on the "Ethics declarations" section, and it reads "The animal study protocol was approved by the Animal Care and Use Committee (ACUC) of [Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine], protocol number [ACU240404]".



We also note that the protocol ACU240404 was also cited on a preprint [2], which shares common authors with this article. The preprint [2] cites another ethical approval, it reads "The experiments were approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of NJUCM (Application Number: 202403A069) on 8th

Mar, 2024". The authors claim the these two approvals were both granted on March 8th, but in different year (2022 and 2024), and the approval numbers share the same last six digits with a common segment (03A069). These suggest that the approval numbers may be false.

10.1186/s13020-026-01331-1

DOI	Title	Submitted	Animals	Ethics
10.1186/s13020-026-01331-1	The protective effect of maternal electroacupuncture on prenatal nicotine exposure-induced intrauterine growth restriction in rats by improving placental angiogenesis	2025-09-17	Eighteen Specific Pathogen Free (SPF)-grade healthy female SD rats (9 weeks old, 280–320 g) and six SPF-grade healthy male SD rats (10 weeks old, 300–340 g) were obtained from Beijing Vital River Laboratory Animal Technology Co., Ltd.	All experimental procedures involving animals were performed in strict compliance with the 3Rs principle (Replacement, Reduction, Refinement) and approved by the Animal Ethics Committee of Beijing University of Chinese Medicine (Approval No. **BUCM-2024120403-4278**).
10.12300/j.issn.1674-5817.2025.053	Exploration of Rat Fetal Lung Tissue Fixation Methods	2025-04-03	选用SPF级雌性SD大鼠6只（10周龄，体重200~250 g），雄性大鼠2只（10周龄，体重300~350 g）/ Six SPF-grade female SD rats (10 weeks old, weighing 200–250 g) and two SPF-grade male SD rats (10 weeks old, weighing 300–350 g) were selected.	实验中遵守动物实验"替代、减少、优化（replacement，reduction，refinement，3R）"伦理原则且予以人道主义关怀，通过北京中医药大学实验动物伦理委员会审批（审批号：BUCM-2024120403-4278）/ In the experiment, the ethical principles of "replacement, reduction, refinement (3R)" for animal experiments were followed with humanitarian care, and the study was approved by the Experimental Animal Ethics Committee of Beijing University of Chinese Medicine (Approval Number: BUCM-2024120403-4278).

This articles shares the same ethical approval with other article [3] published on a Chinese journal, describing different experiments.

10.1186/s13020-025-01295-8

In this article, authors presented their research of developing a a large language model (LLM) assistant (GastroTCM) for gastroenterology, which involved fine-tuning a Llama3-8B model and augmenting it with a Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) and an agent framework. Medical records were used in this research, and the authors claimed that the ethical approval was granted on April 13th, 2020. This is questionable. For one hand, such kinds of researches usually emerged following the development of large language models, such as ChatGPT. It is unusual to have obtained ethical approval prior to ChatGPT's release. For the other hand, whether the medical records collected before the are when general public aware of the LLMs' capabilities can be legitimately used to fine-tune an LLM remains controversial.

10.1186/s13020-025-01289-6

This article cites the ethical approval BF2020-193-01, which was granted for the registered trial ChiCTR2000038969. According to the document published on the ChiCTR website, the recruitment for the ChiCTR2000038969 trial began on October 1st, 2020, and concluded on December 31st, 2022.

However, this article claims that the participants involved in the study were recruited between 2022 and 2024.

DOI	Title	Recuritment	Ethics
10.1186/s13020-025-01289-6	NMR-based metabolomics in a clinical cohort: deciphering the metabolic characteristics of gout with the dampness-heat syndrome and elucidate the efficacy of Simiao Pill	197 GDHS patients and 101 HC individuals who underwent physical examination in Guangdong Provincial Hospital of Chinese Medicine from 2022 to 2024 were selected	**BF2020-193-01**
10.12182/20251160206	Analysis of Plasma Metabolic Profile Characteristics in Gouty Arthritis With Dampness Syndrome		BF2020-193-01, BF2021-235-01
ChiCTR2000038969	Clinical cohort construction and efficacy evaluation of gouty arthritis with dampness syndrome	From 2020-10-01 To 2022-12-31	**BF2020-193-01**
10.1038/s41598-025-03243-w	MBLSTM is a contextual interaction refined method for time series prediction	Since there is no publicly available real dataset for the time series-based gouty prediction task, we collect data from Guangdong Provincial Hospital of Chinese Medicine from 2020 to 2023. The dataset contains real patients diagnosed with gouty arthritis and has a relatively complete time series relationship.	**BF2020-193-01**

We also note that another article [4] also cites the ethical approval number BF2020-193-01. However, the article [4] states the participants were recruited between 2020 and 2023. These inconsistencies suggest that the ethics statement on this article as well as article [4, 5] may be inaccurate or misleading, raising concerns about potential violations of China's ethics management regulations by the author group.

10.1186/s13020-025-01322-8

This article cites an ethical approval from Animal Experimental Ethics Committee of Shanghai Second People's Hospital (2025-0027), suggesting the approval was granted no earlier than January 1st, 2025. The authors should brought the animals after their protocol was granted by the ethics committee, and the treatments to the animal lasted for 10 weeks, after that, the authors analyzed the tissues obtained from the animal, and interpreted the data, prepared the manuscript. This process usually takes long time over a year. However, the manuscript was submitted to the journal on September 2nd, 2025, less than nine months after the approval was granted. This unusual fast process raises concern that the author may started their experiment before they obtain the ethical approval, or that the ethical approval claimed in this article may be false.

10.1186/s13020-025-01307-7

DOI	Title	Animals	Ethics
10.1186/s13020-025-01307-7	Electroacupuncture to point Baihui confers anxiolytic effects by promoting oxytocin release from PVN in Mice	Adult C57BL/6 J mice (8 weeks old) were used in the experiments, with an equal number of females and males in each group to reduce potential gender-related differences.	All animal procedures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee of the Fourth Military Medical University (FMMU, approval No. IACUC-20230115)
10.12300/j.issn.1674-5817.2023.166	Construction and Evaluation of Theranostic Near-infrared Fluorescent Probe for Targeting Inflammatory Brain Edema	选取 35 只 4～6 周龄 SPF 级雄性 BALB/c 小鼠，购自空军军医大学实验动物中心［SCXK （军） -2017-0021］，质量合格证号为20230153。	动物实验于2023年7月开展 （实验动物生产及使用许可证均在有效期内），所有操作均符合实验动物福利伦理审查要求（批号：IACUC-20230115）
10.1002/advs.202501182	Locus Coeruleus Noradrenergic-Spinal Projections Contribute to Electroacupuncture-Mediated Antinociception in Postoperative Pain in Mice	Experiments were conducted using adult mice (C57BL/6J mice or Dopamine-β -hydroxylase (DBH) – Cre mice, 6–8 weeks old) of both sexes, with an identical number of females and males in each group to minimize the possible gender difference	All animal procedures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee of the Fourth Military Medical University (FMMU, IACUC- 20230115)

This article shares the identical ethical approval number (IACUC-20230115) with two other articles [6, 7], both of which describe distinct animal experiments, raising concerns that the experiments outlined in at least two of these works were not formally approved by the ethics committee, thereby potentially violating China's ethics management regulations.

10.1186/s13020-025-01321-9

This article lists an ethical approval number of KY20231295. Notably, this approval was issued by the same ethics committee as referenced in article [8], yet the approval numbers differ in format, KY20231295 in this work versus IACUC-20230115 in Article [8]. These discrepancies raise concerns that the ethical approval cited herein may have been granted for securing funding rather than for the specific experiment described in this study.

[1] 10.1155/2022/3684899
[2] 10.21203/rs.3.rs-7844488/v1
[3] 10.12300/j.issn.1674-5817.2025.053
[4] 10.1038/s41598-025-03243-w
[5] 10.12182/20251160206
[6] 10.12300/j.issn.1674-5817.2023.166
[7] 10.1002/advs.202501182
[8] 10.1186/s13020-025-01321-9
