



上医医国

“A superior physician heals the nation.”

In addition to conferring on Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong the SMA Honorary Membership, the Association also presented Senior Minister Goh with a Chinese calligraphy piece containing the four characters written in the semi-cursive style known as 行书.

The calligrapher is Mr Kee Meng Cheng (纪民贞). Regarded today by his peers as one of the most, if not the most, gifted and accomplished calligrapher in Singapore, Mr Kee's works and philosophy are significantly influenced by his close friend and mentor Mr Pan Shou (潘受). Never ostentatious nor pretentious, his brush-work is noted for originality, depth, inner strength, structure and integrity, yet not without flow and rhythm, balanced both in form and substance.

The four-character phrase 上医医国, chosen by SMA President Dr Wong Chiang Yin, translates literally into: “A superior physician heals the nation.” Another interpretation which is also popular among scholars reads: “An outstanding leader is like a superior physician – able to heal the country's ailments with excellent skills, far-sighted wisdom, altruism and compassion.” This phrase is taken from the book *Alternative Annals of the Spring*

and *Summer Period* (春秋外传) by Zuo Qiu Ming (左丘明), a Confucian scholar in the 5th century BC. The book records the political history of China from 770 BC to 476 BC.

In early Tang dynasty, this phrase was reiterated and elaborated by Sun Si Miao (孙思邈), one of the most respected physicians and medical ethicist in the history of Chinese Medicine, when he wrote: “The superior physician heals the nation, a regular physician heals the patient, and the inferior physician treats only the disease.” Some commentators believe that 上医医国 was the very phrase that inspired and convinced Dr Sun Yet Sen, father of modern China and a Western-trained physician, that the most effective way to restore the health of the many sickly people in China then was to first treat its political and social ills.

The phrase 上医医国 is now quoted often as an appreciation of statesmen who have kept their country in good health. It also expresses an acknowledgement that medical excellence and achievements will only flourish when supported by a stable and well-organised society under a responsible government led by its enlightened leaders. ■