

## THE STORY OF THE ANTIMALARIAL DRUG ARTEMISININ: FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS DISCOVERY

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*Malaria is an ancient disease caused by the parasite Plasmodium, which is transmitted into the blood supply of human hosts by the bite of female anopheles mosquitoes. They require blood for the nourishment of their eggs. The use of cinchona bark for the treatment of various types of fevers was serendipitously discovered in early 17th century. Quinine was isolated from this bark in 1820, and it was the first antimalarial drug in the history of malaria. Some side effects of quinine gave an impetus for the synthesis of new antimalarial drugs such as chloroquine. However, the development of parasite strains that were resistant to new drugs became a serious challenge in malarial therapy, and warranted an urgent need for other alternatives. During Vietnam War (1955-1975), on 23 May 1967, China launched a project named as “Project 523” to discover potent antimalarial drug under the leadership of Tu Youyou, a woman scientist. Eventually, in 1972, she discovered a powerful antimalarial drug – artemisinin from a plant known as sweet wormwood ( Artemisia annua L.). The year 2022 marks the completion of 50 years of this epoch making discovery.*

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