



## The International Communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture: Challenges and Strategies

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### Abstract

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is one of the essential parts of Chinese culture. As the economic globalization is intensified, it is quite necessary to enhance the international communication of TCM culture. However, there are inevitably a lot of challenges to be faced with, mainly including strict restrictions on entry into foreign markets, unsatisfactory education systems of TCM, defective translated TCM classic works and misunderstanding of Chinese culture. To overcome the challenges and promote the international communication of TCM, four typical strategies are put forward as follows: a) to publicize cultural values of TCM; b) to strengthen the function of supervision and management of TCM; c) to improve the quality of translation of TCM classic works into other languages; d) to expand industries of TCM in the world. By following those strategies, TCM culture may well understand and accepted by people in the whole world.

**Key words:** TCM; Culture; International communication; Challenges and strategies

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### INTRODUCTION

It has been generally admitted that Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), as one of the indispensable parts of Chinese culture, has amazingly unique function in curing chronic diseases with complicated symptoms and maintaining health, and consequently enjoy an increasing popularity among people at home and abroad. With the development of globalization of economy and internationalization of national culture, Chinese government and ordinary people begin to be well aware of the strengths of TCM and are trying to intensify the international communication of TCM which may bring many benefits to people in the world. According to statistics, until now TCM has been spread to 183 countries and regions, some of which have already recognized the legal status of TCM. Besides, Chinese government has signed 86 cooperation contracts with foreign governments and international organizations. In addition, TCM centers have been established in 9 countries within the “One Belt One Road” area that is newly designed as the strategic international cooperation zone, and 7 Confucius institutes of TCM have been successfully established (Wang, 2016).

Although TCM, to some extent, has been favorably recognized in many countries, its internationalization still seems to have met with a lot of challenges. Chinese people and western people hold different values and concepts to treat diseases, which will inevitably lead to two different systems of medical diagnosis and treatment. However, it does not mean that one is surely better than the other so that people may pursue one but give up the other. On the contrary, it is highly probable that the two seemingly different medical systems may be well blended into one. Therefore, how to integrate TCM culture into the western-centered world medical culture is the key to the development of TCM. Without

any doubt, TCM culture is one of the most important elements of Chinese culture, and meanwhile plays a very crucial part of the world culture. Without TCM, people would not have found a good way to cure SARS (Deng, 2003). Without TCM, Tu Youyou, the Chinese Nobel prize winner of medical science, would not have found artemisinin that has been proved to be quite effective in curing malaria (Lou, 2015). Therefore, it is an important and extremely urgent task to put forward some practical strategies to improve the international communication of TCM.

## 1. THE ESSENCE OF TCM CULTURE

It is necessary to get a full understanding about the essence of TCM culture before discussing the challenges and strategies of its international communication. The present section mainly focuses on two points. One is about the philosophical concepts, and the other is about the unique diagnosis and treatment of TCM.

### 1.1 Philosophical Concepts

TCM has a long history of thousands of years, the origin of which can be traced back to remote antiquity. In the long course of struggling against diseases, TCM gradually evolved into a unique and integrated theoretical system. Undoubtedly, Chinese unique ways to fight against diseases had been resulted from the attitudes toward nature and its relationship with man. That is why TCM contains deep philosophical connotations. Among the philosophical concepts, Unity of Man and Nature, Yin and Yang, Five Phases are typical ones.

For TCM the human body is regarded as an organic whole in which its constituent parts are inseparable in structure, interrelated and interdependent in physiology, and mutually influential in pathology. Meanwhile, man lives in nature, and nature provides the conditions indispensable to man's survival. Therefore it follows that the human body is bound to be affected directly or indirectly by the changes of nature, to which the human body, in turn, makes corresponding responses. That's why TCM not only stresses the unity of the human body itself but also attaches great importance to the interrelationship between the body and nature in diagnosing and treating diseases.

The Yin-Yang theory permeates all aspects of the theoretical system of TCM. The human body is an integrated whole. All its tissues and structures are organically connected and meanwhile classified as two opposite aspects—Yin and Yang. For instance, the upper part of the body is Yang while the lower part is Yin; the back is Yang while the abdomen is Yin; the exterior is Yang while the interior is Yin; the zang-organs are Yin while the fu-organs are Yang. Meridians and collaterals also have two sides of Yin and Yang. The Yin-Yang theory believes that the normal life activities of the human

body result from the harmonious relation of the unity of opposites between Yin and Yang. If Yin and Yang can't complement each other and become separated from each other, life will come to an end, just as is said in Su Wen that "the equilibrium of Yin and Yang makes the vitality well-conserved; the divorce of Yin and Yang the essence exhausted." Consequently, the changing relationship between Yin and Yang can be utilized to explain the pathological changes and meanwhile served as a guide to diagnosis and treatment in TCM.

In TCM the Five Phases theory, which involves five natural substances such as wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, is used to explain different kinds of medical problems by analogizing and deducing their properties and interrelations. It is also used to guide clinical diagnosis and treatment. Among the five phases, there exist the relationships of generation, restriction, subjugation and counter-restriction, and mutual affection between mother-organ and child-organ. Generation implies that one kind of thing can promote, aid or bring forth another. Restriction means bringing under control or restraint. However, once any one of the five elements becomes excessive or insufficient, there would appear abnormal intergeneration and counter-restriction known as subjugation and counter-restriction. Besides, mother organ's disorder may affect its child-organ, and child organ's disorder may involve its mother organ.

### 1.2 Diagnosis and Treatment

TCM is well-known for its unique four diagnostic methods, namely, inspection, auscultation and olfaction, inquiry, and pulse-taking and palpation. They are the presuppositions of correct differentiation and effective treatment in TCM. The four methods are supplemented to each other, each having its specific function that cannot be substituted for the others. In clinical practice, only when the four techniques are well combined, can a disease be thoroughly diagnosed. Differentiation of syndromes in TCM is a method to analyze and recognize the syndrome of disease. Correct differentiation and appropriate treatment are the prerequisite for achieving good results. There exist many different methods to differentiate syndromes in TCM, such as the eight principles theory; the theory of qi, blood and body fluid, the Zang-Fu theory, the six meridians theory; the triple energizer theory (Sun, 2002, pp.16-18). Each method should be applied flexibly and accurately to deeply understand a disease, hence providing the basis for treatment.

Compared with western medical system, TCM has its unique treatment theory. Usually western medical system focuses on the removal of diseases while TCM always focuses on keeping the balance inside and outside the human body. As a result, sometimes western medical system may cure diseases at the expense of damaging healthy issues or organs, while TCM would rather choose harmonious adjustment to treat diseases, with the purpose

of avoiding bringing harms to health issues or organs (Liu, 2013, p.78). Obviously, to realize this difference is quite helpful for understanding the TCM culture.

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## **2. CHALLENGES IN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE CULTURE**

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### **2.1 Strict Restrictions on Entry Into Foreign Markets**

Firstly, in terms of identity, as a complete national medical system, TCM has not yet legally accepted in many countries. Actually, treatments of acupuncture and moxibustion have been increasingly valued in some countries though, the effectiveness of Chinese herbal medicine is still strongly questioned. Foreign governments have laid out extremely strict regulations about the entrance into their markets. As a result, only few of Chinese medicine can be allowed to go into the medicine market, while many of them are sold only as food or health care products. Secondly, in terms of function, the majority of foreign countries hold a view that TCM is only an alternative medicine of the western medicine. Consequently, TCM's functions of diagnosis and treatment cannot be thoroughly played, which brings about very bad impact to the internationalization of TCM. Thirdly, in terms of basic social system, TCM has not totally been involved in the medical care insurance system in many countries. For ordinary people, it means that they would have to spend much more money if they choose TCM. For those who are engaged in the business of TCM, it may decrease their benefits and interests in the field of TCM. To improve the situation, cultural understanding and governmental cooperation are both quite essential to be taken into consideration.

### **2.2 Unsatisfactory Education System of TCM**

There has already existed much evidence that TCM is quite effective in curing diseases and maintaining health, but many western scholars still hold a doubtful attitude toward TCM. Even they view TCM as pseudoscience. It obviously results from that fact that they have not really understood the diagnosis and treatment differences between western and Chinese medical science, and the different controlling cultures. Besides, there is no mature educational system of TCM in foreign countries. Great efforts should be made to improve many educational elements, such as subject establishment, teaching staff, teaching materials, training standards, practice conditions, and employment anticipation, and etc.. All in all, to improve the international communication of TCM requires that there should be a systemic educational mode and a consensus among academic groups and individuals.

### **2.3 Barriers of Language and Culture**

For ordinary people, Chinese language may be a biggest problem for people to understand TCM. Although "Chinese fever" has been pursued for many years in the world, there are still many ordinary people, especially those who are not well-educated. They cannot easily understand the unique concepts in TCM such as Yin and Yang, Five Phases, San Jiao, and etc., let alone the complicated Chinese grammars and characters. As a result, their ignorance and misunderstanding of Chinese language will keep them far away from TCM (Liu, 2012). In addition, it is inevitable that there exist some money-oriented salespeople who will bring about a bad reputation to TCM by some illegal ways, selling fake or substandard medicine for example. This surely affects ordinary people's evaluation of TCM.

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## **3. STRATEGIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE CULTURE**

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### **3.1 To Publicize Cultural Values of TCM**

As clearly stated in previous sections, to promote the internationalization of TCM, it is a must to publicize cultural values of TCM. It has been proved that the introduction and acceptance of western medicine into China before largely resulted from the western cultural import. It is also true of TCM. If westerners do not learn Chinese culture well, and do not have the theory basis related to TCM, they will surely not understand TCM, needless to say that they will accept TCM (Wang, 2009). Then how to publicize cultural values of TCM turns to be one of the most important questions. There are mainly three ways as follows. Firstly, to strengthen the government communication and introduction of mainstream media will improve the international environment of learning TCM culture. Secondly, to establish particular educational institutes to directly put people into touch with TCM culture. For instance, Chinese government can set up overseas study centers of TCM, and also may add the TCM courses in Confucius Institutes that have already gained much recognition in the world. Thirdly, TCM doctors, nurses and people engaged in TCM business can publicize cultural values of TCM while they are doing their own work. Surely, there may be other ways to publicize cultural values of TCM. However, only when they are well combined together, TCM may have a bright future.

### **3.2 To Strengthen the Function of Supervision and Management of TCM**

The reason why TCM cannot grab a favorable international market share is partly due to the lack of strict management and supervision. Development of

TCM industry calls for the standardization in every aspect, including production, storage, diagnosis and treatment and etc., Chinese government should set up strict scientific measures to manage and supervise each aspect of TCM. Now some countries accept the legality of acupuncture and moxibustion only, while they strongly rejected Chinese herbal medicine, which is thought to be useless and unreliable. It has a lot of things to do with pollution of air, soil, water and etc. and with practice of artificially adding some additives, although it is partly due to unaccustomedness to the unique treatment of TCM. Specifically speaking, different government departments, such as National Administration of TCM, General Administration of Quality Supervision and Inspection, Ministry of Environmental Protection, should work together to provide political support for healthy development of TCM.

### 3.3 To Improve the Quality of Translation of TCM Classic Works Into Other Languages

To strengthen the international communication of TCM, a large number of TCM classic works should be properly introduced into the world, and therefore translation quality of those works naturally becomes quite essential. Without any doubt, scholars at home and abroad have achieved a lot in terms of translation of TCM classics. For example, classic works such as *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, *Treatise on Febrile Disease*, *Compendium of Materia Medica*, have been translated into several languages. However, there still exist many problems to be tackled with. First, the qualities of various translated works are quite different. Some of them cannot fully display the cultural connotations of original works, while some of them even misunderstand the original meaning. Secondly, there exist many different translated versions for the same term, which will inevitably lead to confusion or even chaos among readers. However, this situation is turning better and better. During the past few years, some standards of English translation of TCM terms have been issued such as *Chinese Terms in Traditional Chinese Medicine and Pharmacy* (2004), *International Standard Terminologies on Traditional Medicine in Western Pacific Region* (2007), *International Standard Chinese-English Basic Nomenclature of Chinese Medicine* (2008), which will be quite beneficial to improvement of translation quality (Wang, Liu & Gao, 2015). Thirdly, translation is only limited to the few classic works. More efforts should be made to expand types and scopes of books of TCM. An increasing number of translated TCM works with good quality will surely bring an authentic TCM in front of the world people.

### 3.4 To Expand Industries of TCM in the World

To expand industries of TCM in the world is another important strategy to promote internationalization of

TCM. Cultural industries of TCM involve many fields such as scientific research, education, medical treatment, entertainment, international communication and etc.. Government of all levels, colleges and universities, enterprises and academic groups and organizations at home and abroad are strongly encouraged to cooperate with each other. Specifically, the following measures need to be considered. First, it is essential to innovate the inheritance system of TCM culture. By establishing TCM culture museum, many classic works, and folk medical prescriptions can be collected and classified systemically so that the best ideas of TCM can be passed down generation by generation. Besides, the mentoring teaching mode should be innovated to involve much more TCM lovers into the TCM career. Secondly, it is important to cultivate typical TCM products, including medicine, green tourism, advertisement, TV, movies, books, periodicals, cultural performance and etc., with the aim of expanding markets at home and abroad. Thirdly, more efforts should be made to enhance the industrial talent training, which may range from management, design, marketing to technology research and development. However, to stress industrial values of TCM does not mean that economy is the only focus. To gain the international recognition of TCM culture is the final purpose of the development of TCM.

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## CONCLUSION

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As the health awareness increases in modern society, more and more people begin to realize the health-keeping function of TCM. However, international communication of TCM is meeting with great challenges, ranging from unjust international treatment by foreign government, unsatisfactory education system of TCM, defective translated TCM classic works, to misunderstanding of Chinese culture. To change the awkward situation, it is quite essential to put forth some practical strategies. The international communication involves not only practical medical skills, but also TCM culture. Governments, colleges and universities, enterprises and academic groups and organizations at home and abroad should cooperate with each other to create an active and healthy TCM market. In this way, TCM can be understood and accepted by more and more people in this world.

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