

Analysis of Teaching in Chinese Medicine Culture Classroom for International Students

Guo Wenxiang¹, Lv Jin'e *

¹Shaanxi University of Chinese Medicine , 2297368920@qq.com

*corresponding author , lje20021005@126.com

Abstract: *Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) culture is the crystallization of the wisdom of the Chinese nation over thousands of years, with a profound cultural heritage and a unique theoretical system. This paper analyzes classroom teaching of TCM culture from three aspects: the connotation and characteristics of TCM culture, the importance of TCM culture for international students of traditional Chinese medicine, and the current status of TCM culture teaching. Teaching methods and measures include online-offline blended teaching, integrating classic TCM texts and culture into clinical teaching, and improving the Chinese proficiency of international students, so as to enrich international students' knowledge of TCM culture and enhance their Chinese language level.*

Key words: *Chinese medicine culture; international students; cultural teaching*

1.Introduction

Traditional Chinese medicine is an outstanding cultural heritage of the Chinese nation, which has played a huge role in the long history of the Chinese nation with its unique values and rich philosophical connotations. Rooted in excellent traditional culture, TCM culture is the specific embodiment of traditional culture in the field of TCM. It emphasizes the harmony among human beings, morality, and natural laws. Its core value orientation contains the basic ideas of "benevolence, harmony, kindness, and sincerity", as well as philosophical thoughts sharing the same origin and unique cultural characteristics. These elements have shaped the mechanisms and internal laws of social development, reflecting our ancestors' continuous understanding of the universe and life, as well as their unremitting exploration of nature ^[1].

With the increasing global influence of TCM, more and more international students are attracted to China to study TCM knowledge. Facing this trend, how to effectively carry out TCM education for international students has become a key issue that needs urgent solution. TCM culture teaching can not only help international students better understand and apply TCM knowledge and skills but also enable them to gain a deeper understanding of Chinese traditional culture and China itself, thereby enhancing China's international influence.

2. The Connotation and Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture

2.1.The Connotation of TCM Culture

TCM culture is an important component of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation. It is the sum of spiritual and material civilizations that reflect the essence and characteristics of TCM, rooted in Chinese traditional philosophy, history, and literature [2]. Chinese traditional culture is rich and extensive, and TCM culture constitutes a part of it in the field of medicine. While closely intertwined with traditional Chinese medical culture, TCM culture also has its unique connotations and characteristics.

In ancient legends, Fu Xi tasted various herbs to create nine needles, Shen Nong sampled hundreds of herbs, and Yi Yin invented decoctions. These stories highlight the early attempts of Chinese ancestors in exploring and applying Chinese herbal medicine. Through thousands of years of practice and experience accumulation, TCM culture has continuously evolved and enriched. During this period, classic pharmaceutical works such as Shennong's herbal classic and Compendium of Materia Medica were born, and outstanding pharmaceutical scholars like Li Shizhen and Sun Simiao emerged.

In contemporary times, the integration of Chinese herbal medicine with modern technology has deepened the study of TCM culture. For example, the cultural categories of TCM include medicinal diet culture, the concept of "medicine and food sharing the same origin," research and development of health-preserving herbal drinks, and medical herb classics. The sum of all activities related to traditional Chinese medicine and pharmacy can be collectively referred to as TCM culture.

2.2. Characteristics of TCM Culture

The main research of TCM culture serves as the source for other forms of TCM culture research. Its core contents—such as the theory of herbal properties, efficacy and main indications, monographs on herbal medicine, herbal origins, and traditional processing methods—all embody the connotations of traditional Chinese culture [3]. As an important component of TCM culture, Chinese herbal medicine culture shares the commonalities of TCM culture while possessing its own unique characteristics.

2.2.1. Regionality

China is a vast and multi-ethnic country, which has created regional differences. Traditional Chinese medicine culture exhibits regional characteristics due to the unique living habits and customs of different areas. In TCM, regionality is particularly reflected in authentic medicinal materials. Authentic medicinal herbs refer to those grown in specific geographic regions, known for their superior quality and remarkable efficacy. These herbs go beyond ordinary medicinal materials: their growth not only mirrors the local natural and geographical features but also deeply embodies the local humanistic customs and cultural characteristics. For example, ginseng from Northeast China, wolfberries from Ningxia, fritillary bulbs from Sichuan, and caterpillar fungi and snow lotus from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau are all important components of their respective regional cultures. Authentic medicinal herbs not only profoundly reflect the geographical environment and local culture but also highlight the regional characteristics of TCM culture.

2.2.2 Nationality

General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "Every civilization is rooted in its own soil of existence, embodies the extraordinary wisdom and spiritual pursuit of a country and a nation, and has its own value of existence."^[4] TCM culture demonstrates distinct national characteristics, with its ideological foundation rooted in the traditional thinking patterns of ancient China. During its development, TCM culture has deeply integrated the core concepts of Chinese traditional philosophy, such as yin-yang and the five elements, syndrome differentiation and treatment, as well as Taoist ideas of health preservation and Confucian ethical theories. Against the backdrop of specific social and cultural contexts, these concepts have intertwined with contemporary values and thinking modes, jointly shaping the theoretical framework and practical pathways of TCM culture. TCM culture not only profoundly reflects the national characteristics of the Chinese nation, but also the formation of its theoretical and practical models is the result of the mutual integration of these diverse ideas in practical applications.

2.2.3. Timeliness

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China states that "the fine traditional Chinese culture has a long history and is broad and profound, being the crystallization of the wisdom of Chinese civilization" ^[5]. As the core and essence of traditional Chinese medicine discipline, TCM culture has continued to evolve and innovate with the progress of the times. In the ideological aspect, TCM culture actively absorbs and integrates various emerging cultural elements, including the Daoist cultural concept of TCM health preservation, the influence of Buddhist culture, and the unique cultural characteristics of various ethnic regions. Through this inclusive cultural integration, TCM culture enriches its connotations and demonstrates new vitality in the modern context. In terms of TCM itself, the theoretical system of TCM has become more systematic and perfect. Combined with modern information technology, it has formed a new diversified system of modern TCM culture. Over thousands of years of history and through the succession of eras, TCM culture has been continuously developing and changing, absorbing beneficial cultures and eliminating dross, showing distinct timeliness. From this perspective, the timeliness of TCM culture connects the past, present, and future of traditional Chinese medicine.

3. The Importance of Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture for International Students of TCM

3.1 Understanding Chinese Culture and Stimulating Learning Interest

International students can gain a deeper understanding and learning of traditional Chinese medicine knowledge by studying TCM culture. Conversely, mastering relevant knowledge of Chinese herbal medicine allows international students to have a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese culture. TCM culture has its unique theoretical framework and practical approaches; it plays the role of a cornerstone and link in TCM education, and is an indispensable part of clinical teaching.

TCM culture is an integral part of TCM diagnosis and treatment, and the proficient mastery and effective application of TCM cultural knowledge by international students serve as a basic prerequisite for studying TCM disciplines. Only when international students have a deep grasp

of the basic knowledge and culture of Chinese herbal medicine can they profoundly comprehend the interaction between the Chinese nation and nature throughout its long historical development, as well as how the understanding of nature has been integrated into all aspects of social life. This integration has been accumulated, precipitated, and refined over thousands of years, forming the profound and unique TCM culture today. It also enables international students to more accurately understand TCM theories that explain the efficacy, properties, and mechanisms of herbal medicine based on ancient philosophical thoughts such as Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, as well as the analysis of the deep mysteries of TCM through doctrines like Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. A deep understanding of the core mechanisms of Chinese herbal medicine and its culture can stimulate international students' interest in learning TCM and Chinese culture, thereby promoting their in-depth study of both TCM and Chinese culture.

3.2 Broadening Medical Knowledge and Promoting Communication between Chinese and Western Medicines

The holistic concept and syndrome differentiation-based treatment in TCM are fundamentally different from Western medicine, which emphasizes the physical entities of diseases and the diseases themselves. There is a close and interdependent relationship between TCM's theoretical system and TCM culture, which is deeply rooted in philosophical thinking such as the Five Elements theory, Yin-Yang doctrine, and the concept of vital essence. "Yin-Yang" describes two opposing and interdependent forces or states in nature, which ebb and flow in dynamic balance. The "Five Elements" theory explains the coordination, balance, opposition, and unity among things through the generating, restraining, over-restraining, and insulting relationships of the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth). The so-called "vital essence" refers to the basic substances constituting organisms and maintaining life operations, as well as their functions. By studying TCM's theoretical system and TCM culture, international students of TCM can broaden their medical horizons, understand different medical concepts and treatment methods, and improve their medical literacy. This enables them to have more choices in future clinical medical practices and promote the communication and integration of Chinese and Western medicines in practice.

3.3 Enhancing Humanistic Literacy and Enriching the Spiritual World

TCM culture is an important component of China's excellent traditional culture. Professor Zhang Qicheng has summarized its core values as the four characters "Benevolence, Harmony, Precision, and Sincerity", specifically interpreted as "benevolent medical mind, harmonious medical path, exquisite medical skills, and sincere medical ethics". These fully reflect the values, moral concepts, and ways of thinking of TCM ^[6]. TCM culture embodies the insights of Chinese ancestors into cosmic life and their continuous exploration of nature. It has also absorbed the excellent thoughts of philosophy, Confucianism, and Taoism, making it a rare spiritual treasure for international students of TCM. By learning TCM culture, international students can not only improve their medical skills and theoretical knowledge but also absorb the essence of China's excellent culture. By integrating this with the culture and medical expertise of their own nations, they can enhance their humanistic literacy and broaden their spiritual horizons. Meanwhile,

after studying TCM theories and culture, when international students return to their home countries to conduct clinical research and practice, they promote the internationalization of TCM, further accelerating its global dissemination.

4. Analysis of Teaching Methods for TCM Culture to International Students

4.1 Current Situation and Problems

With the increasing acceptance of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) in more countries and regions, and the rising international status of TCM, an increasing number of international students are coming to China to study TCM. Enhancing the attractiveness of TCM education to international students and strengthening the global dissemination of traditional TCM culture have become core issues and main objectives in the teaching practice of TCM for international students. Specifically, how to improve the quality of TCM education and attract more overseas students to engage in TCM learning is a problem we must face.

However, international students come from all over the world, and their language backgrounds, cultural customs, and learning environments differ significantly, making their adaptation to the Chinese education system a challenging and difficult process to complete quickly. Especially in terms of language and culture, the significant differences between the native languages of international students and Chinese lead to many difficulties in understanding and communication during their learning process. In addition, with the development and introduction of modern education, the education of international students in TCM has placed more emphasis on theoretical and technical training in professional knowledge, which has largely restricted the education of TCM culture. This has resulted in international students being unable to grasp the profound connotations of TCM and has greatly limited the dissemination and development of TCM culture. Moreover, there are other problems in the teaching of TCM culture to international students, such as: the lack of practicality and flexibility in teaching materials and methods, the weak operability of their implementation, and the overly monotonous and limited teaching content.

4.2 Analysis of Teaching Methods for TCM Culture to International Students

4.2.1 Online-Offline Blended Teaching

Blended learning simply refers to the combination of face-to-face teaching and online learning. The development of internet information technology has provided very convenient conditions for the application of blended teaching.

The curricular characteristics of Chinese materia medica and the rapid development of modern educational technology have put forward higher requirements for teachers in terms of professional competence, teaching skills, humanistic literacy, etc. ^[7]. According to the learning situation of international students, corresponding teaching methods should be appropriately adjusted. We should select appropriate teaching methods based on the actual situation of classroom teaching and students' learning conditions.

In offline teaching, we can have direct contact with students and obtain their understanding

of classroom knowledge through specific feedback such as facial expressions and answers in class. For example, in the offline course of Chinese materia medica, according to the main characteristics of the course, we can bring some physical samples to the classroom for explanation, allowing students to specifically recognize the characteristics of the Chinese medicines they are learning. For instance, the medicinal herb **Sedum aizoon** (Jingtian) has a conical root, rough surface, and densely growing fine roots. We can bring this herb to the classroom to show international students, which can deepen their understanding of the herb and make it easier for them to remember its medicinal properties and remarkable characteristics.

However, in online teaching, due to the distance between teachers and students, we often cannot observe students' learning status in real time, so it is crucial to pay attention to the timely improvement of teaching content and methods. For example, when learning about the Chinese medicine **donkey-hide gelatin** (Ejiao), we can quote a clip from the TV series **The Legend of Zhen Huan** where Ejiao is used for health preservation, and then combine it with the Dading Fengzhu prescription (18g Raw White Peony, 9g Ejiao, 12g Raw Turtle Shell, 18g Dry Rehmannia, 6g Hemp Seed, 6g Schisandra, 12g Raw Oyster, 18g Ophiopogon, 12g Roasted Licorice, 2 Chicken Yolks, 12g Soft-Shelled Turtle Shell) to help students understand the effects of Ejiao. Integrating popular film and television elements into online teaching enriches the teaching content, gives full play to the advantages of online teaching, and ensures teaching quality.

4.3 Integrating Classic TCM Theories and Culture into Clinical Teaching

The evaluation criteria for the effectiveness of clinical teaching are of great significance. Clinical teaching can not only test international students' mastery of TCM knowledge, but also deepen their understanding of the learned content. By focusing on imparting clinical practical abilities, it enables international students to enhance their hands-on operation skills.^[8] Meanwhile, clinical practice can also arouse students' enthusiasm and initiative in learning. Adopting a teaching cycle from theory to practice and then back to theory helps international students timely consolidate and apply the knowledge they have learned, thus forming positive feedback on the learning content. This process not only deepens students' understanding and recognition of TCM and Chinese materia medica, but also strengthens their confidence in learning TCM culture.

The classic works of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) are the root of TCM and the essence of the wisdom of medical practitioners across dynasties. Carrying out classic TCM education among medical students is crucial for cultivating TCM talents^[9]. We should adhere to the educational philosophy of "interpreting TCM through culture" and integrate traditional cultural elements into the process of clinical teaching and apprenticeship. This approach aims to verify the profound connotations of classic culture through clinical practice and highlight the effectiveness of clinical treatment with classic culture, so as to effectively promote international students to form a TCM syndrome differentiation and treatment thinking system.

For example, loquat is commonly used in clinical practice for treating coughs. It not only has excellent therapeutic effects but also embodies the essence of ancient Chinese traditional

culture. We can help international students understand this medicinal herb by integrating its therapeutic properties with traditional cultural connotations. In the **Benjing Fengyuan**, the efficacy of loquat is described as: "Only when fully ripe can loquat quench thirst, relieve asthma, and moisturize the five internal organs." This indicates that in its fully mature state, loquat possesses the effects of quenching thirst, regulating qi movement, and nourishing the internal organs. The **Diannan Materia Medica** mentions that loquat can treat symptoms such as lung atrophy, hemoptysis, cough with excessive phlegm, and asthma caused by consumptive injuries, as well as febrile conditions in children due to wind-cold. Cui Yuxi's **Shi Jing** states that loquat can also suppress qi reversal and relieve nausea and vomiting, explaining the principle of its anti-vomiting effect. This allows international students to intuitively perceive the efficacy of Chinese medicine and understand it from the perspective of traditional culture. In clinical treatment, integrating the theories of classic TCM literature into practice and combining the essence of TCM and Chinese traditional culture not only promotes international students' in-depth understanding of TCM theories—transforming abstract and complex concepts into concrete, accessible, practical, and simple forms—but also enables them to experience firsthand the remarkable effectiveness of therapeutic methods from classic TCM in solving clinical problems and treating diseases.

4.4 Improving Chinese Proficiency of International Students

Chinese is an important tool for learning traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), and mastering Chinese plays a crucial role in cultivating international students' interest in TCM ^[10]. Students' Chinese proficiency profoundly affects their acceptance of TCM knowledge and culture, as well as their academic performance. Therefore, before international students begin their studies, their Chinese proficiency should be evaluated and tested to determine whether they can directly enroll in undergraduate programs or need to first enter a preparatory program. During the preparatory education stage, courses such as **Introduction to Chinese Materia Medica** and **Fun Exploration of Chinese Herbs** can be offered, which are simple, easy to understand, and interesting. During breaks, teachers can raise questions that interest students for discussion, such as comparisons of dietary differences, introductions to tourist attractions, and customs of important festivals between China and other countries ^[11]. These measures lay a solid foundation for international students to smoothly transition to undergraduate-level TCM studies.

The study of TCM by international students is not only a matter of language. The historical, cultural, and ideological differences of their home countries are also important factors affecting their learning. Over the course of thousands of years of development, Chinese medicine has formed its own unique characteristics. By absorbing the ideas of China's excellent traditional culture, it has developed a unique Chinese medicine culture. For international students accustomed to modern scientific education, they usually find it easier to master Western medical theories quickly. These theories are based on micro-level analysis, empirical evidence, and reductionism. However, TCM theories are macroscopic and abstract, and emphasize the holistic view and syndrome differentiation and treatment, which are often difficult for them to deeply understand and master proficiently in a short period of time. Therefore, creating an environment full of Chinese traditional culture, providing rich literary,

historical, and philosophical knowledge, and improving the Chinese proficiency of international students have far-reaching implications for stimulating their learning interest and deepening their understanding of the essence of TCM.

4.5 Carrying out a series of TCM culture activities

By launching activities such as the "TCM Classics and Traditional Culture" lecture series, forums, and classic reading & sharing sessions, international students can not only listen to and understand TCM classics and the stories of TCM culture and traditional culture, but also become capable of telling these stories well. Meanwhile, a series of interesting activities can be designed based on TCM-related idioms and allusions, formulae, and herb names, allowing students to experience, perceive, and learn through hands-on participation.

Leveraging the rich resources of TCM colleges and universities, diversified cultural experience courses can be carried out, which serve as practical approaches to understanding and mastering TCM cultural knowledge. Through cultural experience courses, students can step out of traditional classroom settings. Through on-site observation and teaching, abstract and ancient theoretical texts are transformed into concrete and perceptible real-life experiences, which is recognized as the most direct and effective way to feel and understand TCM culture.

Conclusion

Based on the education of TCM culture and Chinese traditional culture, we are committed to exploring various teaching strategies to gradually cultivate the syndrome differentiation thinking of international students in TCM. This approach can not only stimulate international students' deep interest in TCM culture but also help them gain a deeper understanding and comprehension of TCM cultural theories. This is not only an effective way to teach TCM to international students but also the direction of our continuous exploration and efforts in transmitting classics, promoting TCM, and inheriting Chinese culture.

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