

Challenges and Strategies of the International Dissemination of Traditional Chinese Medicine

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Abstract—In the globalized age, TCM international dissemination is confronted with rigorous challenges derived from cultural conflicts on the way to its internationalization. This essay has made a detailed analysis of the factors obstructing its international communication—shortage of professionals, cultural differences between TCM and Western Medicine, and problems TCM in translation, then proposed three corresponding strategies including development of TCM translation, cultivation of internationalized talents, and integration of Chinese and Western Medicine. It is foreseeable that in future, TCM will achieve its legal position as a complementary and substitute medicine and gradually develop to be a part of the mainstream medicine.

Keywords—TCM; international dissemination; challenges; strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) as a significant part of traditional Chinese culture, is disseminating around the world and has become an important constituent of the human health security system[1]. It is a means available for foreigners to understand the major modes of thinking of Chinese. To propel the international dissemination of TCM is to spread TCM theory and Chinese culture, to provide a healthy concept and lifestyle under the guidance of TCM theory, and to better promote the position and influence of TCM in world medical field. However, international dissemination is a complex process involving many different elements, ranging from languages to cultures between the East and West. It is hard for foreigners to understand the profundity of TCM theory.

B. The Significance of the Essay

As a preliminary study of the international dissemination of TCM, this essay may be an incentive to the development of TCM. In the practice of TCM dissemination, there exist still many problems. Therefore, to call the attention of scholars to its communicating methods is a must. Meanwhile, as an indispensable part of traditional Chinese culture, TCM plays a crucial part in the communication of traditional Chinese culture, thus China will be better known through the spread of TCM.

C. The Organization of the Essay

The essay consists of four chapters. It begins with the introduction elaborating on the background, the value and the structure of the study. Next is about the literature review, the

development of TCM culture. The third section is composed of two parts: the challenges and the strategies of the development of TCM culture. Finally, the conclusion, restates the main viewpoints of the author and pointing out the significance of this research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Current Situation of TCM International Dissemination

TCM is a great heritage of the Chinese civilization, and the precious fortune of the Chinese nation. With the continued expanding of Reform and Opening and the enhancement of comprehensive national strength, China has actively propelled international exchanges and cooperation on TCM. China has signed cooperation treaties and agreements on TCM with over 70 countries and has made TCM accessible to over 160 countries and regions globally by steadily expanding international communication of TCM application, education and technological development.

It is satisfactory that the clinical treatment with TCM acupuncture and moxibustion has been acknowledged as a masterpiece of intangible human heritage. Furthermore, some classical works, such as *Huangdi Neijing (Huangdi's Canon of Medicine)* and *Bencao Gangmu (Compendium of Materia Medica)* have been included in the UNESCO Memory of the World. Also, it is cheerful that the International Standardization Organization has set up the TCM Technical Committee, whose secretariat is located in China[2].

Early in the last century, the international spread of TCM is of concern to some scholars. Ma Boying summed up the causes, problems and prospects of the rise of Chinese medicine in the UK combining his personal experience. During the 21st century, China attaches great importance to international dissemination of Chinese Medicine. In April 2009, the State Council issued “*Opinions of the State Council on supporting and promoting the Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine*”, clearly claiming that Chinese medicine, as a treasure of Chinese nation, contains the core of philosophical thoughts and human spirit.

In addition, to promote the development of TCM in foreign countries, TCM technical staffs have been incorporated in a number of overseas Chinese Medicine societies, associations and academic organizations, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE I. INFLUENTIAL FOREIGN INSTITUTIONS OR ASSOCIATIONS OF TCM[3]

Name	Website
International Committee of acupuncture and related techniques	www.icmart.org
The European Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine	www.eatcm.net
German Acupuncture Association	www.daegfa.de
Netherlands Institute of Acupuncturist	www.acupunctuur.com
Swiss International Institute of Chinese Medicine	www.akupunktur.ch
The UK Registered Association of TCM	www.meiplc.com.cn/cmir

B. Modern Education of TCM

Under long-standing support from the Chinese Medicine circles in China, the education in foreign countries has had rapid development[4]. The regular universities in many western countries have commenced the education of the TCM, taking shape from non-governmental, small-scale and low-level stage to mainstream, standardized, localized and fine mode. TCM education thus has gained support from the government and been accepted by the mainstream education. The cross-nation cooperation in the major of the Chinese medicine between Middlesex University in Britain and the Peking University of Tradition Chinese Medicine in China is a typical example.

The total time of modern education of TCM varies from 1800 to 5000 hours, mainly spent on classroom teaching, and partly on clinical probation and practice. TCM teaching recruits students for prospective doctors, dentists, nurses, treatment doctors, rehabilitation staff and so on. And the majors include the Chinese medicine, acupuncture, herbalism, healing and health care. Moreover, Chinese Philosophy, basic theory and history of TCM, Symptomatology, Diagnostics of the Chinese medicine, Chinese language, Chinese Pharmaceutics, Prescription, Plant Medicine, Clinical Practice of the Chinese medicine, Acupuncture, Tuina, Therapeutics of physical training, Diet therapy and Nutrition are involved in courses[5]. Such a complete system helps train professional personnel and provides favorable conditions for international communication of TCM.

III. DISCUSSIONS

A. Challenges of TCM International Dissemination

The process of international dissemination of TCM is saturated with challenges. The shortage of professional talents, the differences between TCM and Western Medicine in cultures and the translation skills of TCM have hindered the international dissemination of TCM.

1) Shortage of Professionals

China has developed a unique training system to bring up qualified TCM professionals as the cultivation of qualified professional considered the cornerstone for the development of TCM. Besides the increasing endeavors to train high-caliber professionals in clinical practice, the government has enhanced its efforts to communicate and pass down the academic philosophies and professional experiences of the renowned and senior TCM experts, master-apprentice tutorials and continuing

education at different levels and through different channels. Up till the end of last year, the total number of institutions specializing in TCM and ethnic medicine has reached 46, with 553,000 undergraduate students of TCM on campus, 294,000 certified TCM practitioners and assistant doctors, and 97,000 licensed TCM pharmacists and assistant pharmacists [6].

However, International communication makes higher requirements for participants that they must have not only the deep knowledge of TCM theory and professionalism, but also good mastery of foreign languages and international awareness. At present, such qualified and competent talents are in a serious shortage.

Chinese medical personnel in the fields of cultivation and research, medicine production and management, as well as medicine foreign trade and marketing are badly in need in the development of traditional Chinese medical industry. Unfortunately, the existing tendency shows the over-simplification in knowledge structure, professional structure and the type of personnel of TCM. Since the core of achieving the internationalization of Chinese medical industry is a matter of personnel, it is urgent to test and optimize the structure of professionals in TCM industry.

2) Cultural Differences between TCM and Western Medicine

TCM and Western Medicine develop along their respective tracks and have their respective characteristics due to the differences in methodology, historical and cultural background and technical conditions. Many foreigners therefore have conflicting attitude towards TCM, which may have adverse impact on the international dissemination of TCM. While Western Medicine relies on accurate diagnosis by naming the disease and its causes, Chinese Medicine stresses the patient's reactions and approaches to the diseases on the point that each individual is unique.

A leading expert on Chinese herbal medicine, Dr. Yakazu Domei, lists the following differences between Chinese and Western Medicine, as shown in table2:

TABLE II. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN MEDICINE

Chinese Medicine		Western Medicine	
Philosophical	Synthetic	Scientific	Analytical
Holistic	Internal	local	Surgical
Empirical	Hygienic	Theoretical	Preventive
Individual	Preventive	Socialized	Bacteriological
Experiential	Humoral	Experimental	Cellular
Subjective	Natural sources	Objective	Synthetic analogs

Chinese Medicine views the universe as an organism and man as a microcosm of the universe. Western medicine on the other hand, views the human body as a machine made up of parts. These different assumptions have produced the divergences between Chinese and Western medicine.

From the above description it is evident that Chinese medicine is holistic in approach while Western medicine is local. Take the syndrome of "red eyes", a Western doctor will

use lotion to wash the eyes while the Chinese physician will regard the disorder as “over-thriving fire” and try to reduce the “fire” by prescribing some fire-dissipating agents like coptis or gardenia. Another example is itching skin, a syndrome related to the vitality of the liver in Chinese Medicine, making the liver the focal point for treatment. The Western physician, however, would be more likely to use a dermatological lotion.

3) Problems of TCM Translation

Language is the carrier of culture. Culture is the basis of language survival and the source of language changes. Therefore translators should not only understand the differences between Chinese and Western languages, but also be familiar with the differences of Chinese and Western cultures. The translation must be taken into account as different cultural factors. TCM, as a collection of ancient philosophy and medicine thoughts, is inextricably linked with culture.

In the history of TCM translation, the most classic and iconic event is the translation of *Compendium of Materia Medica*. Since *the Compendium of Materia Medica*'s was originally published by JinLing Publishing House in 1956, it has been translated into Japanese, Latin, French, Russian, German, British and other languages. Whether for the international communication of Chinese medicine, or for the development of botany and pharmacy on a global basis, it has had a significant impact.

Lots of scholars from China and West have adopted various principles and methods in translating TCM terms. But nobody can propose a systematic system to regulate the translation of TCM terms successfully[7]. Any systematic research in either TCM translation history or the its translation standardization has been published. Presently, four problems exist that confused many translators.

a) The translation of one single term varies from person to person. This seriously hinders the standardization of terminology translation. For example, “辨证论治” has several translation forms: “treatment based on syndrome differentiation”, “differentiating syndrome to decide treatment”, “differentiation and treatment”. “肺朝百脉” also has different translation forms: “all the blood vessels meet in the lungs”, “all the blood vessels lead to the lung”, “blood flow of the whole body converges in the lung”.

b) The translation of a term is verbose. TCM terms are short and refined, but the translation of TCM is usually wordy. For example, the translations of “八纲辨证” are “differentiating diagnosis in accordance with the eight principal syndromes”, “diagnosis according to the eight guiding principles”, “analyzing and differentiating pathological conditions in accordance with the eight principal syndromes” and so on.

c) Inaccurate translation is also a problem. As TCM terms don't have one unified translation standard, it's hard to find proper words in English that can match the cultural meaning of TCM. For instance, “气” is a very important and basic concept in TCM. It has been translated into “energy”, “vital energy”, and “Qi” in different dictionaries. But how

translation can accurately convey the original meaning of “气” remains unanswered.

d) TCM terms are abundant in cultural connotation.

Chinese cultural elements, such as Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and ancient philosophies, all greatly influenced TCM[8]. Due to different cultural backgrounds, translators find it difficult to compensate for the losses of culture information. Consider “青龙白虎汤” for example, it is often translated into “Blue Dragon and White Tiger Decoction” in a literal the way. Target language readers may easily misconceive that the main substance of the decoction are blue dragon and white tiger or this is a decoction curing the diseases of these two animals. It is also hard to explain the imagined dragon to them. Actually both “青龙” and “白虎” are terms originated from Taoism, representing the two crucial constellations. In this prescription they are used to describe the effectiveness of the decoction. Thus, the fact that translations do not embody the cultural image at all or change the original image of TCM terms poses big challenges for most translators.

B. Strategies of TCM International Dissemination

1) Integration of Chinese and Western Medicine

TCM, with its 5000-year history, still has its development potential in theory. And it is gradually recognized by the world because of its unique diagnosis and treatment system as well as effective therapeutic approach. Nowadays TCM is merging into the current trend of cultural, scientific and technological development, moving toward to its goal of modernization. It is urgent that TCM follow its law of development to make full use of modern scientific technology. Also TCM should inherit characteristics and carry forward its advantages to eventually make novel innovations and upgrade theoretically and practically. TCM should make itself a theoretical medical system through modern science and technology[9].

2) Development of TCM Translation

Translation builds up bridge for cultural exchanges. It promotes international communication and cooperation. Accurate, comprehensive, and understandable translation of TCM has the extremely important influence over the communication and development of TCM internationally. The translation of Chinese medicine practice and research is facing extremely chaotic situation[10]. A translator of TCM should overcome cultural barriers and actively adjust the translation strategies on the basis of the knowledge of TCM culture.

TCM has its unique expression about Pathology and Physiology of human bodies, which cannot be found equivalents in English. In order to keep its original meaning, literal ways are usually adopted. In addition, literal translation with annotation can solve some problems of untranslatability and unintelligibility. The misleading and missing of the cultural information in the TCM terms therefore can be avoided. The following example is the translation around Yin and Yang in the following terms in *Huangdi Neijing·Su Wen*[11] from Ms. Veith, a Western scholar .

- Yin and Yang (the male and female elements in nature).

- Yang (the element of light); Yin (the element of darkness).
- Yin and Yang (the negative and positive principle in nature).
- Yang (the lucid element); Yin (the turbid element).
- Yin and Yang (the two opposing principles).

However, on some occasions, the mere literal translation can cause problems and confuse readers more. As a result, a translator has to dedicate the approach of free translation--the way by which translators try their best to express the intended meaning of the original, instead of keeping the original meaning of the source language. Thus in terms of no equivalents available in English, free translation can be advisable.

TCM internationalization is an inevitable result of the international communication of TCM, and accurate translation of TCM terms and expression systems is very important. Only on the basis of accurate translation, can they make people of different cultural backgrounds accurately understand Traditional Chinese Medicine. Therefore, researches on TCM translation must be strengthened.

3) *Cultivation of Internationalized TCM Talents*

At present, many people are keen on the international communication of TCM culture. They have made a great contribution to TCM translation. However, lack of translation talents is still an inescapable drawback. Therefore, in order to realize the globalization and modernization of TCM, specialized institutions must set up a team of international talents who are keen on TCM translation, and provide talent guarantee for the international communication of TCM. Just as the development of any other careers, to promote the international exchanges and cooperation in Chinese medicine, it is necessary to be supported from expertized personnel[6]. And it is necessary to vigorously develop international talents of Chinese Medicine with the following four qualifications.

a) They should have a good command with specialized subject and good command of TCM, modern biomedical theory and relevant skills.

b) They should be not only well-acquainted with Chinese and Western cultures but also good at cultural integration.

c) They should be proficient in TCM translation skills and fluent communicating in a foreign language.

d) They should hold great interests, enthusiasm, and sense of responsibility to implement international exchanges and cooperation between Chinese and Western Medicine.

To realize the international communication of TCM, people should profoundly understand and grasp the historical significance and current situation of international exchanges and cultural output. They also should understand the overall meaning of the Chinese and Western medical systems. Meanwhile, English translators of TCM need to strengthen cross-cultural theoretical study and overcome cultural barriers. A unified translation standard of TCM should be established as

soon as possible. Furthermore, the government should strengthen the cultivation of international talents of TCM.

IV. CONCLUSION

TCM as a fruit of the wisdom in China with a history of several-thousand years, is a huge treasure-house and a valuable heritage of world culture[2]. The international community has gradually realized its scientific features and importance, and paid more attention to it. To sum up, it's the common goal to introduce TCM to the world systematically and completely without losing its characteristics as well as to spread the traditional culture of Chinese Medicine. This essay is written only in the hope that it will be of some help to the spreading of TCM in the world and a better fulfillment of the development of medical science.

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