



Thoughts on the Strategy of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the Post-pandemic Era

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Abstract. In 2020, COVID-19 spreads fast around the world and threatens people's lives. In this special time, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has shown its advantages in curing the disease and gradually grown into the main force in the fight against the epidemic. TCM has shown its excellent clinical effects in the anti-epidemic process, and its social impact has also been continuously enhanced. On this basis, we strive to light on the strategy of traditional Chinese medicine in the post-epidemic era, by discussing restoring self-confidence in Chinese medical culture, reshaping Chinese medical image, reevaluating the clinical efficacy of Chinese medicine, rebuilding discourse platform and reconstruct the living environment.

Keywords: Strategy · Traditional Chinese medicine · Post-pandemic era

1 Introduction

Since COVID-19 broke out at the beginning of 2020, Chinese medicine has gradually undertaken the important task in the entire process of epidemic prevention and control, and become a main force in the fight against the epidemic ^[1]. Reviewing the critical situation of curbing COVID-19 with traditional Chinese medicine, and systematical summary of the excellent clinical efficacy and the increasing social impact during the anti-epidemic process, we propose five strategies for the development of TCM in the post-pandemic era.

2 Restoring Self-confidence in Chinese Medical Culture

For over one hundred years, TCM gradually lost its basic cultural confidence because it has been impacted by Western modern scientific and technological civilization. The crisis in the development of TCM is a part of the crisis of traditional Chinese medical culture. Therefore, to develop TCM internationally, we must regain and enhance our self-confidence in its culture first. Only when the self-confidence of traditional Chinese medicine culture is strengthened, can the brilliant traditional Chinese medicine could be indeed revitalized.

Self-confidence in traditional Chinese medical culture means high identification with its core ideas, life values, and health concepts; a high degree of recognition of the scientific knowledge system created by the cognitive thinking pattern of TCM; a high degree of trust in clinical diagnosis and treatment technology; a high degree of confidence in clinical efficacy. Self-confidence in traditional Chinese medical culture is not based on the praise of flamboyant phrase, but on the definite curative effect as its primary basis and key academic foundation. Self-confidence in traditional Chinese medical culture can be understood from the following aspects:

2.1 Self-confidence in Traditional Chinese Medical History

TCM has a long history, and it is extensive and profound. From the ancient, Shennong tasted hundreds of herbs, Fuxi invented nine needles, Qihuang discoursed the theory of medicine, it has experienced thousands of years of difficult exploration and development until today. The outstanding and intelligent contribution of physicians from different dynasties has gradually created an extensive and profound traditional Chinese medical culture, unique medical knowledge system and exquisite diagnosis and treatment technology. Those have made great contributions to the prosperity of Chinese nation.

2.2 Self-confidence in Traditional Chinese Medical Concept

The core idea of traditional Chinese medicine culture is the holistic view of “harmony between man and nature”, which is also the core value of traditional Chinese culture. It not only emphasizes the identity, correspondence and interaction between man and nature, but also requires people to have reverence for the natural world. Some medical concepts and thoughts such as the holistic view of “harmony between man and nature” and prevention of disease have been updated over time, and they still have a guiding role in the sustainable development of mankind on the earth.

2.3 Self-confidence in Traditional Chinese Medical Theory

Although TCM has not formed the modality of academic theory of modern science, it has gradually formed a set of relatively complete system theories that can guide clinical practice, such as the theory of Yin and Yang, the theory of visceral manifestation, the meridian system and the theory of qi, blood and body fluid. It helps people simply recognize human health and diseases from a different perspective.

2.4 Self-confidence in Traditional Chinese Medicine Method

Traditional Chinese medical thinking methods such as hieroglyphic thinking, intuition, and insight; as well as diagnosis and treatment technologies such as inspection, auscultation and olfaction, inquiry, palpation, acupuncture and moxibustion, are a set of practical and effective diagnostic methods. They play an important role in diagnosis and treatment.

2.5 Self-confidence in Therapeutic Effect of Traditional Chinese Medicine

After thousands of years of clinical practice, TCM has stable and definite curative effects on many common diseases, difficult diseases, critical illnesses and viral diseases. Especially in 2020, it has achieved remarkable curative effects in anti-epidemic and allowed patients receive their treatment without any worries.

3 Reshaping Chinese Medical Image

Referring to TCM, people may come up with some famous physicians such as Bian Que, Hua Tuo, Li Shizhen first and merely remind of some ancient literature as *Huangdi's Canon of Medicine* and *Treatise on Cold Damage and Miscellaneous Disease*. This is partly due to the lack of breakthrough in academic innovation in the past centuries. People may also think of the unique concepts such as the correspondence between man and nature, the five elements, and the theory of yin and yang and meridian points, which endows TCM a mysterious feeling. This is due to the difference between Chinese medicine and modern science and technology. Over the years, TCM has always given people the impression of treating disease slowly. It seems that TCM can only treat some chronic diseases, or terminal disease which Western medicine fails in curing, and that affects its image in the end. In the past few years, some TCM experts and competent departments recommended the dominant TCM diseases as the dysfunctional diseases, unexplained diseases, complicated diseases, psychogenic diseases and viral infectious diseases, rather than the critical diseases.

In 2020, TCM contributes to the victory in curbing the epidemic of COVID-19. The bad image has been changed, and both the government and its people have re-realized that TCM can take on the important task of preventing and controlling the epidemic. This has re-branded the academic image of TCM to a large extent.

In the near future, “artificial intelligence TCM” is expected to make breakthroughs in TCM thinking pattern, information collection and processing, and the summary and inheritance of clinical experience of famous TCM physicians. Big data and “artificial intelligence TCM” realize the full digitization of medical services, at the same time they will surely promote the invention of medical equipment for clinical picture information collection, detection and syndrome differentiation. And help TCM's holistic view, hieroglyphic thinking and syndrome differentiation enter a new era of precision, standardization and modernization.

4 Reevaluating the Clinical Efficacy of Chinese Medicine

As a clinical medicine, TCM have curative effects and can reduce and eliminate pain for patients, and this is the reason and value of its existence. However, we cannot only be satisfied with curative effects, especially in the generation of modern science and technology civilization, big data information age and legalized modern society. We must provide scientific data that can prove its effectiveness, and try to gain recognition and academic status in the academic field.

TCM's cognition of diseases and treatment methods are not based on the diagnosis of Western medicine. If evaluating TCM's curative effect in the modern medical system, it needs to be evaluated by the Western medicine clinical diagnosis and cure standards recognized by the academic field. And this let TCM inevitable to be subject by quantification, data and standards, which has never been seen in its history.

TCM has made brilliant succession in the fight against epidemic in 2020. Although no influential clinical research papers have been published yet, TCM still has received good reputation. But some western medical experts would comment that TCM is lack of convincing comparison group data to prove its effectiveness. This situation once again reminds that TCM should not only have confidence in its curative effect, but also pay attention to the use of objective, standardized, and data-based clinical research methods, and to publish the findings of clinical research.

5 Rebuilding Discourse Platform

Traditional Chinese medical culture is the soul and core of TCM. The discourse power is the basic right for TCM's survival and development in the information age. If it lacks or loses discourse power, it cannot be a vigorous, influential and promising career, even do not have the opportunity to participate in disease diagnosis and treatment. Because traditional Chinese medicine originated in ancient China, the elaboration and context of TCM, especially the vague concepts and dynamic context, are difficult for modern people to understand. Due to the changes in ancient and modern times and the differences between Chinese and foreign cultures, traditional Chinese medicine culture has not been accepted by many modern Chinese and most countries in the world. If it has not been accepted, it is impossible to have the necessary legal protection and policy preference, and this means there is no discourse power.

During the SARS epidemic in 2003, *Clinical Guidance for SARS Pneumonia Prevention and Treatment* published by the relevant authorities focused on Western medicine. The full text only mentioned "TCM can be used as adjuvant therapy". Nowadays our country listed TCM in the national strategy and repeatedly emphasizes both TCM and Western medicine, but after the outbreak of epidemic in 2020, the *Chinese Clinical Guidance for COVID-19 Pneumonia Diagnosis and Treatment (2nd edition)* issued by relevant departments only mentioned "treatment based on syndrome differentiation". It can be seen that TCM has not obtained the same status as Western medicine, and is still in a subordinate position, even losing its basic discourse power. Zhang Boli, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said that "I hope that after the epidemic everyone will not forget traditional Chinese medicine". During the two sessions in 2020, academician Zhang Boli, a representative of the National People's Congress, called for adding TCM to *Emergency Preplan for National Public Health Event* and adding TCM experts to the composition of "Expert Consultation Committee".

The construction of TCM discourse system must rely on the effective operation of the traditional Chinese medicine cultural communication platform. Only when TCM creates influential communication system and realizes effective communication, can it truly have discourse power. To gain government's support and more opportunities to diagnose and treat diseases, and let more patients choose TCM. We can make full use

of modern digital network media to establish a platform for dissemination of TCM knowledge and provide information to the world, and at the same time also achieve the goal of self-development and growth.

6 Reconstructing the Living Environment

In addition to supporting policies, laws and regulations, the development of any career or organization must also be managed and implemented by corresponding government departments and organizations. To better develop Chinese medical career, it is necessary to create an advantageous environment including policies, laws and regulations, and organizational guarantee.

6.1 Policies and Regulations

In 1982, the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* indicated “we should develop both modern medicine and traditional Chinese medicine”. In 1991, the Fourth Session of the Seventh National People's Congress identified “emphasizing both traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine” as the main content of the health work policy in the new era^[2]. In February 2016, the State Council issued *Outline of the Strategic Plan for the Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine (2016–2030)*. Since the reform and opening up, our country has promulgated series of laws and regulations to provide legal guarantee for the legalization of TCM. However, there is still lack of some specific. *Emergency plan for National Public Health Event of China* mentions the need to improve the ability of medical and health institutions to respond to various emergencies. The medical and health institutions here should include traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine, but TCM is not explicitly mentioned. What's more, all levels center for disease control and prevention are mainly Western medicine without any Chinese medical physicians basically^[3]. Therefore, in the event of public health emergencies, it is easy to take Western medical treatment as the priority, ignoring the part of Chinese medicine. Obviously, it is impossible to fully implement the policy of “emphasis both TCM and Western medicine” on a wide scale.

On May 22, 2020, the National Development and Reform Commission(NDRC) issued *Public Health Prevention, Control and Treatment Capacity Plan* that emphasized the optimal allocation of medical resources, adhered to the equal emphasis on TCM and Western medicine, explored emergency work mechanism that integrates TCM and Western medicine, improved basic conditions for epidemics prevention, control and treatment, promoted the ability of integrated TCM and Western medicine to prevent and treat infectious diseases, and optimize the scientific research support platform to respond to public health emergencies. Therefore, the country should establish a mechanism for TCM to participate in the emergency management as soon as possible.

6.2 Government and Organizations

In July 1986, the State Council issued a notice on the establishment of the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Due to the long-term management of national

health department which dominated by western medicine, some management system such as medical administration, science and technology, education and other services all have characteristics of western medicine. So it cannot completely follow the development law of TCM and its independent management and operation. It can be seen that the current irrational and unequal organizational structure of TCM and Western medicine is difficult to truly reflect the “emphasis both on TCM and Western medicine.” The management structure and organization of TCM need to be thoroughly adjusted and improved in many aspects.

TCM has gradually formed its unique medical theories and techniques in the long-term diagnosis and treatment of exogenous diseases^[4]. It is precisely that TCM guaranteed the Chinese nation’s prosperity. The participation of TCM in the fight against the epidemic once again demonstrated that it cannot only treat common and difficult diseases, but also can have unique advantages in solving epidemics. However, corresponding organizations have not been systematically established in medical treatment, teaching, scientific research, and administrative management etc. Through the experience of this fight against epidemic, we should establish and improve the participation mechanism for TCM to participate in public health emergencies and the treatment mechanism for TCM cooperates with Western medicine. Also we should try to establish a normalized anti-epidemic professional institution featured by Chinese medical therapies.

6.3 Suggestion

It is necessary to promulgate *Measures for Handling TCM Medical Disputes* and *Measures for Handling TCM Medical Malpractices* as soon as possible. When revising the *Law of the People’s Republic of China on Traditional Chinese Medicine* and *Emergency plan for National Public Health Event*, we can put forward “pay attention to the role of Chinese medicine in the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases and its role in public health” at an appropriate time.

It is pragmatic to increase TCM professional institutions and foster physicians in Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at all levels. Courses on TCM Anti-epidemic treatment by Chinese Medicine in traditional Chinese medicine universities should be offered. TCM universities and TCM research institutions should cooperate to set up “TCM anti-epidemic professional research institutions”.

7 Conclusion

TCM has made brilliant achievements in the fight against COVID-19 in 2020^[5]. The country and people have re-realized that TCM can take the important task of disease prevention and treatment. We should take this chance to think about the development of TCM in the post-pandemic era and try to solve the current problems and implement the thinking strategies mentioned before so as to benefit the health of our people.

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