Reflections on the Overseas Dissemination and Development of Chinese Medicine in the Post-Epidemic Era

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Abstract: The new coronavirus pneumonia epidemic has had a profound impact on the world, and China has pioneered the “post-epidemic era”. In the face of the new situation in various countries and regions of the world in the post-epidemic era, the epidemic remains severe overseas and the shortcomings of global public health governance have been revealed. The use of Chinese medicine in the treatment of the new pneumonia epidemic in China is highly effective, and it is inevitable that Chinese medicine will go abroad to help fight the epidemic. Seizing the historic opportunity for TCM to “go abroad” and “gain a firm foothold”, and achieving significant results in combating the COVID-19 epidemic through TCM will not only strengthen the awareness and recognition of TCM culture at home and abroad, but also enhance the national and cultural self-confidence of China. This paper analyses the current challenges in the overseas dissemination of Chinese medicine in the post-epidemic era, starting with the history and present situation of the overseas dissemination of TCM. It is argued that in the process of Chinese medicine dissemination, it is necessary to reflect the “four insistences”, explore bridges between China and overseas, establish platforms for cooperation at home and abroad, and increase the participation of Chinese medicine in the process of global health governance.

Keywords: Post-epidemic era; New coronavirus pneumonia; Chinese medicine (TCM); Overseas communication development

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The sudden outbreak of the new coronavirus pneumonia, the most serious global crisis since the Second World War, not only poses a major international public health security challenge, but also accelerates the evolution of a century of great change, as the world enters a period of unprecedented turbulence and change, and the future destiny of humanity stands at a new crossroads. As early as 11 March

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2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak to have “pandemic” characteristics. The outbreak has now extended to over 200 countries and regions, and the situation is critical in many overseas countries. Through nationwide joint prevention and control and active treatment, the disease in China has been effectively controlled within a short period of time and is now stable. The world has entered the “post-epidemic era”. The so-called “post-epidemic era” is “not one in which the epidemic disappears and everything returns to normal, as we originally thought, but the era of fluctuating epidemics, with the possibility of small-scale outbreaks at any time, return of outbreaks from abroad and seasonal episodes with longer delays and far-reaching effects on all fronts. “With the gradual improvement of the epidemic prevention and control situation in China, it will enter the post-epidemic era of regular prevention and control. At present, although initial progress has been made in the development of a specific drug and vaccine for the COVID-19, it still takes some time. The situation of the epidemic abroad is serious and many countries have started to seek China’s help. As a responsible power, China will strive to share its experience in fighting the epidemic with other countries and regions of the world. As of March 26, 2020, China has organized and implemented anti-epidemic assistance to 89 countries and 4 international organizations in four batches under its active foreign aid efforts, and this number is still increasing as of today. The involvement and therapeutic role of TCM in this outbreak is evident to all. According to the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Chinese medicine has played an active role in the fight against New Crown Pneumonia, including prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. The efficacy of TCM in fighting the epidemic has attracted international attention and is well positioned to play a greater role in maintaining human health. As China shares its experience with other countries and regions in the fight against the epidemic, there is no doubt that this is an excellent opportunity for TCM, which has a prominent role in the fight against COVID-19, which will not only enhance international awareness and recognition of TCM culture, but also promote the spread of TCM culture overseas.

1. Historical Basis for the Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Medicine

Chinese medicine has a long history of spreading overseas. As early as during the Han Dynasty, Zhang Qian made a mission to the West, and along with the opening of the Silk Road, Chinese medicine was also spread to the Western countries and interacted with them, thus beginning the spread of Chinese medicine overseas. During the Wei, Jin and North and South Dynasties, the important task of the Japanese and Korean envoys to the Tang dynasty was to learn Chinese medicine. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, when China was the political, economic and cultural centre of Asia, Chinese medicine was introduced to countries such as India, Arabia, Afghanistan and Vietnam. During the Song and Yuan
Dynasties, the Arabs spread Chinese herbal medicine to Asia, Europe and Africa through the Maritime Silk Road. During the Ming Dynasty, Zheng He went to the West and brought Chinese medicine with him and spread the culture of Chinese medicine. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Western scholars translated many Chinese medical texts into English, French and other languages, greatly promoting the spread of Chinese medicine around the world. In modern times, Chinese medicine is even more studied and needed by many countries around the world. At present, TCM has been included in the respective health care systems of East Asian countries such as Japan and Korea. In Southeast Asian countries and South Asian countries, Chinese medicine has a deep public base. As TCM has advantages in terms of efficacy and affordability in treating chronic diseases that Western medicine cannot match, TCM is warmly sought after by people in Central Asia and Africa. In Europe, the characteristics and advantages of TCM are gradually being recognised, and many Eastern European countries have also established TCM hospitals and TCM treatment centres. The overseas spread of Chinese medicine has a deep historical foundation, and nowadays, the internationalisation of Chinese medicine has entered a period of rapid development. At present, Chinese medicine has spread to 183 countries and regions, and according to the World Health Organization, 103 Member States have endorsed the use of acupuncture in Chinese medicine. In addition, the 72nd World Health Assembly adopted the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases, which for the first time included a chapter on traditional medicine originating from Chinese medicine, all of which has laid the foundation for the further spread of Chinese medicine overseas.

2. Chinese Medicine in the New Coronary Pneumonia Epidemic

Chinese medicine has a comprehensive and unique theoretical system and has accumulated rich experience and proven efficacy in the treatment of a wide range of diseases in various clinical disciplines. Since ancient times, Chinese medicine has accumulated a wealth of experience in treating all kinds of sudden outbreaks of epidemics. From Zhang Zhongjing’s Treatise on Typhoid and Miscellaneous Diseases in the Eastern Han Dynasty, Sun Simiao’s The Essential Formula for Emergency Medicine in the Tang Dynasty, Li Shizhen’s Compendium of Materia Medica in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and Ye Gui’s Treatise on Warm Fever and Wu Jutong’s Article on Warm Diseases in the Qing Dynasty, many Chinese medical writings have created a unique and advantageous theoretical system and method of diagnosis and treatment in Chinese medicine. Today, “Chinese medicine plays an important role in the prevention and treatment of diseases such as H1N1, epidemic encephalomyelitis, epidemic B encephalitis, influenza, measles, epidemic haemorrhagic fever, leptospirosis, tuberculosis, schistosomiasis, viral hepatitis and AIDS”. Not only that, but there is even more information showing that in the treatment of SARS, TCM can significantly reduce clinical symptoms
such as poisoning in patients; TCM can shorten the duration and course of fever and improve clinical efficacy; promote the absorption of inflammation and reduce sequelae; reduce the use of hormones and the toxic side effects of western drugs and reduce systemic complications. The theory and practice of Chinese medicine has played an important role in the prevention and treatment of SARS. The prevention and treatment of Chinese medicine has played an important role in the field of medicine since ancient times.

Meanwhile, in an international webinar on the topic of the role of traditional, complementary and integrative medicine in the fight against the New Coronary Pneumonia epidemic, held on 30 March 2020, academician Zhang Boli, Vice-President of the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies, gave a detailed report on the great achievements of Chinese medicine in China’s current fight against the epidemic. Citing detailed clinical data, academician Zhang Boli introduced the remarkable role of Chinese medicine in the fight against the epidemic, saying, “Chinese medicine has been proven through clinical observation of more than 70,000 confirmed cases to be effective in relieving symptoms, reducing the development of light and common types to heavy ones, increasing the cure rate and reducing the death rate, and promoting the recovery of people in the recovery period, with an overall efficiency of more than 90%”. In the work deployment of the Central Steering Group for the New Corona Pneumonia epidemic in Wuhan on April 1st, 2020 the leader of the group, Sun Chunlan, pointed out that “in response to the situation that no special drugs were available in the early stage, a number of drugs with obvious efficacy such as Chinese medicine ‘three to tripartite’ were screened with the demand for rescue and treatment as the guide ...... has provided a strong guarantee for the effective treatment of the New Coronary Pneumonia.” The State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine has set up a special research group to examine the “immune, anti-inflammatory, endocrine and signaling biological processes” of the active ingredients in the National Key Promotion Programme “Clear Lung Detoxification Dose” using a biomedical approach, which has confirmed its unique performance in combating the inflammation of New Coronary Pneumonia. It also focuses on the preventive, rehabilitative and toning functions of Chinese medicine. According to the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the basis for promoting the wearing of Chinese herbal scented packs among uninfected people in infected areas is that “volatile substances can stimulate serum IgA and IgG levels and improve immunity.” Clinical data prove that the overall efficiency of TCM in treating COVID-19 is over 90%, and that TCM and TCM rehabilitation training techniques are highly effective in the recuperation and recovery process of patients with that disease after they have recovered. The effectiveness of TCM in the prevention and control of the COVID-19 epidemic is remarkable.

Since the founding of the PRC, the Communist Party of China has insisted
on the equal importance of Chinese and Western medicine and supported the development of Chinese medicine. Academician Zhang Boli proposed that “giving full play to the advantages of Chinese medicine and insisting on the integration of Chinese and Western medicine” are the core elements of the Chinese programme. The Chinese Academy of Engineering led the leadership of this special class on Chinese medicine for New Coronary Pneumonia, which included, in addition to the national medical masters, pharmacists from the field of chemistry and general practitioners from hospitals combining Chinese and Western medicine. Chinese and Western medicine have been working together in the prevention and treatment of the New Coronary Pneumonia epidemic, and have achieved remarkable results. According to the expert group, the combined treatment of Chinese and Western medicine in the treatment of patients with COVID-19 “exceeded 90% relief rate of fever, weakness and cough, and was able to stop the transformation of serious illness into critical illness”.

Based on the scientific research results of other countries, TCM is focusing on the promotion of effective drugs and treatment techniques, “especially to promote TCM ‘going global’ and playing an active role in international cooperation in the prevention and control of COVID-19”. At present, although there is no specific medicine for the COVID-19 epidemic, Chinese medicine, with its “Chinese characteristics”, has effective solutions, as well as a combination of Chinese and Western medicine, which is worth promoting and spreading globally. At a time when the Newcastle pneumonia epidemic is ravaging the world, Chinese medicine has demonstrated its effectiveness and played an important role in the treatment of patients. At a time when the world is becoming more and more connected, China has the responsibility and ability to share its experience in fighting the epidemic with the world.

3. China Shares its Experience in Chinese Medicine with the World

Following the outbreak of the New Coronary Pneumonia, the contribution of Chinese medicine practitioners, under the leadership of the Chinese government, to the fight against the epidemic is evident to all. Chinese medicine has not only played an important role in the fight against the New Coronary Pneumonia (COVID-19) epidemic and the treatment of COVID-19 patients in China, but has also attracted the attention of international medical experts worldwide for its success in the treatment, rehabilitation and recuperation of COVID-19 patients. The White Paper “China’s Action against the New Coronary Pneumonia Epidemic”, which describes with facts and figures the importance of TCM in combating the New Coronary Pneumonia Epidemic and in tiding over the crisis for all mankind. News of TCM in combating New Coronary Pneumonia has been reported in European countries such as Hungary and France, as well as in Canada and the United States. On 12 March,
a team of medical experts sent by the National Health Commission to combat the epidemic delivered medical masks and other epidemic prevention materials, but also brought Chinese medicines such as Lianhua Qingwen and Jinhua Qinggan to Italy, Iraq and other countries where the epidemic prevention situation is severe or where the medical infrastructure is poor, to help ease the pressure of local epidemic prevention and control. In May, Chinese medicine practitioners in Italy, France and Brazil said that the Chinese medicine programme was applicable and practical in their countries. At the same time, the main audience for the overseas Chinese medicine and Chinese therapeutic techniques used to combat the New Coronary Pneumonia was also the many overseas Chinese and Chinese students. It is clear that China is sharing its experience with the world in the fight against the epidemic, and it is inevitable that Chinese medicine will go overseas to help the global fight against the epidemic. In the face of the new epidemic, Chinese medicine has not only successfully “stepped out of the country”, but has also “gained a firm foothold” in other countries. China’s image as a responsible power in the fight against the epidemic has been widely praised worldwide for its tangible achievements.

4. Overseas Dissemination and Development of Chinese Medicine in the Post-Epidemic Era

With the advent of the post-epidemic era, the control of the epidemic in China has stabilized, while the number of cases in the UK and France is still increasing by more than 10,000 every day. In the face of the global outbreak of Corona Virus Disease and the seriousness of the epidemic situation overseas, and taking into account history and reality, the overseas spread of Chinese medicine has already established a certain foundation and the use of Chinese medicine in China has been effective in treating Corona Virus Disease. At this time, Chinese medicine’s contribution to the global fight against the epidemic not only contributes to the building of a community of destiny for human health, but is also the best historical opportunity for Chinese medicine to “go abroad” and “gain a firm foothold”, as well as to enhance the global recognition and cultural identity of Chinese medicine.

The Chinese government has always attached great importance to the development of Chinese medicine. In recent years, more and more countries and regions have become interested in Chinese medicine based on the “One Belt, One Road” national project, the main body of overseas Chinese and overseas Chinese medicine centres, and other previous overseas practices in promoting Chinese medicine culture. At the time of the outbreak of the New Coronary Pneumonia, Chinese medicine was actively involved in the treatment and achieved good results. At the same time, the therapeutic effects of TCM and the combination of Chinese and Western medicine have been widely recognised and endorsed both at home and abroad. The post-epidemic era has arrived, with the second wave of foreign
epidemic challenges and the obvious results of the domestic battle against the epidemic, and countries and regions around the world urgently need China’s help in fighting the epidemic, and China has the responsibility and obligation to help the global fight against the epidemic. China’s TCM professionals are willing to further strengthen cooperation and exchanges with the international community, share experience in epidemic prevention and treatment, provide assistance in the form of proprietary Chinese medicines and Chinese medicinal tablets, and provide remote TCM treatment and other assistance within their capabilities. Seizing the historic opportunity for Chinese medicine to “go abroad” and “gain a firm foothold”, and achieving significant results in the fight against the New Coronary Pneumonia epidemic through Chinese medicine will not only strengthen the awareness and recognition of Chinese medicine culture at home and abroad, but also enhance our national and cultural self-confidence.

At present, in addition to the above-mentioned good opportunities, the spread and development of Chinese medicine overseas still has historic opportunities in modern times. Our government is actively promoting the spread of traditional culture abroad, and has made great achievements in building a harmonious society since the reform and opening up, all of which are important safeguards for the cross-cultural spread of Chinese medicine. As the world is now in the critical period of the post-epidemic era, it is imperative that we combine the differences between Chinese and Western medicine in order to promote Chinese medicine in the context of heritage and innovation for its dissemination and development overseas. The research methods and theoretical systems of Chinese medicine and Western medicine are very different, and each has its own characteristics and advantages in treating diseases. The research method of Chinese medicine embodies systemic theory, mainly focusing on the whole, mostly using qualitative observation as a means, and generally adopting an integrated approach to dialectical treatment. The research method of Western medicine embodies reductionism, mainly focusing on the local area, mostly using quantitative experiments as a means, and generally adopting an analytical approach to the identification and treatment of diseases. It can be said that Western medicine and Chinese medicine are two branches of the tree of human medicine that have grown in abundance. Today, there are more and more bridges connecting Chinese medicine and Western medicine, which are combining with each other and working together for development. The technical methods of modern medicine have greatly facilitated the study of modern mechanisms in traditional Chinese medicine, and the holistic and systematic view of Chinese medicine has greatly enriched the connotations of modern medicine. The combination of the two is also gaining increasing recognition and promotion. Currently, Chinese medicine is making steady strides towards the world, with its footprint spreading to more than 180 countries and regions worldwide, and a number of overseas centres for Chinese medicine have been established in countries.
and regions participating in the “One Belt, One Road”, with an increasing number of international cooperation projects. At the same time, we must also be aware that in promoting the development of Chinese medicine, there is still a long way to go to discover the essence of its treasures and to do a good job of inheriting and innovating them.

Insist on the equal importance of Chinese and Western medicine. We will organically combine traditional Chinese medicine with modern medicine, promote the mutual promotion of Chinese and Western medicine, learn from each other, complement each other’s strengths and develop together, and play to our respective strengths and combine the strengths of both in the prevention and treatment of major and difficult diseases. On the basis of training a team of “Chinese medicine practitioners with Chinese medicine spirit”, we will train a certain number of high-level multidisciplinary talents in Chinese and Western medicine, so as to better play the role of combining Chinese and Western medicine in the emergency response of public health incidents.

Adhere to Chinese medicine theory and modern science side by side. The essence of the treasury of Chinese medicine should be fully explored, and the academic ideas of Chinese medicine should be thoroughly sorted out and summarised, so as to give better play to the comprehensive and original advantages of Chinese medicine. On the basis of respecting the TCM canon and following the laws of TCM development, modern science and technology should be used to conduct in-depth research on TCM theories and clinical applications, use modern scientific language to explain the unique treatment methods and mechanisms of action of TCM, bring into play the advantages of TCM in maintaining the health of individuals throughout the life cycle, and develop a modern research and evaluation system suitable for TCM’s own characteristics.

Adhere to cultural confidence and promote Chinese medicine culture in parallel. We will step up the promotion of TCM culture, protect the cultural core of TCM, promote awareness and application of TCM, and firmly establish the cultural confidence that TCM is a treasure of excellent Chinese traditional culture. At the same time, the role of TCM culture in disease prevention will be strengthened, and the formation of a cultural symbol of a healthy way of working and living in line with the TCM concept of “treating diseases before they occur” promoted.

Adhere to the parallel track of opening up and sharing with actively promoting the building of a community of human destiny. Share with the World Health Organization and the international community the Chinese solutions for the prevention and control of Chinese medicine and the treatment of New Coronary Pneumonia, actively carry out international cooperation in the fight against epidemics, enhance the dialogue and interpretation capacity of Chinese medicine, and promote the spread of Chinese medicine culture overseas. In the
process of going global, Chinese medicine should not only maintain its own characteristics, but also further connect with international standards, and in the process, continuously expand the road of Chinese medicine to the world, so that Chinese medicine can benefit human health more and play a greater role in building a community of human destiny.

By clarifying the important and difficult points in the overseas dissemination of Chinese medicine, it is conducive for us to make more targeted recommendations on this major historical initiative of overseas dissemination of Chinese medicine on the basis of grasping the facts and making it more feasible and grounded, so as to lay a solid foundation for its smooth dissemination and development.

5. Conclusion

The development of Chinese medicine has a long and rich history, and it has the important task of eliminating diseases and benefiting the people, bringing together the great wisdom of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation, and making an important contribution to the prosperity and cultural heritage of the Chinese nation. In the treatment of patients with the new pneumonia, Chinese medicine has shown its obvious effectiveness and played an important role, and it is inevitable that Chinese medicine will go out of the country to help fight the epidemic. With the advent of the post-epidemic era, it is only right that China, as a responsible power, should face the world and, on the premise that the epidemic is well controlled and stable at home, be brave enough to contribute to the international fight against the epidemic. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that “Chinese medicine is the treasure of the Chinese nation and must be well protected, explored, developed and inherited.” At present, all TCM medical institutions and all TCM practitioners should take up their responsibilities and move forward with courage and perseverance, focusing on enhancing TCM’s “treating the immune system”, prevention and treatment of infectious diseases, prevention and treatment of epidemics by TCM institutions, TCM innovation in the public health governance system, research capability and translation of TCM epidemics, and so on, in order to unite and work together, keep the righteousness and innovation, and revitalise and develop TCM. At the same time, we should seize the historic opportunity for Chinese medicine to “go abroad” and “gain a firm foothold”, strengthen the awareness and recognition of Chinese medicine culture at home and abroad, and enhance our national and cultural self-confidence.
References


