

Original Paper

Cross-cultural Communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine under the Background of the Belt and Road Initiative —A Case Study of Central and Eastern European countries

Hui Pan¹

¹ School of Foreign Languages Studies, Wenzhou Medical University, Wenzhou, 325000, China

Received: September 17, 2023 Accepted: October 2, 2023 Online Published: October 22, 2023

doi:10.22158/jecs.v7n4p25

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/jecs.v7n4p25>

Abstract

With the effective implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese culture has been accepted by more and more Central and Eastern European countries, and has further promoted political, economic and cultural exchanges and cooperation among these countries. As an important part of Chinese culture, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has become a channel of cultural exchange, and has been paid more and more attention. However, in general, the development and scale of traditional Chinese medicine in central and Eastern Europe are far smaller than that of the United States, Canada and Japan, and Australia as well as Western European countries, such as the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands. Therefore, it is necessary to promote traditional Chinese medicine to CEE in order to further spread traditional Chinese medicine culture and open up more opportunities for cooperation.

Keywords

Belt and Road Initiative, Central and Eastern Europe, TCM, Cross-cultural Communication

1. Introduction

With a history of over a thousand years, the traditional Chinese medicine culture is the spiritual wealth of Chinese people to understand life, health preservation, disease prevention and treatment. Traditional Chinese medicine culture is rooted in the soil of Chinese traditional culture, and in the process of its formation and development, it constantly blends with traditional culture. Due to the unique efficacy of traditional Chinese medicine in preventing and treating diseases, it has been widely recognized by people around the world. Since the opening of the ancient Silk Road, there has been a close exchange between traditional Chinese medicine and western medicine.

2. The Belt and Road Initiative

In 2013 Chinese President Xi announced the “Belt and Road” initiative during his official visit to Indonesia and Kazakhstan. The proposal of the “the Belt and Road” strategic concept conforms to the trend of world multipolarization, economic globalization, cultural diversity and social informatization, and is in line with the fundamental interests of the international community. As an active exploration of new models of international cooperation and global governance, it plays a great role in promoting the international dissemination of Chinese medicine culture.

TCM is regarded by many as a national treasure of China for its unique theories and practices, such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, massage and moxibustion. Traditional Chinese medicine can treat some diseases which cannot be treated by Western medicine. Thanks to the “the Belt and Road” initiative, Chinese medicine is increasingly recognized by the international community. In recent years, traditional Chinese medicine has been increasingly integrated into the modern medical system, and its value has been acknowledged in many countries along the “the Belt and Road” (Qi & Wang, 2018), where the theoretical system, cognition and medical methods of traditional Chinese medicine can meet the health needs of the people and make up for the deficiency of medical conditions there.

In May 2018, in order to implement the “the Belt and Road” Development Plan of Traditional Chinese Medicine (2016-2020), the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine set up 57 international cooperation projects in traditional Chinese medicine, and 26 TCM centers overseas have been established, most of which are located in countries along the “the Belt and Road”. With the support of these special cooperation projects, China has established 26 TCM centers overseas, most of which are located in countries along the “Belt and Road”, and has built a number of TCM international cooperation bases in mainland China.

3. Current Situation of TCM Transmission in Central and Eastern European Countries

The spread of traditional Chinese medicine culture in Europe has a long history. Traditional Chinese medicine is an important part of exchanges and cooperation between countries along the ancient Silk Road. Marco Polo, the famous Italian traveller, arrived in China in 1275, and traveled in China for 17 years. In his book *Marco Polo's Travels*, he recorded a large amount of Chinese health knowledge at that time. Through reading his travel notes, Europeans learned about the various effects of traditional Chinese medicine and further applied it widely. Zheng He of the Ming Dynasty led the fleet into the Indian Ocean seven times, bringing a large number of Chinese drugs to Europe, Asia and Africa, making more foreigners understand Chinese medicine (Shi & He, 2018), setting off the climax of the dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine overseas. Traditional Chinese medicine has incomparable advantages over western medicine in terms of curative effect and price in treating intractable diseases and chronic diseases, which has promoted the popularity of traditional Chinese medicine in European countries. For example, in cases of infertility where Western medicine has not found a cure, the therapeutic effects brought by traditional Chinese medicine have won the trust of

people in European countries.

Central and Eastern Europe is a geopolitical concept. Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries are geographically located between Western Europe and the Asian continent. The Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries was officially launched with the first China Central and Eastern European Leaders' Meeting held in Warsaw, Poland on April 26, 2012. On April 12, 2019, the members of the cooperation mechanism between China and Central and Eastern European countries changed from "16+1" to "17+1". CEE countries are playing an increasingly important role in China's foreign policy considerations and are key partners of the "the Belt and Road" initiative. The development of traditional Chinese medicine in 17 countries in Central and Eastern Europe is at different stages.

Traditional Chinese medicine is developing rapidly in Central and Eastern European countries. On the whole, although the development history is shorter and scale of traditional Chinese medicine in Central and Eastern European countries are not as great as that in some developed countries, the influence of traditional Chinese medicine in this region has shown an upward trend in recent years. TCM has developed rapidly and achieved remarkable results in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and other countries (Shi, Zhang, Song, & Jin, 2019). This paper is focused on the TCM development in the core region of Central and Eastern Europe, namely the Visegrad four countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), what have being playing a key role in the economic relations between the region and China.

As the first European country to formulate detailed laws to supervise the qualification and requirements of for TCM practitioners, Hungary has set an example in the promotion and practice of traditional Chinese medicine. In Poland, with the popularization of traditional Chinese medicine, academic exchanges and practices in the field of traditional Chinese medicine also have a solid foundation. In this process, improving residents' understanding of traditional Chinese medicine and expanding residents' acceptance of traditional Chinese medicine are the basis for further development of traditional Chinese medicine cooperation. The recognition of traditional Chinese medicine among the Czech people is increasing, but the development of traditional Chinese medicine in the Czech Republic is still very imperfect and faces many difficulties. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, Chinese medicine treatment was once popular in the former Czechoslovakia and acupuncture and moxibustion was also recognized, which laid the foundation for the promotion of Chinese medicine in Slovakia.

China's "Belt and Road" initiative not only makes the cooperation between countries closer, but also injects new vitality into the economic development of countries along the "Belt and Road", and gradually realizes the concept of building a community of shared future. The countries in Central and Eastern Europe account for about 25% of the total number of countries along the route. These countries, as major emerging industries, are in similar economic development stages to China, and their per capita income is almost the same as China's. They have broad prospects for cooperation.

At the same time, Central and Eastern European countries have a solid foundation for cooperation with

China in the field of traditional Chinese medicine, and the public in these countries have a high degree of acceptance and recognition of traditional Chinese medicine. The parties involved welcome in-depth cooperation in the field of traditional Chinese medicine with a positive attitude.

3.1 Hungary

Hungary is the first European country to sign a memorandum of understanding with China on the the Belt and Road initiative, and plays an important regional role in the construction of the the Belt and Road. In May 2017, the two countries announced the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership to deepen cooperation in the field of health, especially in the field of traditional Chinese medicine, which opened up a broad space for the cooperation of traditional Chinese medicine between the two countries. In recent years, on the basis of the progress made in the joint construction of the “the Belt and Road”, the two sides have expanded cooperation in various fields and constantly enhanced their strategic relations.

Hungary took the lead in promoting traditional Chinese medicine in 16 Central and Eastern European countries, and formulated detailed laws to supervise the qualification and requirements of traditional Chinese medicine practitioners. In 2015, the Hungarian government first formulated and promulgated the practice rules of traditional Chinese medicine in Europe, recognizing and accepting traditional Chinese medicine as a national service. Universities in China and Hungary jointly build a high-level platform for cooperation in traditional Chinese medicine education. Also in 2015, the first Confucius Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Central and Eastern Europe was established at the University of Perth, Hungary. In the same year, the Hungarian Ministry of Human Resources issued regulations on the qualification of practicing Chinese medicine, which laid the legal foundation for the Hungarian Law of Traditional Chinese Medicine. In 2016, the Hungarian government issued the EU license for traditional Chinese medicine, ending the history of Hungarian traditional Chinese medicine under the supervision of western medicine.

Since the launch of the “the Belt and Road” initiative, due to the efficacy and treatment of traditional Chinese medicine, and more importantly, the efforts of Chinese medical professionals, the Chinese medicine industry in Hungary has achieved tremendous development. Local attention to traditional Chinese medicine and acceptance of Chinese culture are key factors for the promotion of traditional Chinese medicine, especially the support of the government and local people. The local government attach much significance to traditional Chinese medicine, which has played an important role in the promotion of traditional Chinese medicine. Since the Hungarian Prime Minister Orban implemented the policy of “opening to the east”, Sino-Hungary relations have been pushed to a new height.

Since the 1980s, Hungary has started the training program of traditional Chinese medicine, which has integrated into education at all levels, including higher education. For example, Heilongjiang University of Traditional Chinese Medicine has set the teaching content and class hours according to Chinese standards at its Budapest campus, and has compiled textbooks for undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral courses in traditional Chinese medicine

Although the development of traditional Chinese medicine in Hungary cannot match that of the United States, Canada and Australia, the achievements in the field of translation of traditional Chinese medicine in Hungary are very prominent in Central and Eastern European countries. The translation of Chinese medical materials by Hungarian scholars is a powerful basis for promotion of TCM, and great achievements have made in this field. For example, Professor P á los Istvan published *Traditional Chinese Medicine* in 1963, which is the earliest study of traditional Chinese medicine in Hungary. Dr. Simoncsis Peter was the first to use laser acupuncture and moxibustion and published four books on acupuncture and moxibustion. Dr. Nyitrai Tam á s started acupuncture and moxibustion training in 1988. The pioneer of the development of traditional Chinese medicine in Hungary is the famous acupuncture and moxibustion doctor Eli Ayandok. He was the first professional to introduce Chinese medicine to Hungary, and established a Chinese medicine acupuncture and moxibustion clinic in Hungary. In 1996, he began to train western medical professionals according to the standards of the World Health Organization, and participated in the basic research of acupuncture and moxibustion carried out by Hungarian Academy of Sciences. His work is considered a useful source of information on acupuncture and moxibustion in Hungary.

Chinese scholars have also played an important role in the promotion of traditional Chinese medicine in Hungary. Dr. Zhang Jin, Wu Binjiang and Zhang Qinbin, all famous experts in Chinese acupuncture and moxibustion, have made positive contributions to the development of traditional Chinese medicine in Hungary. Having lived in Hungary for decades, Dr. Chen Zhen has further promoted the development of traditional Chinese medicine in Hungary through charitable clinics and the establishment of traditional Chinese medicine product companies. His works include *Tonic Diet and Prescription* published in 2002 and *Clinical Application of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Traditional Chinese Medicine (Hungarian)* published in 2010. These two books are prescribed by many Hungarian traditional Chinese medicine practitioners as standard textbooks for learning traditional Chinese medicine. Another example is Dr. Yu Funian, former honorary chairman of the Hungarian Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine and director of the Hungarian Federation of Medical Associations (MOTESZ). He is committed to promoting the traditional Chinese medicine culture in Hungary, and led the Hong Kong Medical Association and local associations to organize seven international conferences on traditional Chinese medicine, which greatly promoted the development of traditional Chinese medicine, especially the development of acupuncture and moxibustion in Hungary and other European countries.

3.2 Poland

Poland is an important country along the “the Belt and Road”, which is connected to the Eurasian market. Its economic size and economic growth rate rank top in CEE region. Poland is one of the first European countries to sign the “the Belt and Road” Memorandum of Understanding with China in 2015. In June 2016, Poland signed a joint statement on establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership

with China. In recent years, the Polish government has actively participated in China's forums and summits, and also laid stress on visits at the national level.

The spread of traditional Chinese medicine culture in Poland has a long history. In the 17th century, P. Michael Boym, Polish Jesuit missionary, scientist and explorer, wrote *The Flora of China* and other works related to medicine, translated *The Compendium of Materia Medica*, and introduced the theory of traditional Chinese medicine into Europe for the first time. Traditional Chinese medicine has been widely accepted in Poland. In particular, acupuncture and moxibustion is very popular in Poland, which can be seen in the clinical practice of official institutions. The scale of the Chinese medicine industry is very impressive in Poland. Acupuncture and moxibustion has been implemented since the 1960s, and has made great progress since the late 1980s. After long-term exploration and practice, the combination of Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture and moxibustion has become an alternative treatment in Poland. Due to the popularization of traditional Chinese medicine, two Chinese medical associations have been established, that is the Polish Society of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Polish Acupuncture and Moxibustion Society. There are about 70000 complementary and alternative medical practitioners.

The academic exchanges between Poland and China have also made considerable progress. In July 2014, the Chinese medicine delegation from Gansu Province visited Poland and reached an agreement with the largest medical university in Poland, Lublin Medical University, to establish a Chinese medicine center and training institution in Poland. In 2015, Lublin Medical University and Wenzhou Medical University signed a "Huatuo Project" cooperation agreement to establish the Huatuo Research Institute. Despite of the development of the training of traditional Chinese medicine, there are no fixed textbooks of traditional Chinese medicine in Poland. Due to the scarcity of Polish textbooks, traditional Chinese medicine teaching in Poland mainly relies on English textbooks, without a standardized terminology set and translation, resulting in difficulties for Polish students in learning and low teaching accuracy. Compared to Hungary, there are no local scholars in Poland who are passionate about traditional Chinese medicine, and no Chinese scholars have played a leading role in the promotion of traditional Chinese medicine.

3.3 Czech

With the strengthening of political mutual trust and the improvement of economic and trade cooperation mechanisms between China and Czech Republic, bilateral trade continues to grow and mutual investment significantly expands.

Chinese medicine entered the Czech Republic in the 1960s. In 1960, the first acupuncture and moxibustion course for western doctors was founded. The First School of Traditional Chinese Medicine (FSTCM), which is the first in the Czech Republic to teach courses related to Chinese medicine, is a member of the European Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine (ETCMA), offering a four-year course of TCM acupuncture and moxibustion.

In recent years, with the promotion of the "the Belt and Road" initiative, traditional Chinese medicine

in Czech has developed rapidly, and China and Czech universities and hospitals have actively established cooperative relations. In June 2015, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Center of the Hospital Affiliated to the University of Heradz Klalovi in the Czech Republic was officially established, which is the first Chinese medical institution in Central and Eastern Europe supported by the two governments, and also the first Chinese medical project in the medical and health sector to promote the construction of the “the Belt and Road”.

The recognition of traditional Chinese medicine among the Czech people is increasing, but there are still shortcomings in the development of traditional Chinese medicine, which faces many difficulties. There are no specific regulations for traditional Chinese medicine in the Czech Republic, and there is no corresponding legislative protection for traditional Chinese medicine. Traditional Chinese medicine practitioners cannot obtain legal independent medical qualifications in the Czech Republic, and can only be attached to clinics owned by Czech doctors and cooperate with local doctors to practice medicine. Czech doctors can use some traditional Chinese medicine methods to treat patients, but traditional Chinese medicine also lacks reasonable drug certification and can only be used as a health food. There are nearly 100 TCM clinics in the Czech Republic, mainly providing rehabilitation treatment such as acupuncture and moxibustion and massage.

3.4 Slovakia

The communication between Slovakia and China in traditional Chinese medicine has also become more frequent in recent years. In March 2009, the Slovak Medical University established the Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine, which is the first time that China has carried out Chinese medicine education in Slovakia (Xue, Chen, & Qin, 2020). On September 24, 2015, the Center for Language Education and Cooperation (the National Hanban) and Confucius Institute Headquarters officially approved the cooperation between Liaoning University of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Slovak Medical University to hold a Confucius Classroom on Traditional Chinese Medicine. In March 2017, TCM teachers and Chinese language teaching volunteers were dispatched to start the teaching work in an all-round way (You, Guo, & Sun, 2018).

At present, cooperation between Slovakia and China in the field of traditional Chinese medicine is carried out through a “government led, university driven” approach. The main exchange activities are led by universities, promoting discipline construction, curriculum design, scientific research cooperation, and clinical exchanges. Overall, these are all official level activities. Relatively speaking, there are few reports on exchanges at the civil level. The actual popularity of traditional Chinese medicine diagnosis and treatment among the general public is not high, and it may only be limited to some groups or a small scale of prevalence.

4. Cross Cultural Communication Strategy of Chinese Medicine in Countries along the the Belt and Road

Professor Jin Hongzhu, a famous TCM communication expert in China, once said in an interview: “Although traditional Chinese medicine has spread to many countries and regions in the world, it is still difficult to make its debut in the mainstream market of international medicine in an all-around manner. In some European countries, traditional Chinese medicine still lacks legal status. TCM doctors cannot practice medicine. TCM cannot be sold publicly, and the use of traditional Chinese medicine cannot enter medical insurance system. Even in countries with legal status of traditional Chinese medicine, traditional Chinese medicine is still regarded as non-mainstream, and cannot be equal to western medicine (Kong & Zhang, 2013).

It can be seen that there are still difficulties for the cross-cultural communication of Chinese medicine in many aspects, such as the lack of unified international standards and norms related to Chinese traditional medicine in the countries along the “the Belt and Road”, the safety of Chinese medicine and the challenges from local traditional medicine (Wang & Li, 2017). In the face of these problems and challenges, we must adopt various strategies to promote the cross-cultural communication of Chinese medicine in countries along the the Belt and Road.

4.1 Promoting the Inter-governmental Exchanges between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, and Strengthening the Construction of Overseas Centers and Institutional Culture

With the implementation of the “the Belt and Road” initiative, intergovernmental cooperation in TCM education and research has become the main driving force for the development of TCM. As an important carrier for TCM to enter the “the Belt and Road”, the construction of overseas TCM centers has carried out extensive cooperation in TCM medical treatment, education, scientific research and other aspects, promoting the improvement of TCM cooperation. For example, the establishment of traditional Chinese medicine centers such as Sino-Czech Traditional Chinese Medicine Center has had a positive and far-reaching impact on the spread of traditional Chinese medicine culture. On the basis of cultural exchange, it is necessary to strengthen the introduction of technical norms and guidance opinions, in order to provide institutional guarantees for the international development of traditional Chinese medicine. Each overseas pharmaceutical center has clear technical service projects and corresponding technical specifications, which are implemented with focus based on the actual situation of the host country.

The Confucius Institute of TCM can be full utilized as a communication platform to spread the culture of Chinese medicine. The Confucius Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine can promote the exchanges between Chinese and foreigners involved in the Chinese medical industry, and promote the exchange and integration between Chinese medicine culture and other medical cultures (Zhang & Zhang, 2011).

4.2 Improve TCM English Teaching Materials and Translation Talent Training System, and Promote TCM Cross-cultural Communication based on Talents

There are many textbooks for traditional Chinese medicine worldwide, but there is a lack of authoritative textbooks. We need to organize cooperation between domestic and foreign experts to launch internationally standardized TCM textbooks. In view of the international situation along the “the Belt and Road” and in combination with the local culture, history, policies and disease characteristics, localized TCM textbooks should be compiled in line with the local culture, which will deepen mutual understanding and promote the layering of international textbook construction.

In order to strengthen the cross-cultural dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine, a large number of classic works of traditional Chinese medicine should be appropriately introduced into the world, so the quality of translation of these works naturally appears to be very important. There is no doubt that scholars at home and abroad have made great achievements in the translation of TCM classics. For example, classic works such as the *Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic*, *Treatise on Cold Damage*, and *Compendium of Materia Medica* have all been translated into multiple languages. But there are still many problems to be solved. First of all, the quality of translated works varies greatly. Some translation works cannot fully express the cultural connotations of the original work, and some even misunderstand the meaning of the original work. Secondly, there are many different versions in the same period, which will inevitably lead to confusion among readers. In recent years, China has promulgated some standards for the English translation of traditional Chinese medicine terms, such as *The Terminology of Traditional Chinese Medicine* (2004), *The International Basic Nomenclature of Traditional Chinese Medicine* (2008), and *The WHO International Standard for Traditional Medical Terms in the Western Pacific Region* (2009), which will help improve the quality of translation. Third, translation is limited to a few classic works. To further expand the types and scope of TCM books, great efforts should be made to ensure more and more high-quality TCM translation works, which will surely bring a genuine TCM to the world.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, in the context of the “the Belt and Road Initiative”, TCM has encountered tremendous development opportunities and gained tremendous influence in cross-cultural communication, but its influence still needs to be strengthened. Taking the development of traditional Chinese medicine in Eastern European countries as an example, the study on the cross-cultural communication strategy of traditional Chinese medicine is conducive to promoting the international development of traditional Chinese medicine and improving the international pattern of traditional Chinese medicine culture under the current new situation. Training of translators of TCM theories should be strengthened. Attention should be paid to the combination of TCM publicity and local language environment. All-round efforts are needed in order to maintain and carry forward the traditional culture of the Chinese nation and make traditional Chinese medicine a new business card of Chinese culture.

References

- Kong, Z. Y., & Zhang, Z. M. (2013). An Interview with Professor Jin Hongzhu, a nationally renowned expert in the dissemination of traditional Chinese medicine culture. *Journal of Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine Social Science Edition*, 2013(1), 4-11.
- Qi, M., & Wang, X. W. (2018). Opportunities and challenges of internationalization of Chinese medicine based on the “the Belt and Road” strategy. *Medicine and Society*, 2018(4), 49-51.
- Shi, L., & He, Z. Y. (2018). A strategic study on the spread of Chinese medicine culture in English speaking countries in the context of the “the Belt and Road Initiative”. *Journal of Changchun University of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2018(10), 821-825.
- Shi, X. F., Zhang, J. Z., Song, X. Y., & Jin, A. N. (2019). Research on the development and strategy of traditional Chinese medicine in 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe. *Chinese Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2019(3), 1016-1018.
- Wang, L., & Li, H. Y. (2017). Traditional Chinese Medicine Diplomacy from the Perspective of the the Belt and Road. *Overseas Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2017(5), 52-57.
- Xue, F. F., Chen, J. X., & Qin, J. J. (2020). The Slovak Republic’s understanding of traditional Chinese medicine diagnosis and treatment services under the background of “the Belt and Road”. *Chinese Medicine Herald*, 26(15), 4-8.
- You, D. M., Guo, L. M., & Sun, D. (2018). Strengthening cultural beliefs and telling good stories about Chinese medicine: the construction and practice of the “Confucius Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine” curriculum system in Slovakia. *Journal of Liaoning University of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 20(8), 130-132.
- Zhang, H. L., & Zhang, Y. P. (2011). Research on the Confucius Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the soft power construction of traditional Chinese medicine culture. *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 2011(11), 36-38.