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Educational Pathways for Young University Students' Participation in the International Communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture

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Abstract: Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) culture is an important component of Chinese traditional culture and a meaningful carrier of China's participation in global health communication. With growing international interest in traditional medicine, health preservation, and diverse medical cultures, it has become necessary to explore how TCM culture can be communicated in a more understandable and credible way. Young university students, especially those from TCM universities, foreign language programs, and digital media-related programs, possess disciplinary knowledge, language competence, and familiarity with digital communication. They can therefore serve as peer communicators, cultural translators, and digital storytellers in the international communication of TCM culture. At present, further improvement is needed in terminology explanation, coordination between medical discourse systems, diversity of communication forms, trust building, and awareness of cross-border communication requirements. Universities should strengthen curriculum integration, practical activities, interdisciplinary teams, and digital platforms to improve students' professional literacy, cross-cultural expression, and awareness of health communication ethics. Youth participation in the international communication of TCM culture should move beyond general promotion and become an educational practice that integrates cultural confidence, professional learning, and international expression.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine culture; international communication; young university students; cross-cultural communication; higher education; digital storytelling

1. Introduction

TCM has developed through long-term practices of production, daily life, disease prevention, and medical treatment in China. It is not only a traditional medical knowledge system but also an important cultural achievement of Chinese civilization. TCM includes clinical diagnosis and treatment, health preservation, disease prevention, and rehabilitation. It also reflects a holistic Chinese understanding of life, nature, the body, and social relations. The WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034 identifies four strategic objectives: strengthening the evidence base; supporting safe and effective traditional medicine through appropriate regulation; integrating safe and effective traditional medicine into health systems; and optimizing its cross-sectoral value [1]. China's national implementation plan likewise calls for TCM cultural communication platforms and workforce development [2]. These initiatives provide a policy and action basis for the international communication of TCM culture.

Acupuncture and other TCM practices already appear in international communication, including on digital platforms. However, a long history does not automatically ensure clear cross-cultural understanding. Some TCM concepts remain unfamiliar to international audiences, technical terminology can be difficult to translate, and online content may emphasize selected treatment methods more than theoretical and

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cultural dimensions. Studies using the "5W" framework and YouTube content analysis suggest that communicators, content, channels, and audience orientation can be further improved [3,4].

The international communication of TCM culture should not merely aim at visibility. More importantly, it should help international audiences understand the value of TCM culture through explanation, experience, and comparison. In this process, young university students have distinctive advantages. Alongside official and expert-led communication, young students can contribute forms of expression that are closer to the everyday media habits of young international audiences. Students at TCM universities have foundational disciplinary knowledge, students in foreign language programs have translation and intercultural communication skills, and students in journalism, design, and digital media-related programs are familiar with digital content production. If students from different disciplines cooperate effectively, TCM culture can be transformed into forms that are clearer, livelier, and more accessible to international audiences. A review of digital storytelling in cultural and heritage tourism identifies social-media platform integration, multimedia engagement, community participation, and cultural authenticity as important elements of youth-oriented communication; this framework may inform, rather than directly establish, approaches to TCM cultural communication [5].

Therefore, examining young students' participation in the international communication of TCM culture is significant in two respects. It can broaden the range of actors involved in TCM cultural communication, and it can also promote interdisciplinary talent cultivation in higher education. Young students should not be regarded simply as promoters. Under professional training and practical guidance, they can become a new type of communication actor who accurately understands TCM culture, respects different cultural backgrounds, and uses digital platforms for meaningful exchange.

2. Major Challenges in the International Communication of TCM Culture

One difficulty appears at the point where language and medical culture meet. Terms such as meridians, yin and yang, the five elements, qi and blood, zang-fu organs, and pattern differentiation carry meanings that have developed within the TCM knowledge system. A word-for-word rendering can leave readers with little sense of those meanings. At the other extreme, replacing them entirely with familiar biomedical terms may remove important parts of the original concept. The translator therefore has to consider lexical accuracy, the audience's prior knowledge, and the setting in which a term is introduced. Research on specialized TCM translation indicates that translation choices should balance preservation of source meanings, accessibility for the target audience, and the purpose of translation [6]. Research on international TCM communication training also highlights the need for interdisciplinary teaching teams and cross-cultural training [7].

A related question is what to communicate and which form is suitable for the intended audience. Existing studies recommend closer attention to audience feedback and needs [3], as well as better use of new media and stronger audiovisual materials [4]. A review in cultural and heritage tourism also suggests that platform characteristics, interactive participation, multimedia presentation, and cultural authenticity deserve attention when engaging young audiences [5]. This does not mean that every topic should be compressed into a short video. Brief visual content, graphic posts, podcasts, live activities, and longer explanations can be used for different purposes, as long as the content remains accurate and understandable.

Trust is another practical concern. An account of TCM culture may introduce its history and ways of thinking, but health-related claims also raise questions about evidence, safety, and local regulatory requirements. The WHO strategy stresses evidence, safety, appropriate regulation, respect for national legislation and cultural circumstances, and the avoidance of unsupported claims [1]. Requirements differ across countries and may apply separately to practitioners, products, services, and public statements about health. Student communicators therefore need a clear boundary: they may explain

cultural ideas and general health knowledge, but they should not diagnose individuals, promise therapeutic effects, or answer clinical questions in place of qualified professionals. This is a normative educational safeguard proposed in this article. A systematic review defines social-media health misinformation as health-related claims that are based on anecdotal evidence, false, or misleading because of insufficient scientific knowledge [8].

This work rarely falls within a single discipline. A useful piece of international communication may require TCM knowledge, careful translation, an understanding of the audience, visual presentation, and awareness of health communication standards. It is difficult for one student, or even one academic program, to cover all of these areas well. When training and activities are organized separately, students may learn individual skills without seeing how they connect. Cooperation across departments and platforms is therefore an important practical requirement. This need is consistent with the "dual-track knowledge translation and collaborative governance" framework proposed in recent research [7].

3. Advantages and Role Positioning of Young University Students

Student participation is most useful when its limits are clear. Young people are not substitutes for clinicians, cultural scholars, or experienced researchers. They can, however, add a peer dimension that is often missing from formal communication. University students tend to know the media habits and everyday concerns of people of a similar age, including international students on their own campuses. A bilingual video made around a Baduanjin session, or a small cultural activity followed by conversation, may offer a more approachable supplement to one-way formal introductions. Research in cultural and heritage tourism suggests that narrative and participation can support engagement with younger audiences and may inform the design of TCM cultural activities [5].

Another part of the students' contribution lies in cultural translation. Here, translation is more than replacing a Chinese term with an English one. The communicator has to decide what background a reader needs and which comparison will clarify the idea without changing it. When zhi wei bing (often rendered as "preventive treatment of disease") is introduced, for example, an explanation may begin with prevention, health management, and everyday habits before returning to its place in TCM thought. Medicinal diet can likewise be discussed through ingredients, seasons, constitution, and ordinary eating practices rather than through a list of herb names. Such choices may make unfamiliar ideas easier to follow while keeping their cultural context visible. This communication strategy may draw on research on intercultural communicative competence, which emphasizes appropriate communication, awareness of the target culture, perspective taking, and the use of cultural knowledge in specific contexts [9].

Digital media gives this kind of translation a visible and shareable form. Students may present Baduanjin through a short bilingual demonstration, explain sachet making with photographs and brief captions, or develop a series on seasonal health practices in daily life. The value of these formats is not that they make TCM fashionable for its own sake. Their value lies in showing where an idea appears in ordinary practice and giving the audience enough context to ask further questions.

Preparing material for an overseas audience also sends students back to their own learning. They must decide what they understand well, what needs confirmation, and which expressions may be unclear outside China. In doing so, they practice professional reading, translation, and cross-cultural explanation in a concrete task. Enthusiasm alone is not sufficient, however. Universities should therefore provide targeted curricula and systematic cross-cultural adaptation training to strengthen cross-cultural communication competence, together with career development support [7]. Teacher review and opportunities for revision may also help students correct unclear, inaccurate, or oversimplified expressions before their work is made public.

4. Practical Pathways for Universities to Support Youth Participation

Curriculum design provides the most stable starting point. Students need opportunities to connect TCM knowledge with language use and communication practice, rather than learning these areas in isolation. Foreign language students may benefit from introductory TCM culture, basic medical knowledge, health communication, and medical ethics. TCM students, by contrast, may need more practice in professional English, intercultural communication, digital media, and international health regulations. The aim is not to turn every student into a specialist in all fields, but to give them enough shared knowledge to work responsibly with others. China's national implementation plan calls for strengthening the TCM cultural communication workforce [2]. Recent research further recommends cross-cultural curricula, targeted training, micro-specializations, and multilingual resources for international TCM communication [7].

In universities with suitable conditions, micro-credentials, minor programs, or interdisciplinary course clusters in the international communication of TCM culture can be explored. These programs may integrate TCM culture, college English, translation practice, cross-cultural communication, health communication ethics, and new media operation. A micro-program does not need to be overly broad. Its key purpose should be to help students understand TCM culture, express it clearly, communicate it effectively, and recognize communication boundaries. In this way, students can gradually develop basic capacity for international communication.

Practice outside the classroom is another necessary part of the pathway. Student associations, volunteer services, international student exchange, social practice projects, and university-community cooperation can provide settings for TCM cultural activities. Baduanjin teaching, sachet making, medicinal diet demonstrations, seasonal health discussions, and small exhibitions are all possible examples. The activity itself, however, is only a starting point. Time should also be left for explanation, questions, and feedback, so that international students and other young participants can understand the cultural meaning through direct involvement.

Interdisciplinary teams are equally important because no single major covers all the knowledge needed for this work. A team might include TCM students, foreign language students, international students, journalism or design students, and a clinical teacher. Their roles need not be identical. TCM students can check professional content; language students can revise explanations for clarity and cultural appropriateness; media students can improve presentation; and teachers can review material before it is released.

A shared digital resource base can support these teams. A bilingual terminology bank, a small collection of reviewed cases, and sample scripts for common activities would be more useful than asking each group to start from the beginning. The resource library may include explanations of key TCM cultural concepts, short-video scripts, graphic templates, and answers to frequently asked questions. The language should be plain enough for non-specialists but should not remove the cultural features of the concept. Items that are easily misunderstood should be checked by teachers with relevant expertise.

Ethical and compliance boundaries should be taught as part of the same process. Students may introduce the history, concepts, lifestyle practices, and cultural experiences associated with TCM, but they should not give personal medical advice or make exaggerated claims about treatment. Specific requirements for TCM-related services, products, acupuncture, and health promotion depend on the legal and cultural setting of the target country. The WHO strategy likewise calls for attention to relevant national legislation, culture, and circumstances [1]. Before material is published, students should be reminded to consider both the legal setting and the cultural expectations of the intended audience.

Feedback should also be built into the activity rather than added at the end. Counts of events, videos, or clicks show reach, but they do not show whether the audience understood the content. Short questionnaires, interviews, comment reviews, and discussion after an activity can reveal points of confusion and help the team revise its approach.

5. Conclusion

Young university students can add a useful layer to the international communication of TCM culture, especially in campus exchange and digital media. Their contribution is not based on professional authority. It comes from their ability to speak with peers, learn across disciplines, and turn course knowledge into explanations linked to everyday experience. For that reason, student participation should be treated as guided educational practice rather than as a substitute for expert communication.

For universities, the central task is to connect learning, practice, and review. Courses can provide the necessary knowledge, joint activities can give students a real audience, and teachers can help them correct unclear or inaccurate material.

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