

Investigation Report on the Cognitive Situation of TCM among College Students—The Revelation of the Philosophy of Life in TCM

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Abstract: The culture of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is one of the treasures of traditional Chinese culture, and its philosophy of life is still of great significance in the modern era. In recent years, there has been increasing social concern about health education for college students. At present, only sporadic studies have begun to pay attention to the enlightening role of TCM ideology on the health of college students, but there is still a need for further exploration on the specialized research regarding the TCM philosophical thoughts and the health of college students. This paper surveys students of 31 colleges in Zhejiang Province. Focusing on four dimensions: TCM method understanding, TCM thought cognition, TCM practice and future development of TCM Taking these four dimensions as the entry points, investigation and analysis are conducted to explore the characteristics of contemporary college students' cognition of TCM, identify existing issues, and discuss the enlightening role of TCM's philosophy of life on the health of college students.

1. Introduction

This study employs a combination of questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews as its primary research methods. It targets college students in Zhejiang Province, with a randomized selection from 21 undergraduate colleges and 10 specialized colleges. A total of 516 questionnaires were distributed, of which 509 were considered valid. The demographic details of the investigators can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic information of the survey respondents

Gender	Male	44.09%
	Female	55.90%

The author delves into the contemporary college students' perception of Traditional Chinese

Medicine (TCM) from four distinct perspectives: understanding TCM methodologies, cognitive awareness of TCM philosophy, engagement in TCM practices, and anticipation of TCM's future development [1-2]. Through this analysis, the study seeks to delineate the nuances of college students' understanding of TCM, critically evaluate the underlying issues, and explore the potential impact of TCM's philosophical principles on the health and well-being of college students [3-4].

2. Limited Understanding of TCM Methods

University students generally lack a corresponding knowledge framework for the practical application of TCM (TCM), mainly manifested in a limited understanding and experimentation with TCM treatment methods and types of Chinese herbs. Some university students hold misconceptions about TCM practice, believing that it can only treat minor ailments or chronic diseases, incapable of addressing major or acute illnesses. Alternatively, they may perceive TCM practice solely as a supplementary method to Western medicine, rather than an independent and effective approach on its own. *“If Western medicine cannot address the issue, we will recommend them to seek treatment from TCM”* (Student Xu 1) *“Basically, it is only for diseases that cannot be cured by Western medicine or some problems in body conditioning that we will go to see a Chinese medicine practitioner”* (Student. Yang).

According to the questionnaire, college students generally have a low level of understanding of the forms of treatment of Chinese medicine, only 5.36% of the respondents indicated that they have a deeper understanding of external treatment methods of Chinese medicine, 3.58% of the respondents have a deeper understanding of the basic treatment methods of Chinese medicine. In addition, 26.93% of the respondents indicated they had little or no understanding of external treatment methods in TCM, while the proportion of respondents with limited or no understanding of fundamental treatment methods in TCM reached a staggering 79.02%.

The most frequently mentioned external Chinese medical treatments among the college students interviewed include acupuncture, cupping¹, TCM bone-setting², massage, gua sha³(scraping), etc., For these TCM diagnosis and treatment, college students basically hold a optimistic attitude, believing that in some aspects it is quite effective. However, most students believe that Western medicine precedes Chinese medicine, and few college students are able to are able to apply some basic TCM knowledge and traditional lifestyle principles to guide their health maintenance, disease prevention, and treatment in their daily lives.

“On the days when a girl in her physiological period, she avoids consuming cold foods, such as crabs. I also sometimes brew citri reticulatae pericarpium⁴ and white tea to sweat and prevent colds.” (Student Xu 2) Most of the respondents can only turn to TCM practice methods for simple occasions and problems, such as dietary adjustments and massage health care, etc., or will not consider TCM practice methods at all, but rely entirely on Western medicine or other methods to solve their health problems. *“College students are going to school alone, what they want to pursue is definitely a simple and effective medicine or method to solve their ailments quickly. The duration of action of Western medicine is short. In the fast-paced lifestyle, university students lack the conditions to decoct Chinese herbal medicine.”* (Student. Yang) It can be seen that factors such as the slow efficacy of Chinese medicine and the inconvenience of boiling and storing Chinese medicine also affect college students' choice of Chinese medicine practice. It can be seen that

¹ It is a kind of TCM therapy using cups and POTS as tools, using fire, pumping air and other methods to produce negative pressure, so that it is adsorbed on the body surface, causing local blood stasis, so as to achieve the function of activating the channels, reducing swelling and relieving pain.

² Chinese medicine refers to the use of pushing, pulling, pressing and other methods to treat fractures, dislocations and other diseases

³ One of the traditional therapies of TCM. With special scraping instruments and corresponding techniques, it dips a certain medium in the relevant parts of the skin to scrape and wipe, so as to achieve the purpose of dredging meridians and collaterals, promoting blood circulation and removing blood stasis.

⁴ The dry ripe peel of Citrus reticulata Blanco and its cultivated varieties.

factors such as the slow efficacy of TCM, as well as the inconvenience of preparing and storing Chinese herbal medicine, also influence university students' choices regarding the practice of TCM.

3. Insufficient Cognition of TCM Thought

Firstly, university students lack a comprehensive understanding of the classic and cultural value of TCM, and their grasp of TCM ideology is shallow. According to survey data, university students generally have a low level of understanding of TCM ideology, with only 6.85% of respondents indicating a deep understanding, while 44.33% of respondents stated they have little or no understanding of TCM ideology. *"The theory of Chinese medicine thought is not very clear. Generally speaking, people are most familiar with terms like 'cold' and 'hot' or 'yin' and 'yang'¹. As for these specialized terms, the general public typically does not have a particularly deep understanding of them."* (Student. Jiang)

Secondly, they have a partial understanding of the concepts of Chinese medicine and only know a few words, mainly focusing on the "Wang, Wen, Weng and Qie"² of Chinese medicine consultation. Only a very small number of respondents are able to accurately articulate the core principles and characteristics of TCM [5-6], such as harmony of yin and yang, unity of heaven and humanity, and nurturing health according to the seasons. However, the majority of respondents can only vaguely describe some concepts and terms of TCM ideology, such as "qi"³, blood, organs, meridians, etc. *"For example, some theories of 'qi' and essence are difficult to understand."* (Student Xu) *"Like 'shanghuo'⁴, which is a very typical concept in Chinese medicine. It's possible that people don't know exactly what this 'fire' is, but as it becomes more commonly used and passed from person to person, people become more inclined to use such a concept to address the confusions in their lives. I think it's a rather positive phenomenon."* (Student Xu 1) Or perhaps they can only superficially acknowledge some explanations and effects of TCM, such as its terminology, therapeutic effects, safety, and naturalness, while lacking a deeper understanding of the classics, concepts, ideologies, and culture of TCM.

4. Uneven practice of TCM

On one hand, some university students hold a skeptical or distrustful attitude towards the effectiveness and safety of TCM practices. They are unclear about the scenarios and scope of TCM application and generally do not accept TCM-related diagnosis and treatment, preferring instead to use Western medicine or modern medical methods for disease prevention and treatment. There are also some students who acknowledge the effectiveness of TCM but consider it "mysterious" or "esoteric" in theory. *"Although it is said that Chinese medicine has a longer course of treatment and the theory is a bit esoteric, it is still quite effective for body adjustment, which is a long-term process."* (Student Ye) On the other hand, due to factors such as family environment, educational background, and profession, some students have personally experienced basic diagnostic and therapeutic procedures of TCM, such as acupuncture, cupping therapy, gua sha, Chinese herbal

¹ A pair of categories used to summarize the unity of opposites in ancient Chinese philosophy, the relative attributes of Yin and Yang are introduced into the medical field, and the substances and functions that promote, warm and excite the human body belong to Yang, and the substances and functions that condense, moisten and inhibit the human body belong to Yin.

² Chinese medicine terms. Wang(Looking), refers to watching the complexion; (Wen)Smell, refers to hear; Weng(Ask); To inquire about symptoms; Qie(pulse-taking); Finger pulse. Collectively called four diagnostic methods

³ One of the basic categories of ancient Chinese philosophy refers to the most basic matter constituting the universe, which is in constant motion and change. Introduced into the field of TCM, Chinese medicine believes that qi is the most basic substance that constitutes the human body and maintains the life activities of the human body, the viscera, essence, blood, etc., are the tangible quality formed by Qi, and the intangible qi has the function of promoting the functional activities of the viscera

⁴ Chinese medicine term, meaning the imbalance of Yin and Yang in the human body, the internal fire is strong. The term "fire" refers to certain symptoms of heat in the body.

medicine, etc. They have some understanding of certain application scenarios of TCM and have received positive feedback from the application of TCM. *“Because I have undergone acupuncture several times, I feel that its treatment effect on lumbar disc herniation is very good. I went to the orthopedic hospital and visited the Small needle knife¹ department. They used acupuncture to help relieve muscle tension and open up the meridians, which lasted about thirty minutes. I think acupuncture is definitely worth trying.”*(Student Xu 2). After receiving effective diagnosis and treatment from TCM, these university students will also be more open and optimistic about accepting other forms of TCM practices. *“My friend has visited an orthopedic specialist, and they said it was excellent. It's very effective for neck and back pain. Unfortunately, I've never had the chance to try it myself.”* (Student Xu 2) Some university students who have little or no exposure to TCM, or who have been influenced by negative information, may harbor doubts and rejection towards TCM practices. This imbalance is not conducive to the widespread dissemination and promotion of the wisdom of TCM, nor does it contribute to the improvement of health literacy among university students.

5. Uncertainty about the Future of Chinese Medicine Development

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of health preservation, guided by TCM theories and employing various methods to regulate the body and mind, nurture life, and prevent diseases, has become widely popular among university students. According to survey results, the level of importance placed on TCM health preservation by university students (including high and very high) increased from 33.57% before the pandemic to 57.34% afterward. The core concept of TCM, “treating the disease before it occurs”, has begun to gain popularity among university students.

Currently, university students' views on the future development of TCM mainly revolve around uncertainty and debate. *“Uncertainty, which is also a major drawback of TCM, includes issues such as resources and scale.”* (Student Xu 2) They hold uncertain or pessimistic attitudes towards the prospects of TCM development, believing that TCM is unlikely to become mainstream. *In fact, TCM has its historical significance, but its accessibility and convenience are relatively weak.* (Student Yang) They do not deny the practical efficacy and ideological status of TCM, but they are uncertain about the future of modern TCM. *“For most of us, TCM is considered quite specialized and obscure. If I were to seriously educate others about TCM knowledge, I believe such dissemination would rely more on professionals”.* (Student Jiang) When it comes to promoting TCM, university students generally express willingness to participate but are unsure where to start. The high level of specialization is also a key obstacle for TCM practice and ideology to reach the wider population.

6. Enlightenment of TCM Life Philosophy

6.1 Provide a New Perspective for the Theoretical Study of College Students' Health Education.

Taking TCM life philosophy as the starting point, this paper explores the important topic of theoretical research on health education for university students from a new angle. The theoretical research on health education for university students needs to trace its roots on one hand and innovate on the other. Tracing its roots, traditional culture is undoubtedly a crucial part of the research on health education for university students. However, traditional culture has mainly

¹ Small needle knife looks like acupuncture needle, but its tip has a narrow blade, which can play the dual functions of acupuncture and knife cutting. It is a new type of traditional Chinese medical equipment formed on the basis of modern Western surgical treatment and traditional Chinese acupuncture therapy

focused on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, especially Confucianism, overlooking the role that medical culture plays in shaping the health life outlook of Chinese people, especially the younger generation. We can use the ideas of TCM life philosophy to address this deficiency, drawing from classics such as the <Huang Di Nei Jing Ling Shu>¹, to summarize the excellent life wisdom in Chinese medicine culture, and provide a fresh research perspective to enrich the theoretical research on health education for university students.

6.2 Provide a New Perspective for the Research on the Inheritance and Innovative Development of TCM Culture.

Secondly, in the study of TCM philosophy, university students can be regarded as an important target for its development research. In the process of promoting TCM, inheritance and innovation are indispensable. Each generation of university students is the backbone of national and social development. TCM must maximize the role of this backbone force in inheritance and development. The research on TCM culture mainly relies on professional TCM practitioners, and its dissemination is mainly limited to these professionals and some older adults who have actually benefited from TCM treatment, most of whom are middle-aged and elderly. The dissemination of TCM culture among university students is seriously insufficient. Considering the actual needs of university students for TCM, there is considerable room for development, making them an important target for the inheritance of TCM life philosophy.

6.3 Providing Realistic Guidance for the Physical and Mental Health of University Students

The research on TCM life philosophy should not be confined to the theoretical level. It is important to utilize various media platforms to disseminate the excellent ideas and practical daily tips from TCM life philosophy to contemporary university students. This will help the university student population truly understand and appreciate TCM, especially by applying these practical tips in daily life, they can become practitioners and beneficiaries of TCM culture.

7. Conclusion

Since the publication of Yao Limin's article "On the Psychological Education Thought in Traditional Culture and Its Significance for Cultivating University Students' Psychological Quality" in 1999, research on the application of TCM philosophy, with the theory of the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon as its core, to the health education of university students has begun. However, most of the content is limited to ideas such as "treating before illness" and constitution theory, while other relevant research is lacking and needs further exploration. Moreover, there is currently a lack of practical research data on the actual attitudes of university students towards TCM cognition based on real-life challenges. This paper conducts an in-depth assessment based on the real-life challenges faced by university students, combined with an online questionnaire aimed at university students in Zhejiang Province, filling the gap in the understanding of TCM cognition among university student groups.

According to the 2023 statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of students in higher education institutions in Zhejiang Province is approximately 1.2533 million. Faced with such a large student population, if we only focus on theoretical teaching without practical guidance, we will end up with a situation where there are many theoretically proficient individuals but lacking practical skills. This is a problem that no discipline wants to face. Therefore, we need to actively

¹ The earliest existing classic works of TCM theory in China is also the foundation work of TCM. It consists of 18 books and 162 chapters. It consists of "su wen" and "ling shu" (9 volumes each).

explore and address the actual challenges faced by university student groups. Based on the research findings, it is important to utilize the ideas of traditional Chinese medicine life philosophy to provide practical guidance for the physical and mental health of university student groups.

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