

Research on the Path and Strategy of Traditional Chinese Medicine Talent Cultivation Based on Demand Orientation

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ABSTRACT

Background: Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has shown unique advantages in the prevention and treatment of chronic complex diseases, emergency treatment and major infectious diseases, especially COVID-19 epidemic. Reformation and improvement of the talent cultivation mode with distinctive TCM characteristics is the approach to realize the high-quality development of TCM. **Materials and Methods:** This paper systematically analyzed the development process of TCM talent cultivation in the past 15 years (2006–2020), comprehensively sorted out the current situation and main problems of TCM talent cultivation from the perspectives of discipline characteristics, industry needs and cultivation methods, and put forward suggestions on the path of TCM talent cultivation in combination with the demands of serving a healthy China strategy and responding to the prevention and control of sudden epidemics. **Results:** The study advocates for a demand-driven approach to TCM talent cultivation. Recommendations include focusing on TCM thinking, integrating master-apprentice and academic training, aligning talent structure with industry needs, diversifying teaching staff expertise, increasing customized talent supply, and promoting TCM internationalization. **Conclusion:** This research emphasizes the importance of adapting TCM talent cultivation to meet the changing demands of healthcare. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the proposed strategies, TCM education can better prepare professionals to contribute to a healthier society and effectively respond to future health challenges.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese medicine, Talent cultivation, Postgraduate education, Cultivation path.

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Received: 08-10-2023;

Revised: 15-05-2024;

Accepted: 23-12-2024.

INTRODUCTION

With the development and progress of human society and the change of disease spectrum, people's health concept and medical model are showing a trend of transformation from "disease medicine" to "health medicine". Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has shown unique advantages in the prevention and treatment of chronic complex diseases, emergency treatment and major infectious diseases. In the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 epidemic, the proportion of confirmed cases treated by TCM reached 92%.¹ It has improved the cure rate and accelerated the recovery period. According to China's 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of TCM, "the number of practicing (assistant) TCM doctors per 1,000 population should be raised from 0.48 in

2020 to 0.62 in 2025"² This has put forward new requirements for the cultivation of TCM talents. Perfecting the talent cultivation mode with distinctive TCM characteristics is the support to realize the high-quality development of TCM. This paper systematically analyzed the development process of TCM talent cultivation in the past 15 years (2006-2020), systematically sorted out the current situation and main problems of TCM talent cultivation from the perspectives of discipline characteristics, industry needs and cultivation methods, and put forward suggestions on the path of TCM talent cultivation in combination with the demands of serving a healthy China strategy and responding to the prevention and control of sudden epidemics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Current situation of TCM talent cultivation

In the 1950s, the college education of TCM began to emerge,³ and the cultivation system of TCM talents gradually became complete, with both quality and quantity breakthroughs achieved, making positive contributions to the development of TCM.



DOI: 10.5530/ijper.20252630

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Favorable environment for the growth and development of TCM

talents has being created. In the 21st century, in order to adapt to the rapid development of economy, the change of people's concept of healthy life and the change of medical model, the state has successively promulgated policies and measures covering industry development, scientific and technological innovation, talent cultivation, cultural inheritance and teaching staff construction (Table 1) to guide and promote the inheritance and innovation development of TCM, and provide a good environment for the growth and development of TCM talents.

The TCM higher education system is becoming relatively complete

In the 1950s, Shanghai College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Chengdu College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Guangzhou College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Beijing College of Traditional Chinese Medicine were established.³ After nearly 70 years of development, a relatively complete higher education system of TCM has been established. According to the relevant data of National Education Development Statistics Bulletin,⁴ China Statistical Yearbook of Chinese Medicine 2020⁵ and Statistical Summary Report on the Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine in 2020,⁶ in 2020, among the 2,738 colleges and universities in China, 44 were TCM colleges and universities, and 400 were western medicine or non-medicine colleges and universities offering TCM major. A multi-level and multi-form higher education system of TCM has been formed, making significant contributions to the development of TCM.

It can be seen from The Number of Higher Western Medicine and Non-medicine Colleges and Universities Offering TCM Specialty in China (Figure 1) that the number of colleges and universities offering TCM specialty is on the rise. Compared with 2019, the number of higher western medicine and non-medicine colleges and universities offering TCM specialty increased by 17 and 23 respectively in 2020.⁴⁻⁶ It shows that the development of TCM is receiving more and more attention, which plays a positive role in completing the education system of TCM talents.

In terms of the discipline construction of TCM, 12 TCM disciplines from 8 universities were selected as "double first-class".⁷ Including 3 first-class disciplines of Chinese medicine (Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine), 6 first-class discipline of Chinese material medica (Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, Tianjin University of Chinese Medicine, Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine, China Pharmaceutical University, Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine), 2 first-class disciplines of integrated traditional Chinese and Western medicine (Beijing University

of Chinese Medicine, Fudan University). In the the fourth round of subject evaluation by the Ministry of Education, 2 subjects of Chinese medicine (Beijing University of Chinese Medicine and Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine), 2 subjects of Chinese material medica (Heilongjiang University of Traditional Chinese Medicine and Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine) rated A⁺. Strengthening of the discipline construction of TCM and optimizing the system have laid a solid foundation for higher quality education of TCM.

The number of TCM talents has being increased rapidly

A relatively complete higher education system for TCM has provided a necessary talent pool for the inheritance, innovation and development of TCM. Since the beginning of the 21st century, from 2006 to 2019, the total number of graduates from TCM colleges and universities in China was 1,244,455.⁴⁻⁶ Statistics (Figure 2) on the number of graduates from TCM colleges and universities (2006-2019) show that the number of graduates has shown a steady growth trend over the years, increasing from 48,827 in 2006 to 117,846 in 2019, an increase of more than 2 times. The rapid increase in the number of talents in the new century plays an important role in promoting the development of TCM.

The internationalization of TCM higher education continued to strengthen

In 1957, Beijing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine admitted the first batch of foreign students to study in the university, and the international education of TCM in China started.³ With the expansion of the scope of TCM communication abroad, TCM colleges and universities actively "go out" and carry out different forms of educational cooperation projects. Since the 21st century, the number of international students in China has shown an overall growth trend, and the number of graduation (completion) has been stable while rising (Figure 3).

The development of TCM industry is in great demand. The TCM industry is not only a competitive traditional industry in China, but also an emerging strategic industry. It possesses independent intellectual property rights and has the potential for independent innovation, and its contribution to national economic growth is constantly increasing. Statistics on the national pharmaceutical industry show that⁸ the TCM industry grew steadily in 2021, with annual operating revenue reaching 691.9 billion yuan, up 12.3% from 615.6 billion yuan in 2020, exceeding the GDP growth rate in the same period. The TCM industry needs solid intellectual support to integrate innovation, improve quality and efficiency, and better serve the development of TCM, which provides a broad stage for TCM talents with original thinking to play their roles.

Table 1: Part of the outline and plan summary table.

Year	Name	Keywords related to talent development	Issuing department
In 2007,	Outline of the Plan for Innovative Development of TCM (2006-2020)	Innovative talent	Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Health, etc.
In 2009,	Several Opinions on Supporting and Promoting the Development of TCM	Construction of TCM talent team	The State Council
In 2015,	Development Plan of TCM Health Services (2015-2020)	Accelerating talent cultivation	The General Office of the State Council
In 2016,	Several Opinions on Strengthening the Inheritance and Innovation of TCM theories	Strengthening team building	The State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine
In 2016,	Outline of the Strategic Plan for the Development of TCM (2016-2030)	Strengthening the construction of TCM talent team	The State Council
In 2016,	Outline of the Healthy China 2030 plan	Pharmacists, TCM health services, health emergency, health informatization, composite talents	The CPC Central Committee, the State Council
In 2016,	The 13 th Five-Year Plan for TCM talent development	Scientific spirit and creative thinking, well-known scholars, leading talents	The State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine
In 2017,	The 13 th Five-Year Plan for TCM Science and Technology Innovation	Talent cultivation and discipline integration	Ministry of Science and Technology, the State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine
In 2018,	Guidelines on Deepening the Master-Apprentice Education of TCM	Gradually establish and improve the master-apprentice education system for TCM	The State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine
In 2018,	"Tens of Millions" Talent Program for TCM Inheritance and Innovation (Qihuang Project) -- National TCM Leading Talent Support Program	The system and mechanism of TCM talent work will be innovated, and a favorable environment will be created for the development of TCM talent	The State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine
In 2022,	The 14 th Five-Year Plan for TCM development	Building a team of high-quality TCM professionals	The General Office of the State Council

Demand-oriented analysis of TCM talent cultivation

Although the reform and practice of TCM talent cultivation have made fruitful achievements in recent years, there are still many difficulties in cultivating TCM talents in the face of the new trend of world medical development and the new challenges from major infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

The thinking of TCM is not deeply embedded

TCM is deeply rooted in China and has its own unique theoretical system, value orientation and technical methods, which are vividly reflected in the characteristics of the eastern way of thinking. However, in the existing cultivation system, students do not have a clear understanding of the thinking of TCM. "The learning of classical works is weakened, and the cultivation of ancient Chinese is insufficient. Many students do not understand and have not read the 'Inner Canon' 'compendium of materia

medica'. The basic cultivation of traditional theory is insufficient, the ideology and values of TCM are pale and the way of thinking and cognition is atrophied, losing the true meaning and essence of TCM academic".⁹ At the same time, influenced by some social factors and family factors, the professional thoughts of students majoring in TCM are still unstable, and it is difficult for students to acquire the essence of TCM. Many factors interweave and superimpose, leading to the cultivation of talents with strong thinking of TCM has not achieved the ideal effect.

The cultivation approach is relatively unbalanced

At present, the cultivation of TCM talents mainly relies on the inheritance of teachers and family and education in colleges and universities. The strength of academia, industry and clinics were not well combined. With the development of the times, its deficiencies gradually emerged: it is difficult to make

a breakthrough in quantity due to the long time and small audience for the inheritance of teachers and family, and there is a lack of a unified scientific and reasonable evaluation standard system. “Currently, there is a lack of standardized management and uniform requirements for the learning process of master-apprentice and a lack of scientific and uniform evaluation standards, and the assessment is a mere formality, which cannot make an accurate evaluation of the effect of apprenticeship”;¹⁰ The university has a strict curriculum and unified textbooks, but the curriculum arrangement is not reasonable, and students do not invest enough energy in studying traditional classics and clinical practice. “Students of more than 100 medical colleges and universities in China only spend 1/60 of their time (about

60 class hours) to learn some knowledge of Chinese medicine, while students of 32 Chinese medicine colleges and universities in China have to spend 1/3 of their time (about 1200 class hours) to learn a lot of western medicine knowledge”,¹¹ resulting in a lack of confidence in TCM.

The supply of top-notch innovative talents is insufficient

At present, the biggest limiting factor of TCM keeping right and innovating is the lack of top-notch innovative talents. From the perspective of talents supply, the number of TCM colleges and universities recruiting doctoral students in China has increased slowly in the past 20 years,⁴⁻⁶ from 15 in 2006 to 22 in 2019, and there has been no increase in the period from 2006 to 2012. However, the number of TCM doctoral students in western medical colleges, non-medical colleges and research institutes also increased slowly (Figure 4). From 2006 to 2019, there were 149,013 graduate students in national higher TCM colleges and universities, accounting for 11.8% of the total number of graduates, including 15,207 doctoral students, accounting for only 1.2% of the total number of graduates (Figure 5).

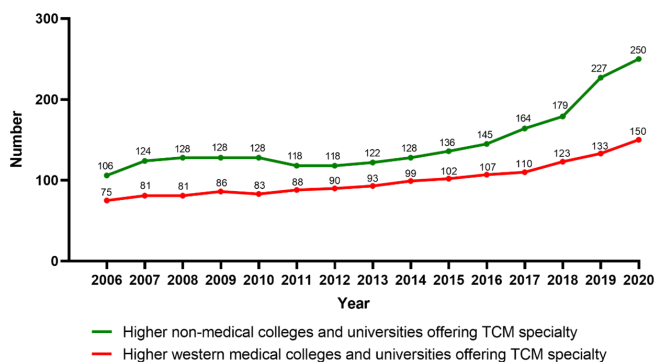


Figure 1: The Number of Higher Western Medical and Higher Non-Medical Colleges and Universities Offering TCM Specialty in China.

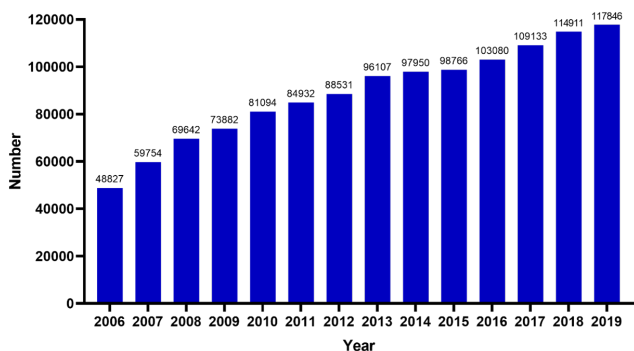


Figure 2: Trend of the number of graduates from TCM colleges and universities in China (2006-2019).

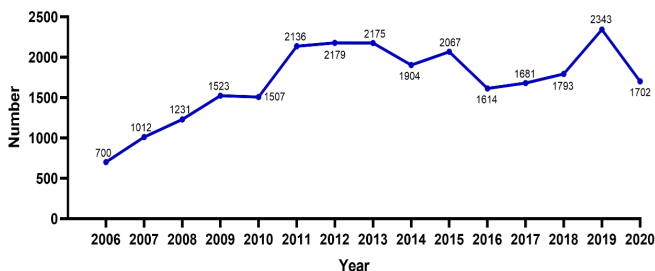


Figure 3: The number of foreign students who graduated from TCM colleges and universities in China.

The total number of high-quality teaching staff is insufficient

In 2006, there were 28,510 teaching and administrative staff in TCM colleges and universities, and the number increased to 51,570 in 2019. The corresponding full-time teachers were 15,877 and 31,151, respectively, accounting for 60.41% of the total, up from 55.69%. During the same period, there were 1,872,600 staff and 1,076,000 full-time teachers in regular institutions of higher learning nationwide in 2006. In 2019, it was 2,566,700, and the number of full-time teachers was 1,70,100, which increased from 57.46% to 67.80%. It can be seen that the proportion of full-time teachers in the total number of teaching and administrative staff and its growth rate are lower than the national level of ordinary colleges and universities. In addition, among the faculty and staff of TCM colleges and universities, the proportion of senior full-time teachers was 14.72% in 2006, which only increased to 18.03% in 2019 (Figure 6), and the growth rate was flat (Figure 7).⁴⁻⁶

There is a disconnect between cultivation and demand

With the development of economy and society, the compatibility between TCM talents and the development of TCM is increasingly insufficient. On the one hand, as the main position and highland of TCM talent cultivation, the reform of the cultivation mode of TCM colleges and universities does not meet the needs of the society, and the problem of the disconnection between theory and practice has not been fundamentally solved. For example, in the aspect of classroom teaching, colleges and universities pay more attention to the systematic and normative knowledge imparted.

However, it is difficult to master the essence of TCM through the acquisition of single and boring textbook theoretical knowledge and experience. In practice teaching, simulation practice and field study are usually arranged, but the practical effect is not ideal due to the influence of time, space, funds and other conditions. On the other hand, the supply and demand of TCM talents is unbalanced. For example, the statistics from 2017 to 2019 showed that the proportion of the number of undergraduates engaged in clinical

work of TCM in the first employment of Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine decreased from 56% and 41.5% to 36%.⁵ In addition, data from the graduate employment quality report showed that students tended to be employed in economically developed areas. For example, among the graduates of the class of 2017 to 2021 of Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, the proportion of employed students in the eastern region increased year by year, from 17.2% to 23.6%. 8.20% of 2021 graduates from Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine were employed in the eastern region, accounting for nearly 50% of the employment outside the province; Another data “intersection of source and employment region” also showed this. From 2017 to 2021, among the graduates of Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine from outside the province, more than 40% of them gave priority to work in Jiangsu province. Among the graduates of Tianjin University of Chinese Medicine, 52.2% of them were employed in new first-tier cities. And 49.6% of them worked for the economic development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.⁴⁻⁶

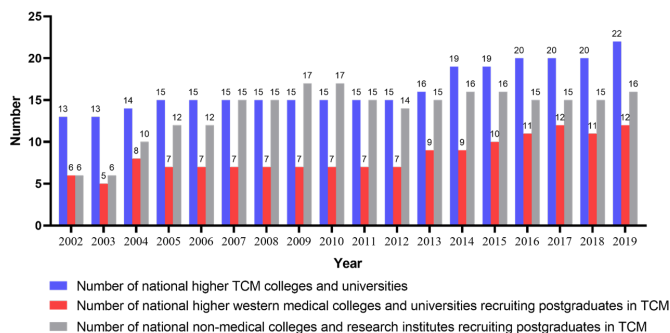


Figure 4: Number of universities and institutions recruiting doctoral students in China (2002-2019).

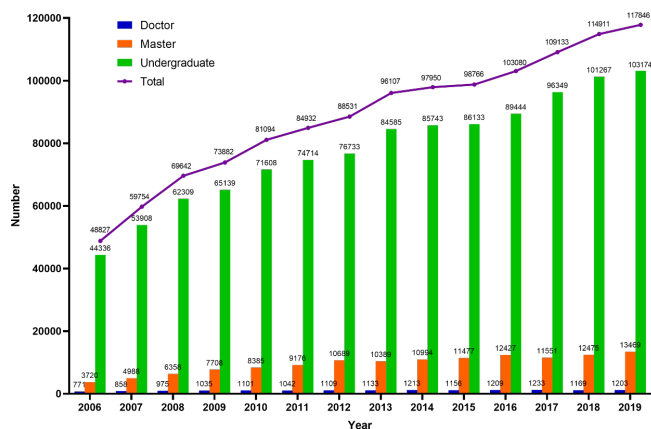


Figure 5: Number of graduates of TCM colleges and universities by education level in China (2006-2019).

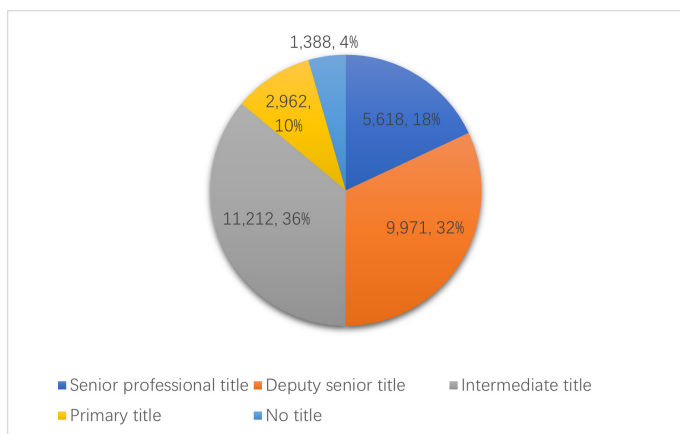


Figure 6: Number of teaching staff in TCM colleges and universities in China in 2019 (by professional title).

Analysis of the path of TCM talent cultivation

According to Healthy China 2030, the leading role of TCM in the treatment of untreated diseases, its synergistic role in the treatment of major diseases, and its central role in disease rehabilitation should be fully played by 2030. TCM plays a full role in human health and effective response to COVID-19. It is necessary to explore and build a new cultivation model for TCM talents.

Clarifying cultivation targets for talents with strong TCM thinking

Following the law of development of traditional Chinese medicine, establishing a cultivation concept focusing on TCM, and strengthening the cultivation of original thinking of TCM, so students can not only have a profound foundation of TCM culture, but also integrate modern science and technology. It is necessary

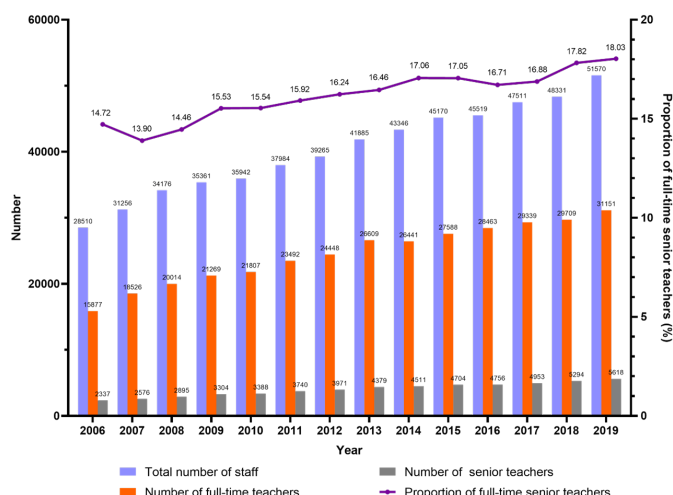


Figure 7: Proportion of Senior full-time teachers in TCM colleges and universities in China (2006-2019).

to improve the comprehensive quality of TCM talents, cultivate TCM talents with strong TCM thinking, effectively inherit the essence of TCM and medical ethics, and build a high-quality and efficient service system of traditional Chinese medicine, so as to better serve the construction of a healthy China.

Establishing a new cultivation model of inheritance, innovation

There is a need to deepen the educational reform of TCM colleges and universities, optimize the construction of the curriculum system in accordance with the principle of "TCM plus", and build a professional curriculum system with TCM courses as the main line, a practical curriculum system with TCM clinical skills as the core, and a general curriculum system based on traditional Chinese culture. It is necessary to deepen TCM master-apprentice education, improve different levels and types of TCM master-apprentice education models, and explore and establish a standard system for evaluating the quality of TCM master-apprentice education. Integrating the "colleges + master-apprentice" cultivation path, exploring the construction of a new inheritance and innovation cultivation model, and cultivating real TCM talents with profound humanistic background and Chinese studies. It is also necessary to perfect the lifelong education system of TCM, reform the assessment and evaluation mechanism, link up the promotion and development channels for key personnel at the grassroots level, and form a virtuous cycle mechanism and environment for talent flow.

Optimizing the cultivation structure

To meet people's demand for a high-quality and healthy life, the scale and hierarchy of TCM talent cultivation should be optimized. According to the structure and quantity of the supply of TCM talents and the demand for medical services, the enrollment scale should be scientifically arranged, and the enrollment plans for different majors should be formulated. The new or adjusted plans should focus on the talents with TCM characteristics, such as the talent cultivation for TCM standardization and the engineering and technical talents for intelligent manufacturing service. The hierarchical structure should be planned scientifically to gradually expand the enrollment scale of TCM postgraduate students and improve the cultivation level of TCM talents. It is necessary to rationally distribute the granting units and authorization centers for doctor's and master's degrees in TCM, increase the number of granting units, increase the number of authorization centers in short supply, and make up for the shortage of high-level personnel. The number of professional degrees is supposed to increase to meet the demand for career-oriented and practice ability enhanced high-level TCM professionals.¹²

Strengthening the construction of teaching staff

A strong teaching staff is an important guarantee for the cultivation of TCM talents. Firstly, it is necessary to break the

conventional wisdom and build a multi-level and multi-field high-level teaching team centering on the cultivation objectives of TCM talents. In addition to teachers from TCM colleges and universities at all levels, it is also necessary to recruit TCM masters and academic celebrities from scientific research institutes and medical departments. Secondly, it is necessary to break through the ideological barriers and build a teaching staff with full of TCM thinking, reasonable structure and integration of the old, the middle and the young around the practical needs of the original thinking transmission of TCM. Masters of TCM and academic celebrities should give full play to the role of "mentoring". Young teachers should advocate academic research innovation, enrich clinical practice experience, enhance the sense of mission and responsibility of teaching and educating people, and grow into high-level talents and academic leaders with both TCM thinking and modern scientific research thinking. Thirdly, conditions should be created to fully mobilize the initiative, enthusiasm and creativity of the teaching staff in terms of policies, mechanisms and systems, so as to fully release the energy of the team, and constantly form national leaders, high-level echelon and innovative team.

Increasing the supply of customized talents

A prominent feature of TCM personnel cultivation is a long period with a certain lag. To meet the needs of the development of TCM, there is a need to innovate the integration model of production and education, carry out "order-based" talent classification cultivation, dynamically adjust the talent cultivation program of TCM colleges and universities, optimize the layout of disciplines and specialties, and ensure the continuous and high-quality supply of TCM talents. The role in deep knowledge of regional diseases, sufficient clinical experience and high technical level of TCM talents who have been inherited by folk teachers and family is supposed to give full play, so as to meet the public's demand for high-quality and efficient services of TCM.

Promote TCM Internationalization

To broaden the international development of TCM, the official exchange and cooperation should be strengthened for teaching staff and talents. Jointly building an international joint laboratory and perform joint research projects would be an effective way to speed up internationalization of TCM especially in the field of talent cultivation. Exploration should be taken to actively develop an international talent certification system of TCM, broaden the channels of talent cultivation.¹³

CONCLUSION

The research emphasizes the urgent need for a comprehensive transformation in TCM talent cultivation to meet the demands of a healthier China and effectively respond to challenges posed by sudden epidemics. Key recommendations include fostering a deeper understanding of TCM thinking, implementing

innovative education models that combine theory and practice, optimizing the structure of talent supply to meet specific needs, strengthening the teaching staff with a strong TCM background, promoting international collaboration, and exploring customized talent cultivation strategies. These efforts aim to cultivate a new generation of TCM professionals equipped with the knowledge, skills, and mindset necessary to advance TCM and contribute to global health.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We thank all the students who participated in the study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

ABBREVIATIONS

TCM: Traditional Chinese Medicine; **COVID-19:** Corona virus disease 2019; **GDP:** Gross domestic product.

SUMMARY

This research proposes a multifaceted approach involving a focus on TCM thinking, innovative education models, optimization of talent supply structure, strengthening of teaching staff, development of customized talent supply strategies, and promotion of internationalization. By implementing these recommendations, TCM can better adapt to the changing healthcare landscape and fulfill its potential in promoting global health.

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Cite this article: Xu S, Yu B. Research on the Path and Strategy of Traditional Chinese Medicine Talent Cultivation Based on Demand Orientation. *Indian J of Pharmaceutical Education and Research*. 2025;59(2):712-8.